

Pakistan-China Relations from Distant Past to the Present: A History of the Silk Route

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Abstract

Pakistan and China are two neighboring countries who have been connected via land routes through extremely difficult terrain since ancient times. This friendship was started through what is historically called the Silk Route. Starting from the times of the Han dynasty (207 BCE – 220 CE) to the contemporary times China has been connected through its trade links with the West and the East including the Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent. Thus Buddhism spread from Indo-Pakistan to Central Asia and reached the Far East through China. This paper attempts to trace the origin and development of historical, socio-cultural, religious and economic ties between China and Pakistan. While tracing the development of historical ties the emphasis would be on the establishment of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Therefore, it is important to understand the precedents of the contemporary Silk Route which will continue an ancient tradition.

Key-Words: Silk, Silk Route, China, Pakistan, CPEC,

Introduction

The history of the silk route trade in ancient times, its revival in the contemporary times between China and Pakistan with its beginnings with the construction of the KKH and the initiation of the CPEC for trade and security of the area and the region are of paramount importance. However, both China and Pakistan facing enormous challenges in implementing the CPEC but steps are being taken by Pakistan for ensuring its safety.

The history of Chinese global trade spans at least a couple of millennia and began in earnest during the time of the Han dynasty. Besides trade this facilitated the free exchange of travelers and also had long-term religious, socio-cultural and economic dimensions. Ferdinand von Richthofen (1), a German geographer and explorer named this Eurasian connection in 1877 system as the "Silk Road" or "Silk Route." He made seven exploratory expeditions to China between 1868 and 1872. Today the China-Pakistan branch of the Silk Route has assumed a totally new political dimension in the second decade of the twenty-first century which is unprecedented in the history of this Route.

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Ancient Period

The "Silk Route" has been a road on which people traveled from one oasis to another, for hundreds of years. This is one of the world's wonders where natural dangers and perils for a distance of a few thousand kilometers have been overcome. Passing through Central Asia this developed as the shortest route between the East and the West. The 4,000 kms long section of the Oasis Silk Route that ran through East and West Turkistan was located in the heart of Asia (Nishikawa, 1988, 16). Although isolated by the imposing Pamir Mountains, many difficult routes through high-altitude passes over them were evidently being used from early times. There were four major areas that defied human access in Innermost Asia. They were Bailongdui (desert around Lop-Nor), the Takla Makan desert, the Pamirs and, finally, the steep cliffs in the upper reaches of the Indus (Nishikawa, 1988, p. 17). The Oasis Route was far more dangerous than the Steppe Route, yet so many people—kings, aristocrats, army generals, local governors, merchants, artisans, Buddhist monks, missionaries, scholars, exiles, musicians and dancers, artists, soldiers and refugees—chose the Oasis Route for their travel at the risk of their lives because the Steppe Route was mostly occupied by nomadic tribes, prohibiting easy access, and lacked towns, markets and accommodation facilities. No water supply, food or other necessities for travel, entertainment or medical services were available for caravans and travelers along the Steppe Route. The caravan city-states along the Oasis Route maintained accommodation and market facilities for caravans and travelers (Nishikawa, 1988, p. 17). Alexander the Great, extended Greek empire to Central Asia and added the trade transaction on the Northern Silk Route in 329 BC (Mark, 2014). By 30 BC trade and communication via the Silk Route between China, Southeast Asia, India, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe had become a norm and multiplied over a period of time. (Boulnois, 1963, p. 56).

Medieval Period

The early middle ages saw an expansion of this network, as sailors from the Arabian Peninsula forged new trading routes across the Arabian Sea and into the Indian Ocean. Indeed, maritime trading links were established between Arabia and China from as early as the eighth century CE. Technological advances in the science of navigation, in astronomy, and also in the techniques of shipbuilding combined to make long-distance sea-travel increasingly practical. Lively coastal cities grew up around the most frequently visited ports along these routes, such as Zanzibar, Alexandria, Muscat, and Goa, and these cities became wealthy centres for the exchange of goods,

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ideas, languages and beliefs, with large markets and continually changing populations of merchants and sailors.

