



Examining the Odyssey of China Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

The relations between Pakistan and China have experienced a deep mutation, shaping global geopolitics and bearing significant intricacies in the South Asian region. Since the birth, these two countries have signed several accords marked by various cooperations, contracts, and strategic agreements. Nevertheless, the second decade of the twenty-first century took a transformative turn with the inception of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This project evolved economic growth in Pakistan and triggered a revolution in the international and regional dynamics of the country. This project has shaped the geopolitics of world powers, and regional influences have grown, which has divided world order into regional order is the main focus of this research's findings. However, this proposed examination aims to investigate the historical evolution of China and Pakistan relations from a historical perspective as a result of CPEC as its central outcome. The study has applied literature review methodology, collecting secondary data and analyzing available literature from reputable journals, including current published data in different newspapers. Through the investigation, the findings of the study explain the far-reaching consequences of this vital project on international and domestic relations, shedding light on emerging discourses in modern diplomacy and geopolitics. Yet, the analysis and discussions highlight the unseen, untold, and unexplored outcomes and narratives for the researchers and foreign policy experts. Consequently, this study recommends revisiting the tensions within the CPEC for a solution in Pakistan. Lastly, this scholarly discourse would open new avenues for the scholars to uncover the dilemmas and dimensions within the project.

Keywords

Historical Ties, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Challenges and future

1. Introduction

Pakistan came into being out of the vision of a Muslim estate where the rule of law flourishes by Islam during the mid of twenty century, currently witnessing significant changes in the geopolitical landscape. Despite its Islamic essence, Pakistan forged a recognized alliance with China, a non-Islamic communist country (Hussain *et al.*, 2020). This coalition was Paradigm-shifting, besides contemplating the strained relations with neighboring Afghanistan, which initially refused to recognize Pakistan as a sovereign state because of Durand line concerns (Irfan *et al.*, 2023). The bond between China and Pakistan strengthened specifically when Pakistan played a paramount role in encouraging dialogue between the

United States and China (Hassan & Khattak, 2023). However, these diplomatic maneuvers have often fueled toxic discourses in both international and regional relations. Similarly, Pakistan and India, born as rivals on the global map, serve as gateways to the Indian Ocean and have similar cultures, language customs, and traditions. Meanwhile, China's strategic interests have consistently aligned with Pakistan, while America has always noted India in its good book, further solidifying their partnership in South Asia. Throughout, Pakistan has maintained a cordial relationship with China, contributing to the complex dynamics of the region. This chapter on ties between the two countries began with the birth of the states. Yet, it gained significant impetus with the initiative discussion of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a mega project of China's "Go West" policy. Central to this alliance is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a cornerstone of the BRI. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor CPEC project has been the key component of the BRI diplomacy.

This research paper explores the historical relation and contemporary significance of CPEC. The CPEC was inked on April 15, 2015, by Xu Shaoshi, Chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. The deal was signed by Ahsan Iqbal representing Pakistan, the Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Reform during the government of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif (Khan & Ahmed, 2024). However, a great milestone of economic treaty, a leading element of China's enterprising Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) diplomacy, foreran a new epoch of cooperation, connecting China's expansive industrial capacity with the growing economic potential of Pakistan in Asia (Khatti *et al.*, 2022). Since its beginning, it has grown into a multi-dimensional project, surrounding an assortment of projects transiting energy, transportation, telecommunications, and industrial sectors, creating jobs, and ending unemployment and economic growth across its roadway. Consequently, this study primarily focuses on the evolution of ties resulting from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), exploring its influence on the geopolitical landscape, domestic dynamics, and interregional connections of Pakistan with neighboring countries. It emphasizes the role of CPEC in both fostering and intensifying tensions. The findings of the prescribed study underpin the insights for future policymaking decisions division of the project and contribute to scholarly discourse by opening new avenues of discussion in the international arena.

2. Literature Review

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) initiative has earned the focus of scholarly investigations, with multifarious research studies examining its multifaceted implications, dilemmas, outcomes, challenges, and regional nuisances. In the present review of literature, the developed studies have underscored insights into different interplay discourses, impasses, and developments through rigorous analysis and observed explorations. Likewise, Safdar (2015) emphasizes the immense influence of CPEC on maritime security and addresses opportunities in the region and emerging challenges to the Indian Ocean. However, the promises and actualities surrounding the CPEC through the economic, infrastructural, and strategic dimensions focused by (Khan 2015). This study proposes insights into the intricacies of executing large-scale infrastructure projects within the geopolitical landscape of South Asia. Besides, Malik, (2017) evaluates risk outcomes in the supply chain networks of the CPEC, presenting practical strategies to mitigate risks and ensure project success. Besides, this study is focused on bilateral trade between both countries. In contrast, the exploration (Wolf, 2017) discusses the developments and challenges of regional connectivity initiatives within the CPEC framework, investigating the tangible spin-offs of infrastructure blossoming and economic integration grinds. The study conducted by Kousar *et al.*, (2018) provide a transformation of Pakistan's economy and major development challenges, and concerns regarding transparency, debt sustainability, and local participation in CPEC projects. It examines the CPEC and the chances to promote sustainable economic development and the various infrastructure projects under the CPEC, including energy, transportation, and industrial zones. China's allocation of resources and investments in port infrastructure, and maritime goods in the Indian Ocean region are aimed at mitigating dependency on the Malacca Strait and developing its influence in the South Asian region (Akram & Fareed, 2019). In this regard, the research also attenuated China's plans to mitigate this vulnerability, including the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the growth of alternative energy routes for the Maritime Silk Road. Thus, the empirical evidence on the developments of exchange rate dynamics and foreign direct investment under the CPEC task is examined in the research (Liu *et al.*, 2020). This inquiry emphasizes its central mania on tattering the intricacies surrounding China's strategic experiences abroad, shedding light on the broader ramifications for regional socioeconomic progress and global connectivity. Yet, identifying key consequences and challenges facing mega infrastructure projects within the CPEC has been underscored in the research (Ali, 2020), highlighting the importance of effective project management and stakeholder engagement to achieve desired upshots. Besides, the study of Gholizadeh *et al.*, (2020) concentrated on China's strategic interests in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) policy in Pakistan, demonstrating the results of investment and engagement in the region. Nonetheless, the nuanced understanding of the geoeconomics of Belt and Road disputes (Hammad, 2021), highlighting the tangible results of economic cooperation and the geopolitical challenges encountered along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Henceforth, (Khalid, 2022) explores the socio-technical dynamics of the CPEC, elucidating the outcomes of divergent narratives and stakeholder engagements in shaping the corridor's development trajectory. By tracing the development of bilateral relations (Nangra, 2022), the study clarifies the shifting dynamics within the strategic partnership of the transformation in diplomacy between China and Pakistan over the past decade. The findings of this research infused the aspects driving closer cooperation between China and Pakistan, as well as the implications for regional

