

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CPEC ON PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Trade through economic corridors comprising land routes and sea-lanes has been rapidly multiplying in velocity and volume due to globalization. Velocity refers to the intensity and increase in the number of interactions. Volume is related with the density of goods that are being exchanged. Ancient Silk Road has been one such corridor. It connected China, Eurasia and the World with mutually beneficial trade and shared economic dividends having social, cultural and religious impacts. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is reincarnation of ancient Silk Road, albeit much larger in scope and magnitude. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the multiple strands of this whole that will connect 60 plus countries. Chinese vision for BRI revolves around voluntary participation and mutually beneficial trade respecting UN Charter. China is proposing a combination of loans, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Built Operate and Transfer (BOT) investments for realisation of BRI. Operationalization of CPEC will bring obvious advantages in multiple spheres including socio-economic impacts, mostly positive for Pakistan.

Keywords: BRI, CPEC, Ancient Silk Road, Mutually Beneficial Partnership, Socio Economic Dividends, advantage to People and Society.

Introduction

Taking theoretical insights from the work of Roland Robertson the process of globalization may be defined in the context of 'globalization'.¹ This ranges from nationalization particularity to the adoption of cosmopolitanism. By focusing on the intermingling of global and local is to accept the plurality and inclusivity in different geographic areas. Thus, "Commodities and the media are seen not as (totally) coercive but rather as providing material to be used in individual and group creation throughout the localized areas of the world".²

This means the world is moving towards growing migration, wide variety of identities and intercultural discourse. The focus is more on inclusivity and acceptance of differences. It may include preservation of specifics with possibilities of varied potentialities.

This study also attempts to focus on contemporary work on IR theory that combines geography and cultural studies.³ However the significance of this study is linked with the notion of global inequality and asymmetry and the core concern to

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bring change, Thus CPEC is reviewed in the context of a dynamic force to bring investment and change in the lives of ordinary people in the region.

China and Pakistan have an exemplary and diversified friendship developed over a period of seven decades. The leadership and people of both the countries, despite multiple challenges, have steadfastly stood with each other through thick and thin; now being termed as 'Iron Brothers'. CPEC is the latest expression of this mutually beneficial and multidimensional cooperation. In a time when Pakistan is facing multiple security, economic and social challenges, China's help in shape of CPEC appears to be an important enabler. Perhaps, it not only has potential to stabilise but also integrate Pakistan's economy into an evolving trade bloc of CPEC and BRI partner countries. CPEC is one of the multiple components of the BRI that is seen as revival of ancient Silk Route. This route has historically interconnected Eurasia for about three millennia. Silk and Spices Routes have traditionally handled commerce along with a peaceful sharing of culture, knowledge, language and beliefs.

After opening to the World in 1980s, China initially focussed on development of its coastal cities. Disparity in the levels of development in the West and interior China was realised by Mr Deng Xiaoping in 1992. He said that, 'by end of the century China must overcome the regional inequality'. Based on Deng's vision, President Jiang Zemin proposed the strategy of "Great Western Development" in late 1999.⁴ Decades of deliberations eventually evolved into BRI⁵ that was initially referred to as One Belt One Road (OBOR). It comprises two main segments: Silk Road Economic Built (SREB) and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road (MSR). Maritime Silk Road will connect Chinese Coast to Europe through South China Sea, Indian Ocean through Gwadar and South China Sea to South Pacific. On land, the SREB, aimed at building "a new Eurasian Bridge", shall comprise five major arteries; China-Mongolia-Russia, China-Central Asia-West-Asia and China-Indochina Peninsula Corridors, Bangladesh-China-India, Myanmar Economic Corridor and CPEC.⁶ CPEC is being termed as "Game Changer" and "Fate Changer" for three billion peoples of the region.⁷

