



EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF THE CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC): A GATEWAY TO REGIONAL CONNECTIVITY AND INTEGRATION WITHIN THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO)

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Abstract

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was founded as the "Shanghai Five" in 1996, and since becoming the SCO in 2001, it has made significant progress in a number of fields, especially in the areas of security and the economy. At the 17th Astana summit, Pakistan's accession to the SCO has further highlighted the strategic significance of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The aim of this study is to examine the potential features of the CPEC regional connectivity between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, as well as its numerous positive outcomes for its members. This research is not only a review of the literature, but also an in-depth understanding of the primary sources. Primary data has been gathered while using a qualitative research methodology. Further, a semi-structured interview approach is used in which 20 participants have been interviewed. The study findings suggest that the CPEC is an exceptional economic corridor that sets it apart from other corridors in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), providing promising prospects for SCO member states in terms of regional connectivity, enhanced economic cooperation, and energy corridor development in the future.



1. Introduction and Background of the Study

The "Shanghai Five" organization, formerly known as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), was founded in 1996. It evolved to become the SCO in 2001 and has achieved significant advancements ever since, particularly in the fields of security and economics (Di Placido, 2007). Although it is a relatively new organization and has a 22-year track record of effective policies as well as significant milestones. On a regional level, it has made outstanding progress in fostering economic cooperation and upholding stability. Additionally, it has developed growing partnerships with other organizations on a global level. On the other hand, the SCO was referred by the Western and American academic community as an "Eastern NATO" and a security agency created to oppose US hegemony in the region. Hasnat and Zamurrad (2016), Considering this, the SCO avoids hostilities and offers the region a useful forum. Its principal objective is to struggle against the "three evils" of terrorism, separatism, and extremism and to advance a climate of peace and security to stop the growth of these ideologies (Cabestan, 2013).

On June 9, 2017, India and Pakistan became members of the SCO during the 17th meeting of the Council of Heads of State. This marked as the first expansion of the SCO, since its establishment in 2001 and ushered into a new era for the organization (Qadir & Rehman, 2016). This enlargement will further heighten the organization's international reputation and will foster regional security cooperation for promoting regional economic prosperity in Eurasia (Xing, 2017). With India and Pakistan comprised, the SCO accounts for 43% of the world population (see Niblock, 2018), and 24% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), or over US\$15 trillion (Mudiam, 2018). Academic circles in Pakistan have hailed Pakistan membership into the organization as an important milestone and have predicted that the CPEC and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) will open an immense number of opportunities across many sectors.

In 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Pakistan and both nations agreed on multibillion-dollar infrastructure projects, including highways, railways, energy power plants, and others, under the CPEC (Qian, 2016). CPEC, flagship project of China's BRI, start from Kashgar in China's Xinjiang province to the Gwadar seaport in Balochistan province. This will bring unprecedented growth and economic benefits to Pakistan development and the region prosperity. Chinese \$64 billion investment to CPEC initially will foster new economic opportunities which may enhance interconnectivity, promote stability, and prosperity in the region as argued by McCartney (2021). Xi Jinping's BRI is supported by all member countries of the SCO. This enhances the multilateral projects of BRI, with all SCO member states and observer states participating in its six economic corridors and having agreements with China (Rab & Zhilong, 2019). Under the umbrella of China's BRI, most infrastructure projects of roads and railway networks are taking the final stage and completing in a speedway within member states. On the other hand, CPEC role as a junction between Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road intensified its geostrategic location for BRI. Pakistan supported stance on BRI and CPEC potential role in the



economic advancement agendas of the SCO cemented its position in accelerating regional connectivity and comprehensive economic integration.

There is an extensive amount of literature on the SCO that focuses on its institutional development, expansion, member state cooperation in security and economic areas, and its successful regional initiatives (see Aris & Snetkov, 2013; Wallace, 2014; Yuan, 2010; Zhuangzhi, 2004; Aris, 2009; Haas, 2007; Aris, 2016). In addition to these studies, a number of others (Saif-ur-Rehman, 2013; Zeb, 2006; Khan 2013; Nizamani, 2018) looked at Pakistan position as an observer state and its aspiration to become a permanent member of the SCO. Although there has been a lot of research done on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), there is not a single study that can analyse the significance of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor's (CPEC) strategic position for the SCO member states using a thorough semi-structured interview approach. Examining the CPEC potential contribution to regional connectivity and its effects on the SCO member states is the primary goal of this paper.