stability and development. Simultaneously, the outcomes of the CPEC on connectivity in Pakistan contribute to a deeper understanding of the tangible impacts of the CPEC (Afaqi & Askari, 2022). The study investigated a meticulous examination of the thorny interplay connection between South Asia and Central Asia in the interregional integration through the corridor. The examination enlightened the multifaceted obstacles that shape the course of this ambitious initiative and the complexities of geopolitical, infrastructural, and socio-economic dimensions. Meanwhile, Hasan *et al.*, (2023) highlight the implications and intricacies of international interventions in disputes between Pakistan and Bangladesh, particularly in the context of the USA's role and the concerns. Yet, the regional perspective on Chinese interests in Pakistan and understanding of the multifaceted dimensions of the bilateral bond is the research (Ahmad, 2023). Likewise, environmental sustainability emerges as a significant outcome in the study (Waheed *et al.*, 2023). Also, it examined the environmental sustainability potential of the CPEC for Pakistan. Furthermore, in the study (Hussain *et al.*, 2024), China navigates pragmatic balancing between Iran and Pakistan's regional partner's strategic imperatives regarding geopolitical and geoeconomic. The study proposes regional relations and the implications for the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project based on the CPEC corridor. However, (Gul *et al.*, 2024) present strategic insights into logistics optimization and transportation planning within the CPEC framework, offering tangible results to enhance efficiency and reduce risks.

Consequently, the above studies jointly nourish beneficial insights into the developments and consequences of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), suggesting focal suggestions for manyman i.e., investigators, policymakers, and practitioners, to steer the tricky challenges and opportunities raised in this initiative of new world power of China.

3. Problem Statement

Pakistan, often called as the gateway to Asia, is a strategic vantage position in the global landscape, a fact of great concern and interest for the international powers in South Asia (Khatti *et al.*, 2022). Despite this geopolitical significance, the current economic status does not align with its possibility of financial prowess and administrative efficiency. Simultaneously, China has emerged as a challenging global power, sharing joint strategic interests with Pakistan, especially concerning the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) diplomacy (Martadinata *et al.*, 2024). Central to this partnership is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project, encouraging connectivity between the two countries, and giving rise to constantly referred to as the "Iron Brotherhood" (Shih, 2018). Furthermore, the Chinese official characterization of Pakistan as "our Israil" (Al-Jazeera, 2024), highlights the depth of this cement in the current time during the speech of the caretaker prime minister of Pakistan (Khan, 2024). The lasting friendship between Pakistan and China, continually defined as "A Friendship Higher than Himalayas, deeper than the ocean, sweeter than honey, and stronger than steel," harkens back to Pakistan's early days as the third non-communist country to recognize China. However, it was the advent of the CPEC project that cemented this adhesive, fetching both states onto a unified platform for economic collaboration. This project has garnered consequential concentration from researchers, leading to multi-dimensional research initiatives analyzing the implications, dilemmas, developments, challenges, and regional nuisances. Different researchers have worded diverse perspectives on this transformative project in scholarly attraction. Likewise, scholars in the domain of bilateral ties have narrated various dilemmas of the research within CPEC (Safdar, 2015: Malik, 2017: Kousar *et al.*, 2018: Gholizadeh *et al.*, 2020: and Nagra, 2022). In a similar context, the understudied research has concentrated on infrastructures, energies, and road railways within CPEC (Ali, 2020: Liu *et al.*, 2020: Khalid, 2022 and Waheed *et al.*, 2023). However, the main focus of other researchers is the relevance of regionalism (Khatti *et al.*, 2022: Afaqi & Askari, 2022: Ahmad, 2023: Gul *et al.*, 2024: Hussain *et al.*, 2024). These researchers have overlooked the fundamental essence of the CPEC and the historical context of the relationship between the states, resulting in a deficiency of in-depth analysis in this study.

Based on the highlighted gaps and lacunas in the research, the present study is limited to highlighting the progression of historical relations between the two states and emphasizes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project as a conclusion of the perpetual bond.

4. Research Questions

Based on the identified gaps in the existing literature and recognizing the deficiencies in the problem understanding, the proposed research aims to address the following objectives, formulated as research questions:

1. How have the ties between Pakistan and China evolved from the past to the present?
2. Is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) a product of the positive relationship between the two countries?

5. Applied Methodology

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project stands at the vanguard of scholarly discourse within the domain of modern international relations and the regional intensity of South Asia. The project has been subject to painstaking analysis across various dimensions colossally examined by scholars employing multifarious methodologies accordingly. In the domain, the researchers have adopted a descriptive approach (Safdar, 2015: Khan, 2015: Wolf, 2017: Malik, 2017: Hussain *et al.*, 2020 and Kousar *et al.*, 2024), meticulously delineating the multifaceted aspects of the project. In contrast, others have opted for quantitative processes and different theories (Hussain, 2017: Degong *et al.*, 2023: Hussain *et al.*

et al., 2024: Gul *et al.*, 2024) in this realm, drawing upon primary data sources to quantify and analyze specific facets of CPEC. Thereafter, confident scholars have employed qualitative approaches, highlighting the nuanced complications of the project's socio-political and economic dilemmas (Ali, 2020: Hammad, 2021: Khalid, 2022: Ahmed, 2023: Waheed *et al.*, 2023 and Martadinata *et al.*, 2024).

