



CPEC: A SOURCE OF STRENGTHENING BILATERAL TIES AND DRIVING STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

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Abstract

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), significantly enhancing cooperation and interconnectivity between Pakistan and China. This \$62 billion initiative, spanning communication infrastructure, energy, telecommunication, industrial zones, and Gwadar Port, is not just an economic endeavor. It holds immense strategic importance for both regional and extra-regional countries. By enhancing trade routes and transforming Pakistan's geostrategic importance, particularly through the link between Gwadar Port and Xinjiang, CPEC provides China with direct access to the Arabian Sea. This paper delves into how CPEC strengthens bilateral ties between China and Pakistan, contributes to regional economic and political stability, and serves as a model for international collaboration. The project's success is underpinned by infrastructure improvements, energy investments, and an expanded transportation network, positioning Pakistan as a key player in global trade and furthering China's geopolitical and economic ambitions. Beyond development, CPEC fosters a new era of bilateral cooperation and shared strategic objectives, serving as a beacon of international collaboration.

Keywords: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC, Belt and Road Initiative, BRI, Pakistan-China relations, strategic importance

Introduction

CPEC is one of the enormous developments in the BRI, whose overall goal is to enhance economic



cooperation and interconnectivity between Pakistan and China. CPEC is an approximately \$62 billion initiative that covers several areas of infrastructure development, transport systems, clean energy development, telecommunication, and the industrial regions that boost trade and economic progress for the two countries (Arshed et al. 2022). Geopolitically, CPEC is not just the story for Pakistan and China but a blueprint for Middle Eastern and Asian countries like Iran and Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics to boost trade and expand economic ties (Parveen & Shah 2020). Its centre lies quite far away from it; the distance from Gwadar Port in the south-west of Pakistan to Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province is approximately 3,000 km, and the corridor is an important maritime link between China and the Arabian Sea, which enables China to get to the markets of the world faster (Garlick 2018). This connectivity promises to improve the cost of operating trade, improve the importance of routes for transport, and become a significant social and economic development in the region, with an emphasis on the strategic advantage of Pakistan in China's worldwide view (Khan, 2021).

CPEC is a vital bridge that strengthens the Pak-China relationship. It is the bedrock of the firm foundation of friendship and partnership that the two countries have rejoiced for years (Nisar, Ali, and Asif 2021). CPEC is seen as an economic initiative and a political strategy, not as an isolated occurrence, since these two components of the deal show that Pakistan and China have standard views regarding regional development and security. To aid and secure the trade routes and enhance economic incorporation, CPEC is a critical player in China's BRI strategy in the region. It ensures that China has a way to adequately access South Asia, which gives it direct access to the region for its trade and resources, such as energy, without having to cross the Pirate-infested Strait of Malacca, which ultimately enhances the sense of security (McCartney 2021). It is a tremendous opportunity for Pakistan that is highly acceptable for the country due to its current economic condition and need for a revival. The CPEC activities in terms of investments, together with technology and infrastructure transfer, can promote economic growth in Pakistan, resolve the problem of power shortages, and enhance the country's industrial and agricultural productivity (Ali et al. 2018). The strategic location of Gwadar port as a prominent trade link in CPEC places Pakistan in a significant position in the international trading system. It can make it a central point in global trade. Aside from the economic aspects, CPEC projects have helped to bring about a strategic alliance between the two countries – China and Pakistan – on issues that concern their regional and global peace and security and their developmental prospects (Javed and Ismail 2021). CPEC has enhanced cordial relations between the two countries by establishing mutual trust and increasing understanding. Besides, the efforts of both countries in the context of CPEC projects have enabled them to address various regional political issues more effectively and to be an inseparable force in the face of external threats. CPEC is far more than merely a compilation of development projects; it represents the relationship of mutual understanding and trust between the two countries. It reflects a mutual determination to sustain regional connectivity, economic success, economic growth, and peacefulness in both regions. CPEC holds the potential to revolutionise not only Pakistan's economic regional scenario but also that of the entire region (Hussain Sajid, Khan Faisal, and Muhammad Ayaz 2021). The initiative becomes an excellent



example of a successful international effort and what can be achieved through collaboration and a shared vision of future development and prosperity.