2. Literature Review

In comparison to other organisations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was established in 1996 under the name "Shanghai Five". The four Central Asian countries were in a phase of post-independence recovery when it was established, and there were conflicts between the neighbours on boundaries, water resources, and cross-border ethnic groups. The economies of China and Russia were also recovering (Huasheng, 2004). Following the Shanghai Five transformation into the SCO in 2001, the organisation quickly demonstrated mutual successes in a number of areas, particularly in the security and economic sectors. Therefore, SCO becomes an important study in Chinese and Russian academic circles. The huge research conducted in Chinese literature by Chinese scholars and think tanks on the SCO such as China's role in the SCO development, China Russia relationship, and SCO, Chinese interest in Central Asia, etc. However, compared to the Chinese and Russian literature, the amount of European and American research on the SCO and its related studies is quite minimal. In this case, the researcher concentrated on the English-language SCO publications. Most Western and American academics regard the SCO severely and refer to it as a "Eastern NATO" in comparison to Chinese and Russian academics (De Haas, 2008). As a result of these academic perceptions that the SCO has a strong anti-Western orientation and has to contend with Europe and America in the Eurasian region, Western and American academic circles have conducted in-depth analyses of the growth, history, structure, and future course of this Organization.

Stephen Aris (2011), a European scholar, has published extensive research on it. He provides a comprehensive overview of the SCO history, development, and prospects, as well as the differing perspectives of its member states on security, economics, and regional cooperation. In his book "Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization" Stephen uses regionalism theory to examine the SCO potential for development and manage differences among member



states. The scholar argues that it offers a new framework for regional cooperation in Central Asia (see Aris, 2011). He has also published papers on the Sino-Russian relations, efforts to combat the “three evils”, comparison to ASEAN, and its relationship with the West. Ziegler, (2013) a professor of Political Science and director of the Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Improving World Order at the University of Louisville, has published a paper on “Central Asia, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and American Foreign Policy: From Indifference to Engagement”. He examines America’s policies in Central Asia over the past 20 years and the impact of the SCO on US interests in the face of increasing influence from China and Russia.

Sun Zhuangzhi, a Chinese scholar, director of the Central Asian Department at the Institute for East European, Russian, and Central Asian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and Secretary-General at the Center for Shanghai Cooperation Organization Studies, has published numerous works on the SCO and the Central Asian region. In “New and Old Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Sino-Central Asian Relations”, he argues that cooperation between China and Central Asian states within the SCO framework promotes regional economic integration and addresses common security and developmental challenges (Zhuangzhi, 2004). Further, Maj Jefferson E. Turner, an American scholar, has devoted considerable time to analyzing the development of the SCO in his several works. In his work "What is Driving India's and Pakistan's Interest in Joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization?" he considered the entry of Pakistan and India as a major step in the organization which accommodates each of the member states interests and position of the SCO to further support a multi-polar world. He further analyzed that SCO would provide opportunities for Pakistan the best channel to revisit its 1990s objectives and goals in Central Asia and improve its relationship with Russia (Turner, 2005).

The mainstream view in Pakistani academic circles is that Pakistan’s full membership in the SCO is a major event in its foreign policy. Many leading experts, scholars, and research institutes support this view and are optimistic about the opportunities that lie ahead for Pakistan. Dr. Zahid Ali Khan, a well-known Pakistani scholar has written extensively on the Pak-Sino relationship and Pakistan membership in this Organization. He published a research article titled “Pakistan and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)”, in which he discussed the importance of the SCO for Pakistan, including its focus on political, economic, security cooperation among its member states and neighboring countries. He also highlighted future opportunities for Pakistan in security and economic sectors within the SCO framework (Khan, 2013). Nizamani, (2018) in his work “The China Pakistan Economic Corridor and Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Implications for South Asia's Strategic Stability,” analyzed the significance of the CPEC in the SCO. He concluded that the inclusion of Pakistan and India in the SCO and the completion of CPEC would not only boost country domestic economy, but also have a positive impact on strategic stability in South Asia and Central Asia regions.



