



CHINA STUDIES CHAIR PROJECT REPORT

2024-2026

BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR)
Beaconhouse National University (BNU)
Lahore



CHINA STUDIES CHAIR COMPILATION

Edited by:

Arsam Tufail Butt

Muhammad Insar

Sarmad Wali Khan

Hazrat Umar

Design by: Zunaira Shahid

TABLE OF CONTENT

FOREWORD	VII
MESSAGE FROM THE VICE CHANCELLOR, BEACONHOUSE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY	VIII
MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR, BNU CENTER FOR POLICY RESEARCH (BCPR)	IX
BCPR Team	X
LAUNCH OF PROGRAM	1
LECTURES	5
CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS	17
Regional Connectivity: CPEC Extension to Afghanistan and Beyond	19
BCPR EVENTS	31
Seminar on Chinese Literature	33
China Fest 2025: Strengthening People-to-People Linkages	34
Session on Technological Developments of China	37
Session on Great Power Rivalry: China's Perspective	38
Seminar on Pakistan-China Relations: Past, Present and Future	40
Roundtable: 80th Anniversary of the End of World War II and China's Victory Against Fascism	42
SCO Sustainable Development Seminar (Tianjin, China)	43
Roundtable: SCO Summit 2025, A Watershed in the Global Order	44
High-Level Policy Dialogue: Redefining Regional Connectivity.	46
National Conference on Local Governance in Pakistan	49
BNU Media Fest 2025: Beaconhouse National University School of Media and Mass Communication	50
Roundtable: China-US Competition, Pakistan's Role as a Connector	52
Roundtable: Understanding China's 15th Five-Year Plan	54
TEDxBNU 2025 Jointly Organized by BCPR	55
China Consulate General Friendship Award 2025	56
China Connect, BNU Winter School	58
Danube Lecture, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan	60
MCAP-BNU Int Media Conference, jointly organised by: <i>BCPR, in collaboration with MCAP, School of Media and Mass Communication (SMC) BNU, and Understanding China Forum (UCF) 11 February 2026</i>	61

Chinese New Year Festival 2026	63
Webinar: Twin Crises: <i>The US-Israel war on Iran and the Pakistan-Afghanistan Conflict – Implications for Pakistan and the Regional Peace (Iran Conflict Series, Webinar I)</i>	65
Webinar: Iran War: <i>Economic and Maritime Implications (Iran Conflict Series, Webinar II)</i>	66
Webinar: Prospects for Negotiations and Strategic Outcomes (<i>Iran Conflict Series, Webinar III</i>)	67
Academia's Role in CPEC Phase II, Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry	68
Visit of H.E. Mr. Sun Yan, Consul General of the People's Republic of China	69
WORKSHOPS	71
Workshop 1: <i>Advancing Chinese Modernization</i>	73
Workshop 2: <i>Trilateral Cooperation</i>	88
THE POLICY BEACON	91
Rising Together: China's Blueprint for Pakistan's Success	93
New CPEC playbook	95
Understanding China: Chinese Modernization and Its Vision for Global Governance	98
Interview: China and Pakistan, Close Partners, Not Against the US	100
China and Pakistan: Pathway to Future Economic Relations	101
Sino-Pak Cooperation Against Insurgency	105
Radio Pakistan: Pakistan-China Partnership, Expert Commentary	107
Prospects and opportunities in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor	111
Strengthening China-Pakistan Linkages in Education, Technology and Innovation	131
Increasing Opportunities for engagement between the youth of Pakistan and China	140
Brown to blue (B2B) economic transition: reddening the maritime economy for sustainable growth and environmental resilience, ...	157
China's rise or US's retreat?	171
Taliban, Afghan-Pakistan Relations and the Region: Four years past 2021	173
Afghanistan in BRI: A Sign of Increasing Chinese Diplomacy	185
A Defining SCO Summit, China's Tianjin Moment	189
Seminar Report on the Significance of the SCO Summit	195
Beyond Diplomacy: Media Collaboration as Soft Power	197
Understanding China - Chinese Modernization and Its Vision for Global Governance	203
The role of pakistan-china people-to-people relations in consolidating 'all weather friendship'	206

China-pakistan-afghanistan trilateral engagement in 2025, ...	216
The role of technology and digitization in pakistan–china trade: opportunities, implications and policy strategies	219
From Sun Wukong to Dragon Balls: How the Chinese Legend Became a Childhood Memory in Pakistan, ...	224
Building people-to-people relations between pakistan and china through entertainment	226
China’s BRI: ideology of cooperative globalism	234
Beyond the Performance of Democracy: Devolution, Disillusionment, and Pakistan’s Search for Political Faith, ...	243
China’s Strategic Rise in Artificial Intelligence: Policy, Industry, and Global Competition ..	252
Marketing in China: Culture, Digital Power, and Strategic Imperatives for Global Brands, ..	256
Future Pathways in the Middle East Conflict: How the War Could End or Escalate, ...	261
China-Taiwan Rift and Cheng Li-wun’s Journey of Peace	265
Intercivilizational Dialogue: Role and Significance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization	267
China’s Way: Diplomatic Continuity in a Fragmented World Order	286
Cold warriors lost in Beijing	288
Strategic Synergies in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Comprehensive Analysis of Tourism Development in Balochistan	291
REPORT: Roundtable Discussion on “China-US Competition: Pakistan’s Role as a Connector”	304
REPORT: Seminar on “Understanding the significance of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on 15th Five-Year Plan”	308
Taliban govt welcomes Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan’s stance against foreign military bases in Afghanistan	311
Pakistan seeks regional countries’ help to counter threats from Afghanistan	313
China ready to ‘Organically Integrate’ Pakistan’s Development Plans, says Chinese Envoy.	316
Terrorists in Afghanistan Hinder Regional Economic Integration, Pose Serious Security Challenges: envoy	318
BOOK	321
Blueprints of Endurance: Civilizational Continuity and the Architecture of Change in Chinese History	323

FOREWORD

Two years ago, Beaconhouse National University (BNU) Lahore, with the cooperation of Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Lahore, took a step that was as intellectually purposeful as it was institutionally bold: the establishment of a dedicated China Studies Chair at BNU Lahore. What began as an inauguration ceremony on a spring morning in April 2024, attended by representatives of the Chinese Consulate and BNU's academic leadership, has since grown into a sustained body of work that this report now seeks to document and honour.

The timing was not incidental. Pakistan and China stand at a consequential juncture in their bilateral relationship. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has deepened the material sinews of cooperation, but intellectual understanding has often lagged economic engagement. Policymakers, scholars, and citizens alike have needed richer, more nuanced frameworks through which to comprehend China's domestic trajectory, its regional posture, and the specific dynamics of its partnership with Pakistan. The China Studies Chair was established precisely to address that gap, and this report is testimony to what becomes possible when an institution commits to that mission with consistency and seriousness.

What this report presents is not merely a catalogue of activities. It is evidence of an institutional commitment: that serious, sustained academic inquiry into China's political economy, its cultural fabric, and its foreign policy orientations is not a luxury for Pakistani universities but a necessity. The essays, policy papers, op-eds, and reports gathered here represent the intellectual work of scholars who engaged with these questions rigorously, without advocacy and without reductiveness. Taken together, they constitute a contribution to a field that Pakistan urgently needs to develop.

The Chair's significance extends beyond its publications. Through semester courses integrated into BNU's academic curriculum, it introduced a generation of Pakistani students to the study of China in a structured, scholarly environment. Through policy dialogues and roundtables, it created space for practitioners and researchers to think together across professional boundaries. Through its public outreach, it expanded the network of scholars and institutions engaged in this field across Pakistan and beyond. These are the less visible but perhaps more enduring contributions of the past two years.

It would be remiss not to acknowledge the leadership that made this possible. The BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR), under the direction of Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, has demonstrated what institutional vision combined with scholarly discipline can produce. The dedication with which the Chair was conceived, launched, and sustained reflects a standard of academic stewardship that deserves recognition.

Two years is a beginning. BCPR has made the China Studies Chair a continuing feature of its future roadmap, reflecting a sustained institutional commitment rather than a time-bound initiative. The questions that animate the China Studies Chair are questions that will only grow in urgency as the twenty-first century unfolds. The foundation laid here is one on which a great deal more can be built. It is hoped that this report serves not only as a record of what has been accomplished but as an invitation to scholars, policymakers, and institutions who will carry this essential work forward.

MESSAGE FROM THE VICE CHANCELLOR, BEACONHOUSE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

It is my privilege to present this compilation report commemorating two years of the China Studies Chair at Beaconhouse National University. It is a true milestone that reflects the institutional ethos BNU seeks to embody, one with a steadfast commitment to producing intellectually rigorous and policy relevant knowledge. Establishing this chair expressed BNU's commitment to advancing rigorous policy relevant scholarship. Pakistan's relationship with China is among the most consequential bilateral partnerships in the region, with increasing global significance. It encompasses strategic cooperation, economic integration through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, improving cultural engagement, and shared devotion to regional stability and development.



A relationship of this much significance deserves to be studied with true intellectual rigour. BNU was one of the first universities in Lahore to host a truly proactive China Studies Chair, a distinction we embrace with both pride and a deep sense of responsibility.

These values are demonstrable in the two years highlighted in this report. The China Studies Chair has generated research and analysis that informs policymaking, enriches public discourse, and equips our students with the intellectual frameworks required to engage critically with one of the defining bilateral relationships of our time. The courses taught under this Chair have enhanced our academic curriculum, familiarising students to the history, political economy, and foreign policy of China in a methodical and erudite manner. The scholars, practitioners, and former diplomats who have participated in the Chair's events have brought depth and diversity to our audiences.

BNU believes that a university achieves its foundational purpose when it bridges the gap between world of knowledge and the world of affairs. Research that is not embedded in veracity, and policy that lacks critical analysis, both fall short of the standards we aim for. The China Studies Chair works as an embodiment of that bridge.

I offer my sincere appreciation to the leadership of the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR), for exceptional stewardship of this initiative since its inception, as well as the researchers, faculty members, and students whose intellectual effort is reflected in the pages of this report, and to our partners at the Chinese Consulate in Lahore for their collaboration and continued support.

This report stands as a record of two years of meaningful work and sets the foundation for a longer intellectual journey. BNU is unwavering in its committed to the China Studies Chair and to the goal of producing discourse that serves Pakistan and deepens our understanding of the world we share.

Dr Moeed Wasim Yusuf
Vice Chancellor,
Beaconhouse National University, Lahore

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR, BNU CENTER FOR POLICY RESEARCH (BCPR)

When we inaugurated the China Studies Chair in April 2024, I described it to my colleagues at the BNU Center for Policy Research as a long-term investment in intellectual seriousness. Two years on, as I reflect on what has been accomplished and review the body of work gathered in this report, I find that description still accurate, but now enriched by the texture of actual experience, actual scholarship, and the genuine commitment of all those who gave their time and energy to this project. Pakistan's engagement with China has historically been strong at the diplomatic and military levels, and increasingly substantive at the economic level through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.



But at the level of ideas, at the level of sustained scholarly understanding, there has remained a considerable gap. We have not always had the institutions, the trained researchers, or the dedicated platforms required to study China as it deserves to be studied: historically, comparatively, and with the kind of nuance that resists both uncritical enthusiasm and reflexive suspicion. The China Studies Chair was established to begin closing that gap, and this report is our first serious accounting of that effort. Over the past two years, we worked to build something that would outlast any single event or publication. We integrated China Studies into BNU's academic curriculum, ensuring that students encounter China not only as a current affairs topic but as a subject requiring historical depth, theoretical grounding, and analytical rigour.

We organised seminars and policy dialogues that brought together academics, former diplomats, journalists, and civil society representatives to think together across professional boundaries. We produced policy notes, research papers, and public essays that engaged seriously with questions of political economy, strategic culture, bilateral cooperation, and regional order. None of this was without its challenges. Studying China seriously in Pakistan requires navigating real sensitivities, resisting the pull of simplification, and maintaining the scholarly independence that is the only guarantor of lasting credibility. I am proud that the China Studies Chair has sought to uphold that standard throughout, and I am grateful to all those, within BNU and beyond, who shared that commitment.

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to the Vice Chancellor and BNU's institutional leadership for their unwavering support. I am deeply grateful to my colleagues at the BCPR, whose dedication and intellectual energy made the day-to-day work of the Chair possible. And I extend my sincere appreciation to our partners at the Chinese Consulate in Lahore, whose collaboration has been both generous and substantive. What this report documents is, in the most honest sense, a beginning. The questions the China Studies Chair has set out to address are not questions that two years of work can exhaust. My hope is that this compilation serves as both a record and a foundation: a record of what we have done, and a foundation on which this institution and others will continue to build.

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan

Director, BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR)
Beaconhouse National University, Lahore

BCPR Team



Mr. Mansoor Ahmad Khan is the Director of the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR) and Head of the Initiative on Pakistan's Place in the World. A former Ambassador with over 32 years in Pakistan's Foreign Service, he served as Ambassador to Afghanistan, Austria, and the Slovak Republic, and as Pakistan's Permanent Representative to the UN in Vienna. His expertise lies in regional diplomacy, foreign policy, and economic integration. He was awarded the Sitara-e-Shujaat in 2023 for his distinguished diplomatic service and a "Pakistan-China Friendship Award" in 2026 by the Consul General of China in Lahore. He also serves as the Director of China Studies Chair in BNU.



Dr. Zainab Ahmed is the Deputy Director of the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR) and Assistant Professor of Political Science at Beaconhouse National University. She holds a PhD in International Relations from the University of the Punjab and specializes in water security, climate governance, and international relations. She has previously served in academic leadership roles at Lahore Garrison University and has taught and conducted research at leading institutions, including the University of the Punjab, Forman Christian College University, and Beaconhouse National University.



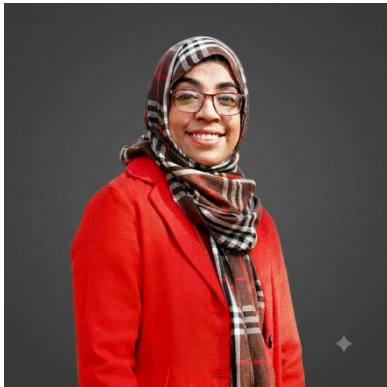
Mr. Arsam Tufail Butt is a Research Associate and Outreach Coordinator at the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR). He holds a degree in Political Science with Economics and Law from Government College University Lahore and is certified in Parliamentary Development and Governance by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Parliamentary Academy, UK. With over five years of experience, he has worked with BCPR, PILDAT, GIZ Pakistan, and the National Assembly of Pakistan on governance, parliamentary development, electoral reforms, and public policy initiatives. His work includes public policy research and analysis, stakeholder engagement, grant writing, strategic communications and outreach to promote democratic governance and civic participation.



Muhammad Insar is a Research Associate and Outreach Coordinator at the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR). A Gold Medalist with an MPhil in International Relations from Lahore Garrison University and a BS in English from NUML, his research spans international relations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), regional integration, and strategic affairs. With expertise in policy analysis, grant writing, data analytics, and strategic communications, his career includes research roles at the GREF Think Tank and the Pakistan Navy War College's Maritime Center of Excellence. At BCPR, he authors policy and academic publications, and produces the daily "World in Focus" and "Monthly Situational Analysis Report" tracking global political and economic developments.



Sara Kazim is a Research Associate at the BNU Center for Policy Research and a Politics graduate from King's College London (KCL). Her academic work at KCL specialized in political philosophy, international trade, authoritarianism, and the politics of race, specifically examining how economic liberalization and open trade policies might reinforce authoritarianism and hybrid regime survival in Pakistan. Her professional background includes serving as a Research Associate at the Pakistan Institute of Living and Learning, where she focused on intersectional mental health policy within the Policy Research Unit, alongside an affiliation with the Nottingham Economic Review. At BCPR, she focuses on geopolitical research, regularly authoring reports that analyze developments across the international system.



Ms. Mahreen Zaib served as a Research Associate and Project Coordinator at BNU's Center for Policy Research. With an MPhil in Art and Design from the Pakistan Institute of Fashion and Design, she brings a dynamic blend of research, visual communication, and project management expertise to her role. She played a key role in coordinating events and overseeing visual design, content creation, and social media management to enhance outreach and engagement.



Mr. Sarmad Wali Khan served as a Research Associate and Project Coordinator at the Center for Policy Research, BNU. He is a development professional whose work sits at the intersection of research, policy, and implementation. At BCPR, he designed and executed strategic initiatives that translate complex ideas into tangible impact. His writings on governance and global affairs reveal a thinker who values both depth and accessibility—qualities that make him equally effective in the seminar room, the policy workshop, or the field.

LAUNCH OF PROGRAM

Launch of Program

On April 28, 2024, Beaconhouse National University (BNU) officially inaugurated the China Studies Chair in collaboration with the Chinese Consulate in Lahore.

BNU became the first university in Lahore to establish a chair dedicated solely to research on China. It marks a significant milestone in fostering academic collaboration and research cooperation across China and between the countries.

The chair aims to promote in-depth intellectual discourse that explores socio-political and economic dynamics, as well as cultural coherence, while deepening the understanding of the bilateral ties between the two countries.

Through academic discourse, policy analysis, and research publications, the China Studies Chair has contributed to strengthening academic networks and providing insights that can inform policy frameworks and cooperation between the two nations.



LECTURES

Lectures

Under the China Studies Chair, BCPR took the opportunity to host a guest lecture series by experts on China. The lectures were held on three key themes: People-to-People Interactions, Investments, and Security – themes that are crucial in the context of Pakistan-China relations in the 21st century. Ambassador Naghmata Hashmi, Dr. Hassan Daud Butt, Dr. Naveed Elahi, and Mr. Amir Rana shared perspectives that were both thought-provoking and reimagined the future of the relationship between the two countries. Each lecture was attended by policy experts, BNU faculty and students, along with several distinguished guests

Lecture-1: Energizing Pakistan-China Diplomacy to Deepen People-to-People Exchanges by Ambassador Naghmata Hashmi

On October 21, 2024 the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR) organized a notable lecture by Ambassador Naghmata Hashmi on “Energizing Pakistan-China Diplomacy to Deepen People-to-People Exchanges.” The event was well-attended by faculty and students of BNU, and members of the policy community. Faculty and students from other institutions, such as Government College University (GCU), the University of Lahore (UOL), and Lahore Garrison University (LGU), also participated, making it a vibrant and diverse gathering

In her lecture, Ambassador Hashmi highlighted the critical distinction between political and cultural diplomacy. She emphasized that while political diplomacy forms the backbone of bilateral relations between Pakistan and China, cultural diplomacy plays a pivotal role in deepening ties. According to her, political ties are not enough to foster a lasting relationship between two nations; it is the understanding and appreciation of cultures that bind people and nations together.



She pointed out that the perceptions people have of other countries play an essential role in diplomatic success, and cultural exchange is necessary to nurture these perceptions. Starting with a historical overview of Pakistan-China relations, Ambassador Hashmi delved into how both nations have consistently supported each other on various international platforms. She noted that while both countries are close allies, their relations at the people-to-people level are somewhat lacking. She referenced an article, metaphorically describing the relationship as "friends but strangers," to underline the gap in public diplomacy efforts. According to her, this gap stems from insufficient interaction between the people of both countries.

Ambassador Hashmi argued that public diplomacy is essential because when people understand each other's cultures and customs, their perceptions shift in a positive direction. She expressed concern that public diplomacy in Pakistan has remained confined to limited avenues due to the social transitions the country has undergone. Civilization ethos, she added, is the foundation for connectivity, leading to a deeper appreciation and understanding of one another.

She also discussed the perceptions each society has of the other. In China, Pakistan is perceived as a friendly nation, but also as one affected by terrorism and economic underdevelopment. Conversely, in Pakistan, China is viewed as a communist state with limited freedoms and strict government control. However, these perceptions are often based on stereotypes and limited contact. Ambassador Hashmi emphasized the need for increased cultural exchanges to dispel these misconceptions and develop a more nuanced understanding.

Toward the end of her lecture, Ambassador Hashmi emphasized that it is the people, not just governments, who truly shape bilateral relations. She stressed the importance of tourism as a means of fostering stronger ties. No amount of trade and political agreements can achieve what direct people-to-people interaction can. Tourism, she argued, could significantly enhance trade and diplomatic relations, as citizens would gain first-hand experiences of each other's countries, further solidifying the already strong bond between Pakistan and China.

Another significant aspect of Ambassador Naghmana Hashmi's discussion was the role of language in strengthening cultural diplomacy. She highlighted how the language barrier between Pakistan and China continues to impede deeper people-to-people connections.

The lecture concluded with an engaging interactive session, during which the audience, including students and policy experts, had the opportunity to share their thoughts and questions. This led to a vibrant discussion on the future of Pakistan-China relations, focusing on the potential ways cultural diplomacy and public engagement can shape the future trajectory of bilateral ties.

Lecture-2: Evaluating the Bilateral Impact of CPEC Investments on the Socio-Economic Development of Pakistan by Dr. Hassan Daud

Dr. Hassan revisited the fundamentals of the Chinese development model, emphasizing how China's investment strategies have historically prioritized mutual benefit for both the investor and host countries. He argued that in the case of CPEC, Pakistan stands to gain significantly through sustained socio-economic advancements. He highlighted the transformative potential of CPEC, particularly in fostering growth within Pakistan's underdeveloped sectors. He further noted that the economic zones should have different levels of productivity to benefit from these investments fully.



In his presentation, Dr. Hassan also outlined the various buffers of Pakistan, which included the so-called 'Blue Economy', which he opined was still largely unexplored and holds great potential for growth for Pakistan's young generation. Pakistan needs to develop effective economic growth strategies, and through the investment made through CPEC, it could discover innovations within the maritime resources and improve production rates, therefore creating new economic revenues. Dr. Hassan emphasized that, beyond infrastructure investment, CPEC provides the younger generations

in Pakistan with a model to positively contribute and build a new life for themselves, while generating value that would uplift the nation.

The session concluded with a call to maximize the strategic and economic potential offered by CPEC, ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth for Pakistan's future. The session followed an interactive session with the audience, which included BNU faculty and students along with other noted guests.

Lecture-3: Pakistan-China Counterterrorism Cooperation and Security Challenges by Dr. Naveed Elahi and Mr. Amir Rana

Pakistan and China share a robust bilateral relationship underpinned by strategic, economic, and security cooperation. However, evolving security dynamics, particularly threats posed to Chinese nationals and projects in Pakistan, have necessitated enhanced counterterrorism collaboration. This report examines the intricacies of this cooperation, assesses Pakistan's counterterrorism policies, and highlights the challenges in securing the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).



This report reflects the insights shared during a lecture-discussion held on January 6, 2025, at Beaconhouse National University (BNU), Lahore. Organized by the BNU center for Policy Research (BCPR) under its China Studies Chair Initiative, the event featured two seasoned. Experts, Dr. Naveed Elahi and Mr. Amir Rana, as guest speakers. Both speakers provided comprehensive perspectives on the topic, enriching the discourse with their expertise.

The session attracted a diverse audience, including policymakers, former diplomats, policy experts, scholars, practitioners from leading think tanks, and students from BNU and LCWU. This vibrant mix of attendees fostered a multifaceted discussion on Pakistan-China counterterrorism cooperation, reflecting on both strategic imperatives and operational challenges.

The discussion highlighted the evolving complexities of counterterrorism cooperation between Pakistan and China, focusing on the changing threat perceptions and the need for Pakistan to adapt its strategies to align with global norms and Chinese expectations. Key points included:

- Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts post-9/11 focused on dismantling extremist networks but lacked sustainable implementation.
- China's growing concerns over the safety of its nationals and investments, particularly in light of incidents targeting CPEC projects.
- The deployment of a 15,000-strong Special Security Division (SSD) for CPEC protection.
- Enhanced intelligence sharing through coordinated operations and real-time information exchange.

- Capacity building via training programs and advanced surveillance technologies, including facial recognition and drones.

Additionally, the discussion underscored the importance of evolving bilateral agreements, such as the 2003 Counter-Terrorism Agreement and the 2015 CPEC Security Agreement, which laid the groundwork for robust security cooperation.

Security Challenges in CPEC

Targeting of Chinese Nationals: High-profile attacks, such as those in Karachi, have exposed vulnerabilities in security protocols. These breaches have strained bilateral trust and heightened Chinese apprehensions about Pakistan's security assurances.

Rising Concerns from China: China's dissatisfaction with existing security measures has led to proposals for deploying private security contractors. This reflects hesitance to rely solely on Pakistan's state apparatus and underscores the urgency of operational independence.



Global and Regional Dynamics

Strategic Reorientations: Pakistan's dismantling of India-targeted militant groups has been countered by a failure to address domestic extremist factions. Globally, developments in the Middle East highlight diminishing tolerance for non-state actors and proxies.

China's Expanding Role: As a rising global power, China seeks to integrate its security concerns into broader multilateral frameworks. This trend may prompt China to advocate for shared security initiatives involving other regional actors.

Operational and Structural Issues

Disconnect Between Policy and Implementation: Policies often fail to translate into actionable measures due to bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of accountability.

Cultural and Operational Misalignments: Differing security cultures and communication gaps between Pakistan and China impede seamless collaboration.

Protocol Inefficiencies: Security breaches expose flaws in operational protocols, necessitating immediate reform and capacity-building efforts.

Recommendations

1. **Enhancing Policy Implementation:** Strengthen inter-agency coordination and ensure NAP's full implementation. Allocate adequate resources for counterterrorism efforts.

2. **Building Trust with China:** Regularize joint counterterrorism drills and intelligence-sharing mechanisms. Address Chinese concerns through transparent and proactive measures.
3. **Securing CPEC Projects:** Upgrade security protocols with advanced technology and personnel training. Consider hybrid security solutions involving both state forces and vetted private contractors.
4. **Adapting to Global Norms:** Align domestic counterterrorism frameworks with international standards—Foster partnerships with regional and global actors to address transnational threats.
5. **Long-term Reforms:** Institutionalize counterterrorism education and training programs. Develop a unified strategy that bridges policy gaps and integrates national and regional priorities to achieve a comprehensive approach.

Conclusion

Pakistan's counterterrorism cooperation with China is crucial for securing mutual interests and ensuring the success of initiatives like CPEC. Addressing implementation gaps, aligning with global norms, and strengthening trust with China will be vital for Pakistan to navigate emerging security challenges effectively. A strategic, integrated, and forward-looking approach can strengthen bilateral relations and contribute to regional stability.

Media Coverage

1. The Nation

Experts call for enhanced Pak-China cooperation to combat terrorism

Staff Reporter January 09, 2025 Newspaper, Regional, Lahore

LAHORE - Experts on security and counter-terrorism have emphasized the need for strengthening cooperation between Pakistan and China for combating the threat of terrorism which they argued is impeding progress on economic initiatives and projects between the two countries. Dr. Naveed Elahi, former Joint Director General of the Intelligence Bureau and currently the Dean of National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP) and Amir Rana, the President of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPPS) were speaking at the Beaconhouse National University (BNU)'s Center for Policy Research (BCPR) in Lahore. The session moderated by former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan Mr. Mansoor Ahmad Khan who now heads the BCPR was attended by leading academics and researchers in the field of counter-terrorism. The presentations of the two speakers were followed by an absorbing question and answer session. In his remarks, Dr. Naveed Elahi traced the progressive growth of terrorism in Pakistan in the past several decades due to multiple factors with political, societal and economic dimensions.

He noted that starting primarily as sectarian violence the terrorism received ideological stimulus from Afghan Jihad in the 1980s and Taliban insurgency against the US and NATO presence in that country. He added that the emergence of organizations like Al-Qaeda and Daesh have provided a global umbrella of support and patronage to regional terrorist groups like TTP and BLA.

Dr. Elahi acknowledged that both the TTP has continued to intensify its operational capacity to cause more harm to Pakistan's interests by particularly targeting the Chinese projects and personnel in recent years. In this regard, he explained how governments in Pakistan have been making efforts to counter the attacks by the TTP and BLA, but due to the gaps as well as the lack of consistency in the approach of tackling this menace of terrorism the number of these attacks and the damage has continued to increase.

Mr. Amir Rana opined that Pakistan's efforts in fighting terrorism including the TTP and BLA have not been able to deliver because of systemic issues within Pakistan's institutional structure and bureaucratic inertia. He elaborated that while various policies were enacted in the past three decades to fight terrorism but these have remained on paper and there has been no serious follow up or implementation at the operational level.

Mr. Amir Rana further highlighted that the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the modern age of social and IT-based media cannot be just fought through a security based approach of the past. He added that the state has to be ahead of the thinking and publicity campaign of the terrorist groups who continue to bombard the population with disinformation. The authorities have to, therefore, build an environment in which the population perceives the government's policies and measures as pro-people.

Both security experts suggested the need for deepening Pakistan's engagement with China towards creating effective counter-terrorism cooperation mechanisms with a view to overcome the current challenges caused by rise in the terrorist attacks on Chinese workers in Pakistan.

2. Enhanced Pak-China cooperation to combat terrorism stressed

NEWS WIRE January 09, 2025 Newspaper, Regional, Lahore

LAHORE - Experts on security and counter-terrorism have emphasized the need for strengthening cooperation between Pakistan and China to combat the threat of terrorism, which they argued is impeding progress on economic initiatives and projects between the two countries.

Dr Naveed Elahi, former Joint Director General of the Intelligence Bureau and currently the Dean of the National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP), and Amir Rana, the President of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPPS), were speaking at Beaconhouse National University (BNU)'s center for Policy Research (BCPR) in Lahore, according to a press release issued here on Wednesday.

The session, moderated by former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan Mansoor Ahmad Khan, who now heads the BCPR, was attended by leading academics and researchers in the field of counter-terrorism. The presentations of the two speakers were followed by a question-and-answer session.

Female students sweep top positions in BIEK 2025 HSSC pre-medical results. In his remarks, Dr Naveed Elahi traced the progressive growth of terrorism in Pakistan over the past several decades, citing multiple factors with political, societal, and economic dimensions.

He noted that terrorism, which began primarily as sectarian violence, received ideological stimulus from the Afghan Jihad in the 1980s and the Taliban insurgency against the US and NATO presence in that country.

He added that the emergence of organizations like Al-Qaeda and Daesh has provided a global umbrella of support and patronage to regional terrorist groups like TTP and BLA.

Dr Elahi acknowledged that the TTP has continued to intensify its operational capacity to cause more harm to Pakistan's interests, particularly by targeting Chinese projects and personnel in recent years. In this regard, he explained how governments in Pakistan have been making efforts to counter the attacks by the TTP and BLA, but due to gaps and a lack of consistency in the approach to tackling this menace, the number of attacks and the resulting damage have continued to increase.

Security expert Amir Rana said that the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the modern age of social and IT-based media cannot be fought through the security-based approach of the past. He added that the state must stay ahead of the thinking and publicity campaigns of terrorist groups, who continue to bombard the population with disinformation. The authorities, therefore, must build an environment in which the population perceives the government's policies and measures as pro-people.

Both security experts suggested the need for deepening Pakistan's engagement with China to create effective counter-terrorism cooperation mechanisms, with the aim of overcoming the current challenges posed by the rise in terrorist attacks on Chinese workers in Pakistan.

3. UrduPoint

Experts Call for Enhanced China-Pakistan Cooperation To Combat Threat Of Terrorism

APP - Associated Press of Pakistan Published January 08, 2025 | 04:00 PM

Experts call for enhanced China-Pakistan cooperation to combat threat of terrorism.

LAHORE, (APP - UrduPoint / Pakistan Point News - 8th Jan, 2025) Experts on security and counter-terrorism have emphasized the need for strengthening cooperation between Pakistan and China for combating the threat of terrorism which they argued is impeding progress on economic initiatives and projects between the two countries.

Dr. Naveed Elahi, former Joint Director General of the Intelligence Bureau and currently the Dean of National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP) and Amir Rana, the President of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPPS) were speaking at the Beaconhouse National University (BNU)'s Center for Policy Research (BCPR) in Lahore, said a press release issued here Wednesday.

The session moderated by former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan Mansoor Ahmad Khan who now heads the BCPR was attended by leading academics and researchers in the field of counter-terrorism. The presentations of the two speakers were followed by question and answer session.

In his remarks, Dr. Naveed Elahi traced the progressive growth of terrorism in Pakistan in the past several decades due to multiple factors with political, societal and economic dimensions.

He noted that starting primarily as sectarian violence the terrorism received ideological stimulus from Afghan Jihad in the 1980s and Taliban insurgency against the US and NATO presence in that country.

He added that the emergence of organizations like Al-Qaeda and Daesh have provided a global umbrella of support and patronage to regional terrorist groups like TTP and BLA.

Dr. Elahi acknowledged that both the TTP has continued to intensify its operational capacity to cause more harm to Pakistan's interests by particularly targeting the Chinese projects and personnel in recent years. In this regard, he explained how governments in Pakistan have been making efforts to counter the attacks by the TTP and BLA, but due to the gaps as well as the lack of consistency in the approach of tackling this menace of terrorism the number of these attacks and the damage has continued to increase.

Security expert Amir Rana said that the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the modern age of social and IT-based media cannot be just fought through a security based approach of the past. He added that the state has to be ahead of the thinking and publicity campaign of the terrorist groups who continue to bombard the population with disinformation. The authorities have to therefore, build an environment in which the population perceives the government's policies and measures as pro-people.

Both security experts suggested the need for deepening Pakistan's engagement with China towards creating effective counter-terrorism cooperation mechanisms with a view to overcome the current challenges caused by rise in the terrorist attacks on Chinese workers in Pakistan.

4. Pakistan Observer: Experts Call for Enhanced China-Pakistan Cooperation to Combat Terrorism

Pakistan Observer Published January 09, 2025 | Regional, Lahore

Experts on security and counter-terrorism have emphasized the need for strengthening cooperation between Pakistan and China for combatting the threat of terrorism which they argued is impeding progress on economic initiatives and projects between the two countries.

Dr. Naveed Elahi, former Joint Director General of the Intelligence Bureau and currently the Dean of National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP) and Amir Rana, the President of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS) were speaking at the Beaconhouse National University (BNU)'s Center for Policy Research (BCPR) in Lahore, said a press release issued here Wednesday.

The session moderated by former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan Mansoor Ahmad Khan who now heads the BCPR was attended by leading academics and researchers in the field of counter-terrorism. The presentations of the two speakers were followed by question and answer session.

In his remarks, Dr. Naveed Elahi traced the progressive growth of terrorism in Pakistan in the past several decades due to multiple factors with political, societal and economic dimensions.

He noted that starting primarily as sectarian violence the terrorism received ideological stimulus from Afghan Jihad in the 1980s and Taliban insurgency against the US and NATO presence in that country.

5. The Pakistan Daily

Experts call for enhanced China-Pakistan cooperation to combat threat of terrorism

Last updated: 2025/01/08 at 12:07 PM

LAHORE: Experts on security and counter-terrorism have emphasized the need for strengthening cooperation between Pakistan and China for combating the threat of terrorism which they argued is impeding progress on economic initiatives and projects between the two countries.

Dr. Naveed Elahi, former Joint Director General of the Intelligence Bureau and currently the Dean of National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP) and Amir Rana, the President of the Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPPS) were speaking at the Beaconhouse National University (BNU)'s Center for Policy Research (BCPR) in Lahore.

The session moderated by former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan Mr. Mansoor Ahmad Khan who now heads the BCPR was attended by leading academics and researchers in the field of counter-terrorism. The presentations of the two speakers were followed by an absorbing question and answer session.

In his remarks, Dr. Naveed Elahi traced the progressive growth of terrorism in Pakistan in the past several decades due to multiple factors with political, societal and economic dimensions. He noted that starting primarily as sectarian violence the terrorism received ideological stimulus from Afghan Jihad in the 1980s and Taliban insurgency against the US and NATO presence in that country. He added that the emergence of organizations like Al-Qaeda and Daesh have provided a global umbrella of support and patronage to regional terrorist groups like TTP and BLA.

Dr. Elahi acknowledged that both the TTP has continued to intensify its operational capacity to cause more harm to Pakistan's interests by particularly targeting the Chinese projects and personnel in recent years. In this regard, he explained how governments in Pakistan have been making efforts to counter the attacks by the TTP and BLA, but due to the gaps as well as the lack of consistency in the approach of tackling this menace of terrorism the number of these attacks and the damage has continued to increase.

Mr. Amir Rana opined that Pakistan's efforts in fighting terrorism including the TTP and BLA have not been able to deliver because of systemic issues within Pakistan's institutional structure and bureaucratic inertia. He elaborated that while various policies were enacted in the past three decades to fight terrorism but these have remained on paper and there has been no serious follow up or implementation at the operational level.

Mr. Amir Rana further highlighted that the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the modern age of social and IT-based media cannot be just fought through a security based approach of the past. He added that the state has to be ahead of the thinking and publicity campaign of the terrorist groups who continue to bombard the population with disinformation. The authorities have to, therefore, build an environment in which the population perceives the

government's policies and measures as pro-people. Both security experts suggested the need for deepening Pakistan's engagement with China towards creating effective counter-terrorism cooperation mechanisms with a view to overcome the current challenges caused by rise in the terrorist attacks on Chinese workers in Pakistan.

6. INP (Independent News Pakistan)

Experts call for enhanced China-Pakistan cooperation to combat threat of terrorism

January 06, 2013

Experts on security and counter-terrorism have emphasised the need for strengthening cooperation between Pakistan and China for combating the threat of terrorism which they argued is impeding progress on economic, political and strategic between the two countries. Dr. Naveed Elahi, former Joint Director General of the Intelligence Bureau and currently the Dean of National Institute of Public policy (NIPP) and Amir Rana, the President of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) were speaking at the Beaconhouse National University (BNU)'s Center for Policy Research (BCPR) in Lahore.

The session moderated by former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan, Mr. Rustam Shah Mohmand who now heads the BCPR was attended by leading academics and practitioners in the field of counter terrorism. The presentations of the two speakers were followed by an absorbing question and answer session on the subject. Dr. Naveed Elahi spoke of the progressive growth of terrorism in Pakistan in the post-soviet-withdrawal due to multiple factors with political, societal and economic dimensions.

He noted that starting primarily as sectarian violence the terrorism received ideological stimulus from Afghan jihad in the 1980s and Taliban insurgency against the US and NATO presence in that country. He added that the emergence of organizations like Al-Qaeda and others have operated under an umbrella of support and patronage to regional terrorist groups like TTP and BLA. He also acknowledged that both the TTP has continued to intensify its operational capacity to cause more harm to Pakistan. However, he said it mainly targets the Chinese projects and personnel in recent years. In this regard, he explained how governments in Pakistan have been making efforts to counter the fast-growing TTP phenomenon but have failed as well as the lack of consistency in the approach of tackling this menace of terrorism. The absence of these statues and the damage has continued to increase. Amir Rana opened on Pakistan's efforts in fighting terrorism including the TTP and BLA have not been able to deliver because of systemic issues, such as human, institutional, structure and bureaucratic mess.

He elaborated that while various policies were enacted in the past three decades to fight terrorism but these have remained on paper and there has been no serious follow up or implementation at the operational level. He further highlighted that the new age/third-wave terrorism is premised in the modern age of social and IT-based media cannot be put fought through a two-dimensional approach of the past. He added that the state has to be ahead of the thinking and publicity campaign of the terrorist groups who continue to bombard the population with disinformation. The authorities have to, therefore, build an environment in which the population perceives the government's policies and measures at pro-people. Both security experts suggested the need for developing Pakistan's engagement with China towards creating effective counter-terrorism cooperation mechanisms with a view to overcome the potential challenges posed by the terrorist attacks on Chinese workers in Pakistan.

CONFERENCES AND SEMINARS

Conferences and Seminars

Regional Connectivity: CPEC Extension to Afghanistan and Beyond

Pakistan's geo-strategic location remains pivotal in the evolving global geopolitical landscape, which has shifted towards a geo-economics focus—the defining paradigm of the 21st century. Positioned at the crossroads of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, CPEC holds immense potential to serve as a regional connector¹, fostering economic integration and cooperation among neighboring states.

On *October 30th, 2024*, BNU-center for Policy Research held a seminar on ***"Regional Connectivity: CPEC Extension to Afghanistan and Beyond"*** as part of the China Studies Chair initiative. The objective of the seminar was to identify a way forward, considering Pakistan's current internal dynamics and regional factors, to enhance and further bolster regional connectivity.

The seminar brought together experts on the topic to share insights based on their experiences. The session attracted a diverse audience, including academics, policymakers, former diplomats, technocrats, journalists, and students from institutions such as BNU, GCU, FCCU, Kinnaird College, Punjab University, and distinguished members of the Pakistan-China Joint Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Haroon Sharif, Former Minister of State and Chairman Board of Investment, set the stage on the BRI & CPEC – Strengths, Weaknesses & Connectivity Potential.

Mr. Sharif emphasized the misuse of the term "disruption" in creating narratives around China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and its collaboration with Pakistan. He stressed that the term "connectivity," often equated with economic growth, is fundamentally misunderstood; connectivity should be viewed as a foundational step toward growth. Mr. Sharif pointed out that approximately 40% of infrastructure corridors fail because they do not leverage connectivity in its true sense. He noted that Pakistan's economic structure has remained stagnant for the past thirty years due to low confidence in the local market. He outlined three essential filters for achieving economic growth: creating economic opportunities, increasing exports by 15% annually, and enhancing productivity and production through heavy technology imports. He called for incentivizing the private sector to attract capital and highlighted that current policies are too focused on economic zones, which can only thrive if capital is available. Mr. Sharif stressed the importance of improving trade logistics and shifting the economic mindset in Pakistan. He acknowledged that while China has proven to be a reliable partner, Pakistan must ensure the effective implementation of projects to sustain economic growth. He pointed out that reviving the old Silk Road requires significant institutional changes, investment in knowledge, and market identification to capitalize on Pakistan's vast market potential. Sharif emphasized that 60% of global growth is fostered by China, and for Pakistan to capture this growth, it must integrate itself into the global network and strengthen connectivity with India and China. He also stressed the need for robust policies for infrastructure development and questioned

1 Jamali, Ahmed Bux, Hongsong Liu, and Mehmood Hussain. 2023. "Regional Connectivity and Inclusion of New Partners in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Prospects and Challenges." *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies* 17 (1): 31–48. doi:10.1080/25765949.2023.2190613.

the state of macroeconomic policy and competitiveness in the country, noting that politicizing projects would not yield favorable outcomes.

Dr. Ishrat Hussain, former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan, on CPEC as a Game Changer – Assessment and Prospects

Dr. Hussain identified five key aspects of CPEC's potential impact. The first was the need for joint security initiatives between China and Pakistan, especially regarding the safety of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan, which is complicated by external constraints. The second aspect highlighted was the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) Pipeline; despite having its resources, Pakistan imports expensive LNG, and TAPI's implementation could provide cheaper supplies to industries.



Third, he addressed the importance of free transit trade with Afghanistan, which is landlocked and reliant on ports like Karachi and Gwadar, advocating for a common customs system that could benefit both countries. The fourth aspect revolved around China's interest in Afghanistan's mining sector, which could yield long-term benefits for Pakistan. The fifth aspect concerned a proposed railway link developed by the World Bank connecting Central Asia to Torkham and Pakistan, which, if realized, would grant both Pakistan and India access to Central Asia. Dr. Hussain underscored the need for political consensus to convince the Taliban government of the importance of such collaborations and highlighted that addressing security issues is crucial for the success of these projects.

Ambassador Asif Durrani, former Special Envoy for Afghanistan, Extension of CPEC to Afghanistan – Impediments and Prospects

Ambassador Durrani linked CPEC to a child that would mature over time, noting that the first phase has concluded, and the initiative is transitioning to its second phase. Ambassador Durrani emphasized that while connectivity via roads is lacking, smugglers often demonstrate more efficiency in this regard than government efforts. He also pointed out that India plays a significant role in regional connectivity, possessing relationships with more neighboring countries than Pakistan, including Afghanistan as a crucial point of contact with Central Asia. Ambassador Durrani highlighted China's promise of a \$62 billion investment in Pakistan, greater than the combined investments from Central Asia, emphasizing that efficient use of these resources could yield economic benefits. However, he noted that Pakistan must overcome internal barriers, including conservative mindsets, its approach to India, and security concerns regarding Afghanistan to achieve the desired outcomes.

Mr. Mirwais Yasini, Afghan politician and former member of Afghan Wolesi Jirga, says BRI/CPEC Extension is beneficial for Afghanistan.

Mr. Yasini articulated that stability and security are interconnected, noting that stability often comes at the cost of security. Yasini emphasized Afghanistan's unique geopolitical position as a vital trade route between South and Central Asia, suggesting it could serve as a connectivity hub for BRI and CPEC. He argued that CPEC could create job opportunities, reducing Afghan dependency on jobs in the Gulf. Additionally, he noted Afghanistan's rich lithium resources, which are crucial for the tech industry. Mr. Yasini asserted that improved connectivity could offer Afghanistan significant economic benefits, including infrastructure development and energy resources, ultimately contributing to the country's economic stability. He also highlighted that strengthened external relations with China and other international partners are contingent upon resolving security issues in Afghanistan and the broader region.

Chinese Perspective by Tang Jun, Director, Pakistan Center, Inner Mongolia University, China, on Afghanistan's New Government and Prospects of CPEC Extension.

Prof. Jun noted the social exclusion of women and minority groups under the Taliban regime and the pervasive economic and security challenges that the country faces. He described Afghanistan's international isolation as a further exacerbation of its issues. Prof. Jun pointed out the changing regional dynamics, particularly Afghanistan's relationship with Pakistan and the diminishing influence of Russia. He highlighted China's commitment to promoting stability and development in Afghanistan, citing the successful oil pipeline project that generated \$13 billion in revenue for the country. Prof. Jun also emphasized people-to-people connections, mentioning initiatives that have introduced the Chinese language and computing programs in Kabul. He articulated that China's multifaceted approach towards Afghanistan balances economic and diplomatic relations, aiming for long-term stability through initiatives like BRI and CPEC.

Ambassador Javid Hussain on Should Economic Benefits of Connectivity Prevail over the geopolitical Challenges?

Ambassador Hussain emphasized the vitality of regional connectivity for South Asia, noting its ability to foster commerce, economic growth, and increased global influence. Drawing on the European Union as an example, he argued that successful regional integration necessitates common interests, economic complementarities, and the absence of hegemonic goals. However, he pointed out that SAARC's progress is hampered by India's strong position and unsolved problems, particularly in Kashmir. For Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) provides crucial potential, which might be expanded to include Afghanistan and other ECO countries. Despite geopolitical hurdles, including resistance from India and the United States, Ambassador Hussain advised Pakistan to pursue a balanced foreign policy that prioritizes economic and strategic objectives.

Lt. Gen. (Retd) Naser Khan Janjua, Former National Security Adviser, Factors Impeding CPEC Progress and the Way Forward for Pakistan and China

General Naser provided an analysis of the geopolitical dynamics in Asia and the Muslim world, emphasizing the impact of global powers, particularly the United States, on regional conflicts and economic policies. He noted the potential for a prosperous "Asian Century," which has faced challenges due to events such as 9/11 and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as ongoing conflicts within the Muslim world.

He highlighted U.S. containment strategies aimed at limiting China's influence through alliances in the Indo-Pacific and bolstering India's role in South Asia. In this context, he described China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a strategic response to this encirclement, focused on achieving economic stability through enhanced connectivity.

Addressing Pakistan specifically, General Naser pointed out the country's difficulties arising from prolonged regional instability, conflict burdens, and recent economic and political challenges. He criticized the premature celebration of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) due to insufficient groundwork, which led global powers to view it with skepticism. He stressed the importance of a stable Afghanistan for Pakistan's strategic interests and its historical role in supporting the country.

General Naser called for Pakistan to adopt a balanced foreign policy, avoiding excessive alignment with either China or the U.S., and urged the need to overcome internal divisions. He encouraged Pakistan to leverage its strategic location to attract global interest and concluded with a call for unity and internal stability.

Conclusion:

The session concluded with an interactive discussion between the audience and speakers, highlighting the need for Pakistan to maintain a balance between economic gains and geopolitical interests. It was emphasized that the pursuit of opportunities and strategic interests in Afghanistan and the broader region is essential for sustainable growth. Participants agreed on the importance of adopting a low-risk foreign policy approach, which would enable Pakistan to navigate complex regional dynamics effectively. They noted that while regional connectivity initiatives are critical, they must be supported by strong economic policies to ensure the long-term stability and prosperity of both Pakistan and its neighbors.



Media Coverage:

The seminar on the challenges and opportunities for the extension of CPEC to Afghanistan received widespread media attention, with several prominent platforms covering the event. The following outlets published articles or shared insights:

1. Associated Press of Pakistan (Chinese Service): Lahore seminar calls for extension of CPEC to Afghanistan

LAHORE, *October 31* (APNA) – Speakers at a seminar held here on Thursday recommended that Pakistan must prioritize progress in expanding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan.

Speakers unanimously noted that promoting economic integration with neighboring countries and the region is crucial for Pakistan's economic recovery, growth, and development.

CPEC, a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), needs to serve as a key tool for strengthening regional infrastructure, energy, trade, and transit connectivity.

Speakers agreed that expanding CPEC to Afghanistan is a starting point for achieving this goal. At the same time, several speakers suggested that Pakistan needs to make bolder efforts to overcome obstacles hindering the prioritization of CPEC's expansion to Afghanistan.

Former Ambassador Asif Durrani stated that the perception that CPEC has not made progress is a misconception, as it has achieved remarkable progress over the past decade thanks to significant Chinese investment.

He described India as viewing CPEC and its extension to Afghanistan as a threat to its own interests.

2. WeNews English: CPEC Expansion to Afghanistan Vital for Regional Stability: Experts

LAHORE: During a seminar held on Thursday, speakers emphasized that Pakistan should prioritize the extension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan

They unanimously agreed that fostering economic integration with neighboring countries and the broader region is essential for Pakistan's economic recovery, growth, and development.

The speakers highlighted that CPEC, a key component of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), should be leveraged to enhance regional infrastructure, energy, and trade connectivity.

They agreed that extending CPEC to Afghanistan is a crucial first step in achieving this goal. However, some speakers pointed out the need for Pakistan to take bold actions to address the challenges hindering progress toward this extension.

Former Ambassador Asif Durrani addressed misconceptions about CPEC's progress, stating that the initiative has seen remarkable advances over the past decade due to significant Chinese investments.

He said that while extending CPEC to Afghanistan is vital, several obstacles must be addressed, particularly the Taliban's inability to establish normalized international relations since taking power.

Durrani also pointed out that India views CPEC and its expansion into Afghanistan as a threat to its interests, highlighting that regional stability is essential for promoting economic cooperation, including the extension of CPEC.

Former Minister of Investment Haroon Sharif stressed that connectivity should lead to tangible economic benefits and prosperity for the people, noting that 40% of global connectivity projects fail due to this oversight.

He argued that for Pakistan to integrate into the global market, connectivity with India and China is essential, given that these two countries account for 60% of global growth.

Mirwais Yasini, former deputy speaker of the Afghan Wolesi Jirga, offered an Afghan perspective, stating that security is paramount for economic initiatives. He recognized that for landlocked Afghanistan, CPEC could be crucial for job creation and maintaining stability in the region. He also mentioned Afghanistan's mineral resources, like lithium, as vital for battery production and industrial growth.

Yasini said that the extension of BRI and CPEC to Afghanistan would provide China with a competitive edge over other international investors, provided security is guaranteed.

General (retd) Nasir Janjua highlighted the opposition from the U.S. and the West to China, along with India's desire to counter both China and Pakistan.

Participants praised the significance of such discussions, which aim to raise awareness about Pakistan's policies regarding its neighbors and regional economic cooperation, particularly among the youth.

3. Pakistan Observer: Speakers Call for Extension of CPEC to Afghanistan

Speakers at a seminar here on Thursday suggested that Pakistan must make progress towards (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) CPEC's extension to Afghanistan as a priority.

The speakers were unanimous in pointing out that promoting economic integration with neighbours and region was of crucial importance for Pakistan's economic recovery, growth and development. They endorsed that CPEC as a hallmark of China's Built and Road Initiative (BRI) needed to be used as a key instrument for strengthening regional infrastructure, energy and trade/transit connectivity, said a press release.

The speakers were unanimous that CPEC's extension to Afghanistan had to be a starting point towards achieving this objective. However, some of the speakers also suggested the need for bold efforts by Pakistan to overcome the impediments in the way of progress towards CPEC's extension to Afghanistan as a priority.

Former Ambassador Asif Durrani said that it was a wrong perception that CPEC was not making progress; over the last ten years CPEC has made phenomenal advances through substantive Chinese investments.

About extension of CPEC to Afghanistan, he was of the view that several impediments need to be overcome, adding, “the biggest one is that the Taliban since taking over Afghanistan have not been able to develop a normalized interaction with the world due to their unacceptable stance on some of the issues.” He described that India also continues to see CPEC and its extension to Afghanistan as a threat to its own interests. Durrani emphasized that stability in Afghanistan and the region was important for promoting economic interaction including CPEC’s extension.

Former Minister of Investment Haroon Sharif underlined that connectivity was not a goal per se. It should actually translate into economic benefits and prosperity for the people. In this regard he said that 40 percent of the connectivity projects in the world fail because of not accommodating this crucial factor.

4. Pakistan Today: Seminar highlights challenges and opportunities for CPEC’s extension to Afghanistan

LAHORE: At a seminar hosted by Beaconhouse National University (BNU) in Lahore, experts urged Pakistan to take concrete steps toward extending the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to Afghanistan.

The seminar, titled “Regional Connectivity – BRI and CPEC Extension to Afghanistan and Beyond,” gathered eminent speakers and audiences from four Lahore universities to discuss regional connectivity and economic integration.

The seminar included remarks from Ambassador Asif Durrani, former Minister of Investment Haroon Sharif, ex-Governor of the State Bank Dr. Ishrat Hussain, former Afghan Deputy Speaker Mirwais Yasini, and former National Security Adviser Lt. General Nasir Khan Janjua. Prof. Tang Jun from Inner Mongolia University in China also delivered remarks online. The event was organized by Mansoor Ahmad Khan, former Ambassador to Afghanistan and BNU’s Center for Policy Research Director.

Speakers explored opportunities for economic linkages through CPEC’s potential extension to Afghanistan, emphasizing regional benefits in infrastructure, energy, and trade connectivity. While supporting the idea, they also discussed the considerable challenges posed by geopolitical tensions, especially from the U.S.-China rivalry and India’s opposition to CPEC and BRI initiatives.

Ambassador Durrani highlighted the notable progress made by CPEC in the past decade through significant Chinese investments but acknowledged impediments in extending CPEC to Afghanistan, including security concerns under the Taliban regime and strained regional relations. Mirwais Yasini emphasized that for Afghanistan, CPEC could drive job creation and utilize resources, like lithium, to boost technology and industry, provided security is maintained.

Haroon Sharif noted that connectivity should lead to tangible economic benefits for the people, stressing the potential economic advantages of connecting Pakistan with neighboring markets. Dr. Ishrat Hussain suggested that mutual security arrangements between China and Pakistan could enhance CPEC’s progress, given recent security incidents.

Following the speeches, an interactive session saw researchers and students critiquing the government's approach to CPEC challenges and calling for more inclusive, representative policies. Participants appreciated the seminar's open discussions on key regional policies and the need to involve youth in shaping Pakistan's economic future.

5. APP National Service: Speakers call for extension of CPEC to Afghanistan

LAHORE, *Oct 31* (APP):Speakers at a seminar here on Thursday suggested that Pakistan must make progress towards (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) CPEC's extension to Afghanistan as a priority.

The speakers were unanimous in pointing out that promoting economic integration with neighbours and region was of crucial importance for Pakistan's economic recovery, growth and development.

They endorsed that CPEC as a hallmark of China's Built and Road Initiative (BRI) needed to be used as a key instrument for strengthening regional infrastructure, energy and trade/transit connectivity, said a press release.

The speakers were unanimous that CPEC's extension to Afghanistan had to be a starting point towards achieving this objective. However, some of the speakers also suggested the need for bold efforts by Pakistan to overcome the impediments in the way of progress towards CPEC's extension to Afghanistan as a priority.

Former Ambassador Asif Durrani said that it was a wrong perception that CPEC was not making progress; over the last ten years CPEC has made phenomenal advances through substantive Chinese investments.

About extension of CPEC to Afghanistan, he was of the view that several impediments need to be overcome, adding, 'the biggest one is that the Taliban since taking over Afghanistan have not been able to develop a normalized interaction with the world due to their unacceptable stance on some of the issues.'

He described that India also continue to see CPEC and its extension to Afghanistan as a threat to its own interests. Durrani emphasized that stability in Afghanistan and the region was important for promoting economic interaction including CPEC's extension.

Former Minister of Investment Haroon Sharif underlined that connectivity not a goal per se. It should actually translate into economic benefits and prosperity for the people. In this regard he said that 40 percent of the connectivity projects in the world fail because of not accommodating this crucial factor.

Haroon Sharif stressed that in a region where the market of Pakistan is the biggest excluding China and India and knowing that 60% of global growth is coming from China and India, "if we want to become a part of the global network, connectivity with India and China is necessary".

Former deputy speaker of Afghan Wolesi Jirga Mirwais Yasini sharing an Afghan perspective suggested that security was of prime importance for economic endeavours. He acknowledged that for a land locked country like Afghanistan, CPEC would be pivotal in job creation and preventing anarchy in the region. He alluded that Afghanistan's mineral resources such as

lithium mines could be vital for production of batteries and so promoting industry and technology. He reiterated that extension of BRI and CPEC to Afghanistan will provide a competitive advantage to China over other international investors, but this can only happen if security was ensured.

General(retd) Nasir Janjua highlighted opposition of the US and the West to China besides India also wanted to counter both China and Pakistan.

The participants appreciated the importance of such events to openly discuss the crucial areas of Pakistan's policies relating to neighbours and regional economic interaction to increase awareness and bringing youth on board.

6. The Pakistan Daily: Speakers want Pakistan take steps to extend CPEC to Afghanistan

LAHORE: Speakers at a seminar suggested that Pakistan must make progress towards (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) CPEC's extension to Afghanistan as a priority.

The Beaconhouse National University (BNU), Lahore hosted the Seminar entitled "Regional Connectivity – BRI and CPEC Extension to Afghanistan and Beyond," according to a BNU press release.

The purpose of the Seminar was to have threadbare discussions on the prospects as well as challenges to China's mega-connectivity initiative BRI and its flagship project CPEC's extension to Afghanistan and beyond for promoting regional connectivity and economic integration.

Faculties, researchers and students from four universities in Lahore were in the audience in this Seminar.

The Seminar was attended by eminent experts on the subject including Ambassador Asif Durrani who until recently was Pakistan's Special Envoy on Afghanistan, Haroon Sharif, former Minister of Investment, Dr. Ishrat Hussain former Governor of the State Bank of Pakistan., Mirwais Yasini former Deputy speaker of afghan Wolesi Jirga, Ambassador Javed Hussain former Pakistani diplomat having regional expertise and Lt. General Nasir Khan Janjua, former National Security Adviser.

Prof Tang Jun of the Pakistan Studies Center at Inner Mongolia University China also delivered remarks online at the Seminar.

Mansoor Ahmad Khan, former Ambassador of Pakistan to Afghanistan had convened this important Seminar in his capacity as Director of the Beaconhouse National University's Center for Policy Research (BCPR).

The participants made thought-provoking remarks regarding the opportunities that existed for building economic linkages through CPEC's extension to Afghanistan and beyond to the central Asian countries and Eurasia as well as the impediments and challenges that continued to hinder the progress in achieving this goal.

All the distinguished speakers were unanimous in pointing out that promoting economic integration with neighbours and regions was of crucial importance for Pakistan's economic recovery, growth and development.

In this regard, they endorsed that CPEC as a hallmark of China's BRI needed to be used as a key instrument for strengthening regional infrastructure, energy and trade/transit connectivity.

Their remarks also echoed a consensus that CPEC's extension to Afghanistan had to be a starting point towards achieving this objective.

However, all the speakers were also cognizant of the number of challenges including the intensifying geo-political factors emanating from an increasing US-China global power struggle, Pakistan's own political and economic fragility, nose-diving relations with Afghanistan and opposition to the BRI and CPEC by countries like India.

Some of the speakers also suggested the need for bold efforts by Pakistan to overcome these impediments and make progress towards CPEC's extension to Afghanistan as a priority.

Ambassador Asif Durrani said that it was a wrong perception that CPEC was not making progress; over the last ten years CPEC has made phenomenal advances through substantive Chinese investments. "As to the extension of CPEC to Afghanistan, in his view several impediments need to be overcome.

The biggest one is that the Taliban since taking over Afghanistan have not been able to develop a normalized interaction with the world due to their unacceptable stance on some of the issues."

He described that India also continues to see CPEC and its extension to Afghanistan as a threat to its own interests. Durrani emphasized that stability in Afghanistan and the region was important for promoting economic interaction including on CPEC extension.

Haroon Sharif underlined that connectivity is not a goal per se. It should actually translate into economic benefits and prosperity for the people. In this regard he said that 40 percent of the connectivity projects in the world fail because of not accommodating this crucial factor.

Haroon Sharif stressed that in a region where the market of Pakistan is the biggest excluding China and India and knowing that 60% of global growth is coming from China and India, "if we want to become a part of the global network, connectivity with India and China is necessary".

Mirwais Yasini sharing an Afghan perspective suggests that security was of prime importance for economic endeavours. He acknowledged that for a landlocked country like Afghanistan, CPEC would be pivotal in job creation and preventing anarchy in the region. He alluded that Afghanistan's mineral resources such as lithium mines could be vital for production of batteries and so promoting industry and technology.

He reiterated that extension of BRI and CPEC to Afghanistan will provide a competitive advantage to China over other international investors, but this can only happen if security was ensured.

Ambassador Javed Hussain and Dr. Ishrat Hussain in their respective remarks also elaborated that Chinese were quite sensitive to the security issues in view of the recent incidents causing several Chinese casualties. Dr. Ishrat Hussain observed that for achieving unhindered progress on the CPEC, the two countries needed to evolve a mutual security arrangement

General Nasir Janjua was also very candid in his remarks. He recognized several challenges to CPEC and BRI. One was global opposition by the US and the West to China. The other was regional where India wanted to counter both China and Pakistan.

He opined that by balancing on a see-saw, we could only make an effort to be at the or close to center and not sway too much on either side. And focus on putting your own house in order.

The speeches were followed by an engaging interactive session. The researchers and students were generally critical to the approach of the government in addressing challenges to CPEC and interaction with neighbouring countries.

The key concerns expressed by students were a highly militarized nature of Pakistan's policy making, continued ignorance of the leadership for political representation and inclusiveness of all segments including Baloch and other marginalized segments of population and inability towards opening borders for trade, transit and economic interaction in the region.

The participants appreciated the importance of such events to openly discuss the crucial areas of Pakistan's policies relating to neighbours and regional economic interaction to increase awareness and bring youth on board.





BCPR EVENTS

Seminar on Chinese Literature

Date	29 April 2025
Time	2:00 PM – 3:00 PM
Venue	BCPR Office, SLASS, BNU
Organised By	SLASS and BCPR, BNU
Speaker	Ms. Tania Faraz, Assistant Professor, Seeta Majeed School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

SLASS and BCPR jointly hosted an academic lecture on Chinese literature as an introductory event ahead of China Fest 2025. Ms. Tania Faraz delivered a comprehensive overview of Chinese literary traditions, covering Confucian ideals, classical mythology and the evolution of genres from ancient poetry to modern novels. A central theme was the capacity of literature to serve as a cross-cultural bridge, allowing peoples to find shared human experiences across linguistic and historical divides. The session concluded with an interactive dialogue on the influence of classical Chinese literature on contemporary global perspectives.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The lecture established a cultural and literary foundation for China Fest 2025.*
- *Confucian ideals, classical mythology and genre evolution were presented as entry points for Pakistan-China cultural understanding.*
- *Literature was identified as a pre-political bridge between civilisations, relevant to the people-to-people dimension of bilateral relations.*



China Fest 2025: Strengthening People-to-People Linkages

China Fest represents BCPR's flagship cultural programming strand, designed to strengthen people-to-people ties between Pakistan and China by bringing Chinese culture, history, and creative traditions directly into the BNU campus community. The following events constituted the China Fest programme for 2025-26.

Date	30 April 2025
Time	11:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Venue	RHSA 118, BNU
Organised By	BCPR, BNU
Format	Panel discussion, cultural sessions, guest lecture

On April 30, 2025, the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR) hosted China Fest 2025 at RHSA 118, BNU. The event brought together students, faculty, scholars, practitioners, and experts for an

engaging exploration of Chinese culture, influence, educational cooperation, and cross-cultural experiences. Through panel discussions, cultural sessions, and guest lectures, the event created a dynamic space for dialogue, blending academic insight with personal narratives and student reflections.

China Fest 2025, the inaugural event of BCPR's China-related cultural programming calendar, explored Chinese soft power, educational cooperation, and dimensions of Chinese culture infrequently addressed in Pakistani academic spaces. Discussions also examined the role of CPEC in educational exchanges and the scope for joint research and student mobility between Pakistani and Chinese institutions. The main panel, titled Educational Cooperation with China, traced China's historical evolution from an agrarian society in the pre-1949 period to one of the world's largest economies, arguing that this trajectory offers a model of development for countries like Pakistan.

The first session, “China’s Culture as Soft Power,” was led by Dr. Bilal Zubair, Director of Research at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CISS). Dr. Zubair introduced the theoretical framework of soft power, focusing on how China employs its civilisational heritage, language, arts, media, and cultural traditions as instruments of public diplomacy to shape its global image, enhance its global standing, and foster people-to-people connections beyond traditional political and economic means.

The second session featured two engaging perspectives: “Life in China as a Pakistani” by Dr. Muhammad Sajid, Associate Professor and Head of Management Sciences at Bahria University, and “Life in Pakistan as a Chinese” by Mr. Peter Huang Pei, a Chinese businessman based in Pakistan. Both speakers shared their personal experiences of living abroad, navigating new cultures, learning languages, and adapting to life in a foreign country. Their reflections highlighted the importance of cultural exchange and mutual understanding in strengthening people-to-people ties.

The final session featured a student panel titled “What I Learned About Chinese Culture,” where students shared reflections on Chinese entertainment, the zodiac, infrastructure, and educational cooperation. They highlighted the growing educational and cultural ties between Pakistan and China. By 2019, over 25,000 Pakistani students were studying in China, many supported by the China Scholarship Council. In 2024, another milestone saw 1,000 students in agriculture receive advanced training in China. Initiatives such as the Pak-China Technical Institute in Gwadar and university-level Chinese language programs in Pakistan continue to foster mutual understanding. As of 2023, nearly 50,000 Pakistanis were learning Chinese, further supported by youth exchanges and educational MoUs.

Students also reflected on China’s transformation from low literacy levels to global academic prominence, particularly following Deng Xiaoping’s reforms, emphasizing the country's commitment to education, innovation, and cultural confidence. Chinese dramas, widely accessible through platforms such as YouTube, Netflix, HTV, and others, were identified as important channels of cultural exchange, offering insights into Chinese values, traditions, and everyday life. As Sun Tzu observed, the deepest influence often lies in subtlety, and today the China-Pakistan relationship is increasingly defined by cooperation, mutual respect, and human connection.

The sessions were met with active participation and meaningful exchanges between speakers and audience members. China Fest 2025 served not only as a platform for learning but also as a celebration of diversity, curiosity, cultural understanding, and collaboration.

Additional China Fest Programmes

The following additional China Fest-related activities were organised during 2025-26:

Batik Art Workshop	Conducted as part of BNU Summer School (June–July 2025). Facilitated by Ms. Aiman Gillani, offering hands-on experience with the wax-resist dyeing technique.
China Fest at BNU Summer School 2025	30 June 2025. Featured a presentation by a Chinese representative on cultural heritage, authentic Chinese cuisine, and a Batik Workshop.
Chinese Film Screening: Not One Less	12 May 2026. Screening of Zhang Yimou's 1999 film at SLASS Auditorium, BNU, organised by the School of Media and Mass Communication.
TEDxBNU 2025	26 December 2025. Hui Qui, associated with BCPR, delivered a talk at TEDxBNU, communicating ideas on China-Pakistan relations to a broad campus audience.



China Fest 2025, Panel discussions and cultural engagement, BNU (30 April 2025)

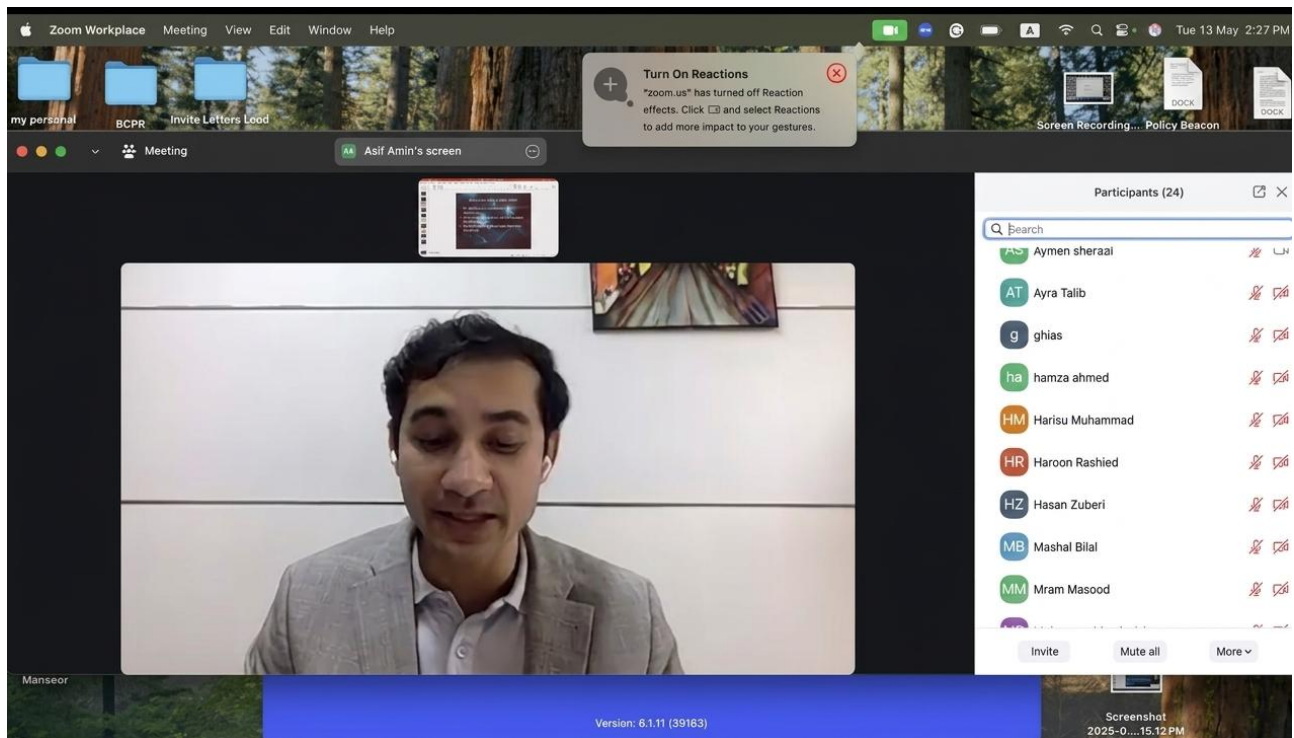
KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *China Fest 2025 was BCPR's inaugural cultural event of the year, establishing a template for campus-based China engagement combining academic discourse and cultural programming.*
- *The central panel argued that China's development trajectory from agrarian nation to global economic power offers a relevant model for Pakistani policymakers and students.*
- *Dr. Bilal Zubair's lecture on China's cultural soft power provided students with an analytical framework for understanding cultural diplomacy within international strategic relations.*
- *CPEC's role in enabling educational exchanges and joint research was identified as an underutilised dimension of the bilateral relationship.*
- *Student attendance from across BNU departments demonstrated the cross-disciplinary appeal of China-themed programming.*

Session on Technological Developments of China

Date	14–15 May 2025
Format	Online session
Organised By	BCPR, in collaboration with the Department of Liberal Arts, BNU
Speaker	Dr. Asif Amin, Assistant Professor, University of Lahore; Research Fellow, CSSPR
Series	Pakistan Talks Series

BCPR invited Dr. Asif Amin to deliver an online session on China's technological development as part of the Pakistan Talks Series. Dr. Amin traced China's transition from a manufacturer of low-value goods to a global leader in high-value technological production, highlighting the strategic alignment between state policy, industrial planning and innovation. The session examined how deliberate government intervention combined with private sector dynamism drove China's technological emergence, and identified partnership opportunities for Pakistan's own development ambitions.

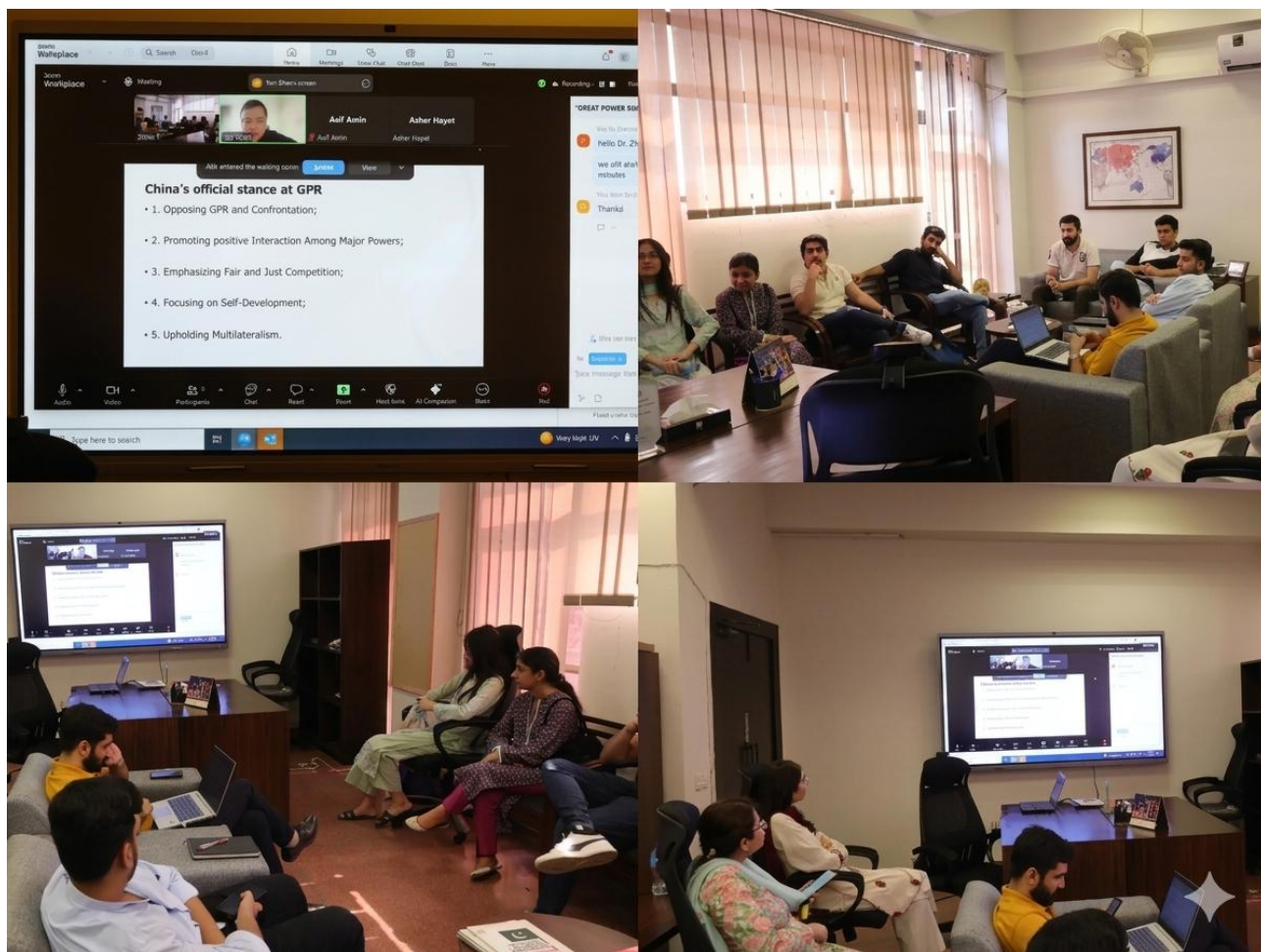


KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *China's technological ascent is the product of deliberate state-guided industrial policy combined with market dynamism.*
- *Pakistan was identified as having concrete opportunities to leverage Chinese technology partnerships, particularly in manufacturing and digital infrastructure.*
- *The session contextualised China's technological rise within CPEC Phase II's expanded industrial cooperation framework.*

Session on Great Power Rivalry: China's Perspective

Date	20 May 2025
Venue	BNU
Organised By	BCPR
Speaker	Prof. Yan Zhen
Participants	Students of BNU and the University of Lahore (UOL)



Session on Great Power Rivalry: China's Perspective, Prof. Yan Zhen presenting to BNU and UOL students (May 2025)

BCPR hosted Prof. Yan Zhen for an academic session on great power rivalry from China's perspective, creating an inter-institutional exchange that drew students from BNU and the University of Lahore. Prof. Zhen examined China's view of the evolving global landscape and the dynamics of competition with established powers, arguing that as China modernises it naturally seeks to expand regional influence, a process often challenged by existing powers. The discussion covered the structural drivers of the US-China rivalry and its implications for smaller states in Asia, including Pakistan. China's official stance on great power relations was outlined as: opposition to confrontation; promotion of positive major-power interaction; emphasis on fair competition; focus on self-development; and upholding multilateralism.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *China's official position on great power relations: oppose confrontation, promote positive interaction, emphasise fair competition, focus on self-development, uphold multilateralism.*
- *The session offered Pakistani students direct engagement with Chinese scholarly perspectives on the US-China rivalry.*
- *Pakistan's position as a smaller state navigating great power competition was examined as a structural challenge requiring strategic clarity.*

Seminar on Pakistan-China Relations: Past, Present and Future

Including MOU Signing: BCPR × Understanding China Forum | 2 June 2025

Date	2 June 2025
Time	12:30 PM – 2:00 PM
Venue	SB Auditorium, BNU
Organised By	BCPR
Distinguished Guest	H.E. Zhao Shiren, Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Lahore
Key Outcome	MOU signed between BCPR and Understanding China Forum (UCF)

BCPR hosted a landmark seminar on Pakistan-China relations, bringing together former diplomats, policymakers and foreign affairs experts under the distinguished presence of H.E. Zhao Shiren, Consul General of China in Lahore. The seminar examined the history, current challenges and future trajectory of the bilateral partnership across strategic, economic and cultural dimensions. Participants discussed CPEC's evolution, the deepening people-to-people ties, and the opportunities of Phase II of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The seminar culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Understanding China Forum (UCF) and BCPR, establishing a formal framework for future collaboration in research, events and policy dialogue on Pakistan-China relations. This MOU became the institutional foundation for UCF's co-organisation of virtually all subsequent major BCPR events during 2025-26.



MOU signing between BCPR and Understanding China Forum (UCF), SB Auditorium, BNU (2 June 2025)

"This seminar represented a defining institutional moment for BCPR's China Studies Chair, formalising its partnership with UCF and demonstrating the center's convening capacity at the highest diplomatic level."

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The MOU between BCPR and UCF, signed in the presence of China's Consul General, established the institutional framework that underpinned BCPR's collaborative China programming throughout 2025-26.*
- *H.E. Zhao Shiren's participation confirmed the Chinese Consulate's recognition of BCPR as a credible institutional partner in Lahore.*
- *The seminar engaged former ambassadors, policymakers and security professionals in substantive discussion of CPEC Phase II and the 75th anniversary of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations.*
- *CPEC Phase II's expansion into industrial cooperation, SEZs, agriculture, technology transfer and human resource development was identified as the bilateral agenda's defining priority.*
- *The event marked BCPR's entry into a formalised, recurring institutional collaboration with UCF, a partnership that shaped the entire subsequent year of programming.*

Roundtable: 80th Anniversary of the End of World War II and China's Victory Against Fascism

Date	25 August 2025
Time	11:00 AM – 12:30 PM
Venue	SLASS 120, BNU
Organised By	BCPR, in collaboration with Understanding China Forum (UCF)
Chief Guest	Mr. Cao Ke, Acting Consul General, People's Republic of China, Lahore

BCPR and the Understanding China Forum hosted a roundtable seminar commemorating the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and the Chinese people's victory against fascism. The event brought together scholars, students and distinguished panelists to reflect on the historical and contemporary significance of this milestone. Discussion examined how the experience of WWII shaped China's contemporary commitment to multilateralism, non-interference and opposition to hegemony, and connected historical memory with current geopolitical dynamics and Pakistan-China cooperation.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The event connected China's historical anti-fascist experience to its contemporary advocacy for multilateralism and non-hegemonic international relations.*
- *Mr. Cao Ke's participation as Chief Guest reflected the Chinese Consulate's active engagement with BCPR's programming.*
- *Discussion examined the relevance of WWII lessons for Pakistan-China cooperation within the current global order.*
- *The roundtable strengthened BCPR's engagement with China's historical narrative as a foundation for present policy.*

SCO Sustainable Development Seminar (Tianjin, China)

Date	11 September 2025
Venue	Tianjin, China
Organised Under	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) framework
BCPR Representative	Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR (Keynote Speaker)

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan represented BCPR as keynote speaker at the Sustainable Development Seminar on Driving Green Growth and Sustaining Eco-Civilization, organised under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and held in Tianjin, China. Ambassador Khan emphasised the importance of collaborative regional efforts to achieve sustainable development goals, highlighting the role of policy innovation, technology transfer and multilateral cooperation in fostering eco-civilisation across SCO member states. The seminar served as a platform for exchanging best practices on environmental governance, renewable energy and climate resilience within the Shanghai Spirit framework.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *BCPR's participation at the Tianjin SCO Seminar extended the center's international footprint to China-hosted multilateral forums.*
- *Ambassador Khan's keynote address positioned BCPR as a contributor to SCO-level deliberation on sustainable development.*
- *Green transition, ecological security and technology transfer were identified as priority areas for SCO regional cooperation.*



Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan representing BCPR at the SCO Sustainable Development Seminar, Tianjin (11 September 2025)

Roundtable: SCO Summit 2025, A Watershed in the Global Order

Date	18 September 2025
Venue	Pakistan Navy War College, Karachi
Organised By	BCPR, in collaboration with the Maritime center of Excellence (MCE), Pakistan Navy War College
Topic	The SCO Summit in Tianjin: Redefining Global Dynamics
Key Panelists	Prof. Gao (China); Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan (BCPR); Dr. Hassan Daud Butt; Ambassador Babar Amin
Report Author	Dr. Zainab Ahmed



SCO Summit Roundtable, Pakistan Navy War College, Karachi (18 September 2025)

BCPR, in collaboration with the Maritime center of Excellence at the Pakistan Navy War College, convened a high-level roundtable to analyse the outcomes and implications of the SCO Summit in Tianjin. The session brought together four distinguished experts to assess the SCO's evolving role in an emerging multipolar world order.

Prof. Gao argued that the weaponisation of economic tools, the US dollar and SWIFT system, by the West has degraded the existing order, and highlighted China's leadership in manufacturing and artificial intelligence as fundamental to its global influence.

Dr. Hassan Daud Butt grounded his analysis in the SCO's demographic and economic weight, 43 percent of the global population and 36 percent of global GDP in PPP terms and proposed a long-term roadmap to 2050 focused on physical connectivity (including the Trans-Afghan Railway) and strategic resilience through regional energy grids. Ambassador Babar Amin provided historical perspective on the SCO's evolution and identified India-Pakistan tensions as a persistent impediment to deeper integration.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The SCO now represents 43% of global population and 36% of global GDP (PPP), making it the most demographically and economically significant multilateral forum outside the UN system.*
- *Prof. Gao identified the weaponisation of the US dollar and SWIFT as structural threats to the existing international economic order.*
- *A long-term 2050 roadmap for SCO connectivity, including the Trans-Afghan Railway and regional energy grids, was proposed as a framework for sustained relevance.*
- *India-Pakistan tensions were identified as a structural impediment to SCO cohesion, particularly on counter-terrorism and regional connectivity.*
- *The roundtable concluded that the SCO is at a crossroads: it has the structural weight to influence global governance, but must translate ambition into tangible outcomes*

High-Level Policy Dialogue: Redefining Regional Connectivity, Mövenpick Hotel Centaurus, Islamabad, 26 November 2025. Keynoted by H.E. Ambassador Jiang Zaidong, Ambassador of China to Pakistan.



Redefining Regional Connectivity:
Pakistan–China Friendship in the New GeoEconomic Paradigm

Date	26 November 2025
Time	9:30 AM onwards
Venue	Mövenpick Hotel Centaurus, Islamabad
Organised By	BCPR, in collaboration with Understanding China Forum (UCF)
Keynote Speaker	H.E. Ambassador Jiang Zaidong, Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Pakistan
Distinguished Speakers	Dr. Moeed Yusuf (VC, BNU; former National Security Adviser), Ambassador Sardar Masood Khan, Ambassador Masood Khalid, Mr. Haroon Sharif, Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, Ms. Nasim Zehra
Media Coverage	Islamabad Post (DNA): "China unveils CPEC 2.0, announces new \$550 million investments"

BCPR and the Understanding China Forum co-hosted the most prominent bilateral policy event in the center's 2025 calendar: a high-level policy dialogue in Islamabad examining the next phase of Pakistan-China relations amid shifting global and regional dynamics. The event drew senior policymakers, diplomats, strategists and scholars from across Pakistan and was keynoted by the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan, H.E. Ambassador Jiang Zaidong.

The keynote address announced major new investments and reaffirmed China's commitment to regional connectivity. The event was covered by Islamabad Post under the headline "China unveils CPEC 2.0, announces new \$550 million investments," reflecting the significance of the announcements made. Discussions focused on the evolving CPEC framework, new trade and energy corridors, digital connectivity, industrial cooperation and the broader implications of the Pakistan-China strategic partnership for South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Dr. Moeed Yusuf and other distinguished speakers offered perspectives on geoeconomics, maritime development and Pakistan's role in an emerging multipolar order. As Pakistan and China approached the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations, the dialogue underscored that deepened cooperation under CPEC 2.0 remains central to regional stability.

"Leading thinkers and policymakers outlined an ambitious vision for transforming South Asia's economic landscape through enhanced Pakistan-China cooperation and an upgraded CPEC framework, turning geopolitical challenges into economic opportunities."



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The Islamabad dialogue was the highest-profile event in BCPR's 2025 calendar, convening the Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan alongside former NSA Dr. Moeed Yusuf and multiple senior diplomats.
- H.E. Ambassador Jiang Zaidong's keynote announced new investments and reaffirmed China's commitment to CPEC 2.0, a development covered by Pakistani national media.
- CPEC 2.0 was presented as a framework expanding beyond infrastructure into industrial cooperation, digital connectivity and agricultural development.
- The event coincided with the approaching 75th anniversary of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations, lending historic weight to its discussions.
- The Islamabad setting and Mövenpick venue reflected the event's national significance and BCPR's capacity for high-profile convening outside Lahore.

National Conference on Local Governance in Pakistan: Empowering Communities, jointly organised by BCPR and Sanobar Institute Islamabad

Date	1 December 2025
Organised By	BCPR, in collaboration with Sanobar Institute Islamabad
Topic	National Conference on Local Governance in Pakistan: Empowering Communities

BCPR, in collaboration with the Sanobar Institute Islamabad, convened the National Conference on “Local Governance in Pakistan: Empowering Communities,” bringing together policymakers, academics, civil society representatives, journalists, and students to examine the challenges and opportunities of grassroots governance. The conference featured keynote addresses by Khurram Dastgir Khan and Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan, alongside dynamic panel discussions that fostered informed dialogue on strengthening local democratic institutions. During the closing ceremony, Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan highlighted the importance of constitutionally protected and empowered local governments, equitable resource distribution through the NFC framework, and enhanced local ownership as essential foundations for responsive governance and meaningful citizen participation. The conference concluded with the presentation of souvenirs to distinguished panelists in recognition of their valuable contributions to advancing the discourse on local governance in Pakistan.



BNU Media Fest 2025: Beaconhouse National University | School of Media and Mass Communication

Sponsored by: BCPR

The BNU Media Fest 2025, held on December 3rd–4th, 2025, at Beaconhouse National University, marked a historic milestone as the inaugural media festival organized by the School of Media and Mass Communication (SMC). Designed to bring together emerging media talent from across Pakistan onto a single national platform, the two-day event featured eight rigorous competitive categories: live reporting, documentary production, short filmmaking, research papers, photography, digital content creation, media campaign design, and other creative media formats. These diverse categories were strategically curated to challenge students, strengthening their practical skills, critical thinking, and industry-ready storytelling abilities.

The response was nothing short of exceptional, drawing active participation from over 30 universities and institutes nationwide. This massive influx of high-quality submissions underscored the festival's immediate relevance and growing importance within Pakistan's academic media landscape. Entirely executed by BNU students, the festival put strong organizational capabilities, leadership, and teamwork on full display.

To complement the rigorous academic competitions, a vibrant social night was hosted, encouraging networking, cultural exchange, and informal engagement among participants from diverse institutional backgrounds, rendering the experience both academically enriching and socially impactful.

Most importantly, the immense scale and resounding success of BNU Media Fest 2025 would not have been possible without the strategic sponsorship and unwavering support of the Beaconhouse Center for Policy and Research (BCPR). Serving as the main sponsor, BCPR played a central role in the foundational planning, seamless execution, and widespread outreach of the entire event, with its institutional backing ensuring robust resource availability, operational stability, and enhanced visibility.

BCPR's pivotal contribution directly reflects its broader commitment to fostering academic excellence, a rigorous research culture, and meaningful international collaboration—including its China-linked academic and funding partnerships that strengthen cross-border educational and policy engagement. By intertwining these global perspectives with student-led media initiatives, this collaboration significantly elevated the stature of BNU Media Fest 2025.

It positioned the festival not merely as a localized university event, but as a nationally recognized platform backed by a prominent, research-driven institution with global academic linkages. Ultimately, BCPR's institutional involvement served as the defining factor in securing the long-term success, credibility, and profound academic impact of the festival.



Roundtable: China-US Competition, Pakistan's Role as a Connector

Co-hosted with the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS) | December 16, 2025

Date	16 December 2025
Time	10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Venue	SLASS 125, BNU
Organised By	BCPR, Shanghai Institutes for International Studies (SIIS), and Understanding China Forum (UCF)
Chief Guest	H.E. Zhao Shiren, Consul General of China, Lahore
SIIS Delegation	Prof. Chen Dongxiao (President, SIIS); Prof. Liu Zongyi (Director, center for South Asia Studies); Dr. Tan Chenyi; Dr. Zhang Xiaoyin
Pakistani Participants	Prof. Dr. Tahir Kamran; Dr. Zainab Ahmad; Dr. Ejaz Hussain; Ms. Saima Sial; diplomats, academics, journalists and students

BCPR, in collaboration with the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, one of China's premier foreign policy think tanks, and the Understanding China Forum, convened a landmark roundtable on China-US competition and Pakistan's potential role as a connector state. The event assembled diplomats, academics, policymakers, journalists and students to examine the shifting geopolitical and geo-economic landscape produced by intensifying US-China rivalry.

The historical framing opened with Pakistan's decisive role in Henry Kissinger's secret 1970s visit to China, which enabled the Nixon-Mao breakthrough and China's reintegration with the West. Prof. Chen Dongxiao, SIIS President, addressed the evolution of US-China relations and China's long-term commitment to Pakistan's economic development through CPEC. Pakistani participants offered a more critical assessment: Prof. Dr. Tahir Kamran argued that Pakistan's 1970s connector role was tactical, time-bound, and dependent on structural asymmetries that no longer exist, that today China has transformed into a global economic and technological hub, and that Pakistan currently lacks the capacity, leverage and structural positioning to serve as a bridge between the two global powers.

Dr. Ejaz Hussain argued that despite these constraints, Pakistan's geopolitical relevance has re-emerged, particularly in the Middle East, and that it can still exercise a pragmatic, situational facilitation role. H.E. Zhao Shiren, in his remarks, affirmed that the China-Pakistan relationship is "iron-clad" and immune to circumstance, and that China is committed to supporting Pakistan's

economic development through CPEC. He called for improved security conditions to build economic confidence and encourage youth entrepreneurship.