CPEC - Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and their Strategic Significance

A new paradigm has characterised the Sino-Pak relationship, which is no longer traditional diplomatic bilateral diplomacy but rather diverse strategic and economic corroboration. This illustrates what our two countries strive to achieve in our multifaceted partnership, which aims at economic prosperity and strategic security, and it also underlines our countries' concern with navigating the growing complexities of the 21st century. This partnership regarding CPEC turns Pakistan into a vital geostrategic location, turning the country into a bridge across geo-continent regions and a link in trade revenue that traverses continents. This seems to have aligned with its past role as a passage of the silk route, perhaps revived in modern times. In this regard, for China, CPEC is not merely an economic venture, but rather, more importantly, a strategic one which is aimed at achieving a strategic transportation line, opening direct access to the Arabian Sea, and diversifying the Malacca Strait vulnerability for China (Hussain 2017). For instance, incorporating CPEC into the BRI tent shows the project's relevance in encouraging cooperation in trading, developing political trust for political cooperation, and stabilising the Asia-Pacific region. It results from China's "community of shared future for mankind" policy, which outlines the need to build cooperation that fosters new economic zones for mutual growth and development (Khawaja and Raza 2022).

The BRI can be best defined as a socio-economic connectivity strategy that resurrects old trails of international commerce used during the ancient Silk Road. They are not just limited to the creation of infrastructure but also to encouraging policy coherence among member countries, improving trade and investment, encouraging the integration of the finance sector, and cultivating people's relations (Huang 2016). Promising to form as many railways, highways, harbours, and digital roads as possible so that geography cannot limit business deals, capital, and ideas, BRI aims to make them flow more easily. It is geoeconomic in vision, aimed at facilitating development and eradicating poverty with the help of connectedness (Thürer et al. 2020). As the grand vision of the BRI unfolds, CPEC emerges as more than just a current set of works in progress. It is a crucial pilot project for the BRI's larger political and economic goals: integration, economic cooperation, and sustainable development of Pakistan and other regional countries. CPEC's role as a pilot project underscores its potential impact on the growth and integration of the concerned regions.

CPEC is a new silk road embracing this archival strategic global vision to revive and expand the golden age of the ancient silk route and put into practice a new-looking modern-era world silk expressway. Due to it being a pilot connectivity project, CPEC seeks to improve physical connectivity, optimise trade corridors, and promote cross-border cultural interaction to promote economic development in Asia and worldwide, representing the true essence of the Silk Route. CPEC is anticipated to usher in positive changes for China and Pakistan. It presents new opportunities for boosting trade and investment relations, making the economies more dynamic,



and fostering cultural exchanges and cooperation. With initiatives like CPEC, this modern-day trade route paints a picture of a connected world where nations are bound by the threads of business, culture, and shared prosperity. (Javed and Ismail 2021). Altogether, CPEC can be seen as a significant advance in reopening the Silk Road and using its ideas and actuality to overcome contemporary difficulties and seize opportunities in the twenty-first century. The project shows that infrastructure and economic connection, namely the Strategic partnership, can break down geographical barriers and move forward to a new level of integration that should continue the legacy of the Silk Route by bringing it to new heights. CPEC should be regarded as an essential development in the sense of the impulse of reopening the Silk Road and utilising the Silk Road and its reality in facing the difficulties and challenges of the modern world and grasping opportunity in the twenty-first century. The strategic partnership of the project demonstrates that infrastructure and interaction through the ballast of economic relations can overcome geographical barriers and begin a stage further. It is necessary to proceed to the beginnings of the Silk Route and bring it to various degrees of the new stage.

