

Wan Jiqiong\*  
Zhou Keyu\*\*

## **Thinking on the Ways of Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation between China and Pakistan under Belt and Road Initiative**

### **Abstract**

*The construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been implemented smoothly under the Belt and Road Initiative. Some significant energy and transportation projects are at their final stage, with visible impacts on Pakistan's economic development and on Sino-Pakistan relations. However, it is found that during this process the cultural understanding and exchanges between the two countries are not given as much importance as the cooperation in other areas. This paper, thus, focuses on the cultural cooperation between China and Pakistan. It argues that to implement the CPEC, and deepen the all-weather bilateral strategic cooperative partnership and further boost a comprehensive and healthy development of the bilateral relationship, China and Pakistan should significantly improve their cultural exchanges. Therefore, a more efficient mechanism must be established, and some appropriate and practical measures must be implemented to increase the bilateral cultural exchanges at different levels. This paper will then accordingly provide some constructive ideas to deal with the issue mentioned above. Amongst them, there are two primary directions to be focused on. Creating a community of cultural industries and building up a cultural ecosystem which could be shared by both countries, are the two possible solutions. Through these methods, the "China-Pakistan Shared Destiny" can be constructed and can also be presented to the world as a model of cultural cooperation between two civilisations.*

**Key Words:** One Belt and One Road, Cultural Exchanges and Cooperation between China and Pakistan; Community of Common Destiny, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

### **General Statement of the CPEC**

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been implemented smoothly since its launch in 2013 under China's mega project the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).<sup>1</sup> China terms the CPEC as the "flagship" project and intends to make it a positive example of the regional development projects. Through the collaborative efforts

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\* Ms Wan Jiqiong, Associate Professor, School of Marxism, Sichuan University of Science and Engineering, Zigong Sichuan, China, 643000. Email: [Jiqiong\\_wan@126.com](mailto:Jiqiong_wan@126.com).

\*\* Zhou Keyu, student of International Relations and Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Education (Honour) Monash University, 108/2 Clarkson court, Clayton, VIC Australia 3168. Email: [skipperzhou@gmail.com](mailto:skipperzhou@gmail.com)

by two countries, some essential energy and transportation projects have entered the final stage. In November 2016, the first Chinese convoy containing 60 containers starting from Kashgar city reached Gwadar Port, and those containers were loaded at Chinese freighters waiting at the port.<sup>2</sup> This convey travelled nearly 3115 km, which passes by the Pamirs and the Hindu Kush, and crosses the Karakoram and Khunjerab Pass and then enter into Pakistan. It showed that connectivity between China and Gwadar is completed. Under this background, the CPEC has shortened the distance of bilateral commercial trade from 10500 km to 2500 km, which eventually benefits both countries.<sup>3</sup> A number of Pakistani trucks containing containers joined the convey at different points in Pakistan. Besides trade, analysts argue that CPEC will help China to overcome its Malacca Strait dilemma, the choke point from where bulk of China's trade and energy pass.<sup>4</sup>

The cooperation between China and Pakistan under the umbrella of CPEC has created a real impact on Pakistan's economic development as well as on Sino-Pakistan bilateral economic and trade relations. According to the World Bank, from 2013 to 2016 Pakistan's GDP grew from \$231.219 billion to \$283.66 billion.<sup>5</sup> In 2013, China was the second largest trade partner of Pakistan, and the China-Pakistan trade volume of that year was \$7.458 billion.<sup>6</sup> Three years later, according to the Pakistan's Parliamentary Secretary for Commerce, Najeebuddin Awaisi, that China-Pakistan volume of trade had reached at \$13.77 billion in 2016.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is evident that there is a consistent increase in the bilateral trade. In the first 8 months of 2017, China-Pakistan trade has reached \$13.23 billion, which represents a 6% of year-on-year growth.<sup>8</sup>