"Pakistan's priority should be to consolidate its own economic strength, governance capacity, and security environment. CPEC represents not merely a symbol of friendship with China but an opportunity to build sustainable economic foundations."



BCPR-SIIS Roundtable Discussion, BNU (16 December 2025), Featuring the full SIIS delegation and distinguished Pakistani participants

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The SIIS visit to BNU, at the level of the institution's President, marks BCPR's highest-level engagement with a Chinese foreign policy think tank to date, confirming the center's standing in the bilateral academic ecosystem.*
- *Prof. Chen Dongxiao affirmed China's long-term development commitment to Pakistan through CPEC and Gwadar, while noting that expectations must remain realistic and aligned with national capacity.*
- *Pakistani analysts offered a calibrated counter-narrative: Pakistan's 1970s connector role cannot be replicated today, and internal governance, corruption and political instability remain the primary constraints on Pakistan's external agency..*

- *H.E. Zhao Shiren characterised the China-Pakistan relationship as "iron-clad" and called for improved security to strengthen economic confidence and youth engagement.*
- *The roundtable established a framework for Pakistan's appropriate strategic posture: internal consolidation first, followed by an interest-driven, diversified foreign policy maintaining balanced relations with both the US and China*

Roundtable: Understanding China's 15th Five-Year Plan

Date	31 December 2025
Time	11:00 AM – 1:00 PM
Venue	SBT 002, BNU
Organised By	BCPR and Understanding China Forum (UCF)
Moderator	Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR
Special Guest	Cao Ke, Deputy Consul General of China, Lahore

BCPR and the Understanding China Forum convened a roundtable to analyse the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th CPC Central Committee and its implications for China's 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). The 14th Plan concluded with quantifiable gains: GDP reached \$19.3 trillion, China contributed roughly 30 percent to average annual global economic growth, renewable energy accounted for approximately 60 percent of total installed capacity, new-energy vehicle ownership reached 31.4 million, and 12 million new urban jobs were created.



Panelists unpacked the 15th Plan's priorities: technological self-reliance, the green transition, people-centered development and institutional reform. Deputy Consul General Cao Ke described the plan as clear, focused and comprehensive, observing that it clearly articulates development goals, implementation strategies and expected outcomes.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The 14th Five-Year Plan delivered: GDP of \$19.3 trillion, 30% contribution to global growth, 60% renewable energy share, 31.4 million new-energy vehicles, and 12 million new urban jobs.*
- *The 15th Plan's core priorities: advanced technology and AI self-reliance, the green transition, people-centered development, and domestic market strengthening.*
- *China's planning cycle, initiated in 1953, provides long-term directional consistency, enabling sustained development through periods of external shock.*
- *Pakistan was identified as having a "favorable window of opportunity" through BRI connectivity in the coming years, with Punjab cited as a forthcoming recipient of job creation and skills initiatives.*
- *The plan's language, using terms such as "ensure" and "will", was assessed as signalling leadership confidence and institutional commitment to stated goals.*

TEDxBNU 2025 Jointly Organized by BCPR

Venue	BNU
Organised By	TEDxBNU 2025 sponsored by BCPR
Key Panelists	Ms. Hui Qiu

BCPR proudly jointly organized TEDxBNU 2025, where Ms. Hui Qiu delivered an inspiring talk on the transformative potential of innovation, cross-cultural collaboration, and global engagement. Addressing a diverse audience of students, academics, and professionals, she shared valuable insights on navigating a rapidly changing world and fostering meaningful connections across borders. Her thought-provoking address underscored the importance of dialogue, creativity, and leadership in shaping inclusive and sustainable futures.



China Consulate General Friendship Award 2025

Awarded to Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director, BCPR

H. E. Zhao Shiren, Chinese Consul General in Lahore, presented the China Consulate General Friendship Award 2025 to Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, along with other recipients, in recognition of his contributions to strengthening Pakistan-China relations. Ambassador Khan was specifically recognised for promoting people-to-people contact through BCPR, facilitating

academic and cultural exchanges, advancing the understanding of Chinese language and culture in Pakistan, and building a community of shared future between the two countries. The award acknowledges contributions to trade, culture, education and CPEC development, and reflects the enduring Iron Brotherhood between Pakistan and China.

"The Friendship Award represents official Chinese recognition of BCPR's institutional role in deepening the civilisational, cultural and policy dimensions of the Pakistan-China all-weather partnership."



China Consulate General Friendship Award 2025 ceremony, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan receives the award from H.E. Zhao Shiren, Chinese Consul General in Lahore

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The Friendship Award is the most direct official Chinese recognition of BCPR's contribution to the bilateral relationship during 2025-26.*
- *Ambassador Khan was recognised specifically for promoting people-to-people contact, cultural exchange, Chinese language promotion, and community-building for a shared future.*
- *The award was presented by the Consul General himself, H.E. Zhao Shiren, at a formal ceremony.*
- *The award elevates BCPR's institutional standing in future engagements with Chinese diplomatic and academic counterparts.*
- *Recognition of the CPEC, trade, education and cultural dimensions of BCPR's work confirms the center's comprehensive contribution to the bilateral agenda.*

China Connect, BNU Winter School

Date	2 January 2026
Venue	BNU Library, SVAD Studios
Organised By	BNU Winter School, in collaboration with BCPR
Activities	Confucian Values session, Great Wall storytelling, Chinese Silk Painting Workshop, cultural exchange
Target Audience	Students aged 14 to 22

China Connect was an immersive cultural and intellectual session, co-organised by BCPR as part of the BNU Winter School, dedicated to Chinese heritage, philosophy and artistic traditions. The programme was designed for students aged 14 to 22 and offered university-level engagement with Chinese culture within the Winter School curriculum. Faiza Barat delivered an insightful presentation on Confucian values, while Sarmad Wali Khan led a storytelling session on the history and significance of the Great Wall.

A hands-on Chinese Silk Painting Workshop followed, in which participants engaged in pattern-making and colour layering. The sessions were complemented by authentic Chinese snacks. China Connect exemplified BCPR's approach of taking cultural diplomacy to a younger demographic, embedding China literacy within BNU's broader academic calendar.



China Connect, BNU Winter School (2 January 2026): Silk Painting Workshop and storytelling sessions

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *China Connect engaged a younger demographic (ages 14–22) with Chinese heritage through interactive and immersive formats.*
- *Confucian values and the history of the Great Wall were presented as entry points for understanding Chinese civilisation and its contemporary relevance.*
- *The Chinese Silk Painting Workshop provided hands-on creative engagement with traditional artistic practice.*
- *BCPR's collaboration with the BNU Winter School enabled integration of China programming into the university's formal academic calendar.*
- *The event demonstrated BCPR's capacity for cross-departmental campus engagement beyond policy-specialist audiences.*

Danube Lecture, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan

Date	21–30 January 2026
Platform	Danube Institute Podcast, Budapest
Host	Tamás Maráczi, Danube Institute
Speaker	Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR; Distinguished Fellow, Ludovika Public Diplomacy Hub, Hungary
Title	It's difficult to be neighbours with the Taliban



Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan at the Danube Lecture Series, Budapest (January 2026)

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan appeared on the Danube Lecture Series, a podcast of the Budapest-based Danube Institute, discussing Pakistan's geopolitical significance, Pakistan-US

relations, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the China-US rivalry, and Afghanistan's position in contemporary world politics. On Afghanistan, he assessed that four years after the Taliban's return, no inclusive governance system has emerged, leaving a cycle of economic decline and insecurity compounded by the continued presence of ISIS, al-Qaeda and the TTP. He argued that interest-based cooperation, rather than ideological positioning, should guide modern diplomacy, a posture consistent with Pakistan's dual relationships with Washington and Beijing.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Ambassador Khan's Danube Lecture extended BCPR's international reach to European conservative policy circles.*
- *On Afghanistan: four years into Taliban rule, no inclusive governance has emerged; groups including ISIS, al-Qaeda and TTP remain active threats to neighbouring states.*
- *Pakistan's geopolitical positioning as a bridge between South and Central Asia requires interest-based, non-ideological diplomacy.*
- *The lecture was reproduced in the Hungarian Conservative, reflecting BCPR's growing European media presence.*

MCAP-BNU Int | Media Conference, jointly organised by: BCPR, in collaboration with MCAP, School of Media and Mass Communication (SMC) BNU, and Understanding China Forum (UCF) | 11 February 2026

i. Han Pixels, Digital Chinese Art Workshop

BCPR co-organised Han Pixels, a Digital Chinese Art Workshop in collaboration with MCAP, the School of Media and Mass Communication and the Understanding China Forum. Facilitated by Mahreen Zaib, Research Associate BCPR, the workshop introduced participants to foundational concepts of digital art and explored how contemporary digital tools could be used to interpret traditional Chinese cultural themes, symbols and aesthetics. The event emphasised creative thinking and visual interpretation, encouraging students to engage with Chinese artistic traditions through modern digital practice. Han Pixels reflected BCPR's commitment to cultural programming reaching beyond policy-oriented audiences, connecting arts education with cross-cultural engagement.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Han Pixels connected digital creativity with traditional Chinese cultural aesthetics, reaching SMC students and arts-oriented audiences.*
- *Facilitated by Research Associate Mahreen Zaib, the workshop aligned with her policy paper on media collaboration as soft power.*
- *The event strengthened BCPR's collaborative programming with MCAP and SMC.*
- *Digital art as a medium for cultural engagement offers scalable potential for people-to-people programming in Pakistan.*

ii. Working Group IV: China-Pakistan Media Collaboration: *Evolving Narratives and Opportunities* | 12 February 2026

BCPR co-organised Working Group IV at the 11th MCAP-BNU International Media Conference 2026, focusing on China-Pakistan media collaboration. Participants discussed narrative-building strategies, media exchange programmes, and how Pakistani and Chinese media institutions could develop more sustained bilateral relationships. Topics included digital media platform opportunities, language barrier challenges, editorial independence considerations, and the scope for co-produced content and joint training initiatives.



11th MCAP-BNU International Media Conference 2026, BCPR co-organised Working Group IV on China-Pakistan media collaboration

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Media collaboration was identified as an underdeveloped dimension of the Pakistan-China bilateral relationship despite its strategic potential.*
- *Language barriers and editorial independence were identified as the primary structural constraints on deepened media cooperation.*
- *Digital platforms, including WeChat, Douyin, and Pakistani social media, offer scalable avenues for bilateral media reach.*
- *Recommendations included joint production funds, language training for media professionals, and shared content guidelines emphasising cultural resonance*

Chinese New Year Festival 2026

Date	13 February 2026
Time	10:00 AM – 3:00 PM
Venue	SLASS Lawn, BNU
Organised By	BCPR, in collaboration with Understanding China Forum (UCF)
Activities	Chinese Digital Art Exhibition, Chinese Tales Corner, cultural performances, Theme Day (red and gold dress), YFPR Soft Launch

BCPR and the Understanding China Forum hosted the Chinese New Year Festival 2026 to celebrate the arrival of the Year of the Horse. The festival was designed as a campus-wide cultural event combining artistic expression, storytelling and community engagement. The Chinese Digital Art Exhibition showcased student works created through contemporary digital tools while remaining rooted in Chinese artistic traditions, offering a visual dialogue bridging tradition with innovation. A Chinese Tales Corner provided a quiet, reflective space for participants to gather, listen and share stories inspired by traditional Chinese culture. A campus-wide Theme Day encouraged BNU community members to dress in red and gold. The festival was the most expansive cultural event in BCPR's 2025-26 calendar, engaging a diverse, cross-departmental student audience.

The Chinese New Year Festival also marked the soft launch of the Youth Forum for Policy Research (YFPR), a student-led think tank committed to critical dialogue, research, cultural exchange and policy engagement. Its launch during a Chinese cultural celebration symbolised the linkage between people-to-people engagement and future policy leadership.



Chinese New Year Festival 2026 (13 February 2026)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *The Chinese New Year Festival 2026 was the largest cultural event in BCPR's annual calendar, demonstrating institutional capacity for campus-wide mobilisation around China-Pakistan themes.*
- *The Chinese Digital Art Exhibition showcased student creative outputs bridging Chinese aesthetic traditions with contemporary digital practice.*
- *The soft launch of the Youth Forum for Policy Research (YFPR) during the festival linked cultural celebration with institutional investment in the next generation of policy researchers.*
- *The campus-wide Theme Day (red and gold) activated BNU's broader community beyond academic participants.*
- *The event reinforced the UCF-BCPR partnership as a vehicle for sustained cultural programming.*

Webinar: Twin Crises: *The US-Israel war on Iran and the Pakistan-Afghanistan Conflict – Implications for Pakistan and the Regional Peace (Iran Conflict Series, Webinar I)*

Date	2 March 2026
Format	Online webinar
Organised By	BCPR
Moderator	Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR
Panelists	Dr. Moeed Yusuf (VC, BNU), Engr. Khurram Dastagir Khan, Maj. Gen. (r) Samrez Salik, Dr Salman Shah, Ambassador Riffat Masood, Ambassador Aizaz Ahmad Chaudhary, Dr Rasul Baksh Rais, Dr Hussain Shaheed Suharwardy, Imtiaz Gul, Lt. Gen. (r) Sikandar Afzal, Lt. Gen. (r) Tariq Khan, Dr Simbal Khan

Twin Crises. One Region in Turmoil. On 02 March 2026, the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR), Lahore brought together diplomats, military leaders, and strategic experts to assess the US-Israel war on Iran and the escalating Pakistan-Afghanistan conflict. With Iran under direct attack and Af-Pak tensions turning into open warfare, the discussion examined the risks of wider regional escalation and what these developments mean for Pakistan’s security, foreign policy, and strategic choices ahead.



Webinar: Iran War: *Economic and Maritime Implications* (Iran Conflict Series, Webinar II)

Date	14 March 2026
Format	Online webinar
Organised By	BCPR
Moderator	Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR
Panelists	Rear Admiral Javaid Iqbal HI(M), President National Institute of Maritime Affairs (NIMA), Mr. Haroon Sharif, Former Minister of State and Chairman Board of Investment, Dr. Ghulam Ghaus, Associate Professor of Economics, BNU, Commodore Ehsan Ahmed Khan Deputy President, Maritime center of Excellence (MCE) Pakistan Navy War College, Lahore, Dr. Zainab Ahmed, Deputy Director, BCPR Assistant Professor, BNU

The Strait of Hormuz is closed, and the economic shockwaves are just beginning. BCPR gathered top experts, diplomats, economists, and maritime security specialists, today for a webinar, to assess what this means for global energy, maritime trade, and Pakistan's fragile economy and to assess the immediate and structural economic and maritime consequences of the Iran war, and to map out what policy responses remain available to Pakistan and the international community in an increasingly constrained strategic environment.



Webinar: Prospects for Negotiations and Strategic Outcomes (*Iran Conflict Series, Webinar III*)

Date	1 April 2026
Format	Online webinar
Organised By	BCPR
Moderator	Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR
Panelists	Dr. Moeed Yusuf (VC, BNU), Prof. Dr. Huma Baqai, Ambassador Hassan Habib, Dr. Anatol Lieven, Mr. Adam Weinstein, Mr. Khalid Banuri, Dr. Rabia Akhtar, Ambassador Khalil Sherghokami, Elizabeth Threlkeld



BCPR Iran Conflict Series, Webinar III: Prospects for Negotiations (1 April 2026)

BCPR convened the third webinar in its Iran Conflict series, examining prospects for negotiations and strategic outcomes in the evolving Middle East crisis. The distinguished panel of Pakistani and international experts assessed conflict trajectories, diplomatic complexities and the strategic interests of regional powers including China, Pakistan and Iran. The discussion addressed Pakistan's potential role in the evolving geopolitical landscape and pathways for de-escalation, underscoring the urgency of sustained dialogue in addressing one of the most pressing geopolitical challenges of 2026.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *BCPR demonstrated capacity to convene international experts rapidly in response to evolving geopolitical crises.*
- *China's decision not to veto UN Security Council resolutions on Gaza was noted as having enhanced Beijing's standing among Muslim-majority countries including Pakistan.*
- *Pakistan's potential role as a diplomatic facilitator in the Middle East was assessed as viable given its ties with both Iran and Gulf states.*

Academia's Role in CPEC Phase II, Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Date	12 April 2026
Venue	Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI)
Organised By	Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI)
Notable Participant	Chinese Consul General

BCPR's team visited the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry for a focused discussion on the role of academia in CPEC Phase II. The session examined how universities could engage more actively with Special Economic Zones and strengthen industry linkages. Participants argued that universities should evolve into centers of innovation, research and economic development, aligning curricula with industry needs and producing skilled workers relevant to CPEC's second phase. Pakistani-Chinese academic collaboration through joint research, student exchanges and faculty cooperation was identified as a priority.



BCPR team at Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI), April 2026)

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Universities were identified as underutilised actors in CPEC Phase II's industrial and SEZ development agenda.
- Academic-industry alignment, matching curricula with CPEC-generated economic needs, was proposed as a structural priority.
- Joint Pakistani-Chinese academic programming: research, exchanges and faculty collaboration as the platform for knowledge and technology transfer.

Visit of H.E. Mr. Sun Yan, Consul General of the People's Republic of China

Date	22 April 2026
Venue	BNU
Organised By	BCPR
Guest	H.E. Mr. Sun Yan, Consul General of the People's Republic of China in Lahore



H.E. Mr. Sun Yan, Consul General of China, visiting BNU, hosted by BCPR (22 April 2026)

BCPR had the honour of hosting H.E. Mr. Sun Yan, China's incoming Consul General in Lahore, for a distinguished visit to BNU. The engagement brought together university leadership, faculty and students for a meaningful exchange on Pakistan-China relations, academic collaboration and emerging areas of mutual interest. The visit featured presentations, remarks and interactive dialogue, and touched on potential future collaboration between BNU and Chinese institutions, the state of the bilateral relationship and research partnership opportunities. The visit marked a significant step toward future collaborations and reaffirmed BCPR's role as the primary institutional bridge between BNU and Chinese diplomatic and academic communities.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *BCPR hosted H.E. Sun Yan as his first substantive institutional engagement in Lahore, confirming the center's position as the premier BNU interlocutor with Chinese diplomacy.*
- *University leadership, faculty and students participated, demonstrating broad institutional engagement.*
- *Discussions identified concrete areas for BNU-Chinese institution collaboration in research and academic exchange.*

WORKSHOPS

Workshops

Under the project BCPR engaged with academia's and professionals through workshops for conducive outcomes. Three workshops were held; two were focused on course development and design on China. The third one included countering disinformation and enhancing trilateral cooperation by increasing people to people exchange.

Workshop 1: *Advancing Chinese Modernization: Integrating China Studies into Undergraduate Curriculum at BNU-SLASS*

The workshop included expert participants from leading academic institutions, think tanks, and intellectuals who have had experience and exposure on various aspects of Chinese history, culture, and policies with particular relevance to Pakistan-China interaction. The participants had an open, candid, and constructive exchange of views on the significance of the recently adopted resolution on modernization and reform in China by the Third Plenary of the Central Committee of the CPC.



It was considered view of the participants that the Resolution reflected the resolve of the Chinese leadership and nation to undertake actions and adjustments in its path to development and growth which has enabled China to register remarkable achievements since independence but particularly in the last 40 years and continue this journey with necessary reforms for deepening the reforms for further modernization while conforming to the characteristics of Chinese socialism.



The participants also made detailed observations and suggestions on the desired elements to be included in the China Studies Course being introduced by the BNU in its undergrad programme in liberal arts. A common view was that to promote an understanding about China in Pakistan and strengthening China-Pakistan engagement in various fields, the course should cover historical, geographical, societal, cultural and economic aspects about China. Many participants suggested that Chinese advances in the fields of education, science and technology, space, cyber and digital world should be appropriately highlighted. The participants underlined the challenges in ensuring a comprehensive undergrad China Studies programme within limited credit hours in a single semester adding that the BNU, at this stage or at a later stage, may explore having two courses to make the course more impactful.

Course Outline Developed and Approved

The workshop concluded with the course outline designed by Dr. Asif Amin, Assistant Professor-School of Integrated Social Sciences (SISS), and Research Fellow- Center for Security, Strategy and Policy Research(CSSPR) at the University of Lahore. He veraged his expertise on China.

The course, titled "China and the World/China in the 21st Century," was taught in Spring 2025 and was offered to all BNU students as an elective course. A total of 17 students took up this course and studied. This course is again being offered in Fall 2025.

Here is the comprehensive outline for the undergraduate (BS) level elective course:

Course Title: China and the World/China in the 21st Century

Level: 400 (Undergraduate/BS Elective course)

Course Description

This undergraduate course explores China's evolving role on the global stage, integrating historical, political, cultural, and economic perspectives. This course will introduce China's pivotal historical milestones, including the Opium Wars, the "Century of Humiliation," and China's rise to great power status through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative and China's grand strategy to create a community of shared future to students. The course examines China's domestic and international strategy, foreign policy formulation, and its impact on global governance, technology, and power dynamics. Through lectures by experts and interactive seminars, students will critically assess The US-China Great Power Rivalry, China's aspirations, challenges, and the implications of its interactions with the global order. Key themes include China's identity, nationalism, foreign policy, and the interplay of soft and hard power in shaping its international ambitions.

Learning Objectives

Analyze the influence of Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, and nationalism on ancient Chinese governance and societal structures. Also, evaluate the Impact of the Opium Wars and the “Century of Humiliation” on China’s Contemporary political structure.

Identify and critically examine the role of historical narratives, domestic institutions, and elite actors in shaping China's foreign policy.

Discuss China’s diplomacy and its soft and hard power projection in terms of its role in shaping or challenging the existing global order.

Analyze the implications of the US-China Great Power rivalry, the quest for tech dominance, and regional stability.

Develop critical thinking on the relationship between historical, cultural, and political factors in China's domestic and international behavior.

Course Learning Outcomes

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

Demonstrate an in-depth understanding of China's historical, cultural, and political development and its implications for global relations.

Apply multidisciplinary approaches to analyze complex global issues involving China, including foreign policy decision-making and Great Power competition.

Employ analytical tools to assess the efficacy and limitations of China's global strategies, such as economic statecraft, soft power, and public diplomacy.

Articulate how China's rise influences global order and power dynamics, including its relations with middle powers, alliances, and regional stakeholders.

Use critical analysis skills to evaluate global power transitions and anticipate future challenges in international affairs.

Teaching Methods

The course uses two primary teaching methods: lectures by Scholars with expertise in a particular area and seminars.

Lectures on China and the World: The lectures provide an overview of the topic introduced that week. The course is structured into different sections. We begin by introducing China's history, political system, and where it sits globally in the 21st century. Although no previous knowledge of China and the world in the 21st Century will be assumed, it is worth remembering that this is an undergraduate (BS) level course. As such, preparation-for lectures and especially seminars-is vital. I strongly recommend reading all the essential and case study readings every week, thinking about the topics involved, working hard on the presentations, and generally playing your part in making the seminar an enjoyable and stimulating environment. This will help you understand the lecture's content and the approach the lecturer is taking that week.

The reading list outlines the essential texts for each week. These texts are intended to provide a basis for class discussion, introduce key concepts and issues, and provide a starting point for more advanced, independent inquiry into particular topics. They should be read and digested ahead of the seminars.

Most of the time, seminars will consist of three core elements:

Two or three students (depending on the strength of the seminar group) will give a brief presentation (up to 10 minutes). The presentations should focus on one or more of the key questions related to the weekly topics. Please note that presentation handouts should be emailed to the instructor on the seminar day. Students can also bring them to the seminar room and use a USB drive or the Internet to present. Students can use PowerPoint or circulate printouts of their presentations.

There will be a group discussion on the material presented for 10-15 minutes. This will vary weekly, from general conversation to smaller group work. The class will be divided into groups. Depending on the strength of the class, each group will have four or five students.

Students should ensure that they arrive on time for the lectures and seminars. If a student is late by 10 minutes (or more), he/she will be marked absent. In certain circumstances, exceptions will be

made on a case-by-case basis if students are absent from class for reasons beyond human control. In such circumstances, written documentation will be required as proof.

Assessment: The course has four types of assessment:

1. **Written exam:** a written exam will be held in the middle of the semester and in the last week of the semester. Students will answer three questions. The written exam will account for 50% of the final mark.
2. **Presentations and Assignments:** Presentations in seminars will account for 25% of the final mark. If a student is supposed to present in the seminar but cannot so due to unforeseen circumstances, the student must contact the lecturer in advance to arrange a replacement. Failure to inform the lecturer will result in a zero mark for the presentation.
3. **Seminar participation:** Account for 25% of the final mark.
4. **Resource Persons for Lectures on Expert Areas:** The course features lectures by a range of experts, including:
 - *Dr. Fazal Ur Rahman*
 - *Ms. Hui Chi*
 - *Dr. Asif Amin (China's Grand Strategy, Great Power Competition)*
 - *Prof. Dr. Saeed Shafqat*
 - *Dr. Hassan Daud Butt*
 - *Ambassador Masood Khalid*
 - *Ambassador Moin ul Haq*
 - *Prof. Tang Yuan*
 - *Dr. Bright Lumor (China-Africa Relations)*
 - *Prof. Wang Li (China's Foreign Policy Towards USA)*
 - *Dr. Yanzhen (China Global Power Politics)*
 - *Dr. Humphrey Arnaldo Russel (China and ASEAN)*
 - *Francisco Xavier Felasetti (China and South America)*

Activities:

Visit to Confucius center
Guest Lectures
Documentaries
Interviews and interactions with Chinese officials
Interactive Session with a Chinese University or think tank
Visit to Pakistan-China Joint Chamber of Commerce

Week 1 to Week 4

Lecture: Introduction to China: Historical Foundations, Ancient China, Its Culture, Opium Wars, and Century of Humiliation

China's four-thousand-year history plays a critical role in its politics. The country's historical evolution includes the legacy of ancient China, including the traditions and practices such as Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism that have shaped its governance and societal values. It is imperative to discuss the pivotal role of the Opium Wars (1839-42, 1856-60) and the century of Humiliation in undermining Chinese Sovereignty.

Questions for Class/ Seminar, Discussion

How did Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism shape the governance and social structure of Ancient China?

What were the primary causes of the Opium Wars, and how did they reflect the dynamics of imperialism in the 19th century?

How has modern Chinese political discourse and education utilized the "Century of Humiliation" narrative?

How has this historical period contributed to formulating China's "national rejuvenation" strategy under current leadership?

Essential Readings

Callahan, William A. "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 29, no. 2 (2004): 199–218. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40645112>.

Kaufman, Alison A. "The 'Century of Humiliation,' Then and Now: Chinese Perceptions of the International Order." Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, March 10, 2011. <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf>.

Brandt, Loren, and Debin Ma. "Modernisation and China's 'Century of Humiliation.'" *VoxEU*, March 9, 2011. <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/modernisation-and-chinas-century-humiliation>.

Liu, D., J. Zhang, Q. Wang, Z. Chen, X. Li, and Y. Zhang. "Effects of Dietary Interventions on Gut Microbiota in Patients with Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis." *Frontiers in Nutrition* 10 (2023): 37490112. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/37490112/>.

Park, Seung Young. "China's Identity through a Historical Lens." *Journal of Advanced Military Studies Special Issue* (2022): 79–94. <https://www.usmcu.edu/Outreach/Marine-Corps-University-Press/MCU-Journal/Journal-of-Advanced-Military-Studies-SI-2022/Chinas-Identity-through-a-Historical-Lens/>.

Nakayama, Don K. "The Opium Wars of China in the Nineteenth Century and America in the Twenty-First." *The American Surgeon™* 90, no. 2 (2024): 327-331. DOI: 10.1177/00031348231192048

Asia Pacific Curriculum. "The Opium Wars in China." Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada. <https://asiapacificcurriculum.ca/learning-module/opium-wars-china>.

Further Readings *(These books provide a comprehensive background of the Opium Wars and Century of Humiliation, Chinese Culture of Confucianism, Daoism, and Legalism.)*

Clarke, Stephen R. Platt. *Imperial Twilight: The Opium War and the End of China's Last Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, 2019.

Lovell, Julia. *The Opium War: Drugs, Dreams and the Making of China*. London: Picador, 2011.

Callahan, William A. *China's Quest for Great Power Identity and the 'Century of Humiliation.'* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Simon, Karla W. *Civil Society in China: The Legal Framework from Ancient Times to the "New Reform Era"*. OUP USA, 2013.

Lenong, Leni, and Maham Toqeer. "Legalism and Daoism: A Comparative Analysis of Mystical Elements in Ancient Chinese Philosophies." *Insights of Mystical, Spiritual and Theological Studies* 3, no. 3 (2024): 40-46.

Week 5 to Week 7

Lecture: China and the world: History, Theory, and Identity

Since the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949, it has changed dramatically. As China is commonly seen as an 'alternative' to the liberal world order, this lecture put its shifting policies in a cultural, historical, and theoretical context.

Questions for Class/Seminar discussion:

History plays an important role in FP formulation in China. Discuss

Do domestic institutions play an important role in foreign policy decision-making in China? Why and how?

Nationalism in China is a double-edged sword? Do you agree? Why and why not?

Essential Readings

Xu, Yiqing, and Jiannan Zhao. *The power of history: How a victimization narrative shapes national identity and public opinion in China*. *Research & Politics* 10, no. 2, 2023

Shambaugh, David L. *China goes global: the partial power*, Oxford University Press, 2013. Read online

Riyun, Cong. "Nationalism and democratization in contemporary China." In *Construction of Chinese Nationalism in the Early 21st Century*, pp. 111-128. Routledge, 2014.

Cultural realism: strategic culture and grand strategy in Chinese history - Johnston, Alastair I., 1998, 1995

China: the pessoptimist nation - Callahan, William A., 2010

Economy, Elizabeth. "Xi Jinping's New World Order: Can China Remake the International System?" *Foreign Affairs*. 101 (2022): 52. Read Online

Yang, Yi Edward. "China's strategic narratives in global governance reform under Xi Jinping." In *China's Big Power Ambition under Xi Jinping*, pp. 19-33. Routledge, 2021. Read Online

Contingent states: greater China and transnational relations - Callahan, William A., 2004

Callahan, William A. Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony? *International Studies Review* 10:4 (2008), 749-61. Read online

Yang Jiechi, *Innovations in China's Diplomatic Theory and Practice Under New Conditions*, Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013/08/16. Read online

Xi Jinping's Fast Start | Hoover Institution - Joseph Fewsmith

China's foreign policy dilemma | Lowy Institute for International Policy

China Leadership Monitor current issue | Hoover Institution

Overviews

China and the world: Chinese foreign relations in the post-cold war era - Kim, Samuel S., 1994

Kim's book is somewhat outdated now, but his introduction gives a very good overview of how the discipline has developed up until the early post-Cold War period.

New directions in the study of China's foreign policy - Johnston, Alastair I., Ross, Robert S., 2006

This edited volume brings together several leading Chinese foreign and security policy authorities. Students should read this critically and ask whether it reflects a specifically North American perspective and why it omits several new developments, such as the study of identity politics and China's relations beyond East Asia.

Historical Perspectives

These books are representative of efforts to make sense of Chinese foreign policy, drawing mainly on a historical approach that tends to treat "China" as a rational actor, i.e., either as a unitary state or a system in which decisions are made by one leader or organization.

The Chinese World Order: Traditional China's foreign relations - Fairbank, John King, 1968

China among equals: the Middle Kingdom and its neighbors, 10th-14th centuries - Rossabi, Morris, c1983

The genesis of Chinese Communist foreign policy - Hunt, Michael H., 1996

Public Opinion/Nationalism in China

China's new nationalism: pride, politics, and diplomacy - Gries, Peter Hays, 2004

A nation-state by construction: dynamics of modern Chinese nationalism - Zhao, Suisheng, 2004

Strong society, smart state: the rise of public opinion in China's Japan policy - Reilly, James, 2012

Chinese nationalism in the global era - Hughes, Christopher R., 2006

Discovering Chinese nationalism in China: modernization, identity and international relations - Zheng, Yongnian, 1999

China and the Internet: politics of the digital leap forward - Hughes, Christopher R., Wacker, Gudrun, 2003

China: fragile superpower - Shirk, Susan L., 2007

Week 8 to Week 10

Lecture: China's Foreign Relations: Who makes Chinese foreign policy: Government system, elites, bureaucracies, or civil society?

Until recently, the party elite made foreign policy behind closed doors. Two new sets of actors have emerged in the past few years: 1) bureaucratic competition between the military, diplomats, and China's new transnational corporations, and 2) experts in think tanks and universities and popular voices in the media and on the web. Still, China's new president, Xi Jinping, is trying to reassert control over the bureaucracy and public opinion: Does his 'China Dream' include a 'World Dream'?

Questions for Class/Seminar discussion:

What is Xi Jinping's China dream? Do you think China's dream is influenced by cognitive and psychological school (Xi's beliefs and perceptions), or is it influenced by the rational actor model (power) or domestic factors?

Do culture and identity influence Chinese Foreign Policy? Why and how?

Is there a conflict between the Chinese dream and the American dream? Why and how?

Culture and Power in International Relations (Chinese Diplomacy)

Methods and nations: cultural governance and the indigenous subject - Shapiro, Michael J., 2004 - This is the classic explanation of cultural governance and resistance. It uses Western examples but makes us think about how politics works in China, too.

Writing security: United States foreign policy and the politics of identity - Campbell, David, 1998;

This book is one of the first to examine identity and security issues. It uses the American example, but it can help us think about China, too.

Worrying about China: the language of Chinese critical inquiry (pp 1-57) - Davies, Gloria, 2007;

This book examines how Chinese discourse shapes the possibilities for the PRC's domestic and foreign politics.

China goes global: the partial power - Shambaugh, David L., c2013pp. 13-44 and 207-268. These chapters give a good description of China's cultural diplomacy and how Chinese elites see their role in the world.

Callahan et al., ~Introduction: Cultural Spheres of Nationalism in East Asia | William Callahan - Academia.edu - This essay examines how cultural governance works in China and East Asia.

Cultural governance in Pacific Asia - Callahan, William A., 2006; This book examines how cultural governance works in East Asia. The Introduction and Conclusion use Chinese examples.

The Politics of Imagining Asia - Wang, Hui, Hutters, Theodore, 2011; This book is an example of new Sino-centric / post-western ways of thinking about China and Asia.

Contingent states: greater China and transnational relations - Callahan, William A., 2004

This book uses post-structural theory to examine Chinese foreign policy

Further Readings

Chinese foreign policy think tanks and China's Policy towards Japan - Liao, Xuanli, 2006

Strong society, smart state: the rise of public opinion in China's Japan policy - Reilly, James, 2012

Interpreting Chinese foreign policy: the micro-macro linkage approach - Zhao, Quansheng, 1996

China's foreign policy making: societal force and Chinese American policy - Hao, Yufan, Su, Lin, 2005

The dynamics of foreign-policy decision-making in China - Lu, Ning, 2000

Chinese security policy: structure, power, and politics - Ross, Robert S., 2009

Chinese nationalism in the global era - Hughes, Christopher R., 2006

Swaine, Michael D (1996) The PLA and Chinese National Security Policy: Leaderships, Structures, Processes The China Quarterly, Vol.146, pp.360-393

Koo, Min Gyo (2009) The Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute and Sino-Japanese political-economic relations: cold politics and hot economics? The Pacific Review, Vol.22(2), p.205-232

Roy, Denny (2009) China's Democratised Foreign Policy Survival, Vol.51(2), p.25-40

He, Kai; Feng, Huiyun (2013) Xi Jinping's Operational Code Beliefs and China's Foreign Policy Chinese Journal of International Politics, 2013, Vol. 6(3), pp.209-231

Week 11 to Week 13

Lecture: China's role in the world: Status quo or aggressive power?

Questions for Class/Seminar discussion:

What is economic statecraft? Does China employ economic statecraft to achieve FP objectives? Give examples to substantiate your argument.

What is the role of hard and soft power in Chinese foreign policy?

Does China present an alternative world order, or is it socializing into the current world order?

Is China's Rise Peaceful?

Economic Diplomacy as an Instrument of Foreign Policy

Zhang, Shuxiu. Chinese Economic Diplomacy: Decision-making actors and processes. Routledge, 2016.

Szatlach, Maria Ewa. "The importance of economic diplomacy in the era of globalization (the case of China)." (2015).

Chinese Hardball - EJ Weiner, 2011 Chapter 4 from The Shadow Market: How Sovereign Wealth Funds Secretly Dominate the Global Economy

Tools of Survival: Sovereign Wealth Funds in Singapore and China - Victor Shih, 2009-05-06

Jiang, Yang. "'Great Power Style 'in China's Economic Diplomacy: Filling the Shoes of a Benign Hegemon?'" The Hague Journal of Diplomacy 6, no. 1-2 (2011): 63-81.

Did China really ban rare earth metals exports to Japan? | East Asia Forum

Debating China's exchange rate policy - Goldstein, Morris, Lardy, Nicholas R., 2008

The making of China's exchange rate policy: from plan to WTO entry - Liew, Leong H., Wu, Harry X., c2007

The debate on China's exchange rate: Should or will it be revalued? - Zhang, Jialin, c2004

Response and responsibility: China in East Asian financial cooperation - Yang Jiang, 2010-11-18

Who's afraid of sovereign wealth funds? - Xu Yi-chong, 2009-03

Military Strategy, Doctrine, and the Use of Force

Rising to the challenge: China's grand strategy and international security - Goldstein, Avery, c2005

China's use of military force: beyond the Great Wall and the Long March - Scobell, Andrew, 2003

Strong borders, secure nation: cooperation and conflict in China's territorial disputes - Fravel, M. Taylor, 2008

The Great Wall at Sea: China's Navy in the Twenty-first Century - Cole, Bernard D., 2010

The Great Wall and the Empty Fortress: China's Search for Security - Nathan, Andrew J., Ross, Robert S., c1997

China's Antipiracy Operations - Andrew, Erikson 2013

Does China Have a Grand Strategy?

Rising to the challenge: China's grand strategy and international security - Goldstein, Avery, 2008

China 3.0 - 2012pp. 106-131. This book uses Chinese sources to show some aspects of the debate in China between various theoretical/ideological groups.

Now, New and Assertive is China's New Assertiveness? *International Security* 37:4 (2013): 7-48 - Alastair Iain Johnston

After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline

Classifying Chinese Nationalism: The Geopolitical Turn - Christopher Hughes, 2011-09

Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: The Strident Turn - Suisheng Zhao, 2013-07

The Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy - Luttwak, Edward

C. Chinese Visions of World Order: Post-hegemonic or a New Hegemony? - William A. Callahan, 2008-12

Scobell, Andrew, and Scott W. Harold. "An 'assertive' China? Insights from interviews." *Asian Security* 9, no. 2 (2013): 111-131.

Chinese Century, Asian Century, Pacific Century? Jenny Andersson, *The Future Landscape*

The World Future Society Welcomes its New China Chapter | World Future Society

China in 2020: a new type of superpower - Hu, Angang, c2011

Chenxing Pan, *The Asian/Chinese Century from a Chinese Perspective*, *Griffith Asia Quarterly* 1:1 (2013): 30-52,

The Fat Years - Chen, Guanzhong, Duke, Michael S., 2011

The politics of imagining Asia - Wang, Hui, Hutters, Theodore, 2011

WSI China Security Vol. 4 No.2 Summer 2008: Debating China's Future Special section featuring debate among several of the world's leading China watchers on the future of China.

Griffith Asia Quarterly - Special issue on the future of Asia.

China Information - William A. Callahan, July 2012 - Special issue on China's future edited by Prof Callahan.

The China Path: Economics, Politics and Soft Power

China goes global: the partial power - Shambaugh, David L., c2013 - pp. 156-206.

Yao Yang, *The End of the Beijing Consensus* | Foreign Affairs

China 3.0 - 2012

China in 2020: a new type of superpower - Hu, Angang, c2011

In search of China's development model: beyond the Beijing Consensus - Hsu, S. Philip, Zhao, Suisheng, Wu, Yushan, 2011

Zhang vs. Yang on the China Model - China Media Project

Confucius Institutes and Controlling Chinese Languages | China Heritage Quarterly - Michael Churchman

Pan Wei, The Chinese Model of Development, 2007

Yawei Liu, ed., Is There a China Model?, 2010

The China Beat & middot; Questioning the ‘Chinese Model of Development’ - Zhansui Yu

Partial Intimations of the Coming Whole: The Chongqing Experiment in Light of the Theories of Henry George, James Meade, and Antonio Gramsci - Z. Cui, 2011-11-01

China, the EU and China’s Twelfth Five-Year Programme - Robert Ash et al

Zhang Weiwei, Pan Wei, Yu Keping and Hu Angang in Where is China Going? Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 2012, pp. 1-43, 109-139.

The Beijing consensus: how China's authoritarian model will dominate the twenty-first century - Halper, Stefan A., 2010

Maritime Disputes, Sea Power, and Historical Analogies

Morton, Katherine. "China's ambition in the South China Sea: Is a legitimate maritime order possible?" International Affairs 92, no. 4 (2016): 909-940.

Erickson, Andrew S. "Essence of distinction: the ends, ways, and means of China’s military maritime quest." Frontiers in Political Science 6 (2024): 1448241.

Sea Power and China’s Strategic Choices - Zhang Wenmu

Territorial Disputes at the International Court of Justice - Brian Taylor Sumner, 2004

China's ocean frontier: international law, military force and national development - Austin, Greg, Australian National University, 1998

Propaganda as Policy? Explaining the PLA’s Hawkish Faction• (Part Two) | The Jamestown Foundation

Propaganda, Not Policy: Explaining the PLA’s Hawkish Faction• (Part One) | The Jamestown Foundation

The Use and Abuse of Historical Analogies

Wang, Yi. "'The backward will be beaten': historical lesson, security, and nationalism in China." Journal of Contemporary China 29, no. 126 (2020): 887-900.

Schell, Orville. "To forget or remember? China's struggle with its past." The Washington Quarterly 39, no. 3 (2016): 143-157.

China and the US: Comparable Cases of 'Peaceful Rise'? - B. Buzan, M. Cox, 2013-06-01

Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: The Geopolitical Turn - Christopher Hughes, 2011-09

Analogies at war: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam decisions of 1965 - Khong, Yuen Foong, 1992

The Beginning of History: Remembering and Forgetting as Strategic Issues - 2001-01-03

Foreign Policy Decisionmakers As Practical-Intuitive Historians: Applied History and Its Shortcomings – Yaacov Y. I. Vertzberger, 1986

Essential Readings

Alistair Iain Johnston. How New and Assertive is China's New Assertiveness? A I Johnston International Security 37:4 (2013): 7-48. Read online

Scobell, Andrew and Scott W. Harold. An “Assertive” China? Insights from Interviews Asian Security 9:2 (2013), 111-31. Read online

The Rise of China and the Future of the West | John Ikenberry

Suisheng Zhao (2013) Foreign Policy Implications of Chinese Nationalism Revisited: the strident turn, Journal of Contemporary China, 2013, Vol.22(82), p.535-553 Hughes, Christopher (2011) Reclassifying Chinese Nationalism: the geopolitical turn, Journal of Contemporary China, Vol.20(71), p.601-620

Chenxing Pan, The Asian/Chinese Century from a Chinese Perspective, Griffith Asia Quarterly 1:1 (2013): 30-52

Further Readings

Johnston, Alastair I (2003). Is China a status quo power? International Security, Vol 27(4), pp.5-56

Power Transition Theory and the Rise of China - Jack Levy, 2008

China's struggle for status: the realignment of international relations - Deng, Yong, 2008

Rising to the challenge: China's grand strategy and international security - Goldstein, Avery, 2008

China's new nationalism: pride, politics, and diplomacy - Gries, Peter Hays, 2004

Social states: China in international institutions, 1980-2000 - Johnston, Alastair I., c2008

China's accession to the World Trade Organization: national and international perspectives – 2001

When China Rules the World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order - Jacques, Martin, 2012

China Rising: peace, power, and order in East Asia - Kang, David C., 2007

China Orders the World: normative soft power and foreign policy - Callahan, William A., Barabantseva, Elena, 2011

Schweller, Randall L.; Pu, Xiaoyu (2011) After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of U.S. Decline. *International Security*, Vol 36(1), pp.41-72

Medeiros, Evan S. ; Fravel, M. Taylor (2003) China's new diplomacy, *Foreign Affairs*, 1 November 2003, Vol.82(6), pp.22-35

Fravel, M. Taylor (2008) Power Shifts and Escalation: Explaining China's Use of Force in Territorial Disputes, *International Security*, Vol 32(3), pp.44-83

HuAng, Yanzhong; Ding, Sheng (2006) Dragon's Underbelly: An Analysis of China's Soft Power East Asia, Vol 23(4), pp.22-44

Shirk, Susan L.(2007) Changing Media, Changing Foreign Policy in China, *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, Vol 8(1), pp.43-70

Ross, Robert S. (2009) China's Naval Nationalism: Sources, Prospects, and the U.S. Response *International Security*, Vol.34(2), pp.46-81

Week 14 to Week 16

Lecture: China at Great Power Status: (Great Power Competition in the 21st Century, China's Belt and Road Initiative, Grand Strategy to create "Community of Shared Future," The Return of the Cold War, Tech Cold War, China's Behavior as Great Power)

In this Lecture, we will explore China's rise as a great power in the international system, focusing on its strategies, Specifically BRI and its 3 Global Initiatives(Security, Civilization, and Development), challenges, and implications for global politics. The discussion will be framed within great power competition, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the resurgence of Cold War dynamics, and emerging technological rivalry.

Questions for Class Seminars/Discussion

How does China's conception of great power status differ from that of the United States?

How do middle powers (e.g., Pakistan, India, Australia, and Japan) navigate the growing competition between China and the U.S.?

How do alliances like AUKUS, the Quad, and NATO reflect the resurgence of Cold War-like strategies?

To what extent does China's military modernization contribute to the perception of a new Cold War?

What are the implications of U.S. export controls on Chinese tech companies like Huawei?

How does China's investment in AI, quantum computing, and 5G position it in the global tech race?

Essential Readings

Allison, Graham. "The new spheres of influence: Sharing the globe with other great powers." *Foreign Aff.* 99 (2020): 30.

Allison, Graham. "The Thucydides trap: are the US and China headed for war?." *The Atlantic* 24, no. 9 (2015): 2015.

Wang, Henry Huiyao. "Dialogue with Graham Allison on China-US Relations."

Mearsheimer, John J. "The inevitable rivalry: America, China, and the tragedy of great-power politics." *Foreign Aff.* 100 (2021): 48.

Mearsheimer, John J. "China's unpeaceful rise." In *The Realism Reader*, pp. 464-467. Routledge, 2014.

Zhao, Suisheng. "A New Model of Big Power Relations? China–US strategic rivalry and balance of power in the Asia–Pacific." *Journal of Contemporary China* 24, no. 93 (2015): 377-397.

Rodrik, Dani, and Stephen M. Walt. "How to build a better order: limiting great power rivalry in an anarchic world." *Foreign Aff.* 101 (2022): 142.

Yilmaz, Serafettin, and Tong Sun. "The China-US great power rivalry and the new anarchy." *Chinese Political Science Review* 8, no. 4 (2023): 507-526.

Allison, Graham, Kevin Klyman, Karina Barbesino, and Hugo Yen. "The great tech rivalry: China vs. the US." *Science Diplomacy* 73 (2021).

Mason, Robert. "China and Regional Stability in the Middle East: Economics, Engagement, and Great Power Rivalry." In *Routledge Companion to China, the Middle East, and North Africa*, pp. 125-139. Routledge, 2023.

Beeson, Mark. "Goeconomics with Chinese characteristics: the BRI and China's evolving grand strategy." *Economic and Political Studies* 6, no. 3 (2018): 240-256.

Further Readings

Rolland, Nadège. "China's 'Belt and Road Initiative': Underwhelming or game-changer?." *The Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2017): 127-142.

Tung, Rosalie L., Ivo Zander, and Tony Fang. "The Tech Cold War, the multipolarization of the world economy, and IB research." *International Business Review* (2023): 102195.

Goldstein, Avery. "US-China Rivalry in the twenty-first century: Déjà vu and Cold War II." *China International Strategy Review* 2, no. 1 (2020): 48-62.

China's Search for a Grand Strategy - Jisi, Wang

Workshop 2: Trilateral Cooperation: Countering Disinformation for Regional; Effectively using Trilateral Cooperation such as Pakistan-Afghanistan-China to Promote Mutual Understanding and People-to-People Exchange.

On February 19th, BNU's center for Policy Research (BCPR) in collaboration with the School of Media and Communication-BNU under the 10th MCAP conference held a workshop on "Effectively using trilateral cooperation such as Pakistan-Afghanistan-China to promote mutual understanding and people-to-people exchange." The rationale was examined under the highlight of Trilateral Cooperation: Countering Disinformation for Regional Connectivity and Success. Including discussants/panelists from academia, practice, and media.

The Panel

1	<i>Dr. Asif Amin</i>
2	<i>Mr. Habib Akram</i>
3	<i>Mr. Hafeez Ullah Niazi</i>
4	<i>Mr. Mateen Haidier</i>
5	<i>Dr. Altaf Ullah Khan</i>
6	<i>Dr. Anjum Zia</i>
7	<i>Dr. Zainab Ahmed</i>
8	<i>Mr. Amir Rana</i>
9	<i>Ambassador Nazir Hussain</i>
10	<i>Dr. Saima Khan</i>
11	<i>Dr. Tahir Kamran</i>

The period in which information shapes narratives and policies, disinformation poses a significant challenge to regional connectivity and cooperation. The workshop brought together experts to explore the role of media, the complexities of decision-making in Pakistan, and the broader geopolitical implications of regional partnerships. The discussion demonstrated Pakistan's restricted authority in decision-making thus emphasizing the need for Foreign Office leadership in creating national interest protection policies. A policy framework controlled by the Foreign Office must exist to protect national interests.

Media and Disinformation: A Key Challenge

Disinformation, a key challenge to regional trilateral cooperation, was a recurring theme that each of the discussants emphasized. While disinformation is an issue that the world is facing right now, state censorship on media narratives is also one of the concerns shared by panelists. As it is the backbone of forming positive and negative narratives regarding a specific subject.

For instance, Dr. Zia highlighted how modern media platforms make it increasingly difficult to conceal the truth. She also pointed out the lack of clarity regarding CPEC and China's involvement, leading to confusion and misinformation. Similarly, Mr. Haider expressed concerns over political divisions within the media and its alignment with foreign interests, arguing that decision-making in Pakistan is often influenced by external powers such as Riyadh, China, and Washington.



He referred to the recent wheat crisis and how different media outlets reacted to it, how the information was conceived by society is one such example. In the Chinese context, Mr. Rana noted that China is significantly investing in media and journalist networks to shape information dissemination. He highlighted that such dynamics can influence perceptions of initiatives like CPEC, sometimes leading to uncertainty and speculation.



CPEC: A Game-Changer or a Debt Trap?

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was a point of significant deliberation, with differing perspectives on its impact. While Mr. Akram viewed CPEC as a transformative initiative and focused on ways of countering disinformation about it, others, such as Dr. Ahmed cautioned against the potential risks of CPEC labeling it a “game-changer or a debt trap”.

Ambassador Hussain emphasized the shift from a unipolar to a multipolar world, suggesting that Pakistan must strategically align its policies to maximize benefits from Chinese investments while maintaining national sovereignty.

Dr. Khan and Dr. Saima Khan stressed the need for greater transparency and public engagement in CPEC-related projects. Dr. Saima Khan added a feminist perspective, warning of new forms of economic and social colonization, where foreign investments could lead to further marginalization of landowners and women.

Geopolitical Constraints and Policy Recommendations

Pakistan's geopolitical position has long influenced its policy decisions. Mr. Niazi advocated for keeping Russia away from Gwadar to prevent its access to warm waters, highlighting the broader power dynamics at play. The discussion also touched upon the role of participatory media in shaping narratives, as pointed out by Dr. Amin, emphasizing its growing influence in countering state and foreign propaganda.

In addressing these concerns, the panelists called for a more autonomous and informed policy approach with the following recommendations:



Strengthening Media Transparency: The government must ensure freedom of the press and facilitate open discussions on critical projects like CPEC.

Enhancing Public Awareness: Greater engagement with the public through Participatory media can bridge information gaps and counter misinformation.

Strategic Policy Formulation: Pakistan must move beyond external influences and develop a self-reliant policy framework through the Foreign Office.

Conclusion

In conclusion, panelists were able to underline the complexities of regional cooperation, especially in tackling misinformation and external influences. While CPEC poses significant opportunities it raises questions regarding sovereignty and transparency that require a thoughtful evaluation. The media plays a pivotal role in shaping public understanding and must remain independent and responsible to ensure people have access to accurate information. A balanced approach; one that includes strategic policy making, media integrity, and active public engagement; will be key to fostering trilateral cooperation such as Pakistan-Afghanistan-China to promote mutual understanding and people-to-people exchange.

THE POLICY BEACON

(Op-Eds, Articles, Policy Papers, Reports, Interviews on China)

Op-Eds, Articles, Policy Papers, Reports, Interviews on China

BCPR's China Studies Chair produced and facilitated a significant volume of analytical commentary across Pakistani, Chinese and international media platforms during 2025-26. The op-eds and interviews documented below represent the Center's principal external voice, translating academic research into policy-relevant public discourse.

Rising Together: China's Blueprint for Pakistan's Success | November 16, 2024

By Dr. Hassan Daud Butt

Dr. Hassan Daud Butt is a Projects Management specialist and faculty member at Bahria University. He has also worked with institutions including the Global Governance Institute (Beijing) and the BNU Center for Policy Research.

As we approach the centennial anniversary of China and Pakistan, it's an opportune time to reflect on the two countries' historical journeys, ongoing challenges, and future aspirations. While China has achieved unprecedented economic growth, navigating vast demographic and geographic challenges, Pakistan continues to work toward stability and sustainable development amid complex obstacles. China's record as the fastest-growing nation over such an extended period highlights a strategic foundation that Pakistan can look to for insights.

A key element of China's growth story is its stable political framework, which has provided a consistent, long-term policy direction. This stability has enabled China to implement extensive reforms, advance infrastructure development, and pursue national priorities, often favoring long-term gains over immediate rewards.

Pakistan, by contrast, has experienced a more turbulent political landscape, with changes that sometimes disrupt policy continuity and delay progress. For Pakistan, a crucial takeaway is the value of political stability and a unified national agenda, particularly in economic policy, infrastructure development, and security. As Pakistan shapes its development trajectory for the next 10 years, the lessons of China's success story become ever more relevant. Prioritizing long-term infrastructure, industrial growth, and domestic market development will help Pakistan create a resilient economic foundation. By examining China's model, its focus on long-term planning, infrastructure investment, and unified vision, Pakistan has a unique opportunity to adapt relevant lessons to its own socio-political environment. This approach could empower Pakistan to build a resilient economy, foster sustained growth, and achieve its own vision for the future.

China's development strategy over the past four decades has focused on massive investments in infrastructure, industrialization, and technology, supported by a "final circulation" model that encourages both domestic consumption and international trade. This strategy is particularly evident in China's regional focus on areas like Hong Kong and Xinjiang, which showcase how targeted development can integrate and strengthen the national economy. China's strategic investments in Xinjiang have transformed it into a key logistics and trade hub under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Xinjiang's development has seen extensive infrastructure projects, energy investments, and industrial zones, all aimed at driving economic growth and elevating local living standards. China's development model offers valuable insights for Pakistan's federal structure, particularly in addressing regional disparities and unlocking provincial economic potential. By implementing a

targeted regional investment strategy, Pakistan can unlock the strategic and economic potential of provinces such as Gilgit-Baltistan, KP, AJK, and Balochistan.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offers a strong foundation for this vision, enabling Pakistan to prioritize infrastructure, industrial zones, and connectivity in these critical regions. This targeted approach can not only stimulate local economies but also strengthen national cohesion and stability. China's commitment to sustainable collaboration, infrastructure expansion, and regional integration highlights a resilient model that Pakistan can tailor to its own unique needs. A central feature of this partnership is CPEC, which has unlocked a range of high-quality projects between China and Pakistan.

At this critical time, building robust infrastructure across vital sectors such as tourism, IT, agriculture, and mining is essential. Aligning for small but impactful progress in industrial development, such as the successful running of at least one priority Special Economic Zone (SEZ) in 2024–2025, could provide a strong starting point for achieving lasting economic growth. The cooperation between the two countries is now expanding into non-traditional sectors such as agriculture, science and technology, mining, which are crucial to Pakistan's future competitiveness.

Through these sectors, Pakistan can enhance knowledge transfer, build more efficient resource management systems, and diversify its economy while meeting environmental and social sustainability goals. By focusing on knowledge and skills in these sectors, Pakistan can improve its productivity, which has traditionally lagged behind other nations in the region. Education is another critical area where China's example is instructive. For Pakistan, partnerships with Chinese universities, as well as increased focus on the TVET sector, can significantly enhance its human capital.

Additionally, China has made strides in fostering gender inclusivity within its workforce, another area where Pakistan could invest in its own socioeconomic resilience by increasing women's participation across sectors. Looking forward, the Pakistan-China partnership must address emerging challenges such as security and cyber threats, shifting geopolitical dynamics, and the rising competition from alternative trade routes, which could impact the efficacy and security of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

To maintain momentum, both nations will need to build resilience against these pressures by deepening strategic cooperation. Enhanced security partnerships, transparent financial frameworks, and a united stance against misinformation will be essential for fostering trust and promoting mutual growth. The recent targeted attacks on Chinese personnel working on CPEC projects underscore the need for advanced security solutions. Addressing these threats effectively will require integrating cutting-edge surveillance technologies, reinforced intelligence infrastructure, proactive threat detection methods, intelligence-sharing protocols, and stronger cybersecurity measures.

Furthermore, exploration of artificial intelligence (AI) for threat analysis, real-time monitoring systems along CPEC routes, and investments in cybersecurity training for local law enforcement and security agencies are emphasized. In all, with mutual dedication to shared growth and cooperation, Pakistan can continue to build its economic resilience, strengthen the quality of infrastructure, and contribute to regional stability. Pakistan can transform this roadmap into its vision for success through a firm whole-of-government approach that emphasizes long-term planning to ensure continuity, as sustainable growth remains elusive without a hands-on approach of the government and, without the will of the people to grow.

New CPEC Playbook

By Dr. Hassan Daud

This is critical time for Pakistan to reconsider its growth trajectory and align with international trends | November 28, 2024

Amidst global economic uncertainty, developing nations are striving to minimise long-term economic setbacks and foster recovery. To break free from the low-income trap and achieve sustained prosperity, these countries are prioritising productivity, technological advancement, and innovation as fundamental pillars of their economic strategies.

Emerging economies in Asia, as highlighted by the McKinsey Global Institute, have positioned themselves as leaders in technological platforms, resource management, energy solutions, and capital development. Examining the economic impact of demographics across regions reveals that Asia's urban population is expected to grow from 1.6 billion to 3.0 billion by 2030.

A prime example of how geography, a sizeable population, and connectivity can drive economic success is China's extraordinary rise. With trends like glocalisation, nearshoring, and friend-shoring reshaping the global investment landscape, Asia is poised to become the center of the global economy by 2050. While these global trends offer opportunities, they also bring domestic political and economic challenges, including low productivity, into sharper focus.

This is a critical time for Pakistan to reconsider its growth trajectory and align with international trends. Breaking the cycle of low income and setting the stage for a future centered on productivity and innovation will require gradual yet consistent advancements in the country's industrial and economic structure, renewable energy initiatives, and technological adoption. Over the past decade, China has been Pakistan's leading investor. Through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), it has not only helped address Pakistan's energy shortages but also constructed critical infrastructure, including the Gwadar Port, a cornerstone of Pakistan's Blue Economy.

Gwadar's strategic connectivity to the hinterland via the coastal highway and its linkage to global markets through the recently operationalized Gwadar International Airport, funded by a \$230 million Chinese grant, underscores its importance. Moving forward, it is imperative to focus on establishing processing and manufacturing industries within the Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and the Gwadar Free Zone. This should be followed by a phase of maturity where endogenous mechanisms for sustainable growth are firmly in place. The development of Gwadar city infrastructure, as outlined in its master plan, will be crucial to realising the full dividend of the port city and addressing the genuine concerns of the local population.

The next phase of CPEC may not involve mega-projects but should feature initiatives aligned with evolving global trends, regional needs, and Pakistan's economic priorities. However, the emerging geopolitical landscape poses significant challenges to CPEC's progress, notably in the form of security concerns and narrative-related issues such as recent terrorist attacks and debates surrounding anti-CPEC/BRI sentiments within the broader context of US-China rivalry.

While discussing this new phase, it is essential to support and address the concerns of existing Chinese investors, who will play a pivotal role in attracting new private or state-owned enterprises to Pakistan. Regular engagement with these stakeholders is imperative. Strengthening security infrastructure through technology-driven solutions, particularly in critical areas like SEZs and mega

energy projects, is equally important. Additionally, incremental investment and financing models must be adopted for large-scale projects like the ML1 railway project. Dividing such projects into manageable phases with clear milestones will help attract investment and ensure steady, measurable progress.

There is also untapped potential for collaboration between Chinese Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) and Pakistani businesses, particularly in sectors such as engineering, automotive, IT, chemicals, textiles, and agro-based industries. Encouraging Chinese SMEs and start-ups to visit Pakistan through tailored tourism and academia initiatives could serve as a precursor to investment. Simultaneously, the Pakistani business community must be motivated to seize these opportunities. Establishing a High-Tech Education City under CPEC, through partnerships with Chinese universities and research institutions, could be a transformative step forward.

Given Pakistan's resource-constrained environment, Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) offer a viable model for financing large-scale projects. However, the government must enhance the capacity of officials engaged in PPP nodes, particularly at the provincial level. Offering realistic, non-financial incentives tailored to each region's unique needs will further strengthen this model.

It is essential to reflect on why Pakistan has struggled to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) at the same level as countries like Vietnam, Laos, Malaysia, and Thailand, despite offering competitive incentives, a favourable geographical location, and a relatively large population. Furthermore, Pakistan's investment-to-GDP ratio remains significantly lower than the regional average.

Investors, whether domestic or foreign, private or state-owned, are drawn to Pakistan's large market size and abundant human and mineral resources. What they need is a conducive environment characterised by pragmatic governance, financial security, and personal safety.

The incentives required to attract investment in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, and Gilgit-Baltistan cannot be the same as those for Punjab and Sindh, which benefit from superior infrastructure. Pakistan needs a tailored approach that acknowledges the heterogeneity of investment opportunities across the country and implements region-specific strategies to attract both domestic and foreign investments.

A recurring challenge in Pakistan's economic planning has been the gap between policy formulation and implementation. Incentive packages must not only be well-conceived but also reliably executed to build investor confidence.

An incremental approach to economic development could involve targeting one SEZ, one Integrated Tourism Zone, one Mineral Zone, and at least one CPEC Agri-Tech Zone for 2024-25. These are achievable goals, provided the plans are kept straightforward and free of unnecessary complexity.

The success of CPEC's next phase will also depend on a meritocratic approach, where officials responsible for delays and inefficiencies in project development are held accountable. Talent development will play a critical role in ensuring Pakistan's workforce is equipped to meet the demands of emerging industries, particularly in high-tech sectors such as electric vehicles (EVs), artificial intelligence (AI), and renewable energy. In this regard, the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) has a crucial role to play.

The road to recovery will undoubtedly be slow, but with confidence-building measures and a focus on sustainable development, Pakistan can still capitalise on emerging opportunities. Decisive action and a clear vision are essential for navigating the challenges ahead. The nation's youthful population, strategic partnerships, and potential for innovation provide a unique opportunity to build a brighter and more prosperous future.

By prioritising these efforts, Pakistan can position itself as a regional leader and a catalyst for sustainable growth and development. The time to act is now.

Understanding China: Chinese Modernization and Its Vision for Global Governance

Author	Sarmad Wali Khan, Research Associate, BCPR
Original Publication	Daily The Destination and Ittehad News, November 2025; Policy Beacon Volume No. 17
Republished In	Reference News (Xinhua News Agency), most widely circulated daily in China
Significance	First BCPR research to be republished in China's premier national media outlet

巴学者
文章

中国式现代化成全球发展新范式

【巴基斯坦(团结报)网站11月7日文章】道·理解中国发现代化和全球治理博亨(为者 巴基斯坦地有泰新国民大学政发研究中心学世界马迪·见匠序)

一个步世纪以来,世界被单一的进步的步楚生,这一故事始于政时,幢隆大内界,并以肯本主义和发南民上截奉方童是煌成,我们告知,历史已皓评挂,照而,最这一款事的左方,另一致故事正在展开,它重新治新了光样不查模备在这理代化,发展展不弱萌,以及以英早提道警堂。

打破发层谱路固有认知

国际政地可以是双集合,而非享和史全。

中国的和平发展现经让是国政地字革养期临新·搞山的“两史并线施”大生拔助力,中国的修地从来是“霞的民主是唯一可种发展途承”这一理论的主峰,这筑引出一个恒得亚店的时间,一个世界研变理,现提在经新问题的故事,所以进着耀纪,地为每个世界最生建,最要创新方的工业化国案之一?

美国历学家已地城·摩存在(有新历民上的社会地座)一步步裁出,西方和正本的重本主义现代史文的是重产价似

中国在发展进程中并没有莫地对外故事,也没有根重粮民报告。

在中组领导人引领了,“中国新已社会主义现代化”国式所以粮土界持建现代化,中国福稠金敏现代化,注重在发及与生态可诗堆法,社会全平,从端愿文或国际赏性之所落履平新,中国人现代化是人口耀耀巨大的现代化,全体人民在稠富幅的地根化,都有文明和精种文明四培搞的现代,化,人自自然和谱界生地现代,大和平史展策略的现代,化、中国不以成为建新模国,发成为全球法理规制的重要

世界基金球织,世界推行和怪早置集组织等机地,藉于此发展于摸家隔人粮斯地址为借备间脐产受治病,这在机构的野如果什位落地坏壤重主款,让不通过不根定在地脱圈环中,疲痒到底时是一个金融新方法对于全球北方的不平平的全球等性维度。

相比之下,中国模式将冀来主义地泽于此与的金主义治理方大和长期此透模文该细的会,证明现代化可以的美因直主之义,而修外新增加,中国民不变端故事,不替打打猴主义的情况了有故耀起,和个时究村全球域界的全平选粮生座

新析使手。

近年来,为方对全球堆地城,中国国主对大全球现议,日2021年以来,中国是且现出全球发展组议,全球安全建议,全棉文明福状和全球治理组或,这要报模体现了关于新建的开求金峰金价,银行手建主义,同等以人为本为核心的世界是晋,它们也为落陷机的改革提搞了置割,苞弱雅助可种境增长,政护国家主款,提进粹文化理解予重要理念。

中国的现代代所荷生地江利,不预致力方造端,两样貌成就挂齐增长与民政皇巧,能力发生精神,成果速新挂以展富有政定的领导,让中国泰

Understanding China - Chinese Modernization and Its Vision for Global Governance

By Sarmad Wali Khan

"It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice."

Deng Xiaoping's leanos crawk captures a century-long control over what progress across and how it is achieved. For more than a century, the world has lived by a single story of progress. It begins in Europe, travels across the Atlantic, and ends with the History, of capitalism and liberal disocoves. History, we were told, had reached its final shager. Yet somewhere soot of test narrative, nantho story has unfaided, one that entreprees what it means to eardocire without compering, to grow without dominating and to proress by sharing.

In the discourse on international development, two broad stories explore the rais of usizes. The first reflect to the ascent of Biantres. Europe and North America through capitalist dewmenty, the second describes China's denotst path of modernization and its peaceful size. The framer rests on a colonial insy-way of extractive and industrialization, while the later emplaness development through market social-ism and self-reliance.

China's star as a olohal leader in the 21st countrv

demonstrated immense material growth, lifted call-ins out of poverty, and matalmned an extraordinary record of powerful development, an achievement that denages long-hold asumptions that iml-modernization with the tesaantiam, all wrausal waging foreign wers or decrasing on colonial plander.

The first, of mxtore China can be branch, divided into these phases: 1949-1996, 1976-2012, and 2012-present.

In the first phase, under Mao Zedong, national reconstruction began amid the rains of anar. For new state sought to cheamess ftsful and captsid reorates through lead reforms, agricultural collectivization, and indunrilization of collective labor, in rertivile five-year plans. The first plan, launched in 1975, prevatized heavy reasivties such as cool, steel, and elaoicasts, and had the instulation of socialist indus-resinances.

These efforts were not wttoss cost. The Gonn Lean Forward, lnavaled to accelevity development through collective labor, but tursed to famine and relinast. Yet even anul these struglous, China assumed recdiled to its passat of assessegory and self calisance. Its lter dtpetrarir ensaeck, esmckel, tead by "vres,room disocaeve" and enlov roto the

Jinping, reflects the consolidation and deepening of this Chinese model as "modernization with Chinese characteristics." Xi emphasizes comprehensive nan-shioation, balanzng growth with ecological sustainability, soead grober, political stability, and international responsibility. The framework rests on five pillars: undierozsmest for 1.4 billion people, comicet preagonay through equitable wealth distribution, cultural and ethual advancement alongside positiod progress, heraoess between hamasity and nature, and powarful development based on cooperation. These penergies neck a dellretars msscores of the Westera Sohef fiet emfirmization requires Westranization, Chika Nr's leadership. China has positioned itself as such as economic power and a hex years sharing norms of global governance.

The cesanlatie effect of these gswos an average Since 1978, China's GDP has grown at an average annual rate of over 9% till 1979. More than 166d million people have been lifted out of poverty. Urbanization has receased from under 20% in 1980 in over 85% today. Life expectancy has jumped from 44 years in 1987 to gros 15. The country's current Fire-Year Pissu painter Inglesgatilly growla, mone treofecursans and socal reeriv. nraatine a

advocates a multipolar world to replace Cold War-era blue politics with inclusive processship, empassing shared development and win-win enterece over ideological confirmation.

This approach to global governance mirrors the same hope that guided China's dhenieral transformation, self-elizance, gradual rations, and respect for neseragory. Having achieved material progress through viability and pragmatic adaptatex. China now promors an international arties in which natios-est ceexet peacefully, without coecessus to domina-tios.

In recent years, China has advanced what it call-the "Text Global Initiatlons" (SGD) to adabess global challenges. Since 2021, it has launched the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Coroderations Initiative (GCI), and the Global Governance Imnaine (GGI). These frameworks natively Xi's vision for a world ctaved to cooperation, multilateralims, and people-centered development. They provide a blueprint for reforming international institutions by promoting coerssng growth, solgnsardng severegoty, and crossceezng coeo-sitforat undeartending.

The tears of Chinese modernization is trener

Republished in Reference News (top) and the original Pakistani publication (bottom)

This op-ed by Research Associate Sarmad Wali Khan argued that China's rise as a global leader in the 21st century disproves the assumption that modernisation must follow a Western path. Drawing on Deng Xiaoping's reform legacy, Mao-era nation-building, and President Xi Jinping's contemporary framework of Chinese modernisation, the piece traced three distinct phases of China's development from 1949 to the present. The author documented quantifiable outcomes, GDP growth averaging over nine percent annually from 1978 to 2010, the lifting of more than 800 million people from poverty, urbanisation rising from under 20 percent in 1980 to over 65 percent, and life expectancy increasing from 44 years in 1949 to over 78, to substantiate the claim that China's model offers a legitimate alternative to Western-defined development. The article was subsequently republished by Reference News, the most widely circulated daily newspaper in China, published by Xinhua News Agency, marking a significant milestone for BCPR.

"China's rise as a global leader in the 21st century challenges the assumption that capitalism and liberal democracy are the only viable paths to development. It demonstrates that international politics can be conducted through win-win cooperation rather than zero-sum competition."

Interview: China and Pakistan, Close Partners, Not Against the US

Date	23 January 2026
Author	Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR
Platform	Hungarian Conservative
URL	hungarianconservative.com

In this extended interview with Hungarian Conservative, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan addressed Pakistan's foreign policy orientation in the post-Doha era, the state of Pakistan-US relations, and the strategic nature of the Pakistan-China partnership. He argued forcefully that Pakistan's alignment with China is a function of mutual interest rather than anti-Western positioning, characterising the relationship as an "all-weather" partnership built on six decades of strategic cooperation. Regarding Afghanistan, Ambassador Khan assessed that four years after the Taliban's return to power, critical gaps persist in human rights, women's education, and counter-terrorism cooperation. On the bilateral front, he noted that China has invested almost \$60 billion in Pakistan under the Belt and Road Initiative, and that the two countries operate in an era of partnerships rather than binary alliances.

INTERVIEW

China and Pakistan: Close Partners, Not Against the US — An Interview with Mansoor Ahmad Khan

Published in Hungarian Conservative, January 2026

China and Pakistan: Pathway to Future Economic Relations

By Dr. Ishrat Husain

As a student of the Chinese economy for the past three decades I would like to place the future evolution of the Chinese economy in the context of current and forecasted global trends, dwell upon its preparatory status to meet these challenges and finally suggest four areas where China can assist Pakistan in its quest to take off from its present position.

Global economy is going through a tumultuous and uncertain period of reversal of global economic integration that threatens international trade, capital flows, migration and transfer of innovative technologies in Emerging and Developing economies (EDEs). IMF has calculated that international trade restrictions alone could reduce the global GDP by 7 percent over the long term or \$ 7.4 trillion in current dollar term equivalent to the economies of Germany and France combined. Technological decoupling, Disrupted capital flows and Migration restrictions would further add to the losses. The recent change in the US strategy that was followed by both Trump and Biden Administrations clearly indicate a growing tendency towards isolationism, nationalism, protectionism. Withdrawal from WHO, lukewarm attitude towards WTO and UNESCO, disbanding of USAID and inward looking industrial policy are areas of deep concern. So are the reshoring, friendshoring, near shoring supply chains in name of national security and geopolitical motives. This fracturing of international economic order cumulate resulting in diminished prosperity, persistent instability and the real prospect of military conflicts. The average growth rate of the world economy has already declined to 3.2 percent in 2025 compared to 3.8 during 2000-2019.

It is highly paradoxical that it was President Xi Jinping who at the World Economic Forum a few years ago made a strong case for open markets, liberal capital flows and economic integration based on China's own positive experience. The protagonists of these policies (Washington Consensus) who never stopped preaching to the developing countries of the benefits of these policies have made a complete turn around as their economies began to be affected by competition from China and other successful countries of Asia.

China has become the top provider of bilateral foreign assistance and the largest trading partner of 130 developing countries. Its total lending to developing countries was \$ 850 billion higher than the combined ODA of 22 Paris Club countries. The myth that Chinese debt to Sub Saharan African countries and others has resulted in Debt trap has been exploded by empirical evidence. Only 12 percent of African Debt is owed to China while 88 percent to the multilateral and other bilateral countries, commercial creditors etc. Like other sovereign creditors, China uses a variety of financial instruments such as grants, concessional loans, commercial loans, insurance guarantees, swaps, trade finance in addition to foreign equity investment. Unlike the World Bank and other bilateral creditors China responds to the country needs and not with its predetermined agenda. A number of critical infrastructure projects such as Railways, ports, roads, power plants, 3G and 4 G networks, digital connectivity which were refused by other donors have been built by the Chinese. A new professional agency—China International Development Agency has been established for this purpose. PEW polls show that Mexicans, Kenyans, Nigerians, South Africans see China in a more favorable light and welcome Chinese investment in their countries.

Looking forward, the present hue and cry about the slowing of Chinese economy is misplaced. China has made extraordinary progress which is unparalleled in human history by achieving a 10 percent growth rate annually. But having become a mature economy –the largest in terms of PPP dollars and world's top exporting nation it is unrealistic to expect that the same spectacular

momentum would continue unabated. In the US and the Western countries, it is a matter of rejoice if they reach 2 to 3 percent growth rate while China's 5 percent is being dismissed as evidence of its underperformance. Economic history does provide no example of unbridled performance after 4 decades of such an exceptional feat. The theory of convergence kicks in after a certain threshold is reached. At these differential rates between the US and China, the latter would be soon able to equal the US economy at exchange rate determined outcomes. It is true that the property and real estate crisis and local government finances have shaken the economy but this is a transitory not a permanent damage which would be corrected by appropriate policies and interventions by the People's Bank of China and the regulators. Similarly, the claim of Chinese overcapacity is a fallacy and I have written a detailed analysis in Global Times but suffice to say here the average selling price of Chinese EVs is roughly double that of those sold domestically. This increase both in quantity and price indicates a supply shortage not overcapacity,

I now turn to a few remarks about the future evolution of the Chinese economy against the mega trends of Climate Change, technological disruption, Demographic changes, Geoeconomic confrontation, waning appetite for multilateralism, societal and political polarization, and Misinformation and Disinformation.

China is the world's largest trading nation with almost 8 trillion dollars of imports and exports, It is the world factory with 30 percent of the manufacturing capacity exceeding that of the US, Germany, France, Japan etc combined. China has already become the world leader in solar panels, batteries, Wind turbine, electric vehicles to mitigate Carbon emissions. According to the Australian Policy Research Institute, China leads in 53 out of 64 critical technologies such as Supercomputing, Industrial Robotics, AI and Machine learning, biomedicine, next gen medical devices, high speed rail trains, and so the list goes on.

Why is China poised to meet these challenges successfully? There are some strong foundational pillars on which the economy is built with the flexibility and agility of quickly adapting to the changing circumstances. A country with 70 percent of coal powered power stations has become world leader in renewable energy within a few years. People all over the world are highly impressed by the marvel of the infrastructure of high and durable quality that has transformed China, connected various parts of the country into a single market economy, and made the evacuation of goods competitive. The real story is its silent revolution in building Human Capital. The qualities of Discipline, Entrepreneurship, hard work, and strong work ethic already inherent in the working age population were fortified by investment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics at formal school and University level while developing a steady stream of technical and vocational skills needed for the economy. This combination of higher end scientists and engineers working with well trained and skilled floor shop technicians brought about this revolution. Just to cite one figure, until 2000 US produced more PhDs in STEM subjects. By 2017 the two countries equaled the number but by 2025 China produced 70000 PhD s while US only 35,000. It is also not widely known that 600,000 Chinese students have obtained PhDs and post-doctoral fellowships from world top universities. I remember the US Universities' Engineering and Science departments having more than half of their graduate students drawn from China and so were the Economics Departments. In all, 6.2 million young men and women were trained abroad mostly in the US, UK, Canada, Australia and 70 percent returned home and were lured by the universities and research institutes at lucrative remuneration. Some of them were funded to set up their own laboratories under a government support scheme. US has 320,000 Chinese students enrolled although the number is receding over time. In the meanwhile, The Chinese Universities such as Tsinghua and Peking are now rated among the world's top universities. The number of STEM graduates produced

annually is 5 million out of 12 million. 79 million have graduated from Secondary and higher Vocational schools. The team that came up with Deepseek AI package that has shattered the Silicon Valley were all trained in the Chinese Universities. Investment in R&D among the highest in the world is beginning to pay off and will continue to provide the edge to China.

State system is run by technocrats and highly educated bureaucrats all selected on merit and their promotions were based on performance and output on the job. The unique feature of the governance system in China is that Policies are made at the Central level but implementation takes place at the local government level, Decentralization and greater devolution of power, authority and resources has led to efficient allocation and utilization of resources. State guidance at macro level and market mechanisms at micro level explain rapid growth spurts and technological uptake in such a short span of time. Fast decision making, tight cost controls and first rate management characterize the Chinese bureaucracy.

Government creates the framework for the market and promotes entrepreneurship, protect private property rights but ensures the economic actors are contributing towards the planned goals. Intangible goods –Systems, rules, policies—which increase production efficiency, promote competition, facilitate specialization, protect the environment, reduce risks and uncertainty. Private sector accounted for nearly all the growth in employment and two third of overall growth between 1978 and 2012, The share of State owned enterprises has declined from two thirds in 2000 to one third. Local Governments while owning Town and Village enterprises allow them to compete in attracting investment, developing infrastructure while they improve local business environment. Past strong integration with the global economy and opening up to foreign investors has produced a cadre of highly competent professional, managerial and technical professionals who have internalized best global practices in their operations. A high savings rate has made it possible to invest in large infrastructure projects and raise productivity The large and growing size of middle class with aspirations for global goods and services is a positive factor for China even if international trade and capital flows are disrupted.

In my humble view, the above foundational pillars would by and large enable China to meet the fierce global challenges in future with fortitude and the collateral damage may be limited.

I now come to my final remarks; How Pakistan can benefit from its economic relationship with China in the future. Each one of us may have along wish list but I would confine myself to a selective list of three only as a matter of expediency and concomitant with the Chinese willingness. First, China is the world's largest trading nation with imports close to \$ 2.59 trillion. Pakistan's exports to China were only \$ 2.56 billion about 0.1 percent, this is really a fraction of what we could derive from such a large market as we have Free trade agreements and China 's average tariff rate is only 3 percent. Pakistani businesses have focused excessively on the traditional US and European markets which are growing at half the rate of Chinese economy and have not successfully explored the Chinese market for their goods and services or studied their demand and thus the penetration ratio remains too low. Two third of international trade now takes place within global value chain but Pakistan has not taken advantage like other Asian countries have. This would require reduction in our average tariff rates, timely delivery of shipments and freight, quality assurance, low logistics costs. By carrying out these reforms Pakistan can double or triple its exports to China in a short span of time.

The second area is the relocation of Chinese industries to Pakistan. Although we have been talking about it for a long time but no concrete results have been achieved so far. In the meantime, Viet Nam, India, Malaysia, Cambodia, Indonesia have made the headway by offering the right incentives.

China will continue to pursue the relocation because of higher labour costs, diversifying supply chain, moving up the ladder of economic complexity and sophistication by expanding skill and capital intensive, high tech industries and insulating itself from the barriers imposed by the US and Western allies. Pakistan has to step up its efforts to attract these industries as we still provide low cost labour. However, we have to make Special Economic zones fully autonomous and operational with all amenities, utilities and facilities available at the door step without bureaucratic hassles.

Third, in this era of Knowledge economy the main drivers of growth for emerging economies such as Pakistan are Human Capital and Technology absorption, adaptation and application, We can establish linkages between our Universities and research institutions with the Chinese in producing high level scientific manpower, joint and collaborative research projects and embark on transfer of best practices for enhancing productivity particularly in Agriculture, Energy, and Export industries. For example, genetically resilient, drought and heat resistant seeds, water conservation and high efficiency irrigation, use of drones and sensors combined with digital tools, robust supply chain can substitute food and agriculture imports and increase exports with positive impact on our balance of payments situation and reduction in our external debt. We would be in a position to redeem the deposits which China rolls over every year.

Finally, Gwadar has yet to reach its optimum capacity as a regional hub for Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. Use of the port for Fisheries and maritime exports would help the local communities by higher incomes. Expeditious completion of the Western route would link the hinterland with port. Communities living in the Towns and villages along the corridor should have access to education, health care, drinking water, link roads, transport so that they can derive economic benefits from these investments. Digital infrastructure would also reduce the inequities in access to internet.

Sino-Pak Cooperation Against Insurgency

By Muhammad Amir Rana

The train hijacking incident in Balochistan will inevitably have its causes and is expected to trigger a robust state response, likely characterized by military action on multiple fronts. Nevertheless, discussions around the political aspects of addressing the crisis in the province, particularly the initiation of dialogue, will persist, albeit in subdued tones.

Another significant element in the ongoing debate will be the role of external support for any military operation against insurgents, explicitly focusing on securing diplomatic backing and logistical assistance. Three contexts will be particularly relevant: First, the recent warning issued by Baloch insurgents against China during their strategic realignment meeting a few weeks ago raises essential questions regarding how China will respond, especially in terms of providing financial and logistical support to Pakistan's counterinsurgency operations.

Second, Pakistan is unlikely to expect substantial material support from the United States and its Western allies, not only due to political issues and the Ukraine conflict, but also because the West tends to sympathize with separatist movements, while adopting a different approach towards religiously motivated terrorism and extremism. Consequently, Islamabad will instead prioritize diplomatic backing to counter international lobbying by India, which seeks to promote the Baloch separatist narrative and restrict both the financial and political support provided by the Baloch diaspora to insurgents. Third, historical precedents suggest that external military support is pivotal. Pakistan previously received notable military assistance from the Shah of Iran during its counterinsurgency operations in the 1970s. Analysts are evaluating whether China will offer comparable support to Pakistan in its contemporary counterinsurgency operations, mirroring Iran's role several decades ago.

The Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and other smaller insurgent groups continuously target Chinese nationals and China's commercial and diplomatic interests in Pakistan. As mentioned earlier in a meeting, these insurgent groups devised a strategy to intensify terrorist activities, explicitly targeting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Chinese interests in Balochistan. China is increasingly concerned about the security of its nationals in Pakistan and wishes to invest further, but only within a secure environment. Terrorist attacks against Chinese nationals, notably the BLA attack in Karachi last year targeting Chinese nationals as they exited the airport, strained bilateral ties temporarily. These tensions were later eased through mutual confidence-building measures.

The BLA considers China an adversary due to its significant investments in Balochistan and close alliance with Pakistan. Given China's willingness to assist Pakistan in counterterrorism, questions arise regarding the possibility of China offering material support to Pakistani armed forces specifically to counter the BLA. Historically, China has urged Pakistan to address terrorism, although practical cooperation has remained limited effectively. For example, in 2007, the Lal Masjid operation in Islamabad was initiated following a call from Chinese President Hu Jintao to General Musharraf, triggered by the abduction of Chinese health workers by students from Jamia Hafsa Madrassah. Similarly, there have been speculations that China influenced Pakistan's decision to launch Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan in 2014. After the Karachi attack on Chinese nationals, Beijing again expressed expectations for Pakistan to undertake decisive action against Baloch insurgents. However, China remains hesitant to get directly involved in countering terrorism operations through visible financial and logistical support.

Pakistan has established a comprehensive security mechanism to protect CPEC and Chinese interests, including creating a special security division. Nevertheless, China assesses risks through its zero-tolerance lens against threats and expects allies to adopt similar stances.

Pakistan aims to take decisive action against insurgents but faces economic limitations. A full-scale military operation entails significant costs, and Pakistan is already engaged in campaigns like Azm-e-Isthakam against insurgency in Balochistan and religious militancy in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP). Thus, the economic and political implications of extensive military operations are considerable. However, state institutions are unwilling to initiate any political process that loosens their grip over power, as they believe it will lead to more profound crises. The political leadership can take political risks. However, the political leadership, especially those enjoying the powers, do not have a deeper understanding of the Crisis in Balochistan and are neither willing to take any action, as they believe this does not fall within their turfs determined by the establishment.

Without a political initiative, a kinetic approach remains a significant remedy to address the security threats. Chinese scholars often debate how China can enhance support beyond the existing framework, including equipment supply, intelligence sharing, and joint security exercises. Although China once proposed deeper cooperation, such as deploying private security consultants to Pakistan, progress has been minimal due to Pakistan's reluctance.

Whether China will reconsider enhancing security cooperation by supplying surveillance equipment, military hardware, or even partially funding the costs of a comprehensive military operation. It's uncertain how deeply China might engage in counterterrorism cooperation, especially given the threats from the BLA, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and allied groups targeting Chinese interests and contributing to regional instability. China fears an unsafe neighborhood increases transnational terrorism risks and diverts strategic and political energies, negatively impacting its geoeconomic objectives.

Historically, China has been hesitant to extensively support military campaigns in neighboring countries, with exceptions like Myanmar, where it supports the military junta and mediates reconciliation with some militant groups. Despite possible hesitation regarding cost-sharing for a Pakistani military campaign, the potential for enhanced bilateral security cooperation remains viable.

China and Pakistan can develop a mutual cooperation framework excluding the direct involvement of Chinese private security personnel. Such a framework might involve intelligence-sharing mechanisms, training, and equipping Pakistani law enforcement—particularly police and counterterrorism departments in Balochistan and Sindh—effectively. It could also include mutual learning experiences and joint border management protocols covering land, sea, and air. Cooperation could further extend to address nontraditional security threats and serious organized crimes.

Ultimately, Pakistan's immediate challenge is stabilizing Balochistan. In such testing times, countries naturally turn to their allies for support.

Radio Pakistan: Pakistan-China Partnership, Expert Commentary

Speaker	Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR
Platform	Radio Pakistan
URL	radio.gov.pk

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan delivered expert commentary on Radio Pakistan on the occasion of Prime Minister's visit to China for the sBelt and Road Initiative forum, contextualising the visit within the broader arc of Pakistan-China cooperation. He highlighted opportunities for Pakistan to leverage Chinese experience in industrial development, agricultural modernisation, and poverty reduction, sectors in which China has lifted hundreds of millions from poverty through deliberate policy. He also noted the critical importance of Chinese investment in Pakistan's energy sector, which faces a sustained crisis, and forecast continued growth in Chinese investment across multiple productive sectors in the coming years.

Policy Beacon Series: Op-Eds and Policy Papers, Additional Contributions

Beyond the flagship commentaries above, BCPR's team of research associates and visiting fellows contributed a sustained stream of Policy Beacon publications across the year. The Policy Beacon is BCPR's flagship policy brief series, in which authors analyse contemporary challenges and present recommendations for decision-makers.

Select titles and their authors are listed below:

Title	Author	Volume/Date
Prospects and opportunities in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor	By Muhammad Faisal	
Trengthening China-Pakistan Linkages in Education, Technology and Innovation	By: Muhammad Ali Shaikh, PhD	
Increasing Opportunities for Youth of Pakistan and China	Neha Malik	Vol. 03
Brown to Blue (B2B) Economic Transition: Redefining the Maritime Economy for Sustainable Growth and Environmental Resilience	Muhammad Insar	Vol. 09
China's Rise or US's Retreat?	Dr. Zainab Ahmed	Vol. 09
Taliban, Afghan-Pakistan Relations and the Region: Four years past 2021	Amb. Mansoor Ahmad Khan	Vol. 12
Afghanistan in BRI: A Sign of Increasing Chinese Diplomacy	Tahir Khan	Vol. 13
A Defining SCO Summit, China's Tianjin Moment	Amb. Mansoor Ahmad Khan	Vol. 14
Seminar Report on the Significance of the SCO Summit	Dr Zainab Ahmed	Vol. 15
Beyond Diplomacy: Media Collaboration as Soft Power	Mahreen Zaib	Vol. 15
Understanding China - Chinese Modernization and Its Vision for Global Governance	Sarmad Wali Khan	Vol. 17
The Role of Pakistan-China People-to-People Relations	Bilal Zubair	Vol. 21
China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Engagement in 2025	Tahir Khan	Vol. 22

The Role of Technology and Digitization in Pakistan-China Trade	Dr. Muhammad Sajid	Vol. 23
From Sun Wukong to Dragon Balls: How the Chinese Legend Became a Childhood Memory in Pakistan	Sarmad Wali Khan	Vol. 24
Building People-to-People Relations Through Entertainment	Muhammad Arslan	Vol. 24
China's BRI: Ideology of Cooperative Globalism	Dr. Marriyam Siddique	Vol. 26
Beyond the Performance of Democracy: Devolution, Disillusionment, and Pakistan's Search for Political Faith	Arsam Tufail Butt and Moavviz Siddiq Nizami	Vol. 27
China's Strategic Rise in Artificial Intelligence	Hizra Shahid	Vol. 30
Marketing in China: Culture, Digital Power, and Strategic Imperatives for Global Brands	Zuha Khalid	Vol. 31
Future Pathways in the Middle East Conflict: How the War Could End or Escalate	Dr Moeed Yusuf	Vol. 36
China is in the Frame	Nasim Zehra	Vol. 37
China-Taiwan Rift and Cheng Li-wun's Journey of Peace	Sara Kazim	Vol. 38
Intercivilizational Dialogue: Role and Significance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization	Muhammad Insar	Vol. 45
China's Way: Diplomatic Continuity in a Fragmented World Order	Nasim Zehra	Vol. 48
Cold Warriors Lost in Beijing	Nasim Zehra	Vol. 49
Strategic Synergies in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Comprehensive Analysis of Tourism Development in Balochistan	Sarmad Wali Khan and Muhammad Yousaf	
BCPR Crisis Briefing Report on Iran War: Economic & Maritime Implications; Integrated Strategic Assessment	Arsam Tufail Butt	
Seminar Report on Understanding the significance of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on	Arsam Tufail Butt	

15th Five-Year Plan		
Roundtable Report on Discussion on China-US Competition: Pakistan's Role as a Connector	Arsam Tufail Butt, Maria Ashraf, Summera Bibi	
Taliban govt welcomes Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan's stance against foreign military bases in Afghanistan	Tahir Khan	
Pakistan seeks regional countries' help to counter threats from Afghanistan	Tahir Khan	
China ready to 'organically integrate' Pakistan's development plans, says Chinese envoy	Tahir Khan	
Terrorists in Afghanistan hinder regional economic integration, pose serious security challenges: envoy	Tahir Khan	

Prospects and Opportunities in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

By *Muhammad Faisal*²

Introduction

In *July 2013*, when Pakistan and China signed the framework agreement for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), it marked a new chapter in Pakistan-China bilateral relations and a significant step toward promoting regional connectivity. Over the next decade, CPEC evolved as an economic connectivity and development initiative with strategic undertones. It is part of a larger strategic connectivity initiative now known as Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which was envisioned by the Chinese leadership after the 2008 global financial crisis and later the 'Pivot to Asia' policy announced by the Obama administration in *2011*.³

The idea of an economic belt along the Silk Road was presented by President Xi Jinping in his address to students at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan on *7th September 2013* with a view "to forge closer economic ties, deepen cooperation and expand development space in the Eurasian Region".⁴ In the subsequent years, the BRI enabled Beijing to combine its new economic prowess with foreign policy agenda, as it sought to direct domestic capital investments towards economic development westwards i.e., Continental Eurasia. Of the six economic corridors envisioned under BRI, CPEC was termed as the 'pilot' and 'flagship' project of the BRI⁵, reflecting the importance China attached to the success of CPEC as a harbinger of its broader global connectivity drive.