The book “SCO's Role in Regional Stability Prospects of its Expansion” was published by the Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), and Zafar Nawaz Jaspal, a prominent professor at Quaid-e-Azam University, contributed his work “Expanding SCO for Regional Stability: Pakistani Perspective,” which mentioned that the inclusion of Pakistan and India would make it one of the most important regional organizations, as it would bring together four of the world most populous as well as nuclear-armed nations such as: Russia, China, India, and Pakistan. According to Jaspal (2013), this would balance the interests of these states, leading to a positive impact on regional stability. Another contributor Dr. Saif-ur-Rehman explained that Pakistan's perspective towards SCO in detail in his work and stated that Pakistan’s interests in joining is the right direction from his foreign policy perspective. He further argues that the country’s future opportunities in security, economic, and energy sectors depend on full membership in the organization. He also recommends that under this platform the country must realign its priorities, improve relations with Russia, set new goals, and shake off cold war mistrust. Transforming Pakistan-China relations into a strategic partnership through strategic cooperation, expanding social and cultural exchanges, deepening defense cooperation, and promoting economic ties is important in the future. According to him, Pakistan can be a center for promoting trade and energy because it provides a viable link between the SCO member states and South Asia in the future. The literature discussed above sheds light on the CPEC and the SCO. In order to understand the potential of the regional connectivity and the advantages, additional empirical research is needed. This study attempts to fill this gap in the body of literature, and to achieve this, the following research methodology is used.

3. Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used in this paper. This approach offers participants insights and experiences, which are not possible with other approaches (Kothari, 2004). As a facilitator, the qualitative technique plays an important role in the dissemination of results (Merriam, 2002). Additionally, this approach demonstrates an essential role in clearly communicating the research findings. In addition to using both primary and secondary data in this study, the qualitative social research method also includes document analysis and in-depth interviews.

4 Data Collection and Sampling

This paper employed a qualitative interview approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews to gather primary data. A total of 20 interviews were conducted with field analysts, experts, scholars, officials, and politicians from Pakistan and China to obtain reliable and credible information. The questions posed during the interviews were extensive to ensure the authenticity, validity, and usefulness of the results obtained. Individuals from institutions, academic fields, and research centers in both countries were targeted. The primary objective was to collect impartial data and attain superior research findings. This study has analyzed official documents obtained from the SCO's website, which include joint declarations, agreements, communiqués, press releases, and annual summit reports. By comparing the goals stated in these documents with the viewpoints expressed by the interviewees, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the CPEC’s



potential role in regional connectivity, economic integration, and energy corridor for SCO member states. The data gathered through this study is pragmatic and supports the findings presented.

Table 1. Demographic information of interviewed participants

S. No	Qualification	Designation	Experience	Institute
1	M.Phil.	Associate Researcher	7 years	Institute of strategic studies Islamabad
2	M.Phil.	Associate Researcher	8 Years	Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad
3	MS	Official	15 years	Ministry of Foreign Affairs Islamabad
4	M.Phil.	Secretary	28 years	Interprovincial coordination secretariat Balochistan
5	PhD	Associate Professor	17 years	Dept. of I.R International Islamic University Islamabad
6	PhD	Associate Professor	25 years	Dept. of I.R Quaid-i-Azam University Islamabad
7	M.Phil.	Assistant Professor	6 years	Dept. of I,R BUITAMS, Quetta Balochistan
8	PhD	Associate Professor	16 years	Dept. of Pol-science University of Balochistan Quetta
9	PhD	Dean/Associate Professor	16 years	Social Sciences, LUAMS Uthal Balochistan
10	PhD	Associate Professor	15 years	Dept. of I.R University of Karachi
11	PhD	Associate Professor	20 years	Dept. of I.R University of Karachi
12	PhD	Chairman	28 years	Gwadar Port Authority
13	-----	Ex-Governor and Federal Minister of Pakistan	40 years	Ministry of State & Frontier Region Pakistan



14	PhD	Deputy Secretary-General	25 years	OBOR Center of Chinese Academy of social science Beijing
15	PhD	Executive Director	18 years	Research Centre of SCO, CASS Beijing
16	M.Phil	Deputy Secretary	12 years	Balochistan Civil Services, Quetta
17	L.L. B	Magistrate	11 years	Balochistan Judiciary department
18	PhD	Associate Professor	12 years	Social Sciences, LUAMS Uthal Balochistan
19	PhD	HoD/Associate Professor	18 years	Dept. of International Relation University of Balochistan Quetta
20	M.Phil	Assistant Professor	12 years	Dept. of Pol-science University of Balochistan Quetta

This demographic table provides information about 20 participants, including their highest qualification (M.Phil or Ph.D.), current designation, years of experience, and the institute they are associated with. The researcher reached out to official representatives and scholars who lead as representatives of Pakistan in the SCO. Communication was made through emails and phone calls using numbers obtained from official websites.

