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Building People-to-People Relations Between Pakistan and China
Through Entertainment

BY

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Executive Summary:

This policy paper aims to focus on a relatively unexplored avenue of Pakistan China relationship that is the entertainment industry. The strategic, economic and political headways have been made by stakeholders from both the states garnering dividends for the parties involved. However, the arrangement has taken a disproportionate elite centric tilt as people-to-people interaction remains very limited. People to people bonds between the states can be bolstered by the huge entertainment potential both these states possess in the form of film, gaming, music, digital streaming, television and cultural festivals. These are areas where a strong mutual bond can be formed at a grassroots level, particularly in the youth which is a huge chunk of demography on both sides of the border.

This paper takes a look at barriers that current soft power regime in the diplomacy between two states faces. The huge language gap, the asymmetry in industry and its technicalities, lack of consistency in fostering cultural hubs and events, lack of financial input, dearth of focus on skilled bilateral social capital and lack of bilateral treaties vis a vis people to people cooperation are certain identified problems. Existing case studies in soft power generation such as that of Hallyu program of Korea, the US-Japan cooperation regime, and the Bollywood cultural outreach provide certain tangible lessons that have been applied to this case in order to minimize impediments towards a sustainable cultural partnership between Pakistan and China.

Recommendations like institutional backing to the cultural diplomacy between Pakistan and China, creation of a public private partnership model of soft funding, consistency in tangible focus on recurring cultural events of inclusive nature, lowering of language and cultural barriers, creation of digital and dubbing platforms along with enhancement of skilled exchange programs

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are some remedies that have been polished and extracted from the existing case studies and from theorists and researchers.

Background and Context:

Valued over \$2.5 Trillion annually, the global entertainment industry serves to be a giant with music, film, videogames, streaming platforms, influencer related content and much more (PWC Global Entertainment Outlook, 2023). All of these can prove to be valuable tools in generating a global perception or affinity for cultural norms. China's own entertainment industry has grown by a mile since the last two decades, from creating martial arts stars like Bruce Lee and Jet Li, to becoming a massive \$450 Billion industry in 2022. It is one of the largest and the fastest growing markets globally. Compared to this, Pakistan has an output of mere \$ 1.5 Billion through its formal entertainment industry. However, its potential for growth is massive as 64% of Pakistan's population is under 30 years of age, the digital penetration in Pakistan is ascending (more than 125 million internet users), and the history and culture of the country is rooted in rich story telling traditions that can be vastly capitalized.

In retrospect, Pakistan and China have interacted through state centric platforms for aims that did not contain entertainment as a door opener. Delegations were state sponsored, academic conferences have been a constant norm, and the only cultural exchanges were small-scale art exhibitions. The broader public has mostly been aloof from these developments except for investment oriented stakeholders. More importantly, these measures have not been able to take youth into confidence regarding the Pak-China bonding. Dr. Sun Wei opined that mere state-oriented maneuvers lag behind as far as cross-cultural perception is concerned because the scalability, the popularity and the voluntary public appeal is absent in such cases (Sun,2021). The content, in such cases, is greeted formally and not consumed for enjoyment. South Korea, in this regard, is an important case in point as it has generated considerable soft power via K Pop, Dramas and Films under the "Hallyu" wave. This surge of South Korean entertainment worldwide has changed its global perception from a war-torn nation to global trendsetter which can generate billions and has an outreach to public all over the world.

CPEC is a body that can provide the base for an institutional framework that caters not only to energy and infrastructural needs but also to cultural connectivity. BRI, among other sectors has a "people to people Bonds" pillar, it has a vision for cultural industries that can foster long

term relations. Entertainment can be a key component of this vision providing results on economic and perception building levels.

Current State and Challenges:

The current status quo of Pak-China relationship's people to people dimensions faces following barriers:

1. The Language Barrier:

Language is, practically speaking, the most cumbersome issue when it comes to Pakistan and China's people to people equation as it is the basic cognitive tool to rationalize any communication. David Crystal stressed on the fact that language is a building block of the world, it is the entity that makes one understand and construct one's reality. (Crystal,2006) Pakistanis are far away from even the fundamentals of Mandarin, and similarly, Chinese audience is not exposed to Urdu or other local Pakistani languages. The absence of a good dubbing infrastructure acts as an invisible wall between the two cultures. Despite a rich presence of Pakistanis that have acquainted themselves with the Chinese language, the stakeholders have not been able to utilize them in the entertainment business. A dubbing and subtitling regime on an institutional level is required in order to gain cross border traction.

