

# IMPLICATIONS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY: A PROPOSED MODEL OF SOCIAL-POLYPHONY FOR CPEC

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## ABSTRACT

*The review paper assesses the enormous promises and challenges faced by China-Pakistan Economic Corridor [CPEC] since its inception. CPEC not only serves as an economic game-changer but also questions the current social dynamics; hence the paper critically assesses the implications of the mega project from a cultural standpoint. Firstly, the study highlights the diverse nature of the economic ideologies practiced in China and Pakistan and their infiltration in the social fabric thereby creating a distinct mind-set. Secondly, the study examines the perceived challenges between the two countries that encompass cultural differences, language barriers and gaps in technological advancement. Thirdly, a multi-pronged approach is adopted to hoist a model of cultural framework to revisit the current issues and envisage a positive outcome of the economic venture. Lastly, the intervention of the think tanks for mitigating is discussed to address the potential conflict among people of the two countries arising due to closer contact on daily basis than previously envisioned.*

**Keywords:** *Economic Ideologies, Culture, Language, Technology.*

## INTRODUCTION

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is harbinger of prosperity against the prevalent bleak economic situation in Pakistan. The CPEC is linked to Silk Road- Economic Belt (Wang, 2015), Chinese launched by the Chinese President Xi Jinping. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between China and Pakistan in July 2013 followed by the official visit of the Chinese President Xi Jinping to Islamabad in 2015 (Xu, 2015). The net worth of CPEC almost \$46 billion which is being spent on the infrastructural and energy development sectors. Esteban (2016, p. 2) asserts that “up to 36 per cent of CPEC funding will be devoted to infrastructure,

transport and communication”; [CPEC covers] “2700 km long road, rail and gas and oil pipeline between China and Pakistan” (Ali, 2017, p.1). The overall project is estimated to be completed by 2030. Furthermore, the New Year, 2021, also endorses 70 years of bilateral friendly relations between China and Pakistan; thereby the bilateral ties have strengthened infrastructural development, generating power and energy project, telecommunication and strategic fields (CPEC Portal, 2021).

Nevertheless, the emerging Geo-political as well as Covid-19 situations in the region are also crucial in the smooth functioning of CPEC. Regardless of the challenges, both China and Pakistan are determined to accomplish the goals affiliated with the project. Chinese state-run media agency Xinhua indicated that “[China is] unlikely to give up on the idea” of CPEC - India’s protest may not also halt the project which covers Pakistan-occupied Kashmir- (Cited in Kashmir Reader, 2016, p.1). However, “China and Pakistan have traditionally valued one another as a strategic hedge against India (Afridi & Bajoria, 2010, p. 1).

Pakistan is combating terrorism since 9/11 for being an ally of America as “more than 67,399 people are killed in terror attacks during past 15 years” (Sabri, 2017, p. 2). Pakistan is also facing pressure from America on one hand and is battling against India’s efforts to sabotage CPEC on the other hand. According to Forbes (2018) Donald Trump’s very first tweet about Pakistan reflects animosity towards Pakistan’s role in the equation:

“The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!”

Donald Trump’s tweet indicated the changing world order. Pakistan took a firm stance against American policies; later on, several clarifications were exchanged to mitigate the effect of his tweet. However, even in this critical moment China has extended enormous support to Pakistan. Although Pakistan’s stance at both governmental as well as military level has been firm on safeguarding the primary interests of Pakistan, yet in the absence of American aid, Pakistan political as well as economic survival is contingent upon CPEC.

Interestingly, the apogee of CPEC’s success may be measured through several latest developments: CPECinfo (2018) reports that Pakistan and China

signed five Agreements and a MoU in Gwadar on 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2018; on the same day five airlines, both national and international, have initiated with public transport airline license (as Cited in Xinhua Net, 2018). According to Layton (2020) the digital security apparatus containing biometric facial recognition is also included as a crucial part of the entire project. Likewise, the improvised access to personal data is likely to be used utilized by other sectors of the industry as well. Currently, CEPC encompasses 3,000 projects whereby 60 percent of the projects have already underway. Moreover, the magnitude of CPEC includes 126 countries and 29 international organization that have already signed agreements with CEPC. According to newsfeed of The CPEC Portal (2021) a bill has been passed in the National Assembly for establishing CPEC Authority for the planning and coordinating \$ 62 billion connectivity projects.

