



PERCEPTIONS OR MISPERCEPTIONS: CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC CORRIDOR (CPEC)

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Abstract

Public views are essential, particularly when it comes to large-scale development initiatives like CPEC, which have the potential to change the socioeconomic and political climate of a nation comprised of more than 200 million individuals. This paper focuses on the perceptions of CPEC among the media in a virtual world. The study is based on a qualitative analysis of media handling, that is, the positive or negative image of CPEC. The media reports gathered indicate that the majority of Pakistanis consider CPEC a valuable project for Pakistan and regard China as a more reliable, friendly nation than the US, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Iran (Awais et al., 2019). However, there are dissenting views readily floating in the country regarding the nature of Pak-China relations, where the media also refers to the amity between China and Pakistan as being "interest-based." It suggests that the educated Pakistani public's support for China is motivated by pragmatism rather than sentiment and that the states' claim that their relationship is "sweeter than honey, higher than the mountains" should be considered pragmatically. The development of the project's perception management strategy for the two concerned nations will benefit from an analysis of how this project is perceived on social media by various societal groups (Akhtar et al., 2021).

Keywords: CPEC, Perceptions, Media, China, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

McCartney, in his paper, "The Prospects of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): The Importance of Understanding Western China," argues various essential facets related to perceptions of CPEC. He exclaimed that the world views CPEC through its lens. Approximately \$60 billion Chinese-led economic prosperity package knotted with road-railway networks that are jeweled with industries, energy parks, and special economic zones



(SEZ) has its designs in overall China's vision of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (McCartney, 2021). CPEC has a debatable and controversial impact on Pakistan. Some scholars make it a case of economic or political subordination, while others argue it is a regional equality and economic prosperity for Pakistan. McCartney believes that most scholars hash out Pakistani woes with an exclusive inward focus on Pakistan. However, the success of CPEC shares a standard triumph for both China and Pakistan (McCartney, 2021).

1.1. External Challenges

Many local, national, and international geopolitical actors have been criticizing and opposing CPEC since its inception. The United States and China have been trying to maintain the balance of power status quo ever since 1949. Although it appears that the United States is interested in a stable and rising Pakistan, Pakistan needs to oblige to the US stance on a few fronts. At this particular moment, the US vested interest lies in Pakistan's maintenance of its stance on Afghanistan and making sure that Indian interests in Afghanistan are not threatened, as India's strategic significance has increased for the US since QUAD was signed to tackle China's growing influence in the Asian continent (Hyder, 2023).

The economic ties between Pakistan and China initially elicited ambivalence from the United States before receiving some blatant criticism. The American criticism over China's interest and investment in Pakistan is that the MoU signed on CPEC is designed to advantage China more as the benefits for other stakeholders are much lesser in comparison. However, the scale of investment carried out by China is much more than the US, any other nation, or any MNC is even willing to make (Li, 2020).

The hostility of Afghanistan towards Pakistan has brought India closer to it. Moreover, on the basis of this mutual animosity, Afghanistan has been acting as India's haven from where Afghanistan's Intelligence outfit, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), gets trained, armed, financed, and used for destabilizing Pakistan either via terror attacks in former FATA or insurgents sent in to challenge the writ of state in the province of Baluchistan. While this destabilizes the peace situation in Pakistan, these kinds of actions were also a tool used for undermining the progress of CPEC as many Chinese Nationals working on CPEC were also the prime target of such terror attacks. The capture of Kulbhushan Jadhav is a testament enough to apprehend the strategic scheming of our so-called neighbors who were both involved in financing terror, providing arms, and employing saboteurs in Baluchistan to weaken Pakistan overall and to mess up CPEC in specific designs (Constantino, 2020).

Such strategies must be adopted that it must broaden participation in the political and economic processes while simultaneously putting an end to the Indian terrorist threat in Baluchistan. The CPEC will support the growth of employment and professional training. Once the CPEC becomes operational, it will surely boost TAPI (Hyder, 2023).