4. Result and Discussion

It is noteworthy to mention that the data collected from the interviewees portrays a consistent and repetitive pattern of answers and opinions. This reveals that there is a widespread belief among observers that the CPEC has the potential to generate abundant and beneficial outcomes in the context of regional connectivity and integration for SCO in the imminent future. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) potential to become a hub for energy transit, the security issues that may arise from the corridor's development, regional connectivity and integration for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) were the main themes of this study. They are also incorporated into the semi-structured interview questions that were posed to the respondents.

4.1. Regional Connectivity and Integration for SCO

Findings of the study describes that the CPEC has the potential to promote regional connectivity and integration into a great extent, as the country adjoins borders and intersects with the member of states such as, China, India, Afghanistan, and Iran. From the participants of the study further it revealed that the country's importance as well as unique geo-strategic location provide a bridge to



Central Asia, South Asia, and Middle East regions through the Arabian Sea. As a member State of the SCO, Pakistan holds a crucial position in the region due to its strategically and economically located at the crossroads of three regions. The study demonstrates that inclusive economic cooperation within the SCO is appealing to Pakistan, as this comprehensive cooperation under the organizational banner would catalyze the CPEC. Thus, the CPEC can be considered an optimal project for realizing the SCO's policy of regional economic connectivity and integration. The Dostain Jamaldini, the chairman of the Gwadar Port Authority, sees the CPEC as a bridge that covers the Arabian Sea and connects the SCO member states to South Asia and the Indian Ocean. In his opinion, Pakistan accession to the SCO is a wise move given the current state of regional affairs because it may significantly improve economic connectivity in the area. He emphasizes the strategic importance of the seaport location at Gwadar, which is near the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, two main routes for the transportation of a sizeable amount of the world's oil. A significant amount of the transportation of oil around the world travels along these waterways, which are vital routes. This connectivity through CPEC has the potential to yield bountiful benefits for the SCO in the coming future. The situation was discussed by the interviewees in the following comments:

As SCO's regional economic connectivity expansion, Here CPEC performs the role of the bridge. It connects SCO member states to South Asia and the Indian Ocean via The Arabian Sea. Pakistan needs to access all SCO members, and this mutual understanding and interests would mutually be beneficial in economic and infrastructure development. Pakistan's entry into the SCO came in a very important era, where Islamabad could be a leading member country for its crucial role in the regional economic connectivity" (Jamaldini, 2018).

He further stated that the "geo-strategic location of Gwadar could be significant for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Gwadar deep seaport is situated geo-strategically close to the Persian Gulf and next to the Strait of Hormuz, whereby approximately 40% of the world oil transmits. During an interview with a representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan in Islamabad, a representative mentioned that the CPEC has the potential to act as a connecting link for member states of the SCO. The official expressed their belief that, owing to its strategic geographical position, the CPEC could play a crucial role in promoting regional development. In the following response, he articulated in detail. "CPEC is the 6th corridor of BRI which is connecting Gwadar deep seaport a coastal city of Balochistan, Pakistan to Kashgar city in the western part of China. In this sense, this corridor could play the role of a bridge for SCO member states which is now the largest organization regarding population and area after the UNO. This corridor could have a huge impact on the region's development due to its geostrategic location".



The opinion expressed by the above participants is supported by a senior research analyst, Zeb (2006), who quoted former President of Pakistan General Pervez Musharraf speech in his research paper titled “Pakistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization” that “Pakistan could serve as a trade-economic corridor in the SCO territory and would uphold the organization’s charter”. The participants’ remarks about CPEC were highly positive, indicating that it can help to increase economic connectivity in the region. The SCO member states are especially eager to enhance connectivity through the economic corridor. This will have a direct positive impact on the region’s economic development that enhances trade capacity, reduces the trade deficit, support the growth of the industrial sector and infrastructure, ultimately leading to overall economic growth.