Generally speaking, the speed of bilateral economic and trade growth between China and Pakistan was faster than China with other countries. For instance, from 2013 to 2015 the bilateral economic and trade growth between China and Pakistan was keeping more than 12.5 %, and accordingly, the bilateral economic and trade growth rate between them was around 15% per year.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the imports and exports of Chinese cultural products rose from \$6.09 billion in 2003 to \$27.41 billion in 2013, only the export of its cultural products of 2013 amounted to \$ 25.13 billion.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, the export of Pakistani cultural products also surged from \$60 million in 2004 to \$276 million in 2013.<sup>11</sup> Despite the positive growth of China-Pakistan bilateral economic and trade relations under the CPEC, there is one vital area which was not significantly focused that was cultural communication and cooperation between the two nations. It is found that the emphasis on cultural communication and collaboration is not in the balance with other areas covered under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. China and Pakistan have a long and valuable history of cultural communication which could be traced back to the establishment of the ancient Silk Road or even earlier. During this process, the level of bilateral cultural exchanges gradually increased, and cultural cooperation was also slowly enhanced. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC), both the volume of consumption and trade of cultural products between China and Pakistan were relatively small. Even in 2016, the scale of bilateral cultural trade is still too small to be worthy to mention.

With further cooperation in the CPEC being implemented and more desirable needs for regional development are pursued, it is a right time for China and Pakistan to promote more and deeper cultural exchanges and cooperation. It is

believed that these cultural exchanges and cooperation will play a significant role to boost the comprehensive bilateral relationships and help to balance the regional developments to further deepen the “all-weather” bilateral strategic and cooperative partnerships between China and Pakistan.

### **History of Cultural exchanges**

Let us have a brief review of cultural exchanges between China and Pakistan. This will enable us to the existing status and formulating future strategy. According to the Embassy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in Islamabad, the cultural exchanges links between the people of the two countries go back to the ancient times. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, the two countries have taken a number of steps to promote two-way exchanges. The most important step in the promotion of two-way exchanges was taken when on 25 March 1965, the countries signed The Cultural Cooperation Agreement between Pakistan and China. The two countries resumed the signing and implementation of the two-year executive programme on regular basis. As a result, the “cultural exchanges and cooperation have made continuous headways ever since the diplomatic ties of the two countries.” Following are some of the high-profile cultural exchanges between the two countries: “In May 1983, a Chinese Government Cultural Delegation, headed by Mr. Zhu Muzhi, ex-Minister for Culture of China, visited Pakistan; In November 1991, a Chinese Government Cultural Delegation, headed by Mr. Xu Wenbo, ex-Minister for Culture of China, visited Pakistan; In November 1981, a Pakistani Government Cultural Delegation, headed by Mr. Niaz Mohammad Arbab, visited China; In June 1982, a Pakistani Government Cultural Delegation, headed by Mr. Masood Nabi Nur, ex-Secretary Ministry of Culture of Pakistan, visited China; In September 1999, a Pakistani Government Cultural Delegation, headed by Mr. Shaheed Hussain, ex-Minister for Information and Culture of Pakistan, visited China.”<sup>12</sup>

Besides this, Beijing and Islamabad have conducted a number of “fruitful exchanges and cooperation in art, literature, education, information, sports, youth affairs, cultural relics, archives, publications, health and women affairs etc.” Chinese art troupes made visits to various Pakistani cities and performed dance, folk song, played traditional instrumental and acrobatic. According to official sources two-way exchanges have also taken place in the areas like painting, handicrafts as well as puppet show. literature, quite a few writings from both sides have been translated into each other's language throughout the years. In TV and film, a special agreement was signed by the two governments in order to promote the cooperation in this field, and in mid 1980s several TV programs were jointly produced by two countries' TV channels including Affection on the Highway which captured the fondness from the people of both countries.<sup>13</sup> China-Pak educational exchanges and cooperation have developed a lot too over the past years. China offers hundreds of scholarships to Pakistan students not only for learning Chinese language but also in other areas. According to Pakistani education attach in Beijing, currently over 19,000 Pakistani students have been studying in different fields in China.<sup>14</sup> This number is on constant rise.

It is also worth mentioning that Urdu which is the national language of Pakistan and Chinese which is national language of China, are becoming popular in both

countries. China in particular has long history of the promotion of Urdu. During the 1950s, China established Urdu department at Peking University, Beijing. The department since then has trained number of Chinese scholars with command on Urdu language. The department has also translated very important books from Urdu literature into Chinese and have published first ever comprehensive Chinese-Urdu dictionary. The popularity of Urdu language in China could be measured from the fact that currently at least five universities offer Urdu language course at different level. Graduates from these departments, serves in various government departments and offer their services to different business companies.