The Silk Route stopped serving as a delivery route for silk around 1453 with the Ottoman conquest of Constantinople (Singh, 2016). After the loss of Andalusia, leaders of the day were hostile to western political and trade moves and remained busy in countering them. The Ottomans expressed their anger by restricting European trade with the East. Strains with the west had eased a bit a century later, and Venice had recovered part of its clout as the go-between. With the land route either cut completely or interrupted a sea-route began to be used. The new ocean-borne exchange ended up being a much more secure, lucrative and solid option. Soon Portugal, Spain, France, Austria, Germany and Russia showed up as large maritime and land traders. (britannica.com)

Above all else Christopher Columbus cruised over the Atlantic in 1492 from Spain looking for a western sea-route to Asia. from Spain. He ended up in the Americas. The Ocean course from Europe to the East was then fully charted by Vasco de Gama in 1497-98. An essential aim of this Portuguese endeavor of the Indian Ocean was exchange of goods and trade. (Singh, 2016).

Modern History

In 2008 the railroad connecting China's Xinjiang Province to Kazakhstan was started and since July 2011 is being utilized, which interfaces Chongqing, China with Duisburg, Germany (aapacgroup.com). This benefit has cut travel time for freight from 36 to 13 days (xinhuanet.com). The course offers a noteworthy alternate route to the more customary ocean exchange courses from Shanghai and Guangzhou to Europe. Though the rails have been there for over ten years, the route is new as no train services linking Chongqing and Europe have been provided before due to complicated customs checks and cargo transfers, according to Ma Zhongyuan, director of Chongqing customs. China is also achieving stability in Xinjiang because it is prerequisite and goal for China's economic aims. (Zimmerman, 2015)

However, a major shift took place when Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013, during his visit to Kazakhstan, presented an arrangement for making a New Silk Road from China to Europe. Most recently this has been characterized as "One Belt, One Road" "(OBOR). (Ahmed, 2013). He proposed the establishment of "an economic belt based on the original Silk Road through an innovative cooperation model" to connect China with Central Asia and Europe. (Xinzhen, 2013). -In Indonesia, addressing the Parliament, he sought |

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cooperation with the ASEAN countries and beyond by reviving “the ancient Maritime Silk Road. (Rizvi, 2015).

Silk Route and Transmission of Religions

The trading practices along the Silk Road over several centuries greatly expanded the socio-cultural and religious activities. In this way diverse religions, for example, Buddhism, (Puri, 1987, p. 169) Christianity, Zoroastrianism (Foltz,2010,58) Manichaeism, Islam and Judaism, (Foltz,2010,57) all spread across Eurasia (Chouvy, 2009, p. 77). The religious missionaries and preachers of these religions navigated the Silk Route and traversed it to disseminate faith across overseas countries (Foltz, 2010, p. 56). However, my focus is upon understanding the political dimensions of Silk Route which have not yet been scholarly discussed by the historians.

Silk Route and the Pakistan-China Friendship

The emergence of modern nation-states, particularly following the partition of British India in 1947, created border controversies among China, India and Pakistan.- While China and Pakistan tried to address these issues amicably but India adopted a hostile attitude towards both Pakistan and China. (The Economist, 2012)

China revived the Silk Road when it started the Karakoram Highway (KKH) project with financial and technical assistance after the signing of bilateral border demarcation agreement between China and Pakistan in 1963. The Sino-Pakistan agreements in 1966-1967 set the stage for China and Pakistan to build the road, later designated as the Karakoram Highway (KKH) which began to be used in 1971 (Rizvi, 2007). In 1973, China and Pakistan decided to turn it into an international standard highway, with the Chinese making the lead contribution to this project. The modern KKH was inaugurated in June 1978. (Rizvi, 2008). It was opened to third country travelers in May 1986. Often referred to as the eighth wonder of the world the KKH originates in the Xinjiang province of China and after passing through many towns extends right up to Islamabad. In China, it is officially known as G314 (humshehri.org). The KKH became a symbol of Pakistan-China friendship and cooperation and its layout roughly coincided with the old Silk Road. The work of expanding and upgrading KKH was undertaken in 2006. The KKH was damaged by the floods and landslides in 2010 that created an artificial lake. China offered financial support and labor for the rehabilitation and repairs of the KKH in 2011-2012. The Chinese also agreed to cover 85 per cent of the cost of