These methodological techniques serve as the cornerstone pillar of robust literature reviews, encouraging a wide exploration of existing scholarly narratives and discourses. By analyzing different understudies in-depth, the proposed study aims to contribute new and innovative insights and novelty by applying the literature review approach examining the inception of relations between Pakistan and China, beginning from diplomatic era of recognition to economic cooperation, yet reshaping the CPEC consequences often known as the "Iron Brotherhood." Simultaneously, methodology plays a vital role in scientific research. However, in a literature review mode of inquiry, researchers examine existing literature (secondary data) on a particular topic to understand analysis, identify lacuna, and synthesize results and developments from numerous sources (Lagrasta *et al.*, 2024). In this regard, current study presents a novel exploration that underscores existing paradigms in the CPEC concerns and analyzing secondary data cited through a meticulous review of reputable journals mentioned in the analysis and discussions. Consequently, synthesizing engages analyzing, structuring, and concluding the arguments and findings underpinned in the literature to underline fruitful conclusions and identify patterns or trends (Snyder, 2019). This study strives to synthesize and interpret existing literature to construct a cohesive narrative and offer valuable insights into the dynamics of the China-Pakistan relationship.

6. Findings of the Study

The findings of this study analyze the historical evolution of Pakistan-China relations and the genesis of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. These research findings are highlighted below.

6.1 Historical Background of China Pak Ties

China has risen as a preeminent global power in the twenty-first century, increasing its influence across the globe as a beacon of progress. In this way, Pakistan has appeared as a crucial and primary economic partner in several agreements, with the connection often referred to as that of the "Iron Brothers." Similarly, the historical bonds between the Pakistan and China have continuously fortified since the birth of the states.

Meanwhile, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was founded under the stewardship of Mao Zedong in October 1949, while Pakistan gained independence in 1947 under Muhammad Ali Jinnah. Simultaneously, it was the state of Pakistan which has a credit of being the third Noncommunist country to recognize China on 04 January 1950, initiating cordially ties (Hussain *et al.*, 2020). At the beginning, Pakistan supported Beijing's UN representation in September 1950, setting the stage for bilateral relations. In this way, the first Pakistani ambassador general N.A.M. Raza (Nawabzada Agha Muhammad Raza) to China was appointed in July 1951. A significant milestone occurred in 1952 when Pakistan and China signed a barter deal, strengthening economic cooperation while Pakistan recorded exported values Rs. 97.2 million values of cotton from China (Malik, 2017). Additionally, During September 1954, Pakistan joined Southeast Asia Treaty Organization "SEATO" aligning the foreign policy also joined Central Treaty Organization "CENTO". Despite tensions over issues like the Korean War and Tibet conflict, mutual understanding prevailed. Hence, cultural exchanges flourished, with high-level visits strengthening ties within the emerging states in Asia. In April 1955, Chou En-Lai recognized Pakistan's position at the Afro-Asian Conference held in Indonesia, noting that Pakistan, despite being party to a military treaty, wasn't against China (Mahdi, 1986). Likewise, Chinese Vice Premier Madame Soong-Ching-Ling visited Pakistan in January 1956 while, China was represented at the inauguration of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan by Chinese Vice Premier Marshall Ho Lung in January 1956 (Khan, 1961). Meanwhile, Russia affirmed its recognition of Kashmir as an intrinsic component of India during 1955, further complicating regional dynamics. Despite this, trade agreements continued, with multiple signings in 1954, 1955, 1956, and 1958. However, Hussain Shaheed Sahrawardi, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, had a trip to China in October 1956, and this visit was reciprocated in December 1956 when Chou En-Lai came in Pakistan (Palmer, 1971). Similarly, cultural exchanges flourished, with delegations from both countries visiting each other and Pakistan demonstrated its commitment to China by supporting its UN membership in the difficult era during 1961. This solidarity deepened in 1962, leading to negotiations on the Sino-Pakistan boundary. A boundary agreement was reached in March 1963, further bolstering bilateral relations (Lamb, 1964). In the meantime, economic cooperation flourished, with agreements signed in various sectors. Both states also granted each other the most favored nation treatment in trade and commerce, deepening their economic relations. Yet, an airlines agreement was signed in August 1963 to initiate air service between the two countries. Pakistan's steadfast stance convinced China of its commitment to the friendship. Consequently, when Chou En-Lai visited Pakistan in February 1963, China departed from its neutral stance on Kashmir for the first time, endorsing Pakistan's call for a plebiscite. The joint communique issued on February 23, 1964, expressed hope for the resolution of the Kashmir issue according to the wishes of its people (Bhattacharya, 2022). In July 1964, China provided a \$60 million interest-free loan to Pakistan. From March to September 1965, Chou En-Lai visited Pakistan thrice, and several high-level delegations exchanged visits (Mahdi, 1986). Amidst second decade of countries birth, President Ayub Khan and Zulfikar ALi Bhutto visited China, reaffirming Pakistan's endorsed for China's representation in the United Nations and rejecting the TCP (Two-China policy) in March 1965 (Khalid, 2022). An agreement for monthly sea transport service was signed in April 1965. Following India's aggression on September 7, 1965, China firmly supported Pakistan's just struggle against aggression. In January 1966,