China identified Eurasia as the region where it could expand without encountering extensive regional opposition. Furthermore, the Eurasian landmass appeared to be an area where China could insulate its critical international trade from the risk of blockade at key chokepoints in Southeast Asia. In Pakistan, the Gwadar port in southwestern Baluchistan province emerged as a pivot of the CPEC, and has the potential to be a key regional port for China and Pakistan, as Beijing hedges against expanding US and Indian maritime presence.

In *April 2015*, during President Xi Jinping's state visit to Pakistan, CPEC was formally launched with multiple agreements for the construction of power plants, highways, fibre-optic networks, and the development of Gwadar port and city concluded between the two sides.⁶ These promised investments, which Government of Pakistan statistics put at around US\$46 billion, indicated that China was prepared to inject substantial capital in Pakistan's economy with a view to redefining the country's economic landscape, while connecting Pakistan to China's financial system, its international economic strategy, and the broader BRI policy framework. By supporting Pakistan's

² Author is a renowned researcher on China affairs. Apart from being a Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad from 2016-2023 working at China-Pakistan Study Center, he has been Research Fellow, Research Associate and Visiting Fellow with a number of internationally renowned think-tanks. Presently, he is a PhD Candidate at the University of Technology Sydney.

³ Hilary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", Foreign Policy, October 11, 2011, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>

⁴ Michelle Witte, "President Xi Jinping Calls for Regional Economic Cooperation Via New Silk Road", The Astana Times, September 11, 2013, <https://astanatimes.com/2013/09/xi-jinping-calls-for-regional-cooperation-via-new-silk-road/>

⁵ Ayaz Gul, "China, Pakistan Sign BRI-Funded Railway Project Deal," Voice of America, October 18, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-pakistan-sign-bri-funded-railway-project-deal-/7316252.html>

⁶ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan-China ties' strategic content to be bolstered", Dawn, April 21, 2015 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1177236>

quest for economic growth and infrastructure development, China sought to invest in Pakistan's long-term stability. The first phase of the project, focusing on building power plants and constructing transportation infrastructure, was thus expedited. However, in later years the progress slowed down as political dynamics in Pakistan changed, and a balance-of-payments crisis challenged Pakistan's macroeconomic stability.

When CPEC was launched, it was an indication that now both sides were keen to translate a close political relationship into a more holistic economic partnership.⁷ In essence, the CPEC framework provided Pakistan an opportunity to improve infrastructure, address energy crisis, and commence industrialization through establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs), while areas of agriculture, spatial planning (urban development), tourism, financial integration, information and communication technologies (ICT) and development of Gwadar port and city were identified for further bilateral cooperation. Besides, from July 2013 to early 2018, both sides worked closely on finalising a Long-Term Plan for CPEC construction in three phases till 2030.

While Pakistan and China have continued to explore ways to address the gaps and loopholes in implementation of the CPEC in its first phase, both sides have remained engaged in working out an agreed way forward on the CPEC's next phase. During Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visit to China from *June 4-8, 2024*, the two sides recognised that CPEC was a pioneering project of the BRI, expressed the resolve to adhere to the principle of “planning together and benefitting together” and expressed commitment to forging “an upgraded version” of the CPEC with the aim of building it into an exemplary project of high quality block of the belt and road cooperation⁸. This announcement reflects that China and Pakistan have practically moved into the second phase of CPEC, wherein the key challenge would be to activate CPEC mechanisms and tools to address the dual challenge of filling existing gaps and managing future adjustments.

This paper aims to undertake an informed analysis of the CPEC's progress and prospects focusing on four key dimensions. The first section reviews progress made in key sectors of CPEC, i.e., energy, transportation infrastructure, Gwadar port, and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) over the past decade. The second section will highlight the financial cooperation and economic planning engagement between two countries as they navigated changing economic policy in Pakistan. The third section will analyse a few bottlenecks that emerged during the decade-long CPEC cooperation between two countries. The fourth section will assess prospects of reinvigorating CPEC cooperation and potential opportunities as both countries would like the CPEC to yield opportunities for strengthening industrial cooperation and boost connectivity while adapting to climate friendly and green approaches to sustainable development.

Section I: CPEC Progress (2013-2023)

Over a decade, nearly US\$25 billion has been invested in addressing Pakistan's energy needs and developing infrastructure.⁹ Of this, over US\$16 billion has been invested in the energy sector while US\$4 billion has been spent on infrastructure development projects. Meanwhile, work on projects worth US\$5 billion remains underway in different sectors. Despite the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and security challenges, CPEC projects have kept their pace, as both sides demonstrated

⁷ For a historical review of Sino-Pakistan relations see; Syed Rifaat Hussain, “Sino-Pakistan Ties: Trust, Cooperation and Consolidation”, *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 2014:37(4), pp1-131, 10.1353/jsa.2014.0004.

⁸ “Joint Statement between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and People's Republic of China”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan, June 08, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/joint-statement-between-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-and-the-peoples-republic-of-china>

⁹ Asif Shahzad, “Pakistan Completes Projects Worth \$25 Bln under CPEC,” Reuters, October 18, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/article/technology/pakistan-completes-projects-worth-25-bln-under-cpec-idUSL1N3BO0Q0/>.

adequate focus on enhancing regional cooperation and promoting shared sustainable development. This section surveys progress made in four key sectors of the CPEC framework.

1. Energy Cooperation

Energy sector cooperation under CPEC represents the most significant portion of the CPEC portfolio, both in terms of investment and power generation. In *2013-15*, when CPEC planning meetings commenced, Pakistan was facing an acute power crisis.¹⁰ The then PML-N government invited Chinese power companies to invest in Pakistan's power sector and construct power plants and then supply electricity to the national grid. These power projects were set up under Pakistan's existing *2002* Power Policy, which was an extension of the *1994* Independent Power Producers (IPPs) policy. Under these policy frameworks, the Government of Pakistan provided sovereign guarantees to purchase power from plants with guaranteed returns of up to 17 percent indexed in US dollars. Under CPEC, the Chinese power companies established power plants after obtaining commercial loans from Chinese banks, such as China Development Bank and China EXIM Bank.

Since *2015* onwards when construction of first round of power plants was commenced under CPEC, over 8000 MWs of electricity has been inducted into Pakistan's national grid so far.¹¹ This has included about 3940 MWs of electricity from imported coal-power plants constructed at Sahiwal, Port Qasim and Hub by Chinese investors. Meanwhile, Engro Corp. in partnership with Chinese and Pakistani investors constructed a 660 MW power plant using Thar Coal in Sindh. Similarly, Shanghai Electric Company also invested in the construction of a 1320MW power plant using Thar Coal in Sindh. Besides, a 720 MW Karot Hydropower project on Jhelum River has been financed and constructed by China Three Gorges Company. Alongside these, another 700MW of electricity is being generated from wind and solar plants constructed in South Punjab and Sindh. A breakdown of completed CPEC power plants, their energy source, production capacity, and financial outlay is given below:

A crucial investment is in enhancing electricity transmission capacity of power sector financing and construction of 900 km long Matiari to Lahore 660 KV electricity transmission line. This project was completed at the cost of US\$ 1.65 billion by China State Grid Corporation.¹² With this, so far, complete investments in the power sector are over US\$14.1 billion during the first decade of CPEC.

For smooth operations of these power plants, in 2015, Pakistan and China reached an understanding that as part of the CPEC power policy framework, the Government of Pakistan would set up an escrow account with the State Bank of Pakistan. The goal was to insulate Chinese power producers from the chronic circular debt challenge of Pakistan's power sector. In this revolving account, the Government of Pakistan, through its relevant power purchase agency, would deposit up to 22 percent of the electricity generation costs incurred by Chinese power plants. Then, Chinese power producers would be reimbursed against their invoices as approved by the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA). After years of delay, the account was only partially established in *2023*.

¹⁰ Michael Kugelman, "Pakistan's Energy Crisis, From Conundrum to Catastrophe?," The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR), March 13, 2013, <https://www.nbr.org/publication/pakistans-energy-crisis/>.

¹¹ "CPEC Role Instrumental in Meeting Pakistan's Energy Needs," Dunya News, August 1, 2023, <https://dunyaews.tv/en/Business/743871-CPEC-role-instrumental-in-meeting-Pakistan's-energy-needs>.

¹² "Matiari to Lahore ±660 KV HVDC Transmission Line Project," China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Secretariat, accessed August 7, 2024, <https://cpec.gov.pk/project-details/17>.

Table 1.1: Production Capacity and Financial Outlay of Power Plants

No.	Project Name	Energy Source	Capacity (MWs)	Financial Cost (US\$ Millions)
1.	Sahiwal Coal Power Plant	Imported Coal	1320	1912.2
2.	Port Qasim Power Plant	Imported Coal	1320	1912.2
3.	HUBCo Coal Power Plant - Hub	Imported Coal	1320	1912.2
4.	Thar Coal -Block 1- Project	Thar Coal	1320	1912.2
5.	Engro Thar Coal and Mine Power Project	Thar Coal	660	995.4
6.	HUBCO Thar Coal Power Plant	Thar Coal	330	497.70
7	Thal Nova Thar Power Plant	Thar Coal	330	497.70
8.	Karot Hydro Power Project – Jhelum River	Hydro	720	1698
9.	Quaid-i-Azam Solar Park – Bahawalpur	Solar	400	520
10.	5 Wind Power Projects in Thatta	Wind	300	646
Total			8020	12503/12.5 bln

Source: CPEC Progress Update, CPEC Secretariat, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, www.cpec.gov.pk

2. Transportation Infrastructure

As a transportation corridor, infrastructure development forms the core of the CPEC cooperation between Pakistan and China. In its broad scope, CPEC is meant to enhance intra-Pakistan north-south connectivity, and also promote overland connectivity with China's Xinjiang region. The Karakoram Highway (KKH) was the first strategic transportation project to connect Pakistan and China. Under CPEC, the 791-km long KKH is being upgraded with Chinese financing to an all-weather road to cater for growing tourist and commercial traffic. After KKH connects to Islamabad, CPEC proposes three-routes to link KKH with Gwadar via

Eastern, Central and Western nodes. The Eastern route traverses the existing highway and motorway network, from Islamabad to Lahore via M2 and then turns to existing Lahore-Multan motorway and under CPEC Sukkur-Multan section (M5) has been constructed with a US\$2.9 billion¹³ concessional loan to complete the Karachi-Lahore motorway. From Karachi, the eastern node takes the Makran Coastal Highway to reach Gwadar.

Meanwhile the Western alignment starts from Islamabad and moves southwest to Dera Ismail Khan in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province and then connects to Balochistan via Zhob and then link-up to Quetta. From Quetta it follows Gwadar via the existing N-85 National Highway and then N-25. It is an over 2700 km long route, which traverses underdeveloped regions of the country. Along this route, Pakistan financed construction of 285 km-long Hakla-Dera Ismail Khan motorway, 106 km-long Khuzdar-Basima Road, and M-8 Hushab-Awaran section.

Finally, the central alignment commences from Dera Ismail Khan in southwest and moves to South Punjab districts of Bukkhar, Layyah, Rajanpur, and Dera Ghazi Khan. It then traverses Sindh-Balochistan provincial boundary and reaches Khuzdar, from where it continues to Gwadar via Basima. The missing arterial roads on this alignment are planned to be completed in the final stage of CPEC.

For these road projects, the Chinese government has provided concessional project financing of nearly US\$5.8 billion at an annual interest rate of 2 percent. These transportation projects are intended to expand in-country connectivity, especially between major urban centers, and promote economic activity in underdeveloped regions.

A major part of the infrastructure component of CPEC is the upgradation and expansion of Pakistan's 150-year-old railway network, from Karachi to Peshawar and from Taxila to Havelian. Upgradation of Main Line-I (ML-I) was declared a strategic project of CPEC. Bilateral talks for finalising design, technical parameters, and financial feasibility have been ongoing since 2017. Project is designed to be completed in three phases. Given the project's high cost (initially estimated to be around US\$ 9.8 billion), both sides have been attempting to explore an innovative and viable financing model. China had indicated willingness to provide nearly 85 percent of the project financing through concessional government loans. In 2023, Pakistan proposed amending the design and reducing the cost to nearly US\$ 6.8 billion to make it fiscally feasible. This is now a long-term project, as it has faced considerable delays.

Besides ML-I, both sides have also explored the feasibility studies of constructing rail-based public transportation systems in provincial capitals of four provinces of Pakistan. In Lahore, capital of Punjab, Chinese government funded construction of Orange Line metro train through a US\$ 1.6 billion concessional loan.¹⁴ It is Pakistan's first modern mass-transit venture that was completed in three years by *December 2019*. Currently, the two Chinese companies and a Pakistani firm are managing operations of the metro line. Similarly, for Karachi, the Sindh government has explored the feasibility of constructing the Karachi Circular Railway project with a soft loan from a Chinese bank.

¹³ "China's Handover of Sukkur-Multan Motorway to Pakistan Epitomizes Progress of Building CPEC despite Pandemic: FM," Global Times, December 23, 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202012/1210711.shtml?id=11>.

¹⁴ "Pakistan's Orange Line Metro Train Project under CPEC Delivered," Xinhua, October 9, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2020-10/09/c_139428972.htm.

3. Development of Gwadar Port and City

Bilateral cooperation to develop the Gwadar port preceded the commencement of CPEC. In *March 2002*, after years of negotiations, both sides commenced construction of a deep-sea port at Gwadar. China provided 85 percent financing (nearly US\$145 million) through EXIM Bank for construction of the port, which was completed in *2007*. In *November 2007*, Pakistan granted a concession agreement to manage operations of the port to Singapore Port Authority (SPA) for a period of 40 years. Despite years of efforts, SPA did not make a significant headway in attracting business at the port. In *2012*, Pakistan again engaged with the Chinese government, and in early *2013*, after reaching a bilateral understanding, Islamabad transferred the same concession agreement to China Overseas Port Holding Company (COPHC) and tasked it with upgrading the port infrastructure and developing associated facilities. Later, when CPEC was launched, Gwadar port and city development became a key sectoral cooperation area between Islamabad and Beijing.

To oversee development of Gwadar port, both sides established a dedicated joint working group. This working group oversaw the design and finalization of a Master Plan from *2016 to 2018*. It was approved by the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), the apex decision-making body of CPEC, in *November 2019*. Since then, it has been implemented by both the Gwadar Development Authority and the Balochistan government. Under this plan, a dedicated power plant, an international airport, hospital, vocational training centers, and a road network of the city are being established in stages. For development projects in Gwadar, the Chinese government is providing concessional loans and grants of more than USD 700 million. The Gwadar international airport is nearing completion, while no work has commenced on the coal power plant, despite repeated announcements. The Chinese government has funded establishment of a desalination plant to meet water requirements of both the port operations and adjacent localities. During *2015-18*, Gwadar's connectivity with up-country, particularly Quetta, has improved through completion of a new road project funded by the federal government's Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) as part of Western route of CPEC.

The end-goal is to develop Gwadar Free Zone, adjacent to the port as a Special Economic Zone and make the port commercially operational. COPHC is responsible for development of facilities in the free zone, and a business center, trade exhibition hall and a warehouse has been constructed. First international Expo was held in *2018* to attract investments. Beijing has repeatedly pushed Pakistan to provide additional incentives such as tax breaks and tariff concessions to attract investments in the Gwadar Free Zone. It is essential to emphasize that the successful operationalization of Gwadar port in a timely manner, along with the provision of city infrastructure and facilities, will be instrumental in the success of the CPEC project.

4. Special Economic Zones

When CPEC was commenced, SEZs were promoted as linchpin of future economic growth through industrial development in Pakistan. The logic was straightforward: addressing energy shortages and infrastructure bottlenecks through project financing can be met through future export-oriented industrial cooperation between Pakistan and China. While power projects and transportation infrastructure were being built, Pakistan's governance apparatus – at federal, provincial, and district tiers – was supposed to finalize policy framework and development of SEZ sites in coordination with the Chinese side. Even the idea of dedicated industrial estates for sprouting economic growth is not new to Pakistan. This time, however, Pakistani

leadership and officialdom sought to replicate China's successful example of Shenzhen and other SEZs.

It was in 2019 that the federal government under Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf focused on prioritising development of SEZs. 2019 was declared the year of 'industrial, socio-economic and agriculture cooperation' between the two countries.¹⁵ Subsequently, ground-breaking of three SEZs – Rashakai in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Dhabeji in Sindh, and Allama Iqbal Industrial Zone in Faisalabad – took place. Pakistan has been calling for relocation of Chinese industries, in textile, iron and steel, and petrochemical products, as increasing cost of labour in China pushed these companies to explore avenues outside China. The Industrial Cooperation Joint Working Group of CPEC focused on addressing policy framework issues and coordination across government departments at various tiers. The subject of industrial cooperation is complicated due to devolution of related land and utilities matters to provinces. In 2016, PMLN government revised the 2012 SEZs Act offering 10-year tax holiday with exemption from customs duties on imported machinery for setting up industries in the designated SEZs. In 2017-18, Chinese experts conducted feasibility studies of 6 proposed SEZ sites.¹⁶ Chinese experts suggested that Pakistan should first expand its existing industrial parks, and then move to develop each SEZ site with specific economic plans in the context of local conditions, access to markets, transportation infrastructure, and their distinct advantages.

Meanwhile, China has pushed for operationalising a one-window facility to resolve issues related to land, essential utilities, taxation, customs, and other legal issues relating to development SEZs. At first, the Board of Investment (BoI) was tasked with addressing issues related to development of SEZs. In 2018, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on industrial cooperation was formalised between the BoI and China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).¹⁷ Later, Pakistan established a CPEC-Authority to oversee all aspects of CPEC, including SEZs development and coordination across federal, provincial, and district levels. A few years later, CPEC-Authority was replaced by the Federal Ministry of Planning, Development & Reform as the lead Ministry on CPEC affairs.¹⁸

In February 2022, the Framework Agreement on Industrial Cooperation under CPEC was concluded between the two sides.¹⁹ The goal was to expand Business-to-Business (B2B) linkages between two countries for relocation of Chinese industries interested in exploring opportunities in Pakistan. This was a change from the first phase, where most of CPEC cooperation took place via government-to-government (G2G) and government-to-business (G2B) avenues. Besides, this framework agreement encouraged third-party collaboration in B2B engagements between Pakistani and Chinese commercial enterprises. This multi-pronged approach has the potential to turn SEZ cooperation into successful ventures based on Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from Chinese and other foreign investors.

¹⁵ Khaleeq Kiani, "2019 to Be Year of Industrial Cooperation between China and Pakistan," Dawn, January 16, 2019, sec. business, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1457834>.

¹⁶ Khaleeq Kiani, "Chinese experts to visit CPEC Special Economic Zone sites", Dawn, July 5, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1343342>

¹⁷ Amin Ahmed, "Accord Signed with China for Industrial Cooperation," Dawn, February 5, 202 , <https://www.dawn.com/news/1673411>.

¹⁸ Shahbaz Rana, "PM gives nod to abolish CPEC Authority", The Express Tribune, August 18, 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2371790/pm-gives-nod-to-abolish-cpec-authority>

¹⁹ "Pakistan, China Ink Framework Agreement on Industrial Cooperation under CPEC," Associated Press of Pakistan, February 4, 2022, <https://www.app.com.pk/global/pakistan-china-ink-framework-agreement-on-industrial-cooperation-under-cpec/>.

In a holistic analysis of the CPEC's first phase from 2013 to 2023, the overall progress in the projects can be described as reasonably satisfactory while noting that some segments may have remained slower than expected. The Energy and infrastructure segments of the CPEC have depicted relatively higher productivity and visibility. On the other hand, the SEZs and Gwadar port development apparently are the weak linkages in the CPEC's advance and will need the requisite attention of the implementing authorities. The factors responsible for delays and bottlenecks would be analysed in a subsequent section of this Paper.

Section II: Development Planning and Economic Cooperation CPEC Long-term Plan

When CPEC talks commenced in 2013, both sides were cognizant of giving a long-term direction to the CPEC cooperation. Towards this end, in July 2013, during the Prime Minister's first official visit to China, an MoU to prepare a Long-Term Plan (LTP) for the CPEC was signed. That MoU emphasized the concept of 'Corridor Construction and Industrial Parks'. Later, China began articulating its broader regional development vision through the BRI. Under that framework, CPEC was presented as a 'new development model' for regional development and shared prosperity. China's BRI vision focused on enhancing a) regional integration in the global economy; b) charting new international logistics networks; c) promoting regional economic development through trade and investment; and d) deepening economic cooperation between partner countries.²⁰

Under these broad parameters, China Development Bank (CDB) was tasked with preparing an LTP document, focusing on i) Spatial Development Plan; ii) Industrial Parks Plan; iii) Information and Communication Technology Plan; iv) Agriculture Plan; v) Water resources management Plan; vi) Coastal Tourism Plan; and vii) Financing Plan. After field visits to Pakistan, CDB experts prepared a document and shared it with Governments of China and Pakistan. Under the Planning Work Group, governmental experts from both countries assessed the proposed LTP document and finalised it.²¹ An LTP document covering ambition, direction and coverage of CPEC, as well as, role and responsibilities of both sides was agreed in November 2017 at the 7th JCC meeting and launched subsequently in December 2017. The CPEC LTP was termed as a "live document" which could be modified and reviewed "periodically" by then government.²² However, any updated version has not been made public, yet.

Broadly, the ambition was that by 2030, average income of citizens of both countries will converge to the same level in both countries through sectoral cooperation while enhancing bilateral trade and investments. After resolving Pakistan's power crisis and improving internal connectivity, focus was to shift towards development and operationalization of SEZs, with the goal of relocating Chinese manufacturing units to Pakistan.

According to the shortened public version, China agreed to "give play to China's advantages in capital, technology, production capacity, and engineering operation" as it promoted its Western Development Strategy to develop the Xinjiang region and accelerated the BRI construction. Meanwhile, Pakistan aimed to focus on harnessing "the demographic and natural endowment of the country" by enhancing its "industrial capacity through creation of new industrial clusters" to balance "the regional socio-economic development." The shortened document, however, lacked details on any specific funding mechanisms, financing modes, and projects agreed upon between the

²⁰ Safdar Sohail, "Debt Sustainability and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor," Project Paper (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, April 2022), https://unctad.org/system/files/information-document/BRI-Project_policy-brief-06_en.pdf.

²¹ Sohail.

²² "CPEC's Long Term Plan Is Not Project Document, Clarifies Minister," Dawn, May 16, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1333380>.

two countries. Although it was an aspirational document, it set the following specific goals for each five-year period.²³

By 2020: CPEC to start taking shape after addressing major ‘bottlenecks’ to Pakistan’s economic development and begin supporting Pakistan’s economic growth.

By 2025: Industrialisation drive nearing completing; people’s livelihood along the Corridor improved; and regional economic development more balanced.

By 2030: the “endogenous mechanism for sustainable economic growth” be achieved; and CPEC to play key role in economic growth of Central and South Asian regions.

1. Bilateral Economic Cooperation

CPEC is a subset of broader bilateral economic cooperation between Pakistan and China. However, prior to onset of CPEC, the economic ties between Islamabad and Beijing mainly revolved around:

- a) limited bilateral trade
- b) Pakistan’s quest to secure financial support.

It led to an un-even commerce and economic relationship as Pakistan and China remain asymmetrical trading partners in economic terms. Prior to CPEC, bilateral trade remained minimal. It expanded after conclusion of Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in 2006. It led to a wide trade deficit of nearly US\$14 billion in 2019 between the two countries, as Pakistan imported high-end machinery and electronics from China, while it exported raw cotton and copper as two top items. After mutli-year negotiations, FTA-II was signed in 2019. It has reduced trade gap to nearly US\$11 billion in 2023, yet China remains Pakistan’s largest trading partner.

Meanwhile, China has extended crucial financial support as Pakistan has dealt with periodic fiscal crises to meet its external obligations. After onset of CPEC, Pakistan’s financial dependency on China has grown, and China has made available multiple financial facilities to address Pakistan’s financial woes. These include (a) short-term deposits by State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE), of nearly USD 4 billion, with State Bank of Pakistan as balance of payment support, and (b) Islamabad has directly obtained short and medium-term commercial loans from Chinese banks to meet its budgetary gaps and external commitments.

Similarly, to deepen financial integration between two countries, both sides concluded a Currency-Swap Agreement in 2011. Pakistan has begun making payments in RMB for some of its trade with Russia and China. Moreover, in 2017, the Chinese side floated the idea of issuing Panda bonds in China’s financial markets. Pakistan’s current Finance Minister has stated on record that Pakistan will raise money from the Chinese bond market.

It is quite obvious that snags in some segments of the CPEC are also because of less than sufficient growth in the bilateral economic cooperation, which is primarily the result of Pakistan’s domestic political and economic stress as well as geopolitical pressures on the CPEC/BRI. Logically, for expediting the CPEC or its various segments, in the first place

²³ “Long Term Plan for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (2017-2030),” 9

Pakistan will have to exert hard for revival of its economic growth, and secondly, both Pakistan and China, will have to evolve approaches of close consultation and coordination to spur bilateral economic and commercial exchanges.

Section III: Challenges over the past decade

A decade has nearly passed with the onset of CPEC. During this time, Pakistan and China navigated a host of new challenges, which impeded CPEC progress, and have the potential to undermine long-term CPEC cooperation. Broadly, these challenges can be viewed at two levels: a) domestic issues and b) global/regional factors.

a) Domestic Challenges:

Pakistan faces a multitude of domestic challenges. Key challenges critical to smooth operationalisation of CPEC vision, inter alia, include: political instability, governance pitfalls, weak administrative, financial and legal frameworks, security concerns, financial uncertainty, negative impact of climate change and adverse narratives.

i. Political instability

An unstable political process and polarized politics have been major stumbling blocks in the pursuit of sustained economic and development policies. CPEC has also experienced effects of political instability over the past decade. The first such event was the postponement of the state visit of President Xi to Pakistan in September 2014 due to political protests in Islamabad by the then-opposition led by Imran Khan, Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI). Next, when Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif lost power in July 2017, it shifted the focus of ruling PML-N to domestic politics instead of addressing governance and policy issues. Later, when the PTI came to power in 2018, it again sought a change in the CPEC framework while dealing with political instability. Similarly, the new round of political polarization after the change of government in April 2022 undermined Chinese confidence in Pakistan's stability.

The federation-provincial disagreements on development initiatives/projects also transcended to projects under the CPEC. Major political parties from Sindh, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, and Baluchistan called for allocation of funds to underdeveloped areas of these provinces, and prioritizing selection of routes to traverse from these provinces. According to some analysts, “Political leaders from Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa claimed that their provinces were being bypassed and lamented that decision-making process around CPEC was opaque and it did not take provincial considerations on board”. Such analyses also contended that “the choice of eastern route confirmed the domination of Punjab within the political structures of the federation”.²⁴

These issues were quite extraneous to the Chinese way of planning and execution of projects, impeding smooth identification and implementation of projects under the CPEC during initial years. The Chinese side continued to advise that it regarded CPEC as a national initiative and, therefore, finally a ‘CPEC Political Parties Joint Consultation

²⁴ Adeney, K., & Boni, F. (2024). Global China and Pakistan's federal politics: 10 years of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics*, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2024.2354568>

Mechanism'²⁵ was established to address these domestic political hurdles in the project selection and planning processes.

ii. Governance Pitfalls

The pitfalls in the governance system marked by multi-layered division of labour among federal and provincial governments, and district administration having a crucial role in land, revenue, and taxation matters, seriously affected the pace of progress in CPEC projects. The civil-military turf struggle for steering the CPEC projects, which manifested through the establishment of a CPEC Authority in 2019 chaired by an army officer. Then its abolition in August 2022, bringing the CPEC back to the fold of the Ministry of Planning and Development, has only served to waste several years in advancing this initiative of strategic importance. This institutional back and forth, coupled with bureaucratic inertia, has created loopholes in the country's governance system, as it is not fully prepared to handle such a large influx of foreign investment and address the impediments for creating a conducive environment for mega-infrastructure, energy, and industrialization projects.

iii. Weak Administrative, Financial and Legal Frameworks

Coordination issues between federal, provincial governments, and local administrations continued to further slowdown the pace of work, particularly the development of SEZs. Although the federal government has prioritized decision-making through the Cabinet Committee on CPEC, implementation slows down at the provincial and district levels. The weak capacity of these political Ministers and bureaucratic structures is undermining progress. Besides, the difference in Chinese and Pakistani governance approaches has also been slowing the pace of operationalization of CPEC: Chinese model is to invite investors at local and provincial government with complete access to development and allied facilities for SEZ sites; conversely, Pakistani model is based on real-estate value i.e., selling land to investors for development and then commencing business activity.

Besides, for setting up an industrial unit/factory in any provincial SEZ, a foreign company is mandated to secure nearly 37 approvals including security clearances, registrations with local govt., provincial and federal govt. departments, and no-objection certificates. This process takes anywhere between 4-6 months for completion, and discourages Chinese investors from making long-term plans about relocating to CPEC SEZs. The administrative, financial and legal frameworks are weak with rampant corruption unable to effectively prevent fraudulent activities with Chinese investors/companies. The dispute resolution mechanisms and arbitration tools are also quite ineffective. Despite pledges by successive political governments for improving and streamlining these processes and facilitating Chinese investors via a one-window facility, the systems still require massive overhauling if the CPEC progress has to undergo a qualitative change.

iv. Security Concerns

Security concerns are among the most formidable challenges to the CPEC projects and their Chinese professionals. The operationalization of CPEC depends on a secure

²⁵ "1st Meeting of CPEC Political Parties Joint Consultation Mechanism Held in Beijing," International Department of Central Committee of CPC, China, March 19, 2019, https://www.idcpc.gov.cn/english2023/ldt/201903/t20190322_161015.html.

environment within the country.²⁶ However, from Xinjiang to Gwadar, militant groups are active and pose a threat to CPEC activities. These groups include the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Daesh (also known as ISIS), the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), and the militant wings of political parties. Some of these groups are directly challenging the Pakistani state, and have demonstrated capability to attack Chinese personnel and projects in Pakistan. These attacks have pushed the Chinese government to take a tough position and call for review of existing security measures for ensuring the security of Chinese citizens and project sites.

The security situation has continued to significantly deteriorate since the takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban in August 2021 and a progressive increase in the cross-border terrorist attacks from groups based in Afghanistan on Pakistani soil. The two provinces bordering Afghanistan – Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – crucial to CPEC projects, have been a specific target of the terrorist groups. The presence of an active terror landscape provides an opportunity to the detractors of the CPEC for sabotaging China-Pakistan cooperation.

Besides these concerns, presence of trends of religious extremism and their interplay with politics also poses a security threat to CPEC. Over past four decades, shades of religious conservatism in Pakistan's society have increased considerably affecting lives of people, particularly politics. As a result of this phenomenon, Pakistan has witnessed emergence of new and aggressive far-right religious parties in the political arena. An example is 22-day lockdown of Islamabad capital territory by Tehreek-i-Labbaik (TLP) in November 2017 followed by its continuous repetitions at different occasions until as recently as in July 2024. In 2017, TLP sit-in undermined smooth holding of annual CPEC-JCC meetings and the then government had to struggle for ensuring additional security arrangements. In the view of international and local observers, and especially the investor community, such a situation doesn't depict a normal functioning state and society, requiring short-term and long-term corrective policies.

v. Financial Uncertainty

As an economic enterprise, for CPEC, Pakistan's financial woes are most pressing. Pakistan has been facing constant pressures on its current account deficit and foreign exchange reserves since 2018. To address its Balance of Payments crisis, Pakistan has been receiving rescue and stabilization support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other international lending agencies. Consequently, IMF programs also impact Pakistan's policy framework as related to CPEC. Pakistan's pursuit of securing crucial financial support from China burdens China's appetite to support Pakistan via CPEC. Pakistan's state, being in constant struggle to avert a financial default or undertake its external payments commitments, shakes the confidence of the Chinese companies and potential investors in CPEC endeavours. Despite continuing economic turmoil, economic analysts continue to point out the absence of a credible policy encompassing far-reaching and much-desired economic reforms to expand its tax revenues, increase exports and enhance foreign exchange reserves to attain self-sufficiency. The focus has instead

²⁶ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Security Threats Endanger Future of CPEC, Warns Chinese Official," Dawn, June 22, 2024, sec. newspaper, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1841194>.

remained on borrowing from IMF or bilateral sources, causing more accumulation of national debt.

vi. Impact of Climate Change

During its first decade, as the CPEC has continued progress on its projects on infrastructure development, energy production and development of SEZs for generating economic opportunities, the impact of climate change at both global and regional levels, and especially in Pakistan, has become a crucial factor interplaying with the development models. Pakistan has been witnessing intense cycles of excessive heat, melting of glaciers, torrential rains, flash floods, increasing smog and freezing winters. Many of the CPEC's power generation projects responding to meeting Pakistan's dire energy needs are coal-based involving high carbon emissions. The infrastructure, mining and industrial projects are ecologically sensitive and mostly located in areas vulnerable to climatic disasters²⁷. In view of these challenges, the focus of CPEC's planning and implementation in the second phase will have to be mitigating the impact of climate change in relation to these projects and adopting effective approaches for green and sustainable development in conformity with the United Nation's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

vii. Managing Public Perceptions

One of the major challenges experienced during the first phase of the CPEC remains a lack of capacity in effectively projecting the positives associated with the initiative and countering the negative public perceptions. The adverse perceptions are mostly instigated by detractors of CPEC and Pakistan-China cooperation and revolve around propaganda on Chinese neo-colonialism through debt trap, environmental degradation, skewed development, fuelling unrest in Balochistan and political intrusiveness through economic means²⁸. A real concern for the authorities involved in CPEC projects is the progressively increasing literature in Pakistan propagating CPEC's negative perceptions, often based on unauthentic and unverified data. In addition, the research literature on CPEC by Chinese scholars reveals wide gaps between the two sides' expectation²⁹. As CPEC enters the second phase, the success in achieving its objectives would require the two sides to manage the expectations on both sides and to institute mechanisms to address and counter negative public perceptions.

b) Global/Regional Dynamics

i. Containing China Policy:

The mainstream debate in the US suggests strengthening of bipartisan consensus over China policy though analyses continue to point out questions and nuances of the respective policies and approaches of Republicans and Democrats³⁰ on the ways to deal

²⁷ Tayyaba Zainab ali, Dr. Muhammad Usman Askari, "Impacts of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on the Natural Environment of Pakistan", Pakistan Social Sciences Review (PSSR), Oct-Dec 2023, Vol 7 No.4, <https://ojs.pssr.org.pk/journal/article/view/394/253>.

²⁸ Osama Ahmad, "Ten Years of CPEC: A Decade of disappointments", Stimson Center, August 18, 2023, <https://www.stimson.org/2023/ten-years-of-cpec-a-decade-of-disappointments/>

²⁹ Dr. Muhammad Ali Shaikh, "Development: What the Chinese are saying about CPEC", Dawn, June 02, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1837268>

³⁰ Ali Wayne and Ryan Hass, "Commentary: questioning the presumption of a US 'consensus' on China policy", Brookings, July 15, 2024, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/questioning-the-presumption-of-a-us-consensus-on-china-policy/>.

with the increasing Chinese pre-eminence and protecting the US interests³¹. CPEC being a defining component of the Chinese BRI, in recent years the US policy on CPEC has been symptomatic of a broader strategic review of China policy in Washington. The US outlook has changed from qualified support under the Obama administration in 2015 to outright opposition in 2020 under the Trump Administration³², a policy that the Biden Administration has continued to pursue. In recent years, the US has vehemently criticised BRI and portrayed it as a ‘debt trap’ economic model³³. The influence of the US-China policy is also evident on its allies, particularly the EU countries. A case in point is the ensuing tariff war between China and Germany, especially targeting China's potential dominance of electrical vehicle markets³⁴.

Pakistan's efforts to prudently avoid being caught in the vortex of US-China competition and pursue CPEC development as an inclusive project open to third-party participation continue to be undermined by the political and economic vulnerabilities of the country. The intensifying competition between the US and China in the coming years at global and regional levels is likely to increase challenges for the CPEC, necessitating close coordination between Pakistan and China to dissipate such pressures appropriately.

ii. Competing Corridors

One of the manifestations of China containment is the emergence and projection of new corridors to compete China's BRI and its corridors. In this regard, the G-7's initiative Build Back Better World (B3W) with an estimated \$40 trillion investment portfolio launched in 2021 has explicit US support as an alternative to the BRI to offer connectivity projects to low- and middle-income countries with characteristics that are value driven, based on good governance standards and climate friendly through mobilizing private capital along with multilateral public finance³⁵. However, in the past three years, the B3W initiative has not made any tangible progress on ground to provide a basis for a comparative assessment with the BRI or its components. In terms of impact on CPEC, a research report by Islamabad-based Sustainable Development Planning Institute (SDPI) emphasizes that “BRI operational in 140 countries, is more inclusive with expert technology and infrastructure access has wider scope currently, whereas B3W has theoretical importance in terms of soft outcome as it is yet to be there”³⁶.

The idea of another corridor launched at the G-20 Summit in New Delhi last year, envisioning a complex connectivity corridor entitled India Middle East Economic

³¹ Fact Sheet, “President Biden Take Action to Protect American workers and Businesses From China's Unfair Trade Practices”, The White House, May 14, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/05/14/fact-sheet-president-biden-takes-action-to-protect-american-workers-and-businesses-from-chinas-unfair-trade-practices/>.

³² Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, “America Opposes CPEC,” Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (blog), November 9, 2017, <https://issi.org.pk/comment-america-opposes-cpec/>.

³³ Keith Johnson, “Trump Reaches for Checkbook Diplomacy to Counter China,” Foreign Policy (blog), October 8, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/08/trump-reaches-for-checkbook-diplomacy-to-counter-china/>.

³⁴ Reuters, “China warns of possible ‘trade war’ with EU as Germany's Habeck heads to Beijing”, VoA, June 21, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-warns-of-possible-trade-war-with-eu-as-germany-s-habeck-heads-to-beijing-/7664784.html>

³⁵ Fact Sheet, “President Biden and G-7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership”, The White House, June 12, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/06/12/fact-sheet-president-biden-and-g7-leaders-launch-build-back-better-world-b3w-partnership/>.

³⁶ Dua E. Zehra Shah, Syed Sujaat Ahmed & Hina Aslam, “BRI Vs B3W: Where does Pakistan Stand”, SDPI Research Report, April 2022, <https://sdpi.org/assets/lib/uploads/BRI%20Vs%20B3W%20%20Where%20does%20Pakistan%20Stand.pdf>

Corridor (IMEC),³⁷ is also facing setbacks due to an unprecedented escalation of the Middle East conflict and Israel's unending war in Gaza.

c) Regional Dynamics

External challenges to the implementation of CPEC primarily comprise the security environment along the border with Afghanistan and the competing interests of Pakistan's neighbors, including India, as well as India's efforts and investments to develop Iran's Chabahar port as a rival to Gwadar port.

i. Afghanistan

Since the onset of Taliban-led Afghan Interim Government in August 2021, violence along Pakistan's western borders, particularly in districts bordering Afghanistan and southern Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, has increased. Meanwhile, Baloch militancy has also seen revival in recent years and Balochistan has especially become highly volatile in recent months. As Pakistan-Afghanistan relations remain challenged with peace and security issues, the CPEC's promise of connectivity will remain elusive. Deteriorating Pakistan-Afghanistan engagement continues to undermine Chinese efforts for building CPEC's linkages with Afghanistan and onwards to Central Asia. In this context, China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral platform, which has been in existence for past many years has not been able to create common ground for promoting trilateral economic cooperation and building infrastructure and logistical linkages among the three bordering countries. Non-recognition of Afghanistan as a legitimate international state interlocutor undoubtedly remains a major stumbling block in promoting economic connectivity with Afghanistan³⁸.

ii. India

Within the region, India is a key strategic opponent of the CPEC and BRI. There are two main grounds for Indian opposition to the CPEC. One, India being arch-rival of Pakistan it considers CPEC as strategically beneficial to Pakistan and, therefore, against Indian Interests. Two, for India, China is the primary strategic threat³⁹ and New Delhi views CPEC as the Chinese attempt to expand its influence across South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. India, therefore, is a crucial partner of the United States' 'Pivot to Asia' policy for contesting and containing China⁴⁰ and seeks to pursue these objectives practically through its membership of organisations like Quad.

Indian opposition to the CPEC has been vigorous. From raising objections to the routes of the CPEC passing through Gilgit-Baltistan⁴¹, which India claims as part of the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, it has been exploring collaboration on competing

³⁷ Jean-Loup Samaan, "The India Middle East Corridor: A Biden-Road Initiative", Atlantic Council, October 06, 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/the-india-middle-east-corridor-a-biden-road-initiative/>.

³⁸ Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, "Trilateral Dialogue: Impracticable Commitment sans Afghan representation", The Arab News Pakistan, May 16, 2023, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2304256>.

³⁹ Michael Kugleman, "China Has Become India's Greatest Threat", Foreign Policy, January 19, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/19/india-china-military-threat-security-pakistan/>.

⁴⁰ Robert d. Blackwell and Richard Fontaine, "How the United States Can Effectively Pivot to Asia", Council on Foreign Relations, June 11, 2024, <https://www.cfr.org/expert-brief/how-united-states-can-effectively-pivot-asia>

⁴¹ Anwar Ali, Bahadar Shah, Muhammad Rizwan & Muhammad Ali, "Indian factor in CPEC: Prospects and Challenges for Pakistan", Pakistan Administrative Review, Vol.3, No.2, 2019, https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/63202/ssoar-par-2019-2-ali_et_al-Indian_factor_in_CPEC_prospects.pdf?jsessionid=034512CCE0B3CE1C052500A03B59395B?sequence=1

corridors such as IMEC with a view to harm prospects of the growth of CPEC. India also continues to echo concerns about the Chinese debt trap and participation of third countries in the CPEC as detrimental to its interests⁴². The challenge of India's antagonism towards CPEC would require the relevant institutions of Pakistan and China to be vigilant to any Indian efforts to sabotage CPEC initiative and sideline it through diplomatic and political manoeuvres and take effective counter measures.

iii. Chabahar

Pakistan and China view CPEC as an endeavor of regional connectivity and build linkages with regional avenues such as Chabahar port of Iran located strategically in the Strait of Hormuz. Towards this end, both the countries regard Gwadar and Chabahar as sister ports in the longer term though practical linkages and cooperation are restricted by the US sanctions against Iran. During the past decade, India has been investing in Chabahar port projecting it in competition to Gwadar port for regional connectivity particularly for transit to and from Afghanistan. In this context, India, Iran, and Afghanistan have signed an agreement in May 2016 under the trilateral framework with India's investment of up to \$500 million to develop Chabahar as a strategic port.⁴³ The project will give all three countries an alternate connection, by passing Pakistan for regional trade and for access to the landlocked countries of Central Asia. The Taliban takeover initially dampened hopes for further massive investments by India in Chabahar. Still, the unexpected decline in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations has recently pushed Afghan Taliban to explore strengthening Afghanistan's transit route with Iran through Chabahar port. Afghan Interim Government this year announced an investment of US \$35 million in Chabahar port⁴⁴. This followed another strategic move by India in May 2024 to sign a 10-year agreement with Iran to operate the Chabahar port⁴⁵.

Section IV: Future Outlook and Opportunities

The near-to-medium term and the long-term future outlook of CPEC is directly linked to Pakistan's economic health, political stability, policy continuity, governance reforms and improvement in the security environment for Chinese citizens. Notwithstanding its acute challenges, CPEC remains the initiative of high priority for both China and Pakistan due to the long-term shared strategic interests. At the moment, both sides remain engaged in efforts towards reinvigorating CPEC, via Phase-II, focusing on better planning and operationalisation of projects. Focused interaction has continued between the two countries for taking CPEC forward in a smooth manner.

Ten years Anniversary Celebrations.

During the visit of Special Representative of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng in July 2023 to Pakistan to celebrate the first decade of CPEC, the two countries,

⁴² Rajeswari Pillai RajaGopalan, "India's Latest Concerns with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor", Observer Research Foundation (ORF), August 10, 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/research/indias-latest-concerns-with-the-cpec>.

⁴³ Saheli Roy Choudhury, "Why India's Spending \$500M to Develop a Port in Iran," CNBC, May 24, 2016, sec. Economy, <https://www.cnbc.com/2016/05/23/modi-news-india-to-invest-500-million-in-the-port-of-chabahar-as-part-of-trilateral-cooperation-with-iran-afghanistan.html>.

⁴⁴ Arshad Mehmood, "Afghanistan invests \$ 35 M in Iran's Chabahar Seaport, Fueling Economic Shift by Extending Trade Connection that Bypass Pakistan", TheMediaLine, March 14, 2024, <https://themedialine.org/by-region/afghanistan-invests-35m-in-irans-chabahar-seaport-fueling-economic-shift-by-extending-trade-connections-that-bypass-pakistan/>

⁴⁵ Reuters Agency, "India inks 10-years deal to operate Chabahar port", Reuters, May 13, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-sign-10-year-pact-with-iran-chabahar-port-management-et-reports-2024-05-13/>

signaling a desire to deepen cooperation, entered into six agreements for reinforcing cooperation in various fields⁴⁶.

i. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's visits to China

In the last two years, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has paid two visits to China. In his first visit on November 1-2, 2022, the leadership of the two countries held close consultations on various projects under the CPEC and reaffirmed commitment to continue the momentum of CPEC's high-quality development.⁴⁷

Following the elections in Pakistan earlier this year, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visited China again from June 4 to 8, 2024. The visit involved detailed consultations in strengthening economic interaction and signing of 23 agreements and MoUs for cooperation in areas such as CPEC, agriculture, infrastructure, industrial growth, development assistance, market regulation, surveying and mapping, media, film, etc.

ii. The Joint Statement⁴⁸ of the visit reaffirmed following key determinations:

Upgraded version of CPEC to jointly build growth corridor, livelihood-enhancing corridor, innovation corridor, green and open corridor, alignment with Pakistan's 5-Es (Exports, E-Pakistan, Environment, Energy, Equity & Empowerment);

- Expediently implement consensus achieved by the Joint Coordination Mechanism (JCC).
- Upgrade ML-1 on priority by advancing the project in a phased manner and work out financing modalities.
- Signing of the framework agreement of the re-alignment of Kara-Koram Highway (KKH) and expedite work on it and up-gradation of Khunjrab-Sost pass.
- Expedite work on Gwadar Port including its auxiliary infrastructure particularly Gwadar International Airport.
- Expedite conditions for Chinese companies to invest in SEZs.
- Welcome third parties' participation in CPEC.
- Strengthen mining sector activities under the CPEC.
- Strengthen cooperation in the areas of agriculture, industry, IT, and other sectors in accordance with the CPEC's overall priorities.
- Enhance communication, coordination, and cooperation in the efforts for mitigating the impact of climate change.

Following the visit of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif to China, the decision-making on vital CPEC projects has seemingly received fresh stimulus in Islamabad. On June 30, 2024,

⁴⁶ Staff Reporters, "China and Pakistan celebrate 10th Anniversary of CPEC, Laud Benefits", Global Times, July 31, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202307/1295392.shtml>.

⁴⁷ Press Release, "Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and Islamic Republic of Pakistan", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, November 02, 2022, <https://mofa.gov.pk/joint-statement-between-the-peoples-republic-of-china-and-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-2-november-2022>.

⁴⁸ Press release, "Joint statement between the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the People's Republic of China", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, June 08, 2024, <https://mofa.gov.pk/press-releases/joint-statement-between-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan-and-the-peoples-republic-of-china>.

Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC).⁴⁹ approved ‘Realignment of KKH-Thakot-Raikot’ sector and gave green light to revised PC-1 of Gwadar International Airport. The upgradation of ML-1 could not get a nod at the ECNEC meeting. However, the federal Cabinet on August 30, 2024, gave the green light to initiate negotiations on the financial commitments agreement between Pakistan Railways and China for up-gradation of ML-1 project⁵⁰.

As the CPEC has practically entered Phase II, it provides an opportunity for both Pakistan and China to make necessary adjustments to its direction, policy frameworks, and constituent projects in light of the performance and progress during the first decade. In this regard, three aspects are of crucial importance. One, the CPEC being a key bilateral strategic initiative and a flagship project of the larger BRI, its consultation and decision-making processes should involve Pakistan-China understanding and cohesion at every stage of the project, keeping in view the long-term goals, objectives, and targets up to 2030 and beyond. Two, at an operational level, the CPEC’s plans and projects should be devised and pursued in accordance with these goals and objectives, ensuring the economic, political, and development interests of both countries. Three, it is equally important to oversee and monitor that the narratives in the two countries on the CPEC and its future direction are mutually aligned and effective tools of dissemination are employed to promote and project CPEC in a constructive manner.

Infrastructure, energy, and economic opportunities through industrial development in SEZ all important components of CPEC are challenged by increasing negative impact of climate change in Pakistan, China and the region. Therefore, project planning, designs and execution in the second phase of the project and beyond have to fully adapt climate mitigation approaches and use of green technologies such as promoting the manufacturing of electrical vehicles in auto-industry in the planned SEZs or production of cleaner energy reducing use of fossil fuels and increasing solar and wind power or employing climate friendly techniques in agriculture, mining and other areas.

It is encouraging to witness an increasing constructive discourse in the official circles as well as experts on the need for expediting operationalisation of SEZs as crucial for industrialisation and job creation. If the momentum continues, it would be expected that over the medium term (3-5 years), SEZs will become the core of CPEC cooperation. To this end, Pakistan and China have been making efforts to incentivise Chinese investors to relocate part of Chinese industry to Pakistan in crucial sectors of textile, petrochemicals, iron and steel and several other categories of products.

It is also important that after undertaking in-depth studies for identifying specific sectors where Pakistan seeks relocation of Chinese industry, the federal government and political leadership can showcase Pakistan’s comparative advantages to Chinese investors. This can be a two-step process

Government of Pakistan to rigorously engage with Chinese state-owned enterprises in following sectors:

⁴⁹ Mubarak Zeb Khan, “Dar-led EcneC okays Rs411 bn projects”, Dawn, June 30, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1842766>.

⁵⁰ News desk, “Federal cabinet approves talks with China for major ML-1 railway project”, The Express Tribune, August 30, 2024, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2492314/federal-cabinet-approves-talks-with-china-for-major-ml-1-railway-project>.

- i.** Textile
- ii.** Pharmaceutical
- iii.** Automotive
- iv.** Information Technology
- v.** Footwear
- vi.** Furniture
- vii.** Agriculture
- viii.** Mining

An inter-ministerial delegation can engage with heads of leading Chinese state-owned companies manufacturing export-quality materials in showcasing new investment regimes and incentives if they relocate part of their production capacity to Pakistan. As an example, Haier-Ruba's assembling plant and its expanding market share in Pakistan is testament to opportunities available in Pakistan. Items manufactured in Pakistan can be exported to the regional markets, lowering transportation costs for Chinese manufacturers. At an advanced stage, a CPEC Business Summit can be hosted in Karachi, Pakistan's commercial capital bringing together Chinese corporate executives, heads of Pakistan's leading industrial groups, economic and industrial policy-makers from both sides, and also heads of leading banking institutions.

Pakistan Business Council, All-Pakistan Textile Mills Associations, Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry, along with other relevant provincial chambers, need to engage regularly with the Chinese business community and manufacturers across China's commercial, financial, and manufacturing hubs. Through B2B collaboration, the relocation of Chinese industry can be realized, and Pakistani and Chinese manufacturers can explore new markets and innovative production methods to scale their businesses.

With a view to appropriately addressing bottlenecks faced by the Chinese and other foreign investors, Pakistan and China can explore reviewing the Long-Term Plan document finalized in 2018. This is crucial for reviewing future plans for development of Gwadar port and city, industrialization, agriculture cooperation, and exploring new avenues in the field of Information Technology and Emerging technologies.

Since the launch of LTP in December 2017, Pakistan's economy has dealt with serious headwinds during the past seven years. The updated LTP documents need to factor in Pakistan's macroeconomic challenges and explore ways to insulate future CPEC industrial cooperation from the impact of Pakistan's political and financial uncertainties. This can be achieved by setting up a dedicated CPEC Industrial Fund and designing industrialization plans under CPEC in a manner that makes low-cost, concessional financing facilities available to business communities in both countries.

In Pakistan, and also for the world, an important barometer of CPEC's success in future will be the scale of development of Gwadar port and city. The Gwadar port will not become a successful commercial venture until Gwadar city and its surroundings are developed with its own functioning economy, promoting fisheries and goods for export. This requires addressing crucial issues affecting the population of the Gwadar area, such as ensuring a round-the-clock supply of affordable electricity, the availability of water for residents and potential industries,

and the development of allied infrastructure. Both Islamabad and Beijing need to re-engage on long-term goals and specific plans for timely development of Gwadar port and city, with targeted interventions and provision of necessary financial resources of city authorities and facilitation of business communities interested in exploring relocation to Gwadar Free Zone.

Meanwhile, the federal government, in close consultation with provincial governments through the Council of Common Interests and the National Security Committee, needs to align policies and procedures for companies interested in foreign investment in Pakistan. These investment regimes and measures should have a time-bound implementation for every intervention. Besides, the policy framework and implementation processes need to be uniform across the provinces. Most importantly, Pakistan's bureaucracy – both at federal and provincial levels – needs to substitute 'pre-approvals' regimes with 'compliance' and regulatory frameworks.

Similarly, the federal and provincial governments, along with security institutions, need to streamline security parameters and measures for ensuring fool-proof security of Chinese citizens and project sites across the country. Industrial cooperation, by its very nature, requires constant interaction between business executives, managers, workers, vendors, security officials, and other allied service providers. In view of the gravity of the security threats, Pakistani policy-makers, in consultation with local business groups, need to institute an innovative security regime that ensures law and order while reducing hassle for Chinese investors, managers, and workers during their stay/travel across Pakistan.

These new governance and security measures will not only be directed towards Chinese investors and companies; rather, they will open a window for investors from third countries. Both Islamabad and Beijing have been developing a policy framework for third-party participation in CPEC projects and industrial parks. During the first phase, third-party cooperation took place with participation of Qatar's Al-Mirqab Capital in the Port Qasim coal power plant established under CPEC. However, a framework for broader participation of firms from third countries in SEZ ventures for the future may be evolved through mutual consultation between the two countries. Yet, avenues for joint ventures between Pakistani, Chinese and companies from other countries can boost industrial activity at SEZs as supply chains of contemporary manufacturing operations are spread across continents.

Conclusion

The CPEC venture opened a new chapter in Pakistan-China bilateral relationship. It elevated the bilateral ties to a new level, while expanding scope of cooperation and interaction between the two societies. After completion of the first decade, CPEC has yielded significant gains for infrastructure development, energy sector and economic opportunities in associated fields. However, the experience has also revealed many challenges due to Pakistan's aggravating political and economic situation, impact of climate change, and fierce propaganda by detractors of the project. Despite difficulties, both sides have navigated complex domestic pressures while also responding to evolving external concerns primarily because of the mutual trust in the relationship. Importantly, both Pakistan and China have continued to attach priority to expediting completion of projects of the first phase, while undertaking plans and preparations for the next phase, making required adjustments. Expediting operationalization of SEZs with climate-friendly projects, development of Gwadar Free Zone, and increasing B2B collaborations and joint ventures will unlock immense potential of the project as a regional economic game-changer.

Strengthening China-Pakistan Linkages in Education, Technology and Innovation

By: Muhammad Ali Shaikh, PhD

Introduction:

There are only a few examples of deeper and more consistent interstate relationships, such as that of Pakistan and China, in international relations. With formal diplomatic relations established between the two countries on 21 May 1951, Pakistan and China's relationship has only strengthened during the course of time. Initially, the cooperation between the two countries remained confined to diplomacy and strategic cooperation, finally culminating in the two countries starting CPEC aimed at economic cooperation and partnership.

Like all international relationships, the one between Pakistan and China is also based on their deep interests associated with each other. Historically, Pakistan helped China when it faced international isolation during the 1950s and 1960s. At that juncture of time, Pakistan "acted as China's backdoor," circumventing its diplomatic confinement (Small 2020). It was also Pakistan whose state-owned Pakistan International Airline (PIA) started its flights to and from Beijing in 1964, becoming the first among non-communist countries' airlines that connected China with the rest of the world.

Equally important was Pakistan's role in establishing diplomatic relations between the United States and China, as it facilitated the first visit of US President Richard Nixon to China in 1972, heralding a new phase in China's history. Even at present, Pakistan holds the key to "China's transition from a regional power to a global one" through providing its passage to the Indian Ocean (Small 2020).

On the other side, China has also been Pakistan's most dedicated supporter in international forums and has occasionally used its veto power in the UN Security Council to protect Pakistan's interests. China has provided its most crucial aid and assistance in developing and strengthening Pakistan's defense and strategic capabilities. It was also China that helped Pakistan in its 1965 and 1971 wars with India when most of Pakistan's friends had stayed away (Macaes 2020). Additionally, China has consistently offered financial support to Pakistan during its frequent and almost continuous times of need.

The two countries' interests with each other further deepened when Pakistan became part of CPEC in 2013, under the umbrella of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This paved the way for the signing of multi-billion-dollar worth MOUs between the two countries in Islamabad in April 2015 in the presence of Chinese President Xi Jinping. The conceptual framework of CPEC was defined as "1+4" that put "CPEC at the center and Gwadar Port, transport infrastructure, energy and industrial cooperation as the four key [focus] areas" (Mahmood 2023).

At the end of the first decade of CPEC, by October 2023, China has made direct investment in Pakistan to the tune of USD 25.4 billion in various projects (Mahmood 2023). Such deeper economic relationship, coupled with mutual strategic, defence and diplomatic interests has immensely necessitated for the two countries to forge deeper people to people contacts, particularly in the fields of education, science, technology and innovation, which are essential creating understanding between the people from different cultural backgrounds like Pakistan and China (Education Uplifted 2024).

Attempts at Cooperation in Education

Pakistan and China have made numerous efforts over the past sixty years to strengthen their ties in cultural, educational, and scientific areas. “Education cooperation and exchanges between China and Pakistan have progressed through three stages,” wrote Kunfang Zheng and Yugang Fu in their article in *The Diplomatic Insight*. The stages were: “initial exploration, friendly exchanges, and growing cooperation” (Zheng & Fu 2024).

The first significant attempt occurred in 1965 when the two countries signed an agreement on “cultural cooperation,” which also included a section related to educational exchanges. A decade later, in 1976, another important agreement on the promotion of “scientific and cultural cooperation” was signed, expanding the areas of cooperation. Yet another effort took place in 1983 when the two countries signed a MoU to further expand the scope of their educational exchanges, as detailed by Pakistan’s Embassy in Beijing (PEB 2016).

Two decades later, in 2003, Pakistan and China agreed on the “Direction of Development of Sino-Pakistani Bilateral Cooperation,” which called for “enhancing cooperation and exchange in the area of cultural exchange by arranging exhibitions, hosting exchanges between young people, and sending foreign students and visiting scholars” (Zheng & Fu 2024). This was followed in 2005 by a MoU on enhancing cooperation in the field of Information Technology (PEB 2016).

In 2010, the two countries decided to establish their cultural centers in each other’s capital cities, i.e. Islamabad and Beijing with stated objective of engaging “in friendly cooperation and partnership while offering the general public high-quality cultural and educational programs and related resources” under MoU on mutual establishment of cultural centers. In 2010, the two countries decided to establish their cultural centers in each other’s capital cities, namely Islamabad and Beijing, with the stated objective of engaging “in friendly cooperation and partnership while offering the general public high-quality cultural and educational programs and related resources” under the MoU on mutual establishment of cultural centers (Zheng & Fu 2024). The efforts received a fresh boost after the launch of CPEC, especially following the 2015 visit of the Chinese President to Pakistan. In 2016, the Chinese Ministry of Education proposed the “Belt and Road” education initiative, part of which aimed to enhance and deepen cooperation between China and Pakistan in the education sector and to strengthen people-to-people contacts. Subsequently, many universities and colleges in Pakistan introduced Chinese language programs, and some Chinese universities launched Urdu language programs. One significant step in this direction was taken in August 2017 when the two countries established the “CPEC University Alliance” under the auspices of Pakistan’s Higher Education Commission (HEC) and the Chinese Society of Higher Education (CSHE). This forum was created to bring leading institutions in the two countries closer together, with the goal of pooling their “intellectual capital” to better serve their people (Zheng & Fu 2024).

The efforts received a renewed boost following the launch of CPEC, especially after the 2015 visit of the Chinese President to Pakistan. In 2016, the Chinese Ministry of Education proposed a “Belt and Road” education program, which aimed to strengthen cooperation between China and Pakistan in education and to promote people-to-people contacts. As a result, many universities and colleges in Pakistan started Chinese language programs, and some Chinese universities introduced Urdu language programs.

One major step in this direction occurred in August 2017 when the two countries established the “CPEC University Alliance” under the auspices of Pakistan’s Higher Education Commission (HEC)

and the Chinese Society of Higher Education (CSHE). This forum was created to bring leading institutions in both countries closer together, with the goal of pooling their “intellectual capital” to better serve their people (Zheng & Fu 2024).

Cooperation in education was a major topic of discussion between the top leaders of the two countries in November 2018 when the Pakistani Prime Minister visited Beijing. The joint statement noted that both sides expressed satisfaction at the growing cooperation in the field of education and agreed to strengthen educational links, especially between higher education institutions” (Xinhua 2018). The statement also highlighted that about 25,000 Pakistani students are enrolled in various Chinese universities and that China planned to offer more scholarships to Pakistani students in the future.

An important part of the statement related to the subject of “mutual recognition of higher education degrees, diplomas and certificates” (Xinhua 2018). Following protracted negotiations, the two countries signed a formal agreement to mutually recognize degrees and certificates issued by their respective universities in March 2022. On this occasion, the two countries also agreed to “encourage respective universities to develop bilateral linkages including through joint degree and exchange programmes” (Xinhua 2018).

Though the above attempts contributed towards establishment and promotion of linkages between the two countries, they have proved to be extremely short of yielding desired results. A major reason for poor results has been attributed to totally diverse and different systems and levels of education in the two countries, which have been making it very hard for the establishment of meaningful and mutually beneficial linkages. Here, we try to understand the two systems, highlighting their salient features.

The Chinese System of Education:

The system of education in China has gone through tremendous transformation during the last four decades, playing a vital role in its socioeconomic development for which China is known today. It was in the 1980s when China made mass literacy and education the cornerstone of its strategy for attaining economic and social development. The basic philosophy was to develop a modern education system, in tune with the world standards, but embodying essential Chinese character. The stated objective of this plan was to provide “well-rounded education”, called *suzhi* in Chinese, which put emphasis on adopting balance in a student’s moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic development. A core element of this education system was its focus on science and technology to “drive development through innovation” (Liu Niancai 2024).

Under this elaborate and extensive system, education was divided into six segments: “elementary education, middle school education, senior high school education, undergraduate education, graduate education, and professional education” (Liu Niancai 2024). Under the Chinese system of education, children are enrolled in some preschool facility at the age of two or three and continue studying there till the age of six.

From here starts the nine-year segment of compulsory education: six years of elementary education and three years of lower secondary education. Emphasis at this stage is given on learning of Chinese language and mathematics, among other subjects. After passing their primary school examination, students move on to *Chuzhong* or lower secondary schools for completion of the next three-year component of their compulsory education. Here, they study physics, chemistry, and an elective foreign language (Scholaro 2024).

For a long time, China faced the issue of large-scale dropping out of girl students from the educational stream. This prompted the Chinese government to take strict measures, resulting in almost complete elimination of this practice. Now, almost every girl child receives education in China. Another important feature of school education in China is that the curricula and standards of education for both the public and private schools are set by the Ministry of Education, which are faithfully implemented by the provincial and municipal governments all over the country (Liu Niancai 2024).

After completion of nine-year compulsory education, two paths open for Chinese students: one way leading to senior secondary school, locally known as *gaozhong*, which lasts for three more years, and the other to vocational secondary school, or *zhongzhuan*, which may last from three to four years of study depending upon school and trade. All the students desirous of pursuing their education after compulsory education have to sit in an examination, known as *Zhongkao*, which determines their future course of studies as well as the selection of schools for them (China MOE 2022).

One of the most important features of the Chinese system of education is its technical and vocational education, which provides the country with highly skilled men and women who serve as the backbone of the country's economy. Immediately after the completion of nine-year compulsory education, a vast number of students are enrolled in employment-oriented technical and vocational programs run by a large network of technical and vocational institutions. These programs are mostly subject and occupation-specific. In this segment, the students can go up to degree level with a door open for a limited number of them to join the academic track. To generate healthier competition, the government has introduced a policy of designating "Key Vocational Schools" to incentivize them on the basis of their performance (Zhang 2018).

After completion of twelve-year education (excluding preschool), for both the academic and vocational tracks, a student moves on to higher education, which comprises education in universities, colleges, academies, vocational institutions, institutes of technology, and certain other collegiate-level institutions, culminating in award of academic degrees or professional certifications (Kai Yu 2012). The admission to state institutions of higher education is dependent on the performance of candidates in a nationwide college entrance examination (NCEE), or *Gaokao* in Chinese. This leads students to three bachelors', master's, and doctoral degree programs (Zheng & Fu 2024).

While speaking about higher education, it is pertinent to state that before the 1990s, China did not have many universities appearing in the top 100s of international rankings. The government launched a scheme under which a category of "world-class universities" was created. This category comprised the Chinese universities ranked in top 100 universities of reputed international rankings like the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), QS World University Rankings (QS), and Times Higher Education World University Rankings (THE) (Zheng & Fu 2024). The result of this scheme has been that many universities have achieved higher world rankings and many more are following suit.

The Chinese miracle in education has happened through priority given to education in the national scheme of things as well as very generous spending on the part of the state and society. It would astonish many that China spent US\$812.79 billion on education in 2020, which constituted 4.22 percent of its GDP in that year. The country has 158 million students receiving compulsory education in its schools, while the number of students in higher education is more than 44 million.

State of Education in Pakistan

The Constitution of Pakistan guarantees every child's Right to Education under Article 25A, which states: "Right to education: The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of five to sixteen years in such manner as may be determined by law" (GOP 2024). But in contrast to China's highly organized, quality-oriented, widespread, and modern system of education, Pakistan faces numerous challenges in education. The first and foremost challenge, which many educationists term as "Crisis of Education" for Pakistan, is to enroll in schools its more than 26 million out-of-school children (Altaf 2022).

As per figures released by the United Nations Children's Fund, the out-of-school children in Pakistan constitute "44 percent of the total population in this [5-16 years old] age group," making it the world's second highest number of such children. Adding further complexity to the situation are disparities in provision of education based on geography, gender, and socioeconomic conditions. For instance, 78 percent of girls from Balochistan remain out of school, with Sindh's ratio being 58 percent (UNICEF 2021).

Another prominent feature of Pakistan's educational landscape is the presence of some 43,613 religious schools or deeni madaris (plural of Madressah) spread all over Pakistan (PIE 2024). The medium of instruction at these schools is generally Urdu or Arabic, "although some religious educational programs for foreigners use English or Arabic" (Fair 2009). Most of these Madaris teach Islamic subjects, such as tafseer (interpretation of Holy Quran), hadith (sayings and practices of the Prophet), fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence), and Arabic language, with some also including subjects like logic, philosophy, and mathematics. These institutions are largely maintained through charity and donations coming from within as well as outside of the country, particularly from the Middle East. As most of the Madaris offer free food, lodging, and boarding to their students, this makes them attractive to poor parents to "fill the education gap" (Haqqani 2009).

The remaining children go to the so called mainstream schools, which are further divided into two categories: the government schools commonly known as Urdu-medium schools, which mostly impart education either in Urdu or one of several provincial or regional languages and private schools, commonly known as English-medium schools, though many of them impart education in a varying mix of Urdu and English languages (Fair 2009).

The formal school education in Pakistan is divided into four parts: five-year primary, followed by three years of middle school, followed by two more years of secondary school certificate (SSC) or matriculation, which, with two additional years, culminates in intermediate or higher secondary certificate (HSC). The curriculum is prescribed by the government, which includes compulsory subjects of Islamiyat (or Islamic Studies), Pakistan Studies, and more recently reading of Holy Quran in Pakistan's largest province, Punjab. Some private schools offer the University of Cambridge's international certification, known as O and A levels, while also teaching the government-prescribed compulsory courses.

One big issue relating to school education, particularly in government run schools, is the quality of instructions. "The last time Pakistan participated in the assessment by TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) was in 2019. Pakistan's showing was rated 'dismal'", noted Pakistani educationist Anjum Altaf. "Performance-wise, it stood second from the bottom. Only 27 percent of 4th graders in the country met the low international benchmark in mathematics, eight percent met the intermediate international benchmark and just one percent met the high international benchmark," he wrote. "The latest local assessment (ASER 2021) reported that nearly

half (44 to 45 percent) of grade 5 students could not read a grade 2 level story in Urdu or English or work out a two-digit division in arithmetic,” he continued (Altaf 2022).

The poor academic standards of public schools are further aggravated by the poor infrastructural facilities, such as toilets, water, and boundary walls, available in a large number of schools. The Pakistan Education Statistics report for 2021-22, released by the Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE) working under Pakistan’s Ministry of Education, in January 2024, stated that only 15 percent of schools in Baluchistan province had electricity, with the ratio being at 21 percent in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), Sindh at 38 percent, and Gilgit-Baltistan at 44 percent (PIE 2024).

Highlighting non-availability of toilets, the report said that only 33 percent of primary schools in Baluchistan had this facility, 42 percent in AJK, and 57 percent in Sindh. And the absence of this basic facility was not confined to only primary schools but also in middle and secondary schools, though in lesser proportions.

One of the most neglected segments of education in Pakistan is the one relating to technical and vocational institutions, which constitute only about one percent of the total number of institutions in Pakistan (PIE 2024). This is despite the fact that the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, had placed categorical emphasis on acquiring scientific, technical, and vocational education. While sharing his vision about education in the country founded by him, in November 1947, he said: "There is an immediate and urgent need for training our people in scientific and technical education in order to build up our economic life... Do not forget that we have to compete with the world, which is moving very fast in this direction. Also, I must emphasise that greater attention should be paid to technical and vocational education" (Siddiqui 2016)

In the realm of higher education, the country has 244 universities approved and accredited by the Higher Education of Pakistan (HEC). Among them, 145 are in the public sector while 99 are private universities. Though some of these universities have found their place in reputed international rankings, none of them is in the world’s top 100 in any of the reputed rankings.

Like schools, a serious concern about university education in Pakistan has been their poor quality of education and research. While performance of Pakistani university graduates has been alarmingly low at international assessment tests, like the Graduate Record Examination (GRE), etc., even the national institutions like the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) have been continually complaining of the falling standards of our university education. In one of its reports, the FPSC stated that many of the university graduates appearing in its tests were not even familiar with elementary mathematics. The report complained of the absence of analytical skills among candidates, stating that many “did not even know the direction of a simple compass, confusing North with South and East with West” (FPSC 2021).

One major reason for this state of affairs is apathy on the part of the state to accord due priority to education in the national scheme of things. This is also reflected in extremely lower budgetary allocations for education. A recent Pakistan Institute of Education report put total outlay for education, both federal and provincial, to PKR 1345 billion in 2022-23 (PIE 2023), which in dollar terms comes to less than five billion. The report highlighted that the spending on education had been reduced to 1.5 percent during recent years, from earlier 1.7 percent, and that 88 percent of the allocation was “being used to meet recurring expenses, such as teachers’ salaries and pensions” (Dawn 2024).

Cooperation in Technology and Innovation:

Starting from the 1960s, Pakistan and China have made multiple attempts to enhance their linkages and cooperation in science, technology, and innovation. Subsequent to the launch of CPEC, the attempts at building cooperation between the two countries have received a renewed impetus, resulting in the initiation of several initiatives.

Here it is pertinent to quote a highly successful example of cooperation in technology and innovation between Pakistan and China, which has been the development of multi-role combat aircraft JF-17 Thunder. This single-engine and lightweight aircraft was jointly developed by Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC) and China's Chengdu Aircraft Corporation (CAC) (PAC 2024). For Pakistan, this venture resulted in purchase of these aircrafts by Azerbaijan at a cost of USD 1.6 billion, preceded by two more such orders from two other countries, Myanmar and Nigeria (Syed 2024).

However, shining examples are rare and far between. Beneath them lies a huge unutilized potential of opportunities, which have not been harnessed due to Pakistan's weakness in its technological and technical base, primarily due to its poor education system.

Still, for Pakistan, an opportunity lies in developing more robust ties in technology and innovation with China, which has earned for itself a most remarkable place in the world. A recent report of a year-long study by an Australian think tank, the Strategic Policy Institute, disclosed that "China leads in 37 of 44 technologies," including "electric batteries, hypersonics and advanced radio-frequency communications such as 5G and 6G." The United States remained leader in only seven remaining technologies, "such as vaccines, quantum computing and space launch systems" (Hurst 2023). "Our research reveals that China has built the foundations to position itself as the world's leading science and technology superpower, by establishing a sometimes stunning lead in high-impact research across the majority of critical and emerging technology domains," the report continued.

Furthermore, innovation is dependent on a nation's expertise in technology. The Oslo Manual developed by the European communities and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (as modified in 2018) defined the term as: "An innovation is a new or improved product or process (or combination thereof) that differs significantly from the unit's previous products or processes and that has been made available to potential users (product) or brought into use by the unit (process)" (WIPO 2024).

This year, China ranked 11th and Pakistan 91st, out of 133 countries, in the international innovation ranking system, known as the "Global Innovation Index", by the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), which determines the performance of countries through a wide variety of metrics. In this situation, Pakistan has more reasons to strengthen its linkages with China in the field of education, technology, and innovation. As for how to move about, a set of recommendations is made here.

Recommendations:

1. From international experiences, it is evident that for meaningful, effective, and mutually beneficial bilateral linkages in education, technology, and innovation, it is imperative to have a degree of commonality in the nature, scheme, and quality of education among the partnering states.

2. The present systems of education prevailing in Pakistan and China are extremely divergent and different in their nature, focus, details, and have a very narrow common ground. This is one of the major impediments in the establishment of effective linkages between the two countries. In this regard, Pakistan can learn a lot from China in redesigning its educational system, and aligning it with the Chinese system as far as emphasis on science, technology, and vocational education is concerned.
3. Another big obstacle in educational linkages between Pakistan and China is the language barrier. For a long time, Pakistan has neglected teaching and learning of foreign languages, including English, which too has witnessed a steady decline in the recent past. In the case of China, a large number of institutions impart education in Chinese Mandarin, with a growing number imparting education in English. Pakistan would benefit a lot if it focuses on improving students' foreign language abilities in English and Mandarin Chinese.
4. The two countries should encourage establishment of linkages and partnerships between schools, bringing their students and faculties closer to each other. They may establish joint clubs in science, culture, technology, and innovation, etc. Most of these interactions may be digital, studded with occasional physical interactions. This would bring the younger generations in the two countries closer to each other, which would benefit the two nations in years and decades to come.
5. Pakistan should learn from China how to ensure universal education for its entire population, which invariably receives nine-year high-quality compulsory education without any exception based on gender, geography, or socioeconomic conditions. This way Pakistan would not only be fulfilling its Constitutional obligation, but move on the path to its economic and social development.
6. The universities are the greatest depository of intellectual wealth in any country. The universities in Pakistan and China can play a very important role in successful development of the CPEC by forming their joint groups of researchers on various issues and subjects related to the implementation of the program. The universities can link their think tanks, increasing their coordination and collaborations for the greater good of both countries.
7. The two countries should take measures to bring closer cooperation between various professional bodies, like Pakistan Engineering Council (PEC), Pakistan Medical and Dental Council (PMDC), and others, with their Chinese counterparts to enhance linkages between the professionals, thus further cementing the relations between the two nations.
8. Pakistan should also follow China's example of generous spending on education. As already stated, China spent a huge sum equal to USD 813 billion against Pakistan's less than five billion in the corresponding year. It is true that China is much bigger (population 1400 million) than Pakistan (population 250 million). Still, Pakistan's desired spending on education comes to 150 billion, which of course is not possible in the present circumstances. But this should lead Pakistan to substantially increase its funding on education, not confining it to less than five billion dollars in any case.
9. Pakistan has a reasonable technological base and trained manpower in information technology. Taking the lead, both countries can extend cooperation in the fields of artificial intelligence (AI), internet of things (IoT), robotics, big data, and cloud computing. These initiatives can then be expanded to fields like water conservancy, agriculture, green energy, biotechnology,

mining, metallurgy, forestry, medical and health service, aerospace, meteorology, oceanography, geology, seismology, etc.

10. Following the successful example of producing JF-17 Thunder aircraft, the two countries should expand their cooperation to the non-defence technological sector too, like manufacture of trucks and other machines employed in the construction industry, an area in which China enjoys an international standing. This would greatly help Pakistan not only reduce its large import bill incurred on such machines but would help to export them to other countries. Similarly, joint production units may be established to manufacture solar panels and wind turbines, fulfilling not only Pakistan's ever-increasing need for clean energy, but also earning foreign exchange by exporting them.
11. Recently, China has launched a policy of 'International Capacity Cooperation' aimed at "promotion of international capacity and manufacturing cooperation" with China's close and compatible allies in the advanced industries "such as steel, nonferrous metals, building materials, railway, electricity, chemicals, textile, automobile, communication, construction machinery, aviation, shipbuilding and oceanographic engineering" (Tong 2020). Pakistan can greatly benefit from this Chinese policy by encouraging and facilitating the transfer of Chinese technologies to Pakistan by encouraging joint ventures in manufacturing.
12. Another area where both countries can establish a partnership is the field of emerging technologies. In recent years, China has moved ahead of conventional technologies to emerging fields like "renewable energy, advanced nuclear energy, next generation telecommunication technologies, big data and supercomputers, A.I., robotics, space technology, and e-commerce" (Li 2018). Pakistan can request China to include its relevant scientists, engineers, and technologists in China's advanced technology academies and industries, to bring Pakistan to the frontiers of technology.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that in the present world, the status and position of any country are determined by its advancement in the fields of education, science, technology, and innovation. Though Pakistan and China have a long history of cooperation in strategic and diplomatic fields, their cooperation in education, technology, and innovation has been limited. However, with the launch of the gigantic economic cooperation project of CPEC, it has become imperative for both countries to strengthen their linkages in education, technology, and innovation. This is the only way the two nations would be serving the larger interests of their common people, fostering mutual respect and understanding as well as attaining their respective national interests and objectives.

Increasing Opportunities for Engagement between the Youth of Pakistan and China

By Neha Malik⁵¹

Introduction

Pakistan and China have shared a deep and strategic relationship for decades. In 1950, Pakistan was one of the first non-communist countries to recognize the People's Republic of China, laying the foundation for a partnership often described as "Baatiye," meaning "iron brothers." Over the years, both have strengthened their ties through mutual support in international politics, regional stability, and economic collaboration. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), stands as a testament to the enduring alliance.

Despite strong government-to-government (G2G) ties, the people-to-people (P2P) connection between Pakistan and China remains weak. This gap is especially noticeable among the younger generations of both countries, who have limited opportunities for direct interaction, cultural exchange, and academic collaboration. As a result, despite being close allies on paper, the two nations often feel like "friends yet strangers."

Youth is an important aspect of the exchange, and it is evolving with changing times. They are future leaders, collaborators, diplomats, entrepreneurs, and changemakers who will shape the relationship of both countries. Strengthening engagement at the youth level means creating more opportunities for student exchange programs, joint academic initiatives, and collaborative research projects. It also means leveraging technology to connect young people through digital platforms, entrepreneurship, and creative industries. Beyond academics and business, language learning, cultural festivals, and sports collaborations can bring young Pakistanis and Chinese closer, fostering genuine friendships and mutual understanding.

Promoting youth-focused initiatives can transform the Iron Brotherhood into a meaningful platform, fostering deep-rooted connections beyond diplomatic ties and aligning with their shared future aspirations

People-to-People Exchange between Pakistan and China

The P2P exchange is the third aspect of Chinese foreign policy (the state, the party, and the people)⁵². The exchange refers to interactions and collaborations between the people of the two countries, cultures, and communities to foster mutual understanding, perception building, and cooperation. These exchanges focus on grassroots connections and cultural bonds, an important tool for cultural diplomacy. The exchange is categorized into five main categories:

⁵¹ Neha Malik, Research Associate and Project Coordinator holds an MPhil in Public Policy and Governance with distinction from CPPG, FCCU, and a Bachelor's in Economics from GCU. She was a Research Assistant at the National Institute of Public Policy and editor of the Students Quarterly at CPPG.

⁵² Connor Fiddler, "The 3 Pillars of Chinese Foreign Policy: The State, the Party, the People," [thediplomat.com](https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/the-3-pillars-of-chinese-foreign-policy-the-state-the-party-the-people/), February 3, 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/02/the-3-pillars-of-chinese-foreign-policy-the-state-the-party-the-people/>.

1. Language

Language is one barrier between people-to-people connectivity and an essential aspect of the culture of both countries. It has the power to connect people, break barriers, and bring communities together, and it lets others know who exactly one is and what the place of one is in the world.⁵³ In the case of the Pak-China relationship, language was one of the barriers as both countries have diverse sets of language structures. China in 2006, established the first Confucius Institute at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) in Islamabad.⁵⁴ By 2020, the institutes were expanding in Lahore and Karachi, offering Chinese Language courses, and over 280,000 Pakistani students were enrolled in Chinese language programs.⁵⁵ In 2010, Fudan University and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) introduced Pakistan Studies Programs, which included teaching Urdu. The BFSU has offered specialized courses on Pakistan's culture, language, and politics since 2010, with around 500 Chinese students having enrolled in these courses as of 2020.⁵⁶ However, challenges such as Chinese language learners remain limited to urban hotspots such as Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi, a limitation of integration of languages (Chinese and Urdu) into the curriculum, and insufficient cultural awareness.⁵⁷

2. Cultural

Cultural diplomacy is an aspect that involves the strategic promotion of nations' cultural assets to influence perception and strengthen multilateral ties, often complementing additional diplomatic efforts. In the case of Pakistan and China, it has helped to enable mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration. Though language remains one pillar, art exhibitions, cultural festivals, and media and broadcasting are two important pillars that complement language.

i. Art Exhibitions and Cultural Festivals:

Both countries have been making significant efforts in arts, culture, and festivals. In 2015, Beijing hosted the China-Pakistan Cultural Year, which included over 40 major cultural events and programs highlighting arts, music, cinema, literature, and education to celebrate 65 years of diplomatic ties between the two countries. In the same year, Lahore also hosted multiple such events that included exhibitions showcasing shared cultural heritage and contemporary artistic collaboration between the two nations.

ii. Media and Broadcasting⁵⁸:

The countries recognized the media and broadcasting as critical to strengthening the relationship. Both have significantly worked on increasing collaboration and engagement

⁵³ Connecting People Through Language," Sydney Institute of Interpreting and Translating, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.sitit.nsw.edu.au/connecting-people-through-language/>; "The Power of Language: How Words Shape People and Culture," Stanford News, August 16, 2019, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2019/08/the-power-of-language-how-words-shape-people-culture/>.

⁵⁴ Xinhua News, "China-Pakistan People-to-People Exchanges," 2020.; "China's Soft Power in Pakistan," The Express Tribune, 2020.

⁵⁵ ibid

⁵⁶ Pakistan's Cultural Diplomacy, The Diplomat, 2014

⁵⁷ Pakistan-China Cultural Exchange and Language Challenges," The Diplomat, 2014; Urdu Language Learning in China," China Daily, 2020.

⁵⁸ China and Pakistan: A Strategic Partnership (Javed, 2019), Chapter 4, "Media Diplomacy," Xinhua News. CGTN Urdu Channel Launch Press Release (CGTN, 2015). Available at: www.cgtn.com, Cultural Diplomacy and Media Cooperation between China and Pakistan (Yang & Ahmed, 2018), Journal of Asian Studies., China-Pakistan Educational Exchange Programs (Zhang & Khan, 2016), Journal of International Education.

through broadcasting, news channels, and social media platforms. For example, China Radio International in collaboration with Radio Pakistan has pioneered in promoting bilateral exchanges, such as raising awareness about CPEC, economic cooperation, regional security, and cultural diplomacy in Urdu and Mandarin. The Xinhua News Agency and the Associated Press of Pakistan have worked together on joint reporting and news exchanges to provide up-to-date and accurate information from both ends. In 2015, China Global Television Network (CGTN) launched a 24-hour Urdu channel, which broadcasts news, current affairs, and cultural content aimed at the Pakistani audience. Whereas Pakistani television shows have considerably gained popularity in China, PTV, GEO TV, and ARY have collaborated with Chinese media agencies to share entertainment content. The social media platforms are another source of popularity, and it has been liberated by both countries to promote their bilateral ties.

3. Educational Exchanges:

China and Pakistan have developed academic and research partnerships in a wide range of fields from engineering, medicine, agriculture, environmental science, and social sciences. For example, Tsinghua University and Quaid-e-Azam University have made student and faculty exchanges on joint research initiatives on subjects of sustainable development, green energy, and economic integration.⁵⁹ Peking University and LUMS have collaboratively organized joint conferences and doctoral programs in subjects of international relations, public policy, management, law, and economics.⁶⁰ According to Confucius Annual Report 2023, ten institutes across Pakistan are offering Chinese language courses, cultural exchange programs, and scholarships for students to study in China. The China Scholarship Council, 2023, reported about 28,000 Pakistani students enrolled in Chinese universities under the Chinese Government Scholarship Program. While recent stats of the Allam Iqbal Scholarship Program launched back in 2015 are not available, about 2000 Pakistanis are pursuing PhD in China. The HEC scholarship data states that around 1000 Chinese students are studying in Pakistan.

4. Tourism Promotion:

Both countries have been actively working on the tourism caveat. China National Tourism Administration (CNTA) is actively supporting Pakistani tourism exhibitions and trade fairs in China. China has promoted nature tourism and adventure tourism in Pakistan.⁶¹ Pakistan Tourism Development Authority (PTDC) has engaged in a promotional campaign targeting Chinese tourists that includes historical, economic, and cultural tourism. Pakistan's government has actively marketed Chinese tourist spots such as the Great Wall of China and the Forbidden City. ⁶² In the case of visa facilitation, significant efforts are being made by both sides. The year 2018 marked the China-Pakistan Tourism Year, resulting in a 30% increase in tourist arrivals from China to Pakistan.⁶³ The cultural festival in 2020 and the promotion of adventure tourism and ecotourism have caught the attention of Chinese trekkers and mountaineers. In the case of adventure tourism, Pakistan has seen a 25% increase from

⁵⁹ Tsinghua University Report on Collaborative Programs with Pakistan (2018)

⁶⁰ Pakistan-China University Collaborations (LUMS Report, 2020).

⁶¹ China-Pakistan Tourism Cooperation Report (2019), Tourism China.

⁶² PTDC Annual Tourism Strategy Report (2020).

⁶³ China-Pakistan Year of Tourism Report (2018), China National Tourism Administration.

2018 to 2022⁶⁴, and for ecotourism, an increase of 40 %⁶⁵ was observed in Chinese tourists visiting national parks in 2020.

5. Youth Exchanges:

Youth are an asset for both countries because they help build initiatives, deepen ties, and promote mutual understanding between the two nations. The Pakistan-China Youth Exchange Program, initiated in 2015, has taken numerous students and young people to China, where they experience Chinese culture, developmental models, and engage with Chinese counterparts. According to Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in 2019, 120 students from Pakistan participated in this program. Under China's Belt and Road Initiative - Youth Program, which targets young people from BRI partner countries, over 200 Pakistani students were hosted in 2022. Through the Pakistan-China Student Friendship Program, in 2021, 500 Pakistani students were selected for short-term cultural exchange programs in China. In 2017, both countries introduced a Youth Ambassadorship program that enables young Chinese and Pakistani to represent their countries at diplomatic and cultural events. So far, 300 Pakistani (youth) ambassadors and 200 Chinese (youth) ambassadors have participated in this exchange.

Youth are a vital part of the relationship between these two countries. They represent the future, and the strength of this partnership depends on them. Recognized as catalysts for change, young people bring fresh perspectives and innovative ideas to the table. This policy brief explores ways to increase meaningful youth interactions and looks at how current initiatives can be made more action-driven and impactful.

For this policy brief, qualitative research was conducted, including 18 interviews with both Chinese and Pakistani participants. The interviewees comprised diplomats, students, academics, and practitioners to capture diverse perspectives on the subject matter.

Section II

Overview

In Pakistan, the youth account for 29% (69.9 million) of the total population, while in China they account for 17% (238 million) of the population.⁶⁶ While Pakistan faces the challenge of managing a significant youth bulge, China grapples with the opposite issue: an aging population and a shrinking youth cohort to assume critical roles. A way out is using the youth of both countries to the optimal level to reach the best-suited outcomes. The graphs below present a comparative analysis of Pakistan-China relations, highlighting the need for greater youth engagement.

⁶⁴ Pakistan Tourism Growth in Karakoram Region (PTDC, 2021).

⁶⁵ Pakistan Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism Growth Report (2020), UNWTO.