1.2. Internal Challenges

CPEC is cladded with numerous internal challenges. Pakistan's vision is to connect the major economic regions as it will help foster the economy and will act as the interconnected economic



engine for the region. Chinese aid (technical or investment) will help in increasing the growth (Business & Outlook, 2018). Whereas the Chinese envision cooperating in terms of money, technology field, production of different goods, engineering field, and operational capacity for the advancement of both countries. Encourage Pakistan's long-term societal stability. Implement the Western China Development Plan and the Silk Road Economic Belt more quickly (Ebrahim, 2015).

Implementation poses significant challenges even though the governing ideals for the future of both parties are justified, clear, and complementary. In Pakistan, there was debate over which strategy was best. The Chinese are also under extreme time constraints, and they would likely have favored a step-by-step strategy. It makes sense that the practical strategy won out. In actuality, one strategy does not preclude the other. Targeted actions must be conducted concurrently with a process of stepped prioritization. In Pakistan, decentralized execution is the norm rather than centralized planning. The norm in China is decentralized planning and centralized execution. As CPEC develops, both approaches must be coordinated (Younus, 2021).

The general perception in Pakistan is that despite the efforts of both governments to be transparent, the Government of Pakistan was unable to adequately explain the idea of cooperating with the Chinese Government under CPEC, especially the financial matters and other consequences (Mahmood et al., 2020). The legislative assembly should step up and explain the CPEC situation in a better way, not only through official spokespersons, conventional print and electronic media but also through social media (Younus, 2021).

A dearth of suitable training and professional connections also appears to exist in Pakistan. Governance and delivery capacity problems are the next. Pakistan's capacity to carry out initiatives has declined over the past 20 years. It will be necessary to employ more Chinese engineers and skilled workers in order to finish projects in the shortest amount of time possible so that economic benefits can start to materialize as soon as possible (Younus, 2021).

A lack of earnestness can be seen in evaluating the competitiveness of CPEC, its advantages or disadvantages, and the utility of transit trade routes, mainly from Afghanistan. Progress in this direction and public acknowledgment that it is being made will play a role in CPEC's acceptance; equity and balanced regional development are both essential objectives (Mahmood et al., 2020).

1.3. Problem Statement

BRI seeks to promote the methodical opening of financially sound investments, as well as the allocation and distribution of essential resources and a comprehensive market assimilation. In April 2015, China and Pakistan contracted for 51 x memorandums of understanding (MoUs). The aim was twofold: to boost commerce and to enhance trade. CPEC calls for the economic growth of Pakistan (Ashraf, 2022).



In Pakistan, improving inter-provincial ties was another goal of the CPEC. Balochistan, where the CPEC's flagship project in Gwadar is located, feels cut out (Ashraf, 2022). Chinese employees on-site are proving to be an easy target for terrorists opposed to the initiative. The recently overthrown Imran Khan administration is alleged to have slowed down the implementation of CPEC. There are more significant underlying causes for the slowdown (Sinha, 2022).

India and the US seem to oppose CPEC. India challenges the construction of CPEC through Jammu and Kashmir, where she unilaterally claims. India takes its expansionist design of rising China, which wants to dominate the Indian Ocean and geo-strategic influence. Surely, CPEC or BRI contests the aspirations of the US and Indians (Ishfaq, 2019).

The United States has remained the primary opponent of BRI, which includes CPEC as a critical component. As China challenges the US over its support for India, the United States has cautioned Pakistan against furthering its relationship with China out of concern for its growing global influence. The United States has supported Indian naval power to contest the expansion of Chinese dominance over sea waters, as evidenced by the ever-increasing U.S.-Indian ties over the past few years (Sinha, 2022).

The United States accuses China of engaging in "debt trap diplomacy," which supposedly enables China to access Pakistan's strategic assets. There are frequent comparisons made between Pakistan and Sri Lanka's dire fiscal situation. The system, at least in Pakistan, did not, however, adhere to the industrialization timelines intended to produce income and jobs to repay the Chinese loans (EFSAS, 2017).