China agreed to supply East Pakistan with electrical equipment worth one million rupees. Subsequently, in June, an agreement was reached to enhance scientific and cultural exchanges. Chinese military supplies began arriving in Pakistan via Xinjiang in October 1965, with the public seeing Chinese T-29 tanks and MiG 19 aircraft for the first time in March 1966 (Hammad, 2021). In July 1966, a trade protocol was signed, followed by China supplying 100,000 tons of rice to East Pakistan. October 1966 saw the conclusion of another agreement on maritime transport. Crucially for Pakistan's industrial growth, in June 1966, an agreement was reached with China to establish a heavy machinery complex in Taxila, with China providing both machinery and technical expertise. By December 1968, China had committed to providing Pakistan with a Rs. 200 million loans on favorable terms. Throughout the 1960s, Sino-Pakistani friendship strengthened, marked by visits from Chinese leaders like President Liu Dhao Chi in March 1966 and Chou En-Lai in June. Pakistani President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto journeyed to China in January 1972 at the invitation of Chinese leadership. The Chinese leadership vehemently denounced the Indian assault on Pakistan and advocated for the withdrawal of the aggressor forces from Pakistan (Deepak, 2020). Through their active partnership with Pakistan, China exercised its inaugural veto power at the UN to oppose actions against Bangladesh, employing it on at least four subsequent occasions. On September 29, the USSR brought the issue of Bangladesh in the United Nations (Hasan *et al.*, 2023). During the Cold War in 1970, Pakistan encountered numerous domestic and external challenges following a change in leadership. Under the rule of Yahya Khan, Pakistan struggled to contain internal unrest, providing an opportunity for separatist movements in East Pakistan to gain momentum. In November 1970, President Yahya's visit to China led to the signing of an economic and technical cooperation agreement. The Indo-Pakistani war of 1971 resulted in the division of Pakistan, leading to the birth of Bangladesh. In February 1973, during Bhutto's visit to China, Beijing announced the forgiveness of four loans to Pakistan and deferred repayment of a \$200 million loan by 20 years. In June 1973, China's Foreign Minister visited Pakistan, urging the release of Pakistani POWs held by India. The formal opening of the Karakoram Highway linking Gilgit with Beijing took place in June 1978 (Ahmad, 2023). In December 1979, the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan prompted a crisis on Pakistan's western border. On January 18, 1980, Beijing accused the Soviet Union of seeking to expand southward towards Pakistan and the subcontinent. During the visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Huang Hua in January 1980, he called on all countries to support Afghanistan's neighbors against Soviet influence (Gul *et al.*, 2024). Gen. Zia-ul-Haq's visit to China in May 1980 reinforced the call for a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. In the post-Cold War era, China underwent a shift in its foreign policy. President Jiang Zemin's visit to India aimed to strengthen bilateral relations across diplomatic, economic, and regional fronts. Meanwhile, the growth of these relations did not affect the relations of Pakistan and China adversely. Simultaneously, President Musharraf's visit to China in November 2003 resulted in the signing of the "Joint Declaration on the Direction of Bilateral Relations," marking a substantial milestone. Successive visits and pacts more solidified cooperation between the two countries, signing the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Good Neighborly Relations" in April 2005 (Hussain *et al.*, 2024). Relatively, the visit of American President George W. Bush to Pakistan in February 2006. Later, the President of Pakistan officially visit to China for four days trip, underscoring the importance of ties to showcasing the relations over the moon with the PRC. The visit yielded agreements in defense, trade, communication, and energy sectors, commemorating fifty-five years of diplomatic ties. President Asif Ali Zardari's visit to China in October 2008 marked a significant achievement in bilateral relations, with both sides signing several memoranda of understanding (MoU) in different sectors. Significantly, 2011 was celebrated by the Government of Pakistan as the "Pak-China Friendship Year" further strengthening ties. Consequently, the visit of Chinese PM Li Keqiang to Pakistan in 2013 repeated the commitment to strengthen economic and diplomatic ties (Nagra, 2022). Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's inaugural visit to China in 2013 further cemented bilateral relations. In this regard, the CPEC was a turning point in the historical relations of the Pakistan and China. The results of these relations are delineated based on these projects cooperation and collaboration. The CPEC stands as a pivotal juncture in Pakistan-China relations, delineating a new era of collaboration. Its projects signify a profound partnership, fostering economic, infrastructural, and strategic synergies. Through joint ventures and investments, both nations have redefined regional dynamics, enhancing connectivity and stability. The CPEC's impact extends beyond economics, shaping geopolitical landscapes and fostering mutual trust. This partnership heralds a paradigm shift, anchoring Pakistan and China's relationship in shared aspirations and tangible outcomes.

Table 1 (Pakistan-China Trade Balance: 1950–1959 Us\$ Million)

Years	Exports	Imports	Total
1950	-	-	-
1951	-	-	-
1952	83.8	2.2	86
1953	7.2	3.3	10.5
1954	26.1	1	27.1
1955	31.7	0.2	31.9
1956	15.9	7.8	23.7
1957	9.5	10.3	19.8
1958	7.6	4.4	12
1959	0.7	4	4.7
Total	182.5	33.2	215.7

Source: Hussain *et al.*, 2020

Table 2 (China Pakistan Trade Balance: 1960–1979 Us\$ Million)

Years	Exports	Imports	Total
1960	14.8	4	18.3
1961	10.2	3.5	13.7
1962	2.6	4.2	6.8
1963	12.8	5.9	18.7
1964	40.3	16.3	56.6
1965	43.3	18.5	61.8
1966	30.1	28.3	58.4
1967	34.6	33.7	68.3
1968	25.5	29.3	54.8
1969	29	26.3	55.3
1970	39.2	27.7	66.9
1971	30.1	34.2	64.3
1972	17.5	24	41.5
1973	13.1	48.2	61.3
1974	11.3	54.3	65.6
1975	13.5	53.6	67.1
1976	17	64.3	81.3
1977	17.4	54.3	71.7
1978	30.7	83.3	114
1979	25	123.2	148.2
Total	458	737	1194.6

Source: Hussain et al., 2020

Table 3 (China Pakistan Trade Balance: 1980–1999 US\$ MILLION)

Years	Exports	Imports	Total
1980	221.3	167.8	389.1
1981	271.9	180.3	452.2
1982	144.6	149.2	293.8
1983	145.9	146.7	292.6
1984	40.2	143.6	183.8
1985	57.6	144.5	202.1
1986	14.2	162	176.2
1987	24.3	232	256.3
1988	51.8	248	299.8
1989	169.4	321.7	491.1
1990	67.2	337.5	404.7
1991	60.9	357.4	418.3
1992	53.7	421s	474.7
1993	57.6	422.6	480.2
1994	54	421	475
1995	118.6	505.8	624.4
1996	119.4	576	695.4
1997	147	586	733
1998	152.3	422	574.3
1999	178.5	450.5	628.5
Total	2149.9	6395.6	8545.5