It is worth mentioning that CPEC is not only a framework of regional connectivity but also its regional goals reflecting the SCO charter that is based on conceptualizing shared benefits. Thus, CPEC could flow from the prerogative of 'development for all' and rely on goals with regional connectivity in future. The front page of the CPEC’s official website mentions, "The \$62 billion worth corridor is a gateway for trade, development, and growth with a promise of sustainability and inclusiveness. CPEC is a journey towards economic regionalization in the globalized world and a solidifying role for the federation of Pakistan. It founded peace, development, and a win-win model for all". At present, SCO is evolving to draw a comprehensive framework for the economic advancement of the entire region based on cooperation. At the 2015 SCO Council of Heads of Government Summit in Zhengzhou, China, the emphasis was on regional economic development through cooperation, a crucial aspect of the CPEC (Zhengzhou Summit, 2015). Furthermore, in 2014, at the SCO’s Dushanbe Summit Declaration, the head of member countries stated that “the top priority of the SCO is to facilitate favorable environments through strengthening the economic and trade events, improvements of technology and industrial sector and setup of the transport and logistics development among the SCO member countries” (Dushanbe Declaration, 2014). The statement suggests that the SCO places a high priority on improving economic and trade relations between its member countries. This includes promoting technological advancements and growth in the industrial sector, as well as the development of transportation and logistics infrastructure. The SCO’s focus on these areas indicates the strategic significance of the CPEC within the organization. The CPEC, which is a key component of the BRI, involves the construction of infrastructure and transportation networks linking China and Pakistan. The SCO’s prioritization of economic and trade development aligns with the goals of the CPEC, making it an important factor in the SCO’s overall strategy.

Dost Muhammad Barrech, an associate researcher at the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad, supported the development of Pakistan’s economy through the economic corridor with China, as Pakistan is a major stakeholder. According to him

It has better opportunities to improve its GDP, which leads to improvement in industrialization. Pakistan through CPEC would link with Eurasia, Europe, Russia, China,



India, and the Central Asian States under the banner of SCO. China, India, and Russia are economic giants, linked with these economic powers, of course, the regional stakeholders could be beneficiaries in the paradigm of the economy. The whole of this credit goes to the SCO which is one of the influential regional organizations.

The statement suggests that the CPEC can contribute to the improvement of the country GDP and industrialization by linking it with major economic powers such as China, India, Russia, and other Central Asian states under the SCO. The significance of CPEC for the SCO lies in its ability to connect its member states, due to Pakistan strategic location, bordering Iran in West Asia, Afghanistan in South and Central Asia, India in South Asia, China in East Asia, and Tajikistan separated by the narrow Wakhan Corridor. This advantageous position allows CPEC to capitalize on numerous opportunities for regional connectivity, integration, economic growth, and trade, as depicted in the map of the SCO below.



This map shows the importance of the CPEC as a trade and transport route within the SCO region, connecting China with the rest of the region through Pakistan and potentially serving as a gateway to the Arabian Sea and the wider Indo-Pacific region. Pakistan membership in the SCO emphasizes the strategic significance of the CPEC. The CPEC intersects with BRI, Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Pakistani scholars view the CPEC as a game-changer in South Asia. It connects all SCO member states to the Arabian Sea, providing the quickest route for energy imports and exports between South Asia and Gulf countries. This is expected to attract additional participation from other SCO member states, thus expanding the CPEC network and boosting the economic growth of the SCO.



Table 2: Distances between Central Asian cities and Gwadar Port

Regional Cities	Ashgabat	Astana	Bishkek	Dushanbe	Kabul	Tashkent
Gwadar Port	2,400 Km	4,500 Km	3,300 Km	2,200 Km	1,600 km	2,700 Km

Source: USAID Trade Project, p. 5. http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00K244.pdf

The table above shows the distances between major cities in Central Asia and the Gwadar deep seaport in Balochistan province of Pakistan. Gwadar Port is located relatively close to several regional cities, with distances ranging from 1,600 km (Kabul) to 4,500 km (Astana). This proximity highlights the strategic importance of the port for the SCO as it provides a gateway to the Arabian Sea for these SCO's landlocked member states. The closer the distance, the easier and quicker the transportation of goods and services between the cities and the port, potentially reducing costs and improving connectivity. The SCO member countries emphasized the significance of regional economic cooperation in the 'Qingdao Declaration' by emphasizing the promotion of transportation, improvement of transit, expansion of rail, road networks, and upgrading of international transport routes. They also highlighted the need to implement the intergovernmental agreement on facilitating international road transportation from the 2014 Summit (Qingdao Declaration, 2018). This highlights the significance of the CPEC as part of their cooperation efforts in regional integration.