### **Purpose of Inquiry**

The cognizance of CPEC among the stakeholders is widely accepted (Khan & Malik, 2013; Shah, 2015; Naseem, 2015). Since then a multitude of research articles have acknowledged CPEC as a key to unlocking the economic prosperity for both the countries (Godement, 2014; Bengali, 2015; Bhattacharjee, 2015; Javaid, & Jahangir, 2015). However, regardless of the expected economic affluence the perceived limitations of social and cultural of CPEC have also generated several concerns among the stakeholders whereas the disparity on social cohesion has been largely ignored. Despite the anticipated success of CPEC, a few controversial issues have increased the sensitivity of the recurring events: For instance, a recent bombing in a local hotel in Quetta 2021aiming to target Chinese ambassador; a Chinese citizen was shot dead and another was injured in Clifton, Karachi in 2018; Killing of two Chinese engineers in 2016 in Baluchistan and the abduction of two Chinese in 2007 in Islamabad. Moreover, The Express Tribune (2018: 1) also addresses social media's "scathing criticism, whereby, China was being accused of using 'prisoners as labor'" by presenting the acting Chinese ambassador, Zhao's clarification: "China punished 1.01 million officials since 2013". Notezai (2015) referring an interview with Andrew Small on the relationship between China and Pakistan told, "The Chinese private sector was already nervous about Pakistan and has always wanted to operate under elaborate protective conditions." Similarly, several researchers have also indicated that despite the economic benefits of CPEC a more rational approach needs to be adopted for curtailing negative sentiments from all quarters (Misra & Clarke, 2013; Shah, 2015).

## **Reasons**

In view of the above concerns, the supporting evidence to endorse the cultural implication has been derived from four major domains. The first claim is linked to the ideological difference between the two countries with regards to their economic stance which leads to a marked difference in the lifestyle of the people of the two countries. Ramay (2016, p. 24) asserts that “Pakistan was [initially] reluctant to accept China due to differences between communist and capitalism blocs”. The second claim addresses the backwash of economic activity on the cultural outlook. According to GOP (2017) CPEC on one hand, aims to promote different traditions and culture of Pakistan in China and Chinese culture in Pakistan (Wolf, 2016). On the other hand, some concerns have been expressed by Zhang and Shi (2016, p. 4) who regard that the ‘micro risks [of CPEC] include ethnic benefits, religious belief, economic demands, language and culture and community benefits.’

The review paper is significant in exploring the factors that may inadvertently question the acceptability of CPEC. In this regard the paper examines the present status of CPEC, and the cultural challenges associated with the project. The purpose is to produce quality research work that will provide information, insight, analysis and policy recommendations for the benefit of stakeholders and for the purposes of knowledge dissemination. The paper will revisit extended literature in the context of culture. Similar ventures have previously been undertaken to explore the extent of ratification between China and Pakistan to address cultural harmony and to examine why these issues need to be addressed over time (Kataria & Naveed, 2014).

## **Evidence**

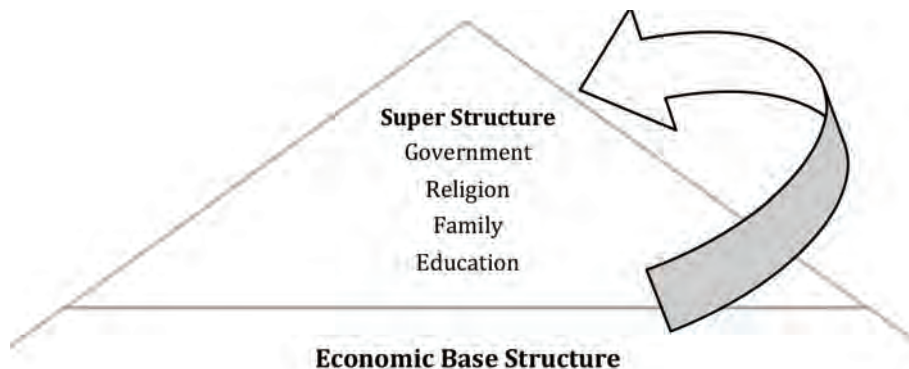
According to Tylor (1871, p. 21) culture is referred to as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a man as a member of society.” Hence, economic systems are instrumental in serving the specific needs of any society.