The over-arching goal of CPEC is development centred on boosting the economy and the connectivity matrix. Since its beginning in 2013 and up to the present, the initial investment that has been made in CPEC has amounted to over \$60 billion and encompasses many projects necessary for the two countries and the regional development of building infrastructure in the shape of roads, railway, ports and airports, generating and distribution of energy (Khan and Liu 2019). The communication infrastructure is instrumental in advancing Pakistan's economics as it seeks to fill essential voids that have previously opened major setbacks for the country. Extend the corridor's objective: Pakistan is to become a connecting link in regional integration and will act as a transportation artery for China to gain access to the Arabian Sea to reestablish the short and cheaper sea routes of the Middle East, Africa and other parts of the world. The energy sector is strategic and critical under CPEC; the primary objective is to initiate numerous energy projects to cater to Pakistan's chronic energy crisis. Similarly, through building energy production from coal, hydro, winds, and solar, CPEC aims to deliver a consistent energy supply to Pakistan that, in turn, will help to enhance the industrial growth and living standard of the citizens, as well as to support a continued economic growth rate (Ali et al. 2018). These other initiatives are believed to produce thousands of employment opportunities, which will help eradicate poverty and attain economic stability.

The geographical advantage that Pakistan occupies at the centre of Asia, Europe, and the Middle East is utilising the CPEC to achieve interconnectedness of the economy, which will boost the economic interrelation among the countries. This is expected to turn the 'Herald' initiative into a vital economic corridor for globalising Central Asia's otherwise geo-strategically significant landlocked regions through Gwadar port with a sense of revival of the ancient Silk Route spirit. This transformation entails economic upliftment in Pakistan and the South Asian region, along with other parties, to create a prosperous society (Nazir 2021). However, the energy sector of CPEC, which touches on the key importance of energy in Pakistan, partakes in bringing positive



change in industrial energy potentiality to boost the country's competitiveness. Through providing sustainable energy sources, the CPEC provides a favourable environment for industrialisation and further growth and development, which the Silk Route also encouraged with its activity of trade promotion (Hussain 2017). Therefore, CPEC envisions itself as a project that extends beyond being an economic corridor; it envisions itself as a project that marks the beginning of a new age of economic transformation and cross-continental cooperation reminiscent of the dawning of the age of the Silk Route. By linking economic cooperation with civilisation and academic links between the countries, CPEC is poised to transform the region's socio-economic future and result in a new age of shared economic destiny based on historical connectivity and relations (Niyangoda, Keppetipola and Bowatte 2021).

CPEC and Empowering Bilateral Ties. The relations bolstered through CPEC denote a complex relationship paradigm that is not confined and limited to solely economic elements. CPEC is a component of China's striving BRI scheme through which Beijing has consolidated and diversified its transportation networks, which has planted the seeds of establishing its global economic dominance. For Pakistan, strategic cooperation with China is the salvation to restart the economy's growth and improve the infrastructural conditions that meet the state's requirements. This credit stress is a sign of a geo-economic trend in international relations, in which the improvement of infrastructure assets and economic cooperation turn into diplomacy and an instrument of influence (Khan 2022). Moreover, the economic and societal connectivity through CPEC has enriched people-to-people relations, delineating better cross-cultural acquaintance and proximities among people of China and Pakistan. Museums, exhibitions, performances, concerts, education exchange, language courses, and cultural programs are building friendly ties. CPEC security measures include defence and security cooperation between Pakistan and China—a key pillar reiterating the assembling of security provisions that complement the Corridor Defense; it is a security-focused and not merely an economic relationship between the nations (Garlick 2018). The economic connectivity between China and Pakistan concerning CPEC has effects at the regional and international levels, showing that economic corridors can dramatically shape the new era of structural realignments in global politics. In recent years, the development of CPEC brought not only the prospect of economic development and integration but also a new round of bilateral entente reserved and more profound than before, which seems to define the region's strategic landscape in the coming decades (Khan 2021).

Regional Integration and Cooperation. The CPEC project, a remarkable and expansive endeavour within the BRI ambit, not only holds the potential to boost relations between states but also inspires hope for a future of improved international cooperation. Going beyond self-interest, profit, and power, CPEC aims to revive the spirit of the Silk Routes, centred on shared accessibility that binds all in a common destiny of mutual uplift. (Ur Rehman 2020). It was intended to bring a revolutionary change to the backbone of the economy of Pakistan and China, as well as the neighbouring states of the region, by encouraging unparalleled volumes of trade, investment, and infrastructure advancement. Through its corridor projects, information highways, communication