Table 3: Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member Countries

Member State	Population, (2020, millions)	World ranks in the population	GDP (current US\$) (2020)	GDP growth (2020, annual %)	Economy ranks in the world
China	1,402.11	1 st	14.72 trillion	2.348	2 nd
Russia	144.10	9 th	1.48 trillion	-2.951	12 th
India	1,380.00	2 nd	2.66 trillion	-7.252	6 th
Pakistan	220.89	5 th	262.61 billion	-0.935	48 th
Kazakhstan	18.75	64 th	171.08 billion	-2.5	55 th
Kyrgyz Republic	6.59	111 th	7.74 billion	-8.617	148 th
Tajikistan	9.54	95 th	8.19 billion	4.5	149 th
Uzbekistan	34.23	42 nd	59.93 billion	1.715	75 th

Source: Data compiled from World Bank; source available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/country>



Above table shows data on the population, GDP, and economic growth of the member states of the SCO. The data highlights the significant economic disparities among the member states including China and India having the largest populations and largest economies, while on the other hand the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan with much smaller populations and economies. Despite these differences, all the countries can benefit from the potential for regional integration and increased people-to-people contact through the CPEC, which could lead to increased trade and investment opportunities and improved relationships among the member states. Mr. Pasand Khan Buladai, the Secretary Inter Province Coordination Balochistan (at the time of interview) has expressed the same situation in the following comments that “SCO in one way or another way inter-connected through silk road in many different modes like communication, people to people contact, and trade purpose. CPEC can boost this aspect through the border openness and movement of the people”.

According to Khetrans and Khalid (2019), the CPEC could serve as a bridge for Central Asian countries that are landlocked to access the Indian Ocean. Based to the authors, the CPEC can act as an essential link between the two regions, giving SCO member nations important economic and strategic advantages. According to Professor Dr. Xu Wen Hong, Senior Researcher and Deputy Secretary-General at the One Belt One Road Centre of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, CPEC is open to all regional countries, and this economic corridor will be more active and alive in the future. It is not limited to Pakistan and China only. More contributions and opportunities for countries will result from it. Gen. Abdul Qadir Baloch, a former federal minister and the former governor of Balochistan, offers his opinion. "It is a forum [SCO] for achieving transit facilities and economic agreements [CPEC comes as a facilitator]" He further stated, "The success of CPEC is now a major goal for Pakistan in the future". Similarly, Zafar Nawaz Jaspal states that “[W]e are part of China's BRI, through CPEC we have access to China, Xinjiang province, and further towards Central Asia and Afghanistan. So, in simple meaning, CPEC is a framework of regional connectivity”.

4.2. Powering the Future: The Role of Energy Transit Hubs

Over the past few years, the SCO has significantly broadened its energy policies, recognizing the crucial role of the energy sector in driving economic development. With member countries rich in energy resources, the SCO has emerged as one of the largest energy organizations globally. Notably, the SCO has established an "Energy Club" platform, enabling the formulation of a uniform policy in the energy sector.



Table 4: Shanghai Cooperation Organization Member States' Total Primary Energy Consumption

SCO Member States	Total Primary Energy Consumption (2016)	World Rank (2016)
China	139.198 quadrillion Btu	1 st
Russia	31.485 quadrillion Btu	3 rd
India	29.038 quadrillion Btu	4 th
Pakistan	3.115 quadrillion Btu	33 rd
Kazakhstan	3.472 quadrillion Btu	30 th
Uzbekistan	1.764 quadrillion Btu	43 rd
Tajikistan	0.217 quadrillion Btu	102
Kyrgyzstan	0.23 quadrillion Btu	100

Source: compiled from U.S Energy Information Administration, EIA, <https://www.eia.gov>

Table 4 shows the member states of the SCO's total primary energy consumption in 2016 along with their global rankings. The top three energy-consuming countries worldwide are China, Russia, and India, with Pakistan coming in at number 33. The table shows both the potential for energy trade within the SCO and the large energy usage of its member countries. China, India, and Pakistan may reduce their energy shortfalls by tapping into the energy reserves of Russia, Central Asia, West Asia, and the Middle East. Energy exchange between SCO member states can be facilitated by CPEC, which offers both water and land routes. A Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs official suggests that CPEC could become a transit hub for SCO states to expand north-south. He expressed this sentiment in the following statement: "CPEC could become a transit hub for SCO states. If you see that SCO has east-west expansion and it needs north-south expansion". Hedayat Ullah, a lecturer at the International Relations department, BUIITEMS, Quetta, shared the same opinion, "CPEC is not just a road, but it is going to connect the regions in the future. It could cover energy needs through the energy-rich member states like Russia, Iran [observer state], and the Central Asian States via energy corridor [CPEC] in the future. It will be the shortest and safest pathway for SCO. CPEC could connect the SCO from the North-South corridor in the future".