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construction of two highways in Gilgit-Baltistan (The News, 2012). However the major change occurred when China and Pakistan signed the CPEC.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

Mr. Nawaz Sharif, after becoming prime minister of Pakistan in 2013, paid his first visit to China and signed several Memoranda (Husain, 2013) of Understanding with China. It was decided to expand the KKH with a railway line running parallel to it. (Pakistan Today, 2013) Oil and gas pipelines would also run parallel to the KKH, enabling China to import oil and gas at much lower cost with great savings in time as well. Another major step taken by Pakistan was the development of Gwadar Port in southern Balochistan. A Joint Pakistan-China Coordination Committee was also set up for a periodic review of the work on the CPEC and other joint projects in Pakistan. China and Pakistan expanded their cooperation in 2013-14 for various industrial- and energy- related projects by launching new development projects in that area and explored ways and means of pursuing further projects in the future as well (Rizvi, 2015, p. 9). The CPEC is also going to provide China better access to west Asian, African and European markets. With the inauguration of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) relations between Pakistan and China have now developed a new dimension which is going to be a huge regional game-changer as it will bring incredible economic benefits to the entire region (Pakistan Today, 2015). The project was proposed by Li Keqiang, the Chinese Premier, in May 2013. The Chinese have come up with three alternate corridors. The shortest one is CPEC, however there are two others. The shortest one is CPEC, but there are two others. These three routes of CPEC are after it enters Khyber Pakhtunkhwa from the Khunjerab Pass and Gilgit-Baltistan. The first (Western) route suggests that the CPEC will enter Balochistan via Dera Ismail Khan to Zhob, Qila Saifullah, Quetta, Kalat, Punjgur, Turbet and Gwadar. The second (Central) route goes from Dera Ismail Khan to Dera Ghazi Khan and onwards to Dera Murad Jamali, Khuzdar, Punjgur, Turbet to Gwadar. The third course (Eastern) enters the Punjab zone from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, experiencing Lahore, Multan and Sukkur, beginning there it takes the conventional interstate to enter Balochistan, encountering Khuzdar, Punjgur, Turbet and Gwadar. A support way to deal with goes will be laid from Sukkur to Karachi and from there will work its way along to Gwadar. Pakistan's central government and the major political gatherings met on May 28, 2015 to talk about these courses (Express Tribune, 2015). Pakistan's federal government and the major political parties met on May 28, 2015 to discuss these routes. They agreed to build the first route on a priority basis which is the shortest of the three routes (Rizvi, 2015, p. 11). This route passes through very underdeveloped areas that have security problems. However, road building and infrastructure development in

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these areas will contribute to their socio-economic development. The third route (Eastern) is already functional, although it requires upgrading (Rizvi, 2015, p. 11).

The revival of Silk Road in the form of the KKH and the opening of a new port in the region will open new avenues not only for China and Pakistan but also for Central Asian states and Afghanistan all of whom would also be one its beneficiaries. The KKH and Gwadar will provide better access to other regions for promoting trade and tourism. The CPEC, some believe, will boost tourism especially in the northern region. The region is considered to be a mountaineer's paradise, since it is home to five of the 'eight-thousand peaks', those peaks which are above 8,000 meters in altitude, as well as more than 50 other peaks over 7,000 meters. It is also home to the world's second highest peak K2 and Nanga Parbat (Ebrahim, 2016). China is currently focusing on economic development of its Xinjiang province. This has led to rapid growth and industrial development in that province. The Chinese government also intends to reduce its dependence on long routes for oil supply. It receives most of its oil from the Middle East which can be carried through pipelines, and by means of railway through Pakistan.

It is important to throw some light India's reservations regarding the CPEC. It claims that China and Pakistan do not have the right to construct a highway through the Gilgit-Baltistan region which forms a part of the disputed territory of Kashmir. India is also showing its serious concerns on the military uses of Gwadar by the parties involved. India is solely interested in gaining military advantages over Pakistan such as helping rogue elements in Afghanistan carry out clandestine attacks on Pakistan territory and by helping with the construction of the port of Chabahar in Iran just 72 kms from Gwadar. But Gwadar has a critical advantage over Chabahar as it is a deep-sea port and, therefore, capable of receiving far bigger sea vessels.