Many countries have expressed intent to become CPEC and BRI partners. This includes UK⁸, New Zealand⁹, Russia¹⁰, France¹¹, Romania¹² and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) that also want to join the CPEC¹³. 37 world leaders participated in Second Belt and Road Forum at Beijing. Equatorial Guinea, Liberia, Luxembourg, Jamaica, Peru, Italy, Barbados, Cyprus and Yemen were the latest countries to join the BRI club. President Putin praised the civilised and soft manner of China. Beijing published list of 283 deliverables related to the BRI.¹⁴ When fully operational, as a part of BRI, CPEC will link Pakistan with more than 60 Countries, housing two thirds of the World population, 55% of the global GDP and having approximately 75% of the global energy reserves. The BRI will comprise about 900 projects, valued at about 1.3 trillion US dollars.¹⁵

"The Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, issued by "The National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China with the State Council Authorization" envisages participation by choice, in consonance with the purpose and spirit of five principles on peaceful

co-existence, as enshrined in the UN Charter. The document offers macro level recommendations leaving most of the details to the partner countries.

It lays adequate emphasis to address concerns on climate change and to promote 'green and low carbon infrastructure construction'.¹⁶ President Xi Jin Ping's thought on the whole process is woven around the spirit of mutual respect, commonality of objectives of socio economic development of partner countries, connectivity, partnership rather than alliances, interdependence and mutually beneficial commerce.¹⁷ In a recent address at 55th Munich Security Conference the Chinese member of Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China (CPC), H.E. Yang Jiechi echoed Chinese leaderships' thought on upholding values like principle of sovereignty, dialogue, consultation, rule of law and win-win cooperation for achieving common development.

All countries aimed at "Working for a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind by Promoting International Cooperation and Multilateralism."¹⁸ This amply highlights that China in no way intends forcing its choices or dominate the cooperation of willing states envisioned towards attainment of the goal of shared gains and perceptions to mitigate the challenges of the 21st Century. Chinese Foreign Minister Mr Wang Yi elaborated these points further in a press conference on March 8, 2019 at Beijing and stressed that China's Diplomacy shall endeavour to 'bring certainty to a World full of uncertainties'.¹⁹

CPEC Summary Plan issued in February 2017 encompasses execution of CPEC vision and objectives through short-term projects till 2020, medium term till 2025 and long term up to 2030. Seven Joint Working Groups (JWG) comprising officials from both the countries have been constituted to oversee the execution of this Plan.²⁰ These JWGs are working under Joint Coordination Committee (JCC) on CPEC.²¹ Several figures are in circulation on the cost of CPEC. As of now the cost of project stands at US Dollar 58 billion.²² It's a combination of grants, soft loans, zero interest based loans and direct investment. Out of this amount only \$ 6.017 billion are the loans that government of Pakistan will have to pay. Pakistan will start repaying these loans with effect from 2021.²³

As Pakistan was going through severe power shortages affecting its people and economy; therefore early harvest projects included production of 10400 of Megawatt electricity as priority.²⁴ Major part of the finances goes into electricity producing projects, development of infrastructure, establishment of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and building of Gwadar Port. These are Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), or Built Operate Own Transfer (BOOT) or Built Operate Transfer (BOT) projects. Major funding of these projects has been done by the Chinese Banks. Chinese companies, which have invested in these projects, are responsible to pay back these loans. Communication infrastructure warranted up gradation and expansion as well. These areas were therefore accorded priority in planning and execution of CPEC.

Progress and Dividends

An important point to emphasise is that CPEC is a fusion of Pakistan's Vision 2025 and the edifice of BRI. Both share the commonality of goals and purposes.²⁵ Pakistan has already started gaining socio economic benefits from CPEC. Following facts and figures related to current progress and future prospects of CPEC amply manifest the significance of this important project of socio-economic significance. Pakistan's GDP growth in 2017 was 5.2%: highest in 10 years. This is likely to rise to 7% by 2020. Despite the fact that break-even period as anticipated by the China Overseas Ports Holding Company Limited (COPHCL) for Gwadar is seven years, Pakistan started getting 9% of gross revenue right from the very first shipment. Out of 22 projects 11 have been completed. There are 20 more projects in the pipeline. About 75000 jobs have been created by CPEC. Out of these only 9500 are held by Chinese. 124 engineers were hired for various CPEC projects. The estimates of Centre of Excellence for CPEC Ministry of Planning and Development Pakistan visualises creation of 1.2 million jobs up till 2030.²⁶