Source: Hussain et al., 2020

Table 4 (China-Pakistan Trade Balance: 2000–2018 US\$ MILLION)

Years	Exports	Imports	Total
2000	237.2	537.8	775
2001	289.3	485	774.3
2002	235.6	699.6	935.3
2003	259.7	957.6	1217.3
2004	299.7	1499	1798.7
2005	435.5	2348.7	2784.2
2006	506.6	2915	3421.6
2007	613.7	4164.2	4777.9
2008	726.7	4738	5664.7
2009	973.8	3774	4747.8
2010	1436	5247.7	6683.7
2011	1679	6470.6	8149.6
2012	2620	6687.5	9307.5

2013	2652.2	6626.3	9278.5
2014	2253	9588.4	11841.4
2015	1935	11019	12954
2016	1590.8	13680	15270.8
2017	1459.6	15356.3	16815.9
2018	1844.3	14213.4	16057.7
Total	22047.7	111008.1	133055.8

Source: Hussain et al., 2020

6.2 China Pakistan Economic Corridor

The onset of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) stemmed from the era of President Musharraf (1999–2007), who concocted robust economic cooperation between China and Pakistan through diverse infrastructure endeavors. The Gwadar Port is the key position in this project which aimed at promoting regional connectivity and trade towards Central Asia and Europe (Gholizadeh et al., 2020). Initially, the construction of Gwadar Port was under the supervision of the Singapore Port Authority rather than China (Liu et al., 2020). Subsequently, China assumed responsibility for its development, and the pivotal milestone was reached in July 2013, when Beijing and Islamabad inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to materialize the economic corridor linking Kashgar to Gwadar via Gilgit-Baltistan (Wolf, 2017). At first, budgeted at \$18–20 billion, the project's financial outlay has burgeoned to \$32 billion, earmarked for the establishment of extensive rail and road networks alongside the establishment of specialized economic zones SEZ. The Gwadar route presents China with a faster path for energy imports and access to the Indian Ocean compared to the straits of Malacca (Akram & Fareed, 2019). The CPEC project gained substantial traction in 2013, fueled by unwavering commitments from both Chinese and Pakistani leadership. The project commenced in 2014 and is slated for continuation until 2030.

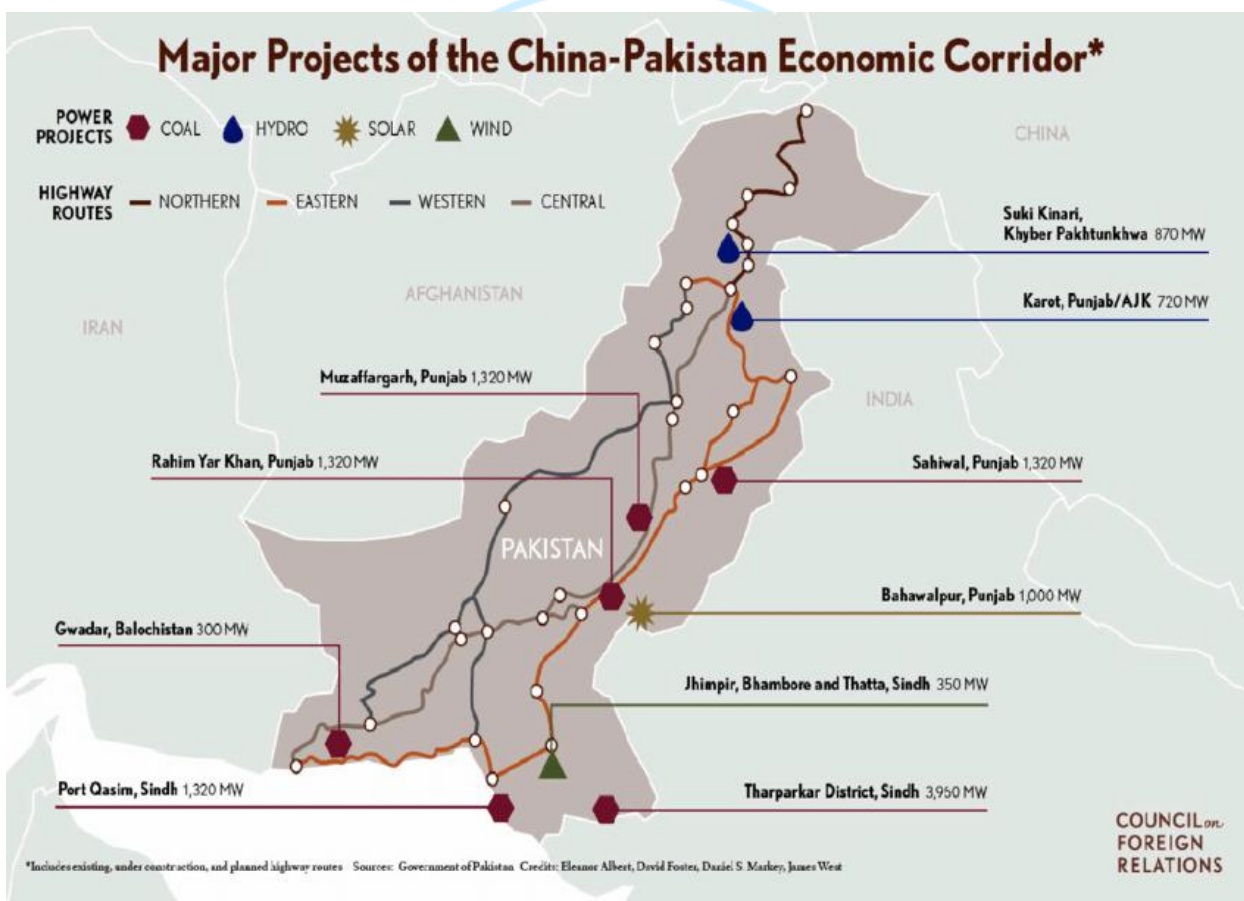


Fig. 1 This Figure Represents the Energy Components of CPEC. Source: (Farooqui & Aftab, 2018)