Table 5: Central Asian State's Energy Reserves

Central Asian Republics	Electricity exports	Oil reserves (proven)	Natural Gas reserves	Natural Gas exports
Kazakhstan	4.9 billion kWh	9 billion bbl	1.8 trillion cum	7 billion
Kyrgyzstan	6.4 billion kWh	NA	NA	NA
Uzbekistan	6.8 billion kWh	594 million bbl	1.87 trillion cum	12.5 billion cum
Tajikistan	4.5 billion kWh	NA	NA	NA
Turkmenistan	NA	600 million bbl	265 trillion cubic feet	1.3 trillion cubic feet



Sources: Compiled with data from the CIA World Factbook 2007, U.S. Federal Research Division, US energy information administration.

Despite not having direct access to the sea, the Central Asian Republics (CARs) are recognised as the region with the most abundant energy resources in the world. Their main source of foreign exchange, as seen in Table 2, comes from the export of energy. It is important to note that the CPEC may provide member states of the SCO in CARs with an alternative way of importing energy into the South Asian region. Furthermore, by increasing its energy export potential with these rich energy states, Pakistan stands to benefit significantly. Dostain Jamaladini argued the same opinion that "Gwadar deep seaport's geo-strategic location at the junction of the busiest oil trade route in the world is supreme significant not for the country but also region countries because it is connecting three regions South Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia".

4.3. Navigating Complex Security and Political Challenges in the Region

Afghanistan security situation has been a matter of concern among majority of the scholars, who believe that the country is breeding ground for terrorism has direct and serious implications for the CPEC. The withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan, without a permanent peace agreement and intra-Afghan dialogue has the potential to push Afghanistan into a civil war. This could lead to a serious economic and security crisis for Pakistan. Civil war in Afghanistan could not only have a significant influence on its borders but also have far-reaching effects on the entire region. Pakistan, Afghanistan's close neighbour, is especially prone to the conflict knock-on consequences. In addition to the security situation, the operation of Gwadar Port, a crucial element of CPEC, could be badly impacted by the expulsion of foreign workforce. Dr. Naeem, an associate professor in the department of international relations at the University of Karachi, asserts that "Afghanistan's peace is vital for CPEC because Pakistan is already greatly impacted by the Afghan War and maintaining Pak-Afghan border, which is the longest border. Terrorism across borders is undoubtedly difficult for CPEC.

One of the primary challenges facing the Gwadar port is security. The port is strategically located, making it an attractive target for various militant groups. Any disruption to the Port operations would have a significant impact on the economic corridor and in turn to the Pakistan economy. This security dilemma becomes more difficult by the escalating insurgency in Afghanistan as well as outside forces supporting and funding militant groups in Pakistan (Abid, & Ashfaq, 2015). Professor Xu Wen Hong observed that the "fight against terrorism is now a common goal of all states in the region" as a senior researcher and deputy secretary general at the One Belt One Road Centre of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences mentioned his ideas. Pakistan has taken up this matter with its neighbours to offset this menace and has asked for their assistance in putting an end to the insurgency.