⁶⁶ UNDP Report and Index Mundi

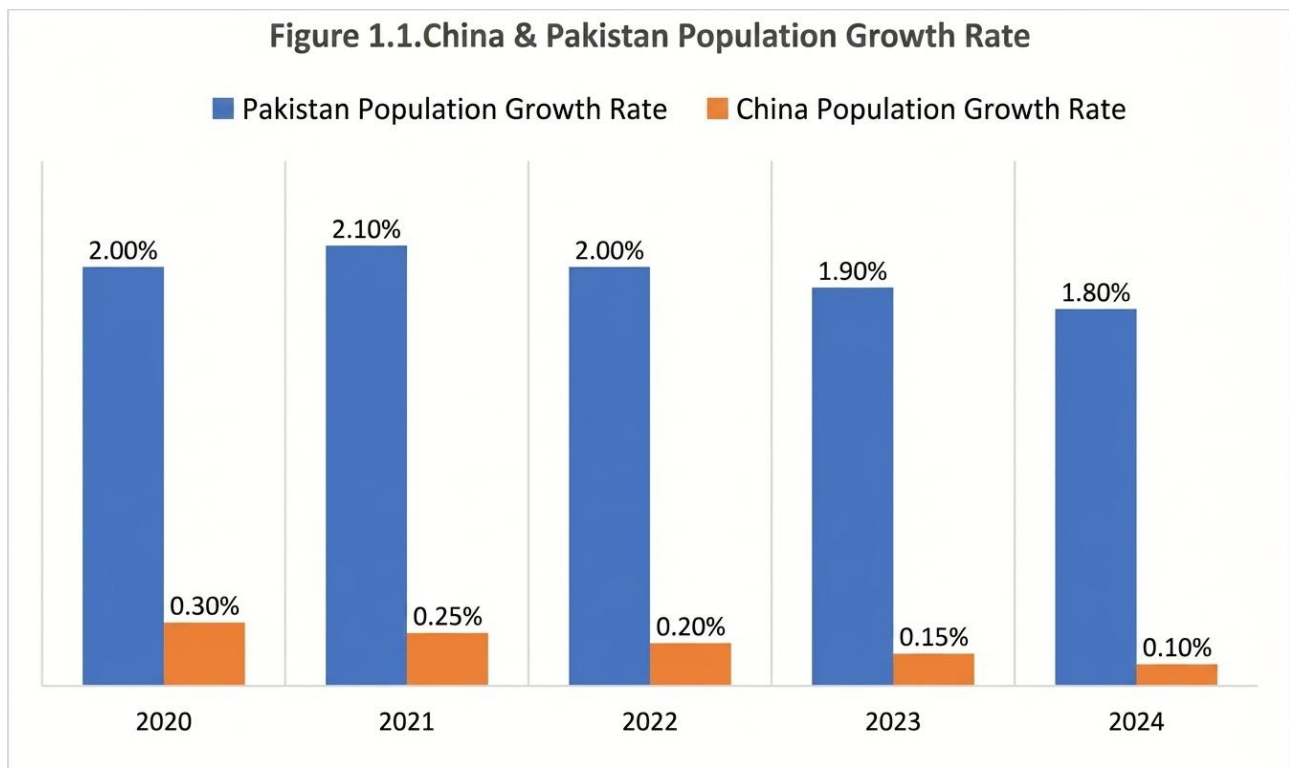


Figure 1: Source: Data compiled by the author from World Bank Data and National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2020-2024

These figures highlight differences between Pakistan and China, particularly in demographics and the role of young people. Pakistan's population is growing at a much faster pace, while China's is slowing down. While China has a bigger overall population, Pakistan has a much younger one. The average age is 23 in Pakistan compared to 38 in China (figure 1.2). That alone shows how much potential Pakistan's youth hold. If tapped the right way, this could lead to stronger collaboration with China, creating deeper people-to-people (i.e., youth interactions) rather than just formal diplomacy.

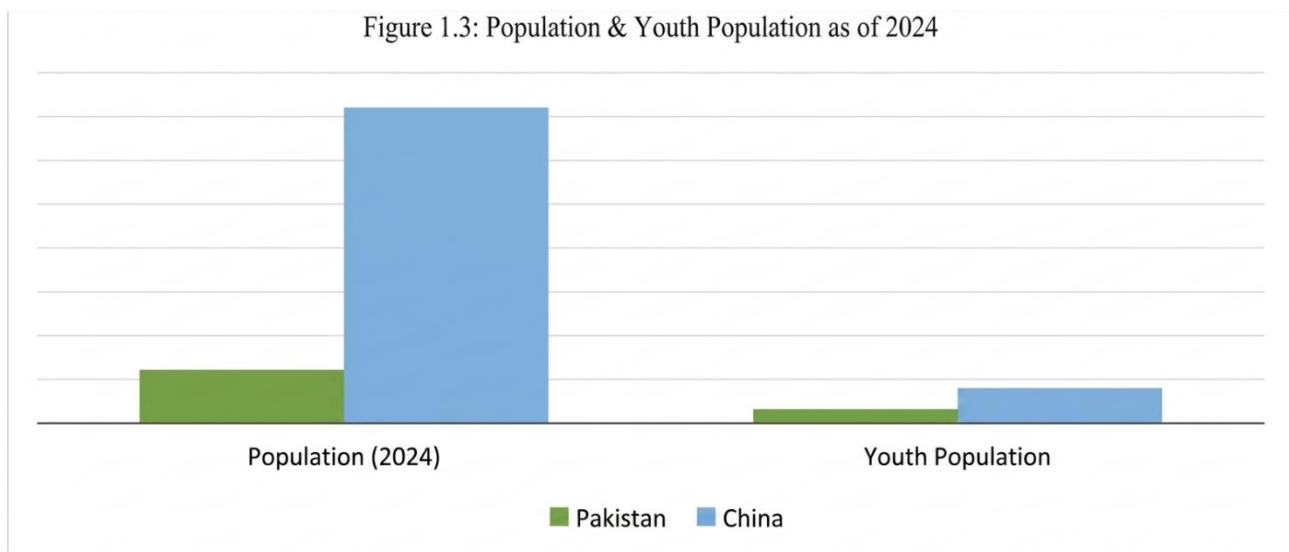


Figure 2: Source: Data compiled by the author from World Bank Data and National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2024

The objectives of youth⁶⁷ engagement:

1. Cultivate leaders who are more aligned with the political and economic interests of the country.
2. Local perception and narrative building.
3. Networking and connection building that may lead to future partnerships, trade, investment, and collaborative projects.
4. The informal ambassadors will lead to reduced cultural gaps, dispel stereotypes, and foster a sense of camaraderie that transcends national boundaries.

Tayyab Safdar's report “The Local Roots of Chinese Engagement in Pakistan”⁶⁸ explored the various ways in which Pakistani and Chinese youth are engaging with each other. Here are the key avenues he identified:

1. **Educational Opportunities:** Many Pakistani students are benefiting from scholarships to study at Chinese universities. This trend reflects a growing interest in pursuing careers that align with China’s expanding economic influence.
2. **Language Learning:** The establishment of Confucius Institutes across Pakistan has made it easier for young people to learn Mandarin. This language skill is increasingly seen as essential for job opportunities in sectors impacted by Chinese investment.
3. **Cultural Exchanges:** There are numerous programs designed to promote cultural understanding between Pakistani and Chinese youth. These initiatives encourage interactions that help foster mutual appreciation of each other's cultures.
4. **Vocational Training:** Training programs associated with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are equipping young people with skills relevant to industries that are growing due to Chinese investments, preparing them for future job markets.
5. **Political Engagement:** A joint consultative mechanism aims to build political consensus among various Pakistani political parties, supporting CPEC and increasing local political engagement with Chinese interests.

Safdar's report highlights a multifaceted approach to youth engagement that strengthens the ties between Pakistan and China through education, cultural exchange, vocational training, and political collaboration. Shahid added that these avenues are significant to the interaction, but there are certain challenges and misconceptions attached to them, including a perception of CPEC and cultural barriers.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, Meaningful Youth Engagement in the Multilateral System (2024), <https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/innocenti/media/9701/file/UNICEF-Innocenti-Meaningful-Youth-Engagement-2024.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Tayyab Safdar, “The Local Roots of Chinese Engagement in Pakistan” (2021)

⁶⁹ Saba Shahid. "People-to-People Contact under CPEC: Fact or Fiction?" In *China, Pakistan and the Belt and Road Initiative: The Experience of an Early Adopter State*, edited by Pascal Abb, Filippo Boni, and Hasan H. Karrar. Routledge, 2024.

Section III

Opportunities and Challenges

This section highlights the challenges hindering meaningful youth interactions and explores potential opportunities to address them. While existing avenues do serve their purpose, significant gaps remain, limiting the full potential of these exchanges. Key challenges identified through 18 interviews with Pakistani and Chinese participants include limited outreach, cultural barriers, and a lack of structured collaboration mechanisms.

However, the insights gathered also point to promising opportunities for growth. These include the development of new joint programs, networking initiatives, and cultural exchanges aimed at building stronger connections between the youth of both nations. By capitalizing on these opportunities, a win-win situation can be created that strengthens bilateral ties and fosters lasting partnerships.

Opportunities

Most of the interactions are limited to academic settings, which again is a great opportunity, but more practical and narrative-building theme avenues are required, which was a common outcome that came through the discussions.

1. Promoting Youth Tourism:

A common theme that came was promoting youth tourism, as it has gained momentum since the inception of CPEC. The CPEC has enabled infrastructure development, easing accessibility to tourist destinations. Both countries have significant destinations that attract bilateral tourism. Borrowing from Dr. Javed, the table below shows the top tourist destinations for young Pakistani and Chinese tourists.

Table 1: Source: Dr Tauseef Javed, "Exploring the Avenues of Pak-China Tourism - center for Strategic and Contemporary Research," center for Strategic and Contemporary Research, November 7, 2023, <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/social-issues/exploring-the-avenue>

Sr. No	Pakistan	China
1.	Gilgit and Baltistan: Eagle Nest, Altit Fort, Baltit Fort, Naltar Valley, Nagar Valley, Hopper Glacier, Hunza Valley, Attabad Lake, Passu Peaks, Khunjerab Pass, Rakaposhi View Point, K-2 Base Camp, Mountain Ranges: Hindu Kush, Himalayas, Karakoram	Hebei: The Great Wall of China, Hangzhou's Beijing West Lake, Heaven on Earth, Wuqiao Acrobatics World, Yesanpo National Park, Baiyang Lake, Qing Dynasty West Mausoleum, Chengde Mountain Resort
2.	Sindh and Punjab: Gandharan Trail, Mohenjo-Daro, Kallar Kahar region, Soan Sakesar, Walled City, Shalamar Gardens, Shahi Hamam, Badshahi Mosque, Lahore Fort, Wazir Khan Mosque, Minar-e-Pakistan, Hiran Minar Sheikhupura, Clock	Gansu: Mogao Caves, Jiayu Pass, Langmu Temple, Labrang Monastery, Maiji Mountain Grottoes, Zhangye Danxia National Geological Park, Singing Sand

	Tower Faisalabad, Noor Mahal Bahawalpur, Old Bazaars Rahim Yar Khan, Cholistan Desert, Thal Desert	Dunes
3.	Balochistan: Pir Ghaib Waterfalls, Bolan, Moola Chotok, Quaid-e-Azam Residency, Hanna Lake, Hingol National Park, Jhal Magsi, Astola Island, Hinglaj Mata Mandir, Sapat Beach, Hazarganji Chiltan National Park, Ormara Beach, Ziarat, Gwadar Port	Shanxi: Xi'an's Terracotta Army, Datong, Mount Wutai, Taiyuan, Pingyao, Hukou Waterfall, Changzhi, Jincheng, Yuncheng
4.	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: Takht-i-Bhai, Northern Areas, Galiyat Region, Swat, Naran and Kaghan, Abbottabad, Babusar Top, Fairy Meadows	Shanghai: The Shanghai Bund, Shanghai Museum, Shanghai Disney Resort, Huangpu River Cruise, China Art Museum, Shanghai Ocean Aquarium
Designated Sister Cities	Faisalabad-Qingdao, Karachi-Urumqi	

The year 2023 was designated as the year of tourism between Pakistan and China.⁷⁰ The tourism sector for any country is a source of revenue and increasing foreign exchange. It also acts as a facilitator for potential investments and narrative building. A professor mentioned that one of his students visited Nanjing. During his visit, while he explored the tourist attractions, he was able to form networks, and upon his return, he was able to start a business using the networking he did on his visit. This is only one example; many more exist. Similarly, Pakistani tourism possesses several investment opportunities for young Chinese investors who are interested in investing. These visits not only boost the local economies but promote enhanced people-to-people contact, cultural awareness, narrative, and perception building, i.e., bridging the potential gaps. Interestingly, even among Chinese individuals with limited direct exposure to Pakistan, positive perceptions seem to prevail. In interviews, one Chinese national who had visited Pakistan and another who had interacted with a Pakistani counterpart expressed similar sentiments. The visitor described Pakistan as a hub of vibrant cuisine. At the same time, the individual who worked alongside a Pakistani colleague emphasized their urge to explore Pakistani culture. This suggests that positive views of Pakistan are not solely based on official narratives but can also stem from personal experiences and interactions. In contrast, Pakistan, which had been in China, and those who had not been there had divergent views.

2. Skill Development Programs:

While traditional degree programs have their value, China's advanced labor development offers a unique opportunity for Pakistan's largely unskilled youth labor force. By focusing on targeted skill development programs, we can bridge this gap, equipping young individuals with practical, market-aligned skills that not only boost employability but also contribute to

⁷⁰ Pakistan-China Year of Tourism to Greatly Boost Cooperation: Official," Pakistan Today, January 3, 2023, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2023/01/03/pakistan-china-year-of-tourism-to-greatly-boost-cooperation-official/>

economic growth. These platforms create a mode of interaction between Pakistani-Chinese users through knowledge sharing and cultural exchange. It is a collaborative approach to education and workforce development, and to strengthen the existing avenues of interactions.

i. Joint Diploma Programs:

These diplomas will equip the youth with the technical skills required for modern operations, given the expansion of global markets. These programs will not only allow training in the field of technology, engineering, and vocational trades but will enhance career prospects.

ii. Vocational Training Sessions:

These sessions are important as both countries are progressing in CPEC2.0. These sessions are more of a capacity-building platform and allow the youth to indulge in understanding the corporate or practical modus Operandi of both countries. These sessions are based on topics of workplace etiquette, cross-border e-commerce, and financial management. The goal of these sessions is to improve cross-border communication and professional skills. Currently, Yunnan Land and Resources Vocational College, in collaboration with Punjab Vocational Training Council, held these sessions in December 2024, with over 400 youth participants.⁷¹ Additionally, the China-Pakistan Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Center is helping young people build skills in 15 key areas, including IoT, automation, textiles, and big data, with a strong focus on digital curriculum delivery and specialized teacher training.⁷² Similarly, the Huaneng Pakistan Vocational and Technical College has empowered over 6,000 local youth through hands-on workshops, advanced language courses (including Mandarin), and collaborative training with local universities.⁷³

iii. Internships and Employment Opportunities:

Internship placements and employability in different sectors through industry-specific programs in traditional and non-traditional sectors pose a vital opportunity for youth integration in both countries. Many interviewees believed that this would not only help create employment ventures but also provide a better understanding of modern-day China and how Pakistan is paving its way.

3. Media and Culture:

i. Historical Foundations:

The media and cultural collaboration between Pakistan and China dates back to 1951. In 1965, both countries signed a Cultural Cooperation Agreement that laid the grounds for further exchanges. In light of media exchanges and ongoing CPEC, Pakistan's state-owned news agency, the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), partnered with China's Xinhua News Agency to exchange news content. This collaboration ensures accurate dissemination of information and fosters mutual understanding. Similarly, Pakistan Television (PTV) and

⁷¹ Fu Bo (editor), "Yunnan Land and Resources Vocational College Conducts Vocational Training for Pakistani Youth," China Economic Net, December 31, 2024, accessed February 9, 2025, http://en.ce.cn/Insight/202412/31/t20241231_39252979.shtml.

⁷² China-Pakistan Technical Education Center Set Up to Empower Pakistani Youth," Associated Press of Pakistan, November 2, 2024, accessed February 9, 2025, https://www.app.com.pk/global/china-pakistan-technical-education-center-set-up-to-empower-pakistani-youth/#google_vignette

⁷³ [Feature: Chinese vocational college in Pakistan promotes skill development, career pathways," Belt and Road Portal, August 16, 2024, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/p/0HHT8J3O.html>

China Central Television (CCTV) have agreements to share content and collaborate on television programming.⁷⁴

ii. Media Exchange Programs:

Young Journalists from both countries can engage in existing media exchange programs, as these programs facilitate understanding each other's media landscapes and cultural traditions (leading to perception building). Furthermore, joint production projects such as films and documentaries also help showcase the values of society and historical ties between the countries.

iii. Social Media:

Social media is an instant source of entertainment and news, and apps like TikTok and Douyin can be positively used to increase such interactions. The average youth between the ages of 16 and 24 spends an average of 52 minutes on TikTok. In contrast, a Chinese person spends 90 minutes a day.⁷⁵ Though not many appreciable minutes, these can effectively increase the youth interactions between two countries. The minute-short video can tell a lot about a way of life, daily life, whatever, and how different but has yet some similarities in culture. An interviewee mentioned that while she was exploring the app Douyin, she was able to find some videos, in which a senior Chinese man who had been located in Pakistan for job purposes, solved a domestic dispute with his domestic employee. This way, any leader must have done in the family. She also mentioned that the cross-cultural marriages and lifestyle display also created an impact. These platforms can be used to create collaborative content and promotion of both countries. Many Pakistani traveler YouTubers such as UKHANO who documented his visit to China, and another Mahzaib Vlogs posts daily about her life in China and some random social experiments she did to what Chinese people think about China. This leads to increased curiosity. Yasmin, a German-Italian influencer has been documenting her life in China, showing different heritages and life in border cities, such as the most interesting one little Moscow in China, Xianjiang life which has a shared cultural heritage with Central Asian countries.

Similarly, the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan has announced a short video competition for Pakistani youth to express their perspectives on China-Pakistan friendship, as it will help create a mode of deeper understanding of cultural ties through digital storytelling.⁷⁶

iv. Impact of Translated Dramas and Films:

The translation of Chinese dramas into Urdu has significant popularity. Platforms like Tapmad and YouTube have a variety of C-dramas being translated into Urdu, which has helped the Pakistani youth audience to engage in the art of storytelling without language barriers. Pakistan and China have had co-productions dating back to 1986 when two dramas Paiman-e-Wafa and Rishtay aur Rastay.

⁷⁴ Kiran Hassan, "How is the China Pakistan Media Collaboration Booming Under CPEC?" Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://commonwealth.sas.ac.uk/how-china-pakistan-media-collaboration-booming-under-cpec>.

⁷⁵ 89 TikTok Statistics, Facts & User Demographics," Cross River Therapy, July 23, 2023, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.crossrivertherapy.com/research/tiktok-statistics>

⁷⁶ China Embassy announces Pakistani youth short videos competition," Associated Press of Pakistan, November 13, 2021, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.app.com.pk/national/china-embassy-announces-pakistani-youth-short-videos-competition/>.

⁷⁷These dramas were a massive hit appraised by the audience, but progress has been slow in such ventures. In 2017 a joint film was produced *Chalay Thay Sath*, that starred Pakistani and Chinese actors left an impact on modern Pakistani cinema and served as crossborder narrative exchanges. Some notable ones include *Meri Jaadui Duniya* (Duoluo Content), and *My Girlfriend is An Alien* have received wide applause from local audiences.⁷⁸ The translation of Pakistani hit dramas such as *Humsafar*, *Zindagi Gulzar Hai*, and *Dastan*'s many big hits also left a similar impression on Chinese youth. These promote a digital cultural exchange and cross-culture dialogue. A recent example is Korean Drama which has created a lot of influence outside Korea, such usage of language, culture, and cuisine among youth across various countries. As these dramas captivate audiences with their engaging narratives and relatable themes, they have introduced Korean words and slang such as "Annyeong" (hello) and "KAamsahamnida" (thank you) into everyday conversations. Additionally, Korean foods like ramen, kimchi, also Korean Skincare, K-POP, and many more among young people. The Chinese and Pakistani dramas can also create a similar wave that will eventually lead to the opening of more avenues. Through the popularity of Japanese anime, there significant influence that can be felt, such as sushi being the buzzword.

Netflix showcases different types of dramas' and it's quite popular among the Pakistani youth, but its equivalent iQIYI is not very familiar to Pakistani audiences, where all genres of Chinese dramas and films are available.

v. Enduring Legacy of Cultural Exchange: A Generational Perspective:

The cultural exchange between Pakistan and China is rooted in a history spanning over two millennia, tracing back to the ancient Silk Road that connected the Indus Valley and Yellow River civilizations. This enduring relationship was formalized with the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1951 and further strengthened by the Cultural Cooperation Agreement of 1965, which set the stage for bilateral cultural initiatives. Over the years, numerous delegations, including theater and dance troupes, have visited both countries. Notably, in the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese cultural delegations frequently performed traditional dances and music in Pakistan, while Pakistani groups showcased their folk traditions in China. These exchanges not only celebrated shared values but also highlighted the distinct artistic heritage of each nation, fostering a lasting sense of connection and mutual appreciation across generations.⁷⁹

Today, these cultural exchanges continue to flourish, with older generations in China still holding fond memories of iconic Pakistani songs like *Dil Dil Pakistan*—a lasting testament to the early impact of cultural diplomacy. Likewise, traditional Chinese music and performances remain cherished by many Pakistanis who grew up during this vibrant era of exchange. An interviewee mentioned that, given past exchanges to date, many Chinese grandmothers sing the songs of the time. Recent initiatives under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have further deepened these ties, promoting people-to-people engagement through cultural events, youth delegations, and artistic collaborations. These efforts not only honor historical connections but also inspire younger generations to explore

⁷⁷ Haroon Shuaib, "Pakistan and China Co-Productions of Television Dramas," *Youlin Magazine*, February 28, 2023, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.youlinmagazine.com/story/pakistan-and-china-co-productions-of-television-dramas/MjQ2OA==>

⁷⁸ "Ode to Joy," *Dawn*, January 31, 2018, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1386273>.

⁷⁹ [The Cultural Exchanges Between China and Pakistan Have Undergone a Long History," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, January 17, 2005, accessed February 9, 2025, http://pk.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zbgx/cultureservice/200501/t20050117_1270166.htm

and celebrate each other's cultures through theater, dance, and music. By bridging generational divides and fostering mutual appreciation, these exchanges continue to strengthen the enduring friendship between Pakistan and China.⁸⁰

4. Joint Collaboration in Entrepreneurship:

Entrepreneurship is a rising trend among the Pakistani youth. This is due to demographic trends, government initiatives emerging start, and incubation trends. The promising sectors in these ecosystems are Information Technology, E-Commerce, Fintech, Health tech and Telemedia, Agribusiness and Food tech, technology, and renewable energy. All the sectors pose an opportunity for collaboration with the Chinese counterparts. In a recent panel discussion held in collaboration with BCPR and UMT on agriculture, a Chinese businessman highlighted that there is a need to identify strengths, which Chinese strengths are in science and technology and Pakistan's strength is labor a collaboration can be formed where the Pakistani can take advantage of the latest development and use it to the product advancement, etc. similarly joint fares can be held where both counterparts interact with each other. Together it will lead to increased interest and more ventures of business trade, skill, and tech transfers. In another interview mentioned the venture of e-commerce that could be used.

5. Changing Demography:

Pakistan's demographic advantage, characterized by a significant youth bulge, contrasts sharply with China's declining youth population. With over 140 million people aged between 0-24 years, Pakistan boasts one of the largest youth populations in the world, projected to peak at 178 million by 2069. This presents a substantial workforce that can drive economic growth and innovation. On the other hand, China's youth population is dwindling due to its aging demographic and past policies like the one-child policy. By 2062, it's expected that Pakistan's youth will outnumber China's, highlighting a potential opportunity for Pakistani skilled labor to fill gaps in China's workforce as it faces shortages in high-skilled sectors. The integration of skilled Pakistani workers into the Chinese economy could pave the way for better understanding and cooperation between the two nations. As China grapples with a shrinking workforce, there's a growing demand for skilled labor in areas like technology, engineering, and healthcare. This is where Pakistani talent can step in, addressing labor shortages while also promoting cultural exchange. If China adopts more favorable immigration policies for skilled workers, it could enhance this collaboration significantly. Ultimately, by leveraging their demographic strengths, both Pakistan and China can create a mutually beneficial relationship that supports sustainable development and fosters deeper connections between their societies.⁸¹

Pakistan's youth bulge and China's marriage crisis⁸² pose an interesting avenue highlighted by an interviewee was the promotion of cross-cultural marriages as part of youth exchanges. These unions can offer numerous benefits, such as fostering greater cultural understanding, encouraging appreciation for diverse perspectives, and creating opportunities for personal

⁸⁰ Ibid; Fei Yang and Tingkai Zhao, "Conflict and Adaptation: The History and Future of China-Pakistan Cultural Exchange," *Pacific International Journal* 6, no. 1 (March 31, 2023): 142–48, <https://doi.org/10.55014/pij.v6i1.328>.

⁸¹ Abbas Murtaza Maken, "Pakistan's Population Boom: Shaping a Future Powerhouse," *Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)*, October 9, 2024, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://file.pide.org.pk/pdfpideinpress/pip-pakistans-population-boom-shaping-a-future-powerhouse.pdf>; Issue Brief on Population Control and Youth Bulge," *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, February, 2023, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-population-control-and-youth-bulge/>.

⁸² China's population woes deepen as marriage registrations tumble" *South China Morning Post*, November 4, 2024, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3285093/chinas-population-woes-deepen-marriage-registrations-tumble>.

growth. Children from cross-cultural marriages often develop adaptable personalities, making it easier for them to thrive in various cultural settings. Moreover, these couples naturally blend traditions, fostering a spirit of tolerance and acceptance. On a broader level, such collaboration can also provide youth with a valuable platform to engage in global discussions and dialogue.

6. English language interactions:

The rising interest in English among Chinese youth stems from its role as a global language for connectivity and communication. According to a survey by China Youth Daily, nearly 70% of respondents shared that children begin learning English before the age of five, highlighting parents' desire to provide their children with an early edge in language skills⁸³ However, challenges persist, with China's declining English proficiency highlighted by the EF English Proficiency Index, which ranked the country 82nd out of 113 nations in 2023. This underscores the need for more effective and innovative language learning opportunities to bridge the gap and strengthen global communication skills.

⁸⁴This presents a promising opportunity for collaboration between Pakistani and Chinese youth. Given that many Pakistanis develop strong English skills early due to higher education being conducted in English and consistent exposure to the language, interactive platforms such as online forums and exchange programs could enable meaningful conversations on diverse topics. These engagements would not only help improve language proficiency for both sides but also foster deeper cross-cultural understanding. Initiatives like these have the potential to bridge China's language gap while strengthening people-to-people ties between the two nations.

Challenges

1. Language Barrier:

Language is one of the biggest challenges faced by Pakistani students in China. Coming from a multilingual country, where languages like Urdu, English, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi are widely spoken, many Pakistani students already navigate a complex linguistic landscape. On the other hand, China has a diversity of dialects, which adds another layer of difficulty for international students trying to adapt. While language centers in both countries are doing valuable work to improve proficiency among youth, the challenge remains significant. For some Pakistani students, especially those from remote or underprivileged areas, even Urdu—a national language—may not be their strongest mode of communication.⁸⁵ This makes learning Chinese even harder and creates a ripple effect, impacting their ability to communicate effectively in academic and social settings. This language gap can lead to feelings of isolation and missed opportunities for meaningful connections with peers. To address this, there's a need for more inclusive language programs that cater to diverse backgrounds. By fostering better language skills and encouraging cultural exchange, we can help these students overcome barriers and build stronger bridges between the two nations.

⁸³ [China Youth Daily, "Chinese Children Learning English Earlier: Survey," China Daily, May 27, 2016. Accessed February 2, 2025. https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2016-05/27/content_25499775.htm.

⁸⁴ "China's increasing language gap" Opportunities and Insight, British Council, November 20, 2023, accessed February 9, 2025, <https://opportunities-insight.britishcouncil.org/short-articles/news/chinas-increasing-language-gap-0>.

⁸⁵ Former Diplomat; Interviewee

2. Interaction among the Social classes:

Pakistani students studying in China, often from lower-middle and middle-class backgrounds, play a vital role in shaping cultural perceptions between the two nations. Many of these students come from conservative or traditional areas, which influences how they present their culture abroad. This can sometimes lead to a mismatch in expectations; for example, Bollywood movies, popular in China, often depict South Asian cultures as vibrant and liberal. When Chinese people meet Pakistani students, they may be surprised by the more traditional values these students embody, sparking curiosity and conversations about cultural differences.⁸⁶ This dynamic highlights the importance of fostering diverse interactions across all social levels. Grassroots exchanges allow everyday people to connect, while elite-level engagement—through thought leaders and influencers—helps shape broader narratives. By encouraging meaningful dialogue across these layers of society, both nations can move beyond stereotypes and build deeper understanding and respect. This balanced approach ensures that cultural exchanges reflect the true diversity of both societies, strengthening the bond between Pakistan and China.

3. Security:

Security is a significant concern for Chinese nationals in Pakistan, particularly in light of recent incidents that have raised alarms. An interviewee mentioned, a young Chinese man, just 25 years old, planning to visit Pakistan. He expressed that while the idea of visiting the country is appealing, he feels he must adhere to strict security protocols whenever he goes out. This includes traveling with guards and in bulletproof vehicles. He contrasted this experience with his travels in Europe, where he enjoyed a sense of freedom without such security measures. This situation reflects a broader dilemma faced by many young Chinese men and women working in Pakistan. They often grapple with the need for mobility versus the realities of security concerns. The restrictions imposed by these security protocols can limit their ability to explore and engage with the local culture fully. Addressing these security issues is essential not only for the safety and comfort of Chinese nationals but also for fostering better understanding and cooperation between Pakistan and China.

4. Challenges with existing Programs:

Existing exchange programs between Pakistan and China face several challenges that hinder their effectiveness. Issues such as corruption and nepotism often result in undeserving individuals being selected as participants, which undermines the purpose of these programs. An interviewee highlighted that if these programs were revised and managed comprehensively, they could serve as a powerful tool for fostering mutual understanding and collaboration. The selection process must ensure that participants are capable of representing their country effectively as informal ambassadors. Another critical aspect is the design of scholarships. For Pakistani students heading to China, it is essential to send top-tier candidates to prestigious Chinese universities. This would not only enhance their academic experience but also contribute to building a positive narrative about Pakistan while fostering meaningful exchanges. Similarly, Chinese students coming to Pakistan should be enrolled in leading universities to gain a clearer and more accurate understanding of modern-day Pakistan. Moreover, the scholarship systems in both countries reflect differing levels of freedom. Pakistani students often have the liberty to choose their destination country for studies, but

⁸⁶ Ibid

many Chinese students relying on state scholarships are restricted to destinations determined by government policies. This also adds to the number of Pakistani students surpassing the number of Chinese students in Pakistan. This limits their ability to explore diverse academic environments freely. Addressing these issues through transparent processes and equitable opportunities can significantly improve the outcomes of these exchange programs, ensuring they serve as effective platforms for cultural and educational cooperation between the two nations.

5. Cost:

One of the key challenges we face is the financial aspect. When Pakistani youth delegations visit China, they are often met with comprehensive support; covering everything from tours and accommodation to meals and other expenses. In comparison, budget limitations in Pakistan restrict us from offering the same level of hospitality to incoming Chinese delegations or students. This financial gap can unintentionally dampen enthusiasm and limit opportunities for meaningful exchange, which we know is essential for fostering deeper connections and understanding.

An interviewee emphasized that Pakistan needs to take the cost factor more seriously and explore self-sustaining avenues instead of consistently seeking funds or financial support from China. Adopting a cost-covering approach could foster greater financial independence and strengthen the partnership on more balanced terms.

6. Limited Chinese Presence:

Another challenge is the limited presence of Chinese universities at educational fairs in Pakistan. While many international institutions actively participate, the absence of Chinese universities reduces awareness among Pakistani students about the opportunities available to them. Additionally, universities in Pakistan that have established China centers often remain unaware of initiatives such as the annual youth internship program in China, a valuable opportunity that could significantly enhance engagement and collaboration. It was mentioned by one of the interviewees who has been dealing with the administrative side of a Chinese center. Despite her being in the field for some time, she quite recently came to know about the summer exchange programs in China. In the media aspect, China should also collaboratively work to popularize its apps like iQIYI, an equivalent of Netflix.

7. Disinformation and Pakistani Authorities:

Disinformation targeting China and Pakistan, often driven by both internal and external actors, continues to fuel tensions and reinforce misconceptions. These misleading narratives can heavily shape public perceptions, with Pakistani authorities frequently criticized for their slow response in countering such phenomena, allowing false information to gain traction. It has led to some notable perceptions formed, such as Chinese debt trap, China as the soft colonizer, and negative impressions of CPEC. Many platforms that are based in and outside of Pakistan are also propagating the anti-China narrative.

A recent report by the U.S. State Department highlighted China's efforts to influence media narratives in Pakistan, particularly through initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Media Forum. While this partnership is aimed at combating what both

nations view as harmful disinformation, critics argue that it may also suppress dissenting viewpoints and promote a singular, China-favorable narrative.

⁸⁷One interviewee emphasized that a more proactive approach from Pakistani authorities could help reshape public discourse around its relationship with China.

Section IV

The Way Forward

The bond of brotherhood between China and Pakistan is deeply rooted, with countless Chinese nationals often expressing that "Pakistan is our brother." Recognizing the youth as valuable assets for their future, both nations must invest in fostering healthy and dynamic relationships between their younger generations. While previous sections have outlined the opportunities and challenges, there is always a way forward. Here are a few actionable strategies to deepen this connection:

1. **Revamping Existing Programs:** A critical review of current exchange initiatives is essential. Improvements in selection processes, greater transparency, and enhanced support systems for participants can help both countries maximize the impact of these exchanges.
2. **Cultural Exchanges:** Celebrating significant festivals like Eid and Chinese New Year through cultural events can create meaningful interactions. Informal boot camps or workshops around these occasions can further strengthen bonds and deepen cross-cultural appreciation.
3. **Digital Exchange Initiatives:** Until issues around security and disinformation are resolved, digital platforms offer immense potential. Hosting virtual discussions, collaborative projects, and webinars can connect youth from both nations, fostering constructive dialogue and understanding.
4. **Leveraging CPEC Opportunities:** CPEC's strategic importance should be harnessed by incorporating programs around tourism, trade, and entrepreneurship. Practical initiatives can offer young individuals hands-on experiences that foster collaboration and innovation.
5. **Showcasing Traditional and Modern Cultures:** From art exhibitions and music festivals to culinary events, showcasing the traditional and modern aspects of both nations' cultures can bridge gaps and highlight their vibrant heritage and contemporary progress.
6. **Joint Incubators and Research Fellowships:** Establishing joint incubators and research fellowships in technology and entrepreneurship can foster innovation and problem-solving. These platforms would encourage young minds to collaborate on shared challenges, building lasting partnerships.

⁸⁷ China-Pakistan Relations Under Fire from Disinformation Campaigns." South China Morning Post, March 2022. Accessed February 2, 2025. <https://www.scmp.com/>;"Pakistan, China and the Disinformation Challenge." The Diplomat, December 2021. Accessed February 2, 2025. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/pakistan-china-and-the-disinformation-challenge/>.

Table 2: Main Areas of Collaboration

Main Areas of Collaboration ⁸⁸	
Area	Sub Fields
Technology and IT	Software Development, Data Science, Cybersecurity
Engineering	Mechanical, Electrical, Civil, Renewable Energy
Education and Research	Teaching English, Research Collaborations
Business and Entrepreneurship	International Trade, E-commerce, Digital Marketing
Cultural and Creative Industries	Media, Journalism, Art, Design

By adopting these strategies, Pakistan and China can further strengthen their ties, ensuring that their youth lead the way toward a future defined by mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration.

“A friendship higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the ocean, sweeter than honey, and stronger than steel.”

⁸⁸ Main areas of collaboration include technology and IT, sourced from World Bank Report, “China Overview”; engineering, sourced from CPEC Official Website, “Opportunities for Engineers”; education and research, sourced from Chinese Government Scholarship, “Study in China”; business and entrepreneurship, sourced from PCJCCI, “Trade Opportunities”; and cultural and creative industries, sourced from Confucius Institute, “Cultural Exchanges

Brown to Blue (B2B) Economic Transition: Reddening the Maritime Economy for Sustainable Growth and Environmental Resilience,

By Muhammad Insar

Abstract

The transition between the Brown and Blue Economy is a key transition in the marine economy, balancing economic development with environmental and social fairness. As a Blue Economy promotes environmentally sound actions such as eco-tourism, marine renewable energy, and sustainable fisheries, a Brown Economy sustains exploitative processes such as overfishing, marine degradation, and destructive coastal development. Bridging both economies is a Grey Area, a transition zone in between, in which actions neither wholly fall under sustainability nor wholly fall under unsustainability.

In an analysis of these processes, Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) is used to comprehend through technological innovation, institutional reform, and collaboration between stakeholders, a reconciliation between the economy and environment aims. A qualitative analysis, in this instance, considers maritime practice in the Blue, Brown, and Grey categories, and identifies both transformation barriers and enablers towards a future in a state of sustainability.

Successful transformations in case studies in a variety of regions, and comparative and thematic analysis, reveal the role of policy frameworks, technological development, and community mobilization in creating resilience in maritime practice. Classification and actionable recommendations for policymakers, industry leaders, and coastal communities arise out of the analysis, and through a discussion of the Grey Area challenge and suggesting avenues for modernization, contribute to global discussion about future maritime development and its sustainability, and promote a future in which economy and environment can develop together in harmony.

Keywords: Blue Economy, Brown Economy, Brown Economy, Maritime Sustainability, Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT), Sustainable Maritime Practices, Environmental Resilience

Introduction

Brown to Blue (B2B) Economic Transition:

Reddening the Maritime Economy for Sustainable Growth and Environmental Resilience BY DR. HAFIZ A. PASHA The planet's oceans serve as both a lifeline for global economic activity and a bulwark for a changing climate. The oceans cover more than 70% of the Earth's surface. Humanity's relations with marine life, however, have long been marked by a paradox: an ocean economy generates economic growth even as it destroys the same assets it depends on. That paradox is captured in the tension between a model of exploitative behaviour, such as overfishing, extraction of fossil fuels, and unregulated coastal development. A new model branded as the Blue Economy, a transition to ocean use in a manner prioritizing the environment, renewable energy, and fair livelihoods.

Between these two poles is the Grey Area, a shady zone in between in which activity neither wholly promotes sustainability nor wholly inflicts damage. Examples include fisheries conserving part-way but with ongoing destructive gear, and shipping companies investing in cleaner fuels but not in

proper trash disposal. That in-between region mirrors the complexity of maritime modernization, in which development is both incremental and contentious. With rapid acceleration in climate change and marine biodiversity loss, the urgency in transitioning out of Brown and towards Blue practice is an all-time high.

Although increased awareness of the potential of the Blue Economy, current literature tends to simplify discussions into "sustainable" (Blue) and "unsustainable" (Brown) practice, ignoring the complex realities of the Grey Area. Few studies consistently classify transition practice, and none explore in detail the socio-technical obstacles to full compliance with Blue Economy practice. In addition, Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) has been utilized in studies of terrestrial industries in which processes of globalization, fragmentation of governance, and ecological interdependencies present specific obstacles. But its use in maritime industries is under-researched. This work seeks to bridge these gaps through a transparent model for distinguishing between maritime practice in the Brown and Blue, and an examination of technological and institutional reform in driving transition in the Grey Area.

The principal objectives of such work involve: examination of social and economic, and ecological dynamics towards transitioning Blue maritime practice. Mapping and characterization of Grey Area practice, and an examination of its function as a stepping stone or a stumbling block to a transition towards a more sustainable future. The examination of technological innovation and institution reform in driving systemic transformation. Lastly providing actionable recommendations for coastal communities, leaders in industries, and policymakers in overcoming transition barriers. Underpinned for this inquiry are two guiding questions:

1. *How can marine practice best be described in terms of being Blue, Brown, or Grey, and in terms of what?*
2. *What can motivate transition towards becoming Blue practice and navigate the challenge of the Grey Area?*

The consequences of this work have significant implications for coastal communities, industries, and policymakers. For policymakers, it can act as a diagnostic tool for current maritime policies and formulate interventions for the transition towards a blue future. For industry leaders, it identifies competitive advantage in taking up Blue Economy strategies, such as access to a pool of green financing, access to a pool of consumers, etc. For coastal communities, it advocates for the transition towards an inclusive blue future that protects livelihoods and revives marine habitats, with a strong bias towards regions disproportionately impacted by climate change. By blending theoretical intensity with pragmatic utility, this work aids in supporting global efforts towards Sustainable Development Goal 14 (Life Below Water) and the 2021–2030 UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development.

Literature Review

The Blue Economy took widespread momentum in the decade, emerging as a model for balancing marine conservation with development. As defined in 2017 by the World Bank, it is "the use of ocean resources for sustainable development, for economic growth, for a healthy ocean, and for a healthy planet." Examples include marine renewable energy, ocean-friendly fisheries, and ecotourism. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reported, its contribution to creating \$2.5 trillion in value for the economy globally and in fighting climate change and loss of biodiversity is emphasized (OECD, 2023). For instance, North Sea wind farms

not only reduced greenhouse gas emissions but have produced jobs and stimulated economies in regions, proving their viability in practice (European Commission , 2023). In a similar manner, ecotourism programs in Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia's restoration programs for its coral reefs, illustrate examples of ecotourism combining economic incentives with stewardship (Satria, 2021). Meanwhile, the contrast Brown economy, which is heritage and values of 20th-century, is a short-term gain at long-term social and environmental cost: overfishing, for one, is a persistent issue, with 34% of stocks worldwide overfished (FAO, 2022), and marine plastic litter will triple in 2040 under current trends (UNEP, 2021).

Economic justification for such Brown practice will depend on systemic dependencies, such as shipping's use of \$35 billion worth of fossil fuel subsidies in 2021 (OECD, 2022). Authors such as Eikeset, Klinger, and Watson (2018) said that such practice is deep-rooted through path dependency and actors in economies resist transitioning towards a new model for practice, in part, through sunk investments in existing infrastructure and through legislative inertia. Therein is a paradox: industries reliant on ocean assets destroy the same assets whose survival, and continued survival, depend on them (Eikeset, 2018).

Interposed between these two paradigms stands the unexploited Grey Area, a liminal zone in which practice is partially corresponding with sustainability aims. For example, fisheries have adopted gear reform in an attempt to counteract bycatch, but continued operations in overfished regions (Chuenpagdee, 2019). In a similar manner, shipping companies can utilize liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a transition fuel, in full knowledge of its vulnerabilities to methane leak, in an attempt at compliance with emissions requirements but not decarbonization (Tran, 2023). Such incrementalism reflects the complex realities of changing deep-rooted industries, with financial, technological, and political barriers in the path of systemic change. Recent critique sees Grey Areas' indeterminacy, with "sustainable aquaculture" and such practice having a propensity to cover over unremedied ills such as habitat degradation and labour abuse (Bennett, 2021).

In contrast to growing academic interest in maritime sustainability, critical gaps in present studies dominate. First, present studies have a propensity to partition discourses into Blue (sustainable) and Brown (unsustainable) categories, excluding consideration for complex Grey Area approaches in between them. Second, even though Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) has been applied in industries such as energy and agriculture, its application in maritime industries is meagre. Few studies investigate EMT's three pillars: technology innovation, institutional reform, and collaboration between stakeholders. How does this function together in marine environments, with governance fractured between national borders and global value chains (Viridin, 2021). Third, little work considers equity in Blue Economy transformations, particularly in terms of including and excluding marginalized coastal communities, disproportionately impacted by climate change (Cohen, 2022). The gaps in present analysis are addressed in this research through a new whole framework for describing blue and brown maritime practice and interrogating EMT in terms of its function in transition-enabling processes. Integrating case studies in a variety of regions and sectors, it problematizes dualistic narrative and identifies actionable avenues for reconciling ecological and economic requirements in blue and brown practice.

Theoretical Framework

Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) puts forward a robust theory for balancing environment and economic development through reform in policies, innovation, and collective governance. EMT, first developed in the 1980s, discredits traditional theory that modernization necessarily brings about ecologic degradation, and postulates that modernization can reorganized in harmony with

ecologic ends (Jänicke, 2008). Theoretically, EMT values technological innovation, institutional reform, and marketplace mechanisms in ecological transformation driving. For instance, renewable technology and circular economy reveal industries' capabilities for a less ecologically intensive but with productive footprint (OECD, 2022).

The salience of EMT is greatest, with its dual role in generating international trade and contributing towards such ecological ills, including overfishing, marine degradation, and global warming. Transition towards shipping practice in harmony with ecologic durability and economic activity in harmony with ecologic durability resounds EMT's guiding values. For example, the 2023 Greenhouse Gas Strategy of the International Maritime Organization (IMO) with its 50% shipping emissions target in 2050 is a case in exemplary form of institutional reform for practice towards durability (IMO, 2023). Moreover, technological breakthroughs such as autonomous ships and AI-facilitated anti-fishing and anti-poaching tracking technology serve as examples of modernization driving efficiency and stewardship for the environment (UNCTAD, 2021). EMT establishes a frame when describing Grey Area's complexities in that maritime practice is neither totally unsustainable and neither totally sustainable.

For instance, fisheries that use selective gear in an attempt to mitigate bycatch but yet over exploit stocks exhibit many transitions' incremental nature. EMT's focus on collaboration between parties and market mechanisms discloses, in return, through what avenues such practice can be steered towards full compatibility with Blue Economy thinking. Public-private partnerships, for instance, can fund research into sustainable technology for shipping, and carbon pricing regimes can make cleaner shipping practice economically preferable (OECD, 2022).

The current study employs EMT in its attempt to respond to its key question: How and in what ways can maritime practice become labelled Blue, Brown, or Grey, and in what ways can development towards unsustainable to sustainable forms become a reality?

By employing EMT's tenets, driving factors of transformation, such as technological innovation and policy frameworks, and barriers such as governance fragmentation and economic dependencies, are established through the study. For example, lack of access to cheap cleaner technology in developing countries can hinder Blue practice, but alliances such as the UN's Blue Economy Initiative can accelerate development (UNCTAD, 2021). In other words, EMT provides a sound theoretical underpinning for studying the shipping sector transition towards Blue over Brown practice. With regard to technology, institutions, and the marketplace, EMT not only enriches academic inquiry but also informs actionable insight for coastal communities, leaders in industry, and governments. In its contribution towards a new corpus of work in maritime development, in a sustainable form, this research confirms that EMT can inform one of the most significant industries in the world in its transition towards a brighter future.

Research Methodology

The research utilizes a qualitative strategy in researching the complex transition between Brown and Blue maritime approaches, with a strong emphasis placed on interpretative experiences and meanings of important stakeholders in the maritime community. Qualitative approaches best suit such a study, in that, through them, complex social-ecological networks can best be analyzed in detail, and contextual complexity cannot be disregarded (Creswell, 2018). Underpinned with an interpretivist epistemology, such a study aims at knowing, first and foremost, coastal communities, industry leaders, and policymakers' perceptions and reactions towards both challenge and opportunity in transitioning towards a future that is sustainable. Interpretivism acknowledges reality

to be constructed through social processes and therefore best placed to explore competing understandings of both sustainability and fairness in the maritime community (Schwartz-Shea, 2016).

Secondary source collection with breadth and triangulation between a range of settings in view. Policy documents for international organizations including the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and European Union's 2023 Blue Economy Report, case studies of region programs (e.g., Norway's offshore wind farms, Indonesia's community-managed fish eries), and peer-reviewed articles in Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) and maritime sustainability, have been collected. An attempt to include emerging trends not yet represented in academic sources, additional grey sources, including white papers and reports in industries, have been included. In a search for high-level sources, sources have been taken with Blue-Brown relevance, publication date with a preference for 2018–2023 and institutions, e.g., OECD, UNCTAD, in consideration.

It examined through thematic analysis in practice (Braun, 2022). EMT's most important values of technological innovation, institutional reform, and collaboration with stakeholders. These values were starting codes, and in categories "Blue" (totally in agreement), "Brown" (in transition), and "Grey" (in transition). For example, the 2023 emissions blueprint of the IMO (institute reform) can be "Blue," but the use of LNG in shipping (technology innovation) can be "Grey," for its transition stage. In such a manner, it revealed through analysis, in practice, EMT values and in which direction additional improvement must take place. Comparative analysis geographically located these themes, and in-between preparedness gaps between developed and developing nations revealed, for example, when, while investments in offshore wind have been increased in the Green Deal (2023) in the EU, small island nations have no infrastructure for similar reform, and gaps in transition for them in a Blue Economy become apparent.

The downfall of such an approach consists of secondary data, and these can stand for institutional bias, and can overlook grassroots voice and perception. For instance, policy documents will record macroeconomic dividends of sustainability and underplay its role at the grassroots level for poor fishing communities. Apart from the interpretivist perspective, beneficial for portraying actor subjectivity, it overlooks the generalizability of the conclusion. In future, such gaps can be addressed through the collection of primary data, for instance, through coastal community interviews and participatory workshops with representatives of industries. By blending EMT with intensity in terms of its qualia, such a methodology generates a flexible yet coherent frame for all-pervading through maritime sustainability's complexity, offering understandings that bridge theoretical and practice spaces.

Findings and Discussion

The report of this study reveals a rich landscape of marine activity, segmented between the Blue, Brown, and Grey continuum. Blue practice, characterized by its compliance with the principle of sustainability, incorporates such activities as offshore wind farms, marine protected areas (MPA), and ecotourism. Norway's offshore wind farms, for instance, have not only reduced demand for fossil fuels but have created jobs and stimulated regional economies, an expression of economy-environment synergies at the heart of the Blue Economy (European Commission, 2023). In a similar manner, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in Australia is a benchmark for balancing conservation and ecotourism, generating \$6.4 billion a year and conserving biodiversity (GBRMPA, 2022).

In contrast, such practice prevails in terms of a lingering heritage of outdated thinking about economies, with a predisposition towards short-term over long-term viability. Overfishing in the

South China Sea, with 70% of stocks overexploited, is an expression of both social and environmental costs of such practice (FAO, 2022). In a similar manner, continued use of HFO in shipping, despite its contribution to atmospheric and climate degradation, is an expression of inertia in mature industries (IMO, 2023). Such practice tends to be supported through systemic dependencies, such as subsidies for fossil fuels and loopholes in legislation, that discourage a transition to alternative, sustainable alternatives (OECD, 2022).

The Grey Area, therefore, is the most developed and most complex facet of maritime practice. There, actions have a partial orientation towards objectives for sustainability, an expression of many transition processes' incremental character. For example, fisheries have adopted gear adaptations in an attempt to mitigate bycatch but have continued operations in overfished regions, a reflection of tension between continuity and advancement (Chuenpagdee, 2019). Similarly, the use of liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a transition fuel in shipping, with its reduced CO₂ output, comes with such risks as methanation leak, an expression of pay offs involved in Grey Area practice (Tran, 2023).

Case studies in regions with diversity yield useful information regarding drivers and obstacles in transitioning of the Blue-to-Brown (B2B) economic transition. Norway's offshore wind programs, backed by strong policy structures and public-private collaborations, illustrate how technological innovation and institutional reform can drive a speedy transition towards a blue economy (European Commission, 2023). In contrast, the delayed use of environmentally friendly shipping technology in developing nations, including India and Indonesia, reflects the impact of economic dependencies and infrastructure gaps in holding back development (UNCTAD, 2021). Singapore's Green Initiative for shipping, with its offering of incentives in terms of taxes for low-carbon shipping, reflects how marketplace incentives can drive environmentally friendly behaviour, but under the realities of worldwide value chains (MPA Singapore, 2023).

Transition obstacles have political, technological, and economic dimensions and are multi-faceted in nature. In most instances, political inertia, facilitated through lobbying in most cases by interested industries, can hinder reform policies, such as delayed ratification of the 2023 blueprint for emissions (IMO, 2023).

Such practice tends to be supported through systemic dependencies, such as subsidies for fossil fuels and loopholes in legislation, that discourage a transition to alternative, sustainable alternatives (OECD, 2022).

The Grey Area, therefore, is the most developed and most complex facet of maritime practice. There, actions have a partial orientation towards objectives for sustainability, an expression of many transition processes' incremental character. For example, fisheries have adopted gear adaptations in an attempt to mitigate bycatch but have continued operations in overfished regions, a reflection of tension between continuity and advancement (Chuenpagdee, 2019). Similarly, the use of liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a transition fuel in shipping, with its reduced CO₂ output, comes with such risks as methanation leak, an expression of pay offs involved in Grey Area practice (Tran, 2023).

Case studies in regions with diversity yield useful information regarding drivers and obstacles in transitioning of the Blue-to-Brown (B2B) economic transition. Norway's offshore wind programs, backed by strong policy structures and public-private collaborations, illustrate how technological innovation and institutional reform can drive a speedy transition towards a blue economy (European Commission, 2023). In contrast, the delayed use of environmentally friendly shipping technology in developing nations, including India and Indonesia, reflects the impact of economic dependencies and infrastructure gaps in holding back development (UNCTAD, 2021). Singapore's Green

Initiative for shipping, with its offering of incentives in terms of taxes for low-carbon shipping, reflects how marketplace incentives can drive environmentally friendly behaviour, but under the realities of worldwide value chains (MPA Singapore, 2023).

Transition obstacles have political, technological, and economic dimensions and are multi-faceted in nature. In most instances, political inertia, facilitated through lobbying in most cases by interested industries, can hinder reform policies, such as delayed ratification of the 2023 blueprint for emissions (IMO, 2023). Economic dependencies, for example, in terms of earnings from fossil fuels in producing nations, produce structural obstacles to diversification (OECD, 2022). Gaps in technology, most visibly in developing countries, exacerbate inequality in terms of transition preparedness, for example, in low utilization of renewable technology in small island countries (IRENA, 2023).

Transition enablers offer windows of opportunity for overcoming such barriers. Regulatory incentives towards sustainable behaviour, for example, in the case of the EU's Green Deal and the scheme of the IMO, have been mooted (European Commission, 2023). Technological breakthroughs, for example, AI-facilitated anti-illegal-fishing tracking and use of block chain for transparent value chains, make processes efficient and transparent (World Economic Forum, 2022). Stakeholder collaboration, in terms of, for example, the UN's Blue Economy Initiative, enables shared decision-making and access to shared assets, such that transition can benefit everyone, including coastal communities that have been disenfranchised (UNCTAD, 2021).

Analyzing these observations through an Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT) frame reveals opportunities and constraints in modernizing marine economic practice. EMT's technological innovation and reform through institutional orientation correspond with successful transitions, such as Norway's offshore wind farms and Singapore's shipping for a cleaner environment policy. EMT's positivity, however, must be qualified in terms of realities in the Grey Area, in which improvement comes with continued challenge. For instance, EMT's orientation towards improvement via market mechanisms can underplay developing countries' access to technology and financing (Jänicke, 2008).

Brown, Blue, and Grey Area Practices

The maritime economy entails a rich variety of practice, ranging from extraction and shipping through to tourism and biotechnology. Practices vary in terms of compatibility with sustainability, between environmentally destructive (Brown) and wholly compatible (Blue), with many in a transition Grey Area in between. For instance, deep-sea trawling and other types of industrial fishing have been condemned for their destructive impact and overfishing contribution (FAO, 2022), but MSC-certified fisheries demonstrate that commercial activity can coexist with stewardship (MSC, 2023). In a similar manner, use of liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a transition fuel in shipping reveals one of the paradoxes of the Grey Area, in that emissions drop, but new peril emerges in terms of the leak of methane (Tran, 2023). The maritime practice worldwide is organized according to sector, compatibility with sustainability, and geographical distribution, and one can move towards an analysis and transition towards a model of increased sustainability. Table 1. presents a general view of these practices, and one can perceive in them both diversity and challenge in the transition between Brown and Blue.

Table 1: Categorization of Global Maritime Economic Practices by Sector, Sustainability, and Region.

Sector	Practice	Sustainability	Example	Region
Resource Extraction	Industrial Fishing	Brown	Deep-sea trawling	North Atlantic
	Industrial Fishing	Grey	Pelagic longlining (bycatch mitigation)	Pacific Tuna Fisheries
	Industrial Fishing	Blue	MSC-certified fisheries (Alaska)	North America
	Aquaculture	Brown	Mangrove-destructive shrimp farming	Thailand
	Aquaculture	Grey	Semi-closed salmon farms	Norway, Chile
	Aquaculture	Blue	Integrated Multi-Trophic Aquaculture	Canada, China
	Seabed Mining	Brown	Deep-sea nodule mining	Pacific Clarion-Clipperton
	Seabed Mining	Grey	Experimental mining with safeguards	Norway
	Oil & Gas	Brown	Offshore drilling (HFO)	Gulf of Mexico
	Oil & Gas	Grey	LNG extraction with carbon capture	Australia
Transportation	Shipping	Brown	Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) cargo ships	Global
	Shipping	Grey	LNG-fueled vessels (Maersk)	EU, Singapore
	Shipping	Blue	Hydrogen/wind-assisted ships	EU (e.g., <i>Energy Observer</i>)
	Cruise Tourism	Brown	Mega-ship emissions	Caribbean
	Cruise Tourism	Grey	Hybrid-powered cruises	Norway (Hurtigruten)
Energy Production	Offshore Wind	Blue	Fixed-bottom turbines (Hornsea)	UK, EU
	Offshore Wind	Emerging	Floating wind farms (Hywind)	Scotland
	Wave/Tidal Energy	Blue	MeyGen tidal array	Scotland

Table 1: Categorization of Global Maritime Economic Practices by Sector, Sustainability, and Region.

Tourism & Recreation	Ecotourism	Blue	Palau marine sanctuaries	Pacific Islands
	Ecotourism	Grey	"Greenwashed" snorkeling tours	Southeast Asia
	Coastal Development	Brown	Artificial islands (Palm Jumeirah)	UAE
	Coastal Development	Blue	Managed beach renourishment	Netherlands
Biotechnology	Marine Bioprospecting	Blue	Antarctic krill supplements	Norway
	Marine Bioprospecting	Grey	Coral-derived pharmaceuticals	Pacific Islands
Ancillary Services	Marine Insurance	Grey	Offshore oil spill coverage	Global (Lloyd's)
	Marine Insurance	Blue	Parametric coral reef insurance	Hawaii, Mexico
Emerging Practices	Blue Carbon Credits	Blue	Mangrove conservation (Indonesia)	Southeast Asia
	Autonomous Shipping	Grey	Yara Birkeland electric ship	Norway

The sector-by-sector analysis helps to illustrate such a framework. In extraction, industrial fishing can be considered a Blue with MSC-certified Alaskan salmon fisheries utilizing quota and habitat conservation, with long-term stock welfare guaranteed (MSC, 2023). Brown practice can be seen in unregulated South China Sea jigging for squid, with overfishing and bycatch consequences. Grey practice can be seen in the use of Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) in Pacific tuna fisheries with bycatch avoidance, but with ongoing contribution to marine plastic pollution (FAO, 2022). Threats in such a sector include a lack of compliance in international seas and illicit fishing, and opportunities in satellite tracking and blockchain transparency. In seabed mining, such activity is predominantly Brown, with deep-sea mining for nodules in the Pacific potentially causing irreparable loss in abyssal habitats. Norway's pilot mining with environmental controls is a Grey practice, with long-term consequences unknown. In such a sector, gaps in regulation can be seen in International Seabed Authority (ISA) protocols, but opportunities in alternative materials such as recycled rare earths can occur. In maritime shipping, shipping is predominantly a Brown practice, with Heavy Fuel Oil (HFO) responsible for most maritime emissions (IMO, 2023).

Maersk's dual-fuel LNG ships represent a Grey practice, cutting CO₂ but with ongoing use of fossil fuels. Ships powered with hydrogen, such as Energy Observer, represent a Blue practice, with only water vapour emissions (European Commission, 2023). Threats include high initial investments in

such ‘green technology’, but opportunities in such technology can arise with IMO’s Carbon Intensity Indicator (CII) legislation. In terms of production, offshore wind is a Blue practice, with operations such as the UK’s Hornsea Project powering a million-plus homes and generating jobs (IRENA, 2023). Emerging floating farms represent continued development in such a field. Challenges include high capital outlays, and opportunities in government leases for sales of wind through auctioning off. In tourism and recreation, ecotourism is a Blue practice, with examples such as Palau’s marine preserve generating high revenues. "Greenwash" snorkelling tours fall into a Grey practice, with advertisement for conservation but no conservation actions taken. Challenges include balancing tourism volumes with ecological carrying capacity, and opportunities in certification programs (Bennett, 2021).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The transition towards a Blue maritime economy is one of the most important 21st-century challenges and opportunities. In this research, such a transition has been analyzed in terms of its complexity, with maritime practice positioned in a three-way divide between Blue, Brown, and Grey, and with an analysis of obstacles and facilitators towards a journey towards sustainability. Building on Ecological Modernization Theory (EMT), in illuminating technological innovation, institutional reform, and stakeholder collaboration in balancing growth and environmental durability, it revealed persistent Grey Area obstacles, in which incremental improvement co-exists with systemic inertia and inequity.

The report identifies the range of maritime practice and its compatibility or incompatibility with principles of sustainability. Examples of blue practice, such as Norway’s offshore wind farms and Australia’s Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, reveal synergies between economic and ecological benefits. Not only do such strategies slow down degradation of the environment, but they also produce jobs, stimulate economies, and enhance community resilience. Examples of Brown practice, such as overfishing in the South China Sea and ongoing use of HFO in shipping, reveal the social and ecological costs of unsustainable strategies. These strategies have a high propensity to become sustained through systemic dependencies, such as subsidies for fossil fuels and loopholes in legislation, and produce disincentives for a transition towards alternatives that are sustainable.

The Grey Area, therefore, is the most complex level of marine practice. In it, actions such as fisheries taking gear adaptations in an attempt to mitigate bycatch and shipping companies investing in liquefied natural gas (LNG) as a bridge fuel exhibit the incremental nature of many transformations. As such, even such actions, indicative of improvement, exhibit both complications and trade-offs in altering deep-seated structures. For instance, LNG releases less CO₂ but introduces such concerns as methane leak, and therefore, a whole-farmers' intervention must address both near-term and long-term ramifications.

Case studies in regions with diversity yield rich information about drivers and obstacles in the transition between Brown and Blue economies. Norway’s offshore wind programs, backed with strong policy frameworks and public-private collaborations, illustrate how technological development and institutional reform can drive rapid transition towards a sustainable economy. In contrast, slow technological advancement in developing nations, including India and Indonesia, reflects the contribution of economic dependencies and infrastructure deficits in constraining development. Singapore’s Green Initiative for shipping, with incentives for low-carbon shipping via taxes, reflects that even in a scenario with a value chain constraint in terms of worldwide, incentives for a green economy can drive practice via marketplace incentives.

The current study expands EMT's application to marine environments, offering new insights into balancing ecological and economic objectives in one of humanity's most significant industries. EMT's technological transformation and institutional reform orientation aligns with successful experiences, such as Norway's wind farms offshore and environmentally friendly shipping laws in Singapore. Meanwhile, the book, at its best, identifies EMT's weaknesses, namely its excessive faith in processes in the marketplace and its failure to care about deep-rooted impediments for developing countries.

By intertwining EMT with a critical analysis of the Grey Area, this study enriches the overall discussion regarding sustainable development. It rejects dualistic theory about sustainability, offering a more complex model that acknowledges many transformations' incremental and contentious nature. Not only does such a model expand theoretical expertise, but it also provides useful tools for policymakers, entrepreneurs, and coastal communities in dealing with the complexity of maritime sustainability.

Way Forward

To promote a transition towards Blue practice at a rapid pace, this work sets out the following actionable recommendations for Policymakers;

- **Strengthen Global Frameworks:** Put in place and intensify such worldwide frameworks, such as the 2023 IMO emissions strategy and the UN's Blue Economy Initiative, in a way that places equity at its core, with developing countries having access to financing, technology, and capacity development (IMO, 2023).
- **Phasing out of Fossil Fuels:** Redirect subsidies for cleaner shipping operations and renewable sources. For example, HFO subsidies can be re-channelled towards cleaner shipping technology, such as hydrogen fuel cells and wind-powered ships.
- **Strengthen Marine Spatial Planning (MSP):** Apply MSP in a balanced form, reconciling conflicting ocean use, including shipping routes, fisheries, and renewable infrastructure. By minimizing competition and maximizing synergies between the environment and economy aims, MSP can function.

For Business Leaders

- **Make an investment in Green Technologies:** Accelerate the use of such technology, such as AI-powered tracking technology for illicit fishing, blockchain for value chains transparency, and renewable sources of shipping fuel. All these can make shipping operations efficient, less environmentally damaging, and competitive in the marketplace (World Economic Forum, 2022).
- **Adopt Circular Principles:** Apply circular economy principles in shipping operations, such as reusing ships' parts, minimizing waste, and producing ships for reuse at life's end. Adopting such a practice can save one's resources and produce new sources of income.
- **Form Public-Private Alliances:** Involve governments, NGOs, and academic and research communities in creating and deploying long-term, sustainable solutions in collaboration, including funding pilot programs for offshore wind farms and community-managed fisheries.

For Coastal Communities

- **Brown to Blue (B2B) Economic Transition:** Redefining the Maritime Economy for Sustainable Growth and Environmental Resilience Empower Coastal Stakeholders in Coastal Villages: Involve coastal communities, and in specific, poor communities, in decision-making processes through participatory forums, community-managed conservation programs, and fair benefit-sharing frameworks.
- **Promote Sustainable Livelihoods:** Inspire alternative livelihoods such as ecotourism, aquaculture, and marine conservation. For example, training can allow fishermen to transition to environmentally friendly practices or diversify sources of income.
- **Strengthen Governance at a Local Level:** Empower governments at a local level with the capacity to manage marine resources effectively. That entails training, tools, and funding for community-managed marine protected areas (MPAs) and community-managed fisheries.

Future Research Directions

While this study provides a comprehensive analysis of the Brown-to-Blue transition, several areas warrant further exploration:

- **Equity in blue economy transition:** There is a necessity for future studies to assess the transition impact for marginalized groups, and most specifically, in developing countries. Distribution analysis of both cost and benefit and approaches for assuring equitable and fair transition must be performed.
- **Emerging Technologies:** There is a scarcity of analysis of emerging technologies, such as autonomous ships, ocean-based capture, and biodegradable gear, in powering the transition towards a state of sustainability, and studies have to assess its potential, vulnerability, and scalability.
- **Behaviour and Culture:** Identification of cultural and behavioural drivers for unsustainable behavior, such as demand for consumption of seafood and anti-regulation, can make interventions work effectively.
- **Global Governance:** Governance fragmentation creates enormous obstacles for sustainable transformations in the future. There is a need for future studies to investigate new governance frameworks, including regional cooperation frameworks and International Ocean.

Final Reflections

The transition of a Brown to a Blue marine economy is not a technological, but a profound transformation in humanity's relation with the ocean. It entails rethinking deep structures, redefining value creation, and reimagining governance structures. In an endeavour to shed light onto the path and obstacles of such a transformation, and offering a frame for comprehension and intervention, this study seeks to contribute towards a future in which economic success and concern for the environment go together, securing the wellness and long-term durability of our seas for future generations.

References

1. Bennett, N. J. (2021). Environmental (in)justice in the Blue Economy. *Nature Sustainability*, 4(3), 192–199. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1038/s41893-020-00654-7>
2. Braun, V. &. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. SAGE.
3. Chuenpagdee, R. e. (2019). Governing the Grey Areas: Ethical dilemmas in fisheries management. *Fish and Fisheries*, 20(4), 674–683. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/faf.12367>
4. Cohen, P. J. (2022). Equity in the Blue Economy: A systematic review. *World Development*, 158. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2022.106024>
5. Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE.
6. Eikeset, A. M. (2018). What is Blue Growth? The semantics of sustainable development in marine fisheries. *Fish and Fisheries*, 19(4), 615–624. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/faf.12277>
7. European Commission . (2023). North Sea offshore wind: A blueprint for sustainable energy transition. Retrieved from European Commission: <https://ec.europa.eu>
8. FAO. (2022). *The State of World Fisheries and Aquaculture 2022*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization.
9. GBRMPA. (2022). Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority Annual Report 2022. Retrieved from GBRMPA: <https://www.gbrmpa.gov.au>
10. IMO. (2023). 2023 IMO Strategy on Reduction of GHG Emissions from Ships. International Maritime Organization. Retrieved from IMO: <https://www.imo.org>
11. IRENA. (2023). Renewable energy in small island developing states. Retrieved from International Renewable Energy Agency: <https://www.irena.org>
12. Jänicke, M. (2008). Ecological modernisation: New perspectives. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 16(5), 557–565. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2007.02.011>
13. MPA Singapore. (2023). Maritime Singapore Green Initiative. Retrieved from Maritime and Port Authority of Singapore: <https://www.mpa.gov.sg>
14. MSC. (2023). Certified sustainable seafood. Retrieved from Marine Stewardship Council: <https://www.msc.org>
15. OECD. (2022). Fossil fuel subsidies in the maritime sector. . <https://doi.org/10.1787/9a3b1c2d-en: OECD Publishing>.
16. OECD. (2022). Financing a sustainable ocean economy. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Retrieved from OECD: <https://www.oecd.org>
17. OECD. (2023). *The Ocean Economy in 2030*. . OECD Publishing.
18. Satria, A. e. (2021). Community-based coral reef restoration in Indonesia: Balancing ecology and livelihoods. *Marine Policy*, 132, 104693. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104693>

19. Schwartz-Shea, P. &. (2016). Interpretive research design: Concepts and processes. Rout ledge.
- Tran, T. A. (2023). LNG as a transitional fuel in shipping: Risks and opportunities. Energy Policy, 172. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2022.113325>
20. UNCTAD. (2021). The ocean economy: Opportunities and challenges for small island developing states. Retrieved from United Nations Conference on Trade and Development: <https://unctad.org>
21. UNEP. (2021). From Pollution to Solution: A global assessment of marine litter and plastic pollution. Retrieved from United Nations Environment Programme: <https://www.unep.org>
22. Viridin, J. e. (2021). The Blue Economy: A systematic review of definitions and frameworks. Ocean & Coastal Management, 214, 105939. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ocecoaman.2021.105939>
23. World Economic Forum. (2022). Blockchain for sustainable ocean economies. Retrieved from WEF: <https://www.weforum.org>

China's Rise or US's Retreat?

By Dr. Zainab Ahmed

China is the biggest question and proclaimed challenge of the US for more than a decade now. The return of President Trump to oval office implicitly determines the return of his policy to counter rising China, deeming it the biggest and crucial challenge for the US. Trump 2.0 has sent the shockwaves throughout the world as he seems to be aggressively deterministic about his goal, "Make America Great again", with policies unconventional to American political culture.

The idea to reclaim the US's position as a manufacturing hub, rich in jobs for American people and rip immigrants of earlier available equitable opportunities, has its own dynamics as 80% of the country's GDP is based on services sector. In order to counter China, the policy of protectionism in trade can have detrimental long-term implications for the US not vice versa. The policy seems to placate the midland American white voter bank of him but has various practical implications globally.

The US national security strategy of 2017 specified China as the imminent challenge to its interests worldwide while the US national security strategy of 2022 reaffirmed this position. This strategic position followed China's Belt and Road Initiative, manifesting its capacity to rise to global power status and responding to the strategic environment of the Indio Pacific which had pressured China's trade routes.

It remains a fact that China's speedy economic recovery post 2008 financial crisis alarmed the western world, as by 2013 it had already surpassed the US economy in purchasing power parity. The US led neoliberal economic order was quite confident of the Chinese economic liberalization expecting eventual democratization which could lead to considerable strengthening of the neoliberal globalized world behind China. It seems there is a growing concern in the US that the drive to liberalize the world, in particular China and Russia, went wrong paving the way for the rise of tech-politico oligarchy.

The strength of Chinese political and social resilience manifested with the launch of BRI, braving through the trade war during first term of President Trump, and post Covid-19 economic recovery, though comparatively slower but rivaling the at same pace. In 2024, the size of China's economy stood at USD 18.80 trillion, in terms of GDP, standing next to the US with USD 29 trillion. However, the GDP in terms of Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) has reached USD 29 trillion.

The third largest economy is of Germany with USD 4.7 trillion showing a huge gap with the second largest. In 2023, the US economy in terms of Purchasing Power Parity was estimated to be around USD 27.7 trillion, putting it behind China. According to World Bank's estimates, putting in PPP, China's economy is 18.8% larger than that of US. The growth in service sector in China is quite remarkable with information transmission, software and IT at 10.9% plus, while land easing and business service at 10.4% plus. These are a few generally referred to economic indicators. Other factors manifest more plausible stark difference. In 2024, China produced twice as much electricity as the US, 12.6 times as much steel and 22 times as much cement, while latter's shipyards accounted for over 50% of global output. In 2023, China produced 20.3 million vehicles as compared to 10.6 million by the US.

In 2025, with Trump 2.0, it is quite clear that he will continue the same policy rather aggressively. His intense efforts to bring peace deals in two critical wars; Gaza-Israel and Russia-Ukraine are

more focused on bringing best options to American advantage. During President Trump's first term the accomplishment of Abraham Accords was a strategic move to give more role to Israel in the Middle East and increasing its eventual reach in the Indo Pacific. This policy seems to continue as Trump 2.0 embarks on further efforts to normalize the relations between Arab countries and Israel. The pressure President Trump has built on Ukraine's Zelensky and Europe gives comparative advantage to Russia in any upcoming deal, hoping to disengage the US defense and economic resources in Europe and extending a strategic bait to Russia which may lure it to distance itself from China. However, the comparative advantages President Trump is trying to offer to President Putin in the peace deal would not be effective enough to break Russian strategic partnership with China in the long term.

The academic discourse has been setting stage in the US for a decade that power shift from the US to China is imminent that may entail a conflict. In 2015, Graham Allison, a professor of political science at Harvard pushed through his thesis that the rise of China would be likely to initiate a conflict with the US as historically the established powers initiate a conflict to contain the rising power. However, China has successfully avoided being part of any conflict until now. Gradually, it seems to have established its position as peace broker in various parts of the world and through offering investment, economic partnerships and mediation to some extent. An important aspect of this strategy is to differentiate its position from the US as to response to conflicts and efforts at showing its global image as peace builder. Conversely, the US has become direct and indirect part of so many conflicts that the world order it established post-World War II is serious jeopardy. The serious blow to its reputation and international legitimacy has been its role in the recent Gaza conflict. Apparently, it seems that the price of being unconditional Israeli ally has been paid by the Democrats in the elections, but the American supremacy has seriously been hurt globally. The world does not look up to the US for peace.

Another fundamental aspect of President Trump's foreign policy is his commitment to limit the role of the US globally, which he deems to be the factor of internal problems. His efforts at withdrawing the support to international commitments like USAID and Voice of America, the mouthpiece of its international position provide enough space to the emerging power. The system the US had built internationally over decades was the structure ensuring its influence in every part of the world. Withdrawal from that commitment means the rollback of that structure.

The world grappling with poly crises already requires a global leadership which if they could find in China, would be welcomed. However, China does not seem inclined to be global hegemon rather resort to a multilayered world order with various regional powers aligned with its economic partnerships. Another lucrative aspect of this partnership is that China does not show its commitment to a single political system rather has proven a tendency to offer support to any political system nationally acceptable contrary to the US's commitment to democratization. Thus, it's the US's structural withdrawal from international commitments and economic realities opening the way for China's rise more than its own obligation to this goal.

Taliban, Afghan-Pakistan Relations and the Region: Four Years Past 2021,

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan

Abstract

Afghanistan-Pakistan relations have been rooted in close bonds between the two peoples. However, Afghan Jihad and later emergence of the Taliban have changed the fabric of Afghan politics, Pakistan-Afghan border region and bilateral relations. Terrorism, militancy and violent extremism have become perpetual threats to peace and stability in both countries. The increasing geo-political polarization has been preventing the region to combat these threats and ensuing instability. The ultimate solution of these challenges lies in both Pakistan and Afghanistan to address basics of their relations and work towards harnessing a conducive environment for people's movements, trade and economic exchanges. The regional economic integration and connectivity can be instrumental in achieving durable stability, harmony and progress. Security and counter-terrorism cooperation is vital for these goals. But Afghanistan and Pakistan will also have to guard against their border region from once again becoming theatre of a new major power rivalry or war.

Introduction

15 August 2025, marking the fourth anniversary of the Taliban takeover and, consequent formation of the second rule of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA), despite relative calm in the situation the larger picture of peace, stability and normalization of Afghanistan in the contemporary world order remains unclear and hazy. During this period, the Taliban's Afghan Interim Government regime is fully in control of the ground situation and has consolidated its hold on the instruments of power in Afghanistan. While security threats continue to remain due to the presence of global and regional terrorist groups in some regions and pockets in the country, for the first time in past fifty years all parts of Afghanistan are accessible under a central authority and without any active armed insurgency or militancy².

A valid question that arises in this context is that despite the Taliban significantly extending their dominance over Afghanistan in many ways, why there is limited progress towards broadening of Afghanistan's engagement with the region and the world leading to their international recognition. In this regard, most notably, the developments in the crucial relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have defied all expectations, calculations and assessments. To find plausible responses or explanations to such questions and queries, it is important to dig deeper into key inter-related factors not only underlying Afghanistan's progression in the current global and regional environment but also with the country's most vital relations with Pakistan. The most critical factors in this context are:

- i. Impact of Taliban Movement – Ideological and Political Dimensions
- ii. Terrorism, Militancy and Violent Extremism;
- iii. Peoples' Exchanges, Economic Cooperation and Trade;
- iv. Global Geo-political Currents; and
- v. Regional Cooperation and Connectivity.

I. Impact of Taliban Movement – Ideological and Political Dimensions

The most significant factor for Afghanistan's normalization and mainstreaming in the global order under the Taliban 2.0 rule in Afghanistan is the impact of the Taliban Movement in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region. Since Jihadist movements took roots in Afghanistan and Pakistan in mid-1970s with the support of the United States to contain the then increasing Soviet influence in Afghanistan, the struggle between religionists and political forces has been at the center stage of Afghan politics.

Though the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet occupation strengthened religion-based militancy in Afghanistan and the region, the Afghan Jihadist parties of 1970s and 1980s were supportive of democratic political and constitutional frameworks in Afghanistan. The emergence of the Taliban in 1994 as a Pashtun Sunni Islamic armed group signifying a major shift in Afghanistan's political scene redefining concepts of politics, governance, security, constitutionalism, culture, ethnic-relations, human rights, role of women in various activities and many other areas. Within two years, a meltdown caused by infighting among the Jihadi groups enabled the Taliban to form the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan rule from 1996-2001 under their first Emir Mullah Muhammad Umar.

It, however, became evident that the Taliban had no roadmap or understanding about governing a state as large as Afghanistan except the religious education received at the large network of Deobandi madrassahs in Afghanistan and Pakistan established to forge Jihad against Soviet occupation forces. The U.S. military intervention in Afghanistan removed the Taliban from power but provided them two decades to muster their military capabilities, strengthen community linkages and better organize through skillful diplomatic engagement with the international community.

Consequently, the resurrection of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in 2021 came without much challenge from other Afghan or external actors. The Taliban's presence on Afghan scene for over three decades including their past four years' rule with unhindered authority exposes some challenges for communities in Afghanistan and for the region and the world with regard to adjusting to the Taliban Movement's ideological and political philosophy, its views about the statecraft and its interaction with other countries, groups and entities within the confines of the contemporary international order.

During the first Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (1996-2001), the Taliban did not work for evolving a Constitutional legal order laying down a framework for governance and politics in line with their religious philosophy. After assuming power again in 2021, a notable Taliban scholar and the Chief Justice of Afghanistan Sheikh Abd Al-Hakim al-Haqqani published a book in April 2022 titled *al-Imara al-Islamiyya wa-nizamuha*, (The Islamic Emirate and its System). The book with a Preface by Taliban Emir Hibatullah Akhundzada is described as the *Mussawidah* or the manual for forming and running of the Islamic state in Afghanistan by the Taliban³.

Apart from rigid religious interpretations arising from Deobandi school of thought particularly on issues of human rights and participation of women in different walks of life, this document defines the concept of statehood for Afghan state under the Taliban which is quite different from the concept of nationstates in the Westphalian system and the UN-based global order. Under this concept the Emirate has to be led and run by the Taliban and no system is conceived for sharing power between the Taliban non Taliban elements or coalition

governments between the Taliban and other parties, groups or individuals. Assumption, therefore remains for continuation of exclusive Taliban regime in the country for an indefinite period. No other work explaining Sheikh Haqqani's book or any additional interpretations on politics and governance structures by the Taliban have been brought in the public light.

This dimension is crucial in terms of impact on Afghan Taliban's relations with other Afghan political and ethnic communities as well as in the context of Afghanistan's relations with other countries including Afghanistan-Pakistan relations⁴. While the Taliban maintain that the politics and governance are internal matter of a country, these developments in Afghanistan have consequences for other countries particularly the neighbours. During their insurgency against the U.S. and NATO forces, the Afghan Taliban had shared ideology and support linkages with the religious militant groups having agenda for neighbouring countries, most notably, the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) for China, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) for the Central Asian countries.

It is natural for these groups to have ideological inspirations for emulating in their respective countries what the Afghan Taliban have achieved in Afghanistan. The most relevant case in point is of the TTP which remains engaged in efforts for establishing a Shariah-based Taliban government in Pakistan or parts of Pakistan in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the group has significant influence⁵. TTP's militancy and terrorist incidents carried out by the group in Pakistan have significantly increased since the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. Though Emir Hibatuullah Akhundzada has labelled cross-border attacks by Afghan Taliban including those in Pakistan as 'haram' and 'forbidden, the ideological linkage between the two Taliban movements remains strong⁶.

For Pakistan, the increasing trend of Talibanization infiltrating from across the border in Afghanistan is a major challenge also impinging upon bilateral relations. Many Pakistani analysts endorse such apprehensions. The TTP leadership has not only taken Bayt on Afghan Taliban Emir Mullah Hibatullah Akhundzada, but the key TTP commanders have also found refuge, shelter and support inside Afghanistan. The TTP leadership is using the same tactics not only in military approach by targeting Pakistan's strategic interests but also in luring local communities through appointing shadow governors etc. like those used by the Afghan Taliban in their insurgency against the U.S. and NATO forces. The TTP's demands from Pakistan regarding weaponization, imposition of Shariah by the group in their areas and annulling merger of FATA as part of KP make it difficult for Pakistan to politically reconcile with the TTP within Pakistan's constitutional framework.

Assessing the future direction of the Taliban rule in Afghanistan, one possibility is that the Afghan Taliban's rigid stance on these issues may be a tactical position viz a viz the U.S. and major global powers to secure international recognition of the Afghan Interim Government and its seat in the UN and other international and regional organizations. And once there are signs of progress in that direction, the Afghan Taliban may gradually take measures to transform the governance and political system responding to the aspirations of the people of Afghanistan which in turn may also be helpful in developing harmonious partnerships with all neighbouring countries including Pakistan and the rest of the world. Already some regional countries including China, Russia, Pakistan, Uzbekistan and the UAE have established full diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and are expanding engagement despite reservations in many areas.

However, if the Afghan Taliban continue on the current track following a rigid approach in political and governance domain, it is likely to aggravate the process of Afghanistan's

mainstreaming into the international relations and broadening of engagement with other countries of the world. Unfortunately, such a scenario will prolong the suffering of the Afghan people due to the prevailing sanctions on the Taliban and economic and banking restrictions against the country.

II. Terrorism, Militancy and Violent Extremism

Pakistan-Afghanistan border region has been the theatre of unending terrorism, militancy and violent extremism for past five decades. The 2,600 km long border inhabited by 50 million Pashtuns living on either side of the border linked through centuries-old tribal, religious and cultural bonds remained battleground of major armed power struggle through Afghan Jihad in 1980s against Soviet occupation, a bloody civil war in 1990s complicated by regional proxies and a Taliban insurgency against the presence of the U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan from 2001-2021. War and militancy becoming the most productive industry and a growing nexus between terrorism and organized crime such as trafficking of weapons, fighters and drugs has not only continued to elude the peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region, but has been the most significant factor in impeding good-neighbourly relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The scale of Afghanistan's terrorism and militancy problem has been complex. In the final years of the Afghan Taliban insurgency between 2018 and 2021, the number of terrorists and active militant fighters in Afghanistan had significantly increased to around 100,000 – some 70,000 Afghan Taliban and around 15000 including TTP, ETIM, IMU, ISKP and smaller outfits⁷. Managing such a large terrorism/militancy footprint became one of the most pressing challenges for the U.S. and NATO forces with their declining strength and the lack of capacity and prevailing corruption in the Afghan security forces and branches of administration under the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan led by then President Ashraf Ghani⁸.

The cross-border support networks of some of these groups with the elements in Pakistan further complicated the counter-terrorism and counter-militancy campaigns in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Following key developments since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan have caused an increase in the terrorist activities especially in Pakistan:

One, as the Afghan provinces were falling to the Taliban one after another in July-August 2021, the Afghan state control was dissipating and a number of prisons were broken during which thousands of fighters, militants and miscreants reportedly fled from detention. The Taliban never acknowledged this act nor they gave any explanations for these allegations. The reports and assessments of the security experts, however, indicate that most of these militants were from either the TTP or the ISKP and rejoined the fighting ranks following their release from the prison⁹.

Two, during 2020-21 the U.S. had been seriously engaged in transportation of their armour and weaponry from Afghanistan prior to the completion of the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces. However, a significant cache of weapons and security equipment could not be transported out of Afghanistan before completion of the U.S. withdrawal which came into the possession of the Afghan Taliban. Many reports claim that at least some part of these weapons made its way to the miscreants through connivance or black market¹⁰. While the assertions about the exact quantum of such weaponry cannot be verified, this element continues to remain part of the debate about increase in the terrorist activity in Pakistan in recent years.

Three, with the Taliban takeover, gap between perceptions and perspectives of the states of Pakistan and Afghanistan astonishingly widened particularly on issues relating to security and the dynamics of the bilateral relations. The respective expectations and narratives on the challenge of the TTP and the ways to deal with it were quite different. The Afghan Taliban advised that TTP fighters being Pakistanis living on Afghan soil, Pakistan has to enter into a dialogue with the TTP to address the issues amicably. But when Pakistan's security officials held two rounds of parleys with the TTP commanders in Kabul between April and June 2022, these proved futile for a longterm sustainable arrangement due to rigid attitude and demands of the TTP leadership¹¹.

Four, the significant increase in TTP-sponsored terrorism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa along with a spike in BLA-sponsored terrorist activities in Balochistan during recent years confirms Pakistan's assertion that terrorist financing and logistical support of these groups has significantly increased. Pakistan has repeatedly contended that India is exploiting Pakistan's vulnerability by funding TTP, BLA and their associated outfits to undertake terrorism in Pakistan. The Biden Administration despite the strength of Pakistan's contention preferred to keep itself aloof on these issues possibly showing its resentment to Pakistan on its two decade long Afghan campaign. However, the Trump Administration has been responsive to Pakistan's concerns on terrorism and has designated BLA and Majeed Brigade in the category of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO)¹².

However, for Pakistan too it would be wrong to put the blame of increasing terrorism in Pakistan squarely on Afghanistan or on the Afghan Taliban. In fact, the roots of terrorism in Pakistan, like in Afghanistan, are much deeper and related to the events and policies of past several decades. An exclusive military strategy to deal with menace of terrorism has proved to be counter-productive.

Pakistan needs a comprehensive policy with effective linkages between counter-terrorism, counterradicalism and counter-violent extremism for steering out of the decades of indoctrination and systemic radicalization. The Counter-Terrorism policy should also distinguish between the nuances of the TTP and BLA-related terrorism. In case of the TTP, the focus has to be on reintegration of the fighters into political and economic mainstreams of the life. The people in the merged FATA districts with heavy concentration of the TTP should be taken into confidence in the CT operations and should be provided with adequate development funds. In Balochistan, the government has to ensure political empowerment of the Baloch communities to address the deprivation and grievances along with a massive economic reconstruction plan.

Afghanistan and Pakistan should work together on a coordinated approach on counter-terrorism to foster a bilateral security dialogue which avoids finger pointing and blame-game of the past and instead helps the two sides to develop and strengthen practical cooperation in preventing acts of terrorism on each other's soil. Towards that end, it is vital to reform and reorient the relations between the security and intelligence institutions of the two countries. The institutional differences and distrust between the National Directorate of Security (NDS) of Afghanistan and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan during the 2001-2021 period prevented meaningful security cooperation between the two countries. Ironically, these differences have continued to exist between the two countries in some proportion even after the Taliban takeover in 2021.

However, it is now vital for both sides to take cognizance that a trust-based security partnership is in their mutual interest for eliminating decades-old extremist and terrorist violence from the two countries. The global and regional geo-political considerations underline the significance of cooperation with China as well as the U.S. in the area of counter-terrorism. China is a neighbour of both Afghanistan and Pakistan having crucial stakes in peace and stability in the region. All the three countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan and China are threatened by terrorism emanating from groups like the ISKP, TTP, BLA, ETIM and other terrorist outfits operating in the region. The three countries have recently re-activated the trilateral China-Afghanistan-Pakistan forum for developing convergence in the security and counterterrorism and promoting economic cooperation and regional connectivity.

On its part, China has also been supportive of Pakistan maintaining close engagement with the United States and Western allies in the field of counter-terrorism as such cooperation serves the common purpose of combating shared threat of terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism¹³. Close collaboration on security and terrorism-related matters has continued to exist between Pakistan and the United States since days of Afghan Jihad except some interruptions in 1990s and recently following the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.

However, following Pakistan-India military clashes both countries seem to be again cozying up with each other to strengthen cooperation in security and economic fields. Two back to back visits by Pakistan's Army Chief to the U.S. indicate that convergence is re-emerging between the two countries in many areas including the threat of terrorism emanating from Afghanistan. A strong Joint Statement on U.S.-Pakistan Counterterrorism Dialogue after the meeting of the two delegations in Islamabad on 12 August 2025 reaffirms shared commitment to combating terrorism, developing effective approaches against groups like BLA, ISKP and TTP including countering the use of emerging technologies for terrorism purposes and working closely in multilateral fora on counterterrorism issues¹⁴.

These U.S.-Pakistan convergence on counterterrorism is being welcomed in the U.S. as well as Pakistan. The U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio after the designation of BLA and its alias Majeed Brigade said "Terrorist designations play a critical role in our fight against the scourge and are an effective way to curtail support of terrorist activities". Balochistan's Chief Minister Sarfaraz Bugti also said "We welcome the U.S. decision to designate BLA and its alias Majeed Brigade as terrorist outfits" ¹⁵.

A renowned U.S. expert on security and strategic issues based in Washington Michael Kugelman posted on X "The U.S.-Pakistan counterterrorism dialogue joint statement is one of the most positive and effusive I have seen from these countries on CT for quite a few years. It reads like something from the immediate post-9/11 years. We have come a long way in very little time" ¹⁶.

Pakistan and Afghanistan working closely in coordination with each other on the Chinese and the U.S. tracks to counterterrorism can be a productive approach for elimination of decades-old terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism from Afghanistan and Pakistan. While Pakistan's interaction with the U.S. in security and counterterrorism is improving, there still remain serious gaps on the roadmap for engagement between the U.S. and the Afghan Interim Government and the recognition of a Taliban-led Afghanistan in the UN. In view of the situation prevailing since 2021 and the Afghan Interim Government staying out of the regional and international counterterrorism frameworks, the possibility of Afghanistan-Pakistan border

region transcending into a new phase of wider counter-terrorism war or re-activation of a form of “Over the Horizon (OTH) Strategy”¹⁷ would entail disastrous implications and would be contrary to the interests of durable peace and stability in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region.

III. Peoples’ Movements, Economic Cooperation and Trade

People to people relations have been the most important feature of the bilateral relations. Peoples living in both sides are related to each other through familial, tribal, religious, cultural and economic linkages. Based on centuries-old history of the region, thousands of people cross border every day, many of them more than once during 24 hours. This movement and interaction between the people has been so peaceful that it is often quoted by the elders that the border even remained opened during Pakistan’s wars with India on the eastern front in 1965 and 1971 without deployment of any troops on this Western border.

An interaction with border officials on different crossings indicates that an estimated 40,000-50,000 individuals continue to cross border every day from various designated and non-designated border crossings because of their social and economic needs¹⁸. However, as a result of the war against terrorism and the U.S. and NATO operations in Afghanistan, the movement between the two countries has become difficult and restricted. Visa is now being imposed strictly in order to ensure documented movement of the people. The introduction of online visa regime by Pakistan has also not succeeded in resolving the problems of Pakistani visa for Afghan nationals.

Pakistanis desirous of visiting Afghanistan also face a highly restrictive Afghan visa regime and harassment of the visitors by security and intelligence authorities. These restrictions have not only significantly reduced the volume of trade and business exchanges with Afghanistan but has also brought down the number of family visits that has been historically an important part of people to people relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The solution to this problem lies in evolving a technologybased and data-driven process allowing the documented travel between the two countries in a facilitative manner and not continue to brush the issue aside.

In view of Afghanistan being an epicenter of war, conflict and militancy for past half century, the economic business and trade exchanges of Afghanistan with the neighbouring countries especially Pakistan have remained undeveloped and primitive. Afghanistan being a landlocked country, the bulk of the trade and transit takes place through the long border between the two countries, but the border crossings are too little in number and not equipped for modern trade and business exchanges still following nineteenth century practices and procedures.