Under CPEC Pakistan and China have started projects for production of 17045 Megawatt of electricity.²⁷ Close to 4000 Megawatt electricity has already been added into Pakistan's system. On May 28, 2019 Unit II of the China Power Hub Generation Company has added 660-megawatt electricity into Pakistan's National Grid²⁸, which sufficiently manifests smooth progress of the planned execution. About 990 megawatts are likely to be added in July 2019. The energy produced by the power-producing units under CPEC is much cheaper i.e. rupees 8/ per unit as compared to the rates per unit for electricity provided by previously installed Independent Power Producing units.

Sind Engro Coal Mining (SECMC) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) are working hand in glove for attainment of objectives of conservation and sustainable management of bio diversity in Tharparker. SEMC has aligned its investments in socio economic sector with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).²⁹ China council for International cooperation on Environment and Development (CCICED) will ensure implementation of strategic policies on 'greening Belt and Road' with due cognizance to UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. For preservation of environment, the coal-fired power producing plants installed under CPEC are using 'super critical' technology to ensure very reduced sulphur dioxide emission.

Pakistan and China have reinvigorated their partnership in the field of education and training for equipping the Pakistani youth with appropriate capacities to be the part of successful execution of CPEC. For the said purpose, Pakistan has created "CPEC Consortium of Business Schools" under the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC). The Consortium will augment Pakistan-China inter university collaboration. China Association of Higher Education (CAHE) and HEC are working closely on exchange and scholarship programmes.³⁰ The China Road and Bridge Corporation (CRBC) announced master degree scholarships programmes for the South East China University.³¹ Presently about 50 faculties of universities of both countries are connected through exchange programmes. 2000 plus Pakistani students are studying on

scholarship in Chinese universities. Hundreds of engineers are on training. Multiple vocational training centres have been opened in Pakistan.

Gwadar Port is a \$ 5 billion BOT project. With a depth of 20 Meters, ability to host 200,000 DWT ships, having 120 berths and handling capacity of 400 million tons cargo per year, will be one of the largest seaports of the World. It also enjoys clear advantages in terms of economy of time and cost over Chabahar.³² Pakistan will get 9% of gross revenue of the port and 15% gross revenue from the Gwadar Economic Zone.³³ It has already got 5 Quay cranes. Facility of 100,000 metric ton storage has been built. Desalination plant, power generation and sewage disposal plants are already functional. Till Last year-end Gwadar had handled 400,000-ton cargo. Gwadar Port will be completed by 2028.³⁴

Pakistan and China have concluded the Plan for Second Phase of CPEC that can be expressed as 'One Corridor, Many Doors': the newer vision for CPEC. In this phase no project has been dropped; rather Joint Working Groups on agriculture and socio-economic development have been added to the existing groups.³⁵ Contrary to the misperception of diverting funds from CPEC, its projects have been augmented by allocation of requisite funds.³⁶ During 8th JCC Meeting, the year 2019 has been declared as year of Industrialisation. During the Prime Minister of Pakistan's visit to China in November 2018³⁷, new multi-cooperation agreements were added. This not only manifests both leaders and Governments commitment to the BRI and CPEC rather indicates enhanced focus on socio economic development, industrialisation and trade and investment to benefit people at grass root level.³⁸

An additional grant of \$ 1 billion has been kept for low gestation, low cost but high input projects for less developed areas of Pakistan. Vocational training, capacity building of provinces, improvements in health care and agricultural shall receive added emphasis. Recently concluded Belt and Road Forum (BRF) at Beijing has brought more advantages for Pakistan under new Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in its exports to China that would increase by \$ 500 million per year and could jump to \$ 6 billion per year.³⁹