1.4. Objectives

The key objectives are to inquire about the following aspects related to the CPEC since 2015:

- CPEC is progressive or regressive project between Pakistan and China.
- China or Pakistan is no more interested in pursuing the CPEC.
- China is in the process to debt trap Pakistan.
- CPEC is proving to be burden on China.
- Pakistan and China are being benefitted out of this project.

1.5. Research Questions

CPEC is a long-term project that is perceived to disturb the economic equilibrium of the US-led coalition in the region. Therefore, the national and international media are playing a debatable role in portraying the CPEC as an influence on them. The research will rotate around the following questions: -

- What were the conceived projects of CPEC since its initiation in 2022?
- Did the envisaged projects complete in the given time frame?
- What were the various reasons for non-completion of the CPEC projects vis-à-vis the perceptions?
- How the negative effects/perceptions on CPEC are be addressed?



1.6. Organization of Paper

The remaining paper will cover research methodology and theoretical/conceptual frameworks, followed by ongoing projects of CPEC, which will be highlighted with a view to having the actual situation on the ground. Then, the perceptions related to the CPEC projects will be addressed. Lastly, the study will cover the redressal of these perceptions in an effort to provide a way forward to stakeholders.

2. Research Methodology

This paper will be based on qualitative research to investigate the perceptions being construed about CPEC due to various ongoing projects, statements of leaders at both ends, and views of think tanks, media reports, and newspapers on the Pakistani populace. The qualitative analysis helped in reaching out the truth about various perceptions or misperceptions carried away into the minds of stakeholders, and eventually, that will help the reader to find out the way forward to improve upon at least on a perceptual plane, or if it exists in reality then it provides a ready reckoner to authorities to address the populace worry.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper will revolve around the Gibson theory of direct perception. It is a bottom-up approach to information processing. Bottom-up approaches, which piece together data to create a larger picture, are more similar to the structuralist strategy. This theory contends that independent of the influence of higher cognitive processes, the context provided by the external environment is sufficient for our visual systems to perceive what is outside correctly (Chong & Proctor, 2020).

According to Gibson's theory of direct perception, all we need to perceive anything is the data in our sensory receptors, including the sensory context. Because the surroundings provide the data we require for awareness, this notion is known to be ecological perception. Contrarily, our ability to mediate between sensory experiences and perceptions does not depend on additional or higher cognitive processes. Preexisting concepts or inferential mental processes of higher order are not essential for perception. This philosophy will be helpful in assessing how people perceive—or do not perceive—CPEC because it assumes that our sensory organs have access to sufficient data to create an image (Gibson, 2017).

CPEC is a socio-economic project. People do get affected by the social contracts between different states, especially once these affect them. Moreover, today's media is so vibrant that nothing is hidden from the common person. So, he makes the perceptions as Gibson propagates (Chong & Proctor, 2020).

4. Conceptual Framework

From Pakistan's perspective, CPEC seems to be the lifeline for Pakistan's ailing economy. Perception and expectation are essential when it comes to the economy and how Pakistanis approach decision-making for the future. For any successful economic model, public support acts as the mainstay for its better prospects (Gabel & Whitten, 1997). Taking the case of CPEC

in point, it is a long-term project (2017 – 2030). Right from the initial phase of this project, it has to face criticism that was required to be addressed. As highlighted in diagram 1.1, the project is in the process (Group, 2018).