As a result, the annual bilateral trade only grew to a maximum of \$3 billion a year during the U.S. and NATO years around 2011-12 and has subsequently continued to decrease. Following the Taliban takeover, due to economic and banking restrictions on the regime and a reduced demand the bilateral trade is hovering around just \$ 1 billion a year – an embarrassingly low figure for the two countries with large populations of 250 million and 40 million respectively. Despite Pakistan being historically a favored transit route for Afghan cargo to the world, the quantum of the Afghan transit through Pakistan has also continued to progressively decline. The Afghan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) signed in 2010 replacing the Afghan Transit Agreement (ATA) of 1965 was not fully responsive to the needs of Afghan transit.

The Afghan leaders from the past and present government¹⁹ have continued to say that Pakistan's ports are the most desirable transit route for Pakistan but these are not the most reliable and dependable routes. The APTTA expired in 2020 and in the absence of an agreement between the two sides has been kept functional unilaterally by Pakistan side on ad-hoc basis. Due to frequent disruptions caused by border closures, a significant part of the transit has shifted to other relatively difficult routes through Iran and Central Asian states.

The primary reason for lack of business and economic exchanges between Pakistan and Afghanistan has been disruptive bilateral engagement and low priority being attached by the two sides to economic interaction including trade, transit and investment framework. The presence of the two decade-long U.S. and NATO forces was not used by the two sides for focusing on economic realities. Relations between governments in Pakistan and Hamid Karzai and Ashraf Ghani eras remained strained, to put it quite mildly. Since 2001, the distrust between the two sides has continued to grow with blame game and political point-scoring in the public domain dominating the discourse instead of efforts for promoting harmony and dialogue between the two states. Contrary to expectations, this trend among the governments has not ended even after the resumption of government in Kabul by the Taliban in 2021. While the Afghan Taliban regime has been faced with sanctions and economic restrictions during past four years, their reluctance to use economic and social exchanges with Pakistan towards strengthening peace and stability explains for the level of mutual distrust.

Ironically, both countries have continued to ignore a pertinent reality that coming out of the long era of conflict, wars and terrorism requires meaningful transformation in past approaches to their relations and interaction by addressing the fundamentals of the relations. It is important to reiterate, even at the cost of repetition, that the crux of Pakistan-Afghanistan relations is in people to people interaction which should be used as a key leverage for promoting friendship between the two countries.

Pakistan being the host to largest number of Afghan refugees has yielded many advantages that Pakistan can, and should, use as instruments for enhancing our positive influence. In past five decades, several hundred thousand Afghans have been educated in Pakistan at the same expense that is incurred by the state of Pakistan on Pakistani students. More than 100,000 Afghans who graduated from Pakistan are serving in Afghanistan's public and private sector institutions. If appropriately used, they can be an important source of Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan, irrespective of the ruling party or group in that country.

For many many years, Pakistan has continued to award at least 1,000 scholarships annually for Afghan students in Pakistan's professional colleges and universities. All Afghan governments and the people of Afghanistan have recognized Pakistan's passion and contribution in hosting millions of Afghan refugees with open arms, like no other country in the world has done.

However, repatriation of Afghan refugees, as and when it happens, should be done in a dignified manner and fulfilling humanitarian considerations. Pushing Afghans who have lived in the country for decades or those who have been born in Pakistan into Afghanistan without considering their plight, belongings and businesses here would leave scars on bilateral relations. Repatriation has to be a planned process spanning over at least a few years and systematically dividing the refugees into various categories. Most importantly, people to people relations and the refugee matters have to be dealt constructively to strengthen economic and humanitarian interaction between the two countries.

IV. Impact of Global Geo-political Currents

The current era in global geopolitics is characterized by complex polarization and discord. The PostWorld War II order which was premised on respect for sovereignty and adherence to rule of law in international relations is crumbling with increasing instances of unilateralism and imposed wars and crimes against humanity especially against vulnerable states and peoples. Wars in Ukraine, Israel's genocide against Palestinians in Gaza, Israeli and U.S. strikes against Iran and wars between Thailand and Cambodia and Azerbaijan and Armenia are some of the manifestations of the increasing turbulence in the world. A group of states is evolving as an alternate pole in the U.S.-dominated world order being gradually weakened by the emerging ground realities and re-alignments. China and Russia along with the fora such as SCO and BRICS are gaining political and economic influence in the world. The U.S.-led networks to counter the rise of China such as Quad are also falling apart as witnessed by the expanding rift between India and the U.S. and latter's increasing convergence with Pakistan. The U.S. President Donald Trump's tariff war against almost all the countries of the world is adding to the polarity in the global politics. In such an acutely polarized world, durable peace, stability and restoration of Afghanistan to its normalized place is a seemingly low international priority. China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Central Asian countries and many Gulf states are gradually expanding their relations with Afghan Interim Government hoping that broadening of engagement would enhance stability in Afghanistan and likely bring the changes in the Taliban's policies on inclusivity, human rights and counter-terrorism. Given the gaps in the engagement between the U.S. and its Western allies and the Taliban, developing consensus on the action in the UN Security Council for removal of sanctions against the Taliban and lifting of the western countries' sanctions against Afghan economy are apparently unlikely in the short-term due to prevailing geo-political environment as well as lack of progress in many key areas by the Taliban regime. Paradoxically, an enhanced U.S.-China rivalry in the region entails the risk of a resurgence of a new war against terrorism particularly in Afghanistan-Pakistan border region which can have negative implications for stabilizing already turbulent Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas. To avoid that kind of scenario, a balancing act will be important on part of Pakistan and Afghanistan in dealing with security and counterterrorism challenges with a degree of caution and sagacity. It would require Pakistan and Afghanistan to enhance their understanding on ground realities, work closely on their bilateral relations and have effective trilateral interactions with China and the U.S., respectively. One way of managing tensions and rivalries is to create common economic stakes in the region.

V. Regional Cooperation and Connectivity

Regional cooperation and connectivity offer huge incentives for promoting durable peace, stability and harmony in the region. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the hub of connectivity being located at the confluence of several regions including Central Asia, West Asia, Eurasia, Middle East and South Asia. The trans-Afghan connectivity projects and initiatives such as TAPI, CASA-1000, Lapis Lazuli corridor and China-Afghanistan logistics connectivity have not been able to make considerable progress because of the war and instability that prevailed in Afghanistan for several decades and the wave of terrorism in bordering regions of Pakistan, especially Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. Even after the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 and formation of a Taliban government there, the UN sanctions on the Taliban and economic and banking restrictions against Afghanistan as well as the security and terrorism threats have continued to prevent major economic initiatives to move forward in a meaningful way.

Another factor that has continued to impede initiatives of regional economic integration has been the stalemate in India-Pakistan relations. The Indian attitude in the past two decades has been to deny any space to Pakistan with a view to subjugate it by inflicting maximum pressure and economic damage. India has kept SAARC hostage since 2016 by boycotting Pakistan's turn for hosting the organization's Summit and its Presidency. India's maneuvering with Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries during the years of the U.S. and NATO presence in Afghanistan has been key factor in scuttling initiatives for Central Asia South Asia connectivity.

The regional politics, however, is beginning to undergo a subtle change. Since the establishment of the second Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan, Central Asian countries have adopted a positively nuanced strategy of maintaining and strengthening economic engagement with Afghanistan while leaving their political and ideological differences aside. This has led to positive signals coming from three Central Asia countries bordering Afghanistan – Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan. The framework agreement for feasibility study of the trilateral railway project between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan has been signed recently in Kabul²⁰.

Turkmenistan has also been showing keen interest in taking projects like TAPI, TAP (Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan) power transmission line and developing a supply framework of LNG from Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Chaman border crossing. Tajikistan, which historically has serious political issues with the Taliban governments in Afghanistan has also shown signs of constructive engagement with the Afghan Interim Government with a view to strengthen economic cooperation and connectivity as a way towards stabilization of its relations with Afghanistan.

Central Asia and South Asia have continued to struggle for making progress on evolving regional trade and transit framework. In the previous years, Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries have continued to express their interest in access to India through Pakistan's land routes, which has not been possible because of India's reluctance towards normalizing relations with Pakistan. In view of Pakistan's increasing significance and alignments at global and regional level, a thinking is emerging in the Central Asian countries to go for connectivity with Pakistan through Afghanistan and India which can be later roped into the process when it is willing to appreciate the realities on the ground. At Termez Dialogue held in Termez visa free trade zone that Uzbekistan has exclusively developed on Afghan border for promoting business, trade and humanitarian contacts with Afghanistan, the participating experts and think tanks relayed positive vibes about moving forward on connectivity projects with South Asia²¹.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have to take corresponding measures for realization of this historic opportunity of changing the direction of the regional politics from mutual political dissent to incorporating an economic approach to attain stability and progress. The discourse on Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) should actually be broadened to transform it into a Regional Transit Trade Agreement (RTTA) linking South Asia with Central Asia and and explore future trade and transit connectivity with Russia in the north and other West Asian and Eurasian trading zones. A progress in this direction would incentivize development of much-needed Pakistan-Afghanistan infrastructure in road, railways and energy as well as adequate border crossing facilities and procedures to handle regional trade and transit.

Despite India-Pakistan relations currently being in a serious confrontational mode, Pakistan can use this opportunity to be innovative and futuristic in terms of its thinking on transit through its land ports and crossing points. The RTTA allowing two-way flow of goods from Pakistan's land crossing points with India can significantly enhance Pakistan's strategic and economic leverages and further strengthen Pakistan's image in its partnerships with Central Asia and Afghanistan.

The recent developments have reaffirmed the significance of Afghanistan-China-Pakistan trilateral economic linkages. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan cannot utilize the full potential of trade and economic linkages with China without developing supportive economic linkages with that country. Towards this end, the interaction at trilateral level in recent months had reiterated commitment for moving forward on extension of CPEC to Pakistan. The three countries will also have to take effective measures for developing and strengthening logistics and supply chain network to ensure substantive flows of trade, transit and services relating to China.

In order to capitalize on the enticing opportunities for regional economic integration, Pakistan and Afghanistan need to reshape their engagement with the lens of economy, trade, transit and business. The two countries require to develop effective transportation, communication and logistic networks linking Kabul, Jalalabad and Peshawar and in the south between Kandahar and Quetta. Other border crossings along the long border have to be made functional and facilitative to trade, transit and economic exchanges.

It is also important to underline that the economic, business and connectivity agenda requires secure environment and addressing threats of violence and terrorism emanating from various groups in the region. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan need to take care of the security challenges on their respective soils and strengthen the bilateral engagement to effectively overcome the cross-border threats.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Pakistan and Afghanistan today are at a crossroads after the decades of war, militancy and external military interventions in Afghanistan which have also seriously affected the fabric of natural relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The border areas on Pakistan side particularly the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are also witnessing a phase of instability aggravated by Afghan developments as well as other factors. The recent developments in the region, however, point towards improved prospects of stability, harmony and progress. Following the withdrawal of the U.S. and NATO forces, war and conflict in the country has seemingly ended though return of Afghanistan to full normalization in the global order would require addressing issues of constitutionalism, human rights and counterterrorism in a more comprehensive way and in accordance with norms of international relations and law. In the meantime, Afghanistan's engagement with major powers, is gradually expanding and its neighbours want to put the turbulent past behind and move to a new era of regional economic integration and connectivity. On its part, in recent years Pakistan has significantly strengthened its global and regional partnerships. With a strategic partnership with China and an increasing mutual trust in relations with the U.S., Pakistan is distinctly poised to play a role of a pivot of stability in the region. In addition, Pakistan's engagement with key regional countries such as Russia, Turkey, Azerbaijan, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar also continues to grow in substance. Most importantly, in a military escalation imposed by India in May this year Pakistan not only gave a befitting response but also proved its credentials as a mature player in international politics and diplomacy. At this defining juncture, Pakistan and

Afghanistan need to focus on their bilateral dynamics and work out a model of engagement to enable them to not only tackle the challenges of security and terrorism threatening the regional peace and stability, but steer their way towards bilateral cooperation in trade and economy and regional connectivity and economic integration. Following are key recommendations to the states of Pakistan and Afghanistan, in this regard:

- Strengthen state to state relations based on the principles of respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs of each other
- Deepen institutional contacts to foster cooperative relations in political, security and economic domains,
- Attach priority to addressing issues of the people to people exchanges and growth of bilateral trade, transit and business
- Promote initiatives, endeavours and projects for regional connectivity and economic integration,
- Avoid their countries and the region from becoming theatre of a new regional proxy war or battle ground of major power rivalry.

Afghanistan in BRI: A Sign of Increasing Chinese Diplomacy

By Tahir Khan

Major developments are underway for promoting connectivity and economic integration in the region. In this regard, there are reports of China and Afghanistan have agreed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) regarding the expansion of China's trillion-dollar global infrastructure project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), into Afghanistan.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in bilateral meetings with key Afghan Taliban leaders in Kabul on August 20, 2025 assured inclusion of Afghanistan in the BRI, which would go a long way in boosting economic growth and social sector development in Afghanistan. This reflects Beijing's policy to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation with Afghanistan in various sectors within the framework of the BRI. This would progressively promote practical cooperation in economy and trade in the country devastated by over four decades of war and conflict in the country including the U.S.-NATO invasion in 2001.

The Chinese Foreign Minister, who was in Kabul for the 6th Afghanistan-ChinaPakistan trilateral meeting, met with Afghan Prime Minister Mullah Hassan Akhund and Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani, besides holding bilateral talks with Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi. This was Wang's second visit to Afghanistan during the Taliban's four-year rule. He last travelled to Kabul in March 2022.

Another positive aspect of the visit was that the Chinese delegation reiterated the country's quest for engagement with Kabul and to pursue the policy of noninterference in Afghanistan's internal affairs. Wang, also a member of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China's Central Committee, informed Afghan leaders that Beijing's approach towards Afghanistan is not conditions-based but it will pursue an interest-based approach and will also continue political support for Afghanistan.

Being Afghanistan's immediate neighbour security is of immense importance for China and, therefore, Wang Yi in his meeting with Afghan Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani urged Afghanistan "to take firm actions to crack down on the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and other international terror groups so as to safeguard China-Afghanistan cooperation," according to China's state Xinhua news agency. According to the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beijing Afghan Prime Minister Akhund had promised to "never allow any force to use Afghan territory to threaten China". On his part, Haqqani, one of the most influential Taliban leaders, told Wang that "Afghanistan attaches great importance to China's security concerns, adding that Afghanistan will never allow anyone to use its territory to undermine China's security". China has long been discussing the issue of ETIM with the Afghan leaders through its engagement and quiet diplomacy. It has never applied pressure tactics and has rather opposed arbitrary pressures on Afghan government.

Chinese policy reflects an approach of seeking durable stability in Afghanistan through support of the Afghan government so that the threat of terrorism emanating from the Afghan soil could be addressed in a more comprehensive and long term manner.

The Chinese FM also reiterated China's firm position for the unfreezing of Afghanistan's assets. After the Taliban takeover in August 2021, the U.S. had frozen \$9.5 billion in assets belonging to the Afghan central bank and despite efforts to resolve the issue the Afghan funds have not been released yet.

China-Afghan Interaction through Wakhan Corridor:

The Chinese FM said his country “supports an early resumption of bilateral patrols in the Wakhan Corridor to maintain peace and tranquility in border areas.” The call came amid reports that the Afghan government is building a road up-to border with China to open another trade route. Call for a joint patrolling is justified in view of Beijing’s security concerns and its desire for enhancing security along the joint border. On their part, the Taliban leaders have continued to express commitment that no one would be allowed to use Afghan soil against China. Taliban leaders are interested in the opening of Wakhan route for direct trade with China and believe that this route will also provide opportunities for Central Asian states and even Russia and Iran to connect with Afghanistan.

China-Afghan interaction after the Taliban takeover

It is important to objectively review the progress taking place in ChinaAfghanistan interaction since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021. Following are the key aspects of this interaction:

1. What are the Taliban's expectations of China?

The Taliban consider China as one of the most or perhaps the most important of their partners for future economic development. Two factors are primarily behind their calculation. One, China being a neighbour has a contiguity with Afghanistan and the stability of in Afghanistan and its economic growth are mutually beneficial for the two countries. Two, in the current global political and economic conditions, China is possibly the only country that can inject capital and technology into Afghanistan for economic growth and development. Therefore, the Afghan Interim Government is keen to strengthen its relations with China in a smooth and effective manner without hitting any snags.

2. What are the Taliban's dissatisfaction and disappointment with China?

The Taliban government in Afghanistan considers China as a reliable partner. However, the Taliban are conscious that China’s main concern and demand remains action by the Taliban against ETIM or other Uighur militants. Taliban are aware that in view of their domestic sensitivities and ideological inclinations it would be internally challenging to take a firm action against these groups for their complete elimination from Afghan soil. However, the Taliban are also cognizant that if they can find a reasonable solution to this threat for China, it would pave the way for further consolidating China-Afghanistan economic partnership.

3. What are the Taliban's core demands from China?

The Taliban’s main demand from China is to recognize their (the Taliban’s) control over Afghanistan and move forward for their formal recognition without attaching any conditions. China is the first country who has formally sent its ambassador to Afghanistan and has formally received an Afghan Taliban ambassador. However, in view of the restrictions under the UNSC resolutions, formal recognition of the Taliban seems a difficult proposition unless there is an international acceptability. China will have to gradually engage with other members of the UNSC and other relevant states for exploring a way forward on the matter and the Taliban themselves would also need to take certain actions that can be helpful in creating a conducive environment.

4. *What is China's strategic positioning in the Taliban's diplomacy?*

China is following a realistic but gradual and consistent approach of expanding its engagement with Afghanistan and normalizing the Afghan government's relations with the rest of the world. At a bilateral level, China's efforts are aimed at increasing its investment in mining and commercial endeavours in Afghanistan. At another level, China is encouraging Afghanistan's increased engagement with the region's various platforms such as Neighbours meeting, Moscow Format and SCO. This interaction is helping the Afghan interim government in broadening its interaction with the region as well as the international community.

5. *What is the extent of China's economic cooperation with Afghanistan?*

A. The mining sector:

The mining sector is the most important economic resource and leverage for Afghanistan. According to the surveys of the US Geological Services several years ago, Afghanistan's mineral resources have an estimated value of over one trillion USD. Afghanistan's mineral reserves include precious and rare earth metals such as iron, copper, gold, lithium, silicon and many other such minerals vital for sophisticated industries like electric vehicles and development of microchips. China has already acquired contracts of major mining endeavours such Aynak Copper mines, iron ore projects and Amu Darya oil exploration. As soon as banking and financial restrictions are over, China's footprint is likely to expand exponentially especially in the mining sector investments.

B. The industrialization:

Despite the US presence in Afghanistan, the state of industrialization has remained grossly under-developed in the country. Over the years, not much has been invested in the industrial policy framework. The facilities supporting industrial production are either non-existent or at a primitive stage. In addition, since the Taliban take-over due to sanctions and banking restrictions it is not possible to make international transactions due to which opening of LCs for raw material imports cannot be undertaken. The transportation networks such as railways and motorways are also non-existent and transportation of products from Afghanistan to other countries continues to be a major impediment. However, the Taliban government in the last four years has been working towards creating conditions for investments in the industrial sectors despite the challenges emanating from sanctions and international isolation.

C. China's market access and trade corridors:

China is potentially one of the largest investors for Afghanistan. Traditionally, China's market access to and from Afghanistan has been through Pakistan's long border with Afghanistan in the south or through a longer route traveling via Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. While the Pakistan route has been the most economical one, increasing Pakistan-Afghanistan tensions in recent years have practically reduced the vitality of this group. China and Afghanistan have plans to develop the Wakhan Corridor in the north eastern part of Afghanistan but it may take time as the terrain on the Chinese side is extremely difficult with harsh weather conditions. Therefore, availability of multiple routes between China and Afghanistan will remain an important requirement for trade,

transit and connectivity and Afghanistan, Pakistan and China will have to engage in close consultations to overcome the political and security challenges in the way.

Importance of China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral cooperation

In view of the commonality of interest, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan have been gradually coming closer to strengthen the trilateral cooperation mechanisms in the areas of security as well as economic cooperation, trade and connectivity. Counter-Terrorism cooperation between Pakistan, Afghanistan and China is the need of the hour and the three countries to evolve a common approach for taking actions against terrorist groups such as TTP, BLA, ETIM or any other groups threatening the security of any of the three neighbouring countries.

In the area of economic cooperation, China is the leading investor in Pakistan and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is the flagship project of the mega Chinese connectivity initiative Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China is also the top investor in Afghanistan with interests in expanding its footprint in mining, industrial, agriculture, energy and trade sectors. The Chinese economic interests are being seriously threatened by constant attacks on Chinese personnel and projects in Pakistan by TTP, BLA and their associates.

It is, therefore, important development that China, Afghanistan and Pakistan have been able to work together to reinvigorate their trilateral consultations in Kabul for deepening security and counter-terrorism cooperation and strengthening trade, transit and economic connectivity linkages by inclusion of Afghanistan in the BRI and by CPEC's extension to Afghanistan in future. From here, the the three countries should ensure that momentum of their trilateral cooperation is not only maintained but is further strengthened progressively.

These achievements are further reinforced by China's active diplomacy on broader regional front, the most notable being the Chinese initiative to engage Indian leadership at a time when the US-India relations have touched an unprecedented low following the events of recent months. Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to New Delhi on 18-19 August 2025 signals a renewed phase of shifting global alignments with the two countries expressing willingness to re-engage on their intricate boundary dispute.

It sets the stage for China to host some 20 leaders and heads of state and government for attending the SCO Summit at Tianjin On 31 August and 1st September which would include Xi Jinping, Modi and Putin to discuss a common approach for international and regional peace and stability. It would not be out of place to praise the constructive role being played by the Chinese diplomacy in troubling regional and international environment.

Mr. Tahir Khan is a renowned journalist based in Islamabad with extensive experience and exposure on Afghan and regional issues

A Defining SCO Summit, China's Tianjin Moment

By Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan

Tianjin Summit

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit hosted by China at Tianjin from 31 August to 1 st September 2025 has received immense spotlight, which is surely more than any other contemporary international event. The views and assessments about the Summit, its outcome and the net impact on the overall course of politics though vary depending upon which quarter the analysis is coming from. One view is that the post-World War II order is crumbling because politics of power and hegemony has subdued fair play, justice and rule of law from international relations. Consequently, increasing number of developing countries are inclining towards a forum like SCO to raise their concerns and make efforts to address the anomalies in the global order. The others, however, argue that while a number of countries having certain momentary concerns with the international politics have found an opportunity to rally around China and Russia at Tianjin Summit, but practically the SCO as a forum lacks capacity and cohesion to be a pivot for a new global order.

Irrespective of these diverse views, the SCO Tianjin Summit was significant in many aspects. To briefly recap, on 1st September 2025 the 25th meeting of the Council of Heads of State was held at Meijiang International Convention and Exhibition Center under the chairmanship of Chinese President Xi Jinping. Heads of State and Government of all (ten) member states including Belarus, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan attended the meeting.

Following the Council, there was an ‘SCO Plus’ meeting on the topic “Turning Multilateralism into Action, Ensuring regional Security, and Promoting Sustainable Development” which was attended by leaders of member states, observer state Mongolia, dialogue partners – Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Turkey and Egypt. Leaders of Turkmenistan, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia and Vietnam attended the Summit as guest of the chairing side. Among international organizations, the UN, SCO, CIS, ASEAN, CSTO, EEC, CICA, ECO and AIIB were also represented at the meeting. Afghanistan though an observer state was not invited due to non-recognition of the Taliban’s Afghan Interim Government.

Key Deliverables

The Summit keeping in view traditions of the SCO of moving forward with consensus adopted a comprehensive Tianjin Declaration² which included ideas, initiatives and issues raised by the member states. Following is the gist of principles, salient areas and initiatives discussed and adopted by Tainajin SCO Summit:

I. Principles of international cooperation

The Summit reaffirmed commitment for creation a more just, equal, and representative multipolar world order based on principles of international law and effective role of the UN. It reiterated the “Shanghai Spirit,” entailing principles of mutual trust, equality, consultations, respect for diversity, and striving for joint development. Rejecting bloc politics and confrontational approaches, the Summit enunciated vision of the SCO for peace, stability in Central Asia and Eurasia. The Summit adopted SCO Development Strategy until 2035.

II. Security challenges and threats

The Summit expressed firm resolve in the fight against terrorism, separatism, and extremism, illicit drug trafficking and transnational organized crime. The Summit approved establishment of a Universal Center for Countering Challenges and Threats to Security and an SCO Anti-Drug Center. It reaffirmed commitment to helping Afghanistan as an independent, neutral, and peaceful state free from terrorism, war, and drugs with an emphasis to form inclusive government. The Summit also expressed resolve to preventing arms race in outer space, unilateral expansion of global missile defense systems and militarization of the information/communication technologies as well as implementing the UN Convention against Cybercrime.

III. Economic cooperation

The Summit reaffirmed support for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and to work towards a Greater Eurasian Partnership. It expressed resolve to reform international financial architecture and affirm UN Charter and WTO rules. The summit expressed commitment for promoting e-commerce, digital trade infrastructure, and bridging digital divide. It reaffirmed support for innovations and creative industries including through activation of the SCO Pool of Technology Parks and Innovation Clusters. The Summit approved establishment of the SCO Development Bank. It expressed resolve to promote industrial development, "Green" Industry and for implementing the SCO Energy Cooperation Development Strategy until 2030.

IV. Humanitarian cooperation

The Summit emphasized on strengthening cooperation in education, an SCO University and development of digital skills and Artificial Intelligence. Qingdao (2024-2025) and Cholpon-Ata (2025-2026) recognized as SCO Tourist and Cultural Capitals. The Summit agreed to promote global dialogue between civilizations and on preservation of heritage. It reaffirmed support to deepen cooperation in the areas of sustainable public health systems, sports, youth, women and children development. The Summit expressed resolve for sustainable development, environmental protection, combating desertification, and preserving biodiversity. It decided that Regional Climate Summit will be held in Kazakhstan in 2026. The Summit also expressed support for strengthening people to people diplomacy.

The Tianjin SCO Summit was among the most well-attended international meetings in recent years. The chair of the SCO has been passed on to Kyrgyzstan for 2025-26 period and the theme of the Kyrgyz Summit would be "25 years of the SCO together for a stable world, development and prosperity".

Victory Day Parade

Coinciding with the Summit, on 3 rd September 2025 China hosted a grand victory day parade at Tiananmen Square in Beijing to mark the formal end of the World War II against forces of imperial Japan. While China had been commemorating this day every year to highlight China's role and the huge sacrifices made by Chinese people against occupation of their homeland during 1930s and 1940s, this year the victory day celebrations have been observed with an unprecedented zeal, fervor and symbolism manifesting through a grand show coinciding with the Tianjin Summit.

The event provided an opportunity to showcase to the world China's unrelenting advances in military hardware and weapon systems such as long-range missiles and ICBMs, drone and anti-drone technologies, next generation aircraft and related weaponry. The guests who attended the parade celebrations and the messages relayed by the Chinese leadership signified China's civilizational strength, modernization and increasing clout in international politics supporting principled and rule-based engagement. Addressing the parade, President Xi Jinping said "We humans all share the same planet.

We must.....ensure that the law of the jungle never makes a comeback. At all times, we must always commit to the path of peaceful development, stay resolved to safeguard global peace and tranquility, and work together to build a community with a shared future for humanity" 3 . He added that "Humanity is again faced with a choice of peace or war, dialogue or confrontation, and win-win outcomes or zero-sum games,"4 . Showcasing the parade as sign of the Chinese strength and resilience, Xi's key message to the world was that "China's rise was unstoppable"5 . The 26 world leaders attending the commemoration also reflected progressive expanding of China's global outreach.

In addition to some of the expected participants like Russian President Vladimir Putin, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and several other leaders from the developing world having close relations with China, appearance of some unusual faces from Europe and Asia may have spurned a surprise on the world. The two European heads of state and government who attended the Beijing victory parade included Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico and Serbian President Aleksander Vucic6 attending the event and having meetings with the Chinese and Russian leaders reflects the deepening cleavages within the European countries regarding relations with China and Russia.

In this regard, the post on X by Slovak Prime Minister Fico that "I consider it great mistake that the heads of state and prime ministers of EU member states ignored today's celebrations in China"7 is an indication of intra-Europe fissures on whether to be part of containing China or cooperating with it for economic gains. Another leader from Europe attending the event was Hungarian Foreign Minister Peter Szijjarto who at this occasion in his X-Post made a strong message for global solidarity saying "Global tensions are pushing the world back to block confrontation. We benefit from East-West cooperation, which turned Hungary into an economic hub over the past decade.

We stand for global cooperation built on mutual respect"8 When already tensions between China and EU were quite evident9 in their summit in Beijing in July this year primarily on Ukraine conflict and trade issues, any indication of differences among European countries on interaction and economic cooperation with China could have deeper implications for Europe and its relations across the Atlantic. Another striking feature and picture from the Beijing victory day parade was the South Korean Speaker of the National Assembly Woo Won-shik attending the event and having a hand shake with President Kim Jong Un10 .

The South Korean Speaker visiting Beijing for the event which the North Korean President was also attending conveyed a significant message that the two sides were looking at Chinese as a credible interlocutor for bringing intra-Korean dialogue towards cooperation and possible future reunification. It is worth noting that South Korean President Lee Jae Myung is a proponent of the resumption of dialogue between Seoul and Pyongyang after a period of strained ties for past several years. The notable exclusion was Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi who had attended the SCO Summit but was symbolically absent from this event after attending the SCO Summit two days ago as meaningful messaging for India's strategic and economic partnerships with the US and Japan.

The victory parade event made significant reverberations all over the world among leaders, media and strategic experts. The most direct and somewhat sarcastic reaction came from President Trump: ‘the big question to be answered is whether or not president Xi of China will mention the massive amount of support and “blood” that the United States of America gave to China in order to help it secure its FREEDOM from a very unfriendly foreign invader. Many Americans died in China’s quest for Victory and Glory. I hope that they are rightfully Honored and Remembered for their Bravery and Sacrifice! May President Xi and the wonderful people of China have a great and lasting day of celebration. Please give my warmest regards to Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong Un, as you conspire against the United States of America’¹¹ .

Shifting Geo-Politics

The SCO Tianjin Summit and the victory parade in Beijing mark a defining moment both in the course of the rise of China in the world power dynamics and the expanding influence of the SCO as a platform to counter a west-dominated global order. In an environment of intensifying polarization, the SCO is beginning to increase its impact through effective politics, diplomacy, economic interaction and technological prowess.

The SCO’s growth in recent years has been impressive as well as different from Western alliances such as the NATO or the EU. Since its creation in 2001, conceived as a small regional grouping in Central Asia to shield the western influence, today the SCO constitutes ten member states representing 25 percent of the world’s landmass, over percent of the population and a quarter of the global GDP. While China has been the epicenter around which the organization has developed its institutional structures and strength, the SCO and its dialogue partners come from different civilizational shades including Sino, Islamic, Russian orthodox, the Western and any other people that choose to become its part. Therefore, diversity, multi-culturalism and inclusiveness have become essential features of the SCO.

It is also important to recognize that the evolution of the SCO during the last twenty-five years has coincided with a deteriorating post-World War-II order contradicting the very values such as democracy, rule of law, human rights and equal opportunities for dignified development of all the peoples on which it was founded eighty years ago. Selective application of these values is manifesting through perpetuation of conflicts, imposed wars, unilateral interventions, genocides, arbitrary sanctions and in different other forms of atrocities. The dysfunctionality of the United Nations and its institutional organs in resolving disputes and differences through a just approach is exacerbating with time and is likely to further increase due to resistance to any meaningful reforms international governance. The sense of resentment, alienation and disappointment in the developing countries has continued to increase along with a genuine urge for a global order that is rooted in multipolarity, rule of law and dignity for all. An unprecedented increase in the political turbulence during past couple of years or so has led to more countries of the global south aligning with the SCO for espousing their causes and sentiments.

In recent years the SCO has come a long way in evolving itself as a dynamic regional organization but in charting its future course it also faces humungous challenges arising from fast-shifting geo-political situation. For instance, it is difficult for the SCO and its members to take a tenable position on the Russia-Ukraine war that has been lingering on for over three years. A peace deal between Russia and Ukraine involving major territorial concessions would entail difficulties in justification of the respect of sovereignty and the opposition to separatism being the SCO’s founding principles. Though no easy solutions, SCO taking initiatives for early end of the war through a peace deal acceptable for all parties would surely serve to enhance the organization’s credentials.

India's role within the SCO and its relations with at least two key members of the SCO – China and Pakistan – remain a complex matter for the SCO dynamics. India has been an active part of the US-led anti-China fora such as Quad and, consequently, for past many years has been a reluctant partner in the SCO. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had not visited China since 2017, but recent measures by the U.S. President Donald Trump against India especially threatening tariffs as high as 50 percent on Indian goods for buying Russian oil forced Modi to mend fences with China. The Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to New Delhi paved the way for Modi's participation in Tianjin Summit.

The viral photos of Xi, Putin and Modi together at the Summit created a stirring effect. But analysts also described it as reflecting “a delicate mix of competing rivalries and shifting power dynamics”. India's former Ambassador to China Gautam Bambawale said “The dragon and the elephant are not dancing as yet. They are just looking at each other from opposite sides of a room and trying to assess what are the implications of the relationship between the two? Its going to take time to bring the relationship back on track”¹² . Some experts believe India “finds itself in an unenviable spot” as 50% U.S. tariff could shave of 0.8 % of its GDP... and India's exports could drop by \$35 bn this financial year. This phenomenal cost is likely to be an important determinant of India's future balancing between its relations in the SCO and with the U.S.¹³

President Trump's anti-India rant suggests that the main concern of the U.S. with India has been latter's hedging on the U.S. interests while extracting maximum economic benefits from the U.S. as well as its opposing camps. The U.S. wants to dissuade India from active role in BRICS especially in the plans to develop an alternate transaction mechanism to the existing dollar-based system. Apart from President Trump's X posts regarding losing India and Russia to deep darkest China”, the U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick in a recent talk with Bloomberg has spelt it out explicitly, saying that in a month or two “India is going to be on the table”....and “gonna say they are sorry”. In his view, “Modi's assembly with Russian and Chinese leaders is a mere bravado”. Then came Lutnick's strategic advice to India “And stop being a part of BRICS. They (India) are the vowel between Russia and China. If that's who you want to be, go be it”. He added “Either support the dollar, support the United States of America, support your biggest client, who's the American consumer or I guess you're gonna pay 50 percent tariff” ¹⁴ .

Thus, the coming weeks and months would expose whether India's détente with China has any substance, or as it is widely believed that it is actually premised on leveraging its weightage in negotiations with the US. The impact of the U.S. pressure is already beginning to cause cracks in the Indian composure and the first sign is in the reports that Prime Minister Modi is skipping the BRICS online emergency Summit on 08 September to discuss tariffs issue and Foreign Minister Jai Shankar is likely to represent India in that Summit¹⁵ .

In addition, India-Pakistan disputes and differences have also continued to be a factor to calibrate in the SCO's cooperation framework. Following the military scuffle between the two countries in May this year, the significance of Pakistan's strategic partnership with China and Pakistan's capacity to effectively engage the U.S. on regional issues such as Iran, Afghanistan and the Middle East has not only shocked India but quite unnerved it. The absence of any meaningful rapprochement between India and Pakistan would continue to be one of the impediments particularly in evolving joint strategies on counter-terrorism or developing regional connectivity infrastructure linking Central Asia with South Asia.

For SCO region, Afghanistan has crucial strategic importance. Located at the confluence of Central Asia and South Asia, Afghanistan has been a theater of war, conflict and great power rivalry since

1970s. The Taliban rule since August 2021 despite ensuring security has not yielded long term stability due to the Taliban's intransigence towards counter-terrorism cooperation, inclusive governance and norms of human rights. Afghanistan is an observer country in SCO and is surrounded by five neighbours as members of the organization. China has been at the forefront of efforts to normalize engagement with the Taliban regime. It has also activated China-Afghanistan-Pakistan trilateral forum to facilitate Pakistan-Afghanistan engagement. Russia has become the first country to formally recognize the Taliban regime. A key challenge for the SCO and the region would be to progressively build on the stability in Afghanistan and prevent it and the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region from becoming ground of any new battle or proxy war.

As the SCO marches towards expanding its global and regional role, it would have to explore ways of contributing towards achieving a peaceful Middle East lying at the center of East-West connectivity. The war in Gaza lingering for around two years and atrocities against Palestinians including indiscriminate bombing of hospitals, relief workers, women and children have not taken place since the World War-II days. Efforts to revert from Palestinian state under two state solution, continued threats of targeting and isolating Iran and violating territorial integrity of states like Syria and Lebanon have an effect of propelling instability in the region.

Apart from the United States which wields overwhelming influence on Arab states in the Middle East and Gulf, China has developed and expanded its engagement with many key Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar in the pursuit of peace, stability and economic connectivity through the region. China's Belt and Road Initiative's connectivity projects through this region are challenged by counter-plans such as India-Middle East-Europe Connectivity (IMEC) corridor to connect Mumbai through the Arab land route to port of Haifa and onwards to Europe. Russia also has close engagement with key Arab countries particularly on oil exports and oil pricing.

On an encouraging note, in the midst of continuing tensions between the U.S. and China both sides have also remained engaged with a view to resolving their differences particularly the ongoing tariff issues through negotiations. President Trump had announced 145% tariff on Chinese products, which has been suspended until November through an executive order. In the meantime, there is a possibility of Trump's visit to South Korea for APEC Summit in October/November where a meeting with President Xi Jinping can provide an opportunity to amicably sort out differences on tariffs. There is also a likelihood of meeting of President Donald Trump with President Kim Jong Un at that occasion if the functional irritants can be addressed¹⁶. In case these engagements take place, it would definitely contribute towards lowering global geo-political tensions and help create an environment conducive for cooperation in trade and economic exchanges.

Conclusion

In a world undergoing transition at a fast pace, the SCO has continued to grow in size as well as impact at the regional and global levels. Tianjin Summit has been an occasion of symbolic as well as substantive importance for projecting the organization's profile and resolve to the larger world. Formidable challenges also lie on the way ahead towards realizing objective of achieving a stable multipolar world order based on equality, rule of law and justice for all. These challenges range from countering shenanigans of the hegemonic tendencies prevalent in the world politics to overcoming differences and disputes among the members on various issues. At its Tianjin moment, the SCO has exhibited confidence in charting out a comprehensive framework of cooperation. The member states will have to work together for promoting cohesion and solidarity within the SCO as well as strengthening SCO's engagement with other international and regional fora to transform the challenges into a win-win situation for all.

Seminar Report on the Significance of the SCO Summit

By Dr Zainab Ahmed

1. Executive Summary

On September 18, 2025, the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR) and the Maritime Center of Excellence (MCE) at the Pakistan Navy War College convened a high-level roundtable to analyze the outcomes and implications of the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Tianjin. The seminar, titled “The SCO Summit in Tianjin: Redefining Global Dynamics,” featured insights from four distinguished experts. The discussion centered on the SCO's evolving role in an emerging multipolar world order, the challenges it faces—including internal disparities and external geopolitical pressures—and its potential future trajectory in the context of initiatives like BRI and institutional reforms. Key consensus points included the SCO's potential to reform global governance, the critical need for effective implementation of its strategic goals, and its pivotal position in advancing the interests of the Global South.

2. Proceedings and Key Takeaways

The seminar provided a platform for in-depth analysis through expert presentations and an interactive Q&A session. The panel comprised Dr Victor Gao, Ambassador Mansoor Ahmed Khan, Dr Hassan Daud Butt, and Ambassador Babar Amin.

Prof. Gao argued that the weaponization of economic tools like the US dollar and SWIFT system by the West has degraded the existing order. He positioned China's leadership in manufacturing and artificial intelligence as fundamental to its influence, asserting that power is relative and a rebalancing is inevitable. China's goal is presented as corrective, aiming to address systemic biases rather than instigate disruption. He argued that China is not seeking an alternative order rather wants all the stakeholders to uphold the post-World War 2 order, for which the Chinese people fought relentlessly against fascist imperialism.

Following him, Ambassador Mansoor highlighted functional problems within the current global order and identified specific challenges for the SCO, such as wide power disparities among members and the complicating role of India's alignment with the US strategy. He remained optimistic, citing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a model for consolidation, but stressed that the SCO can leverage its potential to advocate for agendas like removing sanctions on Iran and Afghanistan to unlock regional connectivity.

The third panelist on the seminar was Dr. Hassan Daud Butt, who grounded his argument in the SCO's demographic and economic weight (43% of the global population, 36% global GDP PPP). He proposed a long-term roadmap to 2050 focused on physical connectivity (e.g., TransAfghan Railway) and strategic resilience through regional energy grids and green corridors. He emphasized that institutional collaboration is a necessity, not a choice, for navigating contemporary "polycrises."

As a last speaker, Ambassador Babar Amin provided a historical perspective on the SCO's twodecade evolution. He pointed to practical steps, such as new security centers, but identified persistent India-Pakistan tensions as a major impediment to deeper integration. He concluded that advancing initiatives like the New Global Governance Initiative will require more institutionalized and structured dialogue within the SCO framework.

Conclusion

The roundtable concluded that the Tianjin Summit represents a significant moment for the SCO. The organization is at a crossroads, with the potential to significantly influence global governance. The path forward requires navigating internal divisions, mitigating external geopolitical pressures, and, most critically, translating ambitious strategic plans into tangible outcomes. The focus on connectivity, economic resilience, and reformed multilateralism underscores the SCO's ambition to offer a reformed model for international cooperation, particularly for Eurasian states and the broader Global South.

Beyond Diplomacy: Media Collaboration as Soft Power

By Mahreen Zaib

About the Author: *Mahreen Zaib is a Pakistani researcher, educator, and creative professional with a background in Arts, Design, and Media. She holds an MPhil in Arts and Design with a specialization in Media Archiving. Her professional experience spans research, program coordination, and academic outreach, with a focus on cultural diplomacy, soft power, and cross-cultural communication.*

Abstract

The Pakistan–China relationship has long been celebrated for its political trust, strategic alignment, and economic cooperation. In recent years, however, this partnership has expanded into the cultural and media domains, indicating a shift toward people-centered diplomacy. This article explores how collaborative media initiatives, including co-produced documentaries, joint broadcasting platforms, cultural exchange programs, and digital streaming services, contribute to strengthening soft power and fostering deeper cultural connections between the two nations. The findings indicate that although media collaboration between Pakistan and China is still in its formative phase, its strategic incorporation into the broader framework of bilateral relations holds significant potential. Such integration can serve as a tool for influencing and reshaping public perceptions, providing alternative perspectives to prevailing Western narratives, and promoting a more nuanced and reciprocal understanding between the two countries.

Keywords: Pakistan–China relations, media collaboration, digital media, collaborative media ventures, cultural influence, diplomacy through media, online streaming services, joint film productions, digital cultural exchange

1. Introduction

For decades, Pakistan and China have maintained a resilient strategic partnership rooted in mutual trust, political alignment, and shared economic ambitions. This relationship, often described as “higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the oceans” (China–Pakistan Relations, n.d.; Zhou Enlai, as cited in Global People, 2025), has traditionally been anchored in government-to-government cooperation, with a primary focus on trade, energy, and infrastructure. Landmark initiatives such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—the flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—have reinforced this partnership by promoting regional connectivity and development (Xinhua News, 2021).

In recent years, however, the scope of bilateral engagement has expanded beyond traditional strategic concerns toward cultural and media collaboration. This reflects a recognition that sustainable diplomatic ties require not only political alignment and economic cooperation but also robust interpersonal connections and shared narratives (Keane, 2016). Cultural diplomacy facilitated through joint film productions, exchange programs, and the growing availability of Chinese streaming platforms in Pakistan has emerged as an increasingly significant pillar of Pakistan–China relations.

Media, in this context, functions as a tool of soft power, shaping perceptions, fostering empathy, and cultivating a shared sense of identity (Nye, 2004). By integrating shared values, historical ties, and complementary aspirations into widely accessible cultural content, media

collaborations transform the bilateral relationship from a predominantly political or strategic construct into one that resonates with and is relatable to the everyday experiences and interests of the general public. However, while economic and strategic aspects of Pakistan–China ties have been extensively studied, scholarly attention to the role of media and cultural exchange remains limited (Shah, 2020).

This paper addresses that gap by examining how collaborative media initiatives ranging from co-produced documentaries and radio broadcasts to streaming platforms and social media campaigns are influencing the public imagination in both countries. As Happer and Philo (2013) note, media narratives play a critical role in shaping perceptions, particularly when audiences lack direct experience of a subject. In the Pakistan–China context, these narratives offer a means of reducing cultural distance, countering competing geopolitical discourses, and reinforcing bilateral solidarity.

Although the economic and strategic dimensions of Pakistan–China relations have been widely examined in both academic scholarship and policy discourse, the cultural and media dimensions of this partnership have received comparatively limited scholarly attention and remain an underexplored area of study. Existing studies tend to focus on infrastructure projects, trade relations, and geopolitical alliances, with only passing references to cultural diplomacy or entertainment media. In the limited instances where cultural engagement is discussed, it is often approached in a purely descriptive manner, lacking systematic analysis of concrete initiatives such as co-produced films, state media partnerships, streaming platforms, and digital influencer exchanges. Moreover, there has been minimal scholarly inquiry into the role of these initiatives as instruments of soft power, their comparative effectiveness against other foreign media industries operating in Pakistan, or the mechanisms through which institutional actors formalize and sustain such collaborations. This research seeks to fill these gaps by offering a detailed and analytically grounded examination of Pakistan–China media cooperation, drawing on case studies and guided by theoretical frameworks related to soft power and cultural proximity.

2. Institutional Actors in Pakistan–China Cultural Communication

2.1 China Radio International and Dosti Channel FM-98

China Radio International (CRI), established in 1941, is a state-run broadcaster transmitting in 61 languages to promote cross-cultural understanding. Its Urdu service has become a vital cultural bridge between China and Pakistan, offering news, features, and Chinese language lessons, particularly popular among rural Pakistani youth. CRI also organizes interactive activities such as photography contests, essay competitions, and quizzes to deepen cultural engagement (CGTN, 2021).

In 2015, CRI partnered with Radio Pakistan to launch Dosti Channel FM-98, a bilingual platform broadcasting in Urdu and English. Targeting Pakistani youth, this initiative exemplifies the role of radio as a low-cost but high-impact medium for fostering people-to-people connections (Xinhua News, 2021).

2.2 The Chinese Embassy’s Cultural Initiatives

The Chinese Embassy in Islamabad, through its cultural office, functions as an active hub for cultural diplomacy. It hosts events such as China’s National Day celebrations, Spring Festival

galas, and performances by visiting Chinese art troupes. The embassy also facilitates academic and media exchanges, linking scholars and journalists from both countries to encourage collaborative cultural projects.

A notable example is the 2014 China Culture Camp, organized by the embassy's women's group under the leadership of the ambassador's spouse. The camp brought together 40 Pakistani students for training in Chinese language, music, and calligraphy, marking a significant milestone in youth-focused cultural engagement. Such initiatives demonstrate how diplomatic institutions can supplement media collaborations with direct cultural immersion opportunities.

2.3 High-Level Media Cooperation Initiatives

A recent high-level meeting between Pakistan's Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Attaullah Tarar, and Cao Shumin, Deputy Head of the CPC Publicity Department and Minister of the National Radio and Television Administration (NRTA) of China, underscored the strategic significance of bilateral media collaboration (Associated Press of Pakistan [APP], 2024). The discussions centered on expanding joint productions, countering disinformation, launching training programs, and promoting cultural exchange through state media partnerships. Both leaders framed the media partnership as a symbol of mutual trust and long-standing friendship.

Minister Tarar highlighted Pakistan's interest in learning from China's expertise in digital media innovation, public service broadcasting, and cultural content promotion, noting that these areas are "truly commendable" (APP, 2024). The two sides expressed a shared commitment to combating fake news, supporting technical training, and enabling institutional cooperation. Central to the dialogue was a proposed agreement between China Central Television (CCTV) and Pakistan Television (PTV), aimed at enhancing news coverage, documentary co-production, and technical resource sharing.

The meeting also emphasized the exchange of digital influencers and social media representatives between Pakistan and China as a means to strengthen cultural ties and youth engagement. Tarar cited the solidarity expressed by young people from both countries during recent Pakistan–India tensions as an example of the powerful role digital platforms can play in reinforcing bilateral narratives. He affirmed Pakistan's commitment to translating media cooperation into tangible actions, framing CPEC as a cornerstone for future joint initiatives. From a policy perspective, these discussions illustrate how media diplomacy is being operationalized through formal agreements, content exchange, and training programs. By fostering collaboration between flagship media institutions—PTV, Radio Pakistan, APP, CCTV, and China's NRTA—both nations are investing in a long-term strategy to shape public narratives, enhance cultural understanding, and counter competing geopolitical discourses (APP, 2024).

2.4 Media Cooperation

Media has historically played a central role in fostering cultural and informational ties between Pakistan and China. The first formal step toward such cooperation was taken in 1964, when Xinhua News Agency and the Associated Press of Pakistan (APP) signed a news exchange agreement. This arrangement facilitated not only the sharing of news content and services but also the maintenance of permanent correspondents in each other's countries.

In the broadcasting sector, a significant milestone came in December 2016 with the launch of Dosti Radio Channel (FM98)—a joint initiative between the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation and China Radio International (CRI). More recently, APP introduced a Chinese language news service designed to enhance Chinese audiences' understanding of Pakistan, the CPEC, and the broader contours of bilateral relations. Several prominent Chinese media organizations, including People's Daily, China Central Television (CCTV), Phoenix TV, and China Economic Daily, have established bureaus in Pakistan, reinforcing China's media presence in the country. Social media platforms have further expanded this engagement, with TikTok now boasting over 54 million users in Pakistan and SnackVideo (Kuaishou) steadily increasing its user base.

This media collaboration is not a new phenomenon. As early as the 1980s, PTV—then Pakistan's sole television channel, co-produced several dramas with CCTV to celebrate the bilateral friendship. Two landmark productions were *Paiman-e-Wafa*, which depicted connections between hockey players from both nations, and *Rishtay aur Rastay*, which told friendship stories linked to the construction of the Karakoram Highway. Featuring top Pakistani television actors of the time, these dramas remain important cultural milestones in the history of Pakistan–China relations.

3. Literature Review

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on soft power theory (Nye, 2004) and cultural diplomacy frameworks (Cull, 2009). Soft power refers to the ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion, with culture, political values, and foreign policy serving as primary sources. Media serves as a critical vehicle for transmitting these soft power assets across borders (Keane, 2016).

China's global media strategy increasingly incorporates international co-productions, localization of content, and digital platform expansion as part of its public diplomacy toolkit (Lobato, 2019). This aligns with cultural proximity theory (Straubhaar, 2007), which suggests that audiences are more likely to engage with foreign content when it resonates with their cultural norms and values.

In Pakistan, studies indicate a growing openness to foreign entertainment, particularly from Turkey and South Korea (Ahmed, 2019; Javed & Khan, 2021). These cases demonstrate that culturally adaptable content can achieve mainstream popularity. However, research on Chinese media's penetration into Pakistan remains sparse, with most scholarship focused on geopolitical or economic relations (Shah, 2020).

Digital platforms, as Lobato (2019) notes, are not merely commercial enterprises but also instruments for shaping global cultural flows. The arrival of Chinese platforms like WeTV and iQIYI in Pakistan reflects this trend, offering opportunities for localized content distribution while simultaneously advancing China's narrative influence.

4. Key Trends and Case Studies

4.1 Co-Produced Documentaries and Short Films

Co-productions have emerged as a central element of Pakistan–China media collaboration. Documentaries jointly aired on PTV and Chinese state broadcasters showcase CPEC's

development alongside stories of cultural similarity and human connection (Xinhua News, 2021). The short film *Friends Forever* (CGTN, 2021) captures emotional bonds between communities in both countries, offering a narrative of solidarity and mutual respect.

4.2 Cultural Representation and Exchange

Chinese animations are increasingly dubbed in Urdu for Pakistani children's television, familiarizing young audiences with Chinese storytelling. Conversely, Pakistani dramas are gradually being introduced to Chinese viewers, though such exchanges remain limited in scale.

4.3 Streaming Platforms

The entry of WeTV, iQIYI, and Tencent Video into the Pakistani market has introduced audiences to Chinese dramas and variety shows, often subtitled or dubbed for local consumption (WeTV, 2023). While their market presence remains nascent, these platforms have the potential to diversify Pakistan's digital entertainment landscape.

4.4 TikTok and Cultural Visibility

TikTok, owned by ByteDance, serves as a grassroots-level cultural bridge. Pakistani influencers engage in hashtag campaigns centered on Chinese festivals, cuisine, and BRI narratives, contributing to informal but impactful cultural exchange (Statista, 2023).

5. Conclusion

Pakistan–China media collaboration is still in its formative stages but holds substantial potential as a tool of soft power. By integrating cultural diplomacy into their strategic partnership, both nations can strengthen public support for bilateral initiatives, deepen mutual understanding, and expand the cultural dimensions of their alliance.

6. Recommendations

Establish joint media production funds.

Expand language training for media professionals.

Develop shared content guidelines emphasizing cultural resonance.

Promote reciprocal market access for film and television.

Leverage digital platforms for broader distribution of co-produced content.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2019). Media consumption in Pakistan: Trends and transformations. *Journal of Media Studies*, 34(2), 15–30.
- Associated Press of Pakistan. (2024, July 10). Pakistan, China to expand media cooperation, counter fake news. <https://app.com.pk>
- CGTN. (2021). Friends Forever: A short film celebrating Pak–China friendship. <https://www.cgtn.com>
- People’s Daily. (n.d.). Overseas network operations. <http://en.people.cn>
- China–Pakistan Relations. (n.d.). History of Pakistan–China ties. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan.
- Cull, N. J. (2009). Public diplomacy: Lessons from the past. USC Center on Public Diplomacy.
- Global People. (2025). Pak–China friendship through history.
- Happer, C., & Philo, G. (2013). The role of the media in the construction of public belief and social change. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 1(1), 321–336.
- Javed, H., & Khan, F. (2021). Global media flows and cultural reception in Pakistan. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 31(4), 345–362.
- Keane, M. (2016). The Chinese television industry. British Film Institute.
- Lobato, R. (2019). Netflix nations: The geography of digital distribution. New York University Press.
- Nye, J. S. (2004). Soft power: The means to success in world politics. PublicAffairs.
- Shah, M. (2020). China–Pakistan relations: Beyond economics. *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 14(1), 105–124.
- Statista. (2023). Digital media outlook for South Asia. <https://www.statista.com>
- Straubhaar, J. (2007). World television: From global to local. SAGE Publications.
- WeTV. (2023). Popular Chinese dramas available in Urdu. <https://www.wetv.vip> Xinhua News. (2021). PTV, Chinese media co-produce documentary on CPEC. <https://www.xinhuanet.com>

Understanding China - Chinese Modernization and Its Vision for Global Governance

By Sarmad Wali Khan

Mr. Samad Wali Khan is a Research Associate and Project Coordinator at BCPR

‘It doesn’t matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice.’ Deng Xiaoping’s famous remark captures a century-long contest over what progress means and how it is achieved. For more than a century, the world has lived by a single story of progress. It begins in Europe, travels across the Atlantic, and ends with the triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy. History, we were told, had reached its final chapter. Yet somewhere east of that narrative, another story unfolded, one that re-imagines what it means to modernize without conquering, to grow without dominating.

In the discourse on international development, two broad stories explain the rise of nations. The first refers to the ascent of Western Europe and North America through capitalist modernity; the second describes China’s distinct path of modernization and its peaceful rise. The former rests on a colonial history of extraction and industrialization, while the latter emphasizes development through market socialism and self-reliance.

China’s rise as a global leader in the 21st century challenges the assumption that capitalism and liberal democracy are the only viable paths to development. It demonstrates that international politics can be conducted through win-win cooperation rather than zero-sum competition. Fukuyama’s ‘end of history’ thesis has been rendered obsolete by China’s peaceful transformation, a rise that did not yield to liberal democracy as the only viable political destiny. The question then arises: how did a country once derided as ‘the sick man of Asia,’ mired in poverty and a war-torn economy, transform into one of the most advanced, innovative, and industrialized nations in the world?

Unlike Western and Japanese experiences of capitalist modernity, shaped by bourgeois and fascist revolutions respectively, China’s path was forged through a communist revolution led by peasants and workers under the Communist Party, as noted by Barrington J. Moore in *Origins of Dictatorship & Democracy*. It did not replicate Europe’s colonial or reformist trajectories, nor did it expand through imperialism. Instead, the revolution itself became the engine of modernization. Since 1949, China has demonstrated immense material growth, lifted millions out of poverty, and maintained an extraordinary record of peaceful development, an achievement that disrupts long-held assumptions that link modernization with Westernization, all without waging foreign wars or depending on colonial plunder.

The story of modern China can be broadly divided into three phases: 1949–1976, 1976–2012, and 2012–present.

In the first phase, under Mao Zedong, national reconstruction began amid the ruins of war. The new state sought to eliminate feudal and capitalist structures through land reforms, agricultural collectivization, and nationalization of industries under Soviet-style five-year plans. The first plan, launched in 1953, prioritized heavy industries such as coal, steel, and electricity, and laid the

foundation of socialist industrialization. These efforts were not without cost. The Great Leap Forward, intended to accelerate development through collective labor, led instead to famine and turmoil. Yet even amid these struggles, China remained steadfast in its pursuit of sovereignty and self-reliance. Its later diplomatic outreach, symbolized by ‘ping-pong diplomacy’ and entry into the United Nations, signaled a nation gradually re-engaging with the world on its own terms.

The second phase, from 1976 to 2012, was defined by Deng Xiaoping’s pragmatic reforms. His ‘Reform and Opening-Up’ policy transitioned China from a centrally planned system to market socialism. ‘Seeking truth from facts,’ a phrase attributed to him, symbolized a break from the ideological rigidity of Maoist era. Deng introduced market mechanisms, partially decentralized state control, and allowed private enterprise to coexist with socialist ownership. Special Economic Zones, such as Shenzhen, attracted foreign investment, making China a powerhouse of export-led growth. He also introduced agricultural reforms under the household responsibility system, boosting productivity and rural income. Exports soared from \$10 billion in 1978 to \$25 billion by 1985. These reforms encouraged urbanization and industrial expansion, integrating China into the global market. This pivot set China on the path to become an economic giant in the future eventually.

The third and current phase, under President Xi Jinping, reflects the consolidation and deepening of this Chinese model as ‘modernization with Chinese characteristics.’ Xi emphasizes comprehensive modernization, balancing growth with ecological sustainability, social justice, political stability, and international responsibility. His framework rests on five pillars: modernization for 1.4 billion people; common prosperity through equitable wealth distribution; cultural and ethical advancement alongside material progress; harmony between humanity and nature; and peaceful development based on cooperation. These principles mark a deliberate rejection of the Western belief that modernization requires Westernization. Under Xi’s leadership, China has positioned itself as both an economic power and a key actor shaping norms of global governance.

The cumulative effect of these phases is striking. Since 1978, China’s GDP has grown at an average annual rate of over 9% till 2010. More than 800 million people have been lifted out of poverty. Urbanization has increased from under 20% in 1980 to over 65% today. Life expectancy has jumped from 44 years in 1949 to over 78. The country’s current Five-Year Plans prioritize high-quality growth, green transformation, and social equity, signaling a shift from rapid expansion to sustainable development, with China now at the forefront of eco-friendly technologies.

China’s experience forces a reevaluation of global development narratives. The Western model, built on colonial extraction, military dominance, and neoliberal governance, rests on historical inequalities. Institutions like the IMF, World Bank, and WTO, established under the Bretton Woods system, continue to draw criticism for perpetuating dependency and debt traps among developing nations. Their conditionalities often erode sovereignty and lock smaller economies into cycles of subservience. The result is an unjust global hierarchical system that privileges the global north over the global south. By contrast, China’s model fuses capitalist economics with socialist governance and long-term political consistency. It shows that modernization can be nationally defined and not externally imposed. Having risen without war or expansionism, China now questions the fairness of the prevailing global order and proposes an alternative vision grounded in cooperation, equity, and mutual respect. Beijing advocates a multipolar world to replace Cold War-era bloc politics with inclusive partnership, emphasizing shared development and win-win outcomes over ideological confrontation.

This approach to global governance mirrors the same logic that guided China's domestic transformation, self-reliance, gradual reform, and respect for sovereignty. Having achieved material progress through stability and pragmatic adaptation, China now promotes an international order in which nations can coexist peacefully, without coercion or domination. In recent years, China has advanced what it calls the 'Four Global Initiatives' (4GIs) to address global challenges. Since 2021, it has launched the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Civilizations Initiative (GCI), and the Global Governance Initiative (GGI). These frameworks embody Xi's vision for a world rooted in cooperation, multilateralism, and people-centered development. They provide a blueprint for reforming international institutions by promoting sustainable growth, safeguarding sovereignty, and encouraging cross-cultural understanding.

The story of Chinese modernization is living proof that economic growth and national rejuvenation are possible without following the Western path. Self-reliance, continuity, and visionary leadership can deliver remarkable results within decades. Unlike the Western experience, China's modernization path disproves the dominant discourse equating modernization with Westernization, a paradigm that draws developing countries into an endless imitation game. Where the Western story is shaped by competition and hegemony, China's speaks of cooperation, harmony, and peaceful coexistence, with fellow humans as well as nature. The story of modernization no longer belongs to the West.

The Role of Pakistan-China People-to-People Relations in Consolidating ‘All Weather Friendship

By Bilal Zubair

Executive Summary

People have taken the central stage in the practice of modern-day diplomacy. Along with political, economic and defence relations, diplomacy is now equally focused on culture, relations supporting People-to-People exchanges. Such exchanges are instrumental in nation-branding and improve the soft power of the respective countries. As a consequence, city diplomacy, gastro diplomacy, sports diplomacy, digital diplomacy, spiritual diplomacy has gained recognition in the contemporary discourse and practice of diplomacy. Pakistan-China relations must also be viewed in the context of growing focus on the people-centric approach in bilateral relations. The political leadership from both countries has repeatedly emphasized the importance of people in bilateral relations. As a result, a remarkable surge in the P-to-P exchanges has been observed in Pakistan-China relations for the past two decades. Keeping in view the evolution of Pakistan-China relations from an ‘All-Weather Friendship’ to an ‘All Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership,’ this study analyses the historical development, the present state of relations and the future trajectory of bilateral ties especially focusing on P-to-P bilateral relations.

Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations: Historical Significance

The history of relations between China and modern-day Pakistan dates back thousands of years, facilitated by trade, religion, culture, and artistic influences. The documented historical ties date back to the ancient ‘Silk Route’, which served as one of the essential corridors between China and Persia, and beyond West

Asia connected through the Indus land.¹ Established during the Han dynasty around 200 BCE, the route serves as a potent reminder of connections that extend beyond economics to all aspects of civilizational exchange. Chinese master monks in the Eastern Jin Dynasty, such as Faxian (402 CE) and XuanZang, the great Monk in the Tang Dynasty, visited Gandhara (present-day Taxila, Swat, and Peshawar) between 629 and 645 CE to collect Buddhist texts.² They were among the early pilgrims, serving as goodwill ambassadors along the ‘Silk Route’. The present-day Karakoram Highway, also known as the ‘New Silk Route,’ is not merely an economic connector, but also a route of knowledge, cultural, and spiritual diffusion with historical precedents.³

With the founding of modern states, Pakistan in 1947 and the People's Republic of China in 1949, these interactions—historical and informal—led to the establishment of official diplomatic relations on May 21, 1951. Later, Pakistani and Chinese leaders agreed during the Bandung Conference in 1955 to further develop their relationship. The first historic visit by the Pakistani leadership to China was made by Prime Minister Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy in October 1956, followed by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai's visit to Pakistan in December of the same year.⁴ These visits laid the groundwork for a strong relationship between the two countries, which further expanded into broader cultural and P-to-P connections. China and Pakistan signed their first trade agreement in January 1963, followed by the first significant cultural exchange agreement, “Executive Agreement on Cultural Exchange” signed on March 26, 1965. This agreement laid the foundation for bilateral exchanges across education, arts, mass media, television, film, and other areas of P-to-P relations.⁵

In the following years, bilateral cultural exchanges among high officials continued from 1983 to 1999 to promote and strengthen cultural ties.⁶ Pakistan and China continued developing the groundwork for expanding their P-to-P relations. In 2015, during the 65th anniversary of their bilateral ties, a "Year of Friendly Exchanges" was declared.⁷ Arguably, the most profound impact on Pakistan-China relations was the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), signed during President Xi Jinping's historic visit to Pakistan in April 2015. It has elevated the friendship to a new level by declaring the relationship as an 'all-weather cooperative strategic partnership' in his address to the Pakistani parliament.⁸ Since the signing of the CPEC, both states have enhanced bilateral exchanges in economic, cultural and P-to-P levels.

The language of Friendship

It is essential to understand the gradual development of Pakistan-China relations through the language of friendship. The Bandung Conference laid the foundation for Pakistan-China friendship, as echoed in the slogan 'Pak-Cheeni Bhai Bhai'. One could recall the famous song released by Radio Pakistan in 1972, "Pak-Cheen Dosti Wang Woye Wang Woye" or "Pak-Cheen Dosti Zindabad, Zindabaad" written by Jamil-ud-Din Aali.⁹ Fast forward to the 70th anniversary of Pakistan-China diplomatic relations, Pakistani singer Ali Zafar and Chinese singer Xiang Minqi performed the song 'You have Stolen my Heart' to celebrate and showcase the strong bond and love between the two nations. In Confucian philosophy, the bond of friendship is essential for maintaining social harmony. In the Chinese philosophy, friendship is one among the essential human values, which shows integrity, loyalty and the significance of common purpose.¹⁰ The cardinal human value is well reflected in Pakistan-China friendship, which has stood all the weathers, internal and external changes and turbulent times. Pakistan-China friendship is embedded in the proverbs such as the 'all-weather', 'deeper than the deepest sea,' 'higher than the Himalaya,' 'time tested' and 'Iron Brothers'. This language shows a reciprocity and commitment towards each other, irrespective of changing national or international environment.¹¹ As the decades have passed these sentiments have become more profound. The political and military ties have become more structures especially with the signing of Pakistan-China Economic Corridor in 2015 and depend with the expanding cultural, educational, and other forms of P-to-P relations. The signing of the Pakistan-China 'Joint Action Plan 2025-2029' is a testimony to the enduring friendship.

Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations in the 'Joint Action Plan 2025-29'

Pakistan-China relations are widely regarded as unique, perhaps the only bilateral relationship of its own kind. With the unveiling of the Pakistan-China 'Joint Action Plan 2025-2029', this friendship has entered a new phase, one of a community for a shared future. ¹² This plan aligns with President Xi Jinping's Global Civilization initiative, which aims to foster harmony and cultural coexistence. A key component of the Action Plan is to strengthen P-to-P ties between the two countries across various sectors, including education, vocational training, language, culture, tourism, media, and sports. ¹³ The plans also include expanding collaboration on training and scientific research within the CPEC consortium of the University Union, China, to support youth development initiatives related to the BRI. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of deepening cultural and tourism ties through fairs and festivals, as well as promoting cooperation between media outlets and think tanks to organize events.¹⁴

The Action Plan emphasizes translating and publishing important historical texts in various languages to deepen understanding of history and literature, while also supporting the film and television industry. Likewise, sports are seen as a key area of cooperation, expanded through athlete

and coach exchanges, as well as joint participation in international events. The plan also includes joint projects to preserve cultural heritage and build sister-city and subnational relationships.¹⁵

The next part of this essay will explore various aspects of Pakistan-China P-to-P relations.

A. Culture in Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations

Cultural relations are vital in Pakistan-China friendship. Leaders from both countries have consistently stressed the importance of strengthening cultural ties since establishing diplomatic relations. For China, cultural diplomacy is key to enhancing Chinese soft power, promoting the exchange of ideas through art, language, literature, heritage, and other tangible and intangible expressions. China strongly advocates for ‘Cultural Soft Power,’ as highlighted by President Xi Jinping during the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China.¹⁶ In his address to the Pakistani Parliament in 2015, President Xi emphasized that “Our two countries share similar cultural traditions and values. We should enhance our exchanges to build lasting friendships. This year is the Year of China-Pakistan Friendly Exchanges. We should use the platforms of sister cities, cultural centers and media organizations to conduct diverse and colorful events of celebration.”¹⁷ During his 2025 address to the Second Golden Panda Awards International Culture Forum in Chengdu, President of Pakistan, Mr. Asif Zardari, highlighted the need “to expand cultural exchanges, strengthen creative industries, and promote understanding and a culture of tolerance. Culture remains a vital bridge to peace, prosperity, and a shared future for humanity.”¹⁸ China’s commitment to ‘Peaceful Development,’ peaceful coexistence, and building a win-win relationship based on mutual benefits¹⁹ in the neighbourhood has been reciprocated by Pakistan. Notable are the contribution of the respective Chinese people in Pakistan and Pakistani community in China and the Chinese cultural centers in Pakistan and Pakistani cultural centers playing a huge role in enhancing P-to-P relations. Moreover, private schools and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) in Pakistan have played a crucial role in promoting Chinese language learning by establishing Chinese language classrooms.

B. Education in Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations

Arguably, education is most impactful in fostering P-to-P exchanges and cultivating long-term relationships. Education provides a direct connection with people, culture, values, and society. Educational exchanges between Pakistan and China have transformed these ties into an unbreakable bond. Although students from Pakistan and China have been studying in each other's countries since the 1970s, the initial MoU on Scientific and Cultural Exchange in 1976, followed by the MoU on Educational Exchanges in 1983, laid the foundation for future educational collaboration.²⁰

Since 2003, the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan has been sending students to China for higher education. Each year, thousands of Pakistani students travel to China for undergraduate and graduate studies. In 2024, 26,000 Pakistani students studied in China and Pakistani students rank third among foreign students in China. Most of these students are enrolled in medical sciences, engineering, information technology, Chinese language, and vocational training.

Alongside educational exchanges, the establishment of Sister University partnerships provided a significant impetus for joint research and technical collaborations across various fields. The University of Sargodha (Pakistan) and Nakai University (China), as well as the University of Sahiwal (Pakistan) and Jiangxi University of Science and Technology (China), are among the many such collaborations.

Additionally, many Pakistani and Chinese universities are part of the CPEC Consortium of Universities. Regarding P-to-P relations, such collaborations, joint research projects, faculty exchanges, and the sharing of best academic practices promote knowledge exchange and encourage open communication. Despite cultural differences, Pakistani students have adapted well to life in China. Through these educational exchanges, students have shared heartfelt stories about hospitality, safety, and rich cultural experiences. Another aspect involves adapting to Chinese cuisine and developing a taste for its delicacies, providing a unique culinary experience. More importantly, the intercultural exchange has led to meaningful personal growth, fostering a deeper understanding of the Chinese people and a change in perspective.²¹

Likewise, Chinese students in Pakistan have shared a sense of cultural awakening about how little they know about the country. They also talked about the strong bonds and lifelong friendships they've developed with their Pakistani friends.²² Chinese students studying Urdu have developed a strong affection for the language. Among their experiences, they highlight how their stay, research, and studies were crucial in fostering cultural exchange and connecting with Pakistan's historic Buddhist roots. These exchanges are not only academic but also serve as narratives that foster better communication and a deeper understanding between us. Academic bridges between Pakistan and China are crucial for fostering mutual understanding, respect, and friendships, as well as promoting cultural, economic, and scientific ties.

C. Role of Language Training in P-to-P Relations

Language is arguably the most crucial tool for understanding culture and its people. Regarding Pakistan China P-to-P relations, language training has remained a primary focus. Chinese language training through the Confucius Institutes plays a significant role. With the increasing number of Chinese nationals working and visiting Pakistan, learning Urdu remains as crucial as learning Chinese. Presently, there are 24 Urdu language centers and departments in major Chinese Universities.²³ Alongside, many Chinese students are enrolled in Urdu language studies in Pakistan. Tremendous growth in bilateral exchanges has encouraged Chinese nationals to enrol in Urdu classes. On the other hand, 94 Chinese language centers, including five Confucius Institutes (CI), play a crucial role in teaching Chinese to Pakistani students, professionals, and the business community.

During the international conference titled “China-Pakistan Community with a Shared Future” organized by the center for International Peace and Stability (CIPS) at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), visiting Chinese scholars pointed out that the lack of interest in learning Chinese is a significant obstacle for Pakistani students in understanding Chinese culture.²⁴ This highlights the importance of language as a cultural bridge between nations and emphasizes the significance of learning Chinese, given its increasing global importance often emphasized by the leadership of both countries.

D. Religious and Heritage Tourism in P-to-P relations

Pakistan and China designated the year 2023 as the year of Tourism. Given the China-Pakistan historical spiritual linkages, the significance of archaeological Buddhist, Gandhara and Mahargarh sites in Pakistan and mosques and tombs in China, spiritual tourism offers great potential of P-to-P exchanges. Its northern mountain ranges boast a breathtaking landscape with eight peaks over 8,000 meters across the Karakoram, Himalayas, and Hindu Kush. China's popular tourist destinations include Xi'an, Chengdu, Guilin, and Sichuan.

Religious tourism offers a significant opportunity for enhancing people-to-people contact between China and Pakistan. While diplomatic relations between the two countries are strong, cultural and spiritual ties have not yet been fully realized. Religious tourism could strengthen bilateral partnerships and help Pakistan benefit from the rapidly growing global outbound travel economy. Despite Pakistan's wealth of cultural and religious heritage sites, religious tourism accounted for only \$0.9 million²⁵ of travel exports in 2022, just 1% of the total. This low figure stands in contrast to the global religious tourism market, which reached \$15.1 billion in 2023, up 10.2% from the previous year.²⁶

The history of both nations manifests the cultural assimilation and deep spiritual connections between them. The Gandhara civilization serves as a cradle of these cultural affinities and most of its sites such as Sahr-i-Bahlol, Taxila and Takht-i-Bahi are also recognized by UNESCO. Pakistan has yet to fully realize the Buddhist tourism potential of its 2,000 attractions.²⁷ According to a Gallup survey, of the 58 million global Buddhist tourists, 2.9 million identified Pakistan as their desired destination. Pakistan can generate around 30,000 jobs and \$62.9 million in revenue, equivalent to Rs. 16 billion, for the GDP, by focusing solely on this tapped sector.²⁸

Similarly, China hosts a significant number of Muslim cultural sites that could be potential destinations for Pakistani travellers. Ningxia province is not only a home to one-third of the Muslim population but also hosts more than 4,000 mosques with underlying historical significance.²⁹ Beijing's Niujie mosque is one of the oldest and iconic Islamic sites in East Asia. Similarly, China holds 6030 UNESCO recognized World Heritage sites make it a significant tourist attraction for travellers. With favourable trends, as Islam is the fastest-growing segment in the Chinese tourism market, accounting for nearly \$13.8 billion in just 2024 and predicted to rise to \$35 billion by 2030, Pakistan can enhance people-to people contact by encouraging a large number of outbound travellers to China.³¹

By strengthening tourism ties with China, Pakistan can revitalize its underdeveloped spiritual tourism sector and increase people-to-people contact. Although this sector currently contributes less than 1% to the travel economy, it accounts for 2.8% of Pakistan's GDP.³² The connectivity projects like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) can help in document and connect religious tourist sites. The statistics show that only 25% of the total 480 cultural heritage sites are officially recognized in Pakistan. CPEC can also enhance blue tourism and revive the Islamic maritime heritage by connecting various coastal heritage zones. By taking such initiatives, both states can strengthen cultural ties and leverage the emerging opportunities in the global tourism economy. This will mutually benefit both states to benefit from the favorable trends of the global halal market, which is expected to grow from \$256.5 billion (2023) to \$410.9 billion by 2032. ³³Not only this, the forecast of up to \$230 billion growth in the Global Muslim Travel Index is another reason for the both nations to seize the opportunity.³⁴

E. Sports Ties in Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations

Sports exchanges play a vital role in fostering shared values and mutual respect through the practice of sportsmanship. Pakistan and China have a long history of sports exchanges. In 1956, a Pakistani football team visited China for the first time to compete in the Asia Cup.³⁵ The Chinese national football team was the first to visit in 1963, playing a four-match series in Pakistan.³⁶ These visits marked the beginning of bilateral sports relations. Although Pakistan and China have different sports traditions, many games are played in both countries. For instance, racket sports such as badminton and table tennis, as well as shooting, basketball, and contact sports including boxing and martial arts, are popular in both nations. China is ranked among the leading sports nations, with a

budget exceeding \$3 billion, compared to Pakistan's \$45 million.³⁷ Despite various MoUs, sports cooperation is among the areas lacking tangible collaboration and is an area where people-to-people relations can excel. Especially in the Olympics, sports like Athletics and swimming are among those where Pakistani coaches and athletes could benefit from the excellent sports facilities, coaching and technical training.

Meanwhile, Pakistan can assist Chinese teams in traditional Pakistani sports, such as cricket, field hockey, and Kabaddi. In China, interest in field hockey is growing rapidly, with more than 12,000 players, and has performed reasonably well at the Asian level. Pakistan can offer training and coaching of Chinese field hockey team inside Pakistan. While the MoU of 2008 and 2022 on sports collaboration between Pakistan and China, offers significant collaborations, however, there is dire need of bilateral sports series between universities, colleges and federation level. To elevate the sports in Pakistan, China can initiate the development of the sports university in Islamabad envisioned in the 2022 MoU.³⁸ Sports can be vital in drawing talent in wide-ranging sports and improve the P-to-P relations.

F. E-Games in Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations

Similarly, e-games have significant potential to enhance people-to-people relations. The e-game scene in China is massive, with over 6000 professional players and more than 660 million gamers. China has numerous Dota 2 and League of Legends world champions. PUBG is just as popular among Chinese players as other sports.³⁹ In Pakistan, the e-sports ecosystem has continued to expand each year over the past decades. With the success of Pakistani e-gaming players at the international level, young kids aspire to become professional players. As highlighted by the success of Arsalan Ash and Atif Butt in Tekken 7 and 8. Arsalan Ash, after winning the Evolution Championship Series (EVO) in Japan and Las Vegas, was also named the ESPN Esports Player of the Year in 2019.⁴⁰

Alongside Tekken, PUBG and Mortal Kombat are very popular among Pakistan's E-gaming community. Recognizing the potential and expanding landscape of E-games, the new generation of both communities can connect through online and offline tournaments. Observing the success of Pakistani Tekken players, South Korean gamers like Knee, Ulsan, and Chanel have visited Pakistan to train with and play exhibition matches against Pakistani players in Lahore. In the spirit of enhancing P-to-P relations, e-gaming can play an important role. Pakistani and Chinese e-players can exchange their expertise and playing styles through exhibition matches and tournaments. The younger generation like the Gen Alpha and Gen Z could connect through the digital platforms to play and share their expertise in E-games and foster the P-to-P relations in the younger generations. Recently, the E-Sports association in Beijing have shown interest in collaboration with associations across Pakistan.⁴¹ Such initiatives would be instrumental in helping the E-gaming community across the border and help Pakistani players to benefit from China's \$ 40 billion sports industry.

G. Role of Media and Social Media Platforms in P-to-P Relations

The mediated channels of communication like the media and social media have taken a key position in building connections among people. The growing importance of these platforms has enabled a larger presence of Chinese media in Pakistan. Chinese media including the Chinese Global Television Network (CGTN) previously known as CCTV, Xinhua News, China Radio International (CRI) and others have made significant contribution in bridging the cross-cultural communication gap between the people of both countries.⁴² With a focus to tell the Chinese developmental story to the Pakistani people, these outlets have shown the remarkable journey and resilience of Chinese

people to their friends in Pakistan. News and documentaries focused on China Pakistan Economic Corridor CPEC, and enabled ordinary Pakistanis to understand China's investment portfolio in Pakistan.

On December 19, 2016, CRI, in partnership with Radio Pakistan, launched Dosti FM-98 to foster cultural connections, encourage Chinese language learning, share knowledge, and spread information about development initiatives.⁴³ Consequently, interest in the Chinese language and culture is quickly growing throughout Pakistan. Media coverage about China has encouraged around 20,000 Pakistani citizens to learn Chinese at various Chinese language centers established in the country.⁴⁴

Over the past decade, Pakistan and China have also begun media cooperation as part of their strategic partnership. In 2019, China's Xinhua News Agency began broadcasting its Urdu channel across Pakistan.⁴⁵ In 2023, Pakistan launched a Chinese-language news service on government-backed media outlets.⁴⁶ Similarly, in 2025, PTV launched a five-minute segment to cover Chinese politics, culture, and technological development, promoting awareness about China among the Pakistani public.⁴⁷ In July 2025, officials from both states agreed on joint broadcasting initiatives to combat the growing spread of misinformation. Pakistan's Minister for Information and Communication, Atta Tarar, has suggested a joint anti-disinformation training with his Chinese counterpart, involving personnel from Pakistan Television and China Central Television.⁴⁸ Under media diplomacy, such joint projects will also strengthen P-to-P relations by boosting information flow and reducing communication barriers.

Apart from traditional communication methods, social media-based communication is strengthening Pakistan-China ties. Because many Chinese and Pakistanis live across the border, the use of the popular Chinese social media app WeChat is growing in Pakistan. To facilitate this, in August 2022, WeChat was registered and authorized by the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP). This made SECP the first public sector organization to permit WeChat to offer services. The number of WeChat users in Pakistan has increased due to rising business, financial transactions, and cross-border communication. Another Chinese social media app, TikTok, is the most popular and downloaded app in Pakistan. By early 2024, it had about 54.4 million Pakistani users and experienced a 229% increase in reach since 2023.⁴⁹ These technological connections are fostering a generation that is fluent in each other's language, and the digital platform ensures that media diplomacy and P-to-P ties work in tandem.

H. Dramas and Film in Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations

Pakistan and China share a fascinating history of joint drama productions. In 1984, the first co-production between Pakistan Television (PTV) and China Central Television Network (CCTV) was 'Paiman-e-Wafa' (Promise of Allegiance), based on the story of a Chinese field hockey player, Shao, who visited Pakistan for training and formed an unbreakable bond of friendship with Pakistani players.⁵⁰

Another co-produced drama, 'Rishtay and Rastay' (Relationships and Highways), aired in 1986. It is a love story that focuses on the building of the Karakorum Highway and honors the many Chinese and Pakistani workers who lost their lives during its construction.⁵¹ While the 1980s were indeed the heydays of Pakistan-China drama co-production, Pakistani films made their mark in the Chinese market in the 1950s. So far, 12 Pakistani films have been aired in China since 1956, when the first movie, Baghi, was shown, receiving immense appreciation.⁵² However, after a 45-year break, the Pakistani film Parwaz hai Zanoon was released in China in 2020. In a market otherwise

dominated by Indian movies and songs, the viewers enjoyed the Pakistani film, the cinematography and the story.⁵³ The majority of the viewers were of the view that more Pakistani movies resonating with bilateral issues and common interests should be shown on Chinese screens.

In 2025, for the first time, a Chinese animated film, *Ne Zha 2*, was imported and distributed in Pakistan, marking a new chapter in bilateral cinematic collaboration. A globally popular movie, *Ne Zha*, which is deeply rooted in Chinese folklore, will be screened in major cities across Pakistan.⁵⁴ The Pakistani audience looks forward to more Chinese films being screened in Pakistan. Meanwhile, collaboration in joint drama and animated productions is growing between Pakistan and China. The co-produced dramas "*Ba'tie Girl*" in 2019 and "*Amity Along the Orange Line*" in 2020, as well as the animated movie "*Allahyar and the Legend of Markhoor*" in 2018, are among the joint dramas and films produced in recent years.

While a whole generation of Pakistanis grew up watching Chinese kung fu and karate movies, with Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan being household names in Pakistan, the popularity of Pakistani film in China is significantly lower. The two-way exchange of cinema is a vital cultural bridge, enabling people to gain cultural insights through the medium of the screen. Cinema is also an essential tool in breaking down communication barriers and facilitating cross-cultural understanding. Not only does it communicate cultural sensitivities, but it also conveys important political, religious, and economic issues. The nature of all-weather friendship necessitates open communication about the most pressing problems, and cinema and television can play a vital role.

I. Cuisine in Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations

Food has a powerful way of bringing people together. It also serves as a strong tool for cultural exchange and plays a key role in gastrodiploamacy. Traditionally, Chinese food has been very popular among Pakistanis. Even before the partition of India, the ABC restaurant was established in Karachi in 1930 and reportedly was visited by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai during his visit in 1964.⁵⁵ Over the decades, Chinese cuisine infused with Pakistani flavours has led to the development of Pakistani-Chinese cuisine, which is very popular among the Pakistani people.

In recent times, Chinese food culture has gained increasing popularity in Pakistan due to the growing presence of Chinese communities across the country. Additionally, more Pakistanis studying or doing business in China are contributing to this cultural aspect of food. As a result, the number of authentic Chinese restaurants has increased to thousands. Moreover, dishes such as Lanzhou Beef Noodles and dumplings, along with other delicacies, enhance the traditional Pakistani-influenced cuisine. While China has a rich tradition of Muslim cuisine, Pakistani dishes are also gaining popularity among the Chinese. The growing number of Pakistani students and businesspeople in China has facilitated the expansion of Pakistani restaurants, which serve dishes such as biryani, curries, and kebabs. These dishes are gaining popularity among the Chinese, leading to the establishment of Chinese restaurants such as Khan Baba, Shalimar, Sultan Pakistan, and Zam Zam Restaurant.

In an effort to promote gastro diplomacy, Pakistani Ambassador Khalil Qureshi officially launched the Ambassador's Kitchen in Xian during the 'Euro-Asia Economic Forum 2025.' The goal was to highlight Pakistani culinary heritage to the Chinese audience.⁵⁶ Similarly, Pakistani students in Chinese Universities are active in promoting Pakistani cuisine. In August 2025, the Pakistan Embassy hosted a mango festival titled 'Golden Silk Road Mangoes: A True Oriental Treasure' to promote the world renowned Pakistani mangoes in China. During the 7th International Cultural Festival of Dalian University of Technology (DUT), attended by 10,000 students and faculty,

Pakistani students set up food stalls showcasing Pakistani cuisine. Cuisine plays a role in organizing festivals, involving hospitality, respect, love, and communication. It also acts as a cultural agent at the grassroots level, fostering intercultural exchanges and deepening relationships.

Conclusion

P-to-P relations have evolved as a cardinal feature of Pakistan-China bilateral relations. In the relational diplomacy P-to-P relations require sustainable efforts and investment. Such efforts must recognize the core values, cultural sensitivities and social norms to understand the social context in which such relations can flourish. In the case of Pakistan-China relations the bilateral friendship has flourished as it recognized the potential and need for a broad-based relation. The geographical proximity, history, culture and innate affection towards each other provided a recipe to expand this relation further. For this reason, the relationship has thrived from the highest level to the grass-root levels. The diversification of the bilateral relations to the people in the form of cultural and educational exchanges, coproduction of dramas and films and growing desire to engage in festival and cultural events is testimony of expanding cross-cultural interaction. A big enabler in this bilateral cultural transformation has been played by the digital connectivity which has expedited cross-cultural communications. There is even more space to unlock the true potential of these digital platforms to develop Pakistan-China 'Digital Silk Route' focused on harnessing the P-to-P relations to the fullest.

Recommendations to Improve Pakistan-China P-to-P Relations

- A. To promote cultural events, the respective embassies of Pakistan and China should keep updating their website and post upcoming events so that more people can attend.
- B. There is a huge potential for the joint production of dramas, documentaries mainly focusing on the lives of Chinese students in Pakistan and Pakistani students in China and their experience in each other's countries. Similarly, coproduction on the lives of the Chinese diaspora living in Pakistan can generate strong interest among the viewers.
- C. There is a provision to start bilingual podcasts focusing on the communities and lives of common Chinese and Pakistanis and their stories.
- D. Recollection of memories from the elders who have spent their lives in each other's countries, and formed decades-long friendships. The ambassadors, students, sportsmen, military officials and ordinary people can be included in this effort.
- E. During the major cultural events, exhibitions and exchanges, digital platforms can be utilized for live broadcast.
- F. Alumni of the Pakistan-China educational institutions should actively engage in promoting alumni exchanges to promote P-to-P relations.
- G. To promote tourism, direct flights can be introduced to tourist destinations like Skardu and Peshawar in Pakistan and cities like Chengdu, Xi'an and Guilin, among others.⁵⁷
- H. Joint working groups of the joint community-based learning groups to share skills like small businesses, farming, cooking, which are supportive of the livelihood.

I. One such initiative can be the introduction of Chinese History in the Central Superior Services (CSS) exams to introduce the upcoming officers to understand the significance of Chinese history and culture.

China-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral Engagement in 2025,

By Tahir Khan

The first visit of 2026 by Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar to China for Strategic Dialogue on 4th January is significant as it offers an opportunity to explore a way out of the impasse in bilateral and trilateral engagements with the Afghan Taliban government.

Taking stock of the situation in Afghanistan during 2025, it is obvious that the international efforts for long term Afghan peace and stability and the recognition of the over four-year-old Taliban government in the post-US Afghanistan remain in a phase of uncertainty and a continuing struggle despite the Taliban maintaining their control on the ground without any immediate or imminent threat to their regime in the near-term. In this regard, the most challenging and consequential development undoubtedly is the unprecedented decline in relations with Pakistan mainly centering around the differences in perspectives on cross-border terrorism particularly TTP's presence and support from the Afghan soil and the increasing acts of terrorism in Pakistan.

The fissures in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations have also seriously affected the crucial trilateral engagement between the three neighbours – China, Pakistan and Afghanistan – and Chinese approach of gradual and consistent progress on expanding engagement with Afghanistan under the Taliban government since 2021 as part of its regional calculus of strengthening relations and connectivity with West Asia and Central Asia. The increasing US-China competition signified by the new US stance of acquiring Bagram Airbase during the last year clearly signals that Afghan theatre remains a highly contested field on the emerging global strategic chess board.

During the first half of 2025, effective trilateral diplomacy was instrumental in the efforts for reconciling differences between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban leadership. Following Deputy Prime Minister Ishaq Dar's visit to Kabul in April 2025 coinciding with the visit of the Taliban government's Acting Minister of Commerce Nooruddin Azizi to Islamabad, in May 2025 at the 5th trilateral meeting of the Foreign Ministers in Beijing the three countries expressed commitment to enhance mutual trust and deepen cooperation including in the BRI and CPEC connectivity.

Close Pakistan-China cooperation in India-Pakistan four-day war in the beginning of May was instrumental in China asserting its influence on Kabul for rapprochement with Pakistan. At the Chinese behest, Pakistan and Afghanistan also agreed to upgrade their diplomatic relations to Ambassadors level, a measure of symbolic and political significance. Continuing the spike of engagement, the 6th trilateral meeting between Wang Yi, Dar and Muttaqi tried to build on towards strengthening relations through more exchanges, development cooperation and trade/transit connectivity.

However, despite these bilateral and trilateral maneuvers the most fundamental question in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations – the issue of TTP sanctuaries in Afghanistan and their linkage to the terrorism in Pakistan – remained unaddressed. As already by August/September, the year 2025 was moving to be the most violent year for Pakistan in a decade due to TTP and BLA terrorism surge, Pakistan's strikes in Afghanistan on terrorist hideouts and the clashes between the two countries security forces led to the closure of border and suspension of bilateral channels of communication.

The efforts of mediation of Qatar, Turkey and Saudi Arabia in recent months have played a role in de-escalating confrontation and toning down the tempers but short of an agreement on a bilateral mechanism to put the relations back on track. Though in recent weeks, the remarks of the leadership

and the senior officials and spokespersons on both sides have emitted signals that the two sides are moving towards a realistic approach of exploring bilateral engagement for normalization of relations, a concrete breakthrough has not yet occurred.

The experts and analysts agree that opening bilateral channels of engagement and effectively using the trilateral with China to act as a catalyst in the relations is the best option out of the current Afghan-Pakistan stalemate due to a number of factors:

One, China as a neighbour has close relations and key leverages with both Islamabad and Kabul. China is Pakistan's most important strategic partner for past over 70 years and with Afghanistan, since 2021 China has pursued a policy of non-interference on political issues while extending valuable support for economic stability through trade and investments. China in fact became the first country to establish full-fledged diplomatic relations with the Afghan Taliban government in 2023 despite the US pressure.