Significantly, the Ex-PM of Pakistan Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif struck a pivotal agreement during a diplomatic visit to Beijing in 2015, granting Chinese firms’ operational control over projects as commercially viable entities (Khan & Khan, 2019). This deal cemented the burgeoning collaboration between China and Pakistan, which deems strengthened significance as Pakistan confronts diminishing support from the US amid troop withdrawals from Afghanistan. China allocated approximately US\$11.8 billion for infrastructure ventures, notably earmarking US\$622 million for the development of the Gwadar port and advancements to vital transport arteries such as the Karakoram Highway, Karachi-Lahore Motorway, Gwadar port facilities, East Bay Expressway Project, and Gwadar International Airport (Safdar, 2015). Originally estimated at US\$46 billion, the investment projection for CPEC has burgeoned to \$62 billion, encompassing endeavors spanning roadways, railways, pipelines, and energy initiatives (Degong et al., 2023). This substantial

investment endeavor, if efficiently executed, harbors the potential to metamorphose Pakistan into a pivotal regional nexus for trade and industry. Divided into distinct components, the CPEC's focal points are infrastructure and energy projects. Prioritized energy projects, known as "Early Harvest," are slated to receive significant investment to bolster electricity generation, a cornerstone for subsequent commercial ventures. Solar, wind, thermal, and hydroelectric projects have been formulated to generate approximately 16,520 megawatts of electricity (Rahman & Kubra, 2020), with major projects scheduled for completion within three years (2015-2017) to alleviate Pakistan's energy deficits, crucial for sustaining the corridor's operations. The second pivotal component entails the development of roads and railways networks, with an estimated US\$8,172 million designated for the rehabilitation and enhancement of the Karachi-Lahore-Peshawar (ML-1) railway track spanning approximately 1872 kilometers. Additionally, a cross-border optical fiber cable system between China and Pakistan is underway, encompassing the federal capital, Gilgit-Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Punjab. Various energy-related projects, including hydroelectric, coal, wind, solar, and nuclear initiatives, are integral to this phase (Kousar *et al.*, 2018). The construction plans, for instance, the new Islamabad airport, Eastbay expressway, hospitals, technical training institutes, and export-processing zones are also integral parts of the project. Besides, the third component entails the enhancement and development of the Gwadar port, already leased to China for a 40-year term. The eyesight of China encloses a container handling facility, a wide freeway, and an international airport to establish Gwadar as an international business center rife with modern amenities throughout South Asia. The fourth essential component revolves around the Special Economic Zones (SEZs), furnishing a platform for Chinese industries to migrate to Pakistan, thereby augmenting exports to Central Asia and Europe. Envisaged as a 15-year project traced into different phases, a 682-kilometer railway line connecting Havelian in Pakistan to Kashgar in China is under process, with an estimated cost of US\$12 billion (Ali, 2020). The railway line is intended to facilitate the transportation of Chinese and East Asian merchandise to the Gwadar and Karachi seaports in Pakistan. Significantly, industries such as automotive, home appliances, solar energy technology, and armaments are earmarked for relocation to Special Economic Zones (SEZs). It was decided during the "eightieth Joint Coordination Committee meeting" in Beijing sketched plans for nine exclusive SEZs across Pakistan:

1. Rashakai Economic Zone, situated in Nowshera, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, spans an area of 1000 acres.
2. China SEZ, Dhabeji, located in Sindh, covers 1000 acres.
3. Bostan Industrial Zone in Balochistan, occupying 1000 acres.
4. Allama Iqbal Industrial City, Faisalabad, Punjab, is designated as a 3000-acre zone.
5. Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT) Model Zone, with a proposed area ranging from 200 to 500 acres.
6. Development of an Industrial Park at Port Qasim, Karachi, Sindh, spanning 1500 acres.
7. SEZ at Mirpur in AJ&K, encompassing 1078 acres.
8. Mohmand Marble City in erstwhile FATA, with details regarding its area and location pending.
9. Moqpanasspe SEZ in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Each SEZ is customized to specialize in individual services and goods services, contingent upon the local availability of raw materials, labor, and workforce.

The result will produce a "scale economy," improving production standards while minimizing costs, thereby enriching Pakistan's export capacity through the project. Similarly, it will bolster local industries, curtail imports, and strengthen economic self-reliance. Moreover, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) are hovered to catalyze GDP growth, induce employment possibilities, and promote foreign trade and investment. In this way, the investment in CPEC has swelled to \$62 billion, transcending the initial estimate of \$46 billion, enclosing infrastructural developments spanning roadways, railways, pipelines, and energy initiatives (Degong *et al.*, 2023). Simultaneously, the short-term plans, termed "early harvest tasks," are slated for consummation within a five-year timeframe (2017-2022), while long-term goals unfold over 10–15 years. However, the specific initiatives within the short-term horizon include the construction of a railway track linking Havelian to Abbottabad and Xinjiang, alongside the installation of a motorway connecting Lahore and Karachi. The geographic spectrum of the corridor traverses Pakistan from Gwadar in Balochistan to Kashgar in western China, with diverse alignment plans desired to promote development and connectivity (Ahmed *et al.*, 2018). China's Xinjiang region will be seamlessly connected to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea via this corridor, offering the shortest route to the province. The distance between Xinjiang and Gwadar spans merely 2500 km, in stark contrast to Chinese ports situated in the Eastern part of the country. This initiative aligns with China's overarching strategy, including the "go west policy," aimed at extending the dividends of its economic prosperity to the volatile province of Xinjiang (Hussain *et al.*, 2017). Moreover, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) serves as an alternative energy conduit for nations such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. These countries currently rely on Russia for their oil and gas exports via the Black Sea pipeline network (Afaqi & Askari, 2022). However, Russia leverages its economic dominance over these states by imposing inflated transportation fees, thus compelling them to pay above-market prices for access to global markets. Consequently, the CPEC emerges as a viable alternative route for these nations. Beyond its immediate economic implications, the CPEC assumes strategic importance in the context of enhancing territorial connectivity and fostering trade relations with key regional blocs such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC), and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Its significance is underscored by its alignment with the ancient Chinese initiative, the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), which aims to

establish a trade route linking China to Europe through Central Asia. Under the expansive umbrella of the CPEC, the Chinese government and financial institutions are slated to finance approximately US\$45.6 billion worth of energy and infrastructure projects in Pakistan, enabling Chinese companies to spearhead their construction endeavors in the region.