2. Industrial Asymmetry:

There is a huge gap in size and technical capability when it comes to assessing Pakistani industry in contrast with the Chinese Industry. Massive state and private stakeholders back the Chinese industry which has a colossal technological edge bringing it at par with other global industries like South Korean and American entertainment hubs. Pakistanis not only face a crisis of underinvestment but are subject to a perpetual brain drain that has intensified over the past half a decade. Numerous technical experts, artists, writers, animators, actors, and even singers prefer havens outside of Pakistan for better opportunities. In addition to these hinderances, Pakistani entertainment industry also suffers from a huge dearth of international distribution networks. Sana Ahmed pointed out that Pakistan's entertainment industry has been experiencing a cycle of low investment, which makes it prone to low production value, in turn limiting the marketability and revenue, which leads to further lack of investment (Sana Ahmed, 2022).

3. Regulatory Divergence:

Regulation and censorship are very complex areas to navigate. Such complexity discourages collaboration. The Chinese regulatory regime functions while keeping political impartiality and concerns for social harmony in check. The content guidelines under Chinese state supervision are rigid. On the other hand, Pakistan too makes its cinema and television adhere to religious sensitivities. Private investors stay away from joint collaborative projects because of the absence of a regulatory regime involving authorities from both the states. Regulatory uncertainty will continue to persist unless a bilateral co production treaty is worked upon.

Opportunities and Case Studies:

The below case studies shed light on soft power generation and diplomacy through entertainment.

1. South Korea's Hallyu Wave:

The South Korean soft power expansion initiative came into fruition after the South Asian financial crisis hit the region in 1997. The South Korean policy analysts realized the potential of a cultural industry that could build cross border perceptions, global and regional soft power, and could help South Korean nation catch the Globalization bandwagon. Government subsidized and facilitated production houses and cultural events. It played an active role in bringing private entities close to diplomatic forums, emphasis on production value of content and synthesis of a hybrid global culture through stories was initiated. These efforts brought South Korea to global platforms like YouTube and Netflix. The shows like Vincenzo, Blood Hounds, Squid Game, and films like Old Boy, I Saw the Devil, and Train to Busan are the results of Hallyu which was a commendable example of diplomacy through entertainment. It brought South Koreans exchanges through tourism, boosts in exports, peaked global interest in its language and traditions, while generating its image to become one of modernity, creativity and inclusivity (KOCIS, 2020).

2. The Case Study of US-Japan relations:

The case study of US Japan relations through entertainment stands out because not only does it bring the two states closer, rather it transforms the perception, of both the interacting states over almost two decades, from war torn rivals to allies with high cultural

and diplomatic affinity for each other. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, US exposed Japan to its entertainment content, such as Jazz, Hollywood movies, and baseball. This made the Japanese overcome their post WW2 anti-US sentiment. Consequently, US opened its doors for Japanese content in the 1960s which flooded its markets and homes with anime the likes of Astro boy, and Speed Racer and later Pokémon, Dragon Ball Z and Cowboy Bebop in the 90s. The governments on both sides facilitated the flow of content US encouraged Japanese entertainment on local public networks and granted exchange programs in academia along with relaxation in visas while Japan focused on eradicating the language barrier in all its entertainment related programs and providing effective entertainment via Nintendo and Sony's PlayStation. Joint initiatives like US-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange further humanized both these nations for each other (Kendra N. Sheehan, 2023).

3. The Bollywood and Indian Image Building:

Indian Film Industry has been a potent tool for the Indian state to cast a projection of spiritual, emotional, colorful and yet a modernizing India. From Yash Raj Productions ventures showing a beautiful Europe in its motion pictures to the casting and appearances of Western stars in projects like RRR (2022) and Kambakht Ishq (2009). Indian government involves its Indian Council for Cultural Relations in order to pursue cultural goals on an institutional level. Since the 1950s, Indian entertainment exports have made a place in markets like Africa, Middle East and Central Asia. The access into public lives of people from far off regions has given India a positive cultural outlook, while also creating headways for commercial and business links. Prime ministers and leaders of India quoting dialogues from Bollywood, involvement of famous stars on diplomatic levels and outreach of Indian studios and artists beyond the region are few areas and tactics that demand attention while studying diplomacy through entertainment.