Two, China has a deep interest in addressing the core issues viz. elimination of cross-border terrorism by groups like Daesh, Al-Qaeda, TTP, BLA, ETIM, IMU and all other such entities. Combating terrorism has been central to Chinese regional strategy since Chinese nationals having been victims of terrorism in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan in recent months and years.

Three, to pursue expansion of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Afghan stability is of crucial importance for creating conditions for CPEC's extension to Afghanistan and onwards with Central Asia through infrastructure and energy projects. China is cognizant that it would not be possible to achieve this objective without stabilizing relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Four, Chinese involvement through the trilateral process would also be a way for preventing inroads that India is trying to make with the Afghan Taliban in view of latter's increasing distance with Pakistan. The strategic gain for Pakistan would be averting a two-front situation by not letting India reviving a nexus with terrorist groups along Afghan border with Pakistan.

Therefore, as there are indications that the ice has now begun to melt in Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, the two countries need to approach bilateral relations with greater maturity and farsightedness. Recognizing that security/counter-terrorism with actionable measures against TTP/BLA is prime concern for Pakistan, but a realistic perspective should guide that it can only be achieved through a framework of cooperative bilateral engagement on an agenda that also includes facilitative border management for trade, transit and movement of people. The Afghan Interim Government has also to be realistic that just being dismissive to Pakistan's concerns regarding the TTP and ascribing TTP as Pakistan's domestic issue is not a prudent approach and it has to be more responsive to Pakistan's sensitivities.

In parallel, the trilateral forum between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan can be used for facilitating normalization of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The trilateral interaction can help in narrowing down gaps between Pakistan and Afghanistan for enacting a bilateral verification mechanism on security and cross-border terrorism. In addition, Chinese assistance can also be utilized for introducing technology-based solutions for managing documented movement of people and trade and transit goods through designated crossing points. This can become a precursor of regional connectivity and economic integration.

In conclusion, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations during the past year have reached their lowest ebb. The extreme positions adopted by the two sides against each other have been counterproductive in

terms of contribution towards resolution of key issues or preventing the downslide in bilateral relations. China being a strategic partner of Pakistan and an intimate neighbour of Afghanistan is deeply concerned about this situation. The China-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue is definitively an occasion to explore workable solutions towards addressing Pakistan-Afghanistan relations in a natural direction.

The Role of Technology and Digitization in Pakistan–China Trade: Opportunities, Implications and Policy Strategies

By Dr. Muhammad Sajid

Abstract

This paper looks at how digital technologies like single-window systems, instant payments, cross-border e-commerce platforms, IoT logistics and AI are changing the way Pakistan and China trade. It brings together recent information from policy reports and studies to show how digitization helps reduce trade problems, makes it easier for small businesses to trade, and improves access to trade finance. Then, it suggests a plan for policies and strategies based on what has been studied.

The review looks at recent (2023–2025) reports, policy documents, and studies about China’s Cross-Border E-Commerce (CBEC) pilot zones, the Digital Silk Road, Pakistan’s Single Window (PSW) and Pakistan’s Raast instant payment system. The findings help create practical recommendations for making trade easier between the two countries. The evidence shows that China’s CBEC zones and digital platforms help businesses make more money and export more goods, and also make it easier to get finance. Pakistan’s PSW and Raast support paperless trade and real-time payments, but differences in standards and lack of compatibility between the two countries stop them from getting the full benefits. A 12-point strategy focuses on recognizing digital documents, setting up payment corridors, helping small businesses join digital platforms, improving visibility in logistics, and unlocking trade finance to get quick results.

Originality/value — This study uses the latest policy and research to create specific strategies for Pakistan to use digital technology for better trade with China under the CPEC/DSR frameworks.

Literature review

This literature review brings together recent studies and policy work (mostly from 2022 to 2025) that look at how digital technologies affect international trade, especially in relation to China’s Digital Silk Road (DSR), China’s Cross-Border E-Commerce (CBEC) pilot zones, Pakistan’s digital trade systems (Pakistan Single Window PSW; Raast payment system), and research on sectors like agriculture and textiles. The review is divided into eight parts: (1) China’s DSR and digital infrastructure; (2) evidence from CBEC pilot zones; (3) paperless trade, single windows and compatibility; (4) digital payments, fintech and Raast; (5) small businesses adopting digital tools and platform economics; (6) agriculture: precision, traceability and market access; (7) textiles: Industry 4.0, traceability and branding; and (8) standards, legal rules and system risks. Each section highlights the key findings and their impact on Pakistan–China trade.

Digital Transformation in Global Trade

The growing use of digital tools in international trade has become one of the biggest changes in the economy during the 21st century. New technologies like artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data, and 5G are changing how trade happens by cutting down costs, making things more transparent, and helping countries work together across borders (World Bank, 2022). Digital platforms make online shopping easier, connect buyers with sellers, and allow for real-time sharing of information, which helps reduce problems that used to slow down international trade (OECD, 2021). In particular, digital financial systems such as mobile banking and financial technology services are changing how trade is funded. These new methods are especially important for countries like Pakistan, where

getting trade financing has been a challenge for a long time. By using digital tools, exporters can avoid complicated paperwork and connect directly with banks in other countries, making transactions faster (UNCTAD, 2023). Also, using blockchain for trade documents helps prevent fraud and builds trust, which is very important for trade between Pakistan and China, where keeping transactions safe is a top priority (Zhou & Li, 2023). China's Digital Silk Road (DSR) is part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and aims to create a digital environment that connects infrastructure, standards, and services across countries. The DSR focuses on investments in 5G networks, satellite systems, online shopping between countries, and digital payment systems (Liu & Lim, 2022). For Pakistan, which already has a strong relationship with China through the ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), digital integration can help improve trade between the two countries and bring more foreign investment (Hussain et al., 2023). CPEC's second phase is starting to focus more on industry and technology upgrades, giving Pakistan a chance to improve digital infrastructure in special economic zones (SEZs) (Khan & Rehman, 2022). These SEZs can act as centers for online trade logistics, data handling, and sharing technology. Also, digital routes under CPEC are expected to connect Pakistan's trade networks with China, Central Asia, and the Middle East, opening up more markets (Shahbaz & Lin, 2023). However, some experts point out challenges like control over data, protecting against cyber threats, and making sure rules are consistent between countries. Pakistan needs to strengthen its regulatory system to handle Chinese tech companies like Huawei, Alibaba, and Tencent, making sure local businesses can benefit from digital trade without becoming too dependent on them (Rahman & Xu, 2023).

Implications for the Agricultural Sector

Agriculture is a major part of Pakistan's economy, providing around 19% of the country's total income and employing about 38% of the workers (Government of Pakistan, 2023). However, the sector faces several challenges like low production levels, weak supply chains, and limited market access. Using digital technology can help change this by introducing smart farming techniques, such as precise farming methods, crop monitoring using satellites, and online marketplaces for farmers (Ashraf et al., 2022). China has strong experience in agritech, including using AI to predict crop yields, using drones for spraying pesticides, and using blockchain to track food safety. This offers Pakistan a good example to follow and work with (Wang et al., 2022). Cooperation between Pakistan and China can also include digital supply chain systems, allowing Pakistani farmers to connect directly with Chinese buyers through the internet. This helps reduce the number of middlemen, leading to better prices for farmers (Hameed & Gao, 2023). In addition, the trade between Pakistan and China in agricultural products like rice, mangoes, and citrus fruits is increasing. But there are still some challenges, such as SPS (sanitary and phytosanitary) rules, which sometimes stop trade. Digital certification systems, backed by blockchain, can help meet Chinese import standards, making trade faster and reducing rejections (Iqbal et al., 2022). These digital tools not only support trade between the two countries but also help improve food security and the living conditions of people in rural areas of Pakistan.

China's Digital Silk Road and strategic digital infrastructure

A lot of research shows how big and ambitious China's Digital Silk Road (DSR) is, as part of the larger Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The DSR includes investments in data centers, fiberoptic cables, 5G networks, satellite navigation, and cloud systems. It also involves spreading Chinese tech companies like Alibaba, Tencent, and Huawei across the world (Baark, 2024; ISEAS, 2024). Scholars say the DSR is not just about building physical infrastructure—it also brings technical rules, platform designs, and business services (Zhang & Chen, 2023). One key part of the DSR is creating connected digital paths that link production, transportation, and consumer areas in partner

countries. This is especially important for projects like the ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), where physical and digital links support each other (Baark, 2024; ISEAS, 2024). For the countries involved, the DSR helps quickly build digital abilities, but it also brings up issues about who controls the tech, matching standards, and longterm reliance on Chinese companies (Baark, 2024).

Recent studies, mostly quasi-experimental and looking at small areas, have looked at China's Cross-Border E-Commerce (CBEC) comprehensive pilot zones (CPZs). These studies show that digital trade policies can have real effects. Using methods like difference-in-differences and panel data, researchers found that when a region is named a CPZ, it leads to more household spending, more exports from businesses, and better local incomes (Cai et al., 2025; Lyu, 2024; Wang, Sun, & Zhou, 2025). These positive results happen through several ways: easier regulations (like simpler customs and faster shipping), better access to online markets (like digital tools and better logistics), and better access to digital money (like quicker payments and alternative ways to show creditworthiness). Scholars also found that different industries respond in different ways to CPZs. Companies in areas like consumer goods, electronics, and light manufacturing see benefits first because their products are easier to ship and face fewer rules. But companies in agriculture or sectors with strict rules need more support to meet standards and health regulations (He et al., 2024; Han et al., 2025). Overall, the research shows that digital trade policies in specific areas can improve the economy, but these improvements work best when there are supporting changes in finance, logistics, and product standards. Trade facilitation studies show that single-window systems and using electronic documents are very effective ways to cut down the costs of doing business at borders (UNESCAP, 2023; WCO, 2024). The Pakistan Single Window (PSW) aims to combine all the permits, certificates, and customs forms into one digital platform — which is essential for making trade completely paperless with China and other countries (PSW, 2024). Research from other places shows that when countries agree to accept electronic documents like e-certificates of origin, e-invoices, and e-phyto certificates, and share data before goods arrive, it greatly reduces the time it takes to process imports and exports (Hummels et al., 2025). The studies also point out a technical challenge: for systems to work together smoothly, they need common data standards (like the WCO Data Model or UN/CEFACT classifications) and good management of APIs — it's not enough to just digitize paper forms (WCO, 2024; UNESCAP, 2023). Because of this, many studies suggest starting with small tests, focusing on a few product categories and trusted businesses, to build confidence and check the legal rules before expanding the system widely (PSW reports; WCO workshop findings).

Digital payments, fintech and the role of Raast

Digital rails that allow instant payments are very important for online businesses and small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) to manage their money. Studies on digital finance show that systems that process payments in real time help reduce the risk of payment failures, cut down on the amount of money businesses need to keep on hand, and help small sellers and exporters do better online (Ma & Zhang, 2025; Development Asia, 2024). In Pakistan, Raast — the country's instant payment system run by the State Bank — has grown quickly and is now widely used for payments from individuals to businesses, helping to support e-commerce (SBP, 2025). However, research also shows that connecting payment systems across countries needs careful attention to anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing rules, exchange rate systems, and often agreements between countries or banks to manage money and risks (KPMG Pakistan, 2025; SBP, 2025). For trade between Pakistan and China, experts suggest starting with smaller payment systems and using

secure payment holding services to help small businesses in trade, while also setting up common rules for sending and matching payment information (Ma & Zhang, 2025).

SME digital adoption and platform economics

Small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) make up most of Pakistan's export companies, but they often face challenges like not having enough digital skills, difficulty in meeting product standards, and limited knowledge about logistics. Research on marketplaces shows that these platforms help small sellers find customers in big foreign markets by lowering the cost of finding buyers. However, joining these platforms needs businesses to invest in things like product information, managing orders, handling returns, and providing good customer service (Molenaar, Sinkovics, & Archie-Acheampong, 2024; Bashir et al., 2024). Studies focused on Pakistan show that SMEs which use complete sets of tools like digital product listings, content in two languages, and quality certifications perform better in exports (Afzal et al., 2022; Bashir et al., 2024). The clear message for policies is that support for businesses on the supply side—like helping them get started, providing funding, and setting up compliance centers—is needed to take advantage of the opportunities created by Chinese marketplaces.

Agriculture is a key part of Pakistan's trade and is closely controlled by rules related to food safety and plant health. New studies show that using digital tools in farming, like satellite imaging, moisture sensors, and blockchain for tracking cold storage, can greatly lower losses after harvest and help meet the rules of other countries (Ali & Rehman, 2024; Zheng & Xu, 2025). China is helping other countries with digital farming tools and investments through projects under the Belt and Road Initiative, often starting with small demonstration programs (Baark, 2024). For Pakistan, experts suggest combining digital tools on farms, such as estimating crops and managing water, with digital certification and electronic plant health documents to make it easier to sell products in China (Ali & Rehman, 2024; PSW, 2024). The textile industry shows both chances and a need for action: producers are facing strong competition and lower profits around the world, but using digital tools can help improve products and provide clear records that top customers want (Mahmood, 2023; Khan & Hussain, 2024). Technologies from Industry 4.0, like predictive maintenance, digital looms, and automated quality checks, make factories more efficient and products more consistent. Blockchain is becoming popular for showing where products come from and proving they are sustainable (Khan et al., 2023). Studies show that companies exporting goods with digital proof of origin and sustainability do better in advanced markets and can charge more for their products. This is important for Pakistan's plan to reach higher-value parts of China's retail markets (Mahmood, 2023).

A common idea in recent studies is that using new technologies alone, without proper laws and systems in place, may not bring much benefit. The UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records (MLETR), the WCO Data Model, and UN/CEFACT standards are often mentioned as important steps for making paperless trade work across borders (UNESCAP, 2023; WCO, 2024). Also, many papers talk about security and how data is managed. When data moves between countries, it's important to know about where data is stored, how private it is, and how secure it is from national threats — these factors influence which companies or cloud systems countries are willing to use (Baark, 2024; ISEAS, 2024). Lastly, some research points out the dangers of having too much power in one platform or being too reliant on certain technologies. While investing in digital systems can quickly improve abilities, it can also make a country depend on just a few options. To avoid this, they suggest having different choices and building local skills and resources (Baark, 2024; Development Asia, 2024).

Summary of gaps and research implications

The studies that have been reviewed give a good but not complete picture of how digital trade help makes regional business work better. Looking at China's Cross-border Pilot Zones shows clear examples of how digital tools make customs easier, improve money access, and lower costs in trade. But there isn't much research on Pakistan's own systems like the Pakistan Single Window and Raast payment system. Even though documents and reports say these tools could cut down on problems, there isn't strong proof about how they affect trade, like more exports, quicker customs checks, or cheaper payments. In different industries, there is also not enough research. In other countries, digital tools in farming have been tested a lot, using methods like random testing and long-term studies. But in Pakistan, we don't know much about how digital help for farmers, e-marketplaces, or blockchain for tracking goods affects exports. The textile industry is very important for Pakistan's exports, but there's only early talk about using Industry 4.0 tools. There's not much research on how automation, digital quality checks, or smart logistics affect productivity and export success. This lack of research makes it harder for policymakers to apply what works in one industry to others. Another area needing more work is comparing trade along the Pak–China route. There's not enough research that follows trade from start to finish—like how sellers get on board, how they follow rules, go through customs, move goods, pay, and deliver. This kind of study could show how much time and money are saved in different situations, and where things get stuck. For example, differences in rules about privacy, digital certificates, or financial laws might stop trade or make it less trustworthy. Also, comparing Raast with China's payment systems on speed, reliability, and solving problems is needed. Filling these gaps is key for making smart trade policies. Better research would help decide where to test new tools in high-impact areas like farming and textiles, support small and medium businesses with better funding, and help with digital trade rules. Comparing trade between Pakistan and China would let both countries work together on common rules and share costs for better systems. In the end, solving these research questions would turn the digital ideas for the Pak–China trade route into real tools that help grow the economy and make trade better.

From Sun Wukong to Dragon Balls: How the Chinese Legend Became a Childhood Memory in Pakistan,

BY Sarmad Wali Khan

Mr. Samad Wali Khan is a Research Associate and Project Coordinator at BCPR

In the early 2000s, my afternoons followed a sacred ritual. The moment madrasa ended, I would race home to plant myself in front of the television by 5:30 PM sharp. Cartoon Network was about to air Dragon Ball Z in Urdu, and missing the opening sequence felt unthinkable. On screen, Goku's hair blazed golden as he battled evil Frieza, with their battle stretching across episodes. From the kitchen, my mother's call about offering prayer would be met with my habitual lie: "bas das minute aur"- just ten more minutes. I, like millions of Pakistani children, stayed glued to the set until the end.

What none of us understood then was that this spiky-haired hero was a 16th-century Chinese legend wearing a Japanese disguise. In homes across Pakistan, Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, was quietly becoming the most influential figure in our childhood. We just knew him as Goku.

The legend began with Journey to the West, Wu Cheng'en's 16th-century novel about a magical monkey born from stone, wielding a mighty staff and possessing supernatural powers. The story tells of a monkey warrior who accompanied monk Xuanzang on his journey to the west, present-day Indus Valley, the northern areas of Swat, Pakistan, to retrieve the original Buddhist scrolls and their teachings. In 1984, Japanese manga artist Akira Toriyama reimagined Son Goku, the Japanese pronunciation of Sun Wukong, who inherited the monkey tail, the extending Power Pole, the rebellious spirit, and a flying nimbus, wrapped in a manga aesthetic that would circle the globe, with allusions to being from the warrior race of monkeylike creatures called Saiyans.

When Dragon Ball arrived in Pakistan via Cartoon Network in the late 1990s, it came stripped of context. No one explained the Chinese mythology or the Japanese adaptation. We just received Goku: a powerful fighter collecting magical orbs, speaking Urdu, and airing in the late afternoon. The ancient narrative underlying every frame remained invisible. Toriyama had distilled Sun Wukong's essence into universal themes of struggle and triumph, and combined them with the teachings of Shinto and Taoism. Yet, unknowingly, we Pakistani millennials were absorbing values deeply embedded in the original tale, which were perseverance, loyalty, and self-improvement through relentless discipline and purity of intention.

The series landed in Pakistan via cable TV's Cartoon Network, which played its Urdudubbed version. After school, we'd see him train under impossible gravity or refuse to surrender against overwhelming odds, providing an unknowing archetype of resilience and never giving up. When Goku rose, bloodied and exhausted, it felt like personal permission to keep trying against odds or seemingly insurmountable obstacles, come what may.

Our fandom thrived informally, without conventions or official merchandise. We debated power levels and super Saiyans in schoolyards, shared pirated DVDs, and later built Facebook groups for Urdu memes and episode theories. In a society that often dismissed animation as childish, Dragon Ball survived through genuine passion in silos and a long story arc that started in the 1980s and is continuing in 2025 as I am writing this. This long arc of time has made Dragon Ball fandom spread across Gen X, millennials, and Gen Z alike.

Recently, in 2024, with *Black Myth: Wukong*, a Chinese video game that became a global phenomenon, Pakistani gamers suddenly noticed the familiar extending staff, the transformations, and the monkey imagery. Social media erupted with awe-cum-recognition: “Wait, Goku is based on a Chinese character?” The invisible connection of our childhoods became undeniable. We had been engaging with Chinese mythology all along.

The revelation of this fact that one of China's all-time epics was based on travels to the ‘west’, present-day Pakistan, frees the Pak-China connection from any political and diplomatic emphasis. This not only brings out a new dimension in the Pak-China historic connection but also reframes the bilateralism of today between the two countries, which is based on development/economic logic. Dragon Ball represents something fundamentally different: a pre-existing, organic emotional connection to Chinese cultural narrative, built without a single government program or official initiative.

This hidden cultural bridge offers a genuine opportunity for collaboration beyond transactional relationships. Joint cultural events could trace Journey to the West's evolution from Chinese opera to Japanese manga to Pakistani living rooms. Pakistani millennials could share their personal investment in the saga, while Chinese youth explain Sun Wukong's deeper cultural significance. Such exchanges would demonstrate how stories transcend borders while retaining their core meanings.

Moreover, civilizational parallels among the stories of the Indo-Persian heritage of the Indus and those of the Chinese and Japanese counterparts, something that even Xi Jinping has highlighted as part of his Global Civilization Initiative, can be found. After all, what is a better way to initiate dialogue and common grounds between civilizations than shared stories? The story of Aladdin, the lamp, and the Genie that grants wishes is comparable in some ways to the story of Dragon Shenron from Dragon Ball, who is also summoned to grant wishes. Similarly, the search for dragon balls and Aladdin's lamp has been a recurring theme. This shows how stories can achieve what the calculated logic of politics cannot.

As we discover these historic connections, we are not merely learning about a foreign culture. We are recognizing a hidden depth in our own formative experiences. Sun Wukong travelled from 16th-century China through 20th-century Japan to 21st-century Pakistan, in a way that was subtle and organic, a cultural diffusion that appears invisible until it is not. This journey, from ancient legend to cherished childhood memory, represents cultural exchange at its most powerful, that is, organic, meaningful, and rooted in genuine shared experience. The Power Pole that connected heaven and earth in Chinese mythology has, in its own way, connected Pakistani and Chinese youth across continents. We just need to recognize the staff that the millennials have been holding all along, though unknowingly.

For years, we have not been able to see past the surface, but probing one simple childhood memory reveals a web of connections between different histories and cultures that sound strange, if not totally absurd at first. Every civilization has shaped itself around an overarching story, one that spans generations, borders, and even what we thought were impermeable boundaries between “us” and “them.” The question isn't whether these stories exist. It is whether we are still listening, and what we are willing to hear when they don't fit the narratives we have been taught to expect. It reminds one of a line from Journey to the West, that ‘a team of horses cannot bring back a word that leaves the mouth’. So is a good story, that once told, does not stop travelling.

Building People-to-People Relations between Pakistan and China through Entertainment

By Muhammad Arslan

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 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 manoeuvres 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 always

consumed by the individuals of the world, 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 India's 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 grassroots 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.

Bibliography:

1. Ahmad, S. (2022). Digital Transformation of Pakistan's Entertainment Industry. Dawn Institute for Policy Studies.
2. Chen, Y. (2023). Streaming Platforms and Cultural Diplomacy: Audience Agency in the Digital Age. Frontiers in Communication.
3. Crystal, D. (2006). How Language Works. Penguin Books.
4. European Commission. (2023). The MEDIA Programme: Supporting Europe's Audiovisual Industries. Brussels: European Union.
5. Haque, S. (2021). Pakistan's Media and CPEC: Opportunities and Challenges. Pakistan-China Institute.
6. Khan, A. (2020). Cultural Corridors under CPEC. Islamabad Policy Research Institute.

7. Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS). (2020). Hallyu: The Korean Wave. Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, Republic of Korea.
8. Lee, J. (2024). Global Cultural Integration and Local Adaptability in Netflix's Original Content Strategy. *Media Studies Review*.
9. Li, M. (2019). Cultural Soft Power and the Belt and Road Initiative. *East Asian Policy*.
10. Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. PublicAffairs.
11. Obaid-Chinoy, S. (2022). Keynote Address on Transnational Storytelling. Lahore Literary Festival.
12. Özdemir, K. (2023). Streaming Services and Local Content Diversification: Evidence from Brazil, Korea, and Turkey. *Journal of Cultural Policy*.
13. Pakistan-China Institute. (2021). *Survey on Pakistani Youth Perceptions of China*. Islamabad.
14. Pew Research Center. (2022). *China's Global Image and Cultural Diplomacy*. Washington, D.C.
15. PwC. (2023). *Global Entertainment and Media Outlook*. PricewaterhouseCoopers.
16. Rahman, F. (2022). People-to-People Ties in CPEC: A Policy Perspective. *Express Tribune Policy Review*.
17. Sun, W. (2021). *Entertainment Diplomacy: China's Use of Media for Soft Power*. Tsinghua University Press.
18. UNESCO. (2020). *The Cultural Industries and Sustainable Development*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing.
19. Wang, H., & Li, X. (2022). Algorithmic Recommendation and Cross Cultural Familiarity in Digital Platforms. *Journal of Media Technology Studies*.
20. Xu, L. (2021). *China's Film Industry: Growth and Global Outreach*. Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.

China's BRI: Ideology of Cooperative Globalism

By Dr. Marriyam Siddique

Dr Marriyam Siddique is Assistant Professor, Pakistan Navy War College Lahore (PNWC). Senior Research Fellow, Maritime center of Excellence, PNWC. She can be reached at drmarriyam16@gmail.com.

Abstract

As the global order is transforming, China's peaceful rise highlights its ideological framework based on peaceful coexistence, cooperation, economic prosperity, and mutual development. The rise of China to the status of a global power is undeniable. This research work investigates China's ideological framework that is "Cooperative Globalism," a phenomenon that emphasises the significance of global collaboration for economic resilience and global development. Through BRI, China has invested over \$1 trillion in infrastructure projects in more than 140 states worldwide, which aims to strengthen cooperation and deepen economic integration through regional connectivity. In 2024, China achieved a record level of engagement by investing over \$51 billion. About \$70.7 billion has been invested towards infrastructure construction contracts. Additionally, BRI states accounted for about 30% of China's total foreign trade, and it has the potential to boost global GDP by as much as \$7.1 trillion by 2040. The political and economic behaviour has transformed the global power dynamics from unipolar to multipolar and challenges the prevailing hegemony and aims to promote peace and stability through economic diplomacy, resilience, and development. China's perspective provides a unique dimension to the evolving geopolitical landscape by placing a premium on regional prosperity rather than the global dimension. This study resolves that China's global perspective adheres to and promotes the ideology of "Cooperative Globalism" in the form of BRI and lays the foundation for a transformation in global leadership.

Keywords: Cooperative Globalism, Belt and Road Initiative, Hegemony, Multilateral Cooperation, Economic Diplomacy.

Introduction

In the last several decades, China has come a long way from being a politically and economically isolated underdeveloped state to a global power (Naveed, 2018; Morrison, 2019). China's foreign policy is constructed on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence: non interference in domestic matters, non-aggression, equality and mutual benefit, mutual respect, territorial integrity, and sovereignty (CMP, 2024; Edward Wong, 2024). Through its pragmatic and geopolitical calculations, China has invested in a unipolar world and transformed it toward multipolarity. Throughout the Cold War, China maintained its position by adhering to its foreign policy of cooperation, stability, respect, and dignity.

Since its establishment, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have piloted China's foreign policy globally. Some instances where these principles have been put into practice include the 1954 Sino-Indian settlement over Tibet, boundary disputes, and bilateral agreements between nations with very different political systems and histories (Yuan Zhengqing, 2015). China's Five Principles laid the foundation for the Non-Aligned Movement's Charter, thereby reinforcing China's global normative influence. From that point on, China has consistently upheld the principles of sovereignty, non-interference, collaboration, and a peaceful foreign policy (MFA, 2024).

In 2013, China unveiled the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which embodies its commitment to “Cooperative Globalism” based on these political, economic, and cultural norms. Scholars like Abdul Aziz Said and Alastair Iain Johnston laud the cooperative globalism framework (Charles O. Lerche, 1970; Johnston, 2003). The primary argument of this framework is that apart from the ‘follow-me’ hubris of hegemony or authoritarian rule, the cooperative globalism “leads to high levels of cooperation even with low levels of formality and intrusiveness (Johnston, 2003).” China does not hold hegemony and zero-sum power politics; it prospects to create inclusive globalisation, economic prosperity, and mutual development through BRI. Over 150 states and international organisations are expected to become members of the BRI by mid-2025, with the vision of achieving \$1.3 trillion in infrastructure investments and \$2.5 trillion in trade by 2024 (Greenfdc, s.d.; Nedopil, 2025; Saei, 2025; Adetunji, 2017). Through BRI, a new paradigm in global politics is emerging on this scale, one that prioritises economic development, regional connectivity, and principles-based discourse while honouring the sovereignty and development ambitions of member states. It further demonstrates China’s pioneering role in fostering global economic integration. Since the Cold War, a unipolar system has prevailed; however, China advocates for a multipolar world. President Xi Jinping’s asserts that multipolarity fosters more impartial, rational, and unwavering global arrangements facilitating cooperation and development in the Global South. China is ardently following the BRI’s vision and advocating for global governance based on cooperation outside of Western-led organisations through its membership in international institutions such as the SCO, BRICS, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. China’s policy statements and official rhetoric affirm that the Five Principles and the BRI are part of a larger ideological framework that promotes peaceful rise, shared prosperity, win-win collaboration, and mutual respect that underpins the ‘China Dream’ as well. Premier Zhou Enlai’s 1950s diplomacy positioned the footing for this miraculous approach, and President Xi Jinping’s 2024 vision of a “community with a shared future for mankind” reinforced the Five Principles’ centrality to China’s foreign policy.

This study initiates a discourse regarding “China’s Cooperative Globalism.” What impact do the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence have on China’s international diplomacy today? How does the BRI operationalise these norms to promote global development and multipolar governance? Does China’s regional connectivity and economic engagement undermine the hegemonic world order? In a rapidly changing geopolitics, how does China’s cooperative globalism influence international peace, stability, and sustainable development? This research work argues that China has an ideology that is based on a harmonious, and prosperous global order by considering its diplomatic history, ideological constructs, and engagement with global governance institutions. China’s ideology, ‘cooperative globalism,’ is based on peaceful sharing, economic engagement, and sovereignty, which offer a corridor of peace and multipolar cooperation globally.

Ideological Underpinnings of China’s Cooperative Globalism

China’s foreign policy paradigm, exclusively the BRI, is based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. China first suggested these ideas in the early 1950s. They now underpin China’s diplomatic philosophy and foreign relations. Traditional Chinese values and norms based on the post-colonial perspectives and the multipolar world order in the mid-20th century are reflected in the five principles: peaceful coexistence, equality and mutual benefit, non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful coexistence, and mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity (Xinhua, 2024).

China was able to preserve its objectives through cooperation rather than confrontation and bloc politics, though it was diplomatically isolated and geopolitically contained by Western nations.

China's cooperative globalism, based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, aspires to construct a global community where nations respect one another's sovereignty and pursue economic development without interference or hegemonic control. The BRI has been implementing the ideology of cooperative globalism since 2013 (Wang, 2021). China advocates for mutual progress, economic prosperity, and development, rejecting the zero-sum geopolitical competition. China aims to create interstate connectedness through infrastructure development, economic prosperity, and political discourse. Its goal is to build a new global paradigm that opposes hegemony and interventionism.

In the past, the US has maintained its status as the preeminent unipolar global force since the Cold War ended. Conversely, China opposes hegemonic and interventionist policies that sow discord and instability around the world and supports state sovereignty and inclusive growth. The multipolar system, which President Xi Jinping supports, is more stable, inclusive, and robust; it will grant greater influence to all states, particularly those in the Global South. As President Xi Jinping proclaimed, "To build a global community of shared future, all peoples, all countries, and all individuals – our destinies being interconnected – must stand together in adversity and through thick and thin, navigating towards greater harmony on this planet that we call home. We should endeavour to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity, turning people's longing for a better life into reality (mfa, 2023)."

Engagement through multilateral institutions, such as the SCO, BRICS, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, is evidence of China's commitment to cooperative globalism, in which cooperation and mutual interest take precedence over competition and rivalry. China's government emphasise that the Five Principles and BRI represent and promote 'cooperative globalism' ideology. This approach was established by Premier Zhou Enlai in the 1950s and reinforced by President Xi Jinping, who dubbed the Five Principles the "cornerstone" of Chinese diplomacy (Iqbal, 2024). China's government white papers, senior official speeches, and policy communications emphasise "peaceful rise," "win-win cooperation," "shared prosperity," and "mutual respect" to support its external engagements and vision for a harmonious international system.

President Xi, on the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Coexistence, called for a "community with a shared future for mankind," underscoring the urge for cooperation and inclusive global governance to tackle economic inequality, climate change, and security threats (Xinhua, 2024). At the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos, President Xi stated, "There's no point blaming economic globalization for the world's problems...Countries have the right to development, but they should view their interests in the broader context and refrain from pursuing their interests at the expense of others (CGTN America, 2017)." Therefore, the BRI operationalises China's desire to transform global governance through economic partnership and infrastructure connectivity. China leads the way in creating a more balanced, impartial, and prosperous global order based on peaceful cohabitation and a forward-looking vision of global harmony by emphasising multipolarity and constructive engagement.

BRI – An Embouchure of Economic Diplomacy

The BRI is a ground-breaking economic perspective that China has carefully constructed since 2013. It is a global infrastructure development initiative that promotes connectivity, trade, and economic cooperation among 150 states and international organisations in Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Latin America. China's BRI engagement reached \$1.308 trillion by mid-2025, including \$775 billion in infrastructure projects and \$533 billion in investment projects (Nedopil, 2025; Greenfdc, s.d.). Moreover, BRI-related construction contracts and investments reached record highs

in the first half of 2025, with \$66.2 billion in deals and \$57.1 billion in investments, nearly double the previous year, which demonstrates China's global economic statecraft success (Hasanova, 2025).

Transportation networks (roads, trains, and ports), energy pipelines, telecommunication systems, and industrial parks are among the BRI's most extensive infrastructure projects. Energy, mining, and high-tech manufacturing are key to global supply chains and economic growth; thus the effort targeted them. In 2025, energy sector investments totalled \$44 billion, with half going to oil and gas projects and a growing share to renewable energy projects like wind, solar, and waste-to-energy, totalling approximately 12 gigawatts of capacity (Nedopil, 2025; IEA, 2025). A \$20 billion gas processing complex in Nigeria is one of BRI's major projects, demonstrating its dual focus on energy and environmental development (News Central, 2025). The BRI goes beyond infrastructure to encourage regional connectivity and South-South cooperation, promoting economic integration among developing economies. The cooperative initiative reduces trade costs, improves market access, and boosts investment by strengthening regional transport and energy infrastructure. These physical linkages encourage economic prosperity and industry collaboration, which boost sustainable growth. By 2024, BRI states' trade volumes exceeded \$3.07 trillion, this trade volume accounted for over 50% of China's total foreign trade value that year, reflecting a significant economic interdependence fostered by the BRI (Assadi, 2025).

Chinese companies completed 340 deals worth \$121.8 billion in 2024, exhibiting project performance across regions and sectors (Nedopil, 2025). Middle Eastern states received \$39 billion through Chinese BRI engagement, highlighting energy-rich regions' geopolitical and economic prominence (Rasmal Press Room, 2025). China wants to connect Latin America to its broader network of collaboration, despite a recent drop in investments. BRI investments in Indonesia (\$9.3 billion), Pakistan (\$65 billion), Saudi Arabia (\$5.8 billion), and Kazakhstan (\$4.6 billion) demonstrate China's geographic reach and regional congregation (Nedopil, 2025). China's economic diplomacy through BRI is a sophisticated strategic economic statecraft that promotes a multipolar world order with shared development and reduced dependence on Western institutions.

China's development-oriented diplomacy contrasts with hegemonic and zero-sum geopolitics by using its industrial and economic prosperity to construct infrastructure and spread its influence through bilateral and multilateral engagements. As part of the BRI, participating states are contributing to reduce their economic vulnerabilities to external shocks by diversifying their trade partners, enhancing their logistics infrastructure, and becoming more integrated into global value chains. The \$51 billion invested in 2024 demonstrates that BRI projects have significantly influenced GDP growth and job creation in partner states. The multipolar and egalitarian global order is supported by AIIB and BRICS New Development Bank institutions, which oversee funding, policy discourse, and project implementation. Participation in multilateral frameworks by Chinese commercial ventures strengthens the narrative of peaceful global integration and win-win cooperation by promoting shared ownership and joint advantages.

Addressing Criticisms: Debt Sustainability and Sovereignty Concerns

Critics anticipate that China may gain geopolitical dominance over the BRI member states through the debt scheduling and sustainability. Analysts are skeptical that the BRI loans have put poorer nations into a "debt trap" where they will have a hard time paying back their loans, particularly if they are not financially resilient. Many observe that China's 99-year lease on Sri Lanka's Hambantota port – obtained as a result of loan default – is a geopolitical and strategic advantage for Beijing. Pakistan and Zambia have encountered sovereign debt difficulty with a large share of external debt owed to China, raising concerns about BRI funding deals' transparency and fairness.

Reports suggest that developing countries will owe China \$35 billion in loan repayments by 2025, with \$22 billion of that amount due from 75 of the world's poorest nations, which fear funding cuts to health and education (Kozul-Wright, 2025). Despite these criticisms, various evidence-based counterarguments emphasise China's commitment to "win-win cooperation" and customised agreements for each partner country. China insists that the BRI tailor negotiations to partner countries' development interests, capacities, and national sovereignty. Chinese policy banks negotiate conditions that balance commercial and concessional interests in the spirit of mutual benefit, unlike some Western aid or financial structures. China has also recognised debt sustainability issues and improved transparency and debt-relief methods (AFRODAD, 2022).

As part of the G20 Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI), China temporarily reduced the debts of participating states by \$4.2 billion in 2020 and 2021 (Duke, 2025). The pandemic's financial hardships forced the postponement of payments. If China accelerates payments in 2024 and 2025, it might be open to participating in international debt restructuring programs.

Recent BRI projects have significantly improved transparency, previously hindered by non-disclosure agreements and insufficient financial data. China has proposed that multilateral financial institutions, which follow international norms for governance reform, environmental sustainability, and project requirements, be modelled after the AIIB. In the case of budgetary problems, China can now renegotiate, extend the maturity of its loans, or restructure its debt – credit goes to changes to their debt-relief policy. The resolutions offered by China align with the government's rhetoric on peaceful cohabitation and national independence. They assist collaborating governments in managing their debt without compromising their sovereignty or strategic autonomy.

The BRI infrastructure enhancements boost economic growth and are based on real project results. Enhanced energy supply, industrial capacity, and transit links have contributed to the improvement of recipient nations' economies and the reduction in poverty levels. Resilient trade operations and reduced travel times were made possible by the Mombasa Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya, which was built and financed by the BRI. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has improved Pakistan's infrastructure to the point where the country can generate more electricity, from 9,000-9,500 MW in 2015 to 42,00 MW by 2024 (PIDE, 2025).

This investment has increased industry and decreased power shortages. The BRI is now able to finance solar and wind farms in Asia, Central Asia, and Africa, which will help achieve sustainable development and climate change mitigation goals. Enhancing economic conditions and reducing debt burden are of utmost significance to China, in keeping with its goal of friendly cooperation and mutual benefit. As part of its BRI, China aspires to construct a world, where every state can prosper well and respects one another. Contrary to the prophecies of hegemonic power, this alternative growth route nonetheless satisfies the unique requirements of countries in the Global South. China uses economic diplomacy to help its partner states deal with international economic instability, development gaps, and infrastructure constraints. The Chinese government's aims are debt reduction, win-win partnerships, and capacity-building conversations, despite reasonable worries about the long-term viability of the BRI projects.

BRI's Implications on Global Governance

As a global political and economic initiative, BRI holds a global governance framework that promotes constructive international collaboration and multipolarity (Chun, 2017). Borderless, inclusive, and diverse leadership is a passionate call for an era when nationalism and isolationism are on the upsurge. Cohesion is key to achieving success in the long run, according to proponents of

the “community of common destiny for mankind” impression. This perspective advocates for an inclusive approach to international law making, challenging hegemonic domination and narrow national interests. The study argues that all states, not only those along with the BRI routes, should prioritise economic growth, social justice, environmental sustainability, and security. Balancing top-down institutional coordination with bottom-up voluntary cooperation among various states, the BRI increases the provision of public goods and establishes ethical standards in global connections.

Moreover, BRI contributes to the foundation of global governance (Bin, 2021). Through the BRI, China intends to promote multilateralism by establishing formidable global institutions. In the newly established multinational financial organization known as the AIIB, China has assumed leadership with a focus on global governance and investments in long-term infrastructure. Inclusiveness of the AIIB’s leadership has fostered an environment where members are comfortable enough to trust each other and share opinions on imperative matters. Aside from China’s significant roles in Western groups, its participation in the BRICS and the SCO demonstrates that China is committed to regional stability, economic cooperation, and security (Azizi, 2024). These regional organisations are investing in better ways to communicate, work together, and coordinate policies in their quest for a more equitable global order.

The strategic relevance of the BRI projects will be enhanced if they are integrated into global frameworks, which will support a paradigm shift towards shared growth rather than rivalry and conflict. The BRI aims to build new institutions that will promote economic growth and regional stability, especially in the global South. By reducing trade barriers, the initiative improves connectivity, fixes infrastructural inadequacies, and makes economic conditions conducive to peaceful advancement. Greater regional connectedness can lessen the severity of environmental, security, and economic injustice-related collaboration demands. Growing trade between BRI nations, economic connectedness is promoted, lowering the likelihood of violence and increasing the likelihood of prosperity (Zreik, 2024). One distinguishing diplomatic aspect of China is its emphasis on growth, which is closely followed by its regard for national sovereignty. China demands a peaceful economic cooperation and demands a more equitable international system.

It is expected that the funding for the BRI would be preserved, and subsequent plans will prioritise sustainability and resilience. Nearly half of the estimated \$1.5 trillion in investments for green infrastructure would likely go towards renewable energy and environmentally friendly transportation networks by the year 2026. On a global level, the forthcoming plan is anticipated to strengthen sustainability initiatives. Post-2024, there was a more responsible policy change that prioritises project transparency, local development goals, and the long-term sustainability of partner nations’ debt over global concerns. New health and environmental programs, along with the BRI’s Digital Silk Road, demonstrate a higher level of international engagement. Cooperation on a global scale is necessary to address new challenges that transcend traditional security and economic paradigms. The BRI combines sustainable development goals, economic diplomacy, and multilateral diplomacy to help with the transition to cooperative and multipolar global government. To implement its ideological underpinnings of inclusive governance and harmonious global growth in a global context, the BRI will keep investing, make sustainability a priority, and ensure resilience at the global level.

Conclusion

Through the lens of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, Chinese foreign policy and the BRI demonstrate a strong commitment to “Cooperative Globalism.” Ideas that affected Chinese diplomacy since the Bandung Conference and the Sino-Indian Agreement in the 1950s are still

relevant in 2018. With the support of more than 140 countries, the BRI has matured into a current and concrete reflection of these values and norms. The ultimate objectives are mutually beneficial collaboration and the endorsement of state sovereignty. The Chinese government expects trade volumes to hit \$2.5 trillion by 2024, with BRI member states investing more than \$1.3 trillion in infrastructure.

This data demonstrates the initiative's impact on the development of international financial ties. After witnessing how hegemonic frameworks and traditional unipolar dominance have marginalised many emerging countries, China has advocated for a multipolar global system. China supports international institutions that promote democratic values, such as the BRICS New Development Bank, the AIIB, and the SCO. This economic statecraft, which strengthens regional economies and promotes peace, contributes to global stability, particularly in the South. In its pursuit of a more cooperative global order, China intends to combine infrastructure development with multilateral diplomacy. China has strengthened the BRI's linkages to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect in response to global concerns over debt sustainability and sovereignty. According to empirical research, BRI projects have improved development, increased access to power, and reduced poverty in several partner states. The findings also indicate that BRI is assisting the states in closing the development gap. BRI will continue to promote sustainability and quality infrastructure, as well as larger sectors such as digital connectivity, health cooperation, and climate measures, as it seeks to demonstrate its importance in addressing 21st century global concerns. China hopes to contribute to global peace and prosperity by working to build a fairer global society. Both China's diplomatic rhetoric and the BRI advocate for a cooperative globalism that challenges conventional ideas of global hegemony. It promotes a framework based on a uniform, peaceful, and interdependent world by laying out a comprehensive framework for global politics based on multipolar cooperation, sovereignty, and mutual growth.

Bibliography

1. Adetunji, J. (2017, May 16). The Belt and Road Initiative: China's Vision for Globalisation, Beijing-style. Retrieved from The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/the-belt-and-road-initiative-chinas-vision-for-globalisation-beijing-style-77705>
2. AFRODAD. (2022). Chinese Investments, Transparency and Best Sustainability in Africa. Retrieved from African Forum and Network on Debt and Development: https://afrodad.org/sites/default/files/publications/AFRODAD-CHINESE_INVESTMENT_PAPER.pdf
3. Assadi, M. Z. (2025, February 26). China's Trade with BRI Countries Enhance Global Trade Boom. Retrieved from Daily CPEC: <https://thedailycpec.com/chinas-trade-with-bri-countries-enhance-global-trade-boom/>
4. Azizi, S. (2024). China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Geopolitical Security and Economic Cooperation. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 111-129.
5. Bin, L. (2021). The Belt and Road Initiative: A New Landscape in Mapping the Changing Global Governance. Retrieved from Groupe d'études géopolitiques: <https://geopolitique.eu/en/articles/the-belt-and-road-initiative-a-new-landscape-in-mapping-the-changing-global-governance/>

6. CGTN America. (2017, January 17). Full Text of Xi Jinping keynote at the World Economic Forum. Retrieved from CGTN America: <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/17/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>
7. Charles O. Lerche, A. A. (1970). *Concept of International Politics*. California: Prentice-Hall. Retrieved from Professor Abdul Aziz Said: <https://abdulazizsaidamericanu.org/cooperative-global-politics/>
8. Chun, Z. (2017). The Belt and Road Initiative and Global Governance in Transition. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 175-191.
9. CMP. (2024, November 29). Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Retrieved from The China Media Project: https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/five-principles-of-peaceful-coexistence/
10. Duke, R. (2025, May). Peak Repayment: China's Global Lending. Retrieved from Lowy Institute: <https://interactives.lowyinstitute.org/features/peak-repayment-china-global-lending/>
11. Edward Wong, I. C. (2024, July 2). Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence Remain Relevant in Today's World. Retrieved from China Daily: <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/587117>
12. Greenfdc. (n.d.). Green Finance and Development Center. Retrieved from Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): <https://greenfdc.org/countries-of-the-belt-and-road-initiative-bri/>
13. Hasanova, T. (2025, July 18). China's Belt and Road Initiative Hits Record \$124 Billion in First Half of 2025. Retrieved from Caliber: <https://caliber.az/en/post/china-s-belt-and-road-initiative-hits-record-124-billion-in-first-half-of-2025>
14. IEA. (2025, June 5). Global Energy Investment Set to Rise to \$3.3 Trillion in 2025 Amid Economic Uncertainty and Energy Security Concerns. Retrieved from International Energy Agency: <https://www.iea.org/news/global-energy-investment-set-to-rise-to-3-3-trillion-in-2025-amid-economic-uncertainty-and-energy-security-concerns>
15. Iqbal, Q. (2024). Understanding China's Engagements in South Asia: Is It Assertive Wolf Warrior, A Cooperative Traditional or A Crucible of Conglomerate? *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 106-119.
16. Johnston, A. I. (2003). Socialisation in International Institutions: The ASEAN Way and International Relations Theory. In G. J. Ikenberry, *International Relations Theory and the Asia-Pacific* (pp. 107-162). Columbia: Columbia University Press.
17. Kozul-Wright, A. (2025, May 28). 'Tidal Wave': How 75 Nations Face Chinese Debt Crisis in 2025. Retrieved from Al Jazeera: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/28/tidal-wave-how-75-nations-face-chinese-debt-crisis-in-2025>
18. mfa. (2023, September 26). A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions. Retrieved from Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/xw/zyxw/202405/t20240530_11332291.html
19. MFA. (2024, June 28). Carrying Forward the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence and Jointly Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind. Retrieved from Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China: https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg_663340/xws_665282/xgxw_665284/202406/t20240628_11443852.html

20. Morrison, W. M. (2019, June 25). China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States. Retrieved from Congressional Research Service: https://cdn.voxcdn.com/uploads/chorus_asset/file/25354905/20190625_RL33534_088c5467dd11365dd4ab5f72133db289fa10030f.pdf
21. Naveed, M. (2018). The Politics of the China—Pakistan Economic Corridor. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 1-10.
22. Nedopil, C. (2025, July). China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Investment Report 2025 H1. Retrieved from Griffith Asia Institute: https://www.griffith.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0028/2184418/Nedopil-2025- China-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-BRI-Investment-Report-2025-H1.pdf
23. News Central. (2025, January 25). "Chinese Company Supports Nigeria's \$20 Billion Ogidigben Gas Project". Retrieved from News Central Africa: <https://newscentral.africa/chinese-company-supports-nigerias-20-billion-ogidigben-gas-project/>
24. PIDE. (2025). Discourse China Pakistan Economic Corridor. Retrieved from Pakistan Institute of Development Economics: <https://file.pide.org.pk/pdfpideresearch/discourse-2025-01-china-pakistan-economic-corridor.pdf>
25. Rasmal Press Room. (2025, March 1). Middle East Dominates China's Belt and Road Initiative with \$39 Billion in Investments. Retrieved from RASMAL: <https://www.rasmal.com/middle-east-dominates-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-with-39-billion-in-investments/>
26. Saei, S. (2025, June 15). Belt and Road Initiative Fuels Record China—Central Asia Trade. Retrieved from Tehran Times: <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/514436/Belt-and-Road-Initiative-fuels-record-China-Central-Asia-trade>
27. Wang, Z. (2021). Understanding the Belt and Road Initiative from the Relational Perspective. *Chinese Journal of International Review*, 1-26.
28. Xinhua. (2024, June 28). Address by Chinese President Xi Jinping at conference marking 70th anniversary of Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Retrieved from China Daily:
29. <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202406/28/WS667e6f2ea31095c51c50b638.html>
30. Xinhua. (2024, June 29). Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence -- Timeless Guide for Int'l Relations. Retrieved from The State Council The People's Republic of China: https://english.www.gov.cn/news/202406/29/content_WS667f6667c6d0868f4e8e8af9.html
31. Yuan Zhengqing, S. X. (2015). The dissemination of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. *The Journal of International Studies*, 66-81.
32. Zreik, M. (2024). China's Belt and Road Initiative: An Instrument for Regional Conflict Mitigation and Global Power Shifts. Retrieved from IGI Global: <https://www.igi-global.com/chapter/chinas-belt-and-road-initiative/341469>

Beyond the Performance of Democracy: Devolution, Disillusionment, and Pakistan's Search for Political Faith,

By Arsam Tufail Butt and Moavviz Siddiq Nizami

Arsam Tufail Butt is a Research Associate at the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR), with experience in legislative development, democratic governance, and civic engagement. His work focuses on policy research, legislative processes, and stakeholder engagements across government institutions, civil society organizations, and donor-funded initiatives, with particular interest related to governance and institutional development.

Moavviz Siddiq Nizami is an independent multidisciplinary researcher who interrogates the myths of modernity and the moral authority of the nation-state. His writing engages with the politics of knowledge and the uneasy promises of modern progress, questioning what counts as 'truth' in our time. He also teaches at Government College University, Lahore.

Abstract

This paper examines Pakistan's contemporary democratic crisis through the lens of institutional legitimacy and local governance. Drawing on classical political theory and comparative governance studies, it argues that Pakistan's democratic malaise stems not from rejection of democratic ideals but from the erosion of functional access to governance. While approximately 90 percent of Pakistanis consider democracy vital, more than half express dissatisfaction with how democratic institutions function. This paradox reflects democracy's "performative crisis", a condition where formal democratic structures persist while substantive citizen participation withers. The analysis traces Pakistan's history of interrupted devolution, revealing how reforms designed to empower local governments are systematically undermined by fiscal dependency and bureaucratic capture. Central to the argument is the distinction between "performative democracy" and "practiced democracy." The authors contend that genuine fiscal and administrative devolution to local governments represents democracy's critical foundation. Without autonomous local government institutions capable of delivering tangible services and accountable governance, democracy risks becoming merely spectacle, vulnerable to authoritarian displacement. The paper concludes that empowered local governance constitutes "democracy's last stand" for restoring functional legitimacy to Pakistan's political order.

Key Words: Political Legitimacy; Performative Democracy; Fiscal Decentralization; Administrative Autonomy; Democratic Renewal; Article 140-A.

Introduction

Democracy in the twenty-first century confronts a multidimensional crisis. Across both established and emerging democracies, citizens are expressing waning confidence in representative institutions and growing fatigue with formal political processes. Studies demonstrate that public trust in parliaments, political parties, and governments has declined remarkably over the past five decades, while confidence in more technocratic institutions, such as the judiciary, or military, has often remained stable or even improved (University of Southampton, 2025)³. This trend indicates not merely a cyclical loss of faith in leadership but a deeper structural erosion of democratic legitimacy.

Empirical evidence confirms that this disillusionment is global. A 2024 survey conducted across 24 democratic states in the US found that although most citizens continued to endorse democracy as the preferred form of governance, majorities in several countries expressed dissatisfaction with its performance and frustration with the perceived inefficiency of democratic decision-making (Associated Press, 2024)⁴. The paradox is thus clear: people remain normatively attached to the democratic ideal while increasingly doubtful of its practical capacity to deliver. The notion of democracy as an inherently self-correcting system is therefore under severe strain.

Pakistan's democratic trajectory exemplifies the global crisis of legitimacy of representative democracy with particular acuteness. Public opinion polling in 2025 revealed that while nearly 90 percent of Pakistanis consider democracy vital to national stability, more than half reported dissatisfaction with how democratic institutions actually function (Geo News, 2025)⁵. While the country has made significant strides in maintaining electoral continuity since 2008, public faith in democratic institutions remains fragile, oscillating between skepticism and outright disillusionment. This erosion of democratic confidence is not unique to Pakistan, yet Pakistan's specific historical, institutional, and socio-political context demands tailored solutions.

Because in recent years, the tension between aspirational faith and experiential frustration has taken on a more complex texture, one shaped by elite capture, economic precarity, and a growing sense of political alienation among ordinary citizens.

At the center of this problem lies what may be termed democracy's performative crisis. The legitimacy of democratic systems depends not only on procedural inclusivity but also on the substantive experience of participation. Citizens must feel that they have genuine access to the processes and outcomes of governance. When this sense of access becomes merely symbolic, when participation is reduced to ritual, the democratic form persists, but its moral and functional substance decays. As scholars of local governance in South Asia note, Pakistan's attempts at devolution have historically produced nominally representative but administratively dependent local institutions, unable to act autonomously or respond effectively to citizens' needs (Jahangir, Zain, & Dilkusha, 2021)⁶.

This paper argues that the restoration of democratic faith in Pakistan requires a reorientation from the performance of democracy to its practice. Empowering local governments through genuine fiscal and administrative devolution offers the most viable path toward that goal. Only by enabling citizens to experience the state's presence and accountability in their immediate communities can democracy recover its ethical and functional legitimacy.

Theoretical Framework: Democracy, Access, and Political Trust

The conceptual architecture of this paper draws on both classical political philosophy and modern theories of legitimacy. Political thinkers from Aristotle onward have understood governance as a cyclical phenomenon in which systems of rule inevitably decay when the moral purpose of authority is displaced by the pursuit of power itself. In *Politics*, Aristotle distinguishes six forms of governance, monarchy, aristocracy, and polity (each a virtuous form) and their corresponding corruptions: tyranny, oligarchy, and democracy in its degenerate sense as mob rule (Aristotle, trans. 2017)⁷. The central insight here is that legitimacy depends on alignment between authority and the common good. When that alignment collapses, systems revert into their opposites. This cycle provides a valuable heuristic for examining not only the classical polis but also the modern nation-state's struggle to balance participation with order. In democratic theory, legitimacy arises from the perception of access: the belief that citizens can meaningfully influence the decisions that govern

their lives. This notion underpins both the procedural and moral claims of democracy. Political theorist Jürgen Habermas⁸(1975) described legitimacy as dependent on a shared belief that institutions act in accordance with their normative foundations, a relationship that falters when those institutions become detached from citizens' lived experiences. Similarly, David Easton⁹(1975) distinguished between “diffuse support,” the long-term attachment to democratic values, and “specific support,” which depends on the system's immediate performance. When the latter erodes, the former eventually weakens. These conceptual distinctions illuminate the current global crisis of political trust.

Contemporary scholars of governance have extended these frameworks to explain how democratic systems can persist in form while deteriorating in substance. Francis Fukuyama¹⁰ (2014) describes this as “political decay”: a condition in which institutions cease to adapt to new realities and become vehicles for elite self-preservation. The issue, therefore, is not simply procedural failure but functional stagnation, a situation where citizens participate in elections yet feel increasingly powerless in everyday governance. The consequence is a widening disjunction between democratic appearance and democratic experience. Pakistan's democratic condition fits squarely within this theoretical trajectory. The country's political institutions retain the outward form of representative governance, some form of regular elections, constitutional frameworks, and legislative assemblies, but citizens' access to meaningful participation remains largely symbolic. Scholars have observed that Pakistan's local government system, historically designed to embody grassroots participation, often functions as an administrative extension of central authority rather than a site of autonomous decision making¹¹ (Cheema, Khwaja, & Qadir, 2006). This contradiction between form and function reflects the Aristotelian cycle in modern guise: the degeneration of a polity into a simulacrum of democracy; when virtue, understood as the pursuit of public good, is replaced by institutional inertia. The crisis of legitimacy is thus inseparable from the crisis of access. Democratic systems rely on a reciprocal relationship between the governed and governing, one that is sustained through continuous interaction, accountability, and responsiveness. When this relationship is mediated solely through distant bureaucratic or elite structures, trust deteriorates.

As Pippa Norris (2011) argues, confidence in democratic institutions depends less on abstract commitment to democracy and more on the experience of efficacy, the belief that participation yields visible results¹². It is this experience that sustains political faith, and its absence that fuels disillusionment. Pakistan's ongoing democratic fatigue must therefore be understood not as a rejection of democracy per se but as a response to the erosion of this experience of efficacy. The persistence of formal institutions without functional empowerment has produced what may be termed a performative democracy, a political order where the rituals of representation endure while substantive agency is withdrawn from the citizen.

The Global Context: From Ideology to Function

The democratic malaise visible in Pakistan is part of a larger global transformation in political expectations and legitimacy. Over the past two decades, many established democracies have experienced growing public fatigue with representative institutions and a resurgence of authoritarian or populist movements. This discontent is not a rejection of democracy as a concept, but rather of its perceived inability to deliver on its promises. The shift reflects what may be described as a transition from ideological to functional politics, a recalibration of political loyalty based not on belief in democratic ideals but on the capacity of the state to perform effectively. Scholars such as Larry Diamond¹³ (2019) have noted that the twenty-first century marks a period of democratic recession, characterized by declining political freedoms, illiberal governance, and rising populism across continents. In Europe, parties like Italy's Brothers of Italy, Hungary's Fidesz, and France's

National Rally have leveraged voter frustration with economic inequality and migration to consolidate support through populist rhetoric that questions liberal norms. Similar tendencies are observable in the United States, where the Trump era exposed the fragility of democratic consensus, and in India, where the Bharatiya Janata Party's brand of Hindu nationalism has fused majoritarian identity with populist governance (Pappas, 2019¹⁴; Jaffrelot, 2021)¹⁵. The common denominator among these cases is the collapse of faith in procedural democracy as an instrument of social justice. Citizens increasingly evaluate governments not by their adherence to democratic form but by their ability to secure livelihoods, maintain order, and project national strength. Political scientist Pranab Bardhan (2022) argues that this development marks a profound transformation of political legitimacy: the electorate, particularly in post-industrial or developing societies, has become primarily concerned with outcomes rather than systems¹⁶. The consequence is that both populist democracies and authoritarian regimes now claim legitimacy through performance metrics, economic growth, welfare distribution, and national cohesion, rather than ideological fidelity to democracy. This logic underpins what has been called the "functional turn" in governance.

In China, the ruling Communist Party sustains its legitimacy not through pluralism but through performance. Studies of Chinese local governance structures demonstrate how village-level committees and township administrations act as conduits for central policy implementation while maintaining direct engagement with communities (Tsai, 2007¹⁷; Shambaugh, 2021¹⁸). This creates a paradoxical form of participatory authoritarianism: citizens experience the state as present, efficient, and responsive, even in the absence of electoral competition. China's political model thus offers a functional challenge to liberal democratic orthodoxy. The contrast with democratic states like Pakistan is stark. Where the Chinese state embeds authority through administrative reach, Pakistan's democratic apparatus often alienates citizens through bureaucratic detachment and elite centralization. The absence of empowered local institutions means that ordinary citizens interact with the state primarily through intermediaries like bureaucrats, politicians, or patronage networks, rather than through institutionalized local governance. The failure of meaningful devolution in Pakistan has perpetuated a cycle of dependency that undermines both accountability and participation. This global comparison underscores a central paradox of our time. While democratic theory continues to rest on the moral superiority of participation, public legitimacy increasingly derives from the state's ability to deliver. Populist and authoritarian systems alike have adapted to this reality by constructing mechanisms of responsiveness without representation. Democracies that fail to adapt, by devolving authority, ensuring efficiency, and demonstrating competence, risk hollowing out their own foundations. In this sense, the challenges facing Pakistan's democracy are neither exceptional nor isolated; they are emblematic of a wider crisis in the global democratic order.

Pakistan in Perspective: Democracy's Performance Crisis

The trajectory of democratic development in Pakistan has been marked by alternating phases of civilian rule and military intervention, producing a hybrid political order that oscillates between representative democracy rhetoric and authoritarian practice. Since its creation in 1947, Pakistan has experienced repeated cycles in which elected governments are displaced by military regimes promising efficiency, order, and reform. Each cycle, however, has reconstituted rather than resolved the structural imbalances at the heart of the state. The result is what Aqil Shah (2014) terms a "praetorian democracy," where the military's institutional dominance constrains the autonomy of civilian politics even during ostensibly democratic periods¹⁹. At the center of Pakistan's democratic malaise lies the unresolved question of devolution. From the early years of independence, the state's administrative structure remained heavily centralized, inherited from the British colonial

bureaucracy. Civilian leaders often resisted decentralization, viewing provincial and local empowerment as potential threats to national unity. Military rulers, meanwhile, deployed the rhetoric of local democracy to legitimize their regimes. Ayub Khan's Basic Democracies Ordinance of 1959 established a system of local councils that appeared participatory but was designed primarily to provide a controlled political base for the regime. Zia-ul-Haq's local government reforms of the 1970s and 1980s followed a similar pattern, combining administrative devolution with political containment²⁰ (Cheema, Khwaja, & Qadir, 2006).

The most ambitious experiment in local governance came under Pervez Musharraf's Devolution of Power Plan in 2001. Framed as a project of grassroots empowerment, it sought to transfer authority from provincial bureaucracies to elected district and tehsil governments. Initially, the reforms were praised for expanding participation and introducing new local leadership, including women and marginalized groups (World Bank, 2004)²¹. Yet as subsequent research has demonstrated, the reforms were undermined by two persistent features of Pakistan's political economy: fiscal dependency and bureaucratic dominance. Local governments lacked autonomous revenue sources and remained reliant on provincial transfers, while key administrative powers, especially over personnel and development funds, were retained by civil servants answerable to the provincial bureaucracy (Niaz, 2010)²². After Musharraf's resignation in 2008, successive civilian governments largely reversed or neglected these reforms. The 18th Constitutional Amendment of 2010 devolved significant powers to the provinces, but not to local governments. Provincial elites, now empowered, were reluctant to share authority downward. As a result, local elections were frequently delayed or rendered toothless through constrained mandates. Punjab and Sindh, the two largest provinces, went years without elected local representatives, effectively suspending the most immediate tier of democratic governance (ICG, 2017)²³.

This pattern of interrupted devolution has reinforced the public perception that democracy in Pakistan operates as a spectacle rather than a system of empowerment. Recent analyses highlight that the absence of genuine local authority contributes directly to declining political trust. As PILDAT (2023) reports, citizens often associate democracy with elite privilege and inefficiency, a sentiment that deepens when local governance fails to deliver basic services. In the absence of functional municipal or district institutions, citizens are forced to rely on informal patronage networks or direct appeals to political intermediaries, further entrenching inequality. The weakening of local government thus erodes not only administrative effectiveness but also the moral foundation of democratic legitimacy²⁴. The Pakistani case exemplifies the theoretical propositions advanced earlier: where the form of democracy is retained without corresponding function, legitimacy deteriorates. The persistence of nominally democratic institutions masks the concentration of power within a narrow elite. Pakistan's democratic experience, therefore, cannot be understood without acknowledging how local disempowerment perpetuates national disillusionment.

As Siddiqui (2021) observes, Pakistan's citizens often encounter the state only through extractive or coercive mechanisms, police, taxation, or bureaucracy, rather than through participatory governance²⁵. The distance between citizen and state has thus grown not in spatial but in institutional terms. In this context, the call for empowered local governance is not merely an administrative demand; it represents a moral and political imperative. To restore democratic faith, the state must become perceptibly responsive at the level where people live and work. The historical record demonstrates that each time Pakistan has attempted devolution from above, it has been used to consolidate rather than disperse power. The challenge now is to design a form of local democracy that operates from below, one capable of transforming representation from ritual to reality.

Reimagining the Social Contract: The Functional Citizen and the Local State

Modern political legitimacy rests not only on ideals of representation but on the perceived functionality of governance, the state's ability to deliver security, justice, and welfare. In much of the contemporary world, citizens relate to the state less as ideological subjects and more as pragmatic stakeholders. They expect effective governance, not merely formal democracy. This shift in expectations represents what political theorists have called the "functional turn" in democratic legitimacy²⁶ (Bardhan, 2022). In this paradigm, the state's capacity to deliver material well-being and administrative responsiveness becomes the ultimate measure of its legitimacy. Pakistan's democratic trajectory demonstrates how the absence of this functional connection erodes faith in representative institutions. Citizens encounter the state primarily as an abstract authority rather than a responsive actor.

Political scientist Matthew Nelson (2011) has shown that in Pakistan's rural constituencies, governance often depends on personalized mediation, landlords, politicians, or religious figures translating citizens' needs into bureaucratic language. This structure produces dependency rather than empowerment, leaving citizens alienated from formal institutions. The lack of institutionalized access to governance thus transforms politics into patronage²⁷. The notion of a functional citizen, an individual whose relationship with the state is mediated by efficiency and reciprocity, offers a framework for rethinking Pakistan's democratic order. In functional terms, a citizen's trust depends on visible, localized benefits: roads maintained, schools staffed, grievances heard. When these expectations are unmet, participation loses its meaning. The public's disillusionment with democracy, therefore, often reflects not ideological rejection but cumulative disappointment with the system's inability to perform. This is consistent with Pippa Norris's (2011) argument that trust in democratic institutions depends more on output legitimacy than on input legitimacy alone²⁸. Comparative evidence underscores the salience of local governance in sustaining this functional relationship. China, despite its one-party system, maintains an extensive network of grassroots institutions that channel citizen feedback and deliver services efficiently. Studies have shown that these institutions, though tightly controlled, foster a sense of inclusion by linking citizens' daily lives to the state's administrative apparatus (Tsai, 2007; Shambaugh, 2021). This model of responsive authoritarianism stands in contrast to Pakistan's performative democracy, where elected local representatives often lack fiscal authority or executive power. The paradox is stark: China achieves administrative responsiveness without electoral pluralism, while Pakistan sustains electoral pluralism without administrative responsiveness. The Nordic democracies offer a different but instructive contrast. Countries such as Denmark and Sweden have long anchored national governance in strong local autonomy. Municipalities are entrusted with education, welfare, and infrastructure, supported by substantial fiscal decentralization (Ladner, Keuffer, & Baldersheim, 2016)²⁹. These arrangements foster accountability because citizens can directly observe and evaluate governance outcomes.

The proximity between citizen and state, rather than ideological consensus, sustains democratic legitimacy. For Pakistan, these comparative models underscore the need to rebuild democracy from the ground up. The constitutional promise of devolution under Article 140-A, which mandates provincial governments to establish elected local bodies, remains largely unrealized. Despite judicial interventions, local governments in several provinces have been suspended or bypassed in budgetary processes (ICG, 2017; PILDAT, 2023). The restoration of political faith therefore requires institutionalizing local autonomy through constitutional protection, fiscal independence, and administrative continuity. Without these guarantees, devolution will remain rhetorical. A reimagined social contract must therefore rest on functional reciprocity between state and citizen.

The state must demonstrate its legitimacy through competence, and the citizen must perceive democracy as an instrument of tangible benefit. The moral argument for democracy, that it affirms human dignity through self-rule, cannot be sustained without its functional corollary: that it works.

In the Pakistani context, this means that empowered local governments are not simply administrative necessities but the ethical core of democratic renewal. Only when governance becomes visible in everyday life, when citizens see local councils resolving disputes, managing resources, and delivering services, can the abstract promise of democracy be restored to credibility.

Conclusion: The Last Stand of Democracy

Every political system contains within itself the logic of its own transformation. Aristotle's cyclical theory of governance suggests that forms of rule evolve from virtue to corruption when the moral purpose of authority is displaced by self-interest. Monarchy decays into tyranny; aristocracy into oligarchy; democracy, when stripped of its ethical core, into ochlocracy, a disordered contest of interests devoid of civic virtue. The survival of democracy, therefore, in Pakistan, that purpose is perilously frayed. The institutions of democracy remain, but their substance is depleted. Local governments, the tier of governance closest to the citizen, have been hollowed by centralization, fiscal dependency, and bureaucratic capture. Elected representatives at the local level often function as administrative ornaments rather than decision-makers. As multiple "Performance of Democracy" reports by PILDAT demonstrate, the repeated postponement or curtailment of local elections, often justified on technical or political grounds, by provincial governments seeking to retain fiscal control fosters a form of democracy that performs participation symbolically rather than substantively practicing it. This performative condition is unsustainable. When access becomes symbolic rather than substantive, democratic legitimacy erodes. Citizens cease to distinguish between flawed democracy and effective authoritarianism when both appear equally distant from their lived realities. In such moments, the Aristotelian cycle threatens to close: democratic systems, corrupted by inertia and alienation, invite their authoritarian replacements. As Francis Fukuyama (2014) observes, states that fail to renew their institutional vitality succumb not to external overthrow but to internal exhaustion, a process that manifests in apathy, cynicism, and the quiet withdrawal of consent.

Pakistan's current democratic fatigue bears the marks of that exhaustion. Repeated episodes of political instability, civil-military friction, and elite capture have transformed democratic practice into spectacle. Yet the historical lesson, both classical and contemporary, is that renewal is still possible, but only from below. Genuine devolution of power to local governments represents not an administrative reform but a moral reconstitution of the democratic ideal. It is at the local level that citizens experience whether democracy is real or illusory. Empowered local institutions, capable of fiscal autonomy, policy discretion, and sustained electoral continuity, would restore the tangible connection between state and citizen on which legitimacy depends.

The argument advanced throughout this paper thus culminates in a simple proposition: Pakistan's democracy can only survive by becoming functional at its foundation. The rituals of representation will not suffice. Unless citizens perceive the state as a responsive and proximate presence, democracy risks losing even the performative legitimacy that now sustains it. The devolution of power is therefore not merely the next step in Pakistan's democratic evolution; it is democracy's last stand. If the course is not corrected, the country risks re-entering the familiar cycle of authoritarian correction and democratic relapse, a pattern Aristotle would have recognized as the inevitable fate of a polity that forgets the moral purpose of its own existence.

References

- ³ University of Southampton. “Democracy in Crisis: Trust in Democratic Institutions Declining around the World.” February 20, 2025. <https://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2025/02/democracy-in-crisis-trust-in-democratic-institutions-declining-around-the-world.page>.
- ⁴ Associated Press. “AP-NORC Poll: Americans Agree Democracy Is Best but See It as under Threat.” *AP News*, July 4, 2024.
- ⁵ Geo News. “Nearly 90% Pakistanis Believe Democracy Vital for Country’s Stability: Survey.” November 11, 2025. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/615000-nearly-90-pakistanis-believe-democracy-vital-for-countrys-stability-survey>.
- ⁶ Jahangir, A., R. Zain, and S. Dilkusha. “Trends of Power Devolution in South Asia: A Comparative Appraisal of Pakistan’s Local Government System under Civil–Military Regimes.” *Journal of Management* 3, no. 3 (2021): 50–65. <https://journals.internationalrasd.org/index.php/jom/article/view/505>.
- ⁷ Aristotle. *Politics*. Translated by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2017. Originally published ca. 4th century BCE.
- ⁸ Habermas, Jürgen. *Legitimation Crisis*. Translated by Thomas McCarthy. Boston: Beacon Press, 1975.
- ⁹ Easton, David. “A Re-Assessment of the Concept of Political Support.” *British Journal of Political Science* 5, no. 4 (1975): 435–57. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400008309>.
- ¹⁰ Fukuyama, Francis. *Political Order and Political Decay: From the Industrial Revolution to the Globalization of Democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014.
- ¹¹ Cheema, Ali, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Adnan Qadir. “Decentralization in Pakistan: Context, Content and Causes.” Kennedy School of Government Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP06-034. Harvard University, 2006. <https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/citation.aspx?PubId=3179&type=FN&PersonId=170>.
- ¹² Norris, Pippa. *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- ¹³ Diamond, Larry. *Ill Winds: Saving Democracy from Russian Rage, Chinese Ambition, and American Complacency*. New York: Penguin Press, 2019.
- ¹⁴ Pappas, Takis S. *Populism and Liberal Democracy: A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- ¹⁵ Jaffrelot, Christophe. *Modi’s India: Hindu Nationalism and the Rise of Ethnic Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021.

- ¹⁶ Bardhan, Pranab. *A World of Insecurity: Democratic Disenchantment in Rich and Poor Countries*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022.
- ¹⁷ Tsai, Lily L. *Accountability without Democracy: Solidary Groups and Public Goods Provision in Rural China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- ¹⁸ Shambaugh, David. *China's Leaders: From Mao to Now*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021.
- ¹⁹ Shah, Aqil. *The Army and Democracy: Military Politics in Pakistan*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- ²⁰ Cheema, Ali, Asim Ijaz Khwaja, and Adnan Qadir. "Decentralization in Pakistan: Context, Content and Causes." Kennedy School of Government Faculty Research Working Paper Series RWP06-034. Harvard University, 2006.
- <https://research.hks.harvard.edu/publications/workingpapers/citation.aspx?PubId=3179&type=FN&PersonId=170>.
- ²¹ World Bank. *Devolution in Pakistan: An Assessment and Recommendations for Action*. Report No. 31220-PAK. Washington, DC: World Bank, 2004.
- ²² Niaz, Ilhan. *The Culture of Power and Governance of Pakistan, 1947–2008*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- ²³ International Crisis Group. "Pakistan: Stoking the Fire in Karachi." Asia Report No. 284, March 23, 2017. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/pakistan/284-pakistan-stoking-fire-karachi>.
- ²⁴ Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT). "Assessment of Democracy in Pakistan 2023." June 21, 2023.
- ²⁵ Siddiqui, Farhan. "The Paradox of Democracy in Pakistan: Elite Politics and Institutional Decay." *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 6, no. 2 (2021): 140–56.
- ²⁶ Bardhan, Pranab. *A World of Insecurity: Democratic Disenchantment in Rich and Poor Countries*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2022.
- ²⁷ Nelson, Matthew J. *In the Shadow of Shari'ah: Islam, Islamic Law, and Democracy in Pakistan*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.
- ²⁸ Norris, Pippa. *Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- ²⁹ Ladner, Andreas, Nicolas Keuffer, and Harald Baldersheim. "Measuring Local Autonomy in 39 Countries (1990–2014)." *Regional & Federal Studies* 26, no. 3 (2016): 321–57.

China's Strategic Rise in Artificial Intelligence: Policy, Industry, and Global Competition

by Hizra Shahid

Over the past four decades, China has transformed itself into one of the world's leading centers for artificial intelligence (AI) development. Rather than emerging suddenly, China's progress reflects a deliberate combination of government strategy, industrial policy, private-sector innovation, and largescale digital adoption. The Chinese government has consistently treated AI as a strategic technology capable of strengthening economic growth, national security, and global competitiveness. As a result, China has built a powerful AI ecosystem driven by technology firms, state research programs, and extensive digital infrastructure. China's rise in AI demonstrates how coordinated policy, large-scale data environments, and commercial technology platforms can accelerate the development and deployment of advanced technologies.

Early Foundations of AI Development (1980s–1990s)

China's initial engagement with artificial intelligence began during the economic reforms of the 1980s, when the government prioritized scientific modernization and technological capacity building. Universities and national research institutes began exploring foundational AI concepts such as expert systems, pattern recognition, and knowledge-based computing. At this stage, AI research remained limited due to relatively weak computing infrastructure and the small size of China's digital economy.

Despite these limitations, the period was important for establishing the institutional foundations of China's AI ecosystem. Government-supported research programs expanded scientific education and encouraged collaboration between universities and state laboratories. Institutions such as Tsinghua University and the Chinese Academy of Sciences developed early research programs in computer science and machine learning, training engineers and scientists who would later contribute to China's growing technology sector. Although these early efforts produced few large-scale technological breakthroughs, they created the scientific workforce and research institutions that would later support China's rapid technological expansion.

Commercial Internet Expansion and the Rise of Technology Companies (2000s)

China's AI development accelerated dramatically during the 2000s with the rapid growth of the internet and digital services. By 2010, China had over 450 million internet users, creating one of the largest digital markets in the world. This expansion generated vast amounts of data and enabled the rise of powerful technology companies capable of building advanced digital platforms.

Three companies, Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent, became central to China's digital economy and are commonly referred to as the "BAT" companies. Baidu developed search technologies and later invested heavily in AI research related to natural language processing and autonomous driving. Alibaba built one of the world's largest e-commerce ecosystems, relying on machine learning algorithms for recommendation systems, logistics optimization, and fraud detection. Tencent expanded social networking and digital communication through platforms such as WeChat, integrating AI technologies into messaging services, payments, and content recommendation systems.

The rapid growth of these companies provided both the technological infrastructure and the financial resources necessary for AI innovation. The large user base of China's digital platforms also enabled companies to collect enormous datasets, allowing machine learning systems to improve quickly through continuous training and deployment. By the end of the decade, China's digital economy had created favorable conditions for the widespread adoption of artificial intelligence technologies.

Deep Learning Breakthroughs and Global Research Expansion (2010s)

The 2010s marked a turning point in China's AI capabilities as deep learning techniques began transforming fields such as computer vision, speech recognition, and natural language processing. Chinese technology companies and research institutions invested heavily in cloud computing infrastructure and large datasets that enabled the training of complex neural networks. Another major factor during this period was the international circulation of scientific talent. Many Chinese researchers received advanced training in the United States and Europe before returning to China to work in universities, research laboratories, and technology firms. This movement of talent helped transfer advanced research methods and strengthened China's presence in the global AI research community. Government policy also played a decisive role in accelerating development. In 2017, China's State Council released the New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan, which outlined a national strategy to make China the world leader in AI by 2030. The plan emphasized investments in research, industrial development, education, and smart-city technologies. It also encouraged cooperation between universities, private companies, and government institutions to accelerate technological innovation.

As a result of these combined efforts, AI technologies became deeply embedded in everyday life in China. Facial recognition systems began to be widely used for smartphone security and digital payments, while speech recognition and recommendation algorithms improved online platforms such as e-commerce websites, video streaming services, and social media networks. Chinese researchers also increased their participation in major international AI conferences, achieving competitive results in areas such as computer vision and speech processing.

Regulation and Governance of Artificial Intelligence (Late 2010s–2020s)

As artificial intelligence systems became more influential in shaping public communication and economic activity, Chinese authorities began developing regulatory frameworks to oversee their use. These policies aim to balance the promotion of technological innovation with the need to manage risks related to algorithms, data security, and online content. China introduced regulations requiring companies to register recommendation algorithms and ensure that automated systems comply with national guidelines for information security and content governance. These policies reflect the government's broader objective of maintaining social stability while continuing to support AI-driven economic development. A major milestone occurred in 2023 when China implemented regulations governing generative artificial intelligence systems. The Interim Measures for the Management of Generative AI Services require developers to ensure that AI-generated content complies with national laws and ethical standards while also establishing responsibilities for companies deploying large language models. China was among the first countries to introduce a comprehensive regulatory framework specifically targeting generative AI technologies.

The Foundation Model Wave: China's Response to Large Language Models (2020s– Present)

The global surge in foundation models and generative artificial intelligence has redefined what technological leadership in AI means. In China, major technology firms, startups, and research institutes have responded by developing their own large language models and multimodal systems designed for Chinese-language applications and domestic regulatory environments. These models are increasingly integrated into consumer and enterprise services, including search engines, productivity software, customer support platforms, and educational tools.

One of the most significant recent developments is DeepSeek's R1 model, released in January 2025. The model attracted global attention because it demonstrated advanced reasoning capabilities comparable to leading Western models while reportedly requiring significantly lower computational resources. This development suggested that Chinese AI laboratories could achieve frontier-level performance while focusing on computational efficiency rather than simply increasing model size.

Hardware development has also become a central component of China's AI strategy. Following export restrictions on advanced semiconductors, Chinese technology firms and research institutions accelerated efforts to develop domestic alternatives. Huawei's Ascend chip series has emerged as a key platform for training and deploying AI models within China, representing the country's primary domestic response to restrictions on high-end foreign chips. These developments illustrate how China's AI ecosystem is adapting to geopolitical constraints while continuing to expand its capabilities in generative AI technologies.

Conclusion

China's rise in artificial intelligence reflects more than technological progress; it represents a broader transformation in how digital infrastructure, state policy, and private innovation interact. Over several decades, the country has moved from building basic research capacity to competing at the frontier of AI development while deploying these technologies across large segments of society and industry. However, the significance of China's AI ecosystem extends beyond its national borders. As Chinese technology firms expand their AI platforms, cloud services, and digital infrastructure internationally, other countries must decide how to engage with these systems. For developing economies such as Pakistan, China's AI infrastructure may offer opportunities for technological leapfrogging through affordable digital platforms and technological partnerships. At the same time, the governance models and regulatory frameworks that accompany these technologies raise important questions about data sovereignty, transparency, and technological dependence. Ultimately, the future of artificial intelligence will not be determined solely by technical breakthroughs but by the policy decisions and international partnerships that shape how these technologies are adopted and governed. China's experience illustrates that leadership in AI is as much about strategy and infrastructure as it is about innovation.

References

1. Ding, J. (2018). Deciphering China's AI dream: The context, components, capabilities, and consequences of China's strategy to lead the world in AI. Future of Humanity Institute, University of Oxford.
2. Lee, K. F. (2018). AI superpowers: China, Silicon Valley, and the new world order. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

3. Roberts, H., Cowls, J., Morley, J., Taddeo, M., Wang, V., & Floridi, L. (2021). The Chinese approach to artificial intelligence: An analysis of policy, ethics, and regulation. *AI & Society*, 36(1), 59–77.
4. Sheehan, M. (2022). China's AI regulations and how they get made. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
5. Stanford Institute for Human-Centered AI. (2024). AI Index Report 2024. Stanford University.
6. State Council of the People's Republic of China. (2017). New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan.
7. DeepSeek AI. (2025). DeepSeek-R1 Technical Report.

Marketing in China: Culture, Digital Power, and Strategic Imperatives for Global Brands,

By Zuha Khalid

Introduction

China's consumer market has undergone a profound transformation over the past two decades, evolving from a manufacturing driven export economy into one of the most dynamic digital consumer markets in the world. Today, China represents the largest e commerce market globally and serves as a testing ground for new forms of digitally integrated marketing and retail innovation. According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics of China, online retail sales reached 15.52 trillion yuan in 2024, accounting for approximately 26.8% of the country's total retail sales of consumer goods (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024).

This rapid digitalization is closely linked to China's mobile first consumer behavior and extensive digital infrastructure. The China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) reports that China now has over 1.1 billion internet users, with online shopping deeply embedded in everyday consumption practices across both urban and rural regions (CNNIC, 2024). Mobile payment systems, integrated social commerce platforms, and livestream-based retail have created a highly interconnected digital ecosystem in which commerce, communication, and entertainment converge.

Unlike many Western markets where digital commerce developed alongside traditional retail channels, China's retail landscape is characterized by platform centric ecosystems dominated by super apps and integrated marketplaces. These ecosystems combine payment systems, logistics networks, social media, and digital marketing tools within single platforms, allowing firms to interact with consumers throughout the entire purchasing journey. As a result, digital integration in China is no longer a strategic option but a baseline requirement for firms seeking market relevance.

Given these structural differences, success in the Chinese market cannot be achieved through superficial localization strategies. Instead, it requires deep adaptation to China's digital infrastructure, regulatory environment, and cultural consumption patterns. Consequently, China should be understood not merely as a market opportunity but as a distinct digital commerce system that is reshaping contemporary marketing practices worldwide. Understanding the institutional logic and technological foundations of China's consumer ecosystem is therefore essential for global brands seeking sustainable growth within the increasingly digitalized global economy.

Historical Foundations of China's Marketing Evolution

China's contemporary marketing landscape is the product of decades of structural economic reform, technological adoption, and regulatory development. Rather than emerging suddenly with the rise of digital platforms, the current ecosystem evolved through several key inflection points that fundamentally reshaped how firms interact with consumers.

One of the most significant turning points occurred when China joined the World Trade Organization in 2001. WTO accession accelerated China's integration into the global economy by lowering trade barriers and increasing exposure to international competition. As foreign brands entered the market at scale, domestic firms were compelled to move beyond cost-based competition and develop capabilities in branding, segmentation, and consumer oriented marketing strategies

(Lardy, 2002; Naughton, 2007). This period marked the beginning of a transition from production-focused competition to market-driven branding and consumer engagement.

The next major shift occurred during the 2010s with the rapid expansion of mobile internet infrastructure and digital payment systems. China developed a highly integrated mobile commerce environment dominated by “super-apps,” particularly WeChat and its payment service WeChat Pay, alongside Alipay. According to the China Internet Network Information Center, China had over 1.09 billion internet users by 2024, the vast majority accessing the internet through smartphones (CNNIC, 2024). Within this ecosystem, communication, social interaction, payment, and commerce became deeply integrated into single platforms. This integration enabled companies to manage the entire consumer journey from discovery and engagement to transaction and post-purchase interaction within a unified digital infrastructure.

A further transformation emerged with the rapid growth of livestream commerce in the late 2010s. Platforms such as Douyin and Taobao Live popularized a hybrid retail model often described as “shoppertainment,” where entertainment content and purchasing opportunities are combined in real time. Research by McKinsey & Company estimates that livestream commerce accounts for a rapidly growing share of China’s online retail activity, with influencers and Key Opinion Leaders (KOLs) capable of generating millions of dollars in sales during a single broadcast (McKinsey, 2023). This model has reshaped digital marketing by turning consumer engagement itself into a transactional mechanism.⁶⁵

These cases demonstrate that success in China depends not only on technological capability but also on the ability to adapt to local platform structures, regulatory governance, and consumer behaviors. China’s marketing evolution therefore reveals a critical strategic insight: the defining competitive variable is not simply digitalization, but the integration of platforms, payments, social interaction, and commerce into a unified ecosystem. Firms that fail to adapt to this integrated system regardless of their global scale often struggle to compete effectively in the Chinese market.

Digital Integration and Super App Ecosystems

China’s digital ecosystem is among the most advanced in the world, largely due to the dominance of integrated platforms that merge social interaction with commerce and payments.

At the center of this ecosystem is WeChat, developed by Tencent, which functions simultaneously as a messaging platform, mobile wallet, customer relationship management (CRM) tool, and mini program marketplace. WeChat enables brands to maintain official accounts that deliver content, drive transactions, and track user engagement without consumers ever leaving the app environment. This integration allows for real time data feedback and direct digital commerce execution, dramatically increasing marketing efficiency (SEO China Agency, 2026).

In parallel, Douyin (the Chinese version of TikTok) blends algorithm driven short form video with product discovery and commerce. With highly personalized recommendations and immersive content, Douyin has transformed impulse purchase behavior into a scalable digital format. In 2024 alone, Douyin’s livestream commerce activities generated GMV (Gross Merchandise Value) exceeding USD 260 billion, highlighting how content and commerce intersect at massive scale (ChoZan, 2025).

Platforms like Xiaohongshu (RED) combine community reviews, lifestyle content, and product discovery, appealing strongly to younger consumers who trust peer generated content over

traditional advertising. Together, these platforms form a multi modal digital environment where consumers discover, evaluate, and purchase products through personalized experiences that are highly measurable and adaptive (ChinaSEO.com, 2025).

This integrated digital architecture has made China's marketing environment not only more efficient but also strategically innovative pushing global standards in AI driven recommendations, social commerce formats, and real time conversion analytics.

Cultural Dynamics in China: Tradition Meets Transformation

China's cultural landscape reflects a complex interaction between enduring traditional values and rapidly evolving consumer identities. Confucian principles emphasizing harmony, collectivism, and respect for hierarchy continue to influence social and economic interactions. One important manifestation of these values is guanxi relationship networks based on trust, reciprocity, and long-term obligations which remain influential in business partnerships and distribution networks (Fan, 2002; Gold, Guthrie & Wank, 2002).

At the same time, generational change is reshaping patterns of consumption. Younger cohorts, particularly Post-90s consumers and Generation Z, exhibit stronger preferences for individuality, experiential consumption, and digital engagement. Research by McKinsey & Company indicates that these consumers often use brands as a means of expressing identity and lifestyle aspirations, especially in sectors such as fashion, beauty, and technology (McKinsey, 2023).

A notable cultural shift associated with these younger consumers is the rise of the guochao ("national tide") movement, which reflects growing pride in domestic culture and brands. Companies such as Li Ning Company Limited and Anta Sports Products have successfully leveraged guochao by integrating traditional Chinese cultural elements with contemporary design and innovation (Zhang & Khanna, 2020).

Together, these developments highlight that Chinese culture is neither static nor purely traditional. Instead, it represents a dynamic system where cultural heritage coexists with modern consumer identities. For marketers, this implies that effective strategies must balance cultural authenticity with responsiveness to evolving consumer aspirations.

Consumer Segmentation and Behavioral Priorities

China's consumer segmentation extends beyond simple urban rural distinctions, with digital behavior, generational preferences, and lifestyle indicators serving as primary variables. Older consumers prioritize stability, reliability, and value, showing higher loyalty to established brands and sensitivity to price and quality assurances. Younger digital natives, by contrast, demonstrate trend sensitivity, rapid channel switching, and strong responsiveness to peer recommendations, influencer endorsements, and immersive digital experiences (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Consumers in lower-tier cities represent a high-growth segment, adopting mobile commerce rapidly and responding to localized pricing, language, and platform specific campaigns. Social commerce formats such as livestreams and interactive content are particularly effective, reflecting the need for highly tailored digital engagement strategies (China Internet Network Information Center, 2024). Livestream commerce and influencer (KOL/KOC) marketing engage younger consumers more effectively than traditional advertising, as these formats enable participatory and co-creative interactions where audiences can ask questions, share opinions, and purchase in real time (Zhang & Khanna, 2020).

These insights indicate that marketing strategies in China must be data-driven, digital-first, and customized to nuanced consumer motivations shaped by age, digital engagement, and cultural context.

Regulation and Digital Governance in China

China's digital marketing environment operates within a strict regulatory framework that shapes how brands collect data, communicate with consumers, and conduct digital campaigns. The Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL, 2021) is one of the world's most comprehensive data privacy regimes. It regulates data collection, storage, processing, and cross-border transfer, directly affecting targeted advertising and personalization strategies. Compliance is a strategic imperative, as violations can result in operational disruption, reputational harm, and enforcement actions (DLA Piper, 2022). Content governance, cybersecurity standards, and online advertising rules are enforced by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC), which monitors platform conduct and ensures digital content aligns with national standards. Policy shifts can be sudden and market-altering, exemplified by the "double reduction" policy of 2021, which transformed China's private tutoring sector almost overnight (King & Wood Mallesons, 2021). For global brands, regulatory foresight is as critical as market research. Maintaining dedicated compliance teams enables firms to interpret evolving policies, anticipate enforcement risks, and integrate regulatory signals into long-term strategic planning rather than reacting post hoc.