Firstly, China and Pakistan practice two markedly different ideologies (Kabiraji, 2012). On one hand, Pakistani society has thrived on Capitalism since 1947 - although very few have benefitted from it and the concept of polarization is evident in all spheres of life. Capitalism entails an economic system in which private entrepreneurs (bourgeoisies) own the factors of production whereas individuals offer their labor in exchange of wages. Capitalism believes in a free market which is contingent upon the principals of supply and demand; the overall goal is to make profits (Amadeo, 2017). Based

on Karl Marx theory, Encyclopedia (2018, p.1) relates to the “capitalist mode of production”, “[which] enables the bourgeoisie to organize the industrial labor process, where individual workers are driven to seek employment by the needs of their own reproduction”. Marx identified the backlash of such ideologies and assumed a revolution may topple down these inequalities in society because the Proletariat (work-force) does not receive the surplus value of their wages, which is instead pocketed by the bourgeoisie. According to Marx, “the first historic art is production of material life itself” (Cited in *The Sociological Conversance*, 2016, p.1). With the flow of time people have not been able to free themselves from the stranglehold of this ideology. The mechanism of the social institutions like family, education and religion reverberate the ideology of the Bourgeoisie.

Notwithstanding Scott (2011, p.2) demonstrates that “capitalism is a system of governance not only for private goods but also for public or “common” goods”. Moreover, Pakistan’s agriculture sector sums up 24 percent of Gross Domestic Product (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017); the Feudal lords have a firm control in policy making by keeping the common masses less educated as it serves their purpose well. According to the latest statistics of the Wikipedia (2018) almost 95-98% of Pakistani are Muslims whereby religion plays a significant role, which Althussur (1970) describes as ‘Ideological State Apparatuses’ driven by the economic forces in a Capitalist society. In Pakistan religion is the driving force that controls most of the matters related to economic activities thus leading to an altogether different mind sets of Pakistanis. Figure 1 illustrates the control exercised by the economic forces over other social institutions of society.

Figure 1: Architectural Design of Capitalist Society as practiced in Pakistani Society

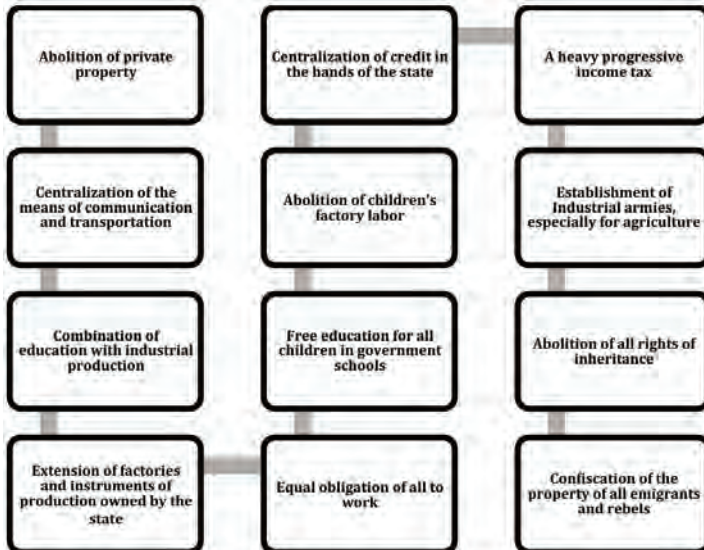


On the other hand, China’s economy is based on Communist ideology; Marx in his book *Critique of the Gotha Program* (1875) relates the basic principle of Communism as “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs” which is also the basis for a future “higher phase” of communist society. Although, with the passage of time the concept of Communism also evolved in China. Interestingly, on the current status of Communism, Ehret, (2017, p. 1) the writer for The Japan Times, remarks that “Marx might struggle to recognize his heirs among the billionaires, skyscrapers and stock exchanges of modern China”. The evolutionary process in China is also acknowledged by Csanadi (2016, p. 25):

“The Chinese pattern of power distribution and dynamics provides the Chinese style” of transformation: the gradual, decentralizing reforms within the decentralized network and the gradual reforms outside the network expanding the market sphere reflect a process of economic transformation first, under authoritarian rule accompanied by macro-economic growth”.