Nevertheless, Indian skepticism towards Chinese BRI has created challenges in the region. New Delhi is the only neighbor that has many concerns about BRI and CPEC. Indian stakeholders argue that China BRI is restricting its influence in South Asia and that the motives behind the initiative are not purely economic but also geostrategic (Blah, 2018). Indeed, India considers both China and Pakistan to be the main rival countries in the region particularly in South Asia. Jinfeng the Executive Director at the Research Center of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, CASS, Beijing, notes that "India believes that this will weaken the traditional influence of India in South Asia". Further, India has always been criticizing CPEC and claiming that it uses the routes of Gilgit-Baltistan that connects the country to China which New Delhi considers to be a conflict zone in Kashmir (Ghiasi, & Zhou, 2017). Additionally, India has accused China of violating international law by allowing economic activities in disputed territories. According to Prof. Jinfeng, "India believes that the BRI is a counter strategy against her policies [Project Mausam and Spice Route] in the Indian Ocean". Thus, Afghanistan security situation and Indian skepticism towards China BRI have created significant challenges for the implementation of CPEC. Given the impacts of Afghanistan security instability on regional security, the success of CPEC hinges on peace in that nation. Indian worries about BRI and CPEC have made situations more difficult because it accuses China of breaking international law and undermining its long-standing influence in the region.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the findings of the interviews, and available literature on the subject, the establishment of regional connectivity through the CPEC will depend greatly on Pakistan participation in the SCO. CPEC is not only advantageous for Pakistan and China; it also has enormous potential for the entire region. The findings suggested that CPEC is a key BRI corridor that, by enabling the Arabian Sea, may improve regional financial links and expand energy transit routes. By offering the fastest and safest route because of its distinctive geographical qualities, the results further demonstrated the significance of CPEC for the SCO member nations. The results also showed that the CPEC has the potential for opening significant energy trade routes for future oil and gas pipeline projects in the energy-rich landlocked SCO states. By importing natural resources from the rest of the globe, they could boost their national economies and take the lead on the global market. As a whole, the results indicated that through fostering inter-personal interactions, boosting economic prosperity, and developing infrastructure, this economic corridor may be a game-changer in the region. In addition, the findings of the interviewees further revealed that regional connectivity through CPEC could boost the regional economies of the member states of the organization which is the main agenda of the SCO. The participants also predicted that CPEC has the potential to attract other member states of the SCO to enlarge the players of economic corridors.

Furthermore, to the conclusions of the interviews, the participants also expressed grave concern over Afghanistan security situation, which they saw as a significant obstacle to the CPEC. Findings



indicate that Afghanistan's stability is crucial to the success of the CPEC because it shares its longest border with China, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in addition to Pakistan. In the end, regional connection and economic integration require peace. Results showed that the region terrorism, especially in Pakistan, increased as a result of the US and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan. According to this study, separatist uprisings would likely pose a problem for CPEC in the future. A terrorist haven in Afghanistan would raise questions about the CPEC. Based to the interviewees, this economic corridor has faced difficulties as a result of Indian skepticism about Chinese BRI and CPEC.

In conclusion, the study emphasised how this promising economic corridor has a significant ability to alter the economic landscape of the entire region. CPEC has the potential to transform the region by enabling regional economic connectivity for all SCO members. However, beneath the guise of collaborative efforts, it is important to have faith in the CPEC's long-term success as it would promote peace and stability in the entire area by improving connectivity and collaboration.



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Interviews

Additionally, this paper is based on interviews that the researcher had while conducting fieldwork in Pakistan and Balochistan for his doctoral dissertation. The interviews were all recorded. The following list includes the interviewees' names and descriptions as of the time of the interview.

Dostain Jamaladini, Chairman, Gwader Port Authority (GPA), Pakistan. Interview conducted on 12 February, 2018 (on tape in Urdu)

Interview with senior official, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamabad on 29 January, 2018 (on tape in English)

Dost Muhammad Barrech, an associate researcher at the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad. Interview conducted 20 March, 2018 (on tape in English)

Interview with former Governor of Balochistan and Ex-federal Minister of Ministry of State & Frontier Region, Pakistan on 25 March 2018. (on tape on English)

Pasand Khan Secretary, Inter Province Coordination, Secretariat, Balochistan. Interview conducted on 15 February, 2018 (on tape in urdu)

Professor Dr. Xu Wen Hong, Senior Researcher and Deputy Secretary-General at One Belt One Road Center of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing. Interview conducted on 04 June 2018 (on tape in English)

Dr. Zafar Nawaz Jaspal Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad. Interview conducted on 18 January 2018 (on tape in English)

Hedayat Ullah, a lecturer at the International Relations department, BUIITEMS, Quetta. Interview conducted on 10 February 2018 (on tape in urdu)

Dr. Naeem, an Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations at the University of Karachi. Interview conducted on 20 February 2018 (on tape in urdu)

Prof. Dr. Jinfeng, the Executive Director at the Research Center of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, CASS, Beijing. Interview conducted on 04 June 2018 (on tape in English)