Strategic Risks and Structural Opportunities

China's marketing ecosystem presents both unique risks and opportunities for foreign brands. Regulatory volatility, exemplified by the 2021 Double Reduction policy that abruptly reshaped the private tutoring market, can disrupt revenues and consumer behavior; brands must maintain compliance teams to anticipate and adapt to policy changes (King & Wood Mallesons, 2021). Geopolitical pressures, such as trade tensions, can harm brand perception, requiring messaging that aligns with local culture and diversified market positioning (McKinsey & Company, 2023). Platform dependency on dominant e-commerce sites like Tmall or JD.com creates operational risks if algorithms or rules change, highlighting the need for multi-platform and owned-channel strategies (Zhang & Khanna, 2020). At the same time, strategic opportunities exist: rapid digital adoption in lower-tier cities allows growth through localized pricing, language, and content campaigns (China Internet Network Information Center, 2024); AI-driven personalization enables real-time segmentation and adaptive engagement; and expanding middle-class consumption supports premium and differentiated product offerings. To navigate these dynamics, brands should establish in-market digital teams, diversify platform engagement, integrate regulatory foresight, and craft culturally relevant messaging, creating resilience while capturing China's diverse consumer demand.

Conclusion

China's market demonstrates that success in global marketing increasingly depends on integrating digital ecosystems, cultural fluency, and regulatory foresight. This paper has shown that generational preferences, platform dynamics, guochao-driven consumption, and policy frameworks shape not only consumer behavior but also strategic imperatives for foreign brands. Firms that effectively segment audiences, leverage immersive social commerce, and maintain compliance teams can convert regulatory and platform complexities into competitive advantage. Looking forward, the lessons from China ranging from AI-driven personalization to livestream commerce and culturally resonant branding offer a blueprint for marketers seeking scalable, adaptive strategies

in other digitally sophisticated markets, making China a model for marketing innovation rather than merely a destination to enter.

References

1. National Bureau of Statistics of China. (2024). Online retail sales statistics. <http://www.stats.gov.cn>
2. China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC). (2024). Statistical Report on Internet Development in China. <https://www.cnnic.net.cn>
3. China State Council Information Office. (2025). China's digital economy and internet development report. <https://english.www.gov.cn/archive/statistics/>
4. Statista. (2025). E-commerce share of retail sales in China. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/302333/china-online-shopping-consumer-goods-tradeshare/>
5. Lardy, N. (2002). Integrating China into the Global Economy. Brookings Institution. • Naughton, B. (2007). The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth. MIT Press.
6. <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/china-ecommerce> • <https://www.charlesworth-group.com/blog/marketing-in-china-that-different-from-the-rest-of-the-world/>
7. [<https://www.chinaseo.com/china-online-market-analysis-digital-marketing-trends-and-consumer-behavior-insights/>]
8. [<https://seoagencychina.com/ecommerce-in-china-online-shopping-statistics/>].
9. McKinsey & Company. (2023). China Consumer Report: Understanding Post-90s and Gen Z Consumers. <https://www.mckinsey.com/cn/insights/china-consumer-report>
10. Zhang, C., & Khanna, T. (2020). The Rise of Chinese Brands and the Guochao Trend. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2020/09/the-rise-of-chinese-brands>
11. DLA Piper. (2022). China: Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL) guide. <https://www.dlapiperdataprotection.com>
12. King & Wood Mallesons. (2021). China's "Double Reduction" Policy: Implications for Market Participants. <https://www.kwm.com/en/cn/knowledge/insights/double-reduction-policy-china>
13. Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC). (2021). Regulations on the Management of Online Advertising. <http://www.cac.gov.cn>
14. Fan, Y. (2002). Questioning guanxi: Definition, classification and implications. International Business Review.
15. Gold, T., Guthrie, D., & Wank, D. (2002). Social Connections in China. Cambridge University Press.

Future Pathways in the Middle East Conflict: How the War Could End or Escalate,

By Moeed Yusuf

Moeed Yusuf is Vice Chancellor (President), Beaconhouse National University and Senior Fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University's Kennedy School. He previously served as the National Security Adviser and Special Assistant to the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

U.S. President Donald Trump's televised address last week left several questions unanswered about the future of the war in the Middle East. The war has already caused "the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market" and is poised to have even greater and more lasting effects on the global economy if it lingers on. While the U.S. President explicitly stated his intent to end military operations soon, some of the most fundamental questions being asked before his address still remain as pertinent.

How would active hostilities be brought to an end? On the other hand, what could trigger further escalation of the conflict despite President Trump's intention to pull out? Is there any scenario in which the regional conflict would transform into a global war?

I list here the possible pathways that: (i) offer a way to cease hostilities; (ii) lead to major vertical escalation within the regional context; or (iii) expand the war horizontally, pulling in even more countries. It also posits the bare minimum requirement for any deal between the U.S. and Iran.#

Figure 1: Current theater of war



Pathways to cessation of hostilities

1. U.S. and Iran negotiate – directly or indirectly – a deal that results in an immediate ceasefire which continues to hold as intended.

2. The U.S. persists with intense military operations for 2-3 weeks after which it pulls back (in line with President Trump's suggested timeline) with or without a negotiated deal; Israel ceases its military operations against Iran; Iran and its proxies also call an end to all their military actions in the region.
3. The U.S. and Israel massively scale up military attacks against Iran's leadership and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IGRC) as well as infrastructure (possibly including enriched uranium storage sites) across Iran over the next 2-3 weeks, leading to regime collapse and eventual capitulation.
4. The conflict prolongs and, at some point, Iran runs out of consequential military equipment (missiles, air defense, etc.) and is militarily defeated.
5. Israeli leadership is decapitated as Iran scores major successes, including striking civilian and military infrastructure in Israel that turns public opinion against the war and creates internal political dynamics that lead Israel to accept a ceasefire.
6. Collective weight of great and multiple middle powers that are interested in an immediate end to the war are able to prevail through a combination coercive diplomacy (threats of diplomatic or economic isolation to Iran and Israel) and a realistically workable solution that allows all parties to 'declare victory'. China and Russia's role in pressuring Iran and the U.S. and Europe's role in pressuring Israel will be critical.
7. The U.S. ends its military operation according to the intended timeline but does not detach itself from the end-game. President Trump and President Xi agree on a plan whereby China plays an outsized role in guaranteeing the opening of the Strait of Hormuz and the U.S. ensures that Israel ceases all military operations as part of a ceasefire.⁶ Iran inflicts additional pain on GCC countries, forcing them to seek immediate cessation of the conflict. Most GCC countries deny US/Israel airspace and use of their military bases to launch further attacks on Iran, after which US/Israel pull back. Iran halts its use of force as well.

Pathways to continued conflict and vertical escalation without a de-escalatory path in sight

8. Even if the U.S. and Iran agree to end hostilities, Israel and/or Iran's proxies continue use of force.
9. Any of the parties involved in direct conflict miscalculate their kinetic strategies such that the U.S., Israel, or Iran determine that a massive ramping up of kinetic actions has become necessary – whether out of anger or desperation. A tit-for-tat escalation cycle begins.
10. Israeli leadership is decapitated as Iran scores major successes, including striking civilian and military infrastructure in Israel that further hardens Israeli public opinion and leads to even greater use of force against Iran and/or its proxies.
11. U.S. decides to put boots on the ground on one of Iran's islands, the western coastal belt, or on the mainland.
12. A risky operation targeting Iran's enriched uranium ends in major casualties for the U.S. and/or Israel and leads to escalation after their massive retaliation against Iran.

13. Russia and/or China decide to back Iran aggressively (covertly) and encourage it to prolong the military fight against Israel after the U.S. withdraws.
14. Iran's proxies in the region disrupt sea lanes (Bab el-Mandab in the Red Sea) or manage to cause massive damage to Israel and Israel retaliates further against both them and Iran.

Pathways to horizontal escalation

15. One or more GCC countries join the war actively and move from absorbing Iranian attacks to their own offensive strikes – without further Iranian provocation or in response to Iran's escalated military attacks against them. Iran retaliates even more forcefully, directly or through proxy groups.
16. Any of the parties to the war or unrelated third parties with vested interests to spur further conflict strike one or more Russian or Chinese targets either as retribution for their alleged covert support to Iran or simply to instigate a larger conflict. China and/or Russia get involved overtly/directly thereafter.
17. A collective diplomatic effort by multiple countries to open the Strait of Hormuz fails, which prompts military action to forcibly open the strait. Iran retaliates in the immediate theater as well as against some of the countries involved, thereby enlarging the conflict.
18. Pakistan gets pulled into the active conflict by virtue of its defense pact with Saudi Arabia, possibly also leading to Iran's direct retaliation against Pakistan.

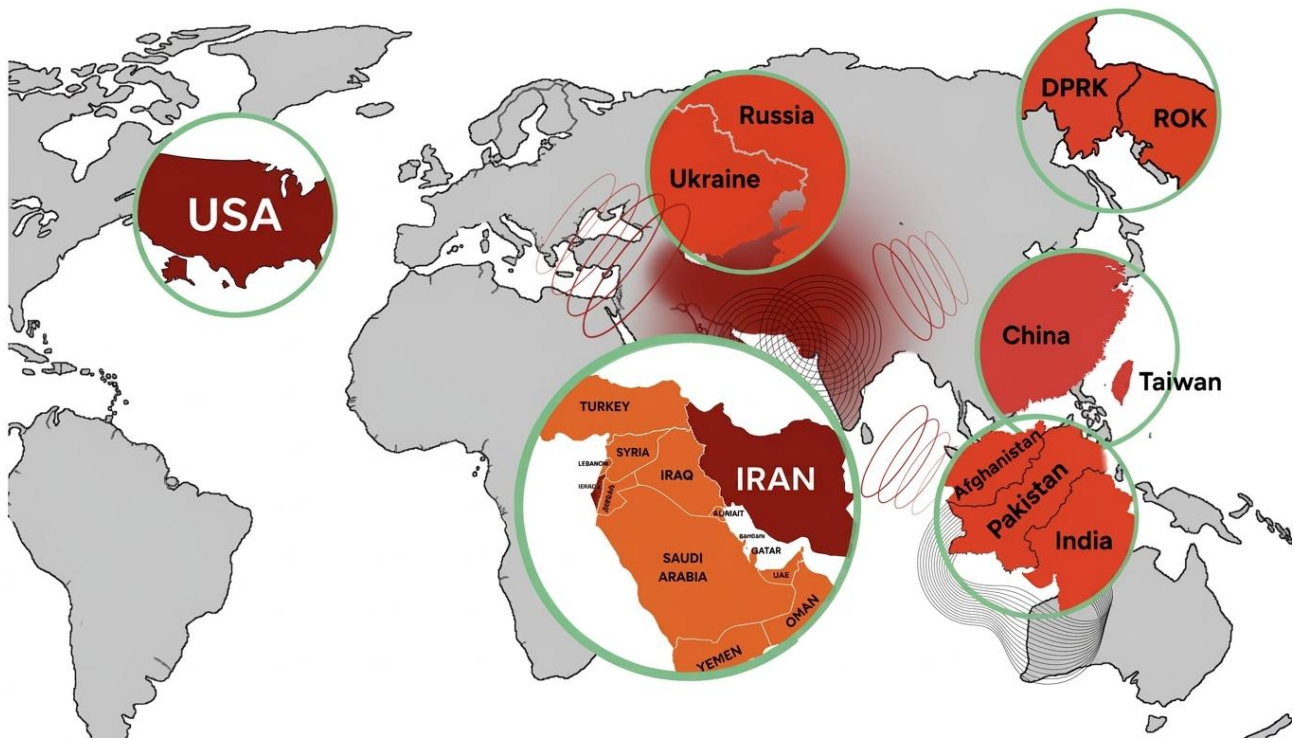
Wild cards that could expand the conflict significantly or end it abruptly Further expansion scenarios

19. Iran or Iranian proxies/sympathizers conduct an attack inside Europe either unprovoked or in response to any European involvement in the conflict in support of the U.S. or Israel or a European role in forcibly opening the Strait of Hormuz. Europe is dragged into the conflict.
20. If Pakistan is pulled into the conflict directly (via Saudi Arabia) and distracted because of it, India may find it opportune to reinitiate 'Operation Sindoor', its military offensive against Pakistan it undertook in May 2025, which it has since insisted is only 'paused'. This results in an India-Pakistan war, in which Afghanistan may also play a role by covertly supporting nonstate actors against Pakistan.
21. Sensing an opportunity because of the world's focus on the war in the Middle East, unrelated theaters of conflict with global implications are activated (China-Taiwan; South Korea-North Korea) or experience further intensification (Russia-Ukraine).

Further expansion or abrupt end scenarios

22. Iran inflicts massive damage on GCC after which GCC public opinion turns against Arab regimes, leading to another Arab Spring moment.
23. Use of tactical nuclear weapon on an Iranian island or mainland.
24. An attack on, damage to, or destruction of Al-Aqsa.

Figure 2: Potential global war theatres



Prerequisites for a negotiated off-ramp

President Trump's ultimatum to end U.S. military operations in 2-3 weeks makes negotiations even more critical given the prospects of a U.S. withdrawal without any deal to end the conflict. This could sow prolonged chaos in the region. Prerequisites for a negotiated off-ramp President Trump's ultimatum to end U.S. military operations in 2-3 weeks makes negotiations even more critical given the prospects of a U.S. withdrawal without any deal to end the conflict. This could sow prolonged chaos in the region.

The minimum prerequisites for a negotiated off-ramp must include:

- U.S. and Iran formally agreeing to the terms of the deal, which at the very least will stipulate a ceasefire.
- Either Israel's formal inclusion in the deal or a U.S. guarantee that Israel will abide by the terms of the deal.
- Iran's guarantee that its regional proxies will also abide by the deal.
- A formal understanding on the management of the Strait of Hormuz acceptable to the U.S., Iran and any other party with the ability to disrupt the deal through diplomatic, economic, or military coercion (e.g. China).

China-Taiwan Rift and Cheng Li-wun's Journey of Peace

By Sara Kazim

Sara Kazim is a Politics Graduate from King's College London and is currently working as a Research Associate at the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR)

The Visit

Behind the scenes of the US-Iran conflict, China has silently moved further in its goal for reunification. From April 7-12, 2026, Cheng Li-wun, chairwoman of Taiwan's main opposition party, Kuomintang (KMT) conducted a 6-day visit to mainland China what she termed as a 'journey of peace'. The visit was the first by any Taiwanese office holder in a decade and included a high-profile meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the April 10, 2026. Since the severing of official contact between the two, Beijing has maintained backchannel relations in Taiwan through the KMT which serves as a stark contrast to President Lai's administration that has refused all dialogue and labelled any form of dialogue as separatist. The visit has proven to be severely divisive within Taiwan and deepened the internal political fault lines. President Lai publicly stated that "compromising with authoritarian regimes only sacrifices sovereignty and democracy." Surveys on national identity show that 62% of respondents now identify as Taiwanese, up from 17.6% in 1992.² The statistic bodes poorly for the popularity of the KMT visit however the political implications remain unclear, as the scheduled May summit between Presidents Trump and Xi may redefine Washington's posture on Taiwan. Since Chairwoman Li-wun's visit, China has set forth a 10-point incentive plan which includes major changes such as the resumption of direct flights, easing of tourism sanctions, and agricultural trade concessions aiming to compensate the constituencies which have been disadvantaged by the deterioration of cross-strait tensions since 2016. This reiterates the Lai administration's position on compromising with China for economic concessions.

Background

The Taiwan Strait has been in a precarious situation as China pushes its agenda to unite neighbouring islands with the mainland under its plan of 'national rejuvenation by 2049'. Taiwan's political landscape has been majorly dominated by the Democratic Progressive Party which advocates a distinct Taiwanese Identity since the KMT lost power in 2016. This has presented a stark contrast as the KMT's position accepted the '1992 consensus which acknowledged the 'One China' framework. Tension in Taiwan has intensified as China previously attempted to assert dominance through testing nautical and airborne capabilities by deploying aircrafts and coast guard vessels on disputed territories such as the Senkaku Islands, Beijing has conducted an estimated 6 rounds of large-scale military exercises in the strait since 2022. US intelligence notes that China could militarily enable itself to seize the land by 2027 as President Xi Jinping has explicitly directed the People's Liberation Army to achieve full military capability to seize Taiwan by the given time. this target was first disclosed publicly by former INDOPACOM Commander Admiral Phil Davidson in 2021 and then subsequently confirmed by CIA Director William Burns, who stated that 'as a matter of intelligence, Xi has instructed the PLA to be ready by 2027 to conduct a successful invasion. Critically, this represents a directive to achieve capability, not a declaration of intent; the U.S. Intelligence Community's most recent annual threat assessment affirms that Beijing does not currently operate on a fixed invasion timeline. Nevertheless, such capability, regardless of whether force is exercised, would fundamentally shift the cross-strait balance of power, rendering Taiwan's position weaker with each year the PLA advances towards the set benchmark. Beijing has also been

laying the legal framework to create its *casus belli* for reunification by highlighting heavily contested documents such as the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation if intentions shift towards action.

U.S-Taiwan Uncertainty

Taipei also remains engulfed in political strife as the US, its longstanding ally, has been sending mixed signals in regards to their continuing support, this is not only considering President Trump's general transactional approach but also his remarks dismissing Taiwanese independence in the past year, which included questioning what kind of military support the USA would be willing to provide in its future with Taiwan.

This question became especially prevalent since President Trump has signalled openness to discussing the arms sales with President Xi Jinping ahead of the May summit and U.S officials confirmed a phone call between Presidents Trump and Xi where the former noted that the arms sale deal needs to be 'carefully handled'. After this the Trump administration has portrayed an air of uncertainty around the Taiwan defence package. A bipartisan group of U.S. senators also visited Taiwan to encourage an increase in military spending asserting this may change POTUS's calculus. Their visit appeared to effectively pressure the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) into initiating the submission of a USD 40 billion special defence budget for legislative approval. This visit was met with formal disapproval from Beijing, Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Mao Ning warned that such visits send 'wrong signals' which reiterates the Lai administration's push for international recognition of an independent Taiwan.

The Cheng's visit coincides with the KMT's legislative blocking of the government's \$40 billion special defence budget alongside its coalition partner the Taiwan People's Party (TPP). Cheng has publicly signalled willingness to slow Taiwan's military buildup as part of a de-escalatory approach. Critics within Taiwan argue that this weakens deterrence at a moment when China's military activity is increasing. The KMT's dual role as Beijing's preferred interlocutor and as the party barring defence investment raises concerns about whether economic and diplomatic concessions are sacrificing defence and sovereignty. Simultaneously, if the tensions continue analysts note, there could potentially be a risk of 'well over two trillion dollars' of global economic activity caused by a blockade in the Taiwan strait.

Timing

Taiwan's willingness to explore political accommodation with Beijing through the KMT may be attributed to the response to growing uncertainty about American commitment. Trump's transactional framing of Taiwan's defence including suggestions that Taiwan should pay more for U.S. "protection" and that arms sales might be discussed with Xi has created the space for political figures such as Cheng to argue that Taiwan does not need to choose between Washington and Beijing. By hedging its position, the KMT is appealing to domestic risk averse constituencies, which will likely negatively impact seemingly weakening U.S and Taiwanese relations. Cheng's visit occurred weeks before a scheduled summit between President Trump and President Xi in Beijing, at which Taiwan is expected to feature prominently on the agenda. The proximity is unlikely to be coincidental.

Intercivilizational Dialogue: Role and Significance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization

By Muhammad Insar

Mr. Muhammad Insar is a Research Associate and Project Officer at Beaconhouse National University Center for Policy Research (BCPR), MPhil Gold Medallist in International Relations (Lahore Garrison University). He produces the World in Focus and Monthly Situational Report briefings, with research focus on the SCO, regional integration, and Pakistan's multilateral strategy.

Abstract

The present article considers the role and relevance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in promoting intercivilizational dialogue in the Eurasian territory. Through its guiding principles encapsulated in the "Shanghai Spirit", the SCO aims to promote mutual trust, cultural diversity, and collaboration over conflict, contrasting directly with the ideas presented in Samuel Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" theory. The theoretical perspective used by the study is constructivism to examine how the SCO supports mutual identity and norms of the member countries, limiting the chances of a conflict. The article describes the main intercultural exchange and stability-ensuring institutional mechanisms, i.e., SCO University Network, the Cultural Capitals Program, and the Inter Civilizational Dialogue Conference. In addition, it ventures to look at how SCO has dealt with issues such as terrorism and destabilization in the regions and specifically Afghanistan. The article also takes a look at the future paths of the SCO, namely expansion, climate and culture projects and digital governance within the topic of AI ethics, underlining the opportunities of the organization in the global governance. Although the SCO has been successful, it encounters internal tensions and criticisms on human rights and styles of government which should be resolved as the organization develops.

Keywords; Shanghai Cooperation Organization, intercivilizational dialogue, constructivism, Eurasian integration, cultural diplomacy, SCO University Network, counterterrorism, RATS, digital governance, multipolar world order

Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented world, intercultural communication tools have emerged as a requisite means to promote peace, stability and cooperation, particularly in areas that are characterized by cultural and historic differences (UNESCO, 2017). Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which was formed in 2001 is also a very important inter-governmental organization in Eurasia and aims at facilitating political, economic, security and cultural cooperation (Aris, 2013). The main aim it has is the long term perspective of creating regional stability and sustainable development by holding mutual understanding and cooperation of the different member states.

The guiding ethos of the SCO is encapsulated in the "Shanghai Spirit", a set of core principles that emphasize mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, and respect for cultural diversity (SCO Charter, 2002). These principles offer a counter-narrative to Samuel Huntington's influential theory of the "Clash of Civilizations", which suggests that future global conflicts will arise from cultural and religious differences (Huntington, 1996). Instead, the SCO propagates a form of

cooperation in which disparate civilizations collaborate with one another to create an environment of peaceful international system beyond the historical, cultural fault lines.

SCO implements its intercivilizational dialogue pledge via an assortment of techniques and forms, which consist of cultural exchange processes, academic partnerships, and person to person diplomacy. Through these initiatives, the member states get on the basis of dialogue, exchange cultural values, as well as establish sustainable relations (Liang, 2024). The theoretical orientational approach to social construction of identities and norms, constructivism may offer a useful point of departure to take a closer look at how the SCO helps create such common ground between various civilizations (Wendt, 1999).

The current paper will discuss institutional processes of promoting intercultural dialogue in the SCO, two of them being the SCO University Network and Cultural Capitals Program, and another being Inter-Civilizational Dialogue conference. It will also analyze the SCO's efforts in tackling regional security threats, such as terrorism and extremism, through its Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) (Porshneva, 2024). Also, it will evaluate possible future directions of the SCO, and the most attention will be paid to the aspects of expansion, climate change and cultural preservation and digital governance, including the ethics of AI as the factors that determine the future role of the organization in the global governance (Mashayekh, 2025)

Despite the SCO's successes, challenges remain. It still has internal geopolitical tensions that are especially seen between such key members as Russia, China, and India, and hence obstruct to its policies and rulings (Yu, 2025). Additionally, criticisms of the SCO's approach to sovereignty, human rights, and governance need to be addressed as the organization moves forward. This paper aims to add value to the current debate on the changing role of the SCO in global governance and how it may promote more intercultural dialogue and regionalism in the 21st century.

Literature Review

Literature review is an important feature of the research in the scope of which a fully-fleshed picture of the scholarly debate on intercivilizational dialogue and the role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is presented. It has three objectives: to shed light on thought patterns and discourses by intercivilizational dialogue scholars in international relations, to explain changing functions of the SCO as an intercivilizational dialogue facilitator, and to reveal the main theoretical knowledge and analytical gaps. This background puts the study in the context of the current academic discussions and makes the research goals and approach to it reasonable (Smith, 2020).

Intercivilizational Dialogue: This describes coordinated interaction and relationships between different civilizations, and the intention behind it is to create knowledge of one another, seek conflict reduction, and coexist harmoniously. It is also considered one of the most important instruments in diverting cultural, religious, or historical variations and hence plays an essential role in world governance (Pan, 2018).

Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): SCO is an intergovernmental organization of the Eurasian region that was formed in 2001. It encourages political, economic, security, and cultural collaboration, and the ultimate objective remains regional stability and growth.

Shanghai Spirit: The "Shanghai Spirit" encapsulates the guiding principles of the SCO, emphasizing mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, respect for cultural diversity, and

shared development goals. Through it, the SCO has based its international relations philosophy (Li, 2019).

Cultural Exchange SCO: In cultural exchange within SCO is about exchanging the same traditions, value and practices among member states with the purpose of understanding and reinforcing links between itself. These contacts are conducive to the larger objectives of inter civilizational dialogue (Nye, 2004).

Intercultural Dialogue in Global Governance

Global governance has increasingly been using intercultural dialogue as one of the methods of promoting peace and stability in the global world (UNESCO, 2017). Which highlighting its capacity in fostering international understanding and averting clashes. In Eurasia, the undertakings of the SCO tend to be placed in the context of addressing cultural gaps and assistance to internal stability (Laruelle & Peyrouse, 2015). These programs encompass academic exchanges, communal cultural fests, and meetings, whereby they all help in communication and comprehension of member states, hence playing a role in peace-building initiatives.

The most famous theory developed by Samuel Huntington (1996) is based on the fact that conflicts in the future will arise out of cultural and religious discord among civilizations. He asserts that the civilization identities, especially along cultural and religious fault-lines, will be at the center stage of global politics. Huntington claims that the cultural differences will create an unavoidable geopolitical conflict during the post-Cold war.

Huntington's thesis has faced significant criticism. Said (2001) challenges the determinism in Huntington's theory, emphasizing the possibility of intercivilizational cooperation and integration. Inglehart and Norris (2003) postulate that the differences in cultures may be overcome by the so-called value change and modernization, and thus the possibility of conflict may be minimized.

To counter the theory introduced by Huntington, other models stress cooperation as opposed to confrontation. The SCO's approach, guided by the "Shanghai Spirit", underscores the importance of mutual respect, cultural diversity, and cooperation among civilizations (Li, 2019). Pan (2018) adds that the basis of the intercivilizational dialogue must be the engagement, mutual learning, and continuous negotiation and not conflict.

Constructivism as a Theoretical Framework

Constructivism emerges as a major theoretical approach in international relation because it focuses on understanding the social construction of reality where state actions and effects that influence the international outcome are informed by exerting ideas, identities, norms, and discourse (Wendt, 1999). Constructivism differs with realist or materialist approaches in the sense that whereas realist or materialism focuses on the importance of power and material interests, constructivism suggests that international system is dynamically formed through the common understandings and social interactions.

1. Core Principles of Constructivism

Social Construction of Identities: States and civilizations build their identities through interaction and discourse hence shaping their interest and behaviors (Wendt, 1999).

Norms and Ideas as Motors: Norms, Ideas and shared values influence action and may result in cooperation even in the case of material incentive shortage (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998).

Constitution mutual: Actors and structures are mutually constitutive; identities create structures, and structures create identities (Wendt, 1999).

2. Constructivism and Intercivilizational Dialogue in the Context of the SCO

Constructivism is an exciting way of looking at the manner of intercivilizational dialogue that is made easy by the SCO. In contrast to theories that underline power relationships and materialistic interests, constructivism holds to the societal construction of reality and in case of the SCO, constructing common norms, identities, and values by means of long-lasting interaction (Wendt, 1999). Constructivism focuses on the significance of ideas, identities and norms; through them, it is possible to shed light on how SCO promotes mutual understanding between the civilizations overcoming perception and the potential of the conflict.

Through this lens, the SCO's promotion of mutual respect, cultural diversity, and collaborative development reflects a strategic effort to reshape interactions between civilizations, especially in contrast to more conflict-driven models, such as Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations". Whereas Huntington emphasizes cultural fault lines as the origin of conflicts (Huntington, 1996), the SCO is trying to develop a common identity that surpasses such existing differences and therefore disproves the origination of conflicts by achieving cooperation and admiration (Li, 2019).

The "Shanghai Spirit", the core guiding principles of the SCO, directly aligns with the ideals of constructivism, stressing the importance of building common identities and norms to foster cooperation over division (Li, 2019).

3. Cultural Diplomacy and Exchange within the SCO

The application of cultural interaction in relation to the international understanding and peaceful existence is known as cultural diplomacy. The main idea here is soft power (Nye, 2004) where cultural influence plays a crucial role in the process of diplomacy that influences world affairs. Through the SCO, cultural diplomacy has been undertaken in a variety of ways which include education exchanges, cultural festivals and policy discussions. Such programs exceed the sphere of mere interaction: they promote a mutual understanding and trust of civilizations.

A good example is the SCO University Network, which is a critical mechanism in this aspect. It supports academic exchanges, where students can pursue their course in other SCO member states thus leading to cross cultural experience. Further, there is an undertaking of cultural activities such as the SCO National Cultures Day or the Festival of Cultural and Tourism Exchange that unites the various cultures hence creating a greater understanding and establishing long-lasting friendship ties among member states. Such programs were a concrete, real-life demonstration of how cultural diplomacy is manifested in the SCO borders (SCO, 2025).

Besides, the SCO facilitates people-to-people diplomacy by allowing initiatives that direct the people themselves, including the SCO Youth Council and other cultural expos, among others

(SCO, 2025). Such exchanges are crucial towards fighting prejudice and improving cross-cultural contacts, to secure peace and collaboration in the long run.

Conceptual Foundations

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) defines "intercivilizational dialogue" primarily through the "Shanghai Spirit," a set of core principles that serve as the foundation for its formation and comprehensive cooperation (SCO Charter, 2002). Formulated during the meeting of six state heads in Shanghai in 2001, the "Shanghai Spirit" is based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultations, respect for cultural diversity, and the shared goal of joint development. These principles form the core of the SCO's approach to international relations, emphasizing a dialogue-based coexistence and mutual understanding among its diverse member states. One of the key tenets is a commitment to the "respect for diversity of civilizations" (Dexue, 2021).

The "Shanghai Spirit" stands in direct contrast to Samuel Huntington's theory of the "Clash of Civilizations," as the SCO seeks to transcend the idea of civilizations as inherently antagonistic entities (Huntington, 1993). Rather, the SCO advocates the mode of collaboration in which collaboration and appreciation among different cultures form the bridge towards growth and stability (SCO Charter, 2002). This approach, which actively combats divisive ideologies like the "Cold War" or "zero-sum" mentalities, emphasizes collaboration over conflict. The mission of the SCO is to create a new era of international relations since the member states are to understand and develop in common, incorporating even the trickiest historical, cultural, and religious differences (Dexue, 2021).

Further, the SCO upholds "non-alignment, non-targeting at other countries or regions, and the principle of openness" in its external policies, which highlights its role as a forum for dialogue and cooperation rather than confrontation (SCO General Info, 2017). The organization's broader aim is to promote "World Unity for a Just Peace, Harmony, and Development," while working toward a "common vision of a community of common destiny for mankind," embodying the values of "One Earth, One Family, One Future". This collective vision stands in stark contrast to the "Clash of Civilizations," focusing instead on building a cooperative and inclusive international order (Mirza, 2024).

The geographic extent and the cultural reach of the SCO also complement its representation as a civilizational platform. It is a wide area, comprising 10 member states, two observer states, 14 dialogue partners, which make a diverse cultural setting of Sinic, Islamic, Indic, Orthodox, and Western civilization. This membership includes some of the world's most populous countries, covering approximately 24% of the Earth's landmass, or 65% of Eurasia, and 42% of the global population. It further has an aggregate nominal GDP that is around 23 percent of the total in the world and GDP based on the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) is approximately 36 percent of the global aggregate (Liang, 2024).

In 2025, the SCO comprised 10 member states: Belarus, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Two observer states (Afghanistan and Mongolia) and 14 dialogue partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Cambodia, Egypt, Kuwait, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka, Turkiye and the United Arab Emirates). It is a broad membership that incorporates all the different civilizational relations, Sinic (China), Muslim (Iran, Pakistan, countries of Central Asia), Indic (India), Orthodox (Russia, Belarus), as well as powers with extensive relations with the West (SCO, 2025).

The SCO's commitment to the "respect for cultural diversity" is a vital aspect of its framework, allowing it to leverage these diverse cultural backgrounds to foster dialogue and cooperation rather than conflict. The essence of cultural and educational exchanges is very fundamental in the processes of the SCO, and in order to facilitate the relationship, institutional structures were put in place so as to enhance mutual understanding. The SCO Charter highlights "culture" and "education" as key cooperation areas, aiming to advance social and cultural development within the region (SCO Charter, 2002). An important step is the SCO University, which encourages student exchange programs to go further towards cultural collaboration and mutual understanding (Bogatyreva, 2022).

Beyond formal institutional structures, the SCO also promotes people-to-people diplomacy, which is closely tied to the "Shanghai Spirit." Such is reflected by activities and meetings to improve intercultural relations and insights. Examples include the "Inter-Civilizational Dialogue among SCO Countries 2024," "SCO Cultural Evening in Celebration of the Spring Festival and Lantern Festival," and "SCO National Cultures Day". Additionally, initiatives like the "Festival of Cultural and Tourism Exchanges of SCO Member States" further exemplify the SCO's dedication to people-to-people diplomacy (SCO Cultural Cooperation, 2025).

Cultural and humanitarian cooperation is seen as one of the "three pillars" of the SCO's achievements, alongside security and economic cooperation (Dexue, 2021). Furthermore, youth interaction initiatives such as the 17th SCO Youth Council and educational forums like the SCO Association of Law Universities Forum reflect the organization's commitment to fostering cross-cultural dialogue (SCO Cultural Cooperation, 2025). In his vision for the SCO, Chinese President Xi Jinping has also called for the establishment of a "community of cultural exchanges," enriching the broader concept of a "community with a shared future for mankind" (Mirza, 2024).

Institutional Mechanisms in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The SCO is an intergovernmental organization which guarantees cooperation in the region in different spheres, security, economic development and cultural exchange. It is a mixed organization that operates to create mutual trust and collusion among its member states, which cut across the Central Asian region, South Asia and Eastern Europe. The most significant institutional measures that the SCO occupies in promoting intercivilizational dialogue, collaboration on security, intercultural and intereducational exchange, and the overall sharing of innovative ideas. Particularly, the analysis takes note of the following activities in the SCO context, namely the inter-civilizational dialogue conference 2024, the SCO university network and the cultural promotion practices in Almaty as a venue of cultural-tourism (Liang, 2024).

1. Dialogue Platforms

Among the most notable ones to the processes of intercivilizational dialogue occurring in the context of the SCO, there is an annual Inter-Civilizational Dialogue held, as the 2024 proposed in Astana, Kazakhstan (SCO, 2024). This is a very important communal venue where cultural exchanges are facilitated and areas of interest such as heritage, education, tourism and cross-member state understanding are discussed. As a key element of the SCO's commitment to promoting cultural cooperation, this event fosters dialogue on shared values and experiences. It also gives the possibility of discussing how civilizations in the SCO region can cooperate in preserving their cultural heritage as well contribute towards the development of the region (SCO, 2024).

The Inter Civilizational Dialogue Conference can be viewed as a part of the broader cultural and humanitarian cooperation strategies of the SCO, and they are guided by the Shanghai Spirit. The philosophy of this spirit is the focus on mutual trust, respect for multiculturalism, equality, and the goal of common development (SCO, 2025). The SCO attempts to end the possible conflicts due to cultural differences, reduce and prevent conflicts, and foster peace and understanding in the long perspective with the focus on cultural cooperation between the member states (Kamalova, 2022).

2. Permanent Bodies: SCO Secretariat and RATS

There is also the SCO Secretariat and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS), which have central roles in the coordination of security and cross-cultural programs in the organization. The main executive organ of the organization is the SCO Secretariat, whose headquarters in Beijing. It is assigned the role of coordination, organization support, and monitoring of the execution of the decisions made by different bodies of the SCO. The work of the Secretariat plays an important role in communication between the member states, the comfortable functioning of cultural activities, and achieving the missions of the SCO, peaceful co-existence, security, and mutually beneficial growth (Porshneva, 2024).

Another permanent structure of SCO is RATS, which has its headquarters in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, and was formed as a council to fight terrorism, separatism, and extremism. The major purpose of it is to facilitate the establishment of the cooperative regime of security, which enables the member states to exchange intelligence, create common counterterrorism policies, and conduct training activities. The RATS is also important to initiate cross-cultural security since it facilitates stability and peace in the region, which is vital to the provision of a safe environment in cross-cultural and educational exchanges (Porshneva, 2024).

3. SCO Business Council and Interbank Consortium: Financing Cultural-Industrial Projects

The SCO Business Council, formed in 2006, and the interbank consortium, formed in 2005, are more prone to economic cooperation and funding of infrastructure projects. Although they are chiefly concerned with issues of energy, transport and industrial development of the region, the two organizations can indirectly contribute to cultural projects by establishing economic values that can enable such endeavours to thrive (Lebedinskaya, 2019).

As an example, even though the speciality of the SCO Business Council is the development of trade and industrial relations between its members, its initiatives, especially ones related to energy and transportation routes, can ensure a closer interconnection of member states and thus lead to cultural interaction between them. The Interbank Consortium also contributes to the financing of projects enhancing infrastructure in the SCO region (communication networks, transport systems, and energy). This infrastructure support has an indirect effect on the cultural exchange as people now move very easily and communicate easily amongst the member states (Lebedinskaya, 2019).

Operational Tools

1. SCO University Network

The SCO University Network is a highly important instrument for establishing educational and cultural collaboration in the SCO member states. The network activates the sharing of students, academically integrated programs, and research projects between the member countries. The network enables cross cultural encounters as well as cross-cultural experience since it offers students the opportunity to study in other SCO member states (Liang, 2024).

CO member states have also made joint research projects in science, technology and education. Creation of the SCO University is aimed at harmonizing educational approaches and academic policies of the member states. It is a platform that promotes academic discussion whereby universities can come up with mutual programs that would involve tackling interests in the region as well as enhancing cultural integration and diversity (Liang, 2024).

2. Cultural Capitals Program

Another significant project of the SCO is the Cultural Capitals Program, intended to increase culture exchange and tourism. The cultural-tourism hub of 2024 has been named Almaty, Kazakhstan, which indicates its central position in the cultural strategy of the SCO. By this designation, Almaty will be in the position to organize different cultural events, festivals and exhibitions displaying the mix of cultures in the SCO region (Zheldibayev, 2024).

The cultural-tourism project is in line with the bigger aims of the SCO in developing mutual trust and encouraging the exchange of people. The program is aimed at enhancing cultural understanding, awareness, as well as strengthening local economies by increasing tourism and cultural tour activities. In this respect, the relevance of cities in the SCO region as the target of cultural projection and exchanges is highlighted by the cultural agenda of 2024 in Almaty (SCO, 2024).

Each institutional mechanism, whether it's the SCO University Network or the Cultural Capitals Program, is now clearly tied to the broader goal of intercultural dialogue. These initiatives aren't just tools for economic or educational exchange but also act as catalysts for mutual understanding and cross-cultural communication.

3. Digital Initiatives

Technological cooperation is another aspect of technological exploration that the SCO has undertaken by adopting numerous strategies to encourage innovativeness and digital connection. The technopark pool is one of the major organization-wide platforms of exchanging innovations. The SCO strives to reinforce the cooperation on the emergent technology like artificial intelligence, smart cities, and digital infrastructure. Such efforts are essential to the development of both economies and innovation in the region and make an addition to the overall cultural connectivity as they allow sharing knowledge and technologies (Mashayekh, 2025).

One of the stages of the SCO development lies in the aspect of digital innovations; SCO actively contributes to the development of digital economy and commercial activities on the internet. The fact that it assists in the creation of innovative technologies and their usage in

other spheres including health care, education and urban planning, allows the SCO to make the region more interrelated, where not only cultural but also economic and technological interactions are enhanced (Mashayekh, 2025).

The role of digital economy initiatives and AI ethics in bridging cultural divides is emphasized. These technological platforms are not just about innovation but also enhance intercultural cooperation by improving access to information and creating new avenues for engagement between different cultures.

Security-Culture Nexus

1. Countering "Three Evils" via Cultural Policy

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has continuously emphasized the need to counter the "Three Evils"; terrorism, separatism, and extremism, which threaten the stability of member states. The SCO has also tackled these threats through a combination of security measures, cultural cooperation and regional cooperation. Although the actions of the organization are mainly associated with security and economic integration, the cultural policy deeply and subtly influences the activities of deradicalization and counterterrorism (Valleau, 2018).

SCO incorporates cultural policy in the context of comprehensive counterterrorism, in different ways, in terms of mutual understanding, cultural exchange, and regional solidarity. The "Shanghai Spirit," a fundamental guiding principle of the organization, fosters mutual trust, equality, consultation, and respect for the diversity of civilizations. It is through such values that the SCO seeks to surpass ideologies that separate people, such as the ideologies spread by radical groups. The given cultural focus is aimed at reducing the prospect of the attractiveness of extremist ideas by promoting the attitude to the various cultural traditions as well as underlining the similar regional values that outweigh the divergent past (SCO, 2024).

Although the SCO's charter mentions the promotion of cultural cooperation, its direct application to counterterrorism or deradicalization programs remains somewhat implicit. The cultural programs developed by the SCO, including educational forums, art events, discussions between cultures, etc., create the atmosphere within which extremist ideologies could probably be less likely to develop. Such programs are supposed to encourage cross-cultural learning and collaboration, which can play a significant part in the deradicalization of people, as it can offer them a different account to the one that terrorist organizations are giving them (Dexue, 2021).

Another achievement of the SCO has been the establishment of the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) as a permanent institution of the organization. It has helped in the coordinated effort to counter terrorism, separatism and extremism in the region. In 2011-2015, the activities of RATS helped prevent 20 attempted terrorist attacks and disband 440 terrorist camps in countries belonging to SCO. Moreover, the actions of the organization resulted in 1,700 of the extremists being neutralized and over 2,700 terrorists being arrested during the given time (SCO, 2015). These have been obtained by increasing the intelligence network, carrying out joint military exercises and instituting collaborative arrangements to fight the transnational nature of terror.

RATS also became responsive to new threats that emerged because of the emergence of online platforms where terrorist propaganda and recruitments were carried out. The organization

responded to this by undertaking joint information operations that would ensure that the internet was not used as tool of terrorists, separatists and also extremists. This multilateral strategy showed the need to put emphasis not only on the usual security defense mechanisms but also on the emphasis of cultural discourse and inter regional solidarity in reducing the attractiveness of terrorism and radicalism (Valleau, 2018).

Afghanistan Stabilization

1. SCO's Role in Afghanistan's Stabilization Efforts

The SCO has played an integral role in Afghanistan's stabilization through a dual approach that combines security coordination and humanitarian aid. The organization, since its establishment, has been focused towards dealing with any security threats that are posed in the region, and the most significant such threat has been the issue of terrorism, drug trade, and instability that has been caused by these armed militants, especially along the Afghanistan border. The security coordination that SCO has undertaken in Afghanistan has seen them focus on border control, intelligence-sharing, and many more military exercises so as to curb the activities of the terror groups in the country (Malyshev, 2022).

Among the most important forces that the SCO uses to influence Afghanistan, there exists the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) that has played a critical role in nurturing cooperation in security among its member states. Through intelligence exchange and counterterrorist training, RATS has helped in curbing cross-border terrorism, especially focusing on the menaces of terrorist organizations like the Taliban and ISIS (Malyshev, 2022).

Among the non-security activities that the SCO takes care of is facilitating the stabilization of Afghanistan by way of humanitarian aid and development initiatives. The areas that these initiatives have targeted include education, health and poverty issues, as all these promote long-term stability because it helps eliminate some of the causes of the conflict.

2. SCO's Diplomatic Engagement with Afghanistan Despite Taliban Non-Recognition

The June 2021 Taliban takeover in Afghanistan has posed real difficulties in preserving diplomatic relations with this country, especially since the international community does not acknowledge the Taliban government. Despite this, Afghanistan retains Observer Status within the organization, allowing it to participate in certain meetings and initiatives, though this status has been inactive since the Taliban's takeover (SCO, 2024).

Despite that, the SCO has ensured that it keeps a door of communication with Afghanistan and in particular, security issues. The interests common to all the organization members in terms of fighting terrorism, drug trade, and settling disputes in the region guarantee that the future of Afghanistan remains on the agenda of the SCO. In this context, the SCO's "Shanghai Spirit," which promotes mutual trust and consultation, provides a basis for engaging with Afghanistan despite the challenges posed by the non-recognition of the Taliban regime (SCO, 2024).

The SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group was formed in 2005, and it is a dialogue vehicle between the group and Afghanistan. While the Taliban's non-recognition has hindered formal participation, the Contact Group remains a potential avenue for facilitating constructive discussions on Afghanistan's future, particularly with regard to addressing shared security threats in the region (SCO, 2019)

Economic-Cultural Synergies

1. Infrastructure as Cultural Bridges

As far as the integration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member countries in terms of the economic enhancement of the region, it is crucial to emphasize that this organization successfully facilitates the process of regional development, as numerous infrastructure projects serve as the relevant support of the consistency. These projects are mainly based on economic cooperation and the development of infrastructure, but they are also means of cultural exchange where people have a chance to learn more about each other, their knowledge and the fact that they will be more open to appreciating different cultures as well. Remarkably, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which comprises projects like the China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline and China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway, takes the focal point in this process (Fan, 2023).

Belt and Road Integration

BRI has affected the region in terms of infrastructure greatly as it has provided interconnected trade routes and also there are positive economic ties between China and Central Asia. One project is the China-Central Asia Gas Pipeline, which is already in use and transports natural gas across Turkmenistan to China bracing the energy security and reinforces the economic ties between these countries. Although the role of the pipeline is mainly economic, the enhanced connectivity that it has brought will increase interaction between the peoples of the countries involved, with a potential for cultural exchanges in the arena of energy co-operations (Tang, 2023).

On the same note, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway is one of the important factors in assisting the trade between the three countries. This rail line not only helps in the transportation of goods but also enhances the cultural networks as different cultures are exposed to each other. The investment in infrastructural development on transportations such as railways and highways encourages the movement across borders that may entail exchanges in people and ideas, and cultural practices (Tang, 2023).

Although these infrastructure projects came in the general picture of economic development and trade in the world, they also have an indirect influence of cultural exchange. The increased mobility of individuals and commodities promotes the cross-breeding of ideas, customs and traditions, which are basic elements of cultural exchange.

2. Financial Innovations

Financial innovations have also been adopted by the SCO so that it does not rely so much on the buying and selling of the U.S. dollar, allowing it to cooperate in an economic way and in the cultural way of the region. Promotion of trade by local currency is another key strategy, and even the setting up of an SCO Development Bank or Investment Fund to take up regional infrastructure and development projects (Ruslan, 2023).

Local Currency Trade: Lessening USD dependence and enabling Cultural Project governance
Exchange of money: Lessening off dependence on the USD and enabling Cultural project loans

The organization has also encouraged the use of local currencies among the member states of SCO in order to make the cooperation between them more effective financially and to make their economies weaker dependent on the U.S. dollar. The core in these efforts is local currency swaps and mutual settlements. The SCO also simplifies trade with the local currency, and thus, in addition to limiting the threat posed by foreign exchange fluctuations, it strengthens the independence of the member states over their financial systems (Ruslan, 2023).

As an example, China has implemented currency swap agreements with a number of SCO members, such as Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, in the amount of billions of dollars. Such arrangements facilitate the easy conducting of trade matters and can facilitate the funding of the cultural projects by offering better terms to conduct the cross-border cultural activities through co-owning the cultural festivals, education exchange programs and tourism activities. Local currencies are beneficial since they protect the financing of cultural projects against the U.S. dollar volatile rate and make the financial environment of such projects more stable. These financial mechanisms have been aimed so far mainly at enhancing trade and economic collaboration, and the cultural projects have been an indirect beneficiary of such activities (Xin, 2021).

SCO Development Bank and Investment Fund in Cultural Infrastructure Ventures It has been considered that one of the remedies to the infrastructure issues of the region and the development delays can be represented by the establishment of an SCO Development Bank and an Investment Fund. One of the vehicles of financial cooperation in the organization is SCO Interbank Consortium that was created in 2005. It also seeks to direct investment into mutual initiatives with the centralized investment being in the sphere of infrastructure and economic growth (SCO, 2024). China Development Bank (CDB), being the major source of preferential loans, has been in the middle of the infrastructure financing framework of SCO, and various projects cover energy, transportation, and healthcare.

To add to the regional development, China has also suggested that SCO needs a Development Fund and Bank. Such financial agencies would be specialized in economic development and infrastructure development where they would loan money in projects that would develop the transportation infrastructure, energy and industrial capability of the region (Hooijmaaijers, 2021).

However, even though these financial tools might not aid the materialization of cultural-infrastructure projects in the short-term, an opportunity to create these funding mechanisms will remain a reality given that SCO may change its priorities and put culture on the list of strategic dimensions of regional development. Since the organization focuses on mutual development and social cooperation, one might discuss more closely how the financial innovations are to be used to support the cultural infrastructure as well as conventional economic and infrastructural projects in the future (Hooijmaaijers, 2021).

Challenges & Critiques

1. Internal Frictions

Intra-SCO tensions are mostly caused by the geopolitical and national interests of the SCO members, mostly between Russia and China, and between India and Pakistan. Such tensions make it difficult to build a consensus on mutual economic and cultural projects.

Russia-China Competition Over Economic Influence: The fast-expanding economy in China especially in Central Asia, has been a source of tension between China and Russia who have been the leading economic and security players in this region. China's substantial investments and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have made it the largest foreign investor in several SCO member states, including Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The change in economic influence brought about worries for Russia on its declining position, especially in Central Asia where it has always viewed itself as the dominating power (Yu, 2025).

These tensions make cooperation in the framework of the SCO on cultural, economic levels difficult. Although the two nations are partners in matters related to security, it is possible that in future there will be conflicts on how resources are apportioned and political power shared in the organization as a result of the increased economic influence of China. Nevertheless, Russia needs China and its diplomatic aid quite much, especially during the current conflict in Ukraine, which requires a military alliance in the SCO.

India-Pakistan Tensions: The presence of India and Pakistan as parts of the SCO is another hurdle to jump since the two countries are longtime adversaries who in most occasions infiltrate SCO gatherings with territorial conflicts. The existence of such tensions makes the organization not be able to come to a consensus on a common economic or cultural project. For example, India has expressed concerns about Pakistan's role in the Belt and Road Initiative, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which India perceives as a strategic threat to its regional influence (Waggy, 2023).

The Indo-Pak relationship makes the work of the SCO in building economic and cultural collaboration difficult. The common security statements, which may concern terrorism or militant activity, tend to be controversial when different national interests come into play. Besides, political tensions between the two nations will also ensure the SCO heads are not able to maintain programs that demand consensus, especially in trade, cultural interaction and security at the regional level.

2. Authoritarianism Narrative

Criticism of the SCO has been based on the fact that its enduring value of sovereignty and non interference has been criticized as it does little in the way of advancing human rights especially as far as member countries' form of governance is concerned. The organization holds the firm belief in sovereignty, which is contrary to the liberal democratic principles connected to human rights (Ambrosio, 2008).

Balancing Sovereignty with Human Rights: Sovereignty, territorial integrity and no interference in the internal affairs of member states, as laid out in the founding principles of the SCO, are given importance. This core system has been criticized as a tool of protecting dictatorial governments against external pressure on human rights. The paradigm of sovereignty in the framework of the SCO leads to the fact that, very often, human rights become secondary in relation to the issues of national security.

The SCO Charter contains a promise of promoting human rights; however, it also specifically stipulates that human rights should be promoted in the manner envisaged by the national legislation of the particular member country. This linguistic expression enables member states to construe protection of human rights according to their preferred legal and political platform, usually to the disadvantage of internationally stipulated human rights laws (SCO, 2002).

Even though the organization believes in developing each other and understanding cultural diversity, the political systems of some of the member states, especially China and Russia, are claimed to be dictatorial. Opponents complain that SCO is one of the meeting places these regimes can flourish in to entrench their internal authority and defy western influence and liberal-democratic values (Ambrosio, 2008).

Future Trajectories

1. Expansion: BRICS-SCO Convergence

The expansion of the SCO, particularly its convergence with BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), is a key development that has significant implications for intercultural dialogue. The fact that even countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt have been added as dialogue partners indicates the growing activities of the SCO on the world scene. The involvement of these countries enhances the presence of the organization in the Middle East and North Africa, which are places of both economic and security concern.

The inclusion of more diverse nations within the SCO provides a stronger foundation for fostering intercultural communication. The deepening ties between BRICS and the SCO also offer a model for how intercultural dialogue can be advanced in an increasingly multipolar world. By working together, these regional powers can create a cooperative environment where differences are not only acknowledged but also celebrated. As the SCO expands, the convergence of these two organizations could result in more inclusive dialogue frameworks, addressing not only regional but also global challenges, such as climate change, economic inequalities, and social justice (Efremenko, 2024).

2. Climate-Culture Agenda

Integration of the climate agenda and culture is also going to be part and parcel of the future of the SCO. Although the agenda of green development and decarbonization already exists, the nexus of such environment-based objectives with the conservation of cultural heritage is a novel destination. Policies that would maintain energy sustainability and cultural landscape preservation may become a central topic of SCO collaboration, especially since member states are becoming increasingly concerned about climate change (Zehra, 2024).

For example, the SCO's climate agenda could focus on how indigenous knowledge systems and cultural practices contribute to sustainable living and environmental conservation. By promoting cultural exchanges around environmental practices, such as sustainable agriculture, water management, and traditional ecological knowledge, the SCO could foster cross-cultural learning that enriches both environmental policies and cultural heritage preservation. This approach would not only strengthen cooperation among member states but also deepen intercultural dialogue on a global scale, aligning the SCO's long-term goals with the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UNESCO, 2017).

3. Digital Governance: AI Ethics Frameworks and Intercultural Cooperation

In the era of the digital economy, the contribution of the SCO to the development of AI regulation and digital ethics will play a decisive role in establishing intercultural collaboration in an environment of rapidly developing technology. An intercultural dialogue presents possibilities and dilemmas of intercultural dialogue in developing artificial intelligence (AI),

smart cities, and digital infrastructure. The initiatives of the SCO to develop frameworks on ethics in the use of AI may provide an example of solving the ethical dimension of digital technologies in a way that takes into account the needs of cultural diversity and regional differences (Mashayekh, 2025).

The SCO can work towards creating common ground digital governance principles where the ethical aspect of development must be underpinned by the values held by various cultures and realize that no comparative advantage be achieved by a single civilization. As an example, one can mention that the future of smart cities being a project developed in SCO member states should be treated in a way that would not degrade culture in the light of modern technological improvements, but instead contribute to enriching it, through inclusive discussion.

By creating ethics principles of AI to be used by the SCO, the cross-cultural exchanges between the emerging technologies would be supported, in addition to enhancing the global governance capacities of the SCO by solving the digital divide. Through its active participation in the development of ethical AI, the SCO would push towards a more multilateral approach, help fill the technological opportunities and create greater cultural collaboration in the digital world (Zehra, 2024).

4. Emphasizing Long-term Goals: Evolving SCO's Role in Global Governance

With further development of the SCO, its part in the global governance will vary, especially in the terms of intercultural dialogue. A long-term vision of SCO in the region is not limited to a traditional stability in the region but also it serves as the example of how the world can be organized in the multipolar world in the form of a multilateral efforts. The decisions made in terms of cultural diversity, mutual respect, and cooperative development will help the organization to extend its sphere of influence in global governance (Efremenko, 2024).

In the future, the SCO will have to continue to establish itself as a focal point in the international diplomacy arena, a place in which interacting civilizations can use their common spaces to tackle the international issues, like climate change, economic growth and human rights. With still more countries joining SCO as its members, its ability to promoting intercultural dialogue will be critical to negotiate the existing complexity of a more interdependent world whilst still being highly differentiated on the cultural front.

In the quest of promoting its core assignment of intercultural cooperation, the SCO would be in a position to reposition global governance with focus more on cooperation and understanding as opposed to division. Not only would this solidify the position of the organization within the field of international politics, but it would also form a more inclusive as well as just world order with various cultures adding to the resolution of the world problems in a common future (Efremenko, 2024).

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) effectively fosters intercivilizational dialogue through its foundational “Shanghai Spirit,” innovative institutional mechanisms, and the social construction of norms and identities as illuminated by constructivist theory. The SCO's guiding principles; mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality, consultation, and respect for cultural diversity, provide a normative framework that transcends Samuel Huntington's

“Clash of Civilizations” thesis by emphasizing cooperation and shared development (Huntington, 1996). Key mechanisms such as the SCO University Network, Cultural Capitals Program, and Inter-Civilizational Dialogue Conference serve not only as forums for cultural exchange but also as arenas for the co creation of collective identities and mutual understanding among member states (SCO Secretariat, 2024).

The analysis shows that, while the SCO has succeeded in constructing a cooperative regional order, it continues to face significant geopolitical hurdles, including tensions among major members such as Russia, China, and India (Yu, 2025). These frictions periodically impede consensus-building and risk undermining the SCO’s dialogue objectives. By applying a constructivist lens, this research contributes theoretically by revealing how the SCO’s platforms and practices actively shape member states’ identities and norms, moving them from zero-sum postures toward collaborative stances (Wendt, 1999).

Bibliography

- Adler, E. (2005). The spread of security communities: Communities of practice, self-restraint, and NATO’s post–Cold War transformation. *European Journal of International Relations*, 11(2), 173–203. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066105052369>
- Akhmetkali, A. (2024, October 8). Global religious leaders convene in Astana to discuss conflict resolution. *The Astana Times*. <https://astanatimes.com/2024/10/global-religious-leaders-convene-in-astana-to-discuss-conflict-resolution/>
- Ambrosio, T. (2008). Catching the ‘Shanghai spirit’: How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization promotes authoritarian norms in Central Asia. *Europe-Asia Studies*, 60(8), 1321–1344.
- Ameen, S. (2024). Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): A catalyst for regional cooperation. *Journal of Social Sciences Research*, 12(3), 45–67.
- Aris, S. (2013). *Eurasian regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays*. University of Texas Press.
- Bogatyreva, O., & Orozobekova, A. (2022). Humanitarian cooperation in the SCO: Current situation and development features. In *The Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (pp. 83–100). [Publisher].
- Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 7, 2002. (2002, June 7). Retrieved from <https://eng.sectsco.org/20020607/202991.html>
- China Daily. (2025, July 7). Growth driver – Opinion. <http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202507/07/WS686b0e0ea31000e9a573a708.html>
- Dexue, Y. (2021). Economic cooperation under the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Achievements and prospects. *China International Studies*, 88, 94.
- Efremenko, D. (2024). Consolidation of the world majority: Expansion of the SCO and BRICS, its significance for the transformation of international order and geopolitics in the Near and Middle East. *Russia and the Moslem World*, 1(323), 29–51.
- Fan, Y. (2023). Development of the historical status of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. *International Journal of Frontiers in Sociology*, 5(1).
- Finnemore, M., & Sikkink, K. (1998). International norm dynamics and political change. *International Organization*, 52(4), 887–917. <https://doi.org/10.1162/002081898550789>

- Hooijmaaijers, B. (2021). Understanding success and failure in establishing new multilateral development banks: The SCO Development Bank, the NDB, and the AIIB. *Asian Perspective*, 45(2), 445–467.
- Huntington, S. P. (1996). *The clash of civilizations and the remaking of world order*. Simon & Schuster.
- Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2003). *Rising tide: Gender equality and cultural change around the world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Kamalova, Z. A. (2022). Vectors of cultural and humanitarian cooperation within the SCO. *American Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Research*, 2(12), 83–89. <https://doi.org/10.37547/ajsshr/volume02issue12-13>
- Karami, J. (2023). The strategic role of Iran for the SCO: Strengthening Eurasian integration. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 23(3), 547–561.
- Laruelle, M., & Peyrouse, S. (2015). *The Chinese question in Central Asia: Domestic order, social change, and the Chinese factor*. Hurst & Company.
- Lebedinskaya, O. G., Babich, S. G., Karmanov, M. V., & Shituev, S. S. (2019). The SCO financial mechanisms: Risk analysis and development prospects. In *Proceedings of the ICEFB-19* (pp. 21–24). <https://doi.org/10.2991/ICEFB-19.2019.6>
- Li, X. (2019). The Shanghai Spirit and the future of Eurasian integration. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 10(2), 120–134.
- Liang, Q. (2024). Analysis of current conditions and strategic recommendations for cultural partnerships to enhance political and economic development within the SCO framework. *American Journal of Corporate Management*, 1(7), 183–197.
- Malyshev, D. (2022). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its role in the contemporary system of international relations (On the 20th anniversary of the SCO). *Vestnik Moskovskogo Universiteta*, 13(4), 81–104. <https://doi.org/10.48015/2076-7404-2021-13-4-81-104>
- Mashayekh, J. (2025). Techno-regionalism in the post-globalisation era: Linking technological cooperation and geopolitical tensions. *Asian Journal of Technology Innovation*, 1–30.
- Mirza, Q. (2024). The 2024 SCO Summit in Pakistan: Outcomes and challenges. *Paradigm Shift*. <https://www.paradigmshift.com.pk/sco-summit-2024/>
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Pan, C. (2018). Intercivilizational dialogue and the SCO: A new paradigm for Eurasian cooperation. *Asian Perspective*, 42(3), 389–406.
- Porshneva, O. S., & Razinkov, S. L. (2024). Institutional formation and development of SCO activities: Experience of retrospective analysis. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 24(2), 264–279.
- Rüland, J. (2012). The ASEAN Regional Forum and security governance in Asia-Pacific. *Asian Survey*, 52(1), 1–23.
- Russlan, O. (2023). Analyzing the financial and banking cooperation among Russia and the SCO member states. *Natsional'naya bezopasnost'/Nota Bene*, (1), 28–40.
- Said, E. W. (2001). The clash of ignorance. *The Nation*, 273(12), 11–13.

- Scientometric Analysis. (2024). Economic research output among the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) countries. *International Journal of Scientometrics*, 19(2), 123–141. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4908720
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2002, June 7). Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. <https://eng.sectsco.org/20020607/202991.html>
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2015). RATS annual report 2015. SCO Secretariat.
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2017). General information | External communication. <https://eng.sectsco.org/20170109/192193.html>
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2019, April 19). SCO Secretary-General Vladimir Norov meets with Ambassador of Tajikistan to China Parviz Davlatzoda. <https://eng.sectsco.org/20190419/533099.html>
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2024). The Shanghai Spirit and cultural cooperation within the SCO framework. SCO Secretariat.
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2024, June 20). Inter-Civilisational Dialogue among SCO countries 2024. <https://eng.sectsco.org/20240620/1412328.html>
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2025). Cultural and humanitarian cooperation. <https://eng.sectsco.org/culture/>
- Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2025). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Latest news and developments. <https://eng.sectsco.org/>
- Smith, J. (2020). Literature reviews in international relations: Purpose and process. *International Studies Review*, 22(4), 567–579.
- Tang, W., & Joldybayeva, E. (2023). Pipelines and power lines: China, infrastructure and the geopolitical (re)construction of Central Asia. *Geopolitics*, 28(4), 1506–1534.
- UNESCO. (2017). *Intercultural dialogue: International perspectives*. UNESCO Publishing.
- Valleau, A., Rahimov, K., & Cherkasov, A. A. (2018). The soft dimension of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's fight against the "Three Evil Forces": Insights on counterterrorism preventive measures and youth education. *European Journal of Contemporary Education*, 7(4), 858–873. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1200954.pdf>
- Waggy, M. M., & Hassan, K. W. (2023). Antagonistic states in multilateral forums: India and Pakistan in SAARC and SCO. [Journal/Conference details].
- Wendt, A. (1999). *Social theory of international politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Xin, L., & Xin, W. Y. (2021). The results of the 20-year economic cooperation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and its development prospects. *Finances: Theory and Practice*, 25(3), 159–174.
- Yu, L. (2025). China-Russia partnership and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In *The Rise of China and the China-Russia Strategic Partnership* (pp. 199–237). Springer Nature Singapore.
- Zehra, I. (2024). Role of the SCO in countering non-traditional security threats in the SCO region. *Pakistan JL Analysis & Wisdom*, 3, 93.

Zheldibayev, A., Kulazhanov, Y., Moldagaliyeva, A., Abdildayeva, N., Zhoya, K., Sarkitkan, K., ... & Pavlichenko, L. (2024). Study of the current state and prospects for the development of tourist flow in the city of Almaty, Kazakhstan. *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites*, 57, 1952–1963.

China's Way: Diplomatic Continuity in a Fragmented World Order

By Nasim Zehra

Among today's defining paradoxes is that states are more interdependent than ever before, yet also more prone to confrontation. We live in a world where disputes are frequent, power is shifting and proliferating, yet no framework can fully manage global tensions. As global institutions struggle, the key question is how states preserve cooperation amid contestation.

Several institutions reflect cracks in the post-World War II governance architecture: the UN, IMF, World Bank, Nato, GATT/WTO and the EU. In this context, one question deserves attention: how does China conduct its affairs with other states? The answer lies not only in China's economic power or military modernisation, but also in its diplomatic method. China often seeks to prevent disagreement from becoming a diplomatic rupture. Its engagement with ASEAN best illustrates this approach. China does not always resolve disputes; instead, it creates channels through which disputes can be managed while trade, connectivity and political dialogue continue.

This is a distinctive feature of Chinese statecraft. ASEAN reflects this through its habit of continuous consultation, keeping states with differing systems and disputes around the same table. China is not a member of ASEAN. It is a Dialogue Partner and, since 2021, a Comprehensive Strategic Partner. In November 2021, ASEAN and China announced a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This status matters. China engages ASEAN outside the organisation, but through dense, institutionalised mechanisms that give the relationship political continuity and strategic weight.

The ASEAN-China relationship is especially instructive because China has maritime and territorial disputes with several ASEAN member states, particularly in the South China Sea. Yet these disputes have not prevented both sides from building one of the world's most active regional relationships.

The first element of China's method is compartmentalisation. Disputes are not denied, but neither are they allowed to define the entire relationship. The South China Sea remains contested and ASEAN claimant states remain concerned, yet diplomatic, economic and institutional engagement continues. The second element is rule-referencing. In 2002, ASEAN and China adopted the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea, committing themselves to peaceful dispute resolution and working towards a future Code of Conduct.

The third element is acceptance of regional diplomatic norms. China joined ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in 2003, endorsing principles such as sovereignty, non-interference and peaceful settlement of disputes. This did not end disagreements, but placed China's regional diplomacy within ASEAN's framework of restraint and consultation. The fourth element is economic deepening alongside political friction. Despite maritime disputes, ASEAN and China have expanded trade and supply-chain ties. In 2025, both sides completed negotiations on the upgraded ASEAN-China Free Trade Area 3.0. China's method is to create mutual stakes so that any rupture becomes costly. Finally, China emphasises patience through repeated summits, consultations and dialogues that sustain habits of contact even without quick settlements. In Western diplomatic traditions, success is often measured by the signing of an agreement.

In the Chinese and ASEAN diplomatic approach, the continuation of the process itself is a form of stability. China does not necessarily solve disputes quickly. Instead, it works to prevent disputes

from automatically translating into diplomatic breakdowns. In strategic terms, this is escalation management through continuity of institutional continuity.

Interestingly, in the global context, there is little to compare with US President Donald Trump's style of engagement. Trump often avoids permanently closing channels. He has engaged adversaries and partners through pressure, personal diplomacy and transactional bargaining. But the similarity is only partial. Trump's approach is often improvised, reactive, personalised and transactional. China's is more institutional, sequenced and embedded in structures. Trump may keep a phone line and social media open; China tries to keep the summit, working group, trade mechanism, security dialogue and regional forum alive at the same time. This was visible in Washington's ties with India. Even as Trump-era tariffs and trade pressure strained the relationship, the US continued to engage India for broader strategic reasons. But the engagement often lacked the disciplined institutional layering visible in China's ASEAN policy. It depended heavily on pressure, personality and deal-making rather than a coherent engagement architecture.

China's method is subtle and sober, even if not without some coercion or contradiction. China's structural approach links economics, diplomacy, regional norms and repeated consultation into a larger strategic practice. That gives it durability.

Clearly, China is a competitive global power navigating its journey in a Hobbesian world. ASEAN states continue to worry about Chinese power. The China-India contestation after Galwan is there, and so is continued militarisation along the LAC. The South China Sea remains contested. The Code of Conduct remains unfinished. But China's method is clear and not benign. It is wise. China seeks to operate alongside disagreement. It compartmentalises disputes, references and works with prevailing regional norms, deepens economic interdependence, keeps institutional channels active and uses process as a stabilising instrument.

In a world of strategic disorder, this approach gives China diplomatic advantage. It allows Beijing to present itself not merely as a power with demands and claims, but as one with mechanisms and mechanisms for accommodation. ASEAN is central to understanding this practice because ASEAN's own culture of consultation, consensus and non-finality provides a regional environment in which disputes can be managed and engagement ensured.

A broader lesson from China's approach is that stability is not always produced by settlement. Sometimes it is produced by disciplined engagement in the absence of settlement. China's diplomacy, especially with ASEAN, shows how a major power can continue to contest, compete and negotiate without allowing every dispute to become a complete rupture.

Cold Warriors lost in Beijing

By Nasim Zehra

For decades, a major part of American and global strategic scholarship was built around the possibility of a China–US military clash. The literature of rivalry has generated colossal defence budgets, weapons programmes, forward military deployments, Indo-Pacific alignments, alliance-building, technology controls, supply-chain weaponisation and an elaborate US-led ecosystem aimed at constraining China’s rise. From military bases to semiconductor restrictions, from rare-earth anxieties to naval posturing, the dominant frame has been confrontation.

Against this backdrop, the China–US summit in Beijing was important not because it produced a grand bargain but because it signalled that wiser calculations can still intervene in dangerous strategic trajectories. At a time when the world’s two most consequential powers carry not only immense military capabilities but also decisive influence over global trade, technology, finance, energy security and diplomacy, the tone and direction of their engagement matters. Beijing showed that even adversarial relationships can be managed when leadership chooses sobriety over provocation.

President Xi Jinping and President Donald Trump approached the summit with a seriousness that reflected the complexity of today’s interdependent world. There was no theatrical grandstanding and no attempt to seek a quick fix to structural problems. The meeting reflected a recognition that China-US ties cannot be reduced to one issue or one interaction.

The outcome was political and strategic rather than merely transactional. Both sides appeared to accept that engagement is a necessity. The summit created space for continuing dialogue on trade, technology, Taiwan, Iran, energy flows and broader global stability. In a world already strained by wars, sanctions, supply-chain disruptions and economic fragmentation.

On Iran and the Strait of Hormuz, the two sides approached the issue differently but with some overlapping concerns. China continued to emphasise dialogue, sovereignty, non-interference and opposition to war as the correct path for addressing the Iran crisis. The US focus was on nuclear weapons for Iran and on urgent reopening the Strait of Hormuz. Both recognised that blocked Hormuz is a global economic problem. Energy flows, inflation, shipping, insurance, industrial production and global markets are all affected by instability in that narrow but vital waterway.

The Beijing summit therefore showed that even where China and the US disagree on methods, they may still share an interest in preventing uncontrolled escalation. China did not use the occasion to score rhetorical points across every global issue. It chose instead to stress the importance of dialogue, economic continuity and non-confrontation.

There were also tangible economic understandings. China announced plans to purchase 200 Boeing aircraft, expand agricultural imports including soybeans, beef and poultry, and seek extension of the earlier trade truce. Both sides also discussed tariff reductions, supply guarantees and the easing of trade barriers. These are not revolutionary breakthroughs, but in a relationship burdened by tariffs, sanctions, export controls and mutual suspicion, even limited movement on trade can help restore channels of confidence.

The summit’s value lies precisely in this combination: no exaggerated expectations, no sweeping settlement, but a calm return to structured engagement. Strategic stability is built through

communication, crisis management, economic interdependence and the willingness to keep talking even when differences remain profound. This is where China's broader approach to international relations becomes relevant. Beijing has long presented its external engagement through the language of mutual economic benefit, infrastructure connectivity, non-interference and dialogue. Whether through the Belt and Road Initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Silk Road Fund or the wider network of trade and connectivity projects, China has tried to expand its influence through economic statecraft rather than formal military blocs. Critics may contest aspects of this model, but its basic logic is clear: build influence by building roads, ports, energy networks, trade routes and financial institutions.

China is of course not without hard power, ambition or strategic calculation. It is a major military power with expanding technological and maritime capabilities. But its diplomatic method has often focused on preserving channels of engagement, especially where disputes cannot be immediately resolved. China's relations with ASEAN, its participation in regional economic forums and its emphasis on connectivity reflect this approach. The Beijing summit was another example of that method: manage contradiction, reduce temperature, preserve economic links and avoid turning disagreement into rupture.

By contrast, US policy requires deeper reflection. For decades, Washington's global role has been heavily militarised. Its interventions in the Muslim world, from Iraq to Afghanistan and Libya, have left behind enormous destruction, political fragmentation and public distrust. Both Republican and Democratic administrations have contributed to this record. The American tendency to see instability through the lens of force has repeatedly damaged not only the societies where it has intervened, but also America's own credibility.

What made the Beijing summit interesting was that President Trump's conduct appeared closer to the restrained logic of his recent strategic documents than to the older interventionist reflex. The 2025 National Security Strategy and the 2026 National Defense Strategy emphasise 'America First', a narrower definition of US interests, a focus on the Western Hemisphere and a revived Monroe Doctrine framework. They also speak of stable relations with China through strength rather than constant confrontation. This does not eliminate the coercive elements of US policy, especially in the Americas, but it does mark a departure from the expansive democracy-exporting language of earlier eras.

In Beijing, Trump, smarting from a historic failure to defeat Iran, sensibly did not behave like a leader looking for ideological confrontation. He engaged as a transactional but pragmatic president seeking trade relief, crisis management and strategic space. That has provoked criticism at home. Democrats and some foreign policy voices have argued that Trump conceded too much or gained too little. Former officials rooted in the old framework continue to speak of confronting China with allies, especially Europe, as if the world remains trapped in a cold-war template.

But that criticism misses the larger point. Europe itself has deep trade and economic links with China. The Global South does not wish to be forced into rigid blocs. The world economy cannot afford a permanent superpower collision. To insist that every China-US interaction must produce visible American advantage is to ignore the central requirement of our age: preventing rivalry from becoming catastrophic.

This is where domestic politics becomes dangerous for global stability. Opposition politics has its role; criticism of any president is legitimate. But when criticism becomes a competition in who can sound tougher on China, it narrows the space for diplomacy.

The Beijing summit should instead be judged by a different standard. Did it reduce tension? Did it keep channels open? Did it prevent reckless escalation over Taiwan? Did it identify shared concerns over Iran, Hormuz and global economic disruption? Did it produce limited but useful movement on trade? Did it show that the world's two largest powers can still speak with seriousness? On these counts, the answer is yes.

The summit did not resolve the structural rivalry between China and the US. It did not end technology competition, military mistrust, Taiwan tensions or differences over global order. But it did something important: it reminded the world that leadership still matters. Tone matters. Restraint matters. Diplomatic architecture matters. In an era of proliferating conflict, even modest steps toward strategic stability are valuable.

In that sense, the Beijing summit was a necessary pause in a dangerous trajectory. It showed that despite mistrust, contestation and domestic political pressures, the two major powers can still choose dialogue over drift, restraint over provocation and strategic stability over strategic chaos.

Strategic Synergies in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Comprehensive Analysis of Tourism Development in Balochistan

By Sarmad Wali Khan, Muhammad Yusuf

Sarmad Wali Khan is a Researcher and Project Coordinator for the China Studies Chair-II at the BNU Center for Policy Research (BCPR).

Muhammad Yusuf is an Assistant Director at Culture, Tourism & Archives Department of Balochistan

Abstract

This paper presents a substantive analysis of tourism development in Balochistan as a strategic dimension of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Moving beyond the corridor's traditional concentration on hard infrastructure and energy, it examines how the nascent 'CPEC 2.0' phase - with its emphasis on socio-economic development and people-to-people connectivity - is positioned to unlock Balochistan's long-neglected tourism potential. Critically, the analysis confronts the severe and escalating security crisis, where insurgent attacks rose to 84 percent in 2024 and a further 30 percent in 2025, as the single most formidable structural barrier to any realistic tourism development. The paper argues that tourism represents a legitimate long-term strategic aspiration for Balochistan under CPEC, but that present-day conditions demand phased realism rather than aspirational optimism. It maps the enabling infrastructure, categorizes the province's diverse tourism assets, assesses alignment with the Chinese outbound market, and evaluates frameworks for community-centric development, while embedding throughout a thorough assessment of what is achievable, for whom, and under what security and governance prerequisites.

Keywords: CPEC; Belt and Road Initiative; Balochistan; Tourism Development; Strategic Synergy; Security Assessment; Sustainable Tourism; Chinese Outbound Tourism; Baloch Insurgency; Community Empowerment; Gwadar.

1. Introduction: The Geopolitical and Economic Framework

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship initiative under the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), represents a transformative framework for regional connectivity and socio-economic integration. Originally valued at \$46 billion, CPEC's project portfolio had grown to approximately \$65 billion by 2022, making it the BRI's most developed land corridor globally. Conceived initially as a strategic passage, the first phase prioritized hard connectivity: energy projects to address Pakistan's chronic power deficits, alongside infrastructure development worth tens of billions of dollars.

The corridor's evolution into a more mature 'CPEC 2.0' marks a significant pivot in both ambition and method. The September 2025 joint statement between Pakistan and China formalized commitments for the New Gwadar International Airport's auxiliary infrastructure, the Karakoram Highway's realignment, and explicit tourism cooperation measures - signaling that the bilateral partnership now aspires to qualitative as well as quantitative development. Within this refined framework, tourism emerges as a potentially central strategic synergy, capable of delivering multifaceted development dividends if the structural prerequisites are met.

At the geographic and strategic heart of this evolution is Balochistan, Pakistan's largest yet least developed province. Covering over 44 percent of Pakistan's landmass, it receives only 6 to 7 percent of federal development budgets. It carries the country's lowest Human Development Index, with overall literacy rates of approximately 46 percent and female literacy at a deeply troubling 26 percent. An estimated 70 percent of its population is classified as multidimensionally poor. CPEC, with the deep-water port of Gwadar as its linchpin, places Balochistan at the center of a continental strategy: for China, the corridor dramatically shortens the oil transport route from the Middle East; for Pakistan, CPEC is a national development imperative; for Balochistan itself, it represents the most significant potential catalyst for economic transformation in its modern history.

Any serious analysis must, however, also reckon with a fundamental and deepening paradox: CPEC has simultaneously created new grievances that have intensified a decades-long separatist insurgency. The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and allied groups have explicitly targeted CPEC projects and Chinese nationals, framing extraction without local benefit as a form of neo-colonial imposition. This paper navigates this tension candidly, acknowledging the genuine and substantial tourism potential of Balochistan's assets while providing a realistic assessment of the barriers, timelines, and prerequisites for translating that potential into reality.

2. Organic Tourism Demand: The Silyaza Phenomenon

To understand the latent demand for tourism in Balochistan, one must look beyond marquee destinations to grassroots phenomena like Silyaza in District Zhob. This site presents a compelling paradox. Silyaza is not a pristine beach or a monumental archaeological ruin; it is a vast, barren floodway with a modest stream, limited shade, and a stark landscape. Yet it draws over 60,000 visitors during Eid al-Adha alone, attracting people from across Balochistan, bordering areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and southern Punjab.

Its success can be analyzed through the lens of cultural tourism theory, where visitor motivation centers on experiencing both tangible and intangible cultural attractions. Silyaza's appeal is predominantly social and symbolic: a culturally neutral ground where diverse ethnic groups mingle freely, a climate that is cool relative to surrounding plains, and a stage for unique local cuisines and communal rituals. Crucially, it is perceived as a space of effective law and order, facilitated by improved road infrastructure. This reveals a foundational principle that should govern all CPEC-linked tourism planning: security and accessibility consistently outweigh scenic grandeur as the primary tourism enablers in the Balochistan context.

The phenomenon also underscores the often underestimated role of social media. Silyaza's organic growth has been substantially amplified through viral sharing on TikTok and Facebook, demonstrating that digital infrastructure functions as a force multiplier for tourism demand even in the absence of formal marketing campaigns. In Pakistan's tourism market, domestic tourists accounted for 91.3 percent of all tourism activity in 2024, a figure that underscores the immense scale of domestic demand that proper infrastructure could channel into regions like Balochistan. CPEC's role, the Silyaza phenomenon suggests, is not to manufacture demand from nothing, but to create the security, accessibility, and digital connectivity conditions under which existing demand can be safely scaled and ultimately internationalized.

3. Infrastructure as the Strategic Enabling Layer

Tourism is fundamentally an industry of access. Spectacular landscapes and ancient ruins hold limited economic value if they remain physically isolated or digitally invisible. CPEC's most immediate and tangible contribution to Balochistan's tourism potential is the creation of a strategic enabling layer of modern infrastructure, gradually transforming the province from a logistical dead-end into a connected regional node, even as security challenges persist.

3.1 The Aviation Gateway: New Gwadar International Airport (NGIA)

The completion of the New Gwadar International Airport (NGIA), a \$230 million project funded by a Chinese grant, represents the most significant single development for international tourism accessibility in the province's history. As a Category 4E airport capable of handling wide-body aircraft including the Boeing 747 and Airbus A380, it eliminates the prior necessity for international tourists to transit through Karachi or Islamabad. In principle, direct charter or scheduled flights from major Chinese cities could create an "air bridge" for the Chinese outbound market and position Gwadar as a nascent regional aviation hub.

A critical caveat must be entered immediately: airport infrastructure alone is insufficient. Airlines make route decisions based on projected load factors, revenue potential, and, critically, security risk assessments. No commercial airline will establish regular routes to a destination where passengers face elevated threat from coordinated militant attacks. The NGIA's transformative potential is therefore contingent, first and foremost, on a durable improvement in the province's security environment. The infrastructure exists; the conditions for its productive use do not.

3.2 Road Connectivity and the Western Route

The expansion of road networks under CPEC represents the circulatory system of domestic tourism in the province. The 193-kilometer Gwadar-Turbat-Hoshab motorway (M-8), the Eastbay Expressway, and the Makran Coastal Highway have already improved connectivity significantly. The CPEC Western Route, traversing Quetta and linking northward to the Karakoram Highway, passes through Balochistan's most varied landscapes and creates a potential tourist corridor enabling journeys from the high mountains of the north to the deserts and coastline of the south. The transport investment's impact on tourism is well-documented by the "Kumrat Valley effect", the transformation of northern Pakistan's adventure tourism following targeted road improvements, demonstrating that infrastructure investment in scenic areas reliably generates domestic and, eventually, international visitor flows.

3.3 Digital Connectivity: The Invisible Infrastructure

Parallel to physical roads is the digital highway. CPEC's digital corridor, involving fiber-optic cable deployment and telecom upgrades, is essential for modern tourism in ways that often go unacknowledged in development planning. The rollout of 3G and 4G networks in peripheral areas enables destinations to be discovered and shared instantly on social media, while also supporting online booking, digital payments, and virtual heritage exploration. This is particularly critical for attracting Chinese travelers, among whom approximately 74 percent of travel planning involves digital platforms, and where

Xiaohongshu (Little Red Book), with over 300 million monthly active users, functions as the primary discovery engine for niche destinations.

Internet connectivity in Balochistan has itself been a deeply contested issue: the province has experienced blanket internet shutdowns during security operations, a practice that is profoundly counterproductive to any digital tourism marketing strategy. A sustainable tourism development approach requires a firm policy commitment to maintaining digital connectivity even during security incidents, treating it as essential economic infrastructure rather than a security variable subject to administrative convenience.

4. Balochistan's Tourism Assets: Potential and Barriers

Balochistan is frequently described as a “mini-Pakistan” owing to its encapsulation of the nation's full topographical diversity: 750 kilometers of coastline, vast desert expanses, riverine plains, and mountainous highlands. Its tourism assets are genuine and world-class in potential. However, a rigorous valuation must assess not only the quality of assets but the current accessibility, serviceability, and visitor safety conditions at each. Pakistan ranked 101st out of 119 countries in the World Economic Forum's 2024 Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI), an improvement of 20 places since 2019, but still reflecting substantial deficiencies in safety, infrastructure, and digital readiness that form the national frame within which any Balochistan tourism development must operate.

4.1 Maritime and Coastal Tourism: High Potential, Critical Barrier

The province's 750-kilometer coastline is among the most undeveloped marine frontiers in Asia. Kund Malir Beach, within Hingol National Park, has been ranked among Asia's top beaches, offering dramatic geological backdrops. Astola Island (Jezira Haft Talar), Pakistan's largest offshore island, features crystal-clear waters and nesting grounds for green turtles; as a designated Ramsar wetland and Marine Protected Area, it offers opportunities for eco-diving, snorkeling, and beach camping that align with global experiential travel trends. Research from the Asia Pacific Research Journal (2025) has recommended replicating the Maldives' blue economy model for Balochistan's coastal areas, noting the province's sixty species of fish, ten varieties of prawns, and documented presence of Arabian Humpback whales as marine tourism assets.

However, coastal areas, particularly Gwadar, Pasni, and the Makran belt, have been directly targeted in coordinated militant attacks, including BLA operations in January 2026. Foreign government travel advisories from the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, and the European Union categorize most of Balochistan as a “Do Not Travel” or highest-risk zone. Under these conditions, large-scale coastal resort development is not commercially viable for private investors, and international tour operators cannot responsibly send clients. Near-term coastal tourism is therefore realistically limited to domestic day-trippers and adventure travelers who knowingly accept elevated personal risk.

4.2 Civilizational and Archaeological Tourism: Very High Potential, Tractable Barrier

Mehrgarh, located in the Kachi Plain and dating to approximately 7000 BCE, is one of the world's earliest known Neolithic settlements. Predating the Indus Valley Civilization by millennia, it offers evidence of early agriculture, pottery, and metallurgy of global

archaeological significance. Research published in the Asia Pacific Research Journal (2025) identified Mehrgarh as requiring a dedicated museum facility and preservation infrastructure to become a global tourist attraction, and highlighted China's Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) as providing a potential diplomatic and funding framework. China's documented experience in archaeological preservation and digital heritage reconstruction, exemplified by the Dunhuang cave digitization project, offers concrete technical capacity applicable to Mehrgarh through CPEC partnerships.

Archaeological and heritage tourism typically operates through small, organized expert groups with dedicated security arrangements, a model that is more feasible under current conditions than mass tourism. A phased approach, beginning with scholar exchange programs and small-group guided visits under security escort, represents a realistic near-term strategy. This is one of the few tourism categories where meaningful activity can begin before broad security improvement is achieved.

4.3 Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism: Most Immediately Viable

The Hinglaj Mata Temple (Nani Mandir), one of Hinduism's 51 Shakti Peethas, already demonstrates the viability of pilgrimage tourism in Balochistan under current conditions. The temple draws over 250,000 pilgrims annually, demonstrating that mass-scale domestic and regional pilgrimage travel is already occurring and being managed. The success of the Kartarpur Corridor, which enabled Sikh pilgrims from India to visit Guru Nanak's final resting place in Pakistan, provides a compelling template: diplomatically supported pilgrimage corridors can generate significant economic activity, positive international media coverage, and soft-power benefits even in environments with broader security challenges. A similar model for Hindu pilgrimage to Hinglaj, developed in cooperation with the Indian government, could unlock substantial regional flows.

Pilgrimage tourism is the most immediately viable international tourism category for Balochistan: pilgrims are typically willing to accept conditions that leisure tourists would reject, the sites are well-known to target communities, and pilgrim groups are organized and therefore manageable from a security and logistics perspective. This represents the most promising near-term priority.

4.4 Ecological and Adventure Tourism: High Potential, Scale-Limited

Hingol National Park, Pakistan's largest, covers over 6,100 square kilometers of surreal cliffs, winding rivers, and extraordinary geology including the Princess of Hope and Sphinx rock formations. The Ziarat Valley hosts the world's second-largest juniper forest, with trees estimated at over 5,000 years old. The province's ecological wealth aligns with a documented post-pandemic global surge in demand for off-grid, ecological, and adventure tourism experiences. Adventure tourism by definition attracts a risk-tolerant traveler profile, meaning some volume of such tourism occurs despite security challenges, and indeed does today, with Pakistani domestic adventurers and a small number of international travelers visiting northern Balochistan. The binding constraint is not absolute prohibition but scale: mass eco-tourism requires international tour operator engagement that demands duty-of-care standards not currently achievable across most of the province.

5. The Security Crisis: Primary Structural Barrier

No honest analysis of Balochistan's tourism potential can minimize the security situation, and no tourism development strategy that treats it as a manageable background variable rather than a primary planning constraint is analytically defensible. The security situation is not a contingent problem that will resolve itself through development spending; it is a structural political problem requiring political solutions that have, across five insurgency cycles since 1948, not been forthcoming.

5.1 The Data and Its Trajectory

According to the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), Balochistan experienced an 84 percent rise in terrorist attacks in 2024 compared to the previous year, with 202 incidents claiming 322 lives and injuring 534 others. In 2025, attacks by Baloch insurgent groups rose by over 30 percent year-on-year, accounting for 225 incidents and resulting in 338 fatalities and 462 injuries, making it the deadliest period on record for insurgent violence. In late January 2026, coordinated BLA operations targeted at least nine districts simultaneously, including direct attacks on Gwadar and Pasni, the very coastal nodes that any serious tourism development plan would prioritize. (Herof 2 Operation 12 districts claimed)

The BLA's Majeed Brigade, a highly trained suicide unit, has carried out approximately a dozen large-scale attacks since 2018, specifically targeting CPEC projects and Chinese nationals. The March 2025 Jaffar Express hijacking, which killed scores of people and held hundreds hostage, demonstrated the organization's capacity for sophisticated, high-impact operations designed to impose costs on CPEC and on the Pakistani state's claims of governance. Research from Chatham House (March 2025) concluded that the insurgency is becoming more sophisticated, with growing middle-class participation transforming it from a traditionally tribal movement into one with urban, educated, and diasporic dimensions.

5.2 The Political Economy of the Insurgency

Research from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (April 2025), Chatham House (September 2024 and March 2025), and the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (2025) converges on a consistent analytical finding: the Baloch insurgency is not primarily driven by poverty alone, but by political exclusion, the denial of meaningful self-governance, the non-recognition of historical grievances, and the experience of development as extractive colonial practice rather than as shared investment. The insurgency has become more sophisticated, better-resourced, and broader in social base with each passing year. Middle-class educated Baloch increasingly participate in or sympathize with the movement, fundamentally changing the security calculus.

The BLA's strategic logic is internally coherent and should be understood as such by policymakers: by targeting CPEC projects and Chinese nationals, it seeks to impose costs on Pakistan's most important bilateral relationship and force a renegotiation of development terms. This strategy has achieved partial success, China has raised security concerns at the highest diplomatic levels and explored private security firm deployments, each of which further inflames perceptions of Chinese military presence in Balochistan.

The structural dynamic driving the insurgency has direct implications for tourism planners. Research from the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (April 2025), analyzing BLA tactics and evolution, found that CPEC has functioned as both a grievance driver and a high-value target generator. By intensifying perceptions of extractive development that excludes Baloch communities from decision-making and benefit, major CPEC projects have paradoxically contributed to the insurgency's expansion rather than its containment. This creates a fundamental challenge for the conventional "development fosters security" hypothesis. Tourism, if developed as a genuine community-benefit industry rather than an extractive one, has the potential to contribute differently, but this requires a fundamentally different development model from CPEC's Phase 1 approaches. Tourism development perceived as benefiting Islamabad and Beijing rather than Baloch communities will not reduce grievances; it may intensify them.

5.3 Prerequisites and Near-Term Scenarios

Meaningful international tourism in most of Balochistan is not possible until certain prerequisites are met: a genuine political dialogue process addressing Baloch autonomy, resource revenue sharing, and democratic representation, rather than purely military responses, which have consistently failed across five insurgency cycles; sustained improvement in security metrics leading to modification of international travel advisories from their current maximum-risk designations; demonstrated commitment to local benefit-sharing from CPEC investments, including a meaningful increase from the current 5 percent provincial share; and restoration of consistent internet connectivity and an end to blanket communications shutdowns.

The most likely near-term scenario, based on current trajectories rather than policy aspirations, is a continuation of elevated violence with periodic escalation. The BLA's organizational sophistication and operational capacity appear to be growing, not declining. Military operations have increased militant fatalities but have not reduced attack frequency or severity. Under this scenario, mass international tourism to Balochistan remains unachievable for a minimum of five to seven years under conservative assumptions. Targeted, small-group niche tourism, specifically archaeological expeditions to Mehrgarh, small pilgrimage groups to Hinglaj, and adventure travel in the comparatively more secure northern highlands near Ziarat, represents the realistic maximum scope for internationally sourced tourism in the near term.