railways, and energy and oil pipelines are key projects aimed at enhancing the movement of people and goods from South Asia to Central to other parts of the world to spur the region for a new economic era (Rauf 2021). The desire to connect the old Silk Route countries through the CPEC is symptomatic of a vision that seeks to revive the ancient trade arteries of the continents. In the past, these routes were not mere transport arteries but avenues for exchanging goods, ideas, knowledge, and technology. In the past, these routes were not just transportation arteries but also conduits for exchanging goods, ideas, knowledge, and technology. CPEC, in its contemporary paradigm shift, seeks to replicate this role, strengthening the diplomatic relations of the nations it encompasses and fostering mutual cultural relationships among them. CPEC's role in improving regions by enhancing transport facilities and goods flow and ensuring FDI across countries is a testament to the interconnected global economy's potential for growth and development (Nisar et al. 2021).

Furthermore, cooperation and integration through CPEC and other BRI are more about building a shared future destination. This vision is economically self-serving but socially responsible since it seeks to uplift all the countries involved to eliminate the gap between the developing and the developed nations, thus financially empowering the participating countries. For example, the development of Gwadar Port in Pakistan contributes not only to the changed geopolitical position of Pakistan but also can be seen as a significant factor in changing the position of the Central Asian states, isolated geographically from the global seas and oceans from a peripheral position of the system of international relations. Likewise, the energy sector of CPEC has the potential to eliminate the power crisis in Pakistan and may have an engagement in exporting excess energy to other zones, thus ensuring energy sustainability and diplomacy (Ur Rehman 2020). The focus on reviving the links with the Silk Route countries likewise aligns with promoting peace, stability, and security. Various analysts define economic development as a significant means that leads to regional stability, and through the promotion of economic cooperation, which is realised through CPEC, political and military cooperation, which is undesirable in the given region, is curbed (Rasool and Ahmad 2021). Therefore, this economic corridor is not merely a physical or infrastructure connection between cities and towns but a development and diplomacy relations bridge that may convert adversaries into friends. It also stands as a testimony to the maxim that people must work together for their benefit if they want to live side by side in peace. It is necessary to underline that CPEC's goals, as the strategic vision of the development of the Silk Route countries, reveal the concept of advancing the integration process of cooperative development. This project vividly illustrates how policy and infrastructure determine diplomacy and cultural relations, leaving a powerful example of diplomatic relations in economic relations in today's development projects.

Modern Silk Route Infrastructure. The concept behind the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is nothing less than a dream to reinstate the lost glory of the ancient Silk Route to reconstruct the regained global framework of connectivity, economic cooperation and cultural ties across continents (Ibrar et al. 2019). These strategic actions are expected to facilitate regional



integration and create a climate of unity instead of competing with one another. While reviving these age-old trade corridors within a new paradigm, CPEC aims to weave a tapestry of interconnected nations, whereby each nation shall derive benefits in terms of improved bilateral trade, connectivity, infrastructure, and overall economic integration (Hussain 2017). This is why the building of CPEC as a complex of multifaceted projects has pledged to revive the Pakistani economy and spearhead the process of regional economic cooperation. The corridor aims to facilitate market access, improve trade and logistics, and catalyse economic integration between the adjacent areas. This initiative fits into the BRI framework, highlighting economic integration as the key to fostering and sustaining harmony and order. It mirrors the planned interconnectivity through projects like Gwadar port development and the cross-border energy pipelines that form the basis of a mutually beneficial story of regional development anchored on mutual economic gains (Ali 2022).

Moreover, CPEC represents one of the most significant shifts in geo-economic terms; it refers to the process of growth and prosperity by working together. By liberalising the energy sector, supporting industrial ties, and promoting infrastructural development, both the success and limitations of CPEC signify that a new paradigm of economic diplomacy is possible: that of win-win propositions and their reciprocity that underpins cooperative interstate relations. This economic interaction built through special connections and trade structures shows that it can greatly reduce regional tensions, making a cooperative instead of a competitive environment dominant. Concisely, it proves that through its strategic objectives based on CPEC, integration and cooperation in international relations marks a shift towards a new paradigm. What this corridor represents is not simply an infrastructural project but the ideal of integrated development seeking to reconfigure the geography of power (Kuszewska and Agnieszka 2021) CPEC dreams of a future of cooperation, stability, unity, and a commitment to interconnectivity. It embodies the spirit of a shared past through a new form of the Silk Route and intends to transform the region's landscape for shared prosperity and progress.