Above models provide blueprint for an effective diplomatic policy that can foster soft power and diplomatically aid Pakistan and China.

Policy Recommendations:

Following are the actionable measures for sustainable cultural diplomacy.

1. Institutional Framework:

The formation of Pakistan-China Entertainment and Cultural Cooperation Council (PCECCC) provides institutional solidity to the concept of cultural diplomacy. Body would coordinate policy, standardize rules and synchronize bilateral activities, ensuring continuity through changes of political regimes. It needs to be populated by policymakers, industry practitioners, and academics, and needs to be an open and participatory model of government. The PCECCC formalizes the decision-making platform in order to tackle fragmentation and link cultural projects with CPEC priorities. As Rahman (2022) suggests, the latter relations would benefit from more formal institutionalized arrangements - however, one-off efforts do not suffice. As a result, the PCECCC makes sure that entertainment cooperation does not remain an episodic sphere of action based on symbolic contacts, but is translated into a supportive and participatory policy apparatus.

2. Financial Architecture:

The creation of a Pakistan-China Joint Entertainment Fund solves the chronic issue of lack of finances available for the cultural and entertainment related incentives. PCJEF could be rationalized to give a hybrid funding model to stimulate co-productions by inclusion of stakeholders from across the borders as well. By grants, loans, and equity funding, the Fund minimizes the risk for investors and promotes sustainability. Seed funding by the government can mobilize private finance, and profit-sharing guarantees return on investment to later projects. Co-productions with maximum distribution potentialities must be given a priority, realizing maximum cultural impact and commercial viability. As Haque (2021) has observed, underinvestment is the biggest hindrance in Pakistan's creative industry. By organizing committed financing, the PCJEF converts entertainment into a tangible business from a symbolic one, linking economic growth to strategic cultural diplomacy objectives.

3. Infrastructure Development:

The setting up of dubbing and translation centers in key cities solves the most direct barrier to cross-cultural communication—language. By improving subtitling and dubbing into Urdu, Mandarin, and English, these centers make it accessible to large masses. They also create quality employment in the creative industry. Subsidized by the PCJEF and within the PCECCC, these centers can easily expand to meet digital platform needs. As Crystal (2006) points out, availability of language is the key to cultural transmission. Placing this infrastructure first guarantees Pakistani and Chinese material resonates widely, providing the foundation for increased cultural collaboration and wider audience base across both cultures.

4. Developing a digital Platform:

The introduction of a bilingual Pakistan-China online streaming service guarantees scalable access to local content and co-productions. Focusing on dubbed and subtitled content, the service transmutes language barriers on the back of youth-led digital consumption patterns. Its library of content should grow in phases, starting with carefully curated co-productions and moving to original, proprietary programming. The addition of interactive elements like user forums and ratings to it will create audience activity and data. As the Pakistan-China Institute (2021) poll demonstrates, 60% of young Pakistanis would watch Chinese content if it existed. A streaming service hence converts dormant interest into quantifiable cultural affinity and potential entertainment diplomacy.

5. Private Sector Incentives:

Marketing cultural cooperation to the private sector in the form of tax holidays, subsidies, and rapid regulatory approval is economically attractive. Tax holidays on co-production revenue, lower tariffs for machinery imports, and rapid access to distribution networks are a handful of incentives. Incentives can be made contingent on quantifiable deliverables—audience numbers, employment generation, and diversity of content—by governments to avoid abuse and align incentives with policy objectives. As Ahmad (2022) points out, Pakistan's cultural sectors remain trapped in cycles of low levels of investments that deter growth. Encouraging cooperation reduces risks of finance, stimulates innovation,

and channels entrepreneurial vigor, hence positioning the private sector as the driving force for sustainable China-Pakistan cultural cooperation.

6. Recurring Events:

Instituting annual Pakistan-China entertainment festivals enshrines cultural diplomacy continuity. Hybrid festivals that include film viewing, music concerts, game tournaments, and food fairs, complemented by industry networking conferences, are a prerequisite. Juggling festival locations in both countries provides them with exposure and proximity and minimizes state expenditure through sponsorships and municipal partnerships. Organization of the festival reaches the public crowds in addition to generating media coverage that propels their message beyond the crowds. As contended by Rahman (2022), sustainable people-to-people relationships depend on affordable and institutionalized platforms. Through transformation into known regional festivals like the Busan's International Film Festival, periodic festivals place Pakistan and China as a cultural benchmark in Asia.