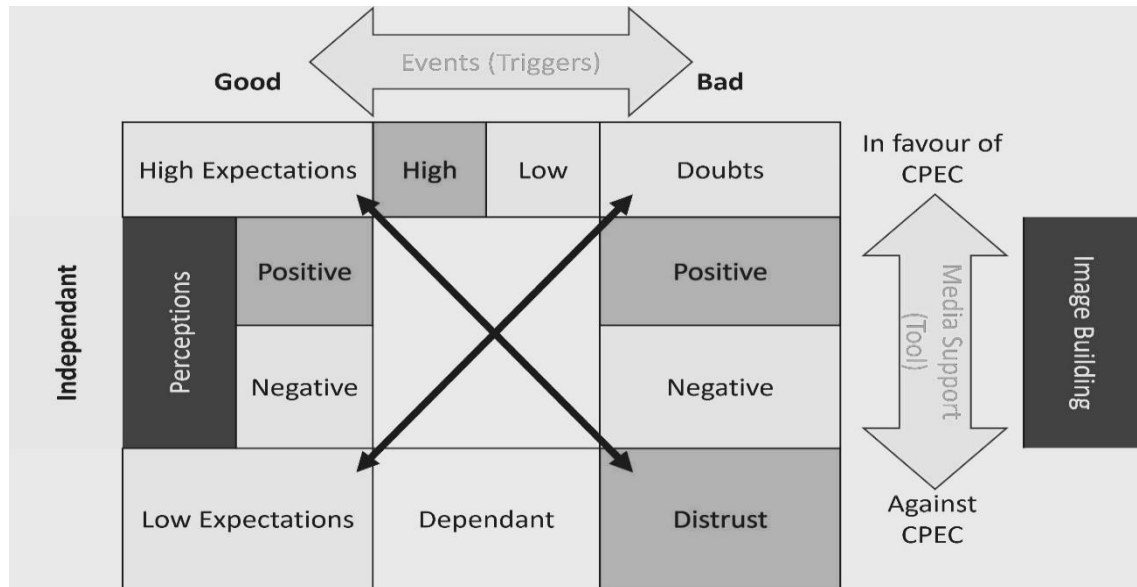


Figure 1: Perceptions about CPEC

Various events occur that create either a negative or a positive perception. Perceptions build a negative or a positive image in the minds of decision-makers or investors. For instance, on July 14, 2021, a bus transporting a Chinese worker in the Dasu neighborhood of Pakistan's Upper Kohistan District exploded and fell into a ravine, killing 13 people—nine Chinese nationals and four Pakistanis—and injuring 28 others (BBC, 2021). A lousy event occurred, creating doubts initially in the hearts of decision-makers as the local media was projecting it as a natural calamity due to the technical fault or posing it as a fault of the driver. Arif Khan, deputy commissioner (DC), told Dawn shortly after the incident that the incident happened around 7:30 a.m. as the vehicle was carrying approximately 30 x employees, including Chinese, from camp to the plant site. He added that in addition to the engineers on board, there were also members of the Frontier Corps and local laborers when a detonation occurred, the cause of which has not yet been determined. However, later, the Foreign Office (FO) said in the afternoon that the bus had "plunged into a ravine after a mechanical failure culminating in leakage of gas that produced a blast" (Umar Bacha, 2021). The foreign office further tries to cover the incident while saying that "China and Pakistan are strong allies and forged brothers. Pakistan places a high priority on ensuring the safety and security of Chinese citizens, projects, and organizations there" (Umar Bacha, 2021). Thus, the central concept of this study will revolve around the projects required to be completed in any given timeframe with respect to the impediments it is facing and how the Government and media are handling the incidents related to those events related to CPEC. Therefore, the study hypothesized the following.

H1. CPEC is subjugated with the perceptions portrayed by media.



5. CPEC Projects and their Current Status

CPEC is a long-term project. Before concluding, it is pertinent to accrue the facts first. CPEC covers various sub-fields related to energy, transport infrastructure, the development of Gwadar port, SEZs, and the development of the Social sector.

5.1. Energy

There are a total of 21 energy projects that are either completed or in the completion phase. In which 14 projects have been completed. 9 projects became operational before 2019, whereas 5 projects just kick-started during 2022 and 2023. Moreover, in the remaining 7 x projects, 3 x projects are under a letter of intent stage (LoI), and 2 x projects are determined to be completed in 2025 and 2026. However, speculations emerged once the Financial Close (FC) of the Suki Kinari Power Project was achieved in February 2017, yet until now, 70% of its work has been completed. It is expected to be completed by the end of 2023 or mid-2024 (Reporter, 2022). Likewise, the completion date of the 300MW Coal-Fired Power Project at Gwadar was December 2021, but its Financial Close is yet under process (MoPD, 2017). The early harvest programs that had to be finished during the first period of CPEC included the Gwadar power project (2015-18). However, its completion is expected by the end of 2023 (Rana, 2022).