Appraisal and Findings

It seems to be an opportunity for change and development for both China and Pakistan. It offers a mechanism to lessen sufferings of their people by speedy developments in social, economic, education, agriculture, and health sectors. PM of Pakistan Imran Khan during his address at ground breaking ceremony of Mohmand Dam on May 2, 2019, praised the exemplary progress made by China for lifting 700 million people from below the poverty line over past three decades as unique in the World history. This has been made possible through long-term focus on socio economic development in the less developed areas. He quoted this example for emulation and making best use of CPEC for the purpose of lifting deprived Pakistanis living below the extreme poverty line to lead a respectable life.⁴⁰ It is hoped that evolving economic opportunities from the CPEC would help alleviate sufferings of 24.3% of our population that lives below the poverty line.⁴¹

In the backdrop of BRI, CPEC figures out to be an undertaking of great magnitude. In a project of this kind possibility of some contradictory views, delays, hiccups and irritants cannot be precluded. These should not be taken as something abnormal. At the same time these must not be allowed to impact negatively on the progress of a useful enterprise like this. CPEC being the pilot project of BRI is progressing at a reasonably good speed. The results are visible in shape of infrastructural development, enhanced energy production, newer jobs, gradually improving businesses and improved focus on socio economic development in Phase II of CPEC.

37 heads of states and officials from 150 countries attended the second BRF forum.⁴² The number of expected members in the BRI is 60 plus countries. This is likely to enhance politico-economic significance of the CPEC and multiply its dividends for emancipation of societies of the member countries. When socio economic gains trickle down to the people they will have more jobs, better income, better living standards thereby becoming less exploitable by the exploiters with vested interest. The shared and interdependent economic prosperity makes the destinies of nations intertwined thereby bringing them closer to each other. The shared gains shall create connectivity between masses belonging to CPEC as well as BRI partner countries, thus gradually increasing commonality of interest and reducing animosity leading to building of mutual trust and forge longer lasting peace and stability in the region.

The increasing membership of the BRI also indicates a gradual shift in trends of global competitiveness from geo-security to geo-economy. China has till now desisted military confrontation and promises not to be offensive in pursuit of its aspiration. Chinese effort for expansion of her sphere of influences focuses on economic cooperation with mutual respect and shared gains. One cannot be really sure that China and USA will be able to get out of the Thucydides Trap or not? China is attempting to challenge the global economic order and by implication global power status of USA.

They may resort to a cold war and then use of military instrument to attain respective national interests. It is a common perception that in post 2nd World War Greater World powers have been successful in avoiding military confrontation. It can be hoped that governments, decision makers, scholars, analysts and writers have realised that to cater for increasing population, depleting resources, decreasing jobs and degrading ecology the focus has to shift to emancipation of their people and societies. The rivalry should preferably be restricted to economic competition only.

Pakistan serves as a conduit between Afghanistan, Central Asia and Indian Ocean.⁴³ Afghanistan's joining of CPEC would enhance mutual gains and bring the people and countries closer. While Afghan businessmen use Pakistan as a link for their trade, President Ashraf Ghani had made access for Pakistan to Central Asia conditional to allowing of Afghan- India trade through Wagah Border. Pakistan and China therefore are working on the alternative access to central Asia through China.⁴⁴ However, grant of land access to Afghanistan and India for their mutual trade could be considered. Well thought out agreement encompassing appropriate trade and security checks may act as a CBM leading to resolution of mutual disputes.

CPEC appears to draw not only regional but also international rivalry due to competing China – US interests.⁴⁵ The US and India seem to be uncomfortable with the concept and manifestation of CPEC due to conflicting interests in the global political system⁴⁶, which is likely to create challenges in implementation of the CPEC. Thus, Pakistan, China and other partners have to craft a joint strategy for timely manifestation of this project for sustainable socio-economic development of the region. Few Pakistani entrepreneurs are also worried about their share of the dividend. They apprehend major share going to Chinese companies. They fear that maximum business and the benefit will go to the Chinese companies.⁴⁷ However, the fact remains that Pakistan shall accrue ample socio-economic gains that will continue to multiply over the years.⁴⁸