7. Human Capital:

Expanding the scope of scholarships and organizing special meetings to facilitate cultural exchange among youth is essential to the sustainability of Pakistan- China cultural cooperation. Providing a scholarship in film, animation, and digital media at top-tier Chinese and Pakistani schools, which would develop bilingual, cross-cultural specialists capable of facilitating sustained collaboration Real world skill-building via internship, workshop, and joint student productions in conjunction with academic learning. As Obaid-Chinoy (2022) argues, transnational storymaking is successful only to the extent that particular ways of seeing can come closer together around a resonating story. Taking this further by preparing these exchanges through the PCECCC and securing funding for them through the Joint Entertainment Fund will contribute to building a sustainable talent pipeline of exceptional importance not only for co-productions, but also for cultural diplomacy in both states.

Implementation strategies:

Below is a Phased roadmap for sustainable Pakistan–China cultural cooperation.

1. Short-Term (1-2 Years):

- Institutional framework development and creation of Pakistan China Economic and Cultural Cooperation Council
- Reduction of language barrier by establishing dubbing centers in metropolises
- Modest start to cultural festivals
- Initiation of cultural and entertainment related scholarships and exchange programs

2. Medium-Term (3-5 Years):

- Joint Entertainment Fund is operationalized to finance coproduction
- Initiation of Bilingual Streaming Platform
- Provision of Legal certainty to Bilateral Arrangements
- Regularization of Festivals and cultural interaction
- Phase 2 of focus, guarantee and increase in magnitude of skill-based exchange

3. Long-Term (5-10 Years):

- Utilizing CPEC Special Economic Zones to house entertainment centers and media economic zones; Giving tax and business incentives to these bodies akin to other franchises of SEZs.
- Promotion of narratives created in tandem to regional and global levels
- Cyclical utilization of profits from previous ventures to vitalize the creative cycle.

Conclusion:

The Pakistan-China relationship has wandered little far from its strategic and commercial spheres. In an era where diplomacy is diversified by democratized aspects of people to people and cultural humanization at an international level, CPEC grants successful business and transit models but consists of a dearth of humanized soft power pillars. Entertainment, being a medium that is consumed by the individuals of the world at all times, is a potent vehicle to spread ideas, create familiarity, humanize cultures and generate a sufficient soft power clout. Entertainment in forms such as television, motion picture, streaming content, music, cultural and folk festivals, E Sports, Gaming and independent content creation has the potential to connect people of Pakistan and China creating a diplomacy not only driven by strategy but by shared values.

The current status of Pakistan and China's mutual cultural and soft power depiction is not very impressive. This is due to challenges like difference in size and capacity of the industry, the lack of institutional and financial work that needs to be put in. The language barrier proves to be a significant hurdle along with the fact that existing schemes in place are not consistent in fostering public curiosity. Private actors feel discouraged due to presence of legal ambiguity and profitable financial models. However, a careful study of successful models of diplomacy through entertainment, such as the Hallyu wave of South Korea, the US Japanese relations built over entertainment flow, and the outreach that Indias Bollywood has acquired recently, signal that lessons can be taken from these to foster a diplomatically lucrative people to people model in case of Pakistan and China.

A phased approach to the problem is presented after the study of existing models and consulted research papers. This policy paper suggests institutional frameworks such as the Pakistan China Council on Cultural and Economic Cooperation that can be operationalized by a joint Economic Fund utilizing equity contributions, cultural grants and public private partnerships. On infrastructural level, this paper suggests coproductions, creation of dubbing and subtitling enterprises, along with a well thought out bilateral streaming platform. Focus on enhancement of skilled exchange is emphasized, particularly scholarships in cultural and entertainment fields along with incentivization to private ventures. Integration of entertainment hubs, managed bilaterally, with SEZs of CPEC is one of the targets suggested. The approach is timebound with initial, medium- and long-term timelines set for each initiative.

Entertainment should, by no means, be a relegated sector when it comes to generation of cultural and humanization approach to diplomacy. Strategic equations shift; profit motives change but the grassroot level networks formed by generation of soft power ensure dividends that last for generations. Pakistan and China can build upon a legacy that is relatable for their respective public sectors that can intersect, strengthening the Pak China friendship regionally and a combined voice of shared public interest globally.

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