5.2. Transport Infrastructure Projects

Road infrastructure and transport make the backbone of CPEC projects. There was a total of 24 x conceived with the projected timeline. At this juncture, 6 x projects have been considered completed, with some speculation on Orange Line Metro Train Lahore. That came under heavy criticism from all over the country (Hussain, 2020). Other 5 x projects have been in progress for a long time, including N-50, N-30, M-8, Shandur-Chitral Road, and Nokundi- Mashakhel road. Khuzdar-Basima Road (N-30) was supposed to be completed by the end of 2021, but its completion date is not finalized (NHA, 2022). Other 8 x projects are under lengthy negotiations due to financial issues or land procurement issues. They are the cause of concern for the taxpayers on both sides of the borders, including the dualization and upgrading of Main Line-1, dry port Havelian, Dir Freeway, Digital Terrestrial Multimedia Broadcast -A, Peshawar – Dera Ismail Khan Motorway, Upgrading of D.I.Khan (Yarik) - Zhob, Awaran - Khuzdar Road Section (M-8), Dera Ismail Khan – Kuchlak N-50 (Phase-I), KKH Alternative Route, Thakot - Raikot Section (Digitalize the existing three sites of PTV) and, KKH Realignment (Phase-I). Apart from that, few other projects have been included in the list of long-term projects due to political interferences to avoid friction with Chinese authorities. These include Mirpur-Muzaffarabad-Mansehra Road, Karachi Circular Railway, Mashakhel-Pangur Road, Quetta Mass Transit, and Greater Peshawar Region Mass Transit (MoPD, 2017).

5.3. Gwadar Projects

The work on Gwadar Projects is moving at a snail's pace. Out of 14 x Projects, only 4 x nominal projects either got completed or only sought approval. There are 7 x projects like The 300MW Gwadar Coal-Fired Power Project, Friendship Hospital, the 1.2 MGD and 5 MGD Gwadar Water Desalination Plants, the International Airport at Gwadar, and other projects that had to be finished before 2023 but are still experiencing financial and security challenges. The preparations of breakwaters, berthing areas, various channels, jetties, the boat manufacturing



industry, the Smart Sanitation System, and the landfill project are additional long-term initiatives in which joint working groups are still engaged (MoPD, 2017).

5.4. Industrial Cooperation/Special Economic Zones (SEZs)

Special Economic Zones are the backbone of this economic model. Out of 9 x projects highlighted on the official site of CPEC, 4 x projects/ zones, namely, Rashakai SEZ, Bostan SEZ, Allama Iqbal Industrial City, and Dhabeji SEZ, are under construction and have already crossed the perceived timeline. The rest of the 5 x projects, namely Industrial Zones at Islamabad, Mirpur, Pakistan Steel Mills, Moqpondass SEZ, and Marble City at Mohmand, are in the pipeline (MoPD, 2017).

5.5. Social and Economic Development

In the Social and economic domain, 27 x projects are progressing on the back burner because the completed 5 x projects are not significant enough to capture the local populace's sentiments.

Completed Projects
Disaster preparedness capacity building
Poverty alleviation training
Emergency relief supplies for enhancing NDMA
Vaccine storage and transportation equipment
Pakistan Vocational and Technical Education Capacity Building Project, equipment upgrading and renovation for Pakistan Vocational Schools

Figure 2: Completed Projects Socio-Economic Development Programs

The other 11 x projects are not capturing the attention of the media, too.