The popularity of Chinese language in Pakistan is far greater. Pakistan has introduced Chinese at very basic level. More number of school across the country start teaching Chinese at kindergarten level. Although this trend mostly is in private sector, central and provincial governments are planning to make Chinese language compulsory at public sector institutes too. At the same time, there is proliferation of China Study Centers at different universities in Pakistan. Confucius Institutes, established the help from Chinese government, have been playing a significant role in this regard.

Being a former British colony, cricket is the most popular sports in Pakistan. However, this sport is hardly known in China. Under friendly relationship, Pakistan is playing a role in introducing cricket in China. China national cricket team has now joined International Cricket Council. Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) in collaboration with the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) appointed Rashid Khan, the former Pakistan bowler, to train young cricketers in China.<sup>15</sup> As a result of this cooperation, two Chinese cricketers are taking part in the Pakistan Super League (PSL).<sup>16</sup> International cricket in Pakistan was badly affected due to law and order situation in the country. Pakistan is now considering using China as a home venue for test match cricket. This truly reflects the nature of close relationship between the two countries.<sup>17</sup> These are only a few examples. The two-way exchanges under the umbrella of culture can be further expanded as discussed below.

### **Measure of improving bilateral cooperation in cultural fields**

As mentioned before, out of six corridors being developed under the BRI, the CPEC is the “flagship” project. Under this project, Sino-Pakistan relations are poised to take a quantum leap in economic, trade, political and strategic arenas. It is critically important at this juncture that two sides take concrete measures to develop cultures exchanges. It will enable the general public of the two countries to further understand each other’s cultures, sensitivities, and essential aspects of society. It will also help to the overall growth of the two-way relationship. Against this backdrop, this study suggests three primary methods to further promote China-Pakistani cultural exchanges and cooperation.

First of all, it is necessary to establish a more effective mechanism of cultural exchanges and cooperation between two countries. The current running mechanism of China-Pakistan cultural exchanges and cooperation is mostly confined to an official level between the two countries. Cooperation and exchanges at the non-governmental levels are not able to contact all segments of the society efficiently. Due to the leading role of governments in the bilateral cultural communication and cooperation, governments should also play certain

significant roles in the new mechanism. Thus, the leaders and runners of this mechanism should still be selected from various governmental organs, such as national and local cultural sectors. Moreover, this mechanism should be given powers and resources to make plans for the cultural exchanges and cooperative projects. At the same time, some new organisations must be established under this mechanism, and then the mechanism should be responsible for setting the targets of the bilateral cultural exchange and cooperation projects, supervising and solving the problems in the implementation of different projects, and evaluating, checking, and accepting the effectiveness of the projects.

Secondly, both the quality and the quantity of China-Pakistan cultural exchanges and cooperation are relatively small which is unable to match the all-weather friendship between two countries. An ancient Chinese saying has indicated that the contacts and mutual understanding between two countries are based on the close communications and intimacy of their people. Thus, it is essential to expand the participants in the bilateral cultural communication and cooperation when there are massive opportunities under BRI. The participants can include the cultural celebrities and famous artists of both countries, the researchers of respective culture, or they can be excellent people from different universities, educational institutions, cultural enterprises, media, film and television, entertainment, museums, tourism, catering and so on. All of them can take part in the groups of bilateral cultural communication to improve the cooperation between two nations. In such exchanges both sides could develop links in similar fields and industries and explore ways to further expand such exchanges. In this case, it would be constructive to increase bilateral cultural exchanges at different levels from various social groups. For instance, two countries can follow the model of the CPEC to build up a China-Pakistan Cultural and Art Corridor, promoting more bilateral regular cultural exchange activities, including song, poetry, dance, folk arts and crafts, acrobatics, fine art, painting, and so on. Two nations can establish some large projects of the cultural industry by using the good artistic resources from both countries and then jointly carry out some projects about cultural cooperation, in the forms of films and television programs. Then, they can also create some new cultural products, which can be consumed not only by people from China and Pakistan, but also by people from other countries or regions. Therefore, this “CPCAC” will not only fully use some current relevant institutions, for example, the Culture Communication Centre of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, but also will improve the mutual exports of cultural products, and create more opportunities for the other countries along the “Belt and Road Initiative” . Another effective method is expanding contacts and communications amongst people of two countries, especially the younger generations inside or outside schools. What is more, there should be more efforts in assisting more Chinese to learn Urdu and more Pakistanis to study Chinese, and then build up more exchange projects for students and scholars, as well as more culture-sharing circles to facilitate the businessmen to understand the difference between the business culture of two nations. It is evident that with the construction of the CPEC becoming deeper and broader, there will be demands of more professional and technical labours. Thus, it is essential that both the public and private sectors of China and Pakistan invest in the construction of human resources, making it a long-term task to benefit the CPEC and bilateral cooperation.