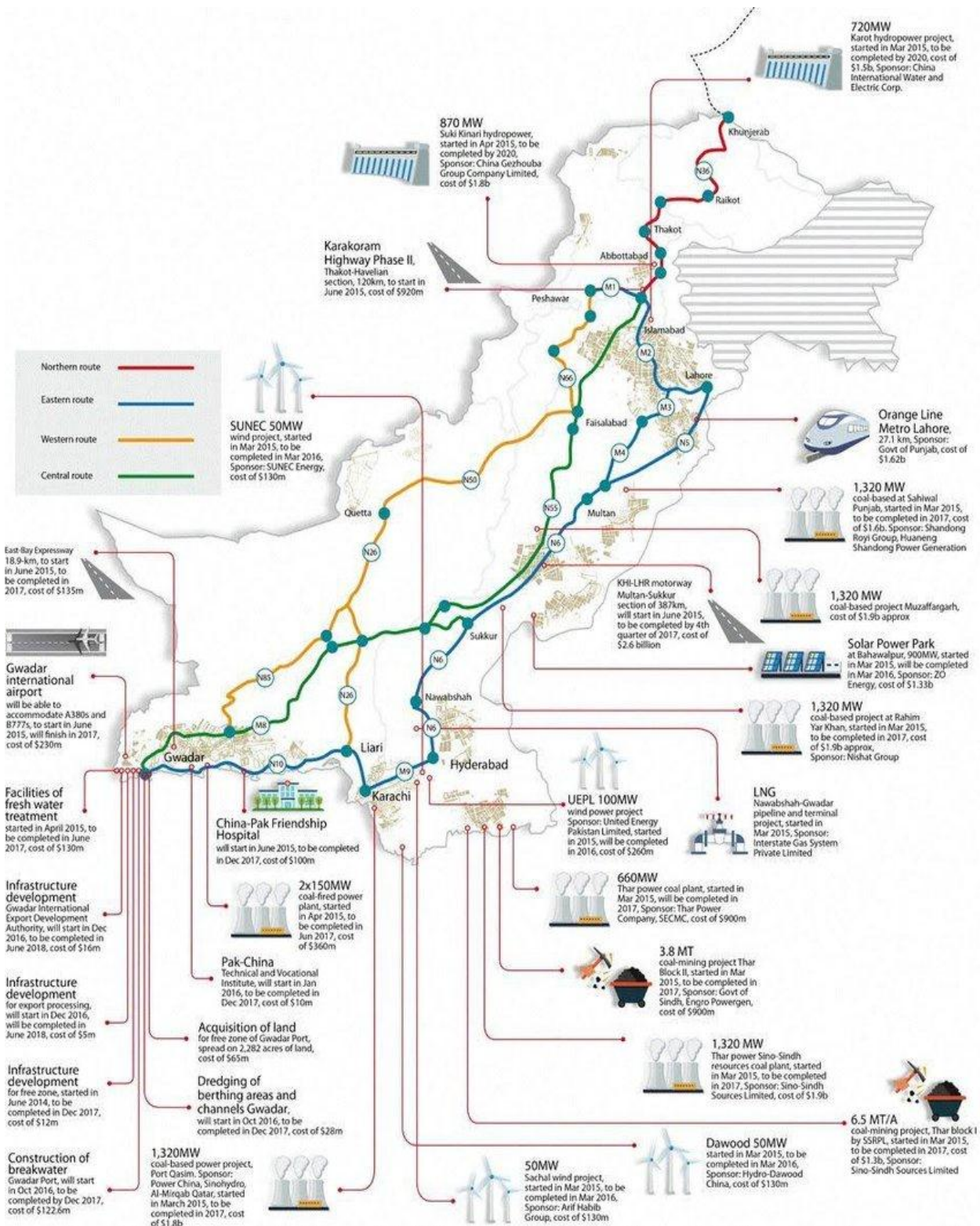


Fig. 2 The Detail Projects of CPEC. Sources: Khan & Liu (2019)

7. Analysis and Discussions

Pakistan's inception, delineated by the partition of the United India, hinged on the ethos of providing a homeland for the Muslim populace. However, the inaugural address of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of the nation resonated with secular inclinations (Khan & Khalid). In contrast, the birth of China saw it emerge as a stronghold of communism from its inception, thus both countries crystallizing disparate ideological paradigms. However, the diplomatic ties burgeoned in earnest with the dispatch of Nawabzada Agha Muhammad Raza in 1951 as the first ambassador of China. Since then, the historical trajectory of the rapport has witnessed a robust augmentation, across