Tactically, Gwadar Port provides an advantageous position for China regarding rearranging the sea supply route to reduce the dependency on the traditional longer sea lanes through strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca. This direct access will bolster China's energetic strengthening with an impressive, adjoining, and expeditious trade corner in the same framework as BRI (Hussain 2020). Beyond the port operations for Pakistan, this development has ushered in a wave of other economic activities within different sectors working to augment industrial boosterism, boost the nation's tourism sector, and improve regional trade integration. Gwadar has developed sophisticated equipment for handling goods, warehousing, and transport to streamline its transportation system and connect it through a global supply chain. The planned Free Zone should promulgate Gwadar as an economic hub for regional and global players and international businesses and investments, encouraging the diversification of industries while creating new employment chances for the residents. This economic boost aligns with other community welfare-oriented development projects, as local development matches Gwadar's steps up as a commercial



city (Nazir 2021). Similarly, the plan of constructing the Gwadar deep seaport highlights its importance based on security aspects of sea power that would strengthen the Pakistan naval fleet and ensure its strategic depth in the Arabian Sea. The concept of the port in the current context goes beyond trading, as it forms a part of the overall realisation of the strategic interest in the nation's safety and stabilisation of the region (Rehman, Ashfaq, and Naeem 2022). As part of CPEC, Gwadar Port signifies a strategic change for Pakistan, joining the determent of trade, security, and investment. The site enshrines the objective and spirit of using geography to enhance people's living standards, like what the great ancient trail of the famed Silk Route signifies today, symbolising the linkages and interconnectivity today.

Economic and Social Dividends of CPEC Projects. The invaluable economic implications of CPEC extend beyond the immediate infrastructural surge to catalyse a high level of economic sustenance and regional integration. CPEC, through the twinning of capital and technology, has activated Pakistan's economic sectors, attracted foreign direct investment, and is highly expected to revive the country's economic landscape. The inception of infrastructure and energy projects through CPEC has had a multilayered effect on Pakistan's economy, industry, and development, leading to GDP growth. These projects' construction and operational phases create jobs, spur demand in related industries, and improve productivity by alleviating energy and infrastructure constraints. (Ali et al. 2018).

Pakistan's trade capability has tremendously improved by implementing improved and modernised infrastructure, transportation networks, and general port facilities. It has also reduced costs and transit times. CPEC can be an exemplary model to bring revolution by transforming Pakistan into a trade hub, rejoicing its geostrategic location to facilitate trade between China, Central Asia, the Middle East, and beyond (Siddiqui et al., 2023). Pakistan can potentially become the centre of attraction for SEZs under CPEC projects, taking advantage of its geological placement. The greatest of the benefits is likely to be foreign investment by proposing a flexible and safe environment with fiscal incentives, infrastructure readiness, and policy support. (Sheikh et al. 2019).

Most importantly, CPEC projects in manufacturing, construction, and energy have generated invaluable employment opportunities for the locals, which can reduce the rate of poverty and raise living standards. The surge of modern technologies and practices through CPEC projects has created the need for skill development programs and knowledge transfer. Training programs and collaborative initiatives associated with CPEC projects help uplift the workforce's skill set, which promotes overall growth. (Mukhtar et al. 2022). Under CPEC's influence, there is a wave of merging infrastructure and industrial development, with new economic centres emerging around project sites. This urbanisation inculcates improvements in social infrastructure, including education, healthcare, and housing, thereby promoting balanced regional development.