On Going Projects
China-Pakistan Joint Agricultural Technology Laboratory
Provision of Agricultural equipment and tools
Smart Classroom for Higher education
Maintenance and renovation for 50 schools in newly merged districts
Solar-powered lighting equipment
Overseas student scholarship
Medical equipment and materials
Gwadar hospital project
Brightness journey in Pakistan
Drinking water equipment
Gwadar Desalination Plant
Gwadar Vocational and Technical Project

Figure 3: Socio – On - Going Socio-Economic Development Programs

However, Pakistan and China need to focus on the image-building of projects of national importance. Additionally, these social initiatives can entice the global market to quicken other ongoing projects (MoPD, 2017).

Long Term Projects
China-Pakistan Joint Agricultural Demonstrations
Bacterial Grass (JunCao) Technology Training and Promotion Project
Pakistan Agricultural Vocational Training
Provision of teaching materials for primary and secondary schools
Burn Centers
China-Pak Joint Telemedicine Network
Medical Emergency Center in Balochistan
Rural Poverty Reduction Joint Initiative

Figure 4: Socio – Long Term Projects Socio-Economic Development Programs



6. Perception or Misperception versus Reality

6.1. Chinese Investment and Rate of Return

There is a perception that Chinese investment in Pakistan is a 'Debt Trap Policy.' Due to this, the investment and the debt rate have been deliberately hidden by the Chinese (Younus, 2021). CPEC has provided Pakistan with a vast foreign direct investment over the years, brought in \$2.12 billion in tax revenue, and created 192,000 employments for Pakistanis. Chinese businesses and initiatives operate freely in Pakistan. A sizable portion of the CPEC projects are funded preferentially or with China's assistance. The CPEC's energy-related initiatives follow Pakistan's approach to electricity tariffs as well. The policy was developed and made public prior to the creation of CPEC IPPs in an attempt to attract foreign investment. However, at that time, only Chinese firms made acquisitions; no other investors expressed any interest (Dawood, 2018).

6.2. Looming Economic Crises and Rescheduled or Rolled Over Loans

Mainly as a result of extensive nationwide flooding, Pakistan is already experiencing its worst economic catastrophe. Whether China has deferred its loans or it is time to get rich quickly is the subject of much interest among economists (Kugelman, 2023).

China has promised to offer Pakistan more than \$160 million in aid, the most of any nation in the world, and has expressed sympathy for its Pakistani brothers who have been affected by the severe flooding. Along with the kind donation from the Chinese community, this assistance was provided by the Chinese Government, military, and businesses. As Pakistan enters the phase of rehabilitation and reconstruction, China Pakistan is continuously negotiating to aid people experiencing poverty. China has done what it can over a long time of cooperation to ensure Pakistan's financial stability. Last year, China gave Pakistan company loans worth 15 billion RMB and deposits worth 2 billion USD. China will continue to contribute what it can to the security of the Pakistani economy (Younus, 2021).

6.3. Chinese Aid and Grants

China helped Pakistan improve its economic livelihood and keep its financial security intact. Pakistan receives a sizable amount of assistance from China. Take Gwadar as an illustration. The biggest single foreign assistance project China has ever undertaken is the new Gwadar International Airport, which is presently being constructed. Chinese labor was used in the construction of the Schools, Medical Emergency Centres, Technical-Vocational College, and Expressway at Gwadar. Chinese-funded hospital and desalination plant at Gwadar is scheduled to be finished this year; the hospital will be finished this year. Over the past two years, China has funded 7,000 x solar panels to the families at Gwadar. Another 10,000 solar panel setups are actively being prepared and will be distributed to underprivileged Baloch people. The Chinese Embassy is also helping Balochis with home solar systems and other aids at the same time (APP, 2022).



6.4. Political Rampage in Pakistan and Upcoming Projects

Pakistan is continuously facing political turmoil in the recent past. It always draws the critics to think about the fragile state of political and economic stability; therefore, it raises reservations about upcoming projects (Bonner, 2023).

During the visit of Prime Minister Shehbaz, the parties signed 21 x documents for cooperation and issued a joint statement. The two parties also agreed to advance the implementation of the ML-1 project. They sought priority in the meeting for its implementation, in accordance with the leaders' consensus, in addition to vigorously advancing the KCR project. The critical areas for concern were the health corridor (social livelihood), industrial corridor (mining), digital corridor (information technology), and green corridor (agriculture). Chinese were interested in investment in the renewable energy industry, too (Nandajie, 2022).

