"China, Pakistan and the Belt and Road Initiative: The Experience of an Early Adopter State"

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In China, Pakistan, and the Belt and Road Initiative, the writers deeply discuss the projects of CPEC and their impacts in Pakistan in every aspect. The book comprises eight chapters, each providing a thoughtful perspective on various segments of China's BRI, especially the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and its profound implications on Pakistan.

In the first chapter, the authors talk about the importance of CPEC, a flagship project of BRI. It touches almost every field of Pakistan, whether it is economically or socially. Currently, it is being processed with both advantages (installation of different projects, and strategic alignment), and disadvantages (disappointment over uneven access to its supposed benefits), and bureaucratic hurdles and security issues. The Corridor has resulted in the establishment of new bureaucracies, such as Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) and Corridor Authority. According to the authors, CPEC has had a mixed experience in Pakistan where considerable energy production and connectivity gains have been made, but CPEC has experienced other issues like coal dependency with power production, distribution, inequalities in access to energy, and uneven infrastructure developments. Also, the locals of the region where China and Pakistan are deeply integrated have deprivations due to having minor benefits from extracted goods and acute securitization of the region.

In the second chapter, the author starts his argumentation by saying that the Corridor has not proved itself as a game changer despite China's investment of 19 billion dollars in the power sector. He highlights the absence of a political settlement among political parties, which affects the process of structural transformation and industrial development. This affected structural transformation leads to low productivity in services and

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low manufacturing of value-added products. To overcome the dismal performance of manufacturing, industrial cooperation between Pakistan and China emerged as a critical pillar of CPEC. Due to a lack of importance given by the provincial governments to industrialisation, most of the Chinese FDI to Pakistan has gone towards the energy sector. The writer believes that without a formal industrial policy regarding the Corridor, it is unlikely that it will be a game changer.

In the third chapter, the writer says that CPEC is a welcome opportunity to promote the transition from traditional to modern agriculture to effectively boost the development of the local agricultural economy. Although there is still little clarity about concrete projects in the agriculture sector, a clear interest in the sector is shown by both sides, as one of the China-Pakistan Joint Working Groups is dedicated specifically to agriculture. In such perspectives, the establishment of a new laboratory in Multan, called the Centre of Excellence, in the research relating to cotton will be confined to collaboration with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences. The writer says that Chinese companies, like Bio Century Transgene China, are already working on hybrid seed production (especially rice seed) and have become very popular in Pakistan in recent years due to their high yield. The writer thinks that the only hurdle, before materialising Chinese agribusiness investment, is concern about potential "Land grabbing" by Chinese investors because farmers are very possessive about land in Pakistan.

In the fourth chapter, the writer talks about the political implications of CPEC for Pakistan, especially in terms of democracy and governance. He examines China's influence on Pakistan in economic, social, cultural, communication, and intergovernmental dimensions. Economically, China has a massive footprint as it is, besides CPEC, the largest trading partner of Pakistan, having a trade volume of 16.1 billion dollars. Socially, CPEC has led to increased people-to-people interactions between Pakistan and China, with a significant rise in tourism, student exchanges, and labour mobility, strengthening social ties between the two countries. Cultural exchange between Pakistan and China with initiatives such as the Confucius Institute, Mandarin language classes, and sister-city agreements are the results of CPEC. After discussing these linkages, the writer

concludes the chapter by arguing that the decline in democracy in Pakistan is due to its domestic politics along with factors such as the political parties, the military, and the dynamics of the federal system rather than the Chinese influence in the country.

In fifth chapter, various militant groups such as Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) have become a security threat to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), since its inception. To counter this challenge, both countries have been compelled to enhance security measures. The complaints by the local populations towards payment of the purchase price of the land, especially in Balochistan, points to the unstable security policy. To enhance the security situation, the two countries are increasingly expanding their partnership by engaging in common military drills as well as exchanging of intelligence to ensure regional stability in the area especially in Afghanistan as this is pivotal towards the success of CPEC in connecting to the Central Asian Republics.

In the sixth chapter, the writer highlights the factors which are increasing local concerns and challenges, particularly in Balochistan, due to the distribution of CPEC investment. He says that the project has underlined the existing imbalances in the province, mainly in terms of electricity access and infrastructure development, with Balochistan receiving limited benefits despite hosting key projects. The factors which add fuel to tensions between the federal and provincial government include: the ownership of Gwadar Port and the construction of the Western alignment of CPEC. The centralized decision-making process in the project seeks to ensure national interests by satisfying the local needs. The critics have raised concerns regarding China's investment approach that how it will maintain balance between regional development and equity. Local concerns over the project's benefits highlight the need for more inclusive planning.

In the seventh chapter, the writer sheds light on Pak-China relations and CPEC through a feminist perspective by reviewing the awards given by China to Pakistani people. Secondly, Pakistani women have been actively involved in reinforcing China-Pakistani relationship by playing different roles i.e. politics, diplomacy, activism, and serving the people of Pakistan, with prominent representatives who gained popularity including

Senator Sherry Rehman, ASP Suhai Aziz Talpur and the late Ms. Attia Ayub who have all contributed their part in cementing the relationship between the two countries. However, China showed disparity in recognition by awarding only one female anchor, Numra Asif, out of 18 Pakistani winners in the Corridor Golden Anchor Award launched in 2018. Similarly, the Corridor Outstanding Pakistani Employee Award has only awarded three female winners out of 79 workers recognised so far. Although the CPEC is empowering women through skill development and employment, its limited scope and societal barriers raise serious questions about promoting women's job opportunities. The writer concludes by saying that CPEC has the potential to promote gender equality, but should ensure gender enforcement mechanisms in both China and Pakistan, under the inclusion of women in CPEC projects.

In Chapter Eight, the writer discusses the experiences of Chinese workers who have been residing in Pakistan since the inception of the CPEC initiative. The writer says that there have been two distinct waves of Chinese migration to Pakistan. The first one, in the 1950s-1960s, delivering to the creation of a small community of Chinese-Pakistani, and a second one, caused by the CPEC, comprising of professionals, business owners, etc., and workers who are more likely to retain stronger connections to China and whose socio-economic profile is not the same. After interviewing Chinese people, the author believes that Chinese migrants in Pakistan develop varying levels of comfort and familiarity with the local culture, with longer-term residents often finding Pakistanis to be friendly and welcoming, and many appreciating the “Iron Brothers” sentiment between the two countries despite facing many challenges and cultural differences. However, due to security concerns, the movement of Chinese workers in Pakistan is limited, leading to a reliance on communal living arrangements and limited interactions with locals, which hinder their cultural understanding and socialization. Despite cultural and religious differences, Chinese migrants in Pakistan find commonalities with locals in values like morality and family orientation, and intercultural marriages are becoming more frequent, although concerns about human trafficking and forced marriages also exist. At the end of the chapter, the writer put interviewees' suggestions, which are scaling university linkages, think tank interactions, tourism promotion, bilateral media collaboration,

and establishing a joint grievance centre to address issues faced by Chinese professionals in Pakistan

Throughout the book, the writers emphasize the importance of CPEC, the causes of disruption before completion of its projects, along with their solutions, and the positive impacts on the economy of Pakistan, especially. Iny this book, writers have negated the alleged mantra about CPEC, which says that CPEC is a resurrected East India Company. One thing that I have felt missing in this book is a discussion on the environmental impacts of the projects of CPEC. The book, having 8 chapters written by 8 different writers, gives diverse opinions on CPEC. This book is recommended for readers interested in China's economic diplomacy, its growing influence on the region and the globe, and the importance of CPEC for Pakistan.