Stakeholders and Partnerships in CPEC

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), an integral part of the China Belt and Road initiative, encompasses a range of stakeholders and partnerships beyond just a bilateral initiative. This dense fabric of cooperation and collaboration extends beyond the Sino-Pakistani governments. It includes various financial institutions and private entrepreneurs, each contributing to the multifaceted goals and outcomes of CPEC.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as an important component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), naturally attracts several international and local partners. This cooperation is not limited to China-Pakistan bilateral relations but rather various Central Asian countries interested in the economic and strategic sharing of the route. Old states and other stakeholder countries like Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia see CPEC as a strategic avenue to enhance connectivity and regional integration. Their participation ranges from infrastructure development, such as road and rail connectivity extending the access road, to the creation of economic linkages within SEZs along CPEC corridors; the objectives of such local cooperation are to foster economic interdependence and mutual growth and position CPEC as a catalyst for wider regional prosperity.

As per the historic Silk Road, the countries in the middle of the CPEC ethos provide cultural and historical context and are important in economic and policy linkages. These countries, including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, etc., find in CPEC a way to modernise their ancient trade routes while integrating them into a modern economic network of connectivity. (Khetran and Khalid 2019). By rejoicing in their geographic and strategic position, these countries can increase trade, facilitate energy exchange, welcome tourism and cultural exchange, and exchange knowledge and ideas. They may also benefit from CPEC's infrastructure and cross-border coordination. Infrastructure development is crucial for a more integrated economic zone, providing a gateway to Europe, the Middle East, and beyond.

Multilateral institutions, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), World Bank and Asian Infrastructure Bank (AIIB), play an important role in providing financing and advisory support to CPEC projects. Their involvement provides other than relevant financial capacity and international knowledge and standards. These organisations contribute to various aspects of the CPEC, from infrastructure development to capacity building in the energy sector. They also provide technical assistance, in addition to their financial support, policy advice, and best practices in governance and environmental protection, increasing the quality and impact of all CPEC projects. (Xiaolong et al. 2021).

Private sector participation is vital in translating CPEC's strategic vision into economic reality. The private sector provides local and international investment, technology, and know-how to stimulate projects that range from infrastructure to technical hallmarks. The active participation of private players speeds up the project timeline and fosters innovation and competitiveness, which is essential for economic growth. Under CPEC, private sector participation such as



telecommunications, manufacturing, and services generates new and multiple opportunities to reduce the number of unemployment through providing sources for employment, promoting economic diversity and increasing productivity (Akash Khan Et Al. 2023).

Under CPEC, the private sector is important in infrastructure and broader economic development. Through direct investments, joint ventures, and public-private partnerships, they help build roads, ports, power plants, and industrial hubs that underpin the success of CPEC. This participation helps mobilise the necessary capital, know-how, and entrepreneurial efficiency for large-scale infrastructure projects that will boost economic growth, create jobs, and improve livelihoods throughout the region (Zhang, Wang, and Okafor 2022)

The public-private partnership (PPP) under CPEC is an example of financing partners that align government objectives with private sector development. The energy sectors carry this kind of management, where maximum investment and sustainable returns require shared risk-reward PPPs to enable the use of private investment and expertise and ensure that the industry is consistent with strategic public interest objectives. They are regarded as the main drivers of sustainable growth and prosperity, providing creative and new financing solutions and business models that drive business and encourage development.

Conclusion

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a great testament to the enduring partnership between China and Pakistan. This friendship has resulted in an economic partnership deeply rooted in their shared history and mutual aspirations for regional connectivity and prosperity. Many aspects of CPEC emphasise its role as a catalyst for economic transformation, articulating geopolitical integration, and a beacon for future development efforts. Through its extensive infrastructure about infrastructure, energy and technology, CPEC aims not only to modernise Pakistan's economic environment but also to take advantage of Pakistan's fragile geography. CPEC aims to enhance connectivity between the country and neighbouring regions, facilitate and provide extensive trade routes beyond its borders, and boost economic growth and confidence in Central and South Asian countries. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is a well-planned and well-instigated effort that embodies two countries' aspirations committed to shared prosperity and regional integration. As CPEC gains more power, it is committed to transforming Pakistan's economy and to forge stronger ties of cooperation and understanding across the region. The project's success will depend on continued and consistent collaboration, transparent governance and the financial well-being and security of all stakeholders, including regional and extra-regional players. Rooted in the connectivity heritage of the ancient Silk Road and with an eye towards the future, CPEC is poised to become a cornerstone of regional development and a model for international cooperation in the 21st century.



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