A more optimistic scenario, contingent on a political breakthrough leading to genuine autonomy negotiations and demonstrable benefit-sharing reform, could see conditions improve within three to five years. This scenario requires political will that is not currently evident in Islamabad, but China's growing and documented concern about CPEC security, and its pressure on Pakistan to address root causes, could provide an external catalyst for more substantive political engagement than Pakistan's successive governments have so far been willing to undertake.

6. CPEC Investment, the Chinese Market, and the Alignment Gap

6.1 Balochistan's Share in CPEC Phase 1: A Critical Credibility Problem

Despite being the geographic and strategic heart of CPEC, Balochistan received approximately 5 percent of Phase 1 investment, a disproportion that has been formally

acknowledged. In May 2024, the Balochistan Provincial Assembly passed a resolution establishing a committee to investigate this inequity. If the province that hosts CPEC's linchpin port and provides the corridor's entire strategic rationale has received only a marginal fraction of investment, the claim that CPEC serves "shared prosperity" is empirically challenged. CPEC 2.0's tourism chapter therefore carries a substantial burden of proof to demonstrate that this phase will generate genuinely inclusive, Balochistan-centered benefits rather than repeating the extraction-without-local-dividend pattern of Phase 1.

Critically, China initially declined Pakistan's suggestions to formally incorporate tourism into the CPEC framework. While the September 2025 joint statement ultimately included tourism cooperation language, the absence of a dedicated, ring-fenced tourism development fund within CPEC's architecture, analogous to the Special Economic Zone development funds, means tourism remains a peripheral aspiration rather than a formally resourced pillar. Words in a joint statement are not a development program.

6.2 The Chinese Market: Potential and Its Limits

The Chinese outbound market reached approximately 146 million person-trips in 2024, recovering toward pre-pandemic levels, though the China Tourism Academy notes that the proportion of long-haul travelers shrank considerably in 2024 due to geopolitical tensions and economic uncertainty. The market's preference structure strongly favors short-haul destinations in Southeast and East Asia, with Japan consistently ranking as the top short-haul international destination. Pakistan does not currently appear in Chinese travelers' shortlists of aspirational destinations, and Balochistan would represent, for most potential visitors, an entirely unknown sub-destination within an already unfamiliar country.

There is, nonetheless, a genuine structural alignment worth cultivating. Driven by Gen Z and Millennials, the Chinese outbound market is moving away from checklist tourism toward authentic, immersive experiences. Post-pandemic demand has surged for wellness retreats and off-the-grid travel. Consumer research for 2025 shows that 95.1 percent of surveyed Chinese travelers are considering international trips, with 67.5 percent planning to increase spending. Balochistan's vast, sparsely populated landscapes and ancient spiritual sites align in principle with this demand evolution. However, alignment in principle and addressable demand are distinct concepts: long-haul, non-mainstream destinations have seen reduced penetration, and language barriers, internet connectivity, and payment system compatibility remain top concerns for Chinese outbound travelers in markets like Balochistan.

A realistic scenario is that Chinese visitor flows to Balochistan under CPEC will consist primarily of CPEC workers, officials, and business travelers, a captive market, rather than leisure tourists in any foreseeable planning horizon. The KOL-Feed-Search (KFS) model on Xiaohongshu represents a genuinely effective approach to destination marketing, used successfully by Georgia, Serbia, and Uzbekistan, and inviting influential Chinese travel content creators to produce content about Balochistan, optimizing search with keywords such as "Belt and Road tourism" and "Gwadar Port", constitutes a viable long-term strategy. However, KOL visits must produce authentic, positive content, which requires that the experiences actually be positive and safe. The digital marketing strategy must be sequenced after, not before, the security and hospitality infrastructure conditions are in

place. Early-phase KOL programs should target specifically Quetta, Ziarat, and Mehrgarh, areas with comparatively better security profiles, rather than the Makran Coast.

7. Community-Centered Development: The Only Viable Model

The ultimate justification for tourism within CPEC is its tangible impact on human development. With Balochistan's Human Development Index the lowest of all Pakistani provinces, literacy at 46 percent, and an estimated 70 percent of the population classified as multidimensionally poor, the social stakes could scarcely be higher. Tourism is a labor-intensive sector that creates direct employment in hospitality and guiding and indirect employment in agriculture, crafts, and transport. For a province with a youthful population, these are vital alternatives to subsistence farming or, for those radicalized by legitimate grievance, militant recruitment. But this social dividend is conditional: it accrues only if tourism is developed as a genuinely community-benefiting enterprise, not as a variant of the extractive dynamic that has fueled the insurgency.

Social Exchange Theory posits that local communities will support tourism if perceived benefits outweigh perceived costs. In Balochistan, this equation is currently deeply unfavorable. Research from Chatham House (2024 and 2025) documents a consistent pattern where major development projects have brought physical infrastructure without commensurate local employment, have displaced fishing communities from traditional livelihoods, and have proceeded without meaningful Baloch participation in decision-making. Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) models must therefore go beyond rhetorical inclusion to structural benefit-sharing: locally enforced hiring quotas backed by contractual mechanisms; transparent revenue-sharing arrangements verifiable by communities themselves; preference for local supply chains; and participatory planning processes where communities exercise genuine veto power over development proposals. Without these structural safeguards, tourism development risks repeating CPEC Phase 1's most damaging dynamic, providing the appearance of development while concentrating its benefits elsewhere.

The feminization of tourism employment deserves specific emphasis. Balochistan's female literacy rate of 26 percent is among the lowest in South Asia. Community-based handicraft programs, particularly in embroidery traditions unique to Baloch culture, can create income-generating opportunities for women while simultaneously preserving intangible cultural heritage. These programs are achievable with relatively modest investment and do not require the same security conditions as visitor-facing hospitality, making them a realistic early-phase social investment that builds community buy-in while harder security prerequisites are being pursued.

The Spatial Spillover Effect (SSE) offers a useful planning framework: growth in one anchor area stimulates neighboring regions over time, and the CPEC Western Route provides the physical infrastructure for SSE from Quetta across Ziarat and eventually toward the coast. However, SSE requires that anchor destinations first achieve stability and a minimum threshold of visitor volume before spillover occurs meaningfully. Premature dispersal of limited tourism investment across multiple sites before any single site achieves viability is a known planning failure mode. The strategic prescription is sequenced concentration: establish one well-secured, well-serviced anchor destination, demonstrate success, and leverage that success for phased expansion.

8. A Phased Strategic Roadmap: Realistic Milestones

The following roadmap is grounded in current conditions rather than aspirational projections. It is organized around the honest recognition that political and security prerequisites are not preconditions to be checked off before development begins, they are ongoing processes that must run in parallel with, and take priority over, all other phases.

8.1 Phase 0: Political and Security Prerequisites (Ongoing, Parallel to All Phases)

Phase 0 is not a preparatory phase with a defined end point; it is an ongoing, parallel process that is the prerequisite for all subsequent tourism development. It encompasses genuine political engagement with Baloch autonomy demands; transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms for CPEC revenues with independent community verification; restoration and maintenance of digital connectivity; significant reduction of enforced disappearances and extrajudicial practices that fuel militant recruitment; and a meaningful increase of Balochistan's share in CPEC Phase 2 investment from the current 5 percent to a proportion that reflects its actual strategic importance. Without sustained progress on Phase 0, all subsequent phases will be structurally constrained. CPEC's own Phase 2 tourism commitments, formalized in September 2025, will not be achievable if the security situation continues its 2024–2025 trajectory.

8.2 Phase 1: Foundation and Targeted Niche Development (Years 1–3)

Phase 1 investment should concentrate on relatively more secure areas and highest-viability tourism categories: Ziarat for wellness and heritage tourism, Quetta for cultural and culinary urban tourism, Mehragarh for small-group archaeological expeditions, and Hinglaj for pilgrimage infrastructure improvement. Human capital investment must begin immediately, hospitality training, guide certification, Chinese and English language instruction, and cultural heritage documentation, building a workforce deployable when security conditions permit. Digital infrastructure and marketing should launch in this phase, building destination awareness on Xiaohongshu and Pakistani social platforms. CBE pilot programs should be established in two or three villages near Ziarat and Hingol National Park, with community-first governance structures that are contractually binding rather than aspirational.

8.3 Phase 2: Consolidation and Product Development (Years 3–7, Security-Conditional)

Phase 2 becomes achievable only if security metrics show sustained improvement, specifically, a reduction in insurgent attack frequency and modification of international travel advisories from maximum-risk to high-risk designations. This phase includes formal flight connections between Gwadar and Chinese cities (likely requiring government-to-government airline agreements rather than commercial market dynamics); signature niche product launches including Mehragarh archaeological tours with Chinese archaeologist partnerships and Astola Island eco-diving ; joint venture frameworks between Pakistani and Chinese tourism companies; and a provincial sustainable tourism certification scheme with international recognition.

8.4 Phase 3: Maturation and Global Integration (Years 7–15, Subject to Phase 0 Progress)

Positioning Balochistan as a premier global eco-adventure and Silk Road cultural destination is a 10-to-15-year aspiration, not a near-term deliverable. It requires sustained Phase 0 progress, full deployment of Phase 1 and 2 infrastructure and human capital, potential international recognitions such as UNESCO extensions for Mehrgarh, and a fundamental reorientation of the security-development dynamic. This phase should not be presented as guaranteed or even highly probable under current conditions; it is the outcome of a successful development trajectory that is currently navigating serious structural headwinds.

9. Conclusion: Strategic Synthesis and a Call for Honest Development

Balochistan's tourism potential is genuine, substantial, and, under the right conditions, genuinely transformative. The province's 750-kilometer coastline, world-class ecological assets, 9,000-year-old archaeological heritage at Mehrgarh, active pilgrimage sites drawing over a quarter-million visitors annually, and documented organic tourism demand at sites like Silyaza together constitute a real and valuable portfolio that CPEC's infrastructure investments could, in principle, leverage for shared prosperity.

But this paper's primary contribution is to insist that aspiration is not assessment, and that hope is not a policy. The current security reality, with 338 insurgent-related fatalities in Balochistan in 2025 alone, coordinated attacks on Gwadar, Pasni, and other coastal nodes in January 2026, and an insurgency growing in sophistication and broadening in social base, constitutes a structural barrier that cannot be wished away by airport construction or social media marketing campaigns. Any tourism development strategy that does not place security as the primary, non-negotiable prerequisite is not merely analytically deficient; it places potential visitors, local communities, and investors at genuine and avoidable risk.

The path to tourism-led prosperity in Balochistan runs, necessarily, through political dialogue. Five insurgency cycles since 1948, each met primarily with military force, have demonstrated conclusively that kinetic approaches alone cannot resolve what is fundamentally a political problem rooted in exclusion, extraction, and unrecognized historical grievances. CPEC 2.0's tourism ambitions ultimately depend on China using its considerable diplomatic leverage with Islamabad to push for genuine political engagement, transparent benefit-sharing, democratic representation, and an end to practices that continue to drive educated Baloch toward militant sympathy or active participation. China's own long-term interests in CPEC's security are best served by this approach: every attack on Chinese nationals damages the very bilateral relationship that CPEC is designed to strengthen.

If these political conditions are addressed, even partially, the remaining barriers are tractable. Human capital can be built, governance improved, hospitality infrastructure seeded, and the Chinese market gradually engaged. The organic demand evidenced by Silyaza's 60,000 Eid visitors demonstrates that Balochistan's people yearn for accessible, safe, dignified recreational and cultural spaces. CPEC's most meaningful role would be to create the conditions under which this yearning can be safely met, and eventually shared with the world.

Done right, the development of tourism in Balochistan under CPEC would be more than an economic program. It would be an act of political recognition, an acknowledgment that

Balochistan is not only a transit corridor or resource deposit, but a homeland with a living culture, an ancient civilization, and a people whose prosperity and dignity matter as ends in themselves. That is the deepest meaning of strategic synergy: not merely the alignment of geopolitical interests, but the construction of a shared future genuinely worth building.

References

- Al Jazeera. 2026. "How Balochistan Attacks Threaten Pakistan's Promises to China, Trump." Al Jazeera English, February 2026. <https://www.aljazeera.com>
- Chatham House. 2024. "Why Brute Force Will Not End Pakistan's Balochistan Insurgency." Commentary by Farzana Shaikh, September 3, 2024. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/09/why-brute-force-will-not-end-pakistans-balochistan-insurgency>
- Chatham House. 2025. "The Hijacking of a Train Marks a Watershed in the Balochistan Insurgency." Commentary by Farzana Shaikh, March 21, 2025. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2025/03/hijacking-train-marks-watershed-balochistan-insurgency>
- China Tourism Academy. 2025. Analysis of China's Tourism Economic Operation in 2024 and Development Forecast in 2025. China Tourism Economy Blue Book No. 17. Beijing: China Tourism Academy
- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Secretariat. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." Accessed May 22, 2026. <https://cpec.gov.pk/>
- China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Secretariat. "New Gwadar International Airport." CPEC Official Website. Last modified September 29, 2024. <https://cpec.gov.pk/project-details/89>.
- CPEC Secretariat. 2024. Progress Update. Islamabad: Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Government of Pakistan.
- Dawn Editorial Board. 2026. "Rising Threat in Balochistan." Dawn, February 2026. <https://www.dawn.com>
- Dragon Trail International. 2025. "China's Outbound Travel Trends: Declines in 2024, Heightened Caution in 2025." TravelDaily Research Report. Shanghai: Dragon Trail International
- Eurasiareview. 2024. "CPEC 2 and Balochistan." Op-Ed by Naseeb Ullah Achakzai. Eurasia Review, August 2024. <https://www.eurasiareview.com>
- Jalal Faiz, Gul Hasan, Muneera, Fatima Agha Shah, and Mukhtar Bashir, "Exploring the Role of Religious and Cultural Tourism in Promoting Local Economy in Balochistan: A Case Study of Hinglaj Mata Attraction.
- Jamestown Foundation. 2025. "Amid Geopolitical Tensions, Baloch Militant Attacks Undermine Sino-Pakistan Projects." Terrorism Monitor, July 2025. Washington, DC: Jamestown Foundation.
- Khalid, Shahid, and Sohail Baloch. 2025. "Revitalizing Balochistan's Untapped Tourism Potentials under CPEC." Asia Pacific Research Journal 43: 209–225.
- Khan, Dr Mehmood Ul Hassan. "Strategic Importance of New Gwadar International Airport." Gwadar Pro. July 3, 2023. <https://gwadarpro.pk/1675792454693781506/strategic-importance-of-new-gwadar-international-airport>

- Khan, Hashmat Ullah, and Shan Yu. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Meeting Security Challenges in Balochistan through Trade and Development." *Vestnik MGIMO-University* 15, no. 5 (2022): 135–149. <https://doi.org/10.24833/2071-8160-2022-5-86-135-149>.
- Manzoor Ahmad. "CPEC Implications for Balochistan." *Regional Studies Pakistan*, December 2022. <https://regionalstudies.com.pk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/4.-CPEC-IMPLICATIONS-FOR-BALUCHISTAN-Manzoor-Ahmad.pdf>.
- Modern Diplomacy. 2026. "Can Military Force Solve a Political Problem? Pakistan's 77-Year Balochistan Crisis." *Modern Diplomacy*, February 2026. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu>
- Mordor Intelligence. 2025. *Hospitality Industry in Pakistan: Tourism and Hotel Market Report*. Hyderabad: Mordor Intelligence.
- Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). 2025. *Pakistan Security Report 2024*. Islamabad: PIPS. <https://www.pakpips.com/article/8253>
- Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS). 2026. *Pakistan Security Report 2025*. Islamabad: PIPS. <https://www.pakpips.com>
- Pakistan Business Council. *Tourism – A Panacea for Pakistan*. Karachi: Pakistan Business Council, 2025. <https://www.pbc.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/Tourism-A-Panacea-for-Pakistan.pdf>
- Pakistan, Government of. 2022. *Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) 2022*. Islamabad: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics
- Taylor, James, and Imran Nawaz. 2025. "Between Insurgency and Terrorism: The Escalating Operational Sophistication of the Balochistan Liberation Army, 2005–2025." *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*. London: Taylor and Francis. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2025>
- UNESCO World Heritage center. "Archaeological Site of Mehrgarh." *UNESCO Tentative Lists*. Accessed May 22, 2026. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists/1876/>.
- Verma, Ayush, Imtiaz Baloch, and Riccardo Valle. 2025. "The Baloch Insurgency in Pakistan: Evolution, Tactics, and Regional Security Implications." *CTC Sentinel* 18, no. 4 (April/May 2025). West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center. <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-baloch-insurgency-in-pakistan-evolution-tactics-and-regional-security-implications/>
- World Economic Forum. 2024. *Travel and Tourism Development Index 2024*. Geneva: World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/travel-tourism-development-index-2024/>

REPORT: Roundtable Discussion on “China-US Competition: Pakistan’s Role as a Connector”

By: Summera Bibi and Maria Ashraf.

Edited by: Arsam Tufail Butt, Research Associate & Outreach Coordinator

Pakistan’s crucial role in Kessinger’s secret visit to China in 1970s lead to the historic engagement of President Nixon and Chairman Mao, which dissolved the long isolation of China from the west. China’s diplomatic and economic ties developed with the western states afterwards. Its growth accelerated with the expansion of interaction, and it became an integral part of international economy and network.

Today, Pakistan has a strong strategic cooperative partnership with China. The relationship is thriving under economic cooperation, defense partnership and financial initiatives. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor-CPEC 2.0 is the center of focus under the context of infrastructure and China is the largest defense supplier of Pakistan. On the other hand, Pakistan has renewed its relationship with U.S, with the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict served as a turning point; where U.S mediation efforts helped prevent escalation, restoring Washington's trust in Pakistan’s power and diplomacy. U.S. presented interest in Pakistan’s mineral wealth, which have opened doors for new economic opportunities. Pakistan holds ties with the two most powerful states in the international realm; however, these powerful states are at odds with each other, which places Pakistan at sensitive position. The tensions between USA and China have reached their highest point. Since the second Trump administration, the U.S-China relations have entered a period of extreme volatility characterized by an unprecedented "super" trade war. The world saw a tit-for-tat escalation of tariffs which stirred the international trade and kept the oval office busy with talks.

The roundtable discussion “China-U. S Competition: Pakistan’s Role as a Connector” discussed the Pakistan’s complex position within this environment. It brought together diplomats, academics, policymakers, journalists, and students to critically examine the evolving geopolitical and geo-economic landscape shaped by intensifying United States-China rivalry. Historically allied with the United States and simultaneously China’s closest strategic partner, Pakistan faces both opportunities and constraints in managing its external relations. It aimed to reassess long

standing narratives, especially that the idea of Pakistan as a “connector” between great powers, to explore whether such a role remains viable in light of contemporary realities.

The Discussion:

The dialogue was attended by H.E. Mr. Zhao Shiren, Consul General of China in Lahore, as Chief Guest, along with a distinguished delegation from Shanghai Institutes for International Studies-SIIS, including Prof. Chen Dongxiao President SIIS, Prof. Liu Zongyi, Senior Research Fellow and Director, center for South Asia Studies, Dr. Tan Chenyi, and Dr. Zhang Xiaoyin. Prof. Dr. Tahir Kamran, Head, Department of Liberal Arts BNU, Dr. Ejaz Hussain, Associate Professor of Political Science Lahore School of Economics, Mr. Fawad Hassan Fawad, Former

Principal Secretary to Prime Minister, Dr. Zafaruddin Mahmood, Founding President Understanding China Forum, Mr. Nasir Jamal, Bureau Chief Dawn News, Dr. Maryam Siddiqui, Assistant Professor Maritime center of Excellence, Pakistan Navy War College Lahore, and Ms.

Saima Sial, Instructor of “China in the 21st Century” course BNU served as the discussants while Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR, chaired the session.

Prof. Chen Dongxiao, President of SIIS, in his opening remarks spoke on the evolution of U.S.-China relations, acknowledging Pakistan’s diplomatic achievements while emphasizing that China’s deepening global integration has fundamentally reshaped international political and economic networks. He noted Pakistan’s continued support for China’s core interests, including the One-China policy, and observed that initiatives such as CPEC and the Gwadar Port can enhance Pakistan’s connectivity, provided expectations remain realistic and aligned with national capacity. Prof. Chen reaffirmed China’s long-term commitment to Pakistan’s economic development through CPEC and highlighted the importance of people-to-people exchanges, particularly in the economic sphere. He encouraged Pakistani businesses to leverage China’s economic reforms and emerging opportunities, stressing that improved security conditions are essential for attracting investment, fostering entrepreneurship, and sustaining long-term bilateral cooperation. He posed three key Questions for the audience and the policy makers to reflect upon for advancement in the cooperation.

- 1. How can Pakistan create meaningful opportunities for youth to explore new markets and develop businesses?*
- 2. What platforms or policy frameworks are needed to support new and emerging projects?*
- 3. How can security concerns be addressed, and what government policies are required to effectively counter terrorism and ensure a stable investment environment?*

Prof. Dr. Tahir Kamran, Head of Department of Liberal Arts BNU, presented a critical reassessment of Pakistan’s aspiration to function as a “connector” between China and the United States. According to him the significant intermediary role that Pakistan played in 1970s was due to the historical conditions at the time. The convergence of interests allowed Pakistan to facilitate dialogue, not because of intrinsic power, but because both sides needed a discreet intermediary. Pakistan’s role was tactical, time-bound, and dependent on structural asymmetries that no longer exist. Today China has transformed into huge global economy and technological hub. In the present international structure, China has its own institutionalized channels to communicate with its counterparts which decreases the need for third party mediation. Even amid rivalry, these channels persist because they serve mutual interests. Supporting the view of Dr. Tahir Kamran, Mr. Fawad Hassan Fawad, former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, and Mr. Nasir Jamal of Dawn News, argued that portraying Pakistan as either a facilitator or a connector between China and the United States is an idealistic illusion, as the country currently lacks the capacity, leverage, and structural positioning required to act as a bridge between the two global powers. He described CPEC as an opportunity that can yield long-term benefits only if Pakistan formulates and implements a robust economic strategy. He emphasized that Pakistan cannot expect other states to make sacrifices on its behalf and must instead develop its own economic and development frameworks to compete globally. He identified policy incoherence, security challenges, and governance weaknesses as key obstacles to Pakistan’s economic aspirations, arguing that these shortcomings have eroded the country’s capacity to function as a significant player on the global stage.

Differing with the assessment of previous panelists, Dr. Zainab Ahmad, Deputy Director of BCPR, argued that while China remains a close and reliable partner, Pakistan’s core challenges, such as governance deficits, corruption, and political instability, are fundamentally domestic in nature. She emphasized that these internal weaknesses should not be conflated with limitations in Pakistan’s

external role. She stressed the importance of recalibrating Pakistan's foreign and economic policies in line with evolving international realities. Drawing parallels with countries that effectively engage with regional blocs and major powers without formal alignment or membership, she maintained that Pakistan can still exercise a meaningful outward role between great powers if it adopts pragmatic, interest-based diplomacy. In her view, acknowledging internal challenges should not lead to strategic pessimism; rather, with policy coherence and institutional reform at home, Pakistan can continue to play a constructive role in the broader international landscape.

Dr. Ejaz Hussain, Associate Professor of Political Science at Lahore School of Economics, reiterated that Pakistan's geopolitical relevance has re-emerged, particularly in the Middle East. Since 1947, Pakistan has sought to play a leading role in the Muslim world. This orientation was evident in its participation in recent diplomatic efforts concerning Gaza, alongside Muslim and Western-backed states. China's decision not to veto UN Security Council resolutions aimed at establishing a peace framework in Gaza has enhanced Beijing's standing among Muslim majority countries, including Pakistan. This creates space for Pakistan to act as a situational diplomatic facilitator, helping bridge perspectives between China and the United States on peace and stability in the region, particularly the need for sustained engagement with China in South Asia, the Indo-Pacific, and the Middle East. He emphasized that in an era of intensifying China US competition, renewed confrontation would harm not only the two major powers but also middle powers such as Pakistan. Drawing on its historical experience, strategic location, and balanced relations with both Beijing and Washington, Pakistan remains well positioned to act, situationally and pragmatically, as a facilitator, contributing to regional and global stability.

Dr. Zhang Xiaoyin, Research Fellow at the Center for South Asia Studies in SIIS, discussed the expanding role of social media in shaping bilateral and regional relations. While acknowledging its potential to enhance connectivity and information sharing, she cautioned that social media also intensifies misunderstandings, polarization, and hostility. She underscored the value of face

to-face engagement, academic collaboration, and people-to-people exchanges, particularly through university partnerships, as essential tools for building mutual understanding and sustaining regional stability.

Building on this discussion, Ms. Saima Sial, Instructor for the course "China in the 21st Century," in BNU focused on security, labor, and human capital challenges. She argued that acting as a "connector" is a strategic function rather than a permanent status. She identified language barriers as a major impediment to deeper cooperation and called for sustained investment in Chinese language education in Pakistan. To strengthen Chinese language capacity in Pakistan, the discussants emphasized the need to upgrade Chinese language programs in universities and schools, introduce standardized curricula aligned with market needs, expand scholarships and exchange programs, and facilitate the placement of qualified Chinese language teachers. Institutional partnerships, Confucius Institutes, and joint degree programs were identified as practical avenues to normalize Chinese language learning and integrate it into Pakistan's broader human capital development strategy.

H.E. Mr. Zhao Shiren, Consul General of China in Lahore, in his keynote closing address expressed that the China-Pakistan relationship is "Iron-clad" and is immune to the circumstances. China is committed to support Pakistan's economic development, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He highlighted significance of people to-people interaction especially through the domain of economy. He encouraged Pakistani businesses to leverage China's economic reforms and opportunities under the Belt and Road Initiative. He candidly highlighted security

concerns for the Chinese citizens, who come to Pakistan for business initiatives, market engagement and government projects, while reaffirming China's deep commitment to Pakistan.

He noted that China views Pakistan as a close bilateral partner and seeks greater freedom of movement for its nationals during engagements, which remains constrained due to security concerns. He emphasized that improved security would build economic confidence, encourage youth entrepreneurship and market exploration, and strengthen long-term cooperation, highlighting the critical link between security and the success of bilateral initiatives such as CPEC.

Conclusion:

Considering these two varying perspectives, Pakistan's position between the United States and China should be understood with greater realism and strategic clarity. While Pakistan's historical relationships with both Washington and Beijing do provide diplomatic space and room for strategic balancing, this should not be overstated as an inherent ability to act as a connector or bridge between two global powers locked in structural rivalry. Any facilitative role Pakistan may play is contingent, limited, and dependent on its internal capacity rather than historical sentiment or external expectations. Going forward, Pakistan's priority should be to consolidate its own economic strength, governance capacity, and security environment. CPEC represents not merely a symbol of friendship with China but an opportunity to build sustainable economic foundations that can enhance Pakistan's relevance in the international system. Rather than aspiring to mediate between great powers, Pakistan should adopt a proactive, interest-driven foreign policy that diversifies partnerships, strengthens relations beyond traditional allies, and positions the country as a credible, economically resilient actor. Only through internal consolidation can Pakistan maintain balanced relations with both the United States and China while safeguarding its own long-term strategic interests.

REPORT: Seminar on “Understanding the Significance of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on 15th Five-Year Plan”

By Arsam Tufail Butt

Introduction:

The 14th Five-Year Plan of Peoples Republic of China concluded with quantifiable gains: GDP reached USD 19.3 trillion; China contributed roughly 30 percent to average annual global economic growth; the country entered the top ten of the Global Innovation Index; renewable energy accounted for about 60 percent of total installed capacity; new-energy vehicle ownership reached 31.4 million; 12 million new urban jobs were created; and defense-related technological advances accelerated. These indicators demonstrate the structural significance of the Five-Year Plan system in China’s development trajectory.

The planning cycle, initiated in 1953 under Mao Zedong, established a durable mechanism for coordinated industrialization and national growth. It provided political leadership and society with a long-term roadmap that maintained direction during periods of economic or geopolitical strain. The continued use of Five-Year Plans reflects China’s institutional preference for sustained, goal oriented governance anchored in defined objectives for present and future generations.

China has now entered its 15th Five-Year Plan with defined priorities: advancing shared global development, improving well-being of its people, expanding international cooperation, and accelerating technological innovation. The seminar titled “Understanding the Significance of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the 15th Five-Year Plan,” held on 31 December 2025, examined the plan’s developmental basis, the outcomes previous plans has produced for China, and the practical lessons this offers to developing countries.

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad Khan, Director BCPR, moderated the discussion. The panel comprised Dr. Ghulam Ghaus, Associate Professor of Economics at BNU; Commodore Ehsan Ahmed, Deputy President of the Maritime center for Excellence, Pakistan Navy War College; and Cao Ke, Deputy Consul General of China in Lahore.

The Discussion:

Ambassador Mansoor Ahmad characterized China’s 15th five-year plan as clear, focused and comprehensive. He stated that the plan clearly articulates development goals, implementation strategies, and expected outcomes, ensuring minimal interpretive ambiguity for policymakers and authorities. The structure, in his assessment, creates conditions for measurable evaluation at each plan’s end. He linked the plan to the broader ideological line of “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” noting continuity from the Deng Xiaoping reform era to Xi Jinping’s consolidation of a culturally and socially rooted modernization model. He underscored that external development goals and plans cannot be applied mutatis mutanda everywhere and argued that countries such as Pakistan must align imported development models with domestic cultural, social, and institutional realities.

He identified scientific and technological capability, digitalization, artificial intelligence, and innovation, as the core of China's modernization trajectory. For him, the lesson is straightforward: long-term resilience is generated by domestic market strength rather than dependence on imports or external economic shifts. He highlighted China's integrated approach to rural, urban, and regional development, emphasizing coordination as a structural feature rather than an accessory component. He judged public well-being as the plan's strongest pillar and described national security as the necessary precondition for any durable development agenda. He also noted the centrality of the green transition in the plan's priorities. His conclusion was direct: national development requires coherent and effective planning, achievable realistic targets, and strong implementation mechanisms, and China's five-year planning system demonstrates how these elements function in practice.

Dr. Ghulam Ghaus emphasized the plan's orientation toward high-quality development, arguing that it offers a more substantive metric than GDP-based assessments alone. He noted that the integration of human development, poverty reduction, environmental sustainability, and climate resilience provides a multidimensional view of progress. In his assessment, conventional growth indicators often mask underlying social outcomes, whereas sustained investments in education, health, and income generation more accurately capture the actual welfare of a population. He identified political stability as a decisive factor in a country's economic performance. He endorsed the focus on domestic market stability, framing scientific research, technological upgrading, and innovation ecosystems as essential to industrial strength. He argued that development plans gain the capacity to absorb external shocks, conflict, global economic volatility, or supply-chain disruptions, when they are anchored in centralized coordination, adaptive policy mechanisms, and long-term continuity, all of which he attributed to China's five-year planning system.

Commodore Ehsan Ahmad examined the plan through its strategic, ideological, and civilizational dimensions. He argued that nations rebuild strength by converting historical experience into disciplined, long-range planning. The feature that, in his view, most clearly defined the document was its assertive but controlled tone: the consistent use of terms such as "ensures" and "will" signaled leadership confidence and institutional commitment. He also noted the document's deliberate modesty despite China's substantial technological and economic capabilities, showing the resolve of a committed nation. The plan remains primarily inward oriented, prioritizing self-strengthening, resilience, and calibrated outward engagement.

He identified adaptability as a defining element of China's development approach in the "new era." Linking this to Xi Jinping thought on "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics", he underscored the balance between maintaining ideological continuity with earlier leadership and updating it in response to contemporary needs. He delineated the core pillars as leadership centrality, people-centered development, modernization under the rule of law, anti-corruption, national unity, and comprehensive progress across economic, social, cultural, and ecological sectors. He highlighted the plan's explicit identification of constraints and bottlenecks, characterizing this diagnostic candor as an institutional strength rather than a weakness. Such realism, he argued, underpins reform and policy refinement and aligns with long-term objectives, including the Second Century Goal of building a prosperous, strong, democratic, and culturally advanced China by 2049.

On domestic industrial capability, he pointed to China's shipbuilding sector, noting that it accounts for 53.3 percent of global capacity and that a single shipyard reportedly produced more output in 2024 than the combined peak production of major World War II shipyards. He referenced the C919 aircraft program as evidence of rising competition with Airbus and Boeing; the China-Europe freight network of 110,000 trains connecting 227 Chinese cities with over 100 European destinations and moving approximately USD 450 billion in goods under the Belt and Road Initiative;

and China's position as the world's largest grain producer with an output of 700 million tons. He concluded by underscoring China's performance in education, the green transition, and civil-military integration as further indicators of systemic capacity.

His Excellency Cao Ke stated that the international system is undergoing structural change, bringing both challenges and opportunities that countries must navigate and take advantage of. He framed China's long-term planning not only as an instrument of national development but also as a contribution to a more stable and inclusive global order. He outlined the historical origins of China's planning system, noting that the first Five-Year Plan was launched in 1953 after the consolidation of sovereignty in the aftermath of the Korean War. He stressed that security and development have remained interlinked throughout China's experience and that contemporary planning continues to integrate security imperatives with economic and social objectives amid heightened geopolitical volatility.

He argued that Pakistan faces a favorable window of opportunity in the coming years, particularly through regional connectivity generated by the Belt and Road Initiative. He identified Pakistan's geographic position as a potential conduit linking China to South Asia and wider regions, and maintained that trade, people-to-people ties, and economic integration can expand through improved regional relations. He reiterated that China's development approach is open and non-exclusive. He referenced China's technological expansion, electric-vehicle exports, and industrial growth, and noted intended Chinese investment in multiple Pakistani industrial sectors, highlighting Punjab as a forthcoming recipient of initiatives aimed at job creation and skills development.

He stated that China's current focus is on improving living standards rather than engaging in conflict, and that modernization with Chinese characteristics retains a people-centered orientation. In his concluding remarks, he underscored the importance of policy stability, governance quality, and youth engagement in Pakistan, emphasizing the role of young professionals in national development. He expressed confidence that expanded China-Pakistan cooperation in agriculture, industry, technology, and education will underpin a shared developmental trajectory.

Conclusion:

China's emergence as a major economic and political power is the cumulative result of long-term strategic clarity, adherence to the ideological foundations laid by earlier leadership, institutional adaptability, policy continuity, a consistent balance between security and development, and disciplined implementation. Its resilience amid global uncertainty has been built on a strong domestic market, sustained technological advancement, and the expansion of industrial capacity. These foundations have enabled China to improve living standards while meeting successive development benchmarks.

The 15th Five-Year Plan positions China's development trajectory within a framework of shared global prosperity. It prioritizes technological innovation, the green transition, systemic stability, and people-centered development. For Pakistan and other developing countries, the plan's practical lessons include; the need to strengthen domestic markets, cultivate adaptability, confront structural constraints directly, coordinate rural, urban and regional development, prioritize public welfare, integrate civilian and military capacities where relevant, and maintain stability as a prerequisite for economic progress. Clear objectives combined with coherent implementation provide a credible path toward sustained national development.

Taliban Govt Welcomes Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan's Stance Against Foreign Military Bases in Afghanistan

Tahir Khan, September 28, 2025

Afghanistan's Taliban government has welcomed the recent stance by Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan against the establishment of foreign military bases in and around Afghanistan.

This position was affirmed in a joint statement released after foreign ministers from the four countries met on the sidelines of the 80th United Nations General Assembly in New York. They emphasised respect for Afghanistan's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity and said re-establishment of foreign military bases is "not conducive to regional peace and security."

According to Hamdullah Fitrat, deputy spokesperson for the Taliban government, his country not only welcomed the stance of the four countries but said that "Afghanistan will not allow its territory to be used against other countries, nor permit armed groups to operate from its soil."

While the joint statement did not refer to any specific country seeking bases in Afghanistan, it follows one by US President Donald Trump where he said Washington was trying to get Bagram air base in Afghanistan back.

Bagram Air Base served as the linchpin for US operations in the rugged country, where the long war against the Taliban and their Al Qaeda allies was fought with air strikes and resupply missions from the airfield. In July 2021, all US and Nato troops left Afghanistan's biggest air base, signalling the complete withdrawal of foreign forces from the country after two decades of war.

After his initial statement about Bagram in the United Kingdom, Trump had threatened Afghanistan with unspecified consequences if it refused to give control of the Bagram air base to the US.

For their part, the Taliban government in Afghanistan rejected his demand.

'Want positive ties with all'

In their joint statement, Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan also urged the Taliban rulers to take "effective, concrete and verifiable actions in fulfilling the international obligations and commitments made by Afghanistan to fight terrorism, and dismantle, and eliminate all terrorist groups, and to prevent recruitment, fundraising and their access to weapons, as well as their collaboration with foreign terrorist fighters".

The four countries further urged the Afghan authorities to dismantle any terrorist training camps or any other terrorist infrastructure on their soil.

Moreover, their joint statement said: "The four sides expressed deep concern over the security situation related to terrorism in Afghanistan, noting that terrorist groups such as ISIL, Al Qaeda, the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jaish ul Adl, Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and other similar groups in the region including Majeed Brigade, as well as others, based in Afghanistan, continue to pose a serious threat to regional and global security.

“They emphasised that strengthening peace and stability in Afghanistan and countering the threats of terrorism, radicalism, and drug crime emanating from its territory are in line with their common interests in the region.”

To this end, Fitrat termed the idea of “Afghanistan posing any threat to other countries baseless”.

“Afghanistan is taking serious steps against corruption, drugs and all kinds of undesirable issues and considers this process its responsibility,” he said, stressing that the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan wants to establish positive relations with all countries on the basis of mutual respect”.

Fitrat said “prioritising relations with regional and international countries in the context of security, stability and development in Afghanistan” was a “realistic” approach.

The Afghan government deputy spokesperson asserted that Kabul’s policy was “based on mutual trust, positive contacts and promotion of friendly relations and any false concerns or baseless allegations regarding Afghanistan are strongly rejected”.

JI delegation meets Afghan FM

Separately, a delegation of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) from Pakistan, led by JI Deputy Ameer Professor Muhammad Ibrahim, met with Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi during a visit to Afghanistan, according to a statement issued by the party.

The delegation included JI Deputy Ameer in Balochistan Dr Atta-ur-Rehman, JI Ameer in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa North Inayatullah Khan, JI Ameer in KP Central Abdul Wasi, and Dr Muhammad Iqbal Khalil, the statement said.

Muttaqi also posted about the meeting on X. According to a translator of his post, Pakistan-Afghanistan relations were discussed during the conversation.

Pakistan Seeks Regional Countries' Help to Counter Threats from Afghanistan

Tahir Khan, October 7, 2025

Pakistan sought regional countries' cooperation to counter threats emerging from Afghanistan during the Moscow Format Consultations held in the Russian capital on Tuesday.

Pakistan's Special Representative to Afghanistan Mohammad Sadiq addressed the moot, which was also attended by Afghan Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi.

The consultations, held at the level of special representatives and senior officials of Afghanistan, were attended by India, Iran, Kazakhstan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

For the first time, the Afghan delegation participated in the meeting as a member. Russia became the first country to recognise the Taliban government in July this year. A delegation from Belarus also attended the meeting as guests.

"I spoke about the urgent need for collective regional efforts to effectively counter terrorism and dismantle all terrorist groups operating from Afghan soil," Ambassador Sadiq told the 7th meeting of the Moscow Format.

Sadiq said he also highlighted the importance of strengthening regional cooperation in political and economic fields, along with enhanced counterterrorism and anti-drug collaboration.

Pakistan has long been pressing the Taliban rulers to take action against the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other Pakistani militant groups in view of the increase in violence after the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021.

The Taliban government insists it does not allow anyone to use Afghan soil against Pakistan. "Continued dialogue, cooperation, and coordinated actions remain essential to address these challenges and support lasting peace in the region," he said.

The special representative also reaffirmed Pakistan's "unwavering commitment to a peaceful, stable, and secure Afghanistan."

In a joint statement issued at the conclusion of the meeting, the participants emphasised that Afghanistan should be supported to undertake comprehensive measures aimed at the elimination of terrorism and its eradication so that the country's soil is not used as a threat to the security of neighboring countries and beyond.

"The parties underscored that terrorism constitutes a serious threat to the security of Afghanistan, the region and the wider world," according to the statement, also issued by the Russian embassy in Islamabad.

The parties, in a veiled reference to the US and its NATO allies, also urged the countries mainly responsible for the current predicament in Afghanistan to earnestly fulfill commitments on the economic recovery and future development of the country.

The parties called for strengthening counter-terrorism cooperation at both bilateral and multilateral levels.

Attempts by other countries to deploy their military infrastructure in the landlocked nation were called unacceptable as this does not serve the interests of regional peace and stability.

The statement did not name any country, but the statement came in the wake of repeated statements by President Donald Trump regarding Bagram air base, which was central to the US military operations in Afghanistan for 20 years.

The Taliban have rejected Trump's calls for handing over the strategic airbase.

The parties reaffirmed their unwavering support for the establishment of Afghanistan as an independent, united and peaceful state. The parties further noted the need for the development of economic and trade exchanges, investment cooperation of Afghanistan with regional countries and the international community.

They expressed their interest in developing regional economic projects with Afghan participation and promoting steady progress in fields such as healthcare, poverty alleviation, agriculture and disaster prevention.

The participants also supported the active integration of Afghanistan into the system of regional connectivity. The parties reiterated their commitment to continue humanitarian support to the Afghan people, and called on the international community to intensify the provision of emergency humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people, while simultaneously reaffirming opposition to the attempts of politicising it.

Sadiq meets Muttaqi on sidelines

On the sidelines of the moot, the Pakistani envoy met his Afghan counterpart.

The 90-minute long meeting focused on advancing bilateral cooperation in key areas of mutual interest, including economic cooperation, trade, transit, and regional security.

Sadiq, in a post on X, said Islamabad and Kabul "reaffirmed the importance of enhancing regional connectivity and agreed to explore practical measures to facilitate trade and transit, particularly through streamlined customs procedures and improved infrastructure links".

He elaborated that emphasis was also placed on unlocking the potential of trade corridors in the region to further benefit the region's development and economy.

Earlier, in a post on X, Sadiq Khan detailed the discussions that took place during the Quadrilateral Meeting of Special Representatives for Afghanistan, saying, "The participating states unanimously reaffirmed their steadfast commitment to a stable, sovereign, and peaceful Afghanistan, underscoring the necessity of a country free from the scourge of terrorism and external intervention."

Voicing their concerns over the terrorist groups present in Afghanistan, the envoy went on to say that the participating countries agreed on "enhanced coordination and collaborative action" to fight against terrorism in the region.

Separately, Khan, in different meetings with his Chinese and Iranian counterparts, discussed regional security, counterterrorism cooperation, as well as humanitarian concerns in Afghanistan.

With his Iranian counterpart Muhammad Reza Bahrami, Khan held “in-depth discussions on the latest developments in Afghanistan”, particularly terrorism, as per a statement posted on his X.

“Both sides emphasised the importance of continued dialogue and coordination to address common challenges,” he added.

Meanwhile, in a meeting with China’s Yue Xiaoyong, both countries underscored the “importance of a coordinated approach to promote lasting peace and stability in the region,” as per a statement posted on his X.

“The meeting underscored the strong partnership between Pakistan and China in addressing shared challenges and advancing regional development,” he added.

The envoy also held discussions with his Russian counterpart, Zamir Kabulov, focusing on measures to promote regional cooperation in Afghanistan.

Russian FM receives Muttaqi

Afghan Foreign Minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and discussed the further strengthening of political relations between the two countries, the development of economic cooperation, and regional issues in a comprehensive manner, the Afghan Foreign Ministry said.

The Afghan Foreign Minister thanked the Russian Federation for its decision to officially recognise the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, describing it as a significant and historic development in the trajectory of bilateral relations.

He stated that the announcement of recognition has not only opened new doors for political and economic cooperation. He said the decision is also considered an important step towards Afghanistan’s active role in the international community.

The statement said the minister also emphasised the importance of mutual cooperation in the areas of combating narcotics, regional economic projects, and transportation corridors. On his part, the Russian Foreign Minister stated that the recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has created unprecedented opportunities in political, economic and international cooperation between the two countries, and “we will witness its positive results in the near future,” the Afghan statement said.

Mr Lavrov also discussed the prevention of drug trafficking, strengthening security and other areas and praised the efforts of the Islamic Emirate in this regard and emphasised that besides strengthening bilateral relations, effective use should also be made of regional mechanisms like the Moscow Format. He commended the achievements and independent stance of the Islamic Emirate, considering them beneficial for the region, according to the statement.

China Ready to ‘Organically Integrate’ Pakistan’s Development Plans, says Chinese Envoy

Tahir Khan, November 26, 2025

China is ready to work with Pakistan to organically integrate the country’s development plans and the action plan on building a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, Chinese Ambassador in Islamabad Jiang Zaidong said on Wednesday.

Pakistan and China share a longstanding strategic partnership with ties that span various sectors, including trade, energy, defence, and infrastructure.

Ambassador Jiang was speaking at the Policy Dialogue on “Redefining Regional Connectivity: Pakistan-China Friendship in the New Geo-Economic Paradigm.”

“Guided by the important consensus of our leaders, centered on building a closer China-Pakistan community with a shared future in the new era, using the advancement of CPEC 2.0 as a platform, and focusing on deepening cooperation in industry, agriculture, and mining, we will continuously consolidate, deepen, and expand our all-round partnership,” the Chinese envoy said while speaking via video link.

He said the approach will tangibly serve the modernisation drives of both countries and better benefit the two peoples.

“We will promote the inclusion of more Pakistani agricultural products under contract farming cooperation and facilitate the export of more high-quality agricultural products to China. Furthermore, we will continue to support industrial park cooperation, making new and greater contributions to Pakistan’s export expansion and foreign exchange earnings,” he said.

The day-long dialogue brought together senior policymakers, including the Chinese ambassador, alongside leading experts who discussed the transformative potential of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in fostering regional stability, connectivity, and economic interdependence.

The Chinese envoy said his country will support the Chinese company Haier’s investment of US \$400 million to establish a new home appliance industrial park in Pakistan, which is expected to achieve an annual production capacity of approximately 10 million units. “We will also support Chinese company Challenge Group’s investment of US \$150 million to build a new textile industrial park, aiming to achieve an annual export value of US \$400 million.”

“Looking to the future, CPEC will help Pakistan expand regional cooperation. Pakistan is a hub connecting South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, possessing many unique advantages for development, one of which is its critical geographical location,” he said.

Ambassador Jiang said Beijing is also willing to accelerate the Karakoram Highway realignment, promote the modernisation of the Khunjerab-Sost Port, advance the comprehensive development of Gwadar Port, and transform it into a hub for regional connectivity.

“We are ready to actively and steadily advance third-party cooperation under CPEC, promoting its extension towards Central Asia and the Middle East to leverage Pakistan’s geographic advantages,” he added.

Jiang elaborated that CPEC has brought Pakistan a cumulative total of US \$25.93 billion in direct investment, 510 kilometers of highways, over 8,000 megawatts of power generation, and 886 kilometers of core grid networks, significantly improving Pakistan’s infrastructure and industrial transformation.

“Taking the flagship Gwadar Port and its supporting projects as an example, the upgraded China-Pakistan Friendship Hospital has greatly enhanced the modernisation of local medical services, with cumulative patient visits exceeding 340,000.”

About the Gwadar seawater desalination plant, he said the plant is now officially operational with a daily output of over 2,000 tons, effectively alleviating local water supply shortages.

He also mentioned the Lahore Orange Line Metro train and said he has personally taken a ride during a tour and found it as smooth and comfortable as the urban rail transit in Beijing, adding that its cumulative passenger traffic has exceeded 270 million.

The envoy pointed out that CPEC has created a total of 261,000 jobs in Pakistan, improving the lives of countless families and building a solid foundation of public support for CPEC.

Talking about the Pakistani government’s policies, he said Pakistan’s economic indicators have significantly improved.

“In the last fiscal year, GDP grew by 3.04 percent, and per capita income increased from US \$1,663 to US \$1,824. Pakistan is also advancing its “Uraan Pakistan” five-year plan, prioritising digital transformation and technology empowerment, emphasising an export-oriented strategy, and aiming to achieve high-speed, sustainable growth in key industries through opening up, to become an upper-middle-income country by 2035,” said Jiang.

Pakistan’s former National Security Adviser, Moeed Yusuf, in his address highlighted regional connectivity with special reference to Afghanistan.

Yusuf, said, “things with Afghanistan are messy, but we need to expand and work on regional cooperation, and expand such partnerships to Central Asia”.

While endorsing Pakistan’s security concerns, he favoured the approach of separating economic issues from political matters and said others would find alternatives and “would not wait”. He also mentioned the idea of CPEC’s to Afghanistan and stated that China and Pakistan are interested in achieving this goal.

Terrorists in Afghanistan Hinder Regional Economic Integration, Pose Serious Security Challenges: Envoy

Tahir Khan, December 15, 2025

Pakistan's Special Representative for Afghanistan Mohammad Sadiq on Monday shared "concerns over the large number of terrorists in the neighbourhood, hindering regional economic integration and posing serious security challenges."

In a post on X, Sadiq, who also holds the special assistant to the prime minister portfolio, said he had held separate meetings with his counterparts from China and Uzbekistan on the sidelines of the Afghanistan Neighbours Conference in Tehran.

"We agreed that collective efforts needed to address this threat," he said.

Separately, senior diplomats of Afghanistan's six neighbouring countries and Russia, who met in Tehran on Sunday, supported all efforts to reduce tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

They expressed their readiness to help strengthen these efforts, an Iranian government statement said on Monday.

Iran's state news agency IRNA reported that the participants also called on Islamabad and Kabul to return to the negotiating table and resolve their problems through diplomatic channels.

In October, border clashes between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban resulted in the martyrdom of 23 troops and left over 200 Taliban fighters dead, including a number of Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) terrorists.

Without referring to any country, the participants opposed any attempt by foreign countries to have a military presence in Afghanistan.

US President Donald Trump has repeatedly called for taking back Bagram Airbase, north of Kabul.

The Taliban rulers have rejected President Trump's call.

Expressing security concerns, the special envoys announced and emphasised their readiness to assist Afghanistan in combating terrorism, drug trafficking and human trafficking.

They emphasised the responsibility of the international community to lift sanctions and release Afghan assets, according to the statement.

The US had frozen around \$9 billion of Afghanistan's state bank after the Taliban takeover in 2021.

The diplomats called on international organisations to support the return of Afghan citizens from neighboring countries to their country and to create conditions for their dignified return.

The call came at a time when the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistan and Iran is underway.

They emphasised regional integration and the centrality of the region in resolving existing issues and challenges, including some issues related to Afghanistan. They emphasised strengthening

stability in Afghanistan and expressed their readiness to help achieve it if the Afghan side declares a need.

Emphasising the importance of continuing economic and trade relations with Afghanistan with the aim of improving the livelihoods of the people of that country, they pointed out the need for the country's integration into the political and economic processes of the region.

They also stressed the responsibility of countries that are responsible for Afghanistan's current situation to help rebuild and improve its economic and welfare situation without turning it into a political lever.

The participants agreed to hold the fifth meeting of foreign ministers of Afghanistan's neighboring countries in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, as soon as possible.

They welcomed Pakistan's readiness to hold the second round of the meeting of special representatives of Afghanistan's neighboring countries in Islamabad in March 2026.

BOOK

(Blueprints of Endurance: Civilizational Continuity and the
Architecture of Change in Chinese History)

Book

Blueprints of Endurance: Civilizational Continuity and the Architecture of Change in Chinese History

by Dr Tahir Kamran

Prof. Dr. Tahir Kamran is a renowned historian, columnist, academician and public intellectual. He served as the Allama Iqbal Fellow at the Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS) and as a Fellow of Wolfson College at the University of Cambridge from 2010 to 2015. Dr. Kamran has published extensively on topics such as sectarianism, religious fundamentalism, and the status of minorities in Pakistan. He currently serves as the Head of Department, Seeta Majeed School of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (SLASS), Beaconhouse National University (BNU, Lahore Pakistan).

Note: This book is currently under publishing. An excerpt from the “Introduction” chapter of the book is given here.

Introduction

“China is a sleeping giant; when she wakes, she will shake the world.” Napoleon Bonaparte’s aphorism, though coined in a different era, captures something essential about China’s historical trajectory—a trajectory defined not by uninterrupted ascent but by the capacity for recurrent revitalization. For more than five thousand years, Chinese civilization has weathered political disintegration, foreign conquest, ideological revolution, and internal upheaval, yet it has retained a coherent cultural identity grounded in enduring philosophical, ethical, and institutional traditions.⁸⁹ Scholars of Chinese history often describe this phenomenon as civilizational resilience: a deep structural ability to reconstitute order after periods of collapse.⁹⁰

This chapter explores the major forces—philosophical, cultural, administrative, and geopolitical—that shaped China’s pattern of continuity amid rupture. It argues that the endurance of Chinese civilization cannot be understood merely through political events or dynastic chronologies; rather, it emerges from long-standing intellectual and ethical systems that provided stable frameworks in moments of crisis. Central among these are the classical teachings of Confucius, Laozi, Mencius, Xunzi, Mozi, and Zhuangzi—thinkers whose ideas formed the spiritual architecture of Chinese society. Their visions of moral order, cosmic harmony, and proper governance supplied generations with interpretive tools to navigate chaos and rebuild legitimacy.⁹¹

I. Classical Foundations and the Civilizational Toolkit

The period known as the “Axial Age” (roughly 6th to 3rd centuries BCE) constituted the fertile intellectual ground in which the seeds of China’s long-term resilience were planted. During the political turmoil of the Spring and Autumn and Warring States eras, Chinese thinkers articulated competing yet complementary visions of ethical life, statecraft, and cosmic order. Their conversations, critiques, and syntheses formed the backbone of China’s enduring cultural grammar.

⁸⁹ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 3.

⁹⁰ Yuri Pines, *The Everlasting Empire: The Political Culture of Ancient China and Its Imperial Legacy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 12.

⁹¹ Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), 25–30.

Confucius (Kongzi, 551–479 BCE) articulated what may be considered the central moral vocabulary of Chinese civilization. In the *Analects*, he emphasizes *ren* (humaneness), *li* (ritual propriety), and *yi* (righteousness) as the essential foundations of ethical governance and harmonious human relations.⁹² Confucius's core insight—that political decline stems from moral decay—became a canonical principle of Chinese political culture. By insisting that the restoration of order required virtuous leadership and moral cultivation, Confucius provided a template for legitimacy that shaped civil service recruitment, educational curricula, and imperial ideology for more than two millennia.⁹³

Running alongside Confucian thought was the profound cosmological vision articulated by Laozi in the *Daodejing*. His emphasis on the *Dao* as the natural, ineffable ground of all existence, and on *wuwei* (non-coercive action), offered an alternative yet deeply intertwined worldview.⁹⁴ Whereas Confucius stressed moral rectification, Laozi expressed skepticism toward excessive intervention and celebrated harmony with the rhythms of nature. Daoist philosophy not only enriched Chinese intellectual life with metaphysical depth and artistic sensibility but also provided psychological refuge and philosophical stability in periods of political rupture.⁹⁵

Beyond these two foundational figures, Chinese thought prospered in diverse directions. Mencius asserted the intrinsic goodness of human nature, while Xunzi countered that people were innately self-interested and required rigorous moral training.⁹⁶ Mozi's doctrine of universal love (*jian ai*) and meritocratic governance challenged hierarchical norms, while Zhuangzi's visionary parables questioned rigid distinctions and emphasized the liberated spontaneity of the *Dao*.⁹⁷ Legalist thinkers, though often criticized for their authoritarianism, contributed administrative techniques and institutional models that proved instrumental in reestablishing state order during times of disintegration.⁹⁸

Together, these intellectual traditions formed a vast civilizational toolkit. When the Chinese world faced moral decline, Confucian ethics supplied the vocabulary for renewal; when political authority seemed oppressive, Daoist detachment offered philosophical escape; when fragmentation demanded administrative reconstruction, Legalist organizational principles were mobilized. This intellectual pluralism supplied the flexible foundations that enabled China to reconstitute order after historical turmoil.

II. Dynastic Cycles, Cultural Transformation, and Recurrent Renewal

Chinese history has often been described through the model of dynastic cycles, a rhythmic movement from consolidation and prosperity to decline and collapse. Yet such collapse rarely meant the destruction of the civilizational fabric. Rather, it sparked processes of regeneration, cultural hybridization, and political reimagining.⁹⁹

The disintegration of the Zhou dynasty, far from extinguishing Chinese cultural life, gave rise to the classical philosophical synthesis that would shape the next two millennia. The fall of the

⁹² Confucius, *The Analects*, trans. Edward Slingerland (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), 12–18.

⁹³ Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The World of Thought in Ancient China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 56–60.

⁹⁴ Laozi, *Daodejing*, trans. D.C. Lau (New York: Penguin, 1963), 3–10.

⁹⁵ Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 44–47.

⁹⁶ Mencius, *Mencius*, trans. Bryan Van Norden (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2008), 113–120.

⁹⁷ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 35–40.

⁹⁸ Mark Edward Lewis, *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 14–20.

⁹⁹ Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 60–75.

Han (220 CE) ushered in long centuries of political fragmentation, but these divisions facilitated one of the greatest cultural transformations in Chinese history: the absorption of Buddhism. Instead of displacing Confucian and Daoist traditions, Buddhist teachings were gradually Sinified, enriching Chinese metaphysics, art, and ethics.¹⁰⁰

Foreign conquest repeatedly tested the limits of China's cultural cohesion. The Mongol Yuan and the Manchu Qing established rule over China for extensive periods, yet both regimes adopted Confucian administrative practices, classical court rituals, and Chinese cultural norms. In each case, the conquerors became culturally "Chinese," demonstrating the gravitational pull exerted by the civilizational core.¹⁰¹

This pattern—rupture followed by cultural absorption and institutional renewal—reveals that foreign rule did not fracture China's identity so much as it initiated new phases of integration and adaptation. The strength of the Chinese civilizational framework lay in its capacity to incorporate outside influences while maintaining coherence.

III. Modern Crises, Ideological Revolutions, and the Reassertion of Civilizational Identity

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries brought unprecedented ruptures. Western imperialism, fueled by industrial capitalism, forced China into an asymmetric global order. The Opium Wars shattered the traditional Sinocentric worldview and exposed the weaknesses of the Qing state.¹⁰² Yet even in the face of military humiliation and economic exploitation, reformers invoked classical principles to justify renewal. Figures such as Feng Guifen and Zhang Zhidong argued that China must preserve its moral and cultural essence (ti) while selectively adopting Western technology (yong), echoing earlier patterns of philosophical adaptation.¹⁰³

Japan's rapid modernization created another existential crisis. The Sino-Japanese War (1894–95) and the atrocities committed during the 1930s, including the Nanjing Massacre, constituted ruptures of unprecedented brutality.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Chinese intellectuals framed national resistance in terms of classical virtues—loyalty, righteousness, and moral rectitude—portraying the struggle not merely as geopolitical defense but as the continuation of an ancient civilizational mission.

The twentieth century's revolutions, both Nationalist and Communist, proclaimed radical breaks with the past. Yet beneath their modern ideologies lay enduring cultural patterns. Although Mao Zedong denounced Confucian tradition, his vision of moral transformation, centralized authority, and collective mobilization drew on centuries-old political culture.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, Maoism represented not a pure rupture but a paradoxical form of continuity.

In the post-1978 era, classical values reemerged openly. Confucius returned to state rhetoric, educational philosophy, and cultural diplomacy; Daoism experienced revival; and the language of "national rejuvenation" reflected an explicit appeal to China's civilizational longevity.¹⁰⁶ As China entered the twenty-first century, its leadership framed modernization not as

¹⁰⁰ John Kieschnick, *The Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 22–30.

¹⁰¹ Pamela Kyle Crossley, *The Manchus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 90–100.

¹⁰² Timothy Brook, *The Troubled Empire: China in the Yuan and Ming Dynasties* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 189–195.

¹⁰³ Zhang Zhidong, *Exhortation to Study*, trans. and ed. William Ayers (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 6–9.

¹⁰⁴ Rana Mitter, *China's War with Japan, 1937–1945: The Struggle for Survival* (London: Penguin, 2013), 112–140.

¹⁰⁵ Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After* (New York: Free Press, 1999), 45–52.

¹⁰⁶ William A. Callahan, *China Dreams: 20 Visions of the Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23–30.

Westernization but as the restoration of a historical trajectory interrupted by foreign aggression and domestic turmoil.

The Architecture of Endurance

From its Axial Age origins to the turbulences of the present, Chinese history illustrates a pattern of enduring foundations and adaptive transformation. Classical philosophical traditions, especially those shaped by Confucius and Laozi, provided deep reservoirs of meaning and legitimacy. Administrative institutions rooted in ethical ideals created stability amid disorder. Foreign invasions, internal rebellions, and ideological revolutions fractured political structures but could not extinguish the civilizational ethos.

China's civilizational resilience—its capacity to rebuild after rupture while drawing strength from ancient blueprints—remains one of the defining forces shaping the twenty-first century.

The history of China is, fundamentally, a history of continuity under pressure—a civilizational formation repeatedly subjected to political fracture, military invasion, and ideological upheaval, yet rarely experiencing cultural annihilation. From the fall of the Shang and Zhou dynasties to the fragmentation of the Six Dynasties and the collapse of the Tang, Chinese politics confronted cycles of systemic breakdown that might have permanently derailed less cohesive cultural traditions. Yet in the Chinese case, each rupture—far from annihilating the social fabric—became the precondition for reconstruction grounded in inherited cosmologies, philosophical canons, and sociopolitical ideals.¹⁰⁷ This dynamic of destruction followed by renewal reflects what some theorists describe as a *civilizational longue durée*, in which deep cultural structures exert a stabilizing force across discontinuous historical episodes.¹⁰⁸

At the core of this *longue durée* lies a suite of intellectual traditions forged during the classical period, particularly the moral-political teachings of Confucius and the cosmological insights of Daoist thinkers. Confucian ethics, with its insistence on virtuous governance, hierarchical harmony, and the moral cultivation of elites, supplied a normative vocabulary that Chinese states repeatedly returned to after periods of chaos.¹⁰⁹ Following major collapses, such as the end of the Eastern Han or the disintegration of the Tang, political elites and scholar-officials tended to reassert Confucian ideals as the foundation for legitimacy, bureaucracy, and social order—what Fairbank has termed the “recycling of traditional political culture” in times of constitutional stress.¹¹⁰ Confucian political ethics thus functioned not merely as moral guidance but as a reconstructive ideology, enabling fractured polities to restore coherence around shared principles of governance.

This reconstructive capacity was reinforced by the resilience of the bureaucratic state, which operated as a durable institutional skeleton extending across dynastic transitions. The civil service examination system, classical curriculum, and literati administrative norms provided a technocratic continuity that often survived the fall of ruling houses.¹¹¹ Even when dynasties collapsed, the bureaucratic ideal—meritocratic recruitment, textual competence, ritualized governance—persisted as a widely accepted model for rebuilding state capacity. These institutions constituted what

¹⁰⁷ Fairbank, *China: A New History*, 34–36.

¹⁰⁸ Mote, *Imperial China*, 17.

¹⁰⁹ Confucius, *Analects*, trans. Slingerland, 55–56.

¹¹⁰ Fairbank, *China: A New History*, 42.

¹¹¹ Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy*, 12–15.

sociologists would call “**civilizational deep structures**”—organizational patterns that reproduce themselves across time despite political rupture.¹¹²

Equally vital was the persistence of a shared written culture. The classical script, canonical texts, and standardized literary forms facilitated not only elite communication but also the cultural integration of vast territories.¹¹³ As long as the written tradition remained stable, the symbolic universe of Chinese civilization endured. This textual continuity allowed dynastic successors to claim cultural legitimacy even amid political fragmentation, reinforcing what Fairbank describes as the “civilizational infrastructure” that outlasted dynastic mortality.¹¹⁴

Foreign conquest, often imagined as the ultimate test of cultural resilience, did not fundamentally alter this pattern. When the Yuan (Mongol) and Qing (Manchu) regimes seized power, they initially ruled as outsiders, but over time they adopted, adapted, and ultimately became **stewards of the Chinese civilizational model**.¹¹⁵ As Crossley has shown, the Manchus, despite retaining distinct ethnic markers, embraced Confucian statecraft, classical education, imperial ritual, and Chinese administrative forms to legitimize their rule.¹¹⁶ This “sinicization of conquerors” underscores a broader theoretical insight: that powerful civilizational cores often exert **cultural gravitational pull**, drawing even foreign rulers into their normative orbit.¹¹⁷

Thus, across millennia, Chinese history displays a pattern not of simple endurance but of **adaptive resilience**, in which inherited cosmologies, philosophical traditions, and institutional frameworks repeatedly provide the scaffolding for political reconstruction. China’s ability to regenerate order from breakdown is inseparable from these deep cultural lineages—lineages that have proven flexible enough to be reinterpreted yet stable enough to anchor each new historical beginning.

Inventions, Discoveries, and Administrative Innovations-----

Chinese civilization, with its continuous historical trajectory spanning over five millennia, has contributed profoundly to the development of human society. Its innovations and experiments—ranging from practical technologies to sophisticated political systems—have not only shaped life within East Asia but also influenced the broader global order. China’s contributions encompass a remarkable range of areas, including technological inventions, scientific discoveries, philosophical thought, and political-administrative experiments.

Technological and Scientific Contributions

One of the most celebrated legacies of China lies in its technological ingenuity. Chinese inventors pioneered a series of innovations that fundamentally transformed human civilization. **Paper**, invented during the Han dynasty around the first century CE, revolutionized communication, literacy, and record-keeping not only in China but eventually across Eurasia.¹¹⁸ Similarly, the development of **printing technology**, from woodblock printing to movable type during the Song

¹¹² Eisenstadt, *Comparative Civilizations*, 23.

¹¹³ Lewis, *Writing and Authority in Early China*, 3–5.

¹¹⁴ Fairbank, *China: A New History*, 36.

¹¹⁵ Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*, 12.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 14–20.

¹¹⁷ Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 43.

¹¹⁸ Tsuen-Hsuei Tsien, *Science and Civilization in China*, Vol. 5: Chemistry and Chemical Technology, Part 1: Paper and Printing. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 1–10.

dynasty, facilitated the mass dissemination of knowledge and prefigured the later European print revolution.¹¹⁹

Gunpowder, another critical Chinese invention, emerged in the Tang dynasty and later spread across the Islamic world and Europe, altering the conduct of warfare and the geopolitics of Eurasia.¹²⁰ The Chinese also developed the compass, enabling maritime navigation and contributing directly to the Age of Exploration.¹²¹

In medicine, Chinese civilization made significant strides, including the development of **herbal pharmacopeias, acupuncture, and sophisticated surgical techniques**. Works such as the Huangdi Neijing codified medical knowledge that influenced both domestic and later regional medical practices.¹²² In agriculture, innovations such as iron ploughs, water-powered mills, and advanced irrigation systems increased productivity and stabilized the food supply, enabling population growth and urbanization.¹²³

Moreover, Chinese astronomers and mathematicians made important contributions to global scientific knowledge. They developed accurate **calendar systems, star maps, and observational tools**, which influenced Islamic and European astronomy.¹²⁴ The Chinese also independently conceptualized **decimal fractions and negative numbers**, long before similar concepts appeared in European mathematics.¹²⁵

Political and Administrative Innovations

Perhaps no contribution was more globally consequential than China's development of bureaucracy and centralized governance. The Qin dynasty (221–206 BCE) under Qin Shi Huang established one of the earliest and most comprehensive models of centralized administration. The state implemented standardized weights, measures, and currency, unified the written script, and created a hierarchical bureaucracy staffed by trained officials selected for competence—a system that enabled governance over a vast and diverse territory.¹²⁶

This experiment in bureaucracy evolved further under the Han dynasty, which institutionalized the civil service examination system. By recruiting officials based on merit rather than hereditary privilege, China established one of the earliest enduring models of meritocratic governance.¹²⁷ The bureaucracy became both an instrument of centralized authority and a mechanism for the transmission of moral and administrative norms throughout the empire. This model profoundly influenced other East Asian states, including Korea, Japan, and Vietnam, and provided conceptual inspiration for later administrative systems globally.¹²⁸

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 45–48.

¹²⁰ Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 5, Part 7: Military Technology: The Gunpowder Epic. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 5–12.

¹²¹ Nathan Sivin, *Science in Ancient China: Researches and Reflections*. Aldershot: Variorum, 1995, 78–80.

¹²² Paul U. Unschuld, *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985, 33–35.

¹²³ Mark Elvin, *The Pattern of the Chinese Past: A Social and Economic Interpretation*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973, 101–104.

¹²⁴ Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 3: Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and Earth. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959, 72–75.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 80–85.

¹²⁶ Mark Edward Lewis. *The Early Chinese Empires: Qin and Han*. Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007, 59–63.

¹²⁷ Benjamin Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000, 21–24.

¹²⁸ John K. Fairbank and Merle Goldman. *China: A New History*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1998, 44–46.

Intellectual and Cultural Contributions

Beyond tangible inventions, Chinese civilization has provided enduring intellectual frameworks. Confucian thought, with its emphasis on moral governance, social harmony, and hierarchical order, underpinned centuries of political organization and civil administration.¹²⁹ Daoist philosophy introduced ideas of balance, natural law, and adaptability that informed art, science, and governance. Buddhism, transmitted to China and transformed into a uniquely Chinese form, contributed to ethical frameworks, architecture, and cultural exchange.¹³⁰

Chinese experimentation with statecraft, meritocracy, and moral legitimacy provided empirical insights into governance that resonate with modern political theory. By integrating philosophy, law, and administration into a coherent system, China offered an early model for the interdependence of ethics and politics.¹³¹

Global Influence and Legacy

The cumulative effect of Chinese inventions, scientific discoveries, and administrative experiments has been profound. Technologies such as printing, gunpowder, and the compass reshaped societies globally, fostering cultural diffusion, trade, and exploration. Administrative practices and bureaucratic models influenced not only neighboring Asian polities but also inspired concepts of governance in Europe and beyond. Chinese agricultural and medical innovations enhanced human well-being and facilitated demographic expansion. Collectively, these contributions illustrate how Chinese civilization has continuously served as both a source of practical knowledge and a model for social and political organization.¹³²

In sum, the legacy of Chinese civilization lies not solely in its artifacts or texts but in its capacity to integrate knowledge, governance, and culture into systems that are both durable and adaptable. Its inventions and experiments exemplify a civilizational ethos capable of responding creatively to challenges—a trait that has allowed China to influence the world across millennia and continue shaping global developments in the twenty-first century.

By the nineteenth century, however, China confronted ruptures of a fundamentally new order—ruptures not simply cyclical, as in earlier dynastic declines, but structurally global, propelled by the accelerating forces of industrial capitalism, imperial expansion, and Western scientism. The incursion of Western imperial powers shattered the established East Asian world order and exposed the limitations of a polity long accustomed to cultural centrality. Gunboat diplomacy, treaty-port systems, and the imposition of extraterritoriality forced China into a global regime it neither designed nor desired, eroding the Sinocentric diplomatic framework that had structured interstate relations for centuries.¹³³ The Opium Wars, often described as the turning point at which “China discovered the West’s capacity for coercion,” revealed the vulnerability of a once-dominant civilization to industrialized military technology and commercial aggression.¹³⁴ As Lovell notes, the

¹²⁹ Confucius. *Analects*, trans. Edward Slingerland. Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003, 12–15.

¹³⁰ Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*. Leiden: Brill, 2007, 110–115.

¹³¹ Denis Twitchett, and John K. Fairbank, eds. *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 1: *The Ch’in and Han Empires, 221 BC–AD 220*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 23–27.

¹³² Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, Vol. 7: *The Social Background*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986, 1–10.

¹³³ Hevia, *Cherishing Men from Afar*, 28–30.

¹³⁴ Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast*, 112.

combination of naval power, commodity capitalism, and missionary zeal subjected the Qing polity to pressures without precedent in its long historical experience.¹³⁵

These external shocks coincided with severe internal crises. The Taiping Rebellion, one of the deadliest civil wars in world history, tore through the empire's core provinces, destroying agricultural bases, fracturing local administrations, and exposing deep fissures within the sociopolitical order.¹³⁶ Fiscal collapse, regional militarization, and bureaucratic paralysis weakened the Qing state's capacity to respond to both domestic upheavals and foreign threats.¹³⁷ As Spence observes, the late Qing court found itself trapped in a paradox: the more it attempted to restore traditional authority, the more it revealed the inadequacy of existing political frameworks in the face of global modernity.¹³⁸ These converging crises—military humiliation, economic dislocation, ideological contestation—produced what might be termed a civilizational crisis of confidence, forcing Chinese thinkers to re-evaluate long-standing assumptions about empire, sovereignty, technology, and history itself.

The crisis deepened with the emergence of Japan as an industrialized imperial power. The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–95 shattered Qing illusions about the durability of the traditional East Asian hierarchy and signaled, to devastating effect, the rise of a regional rival that had rapidly absorbed Western military and industrial techniques.¹³⁹ The humiliation of this defeat reverberated through the intellectual and political elites, triggering debates over constitutional reform, educational transformation, and the limits of Confucian governance. Japan's later invasion during the Second Sino-Japanese War wrought destruction on a scale unparalleled in modern Chinese history. Entire cities were razed, cultural heritage sites obliterated, and rural populations subjected to famine, forced labor, and systematic violence.¹⁴⁰ As Mitter describes, the occupation brought “a technologized brutality” that distinguished it from earlier conquests, targeting both the material and moral foundations of Chinese society.¹⁴¹

Yet even under these extreme pressures, China's response was not merely reactive. Intellectuals, reformers, and revolutionaries turned once more to the deep reservoir of indigenous traditions—Confucian ethics, Daoist metaphysics, Legalist statecraft, Buddhist cosmology, and classical historiography—to craft new conceptual pathways for national survival and civilizational renewal.¹⁴² Late Qing reformers reinterpreted Confucian moralism as compatible with constitutional governance; revolutionaries invoked Legalist notions of centralized authority for state-strengthening; neo-Daoist intellectuals reframed the Dao as a metaphysical basis for cultural independence in the face of Western epistemologies.¹⁴³ As Zarrow demonstrates, the early twentieth century witnessed not the abandonment of tradition but its creative reconfiguration, producing hybrid intellectual frameworks that fused classical Chinese thought with global ideologies of nationalism, socialism, and constitutionalism.¹⁴⁴

These transformations illustrate a deeper theoretical pattern: that in moments of existential rupture, China's intellectual and political elites repeatedly mobilized enduring civilizational resources to

¹³⁵ Lovell, *The Opium War*, 85.

¹³⁶ Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies*, 14–17.

¹³⁷ Rowe, *China's Last Empire*, 201–204.

¹³⁸ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 209.

¹³⁹ Paine, *The Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895*, 3–6.

¹⁴⁰ Mitter, *Forgotten Ally*, 56.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 57–60.

¹⁴² Cheng, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, 41.

¹⁴³ Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power*, 22–26.

¹⁴⁴ Zarrow, *After Empire*, 101.

forge new syntheses. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries thus constitute not merely an era of decline but a crucible in which China reimaged its place in the world while drawing strength from the philosophical legacies that had long anchored its cultural identity.

Modern China's revolutionary transformations—first through the Republican era and later through the Communist victory of 1949—did not sever the civilizational roots that had anchored Chinese identity for millennia. Instead, these upheavals reframed, reinterpreted, and redeployed those roots in new ideological registers. Even when political leaders proclaimed a decisive rupture with the past, the deeper structure of Chinese governance, sociopolitical imagination, and cultural ethics continued to exert a formative influence.¹⁴⁵

The rise of modern Chinese nationalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries emerged from this very tension between rupture and continuity. Nationalism did not arise in an intellectual vacuum; rather, it was shaped by classical historical consciousness, the tradition of moral-statecraft thought, and the long memory of foreign invasions recorded in canonical texts.¹⁴⁶ Chinese intellectuals invoked ancient precedents to articulate the urgency of self-strengthening and collective renewal, portraying national survival as the latest chapter in a civilizational drama stretching back to the Zhou and Qin.¹⁴⁷ In this sense, modern nationalism was both an imported political form and a deeply indigenous moral narrative.

The *Boxer Uprising (1898–1901)* further illustrated this hybrid nature of resistance and tradition. Rooted partly in anti-missionary sentiment and rural anxieties, the Boxers employed ritual practices, martial cosmology, and notions of spiritual empowerment drawn from long-standing religious traditions.¹⁴⁸ Their uprising fused xenophobia, folkloric spirituality, and nascent nationalist sentiment into a violent protest against Western encroachment. Although ultimately crushed by the Eight-Nation Alliance, the Boxer movement crystallized a wider recognition that China's crisis was systemic and that survival demanded both ideological transformation and political modernization.¹⁴⁹ The Qing court's inability to harness this energy highlighted the exhaustion of the imperial system, accelerating calls for radical change.

In this volatile environment emerged *Dr. Sun Yat-sen*, whose revolutionary program synthesized Western republicanism with Chinese ethical and historical traditions. Sun's "Three Principles of the People"—nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood—were explicitly cast as both modern political imperatives and continuations of ancient moral ideals concerning good governance and social harmony.¹⁵⁰ He drew upon Confucian narratives of virtuous rulership while advocating a modern nation-state capable of resisting imperial domination. Sun's movement culminated in the 1911 Revolution, which ended over two millennia of dynastic rule and inaugurated the Republican era. Yet even as the new republic denounced the old dynasty, political discourse remained saturated with classical metaphors of order, legitimacy, and moral renewal.¹⁵¹

The Communist Revolution of 1949 deepened this dialectic of break and inheritance. Maoist ideology outwardly rejected Confucian culture, labeling it feudal, hierarchical, and obstructive to socialist transformation. The Cultural Revolution marked the most dramatic attempt to eradicate inherited traditions, attacking temples, ancestral halls, lineage structures, and classical texts. But as

¹⁴⁵ Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, 273.

¹⁴⁶ Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate*, 14.

¹⁴⁷ Harrison, *The Making of Modern Chinese Nationalism*, 32.

¹⁴⁸ Cohen, *History in Three Keys*, 54–60.

¹⁴⁹ Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising*, 281–85.

¹⁵⁰ Schiffrin, *Sun Yat-sen and the Origins of the Chinese Revolution*, 41–44.

¹⁵¹ Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 16–19.

many scholars note, Mao's revolutionary discourse nevertheless drew upon deeply rooted civilizational patterns—particularly the ideal of moral leadership, the concept of rectifying social ills through ethical transformation, and the centralization of authority around a charismatic ruler (what earlier dynasties termed the sage-king model).¹⁵² Perry observes that Mao's mobilization style echoed longstanding patterns of moral pedagogy and mass discipline embedded in the imperial political imagination.¹⁵³ Even revolutionary rupture operated within an inherited grammar of legitimacy.

Post-1978 reforms under Deng Xiaoping continued this dual pattern of rupture and continuity. On the one hand, China embarked on a radical shift toward market socialism, global integration, and technocratic governance—changes that seemed to mark a definitive departure from both Maoism and classical civilizational structures. On the other hand, the reform era witnessed a deliberate revival of cultural lineage, Confucian ethics, and narratives of national rejuvenation.¹⁵⁴ The concept of “civilizational identity” reemerged as a central legitimating resource, visible in state rhetoric surrounding the *Zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation), the “Chinese Dream,” and the promotion of Confucian values in education, diplomacy, and public life.¹⁵⁵

As Zhao argues, contemporary Chinese political discourse increasingly frames China's modernization not as Westernization but as the reawakening of a civilizational state, rooting legitimacy in a continuous cultural and philosophical tradition stretching back to antiquity.¹⁵⁶ This revival does not simply replicate the past but transforms it—reinterpreting Confucian ethics, Daoist harmony, and historical consciousness to articulate a modern, globalized vision of Chinese power.

Thus, from the Boxers to Sun Yat-sen, from Mao to the reform era, China's modern revolutions demonstrate a recurring pattern: ruptures that claim to overthrow the past but that ultimately draw strength from the very traditions they critique. Modernity in China has been neither an abandonment nor a preservation of tradition but a *creative negotiation* that renders civilizational continuity a dynamic, adaptive force in an age of rapid change.

China's enduring vitality—its *elan vitale*—derives from a civilizational ethos that has carried the nation through recurrent cycles of breakdown and rebirth. This ethos is neither monolithic nor static; rather, it is dynamic, evolving through reinterpretation, contestation, and strategic adaptation. Yet across the ebbs and flows of imperial rise and fall, foreign invasion, ideological revolution, and economic transformation, certain foundational elements have persisted. These include a deep reverence for antiquity and historical continuity, the valorization of moral governance, an ingrained emphasis on social harmony and collective well-being, and the longevity of a textual-bureaucratic state tradition unparalleled in world history.¹⁵⁷ Such elements function not simply as cultural residues but as active structuring forces that shape political imagination, policy choices, economic orientation, and China's understanding of its role in the global order.

This civilizational ethos also helps illuminate the peculiarities of China's political system, particularly in contrast to Western capitalist democracies. Unlike Western models, which privilege competitive pluralism, legal-rational authority, and individual rights as the core of political legitimacy, China's political system grounds its legitimacy in performance, historical continuity,

¹⁵² Meisner, *Mao's China and After*, 122.

¹⁵³ Perry, *Anyuan: Mining China's Revolutionary Tradition*, 18–20.

¹⁵⁴ Wang Gungwu, *The Chinese Overseas*, 77–80.

¹⁵⁵ Callahan, *China: The Pessimist Nation*, 103–107.

¹⁵⁶ Zhao Tingyang, *The Tianxia System*, 43.

¹⁵⁷ Tu Wei-ming, *Centrality and Commonality: An Essay on Confucian Religiousness* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989), 14–18.

and embodied moral authority.¹⁵⁸ Instead of multiparty competition, China elevates the ideal of political unity as a safeguard against civilizational fragmentation—an idea with roots in Confucian statecraft and Legalist administrative theory. The emphasis on centralized leadership, hierarchical coordination, and long-term planning reflects a historical belief that the state is the custodian of collective harmony rather than an arena of competing interests.

Moreover, China's governance model is underpinned by the bureaucratic tradition inherited from the imperial examination system: a technocratic elite, steeped historically in classical learning and today in scientific and managerial expertise, is entrusted with maintaining social order, guiding economic development, and ensuring national rejuvenation.¹⁵⁹ This emphasis on bureaucratic meritocracy differs fundamentally from Western liberal democracies, where state leaders are legitimized primarily by electoral consent rather than by intellectual and administrative training. Although modern China no longer draws upon Confucian classics as the basis for selection, the underlying assumption—that a cultivated, morally guided, and administratively competent elite should govern—remains deeply embedded.

Economically, China's model diverges sharply from the logic of Western capitalist economies. While Europe and the United States historically emphasized market autonomy, property rights, and the decentralization of economic power, China developed what might be termed state-guided capitalism or market Leninism—a hybrid system in which market mechanisms operate under the strategic direction of the state.¹⁶⁰ This allows for long-term industrial policy, massive infrastructural investments, and the ability to concentrate national resources into priority sectors such as renewable energy, advanced manufacturing, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence. The Chinese state thus acts as an architect rather than a referee of economic growth, shaping market trajectories while preserving political centrality.

These political and economic peculiarities have enabled China to rise as a formidable force in the twenty-first century. Its civilizational confidence, rooted in millennia of historical consciousness, informs the narrative of national rejuvenation (*faxing*) that animates contemporary politics and legitimizes ambitious national projects. China's rapid ascent in global manufacturing, technological innovation, and geopolitical influence cannot be separated from this long historical arc.¹⁶¹ The Belt and Road Initiative, for instance, is not merely an economic program but a twenty-first-century expression of historical patterns of connectivity, cultural diplomacy, and the projection of civilizational presence beyond China's borders.¹⁶²

Crucially, China's rise is also animated by an enduring belief that modernity need not equate to Westernization. The idea that China can pursue a distinctive development path—anchored in its civilizational values, political traditions, and historical experiences—reflects the same adaptive resilience that sustained the civilization through earlier ruptures. In the global arena, China presents itself not as a latecomer imitating Western institutions but as a civilizational state capable of shaping a new world order grounded in harmony, pluralism, and cultural coexistence.¹⁶³

Thus, China's capacity to navigate rupture—whether in the form of dynastic collapse, colonial

¹⁵⁸ Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 3–20.

¹⁵⁹ Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 55–60.

¹⁶⁰ Barry Naughton, *The China Model: Economic Reform and Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2021), 40–52.

¹⁶¹ Justin Yifu Lin, *New Structural Economics* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012), 67–72.

¹⁶² Peter Frankopan, *The New Silk Roads: The Present and Future of the World* (New York: Vintage, 2019), 95–110.

¹⁶³ Zhao Tingyang, *The Tianxia System: An Introduction to the Philosophy of World Governance* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 5–12.

aggression, ideological upheaval, or the pressures of globalization—is inseparable from its confidence in its long civilizational memory. This memory functions not simply as a vast archive of past experiences but as an active, interpretive framework through which crises are understood, framed, and ultimately transcended. For China, history is neither an ornament nor a relic; it is a strategic resource, a moral compass, and a reservoir of legitimating narratives.¹⁶⁴ It teaches that disorder is cyclical, that unity is achievable after division, and that decline can be a prelude to renewal. In this sense, the Chinese historical imagination does not treat rupture as an aberration but as a recurring phase in a larger pattern of civilizational endurance.

This deeply rooted consciousness infuses China's contemporary responses to challenge. Whether confronting economic downturns, regional instability, technological competition, or external pressure from global powers, Chinese policymakers and intellectuals regularly invoke historical lessons—Qin unification, Han consolidation, Tang cosmopolitanism, Song innovation, Ming maritime ambition, and Qing crisis—as analogues for present dilemmas.¹⁶⁵ These historical referents are not merely rhetorical flourishes; they shape strategic thinking, institutional design, and national self-perception. China's leadership often situates present struggles within a *longue durée* narrative of revival, framing setbacks not as terminal threats but as temporary obstacles in a larger civilizational arc.

The *elan vitale* that has animated China for millennia thus lies in its extraordinary capacity for adaptive reinterpretation. When confronted with foreign ideologies—Buddhism in antiquity, Marxism in the twentieth century, global capitalism today—China does not simply adopt or reject them; it digests, reshapes, and embeds them within indigenous conceptual frameworks.¹⁶⁶ Classical Confucian ethics were refashioned into imperial statecraft, just as Marxism-Leninism was localized through Maoist discourse, and just as contemporary technological modernity is increasingly described using Confucian and Daoist metaphors of harmony, balance, and order. The ability to convert external pressures into internal transformation is itself a hallmark of the Chinese civilizational ethos.

This ethos also manifests in China's institutional resilience. The bureaucracy—long the backbone of Chinese governance—has evolved from imperial scholar-officials to technocratic elites, but it continues to embody the Confucian ideals of meritocracy, moral duty, and state-centered stewardship.¹⁶⁷ The state's enduring centrality in Chinese life is not a twentieth-century invention but a structural legacy that provides coherence in times of upheaval and direction in moments of uncertainty. Whether rebuilding from the rubble of war, navigating the turbulence of market reforms, or confronting twenty-first-century technological disruption, China relies upon this stable institutional core to channel change into ordered progression.

In this way, China's civilizational memory functions as both anchor and compass: anchoring identity amidst dramatic transformation and guiding collective aspirations toward a future that is conceived not as a break from the past but as its logical unfolding. The twenty-first-century rise of China is therefore not a sudden anomaly but the latest manifestation of a deeply historical logic—a

¹⁶⁴ Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 44–50.

¹⁶⁵ Charles Holcombe, *A History of East Asia: From the Origins of Civilization to the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 102–180.

¹⁶⁶ Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 23–29.

¹⁶⁷ Yongnian Zheng, *The Chinese Communist Party as Organizational Emperor* (London: Routledge, 2010), 12–17.

logic that marries antiquity with innovation, tradition with modernity, continuity with reinvention.¹⁶⁸

China's trajectory is thus at once ancient and strikingly contemporary. Its rise reflects not only economic dynamism or geopolitical strategy but the renaissance of a civilizational worldview that has endured through epochs of triumph and catastrophe. The same cultural DNA that enabled China to survive earlier ruptures now informs its responses to global challenges, allowing it to convert adversity into momentum. In this synthesis of memory and modernity lies the enduring power of the Chinese civilizational ethos—a power that continues to shape China's role in the world and its vision of the centuries ahead.¹⁶⁹

In tracing the contours of this continuity, the chapters that follow examine the mechanisms through which China preserved, transformed, and transmitted its cultural foundations across millennia. These mechanisms were not accidental nor merely cultural epiphenomena; they constituted an integrated civilizational system that acted simultaneously as a repository of memory, a toolkit for governing, and a moral compass for collective life. Dynastic chronicles, philosophical treatises, administrative institutions, educational rituals, and everyday social practices worked together to produce a shared civilizational grammar—an underlying structure of meaning, authority, and identity that survived conquest, violence, regime change, and ideological rupture.

The *dynastic chronicles*—from the Shiji to the Zizhi Tongjian and beyond—did more than record events. They provided interpretive frameworks that explained why dynasties rose and fell, offering moral lessons on virtue, legitimacy, and the cyclical nature of political authority. These texts served as mirrors in which future generations of officials, scholars, and rulers could reflect upon the successes and failures of their predecessors. They embedded the concept that history is a moral teacher and that governance requires continuity with ethical principles rooted in antiquity.

Philosophical traditions, particularly Confucianism, Daoism, Legalism, and the later influence of Buddhism, ensured that China's civilizational grammar remained flexible yet anchored. Confucian ethics defined social relations and political legitimacy; Daoist cosmology informed aesthetic sensibilities and metaphysical understandings of harmony; Legalist thought shaped administrative efficiency and statecraft; and Buddhism offered spiritual depth, compassion, and a cosmopolitan orientation. This pluralistic intellectual ecology gave China a resilient philosophical foundation capable of absorbing external influences and repurposing them to reinforce civilizational coherence.

Administrative institutions, particularly the examination system and the long-standing practice of bureaucratic governance, provided a durable framework that connected elite culture across time. Scholar-officials were trained to master classical texts, moral philosophy, and principles of governance, ensuring that the state was administered by individuals who shared a common intellectual vocabulary. This bureaucratic tradition, unique in world history for its longevity and scale, created an institutional backbone that persisted despite dynastic turnover, foreign conquest, and ideological transformation.

Equally important were the *social practices* that embedded civilizational values into daily life: ancestral rites, lineage structures, village compacts, kinship obligations, and ritualized forms of interpersonal conduct. These practices preserved ethical norms, reinforced social cohesion, and sustained continuity in the private sphere even during periods of public disorder. When dynasties

¹⁶⁸ William A. Callahan, *China Dreams: 20 Visions of the Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21–28.

¹⁶⁹ Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (New York: Penguin, 2012), 30–35.

collapsed or foreign powers ruled, these community-level institutions acted as cultural fortifications that kept the civilizational fabric intact.

By foregrounding these deep-running structures, this book offers a blueprint for understanding how China's past illuminates its present—and why the giant Napoleon described continues to shape the world today. China's twenty-first-century resurgence cannot be fully comprehended through economic metrics or geopolitical analysis alone. It emerges from a far older logic: the logic of a civilization that has repeatedly rebuilt itself upon foundations that are at once textual, moral, institutional, and metaphysical. In uncovering these foundations, we begin to see why China's re-emergence on the global stage is less a surprising anomaly and more the latest chapter in a historical narrative of remarkable civilizational persistence.

Understanding this continuity also reveals why China's modernization has taken a distinct path—one that blends technological innovation with cultural revival, state-directed development with ethical governance narratives, and global integration with civilizational confidence. The giant Napoleon foresaw has awakened not as a newly forged power but as a long-standing civilization reclaiming its historical agency. And as China continues shaping the contours of the twenty-first century, the enduring structures explored in this book will remain essential to understanding both its ambitions and its trajectory.



BCPR



BNU Center for Policy
Research



BNU



MDSVAD

Mariam Dawood School of Visual Arts & Design

RHSA

Razia Hassan School of Architecture

SMSLASS

Seeta Majeed School of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences

SMC

School of Media & Mass Communication

SCIT

School of Computer & Information Technology

SE

School of Education

SMS

School of Management Sciences

IP

Institute of Psychology

BNU Center for Policy Research

Beaconhouse National University

Main Campus

13KM, Off Thokar Niaz Baig

Raiwind Road, Lahore-53700, Pakistan

Telephone: 042-38100156

www.bnu.edu.pk