Marx (1848) presented the salient planks of the Communist Manifesto which are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Adapted Model of Communism by Karl Marx



In comparison to Csanadi’s statement, Pakistan has abruptly vested more power with the provinces with a single eighteenth amendment in 2010 by securing two third majority thereby rendering the federation less powerful. Most of the aspects of Pakistani culture are sentiment driven whereas such measures

indicate a customary ethnic discord among the provinces (Siddiqi, 2020). As mentioned earlier, culture encapsulates all facets of human life. In Pakistan religion is the main driving force which transcends in almost all matters of economic activity: beginning with Zakat (2.5% tithe on wealth in Islam in the form of religious obligation) and preferring Islamic Banking system (sharing of profit and loss); the idea is to show general public's mind-set and their adherence and dutifulness to their religion. As mentioned above Capitalistic ideology is beneficial for the upper class whereas the common Pakistani is ritualized in following in facts indicate a striking contrast with Chinese society. The total population of China as per year 2016 is 1.379 billion (Wikipedia, 2018). The four major religions which are practiced in China are Buddhism, Taoism, Islam (more than 14 Million believers) and Christianity. According to the Gallup poll survey (2015) "90% of Chinese citizens classify themselves as atheists or non-religious" compared to an earlier estimated conducted by the East China Normal University which reported that there were almost 31% religious believers (Wikipedia, 2018). These figures are in sharp contrast to the Pakistani society and a comparative analysis may provide a strategically effective way of overcoming issues which are corollary of religion.

Secondly, language barriers may also prove to be detrimental in creating mutual harmony among the people of the two countries. Although, English language serves as lingua franca internationally, however, in a recent Automated Machine Transaction (ATM) fraud in 2017, the Chinese suspects failed to understand the interrogative questions during remand. Although it may be assumed that they were intentionally distracting the interrogators but given a benefit of doubt, it seems to be a plain issue of language barriers. In order to address similar situations, Liu et al. (2017) have prepared a multi-lingual multi-party chat corpus in English, which has been upgraded by adding Chinese and Urdu (MPC corpus). The extended model deciphers the complex social phenomena in multiparty discourses multiple languages. Thus, bridging the gap caused by misinterpretations among the native speakers of distinct languages. The language barrier needs to be addressed rigorously.

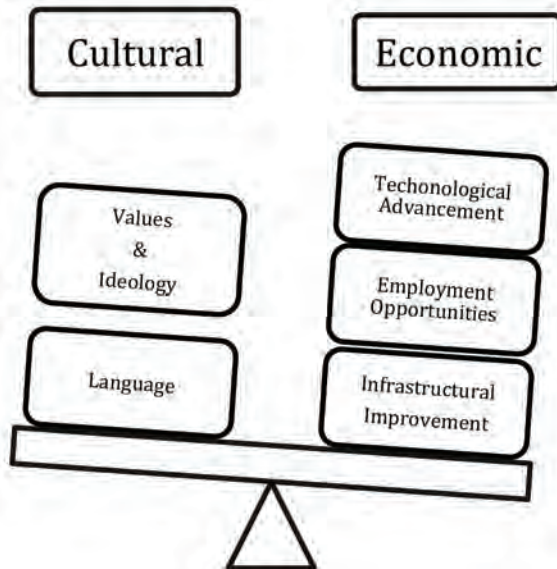
Lastly, Pakistani society in general is less tech savvy. In particular, Pakistani bank customers are quite immune to the conventional banking rituals; however, lately they have become easy victims of cybercrime. Although, Cyber-crime is a household word ever since internet has gradually paved its way into personal, financial and social worlds of the users. In a Ted Talk by Caleb Barlow (2016) the estimated revenue generated through Dark-Web is \$ 4.45 billion, which is larger than the Gross National Product of 160

countries. The information may seem startling to some naïve internet and modern technology users in Pakistan, but world-wide all internet and modern technology users are familiar with terms such as “Hacking” and “Phishing”.