Pakistan confronts some difficulties in the execution of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These difficulties can be recognized as both exogenous and endogenous. Externally, India especially is dejected. It has amassed its heads to work out new methods to impede the wander forward walk. RAW, a secret agency of India has opened a remarkable office in Delhi and has been assigned \$300 million to bother CPEC. (The News, 2015) The NGOs and others are spreading the rumors that the CPEC and the Gwadar trade route will help China extend its military reach. That is a very limited evaluation of these two projects whose main goal remains trade and welfare of the people of the regions through which the CPEC will pass and through

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which the trade will be conducted. In this manner the two projects of CPEC and the Gwadar port are closely linked (Baker, 2015).

Pakistan also encountering serious security challenges inside the country. All sorts of hurdles are created inside Pakistan especially Baluchistan to stop implementation of the CPEC. For the security of all the workers, Chinese and Pakistani, 10,000 security personnel, under a general have been allocated. Baloch nationalist such as Balochistan Liberation Army and others also are unhappy on the implementation of CPEC. Though it will be a fate changer for the people of Balochistan yet in the meantime one section of Balochistan society have a couple of reservations about the errands in light obviously conflict and security concerns (Siddiqi, 2015,94). Without a doubt, even PTI and JUI (F) showed inclinations to climb the temporary pattern of unfriendly to CPEC qualities (Hussain, 2015). Objections were being brought up notwithstanding affirmations by the assembly that this wander will offer relieve even with opportunities to each one of the locales.

Recommendations

The implementation of CPEC does not seem an easy task to be implemented without much precautionary measures. Therefore, it is important to examine the nature of work and its execution on various projects. Precautions are required against defilement, pilferage of material and venture payouts. Pakistan made a Task Force in July 2013 to manage the said issues. Pakistan has taken adequate steps for the security of all those, especially professionals, working on the Gwadar-related projects. Move it with the previous reference to the security arrangements—list all of the challenges and security arrangements to counter them in one place.

In April 2015, the Pakistan Army reported the establishment of a remarkable security division, headed by a Major General, for offering security to those taking care of the Corridor broadens. This remarkable security division contains nine Army military and six wings of paramilitary forces (Rangers and Frontier Corps) (The Nation, 2015) numbering around 10,000 staff. Right when China's Vice Minister for Security, Dong Haizhou, moved toward Pakistan's Army Chief, General Raheel Sharif on June 10, 2015, the last ensured the Chinese power that the Pakistan Army had made remarkable diversion arrangements for the security of all Chinese managing the Corridor amplify (Dawn, 2015). The Punjab government got extraordinary security strategies for untouchables, especially Chinese, in the zone. The on-going attempts by Pakistan's security forces to control mental mistreatment in the tribal zones and elsewhere instigates the trust that this peril will be brought under control which will empower the rebuilding of Pakistan's economy and

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the complete of all China bolstered errands in Pakistan for money related change, industrialization, imperativeness, establishment, individual and worldwide trade.

Conclusion

In addition to great benefits of trade CPEC would most likely have the effect the levels of regional influence of various allies in South Asia locale and possibly across the region. To counter the expanding Pak-China alliance and its expected very positive future effects for not only these but the whole region other countries have, following their own interpretation of this regional game-changer have started making their own moves. Example can be cited of the US backing for India's joining of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and backing its quest for a seat in the UN Security Council besides raising no concerns of India's participation in the Chabahar Port in Iran, a country whose policies the US typically opposes. Additionally, the US has raised issues with Pakistan's internal matters such as its handling of the Balochistan to upset the execution of the CPEC. Despite internal and external challenges the recent opening of the CPEC route for business implies very clearly that no internal or external challenge will ever be able to impede the progress of the Pak-China cooperation in all areas. Further, the progress of the CPEC and Gwadar projects towards fulfillment of their natural potential and creating a stream of unending benefits for both the countries and the whole region will continue towards its logical end.

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