various platforms. Conversely, China's stance towards Pakistan has oscillated between being an ally within the annals of history. During the Dacca debacle, China conspicuously stood in opposition and, on three occasions, rebuffed Pakistan's narrative in the United Nations, underscoring the intricate tapestry of Pakistan (Hasan *et al.*, 2023). The historical of the entwined narrative took a momentous turn with China's proposition of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which served as a linchpin for strengthening Pakistan's economic moorings. Meanwhile, the colossal economic potential inherent in the CPEC project could catalyze the strength of Pakistan's economy. Lamentably, it has metamorphosed into yet another locus of contention among political entities. Despite the predominant allocation of resources to Sindh, its representatives, including those from the ruling party and nationalist factions, have staunchly criticized either the CPEC or its mode of execution. Bilawal Bhutto, the chairman of the PPP, rebuked the PML N, primarily entrenched in Punjab, for fomenting controversy around the project (Ahmed, 2019), particularly during the initial phase of construction, known as the "Early Harvest" phase. In this context, the nationalists of Sindh have almost rejected the project as the neo-colonialism of the capital world tracing its roots back to the East India Company. In Baluchistan, separatist elements have decried the project through various means. Baloch and Sindhi separatists have launched assaults on CPEC ventures (Ahmed, 2019), resulting in the demise of forty-six individuals involved in these undertakings in Baluchistan in 2016. Gwadar is a port city located in the southwestern province of Baluchistan, which is covered by heavy security protocols and Baloch nationalists have encountered the Chinese citizens, and officials through many attacks (Khan & Ahmed, 2024). Furthermore, concerns have been raised regarding employment opportunities, with anxieties revolving around Chinese nationals monopolizing job opportunities (Boni & Adeney, 2020). The ruling party of Khyber Pakhtoon Khuwa KPK, (Pakistan Tehrik -e- Insaaf) PTI, is also among the dissenters of the Project. The chairman of PTI has persistently voiced opposition against CPEC. Even after assuming governmental authority, efforts were made to negotiate terms with China (Ahmed, 2019). Likewise, variance extends beyond mere inter-provincial distribution concerns, and critics posit that this project will breach the state authority and its institutional framework (Akhtar, 2018). Nevertheless, malfeasance in Pakistan obstructed seamless advancement. The second stage of CPEC endeavors to inaugurate 33 Special Economic Zones (SEZs) with an initial nine enclaves slated for initiation, but this phase has encountered delays. The ventures in this phase have also encountered postponements. Pakistan's political volatility, fiscal turmoil, and insurgency have all constrained the execution of CPEC undertakings over the preceding decade. Political instability, fiscal turmoil, and insurgency have all constrained the execution of CPEC projects over the decade. These hindrances endure unabated, exacerbated by lasting political and economic instability and the resurgence of insurgency after the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. While the third phase is yet to formally commence, the fruition of the first two phases seems improbable given the extant circumstances prevailing in the nation. Currently, the conclusion of the CPEC flagship is nearing fruition, poised to enter its final phase of completion. Yet, a prevailing narrative of skepticism related to CPEC's efficacy continues (Khan *et al.*, 2018). In this way, Pakistan is extending invitations to prominent global stakeholders, including Turkey, Iran, and Russia, among others, to partake in this ambitious enterprise. Afghanistan, too, emerges as a pivotal participant in the CPEC framework. Recent reports from state-controlled media highlight Pakistan's strides in enhancing regional connectivity (Wolf, 2020). Notably, Pakistan's official logistics and freight transportation entity has executed an influential accomplishment by successfully dispatching the inaugural shipment of domestically cultivated potatoes to Tajikistan. This milestone marks a seminal moment in heightening Pakistan's export prospects within the Central Asian states. This travel spanning from Okara and Rahim Yar Khan to Dushanbe concluded within a mere seven-day timeframe, pinnacling in a bespoke ceremony convened at Dushanbe Customs Terminal One to commemorate the inaugural convoy's arrival under the purview of International Road Transport. However, the sluggish pace of CPEC initiatives has elicited disquietude from Beijing (NLC, 2024). The Chinese ambassador to Pakistan has lamented what he perceives as Pakistan's detrimental impact on the CPEC trajectory (Ahmad, 2023). Internally, voices within Pakistan have also articulated apprehensions regarding the tardy implementation of CPEC projects. Currently, it is reported that on March 26th, 2024, when a suicide bomber rammed a vehicle into a convoy transporting workers to the Dasu hydropower project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. However, five Chinese nationals and one Pakistani national were killed in this terrorist attack. The attack, which was the third in a week to hit Pakistan, targeted Chinese workers, highlighting the security risks faced by Chinese projects in the region (Hussain, 2024). This project is significant as it is the country's largest hydropower project and a key part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Despite no group claiming responsibility, the incident raised concerns about the safety of Chinese nationals and infrastructure investments in Pakistan. In accordance with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, the assault is also depicted as the "March of Terror" and "Cousins at War," indicating a complicated narrative of intra-regional dispute (Hussain, 2024).

Overall, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor CPEC project developed as a beacon of prosperity and regional integration has mutated into a subject of concern and prospects, venturing on a prolonged journey of exploration and evaluation in the regional and domestic essence.

8. Conclusion

The research paper concludes the discourses highlighting enormous analysis and discussion narrating underscored findings. The study is limited to investigating the historical evolution of the relationships between China and Pakistan, focusing on CPEC as the core consequence of the proposed research. The pivotal initiative has played a significant economic growth in Pakistan but also dovetails with new discourses in international relations. Consequently, CPEC

serves as an implication linchpin in promoting regional connectivity within Central and South Asia, potentially reshaping geopolitical dynamics for the future. The study zeroes in on CPEC's significance in Pakistan, considering its strategic constraints and the backdrop of bilateral relations. In conclusion, this proposed study lays a foundation for future researchers to explore new avenues in this scholarly discourse, thereby promoting the advancement of fresh insights into the BRI and related perspectives of CPEC. Thus, the research discoveries of the understudy would necessitate an examination of CPEC discourses, highlighting the risks presented by a precisely planned framework. The recommendations emerging from the proposed investigation would trace a strategic pathway for attaching to the methodologies of scholarly analysis. Accordingly, the study would accentuate a main role in reaffirming its scholarly pertinence. Furthermore, the purview of the offered research would confine concerted exertions to employ Pakistan concerning under the diplomacy of the China and in the future.

9. Recommendations

1. This study suggests that the CPEC initiative holds the potential to connect China with the South Asia region.
2. The research also implies that the CPEC project serves as a Paradigm-shifting power, promoting China's "Go West" policy.
3. The analysis underscores the importance of considering the Baluchistan case amidst Beijing's tentative dilemma.
4. This investigation recommends China's pivotal role in fortifying Pakistan's economic stability, thus bolstering its resilience and robust state framework to reduce the state within-state tensions.
5. Also, it imbues a platform for exploring fresh avenues to accentuate regional dialogues and progress within South Asia under the BRI's diplomacy.

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