Nonetheless, ATM has become a comparatively preferable way of cash withdrawals and making other monetary transactions. However, in the recent Pakistani bank customers were subjected to numerous grave financial losses (only Habib Bank Limited customers lost Rs. 10 million) due to “wide-scale hacking incident[s]” (Siddiqui, 2017, p.1). Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has tracked down a few Chinese hackers, who have also been thoroughly interrogated to locate their network. The series of such incidents serves to ward all stakeholders (banks, bank officials, customers) alike; it also creates the need for making all users take some concrete steps to avoid such incidents in future. This issue identifies the naivety of Pakistani against cyber-crimes to a vast extent. It also highlights the absence of common ground between the day-to-day encounters that may jeopardize the good will relations between the two concerned countries.

Owing to the previously discussed issue the paper hoists a model that highlights the significance of cultural and economic facets of human ventures. Figure 3 presents the objective necessity of equilibrium between cultural and market forces.

Figure 3: Proposed Model of Economic and Cultural Harmony for CPEC.





## **DISCUSSION**

Pakistani culture, at present, is widely directed by the social media and consequently the nation unites on controversial issues. The recent killing of a seven year old girl in 2018 - Zainab Ameen- demanded the Chief Minister of Punjab to investigate the matter in a matter of two weeks. The public pressure due to the involvement of social as well as conventional media has gained momentum, thus public opinion seems to have played an influential role in sensitive matters. Nonetheless, this incident demonstrates that public opinion in such may aggravate the situation, so preventive measures may be considered from an early stage. The study relies on secondary data due as immense interest has been reflected to assess the success of CPEC, hence the secondary data housed multiple research articles, government websites, print media and social media. The paper presents the alliance between Pakistan and China from a distinct angle. The success of CPEC offers immense opportunities to the people of both countries apart from the strategic interest of the superpower in the region (Vaughn & Morrison, 2006). Pakistan is instrumental in materializing China's geostrategic vision in targeting Middle Eastern and European markets (Ramay, 2016; News ABS, 2017). In order to combat internal and external security threats further cooperation is extended in joint personnel training and equipment (Vandewalle, 2015).

The paper presents mostly Pakistan's context whereas a Chinese stance in this regard may provide more depth to the cultural horizon. The paper proposes future direction of research by indicating that culture, of both countries, to be fully conceptualized and studied within its own right, thus creating more harmonious relationship between people in everyday life. Similarly, the economic ideologies can be simplified for the common man and if any issue arises due to this difference it may be dealt with sagacity. A clear cut stance to be studied with regards to their ideological difference (Vandewalle, 2015) how people of each country need to respect and accept these differences. Likewise, Language barriers may create misunderstandings, since Chinese prefer using their First language in their official dealings; proficiency in Standard Mandarin can further enhance current understanding between the two countries. Several attempts though have been made by different brands to bring the people of the two countries together. For instance, Shan Masala (2017) created an advertisement which secured 517,635 views whereby common elements like food seem to do the trick in bringing people in closer contact. Further research may be conducted in estimating the technological gap between the people of the two countries as well measures to be undertaken to bridge it.

## **CONCLUSION**

Irrespective of the arguments generated in the paper CPEC unquestionably is an embodiment of multifaceted venture. With the help of secondary data in the form of previously published articles and newspaper posts the issue of cultural differences has been addressed. The major arguments concern that in the wake of citizen journalism, the implicit issues which gain immense popularity and unfavorably gain media's focus which at times results in ill feelings among the public. The paper has highlighted the crucial issues concerning CPEC and has also advocated the need for preventive rather than corrective measures.

Moreover, the economic infrastructure can be equally supplemented by hoisting conceptual frameworks by the think tanks to address perturbations in the bud. In doing so, a lot of time and energy can be saved. The paper has voiced the concerns from several quarters thus increasing the need for a multidimensional approach for measuring the success of CPEC.

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