Furthermore, it is essential to develop a closer bilateral cooperation between two countries to create a community of cultural industries and to build up a cultural ecosystem which could be shared by two nations. The current situations of cooperation between China and Pakistan in the cultural industries are very limited, and the scale is too small as well. However, the prospect of this area is promising, and thus it is good to do so. Regarding the background of this part, cultural industry is one of the most potent and powerful areas in the 21st century, and it has also become an emerging industry in the world's industrial development, and more countries are implementing it as an essential part of their economic development. For instance, the experiences of the western and developed countries mainly indicate that people's consumption structure will shift from material consumption to cultural products and services as well as spiritual needs, when the per capita GDP is increasing. Nowadays, as the world's largest economy, the United States of America has the world's largest media and entertainment industry, making up a third of the entire global market and music, movies and television created in the U.S. are consumed worldwide.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, the BRI is to create many opportunities for cultural industry's development for the countries along it. It is evident that China and Pakistan have great potentials and opportunities to improve their cultural industries and then to promote interaction and cooperation in this field. Possible areas in the cultural industries that China-Pakistan bilateral cooperation could focus on are shown as follows:

Radio and television industry, folk arts and crafts industry, performing arts industry, festival exhibition, cultural relic and museum systems, publishing industry, advertising industry, the entertainment industry, sports industry, printing and packaging industry, cultural education and healthcare, cultural agricultural tourism, emerging cultural industry and new cultural formats by using digital technology and network information technology, cultural equipments manufacturing industry, and cooperative training of creative talents in cultural industry, and some other related fields. It omens well that under the long-term plan for the CPEC, the two governments are setting up fiber optic which will enhance digital connectivity between the two countries. They will also launch TV programmes under this plan to promote cultural exchanges between the two sides. This is in line with one of the recommendations made in this paper.

Given the deep-rooted relationship between the two countries spanning over decades, the two sides have appointed diplomats to develop cultural exchanges between the two countries. These cultural sections should be further strengthened especially by allocating more funding. These sections can conduct research how to further promote two-way cultural exchnages between the two countries. In fact, there are large number of similarities between the two countries. For example, Zigong, a small small city in Sichuan province is known for salt mines. On the other hand, Pakistan's Khewra's Salt Mine, in Jhelum District, is the second largest mine in the world. Zigong has expertise and considerable amount of research on salt. It has extensive network of scholars doing studies on salt. The two cities can develop joint projects. This model can be applied in other common areas of research.<sup>19</sup>

It is greatly expected that if the above ideas are going to become true, the frequency and activities of the China-Pakistan cultural exchange cooperation will be significantly increased, and more cultural areas and fields of bilateral communication and cooperation will be broadened. Apparently, combing culture and society in various fields and industries is a good way to build up different cultural industry bases, particularly in areas like culture and film and television industry, cultural tourism, cultural sports, cultural art, cultural science and technology, culture-oriented agriculture, cultural education and medicine. Moreover, it is also possible to establish cultural exchange centre and cooperation institutes, in the forms as “China-Pakistan Film Center”, “China-Pakistan Folk culture and Art Center” which can be excellent examples of the South Asia regions and some other countries along the “Belt and Road Initiative”.

### **Conclusion**

Cultural exchange and cooperation should be seen as the main content and typical characteristic in the China-Pakistan bilateral relations, which will not only accord with the new trend of the regional development and the world economic developments, but also conforms to China’s and Pakistan’s national interests. At the same time, this model can be promoted to other regions as different ways of developing due to the unique role of culture that plays in a nation, and only the cultural ties amongst nations can create the powerful attraction which would never be seen in areas such as economy and military. Moreover, the development of cultural industry is helpful to satisfy the people’s needs for cultural and spiritual life in the 21st century as well. Thus, new methods and measures used in the cultural exchange and cooperation between China and Pakistan, especially in the cultural industry, will significantly bring an enormous economic growth in two countries and the Asian region too. It is believed that the construction of the “China-Pakistan Shared Destiny” can be presented before the world as an excellent model of cultural cooperation between two civilisations.

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