Anti CPEC propaganda, mostly emanating from foreign sources and occasionally from within Pakistan, sows apprehensions like: falling into debt trap, takeover of major projects due to payment default by China like Hambantota of Sri Lanka, CPEC may prove to be like East India Company etc. Pakistan China bond, which has now been termed as Iron Brothers, spreads over 70 Years. China assisted Pakistan across a broad spectrum from socio economic assistance to development of defence industry to make Pakistan militarily and economically strong. Most of the investment in CPEC is by Chinese companies on loan from Chinese banks including Gwadar Port. The projects are on FDI, BOOT and BOOT basis. The loan to be paid back by Pakistan is only 6.3 billion USD that has to be reimbursed in easier installments. China has proven to be a friend in need, latest example being Pakistan India tension on Pulwama attack. Therefore, Chinese intent cannot be suspected of negativity. China will immensely benefit from CPEC, and so shall Pakistan and other member countries.

Pakistan has time and again reaffirmed its commitment to earlier realisation of CPEC.⁴⁹ To cater for visualised threats to CPEC the Government of Pakistan has decided set up a CPEC Authority by merging CPEC Support Project and CPEC Centre of Excellence directly under the Minister of Planning, Development and Reforms.⁵⁰ It shall oversee multiple aspects, Joint Cooperation Committee as well as security. For provision of appropriate security to CPEC Government is improving capabilities of its Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs). Pakistan Army⁵¹ and Pakistan Navy⁵² have dedicated exclusive troops and established special mechanism for provision of security to CPEC including Gwadar Seaport.

Impact on Society and Economy

The infrastructural development brings speedy development in the country through better connectivity. The areas falling along the route of CPEC have already started benefitting. Gwadar is developing at a much faster pace. The property prices in Gwadar have increased manifold.⁵³ About 7500 new jobs have been created; the number is expected to climb to 1.2 million by 2030. When operationalized it will translate into socio-economic uplift of the people ushering an era of comparative prosperity and better living standards. Many problems in a society are due to poverty and illiteracy.

The law and order situation to an extent is also related to socio- economic condition of the masses. Betterment in socio-economic conditions is likely to have

positive impact on overall governance in Pakistan. Similarly more jobs and better education, while alleviating poverty and enhancing knowledge and education, will reduce the availability of exploitable human resource to the exploiters: extremists and criminals. This will help the country in internal stabilisation. The Chinese, Russian, Saudi and other foreign countries investments and presence of foreigners in the country are expected to deter direct external threats as well. Enhanced economic dividend will also augment human security.

When seen in conjunction with the BRI, CPEC is not only a trade corridor. It is likely to go much beyond that. It will be connecting Pakistan to Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Middle East, Europe and North Africa. The interconnectivity will endow economic, socio-cultural, anthropological and educational advantages on the Pakistan, all partner Countries and the Regions. In due course the partner countries will become part of a trade bloc comprising 60 plus countries having population of three billion with intertwined destinies. It will gradually evolve into a mutually beneficial trade bloc⁵⁴ with obvious political influence in the international arena. Another default advantage could be cooperation amongst member countries on issues like countering the growing extremism, drug trafficking and gun running etc. collectively.

Our energy shortfall and distortion thereof cost Pakistan about 18 Billion: about 6.5% of the GDP.⁵⁵ CPEC early harvest projects have increased production of the electricity to an extent that if managed appropriately the electricity load shedding should be completely over in next few months. It will help in better productivity; more jobs increased GDP and better living conditions thereby benefitting the masses in multiple ways.

CPEC is offering great chance to make best use of our youth bulge, currently estimated to be about 60% of the population, through better opportunities for higher education and vocational training. HEC Pakistan and CAHE China have already operationalized the collaborative mechanism for the said purpose. China is expected to provide 21000 Scholarship to Pakistan in next three years. This will improve the chances of their employment on better wages with obvious socio economic advantages.

The connections and trade relations have been impacting various aspects of the trading partner countries over centuries. The impacts and effects span over socio-political, cultural and religious spheres. We may see a kind of hybrid culture after 25-50 years in Pakistan. It may become a more diversified multicultural country adopting dress, food, culture and manners etc. of partner countries especially Chinese. We may see more of intermarriages marriages, increased Feminism and gender equality. However, massive efforts are needed to educate people on misuse of the institution of marriage, as few cases of such kind emerged in recent past.

Over the year's large number of China Towns with typical Chinese Culture and style of entertainment, as seen in many places in the World, may also emerge here. Few of the social aspects of the Chinese culture may be at a tangent to our social and religious values. This may also draw criticism from the conservative elements of our

society, specially the clergy. Traditionally Pakistani Nation is a good host, yet understanding each other's cultural sensitivities is considered essential.

Chinese culture imbedded in five to six thousand years of its civilisation is rich in tradition. The importance of Art and Culture and enhanced value of customs and traditions following Chinese style may be adopted by our society. China has started reviving the Confucianism. In 2007, Confucius Birthday was celebrated with official sponsorship: few term it re-entry of Confucianism in Chinese society. It has had positive effects on Chinese society. The positives may be adopted by our society over the coming years. Few aspects of Confucian teachings like Filial Piety (family system with respect and care for elders) Virtues, Values, Dutifulness, law abidance etc. contain similarities with our culture and Ideology.⁵⁶

Chinese concept of modernization is not westernization rather easternisation with focus to improve in the fields of education, science and technology, infrastructural development and social uplift etc. This could help our people suitably emulate. Chinese as a nation have developed a culture of hard work and better work ethics. Intermingling and working together could instill these attributes in our society.

Phase II of CPEC encompasses steps to alleviate poverty, empower youth through vocational training, improve health facilities in underdeveloped areas and help improve agriculture sector. These steps are in line with Prime Minister of Pakistan efforts under the poverty reduction project called "Ehsaas". This is likely to bring major improvements in life of people from underdeveloped areas living below the poverty line.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The global and regional economic competition, as well as Pakistan's restive inner front breeds multiple challenges for implementation of CPEC and BRI. However, the opportunities outweigh the challenges. Therefore, Pakistan and China must continue with their commitments provide requisite politico-diplomatic support and physical security to the CPEC. Institution of appropriate laws on presence of foreigners, purchase of property and investments by them are also considered essential.

CPEC can be turned into a useful foreign policy instrument to improve relations with Iran, Afghanistan and India by providing them land access for trade. It could help in convincing Afghanistan to become a CPEC partner and establish better Pakistan-China-Afghanistan trilateral relationships. Intertwined economic stakes and confluence of counter terrorism and anti-narcotics objectives could further augment these ties. The prospects of shared economic dividends can also act as enablers to improve bilateral and multilateral cooperation to mitigate prevalent differences and contentious issues.

The short, mid and long-term plans made for CPEC by Pakistan and China have to be strongly supported by the governmental and non-governmental institutions to forestall bureaucratic hurdles, procedural interruptions and internal or external opposition to minimise delays and ensure desired progress. Appropriate mechanism needs to be established and operationalized to ensure this. Announcement of

government of Pakistan to merge various CPEC organs into a single Authority is considered to be a step in the right direction.⁵⁷

CPEC can only change fates if its positive socio-economic impacts reach down to the people living below the poverty line. Benefits in the field of education, vocational training, agriculture cooperation, and health sector must result in economic emancipation of the masses especially from underdeveloped areas. This will require appropriate measures at all levels of implementation.

Flight of capital in shape of profits must also be controlled and scrutinised by CPEC Authority and Security Exchange Commission of Pakistan. A good percentage of the profits earned from Pakistan should stay in Pakistan in shape of reinvestments. People need to be prepared to host a large number of expatriates predominantly Chinese. Special efforts have to be put in to educate people on Chinese culture and way of living. Similarly Chinese must be made aware of our societal norms, religious and cultural sensitivities.

Stability in Afghanistan is considered to be an essential pre-requisite for actualisation of the vision of connecting Afghanistan and ultimately Central Asia and full operationalization of the CPEC. Pakistan should continue its efforts to develop good bilateral relations and support global peace efforts for intra Afghan dialogue and negotiation with Taliban. Of course, stability is a prerequisite for the economic development. To combine geography and economy for the prosperity of an integrated society requires shared perceptions of security as well.

NOTES

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