6.5. Impact of CPEC and Military to Military Relations

China and Pakistan have come a long way and struggled through difficult times to collectively extricate themselves from despicable circumstances. The evidence for this is the long-standing military-to-military collaboration. Researchers are concerned about how the success or failure of CPEC will affect this relationship (Shah, 2018).

China and Pakistan share both success and adversity and are loyal friends, iron brothers. China believes in community-to-community relations and a common destiny. Military links serve as the backbone of their alliance and have, for a very long time, been essential to the development of bilateral relations. The two armies have produced beneficial outcomes in areas like high-level meetings, joint exercises, provision of equipment, transfer of technology or anti-pandemic support, and more, continually enhancing the meaning of bilateral strategic cooperation. A significant accomplishment of the two countries' equipment cooperation is the smooth progress of the fighter jets (Rong, 2022).

The militaries of China and Pakistan are prepared to advance collaboration in many areas to the zenith and give their all-weather strategic cooperative partnership a new impetus going forward, guided by the two countries' leaders, in order to contribute more to preserving regional peace and stability (Alam, 2021).

6.6. General Expectations of Populace

Pakistanis' expectations from CPEC have not yet been met. However, this goal has not yet been reached. Ordinary Pakistanis believed that Beijing and Islamabad's close collaboration would contribute to the development of new electricity and transportation infrastructure across the country (Yoder, 2023).

CPEC is progressing in the field of electricity (6,040 megawatts), transmission lines (886 kilometers), and highways (510 kilometers) to imprint a positive perception among the local populace. To cater to economic development and export race, China places a high priority on assisting Pakistan to increase employment and improve labor quality through collaboration.



Additionally, people anticipate that the Government will offer Chinese business people a secure and committed business climate at cheaper rates than these should be (Rehman, 2023).

6.7. Chinese Debt and Widening Current Account Deficit in Pakistan

One viewpoint claims that the CPEC initiative is to blame for increasing the nation's debt. Various monetary agencies have cautioned Pakistan regarding the widening of current accounts due to the nation's massive imported materials for the projects. That is why Pakistan has to face payment problems and would require IMF assistance (Anwar, 2020).

CPEC contains soft loans and support projects in addition to self-financing investments made by Chinese businesses like IPPs. Pakistan has increased exports and strengthened its ability to grow through cooperation. The nation has begun to benefit from Thar coal thanks to the CPEC project. China has finished the Gwadar East Bay Expressway and permitted the New Airport, Vocational Institute, and Friendship Hospital to stimulate Baluchistan's growth. In elementary and intermediate schools of Pakistan, China has also donated medical supplies and intelligent classrooms as part of Joint Working Groups (JWGs) on Social and Livelihood under CPEC. CPEC also fuels the growth of related businesses in Pakistan. Pakistan used to spend US\$2 Billion prior to the arrival of the Ceramics Industry in Pakistan. This investment helped Pakistan save money by substantially reducing the import of high-quality ceramics (Reporter, 2021).

The 2nd phase of CPEC will boost technology, commerce, science, and agriculture, which will grow by almost 13 times in 2021 (Anwar et al., 2022). The agricultural export to China may rise to US \$1 billion this year. Success can also be found in other types of agriculture and creative business models; for example, sesame exports by Pakistan have exceeded US \$100 million this year. China also gives Pakistan loans for economic growth and financial stability, and the two parties have maintained effective coordination and communication throughout. In this respect, China has never been compelled. As far as we are aware, Pakistan's biggest creditors are Western financial organizations. Instead of placing the blame on China, which is actually making progress, Pakistanis must work to strengthen the Pakistani economy and must take concrete action (Qadir, 2022).

6.8. Slow Pace of CPEC Projects

Pakistanis are also concerned about the CPEC projects' slow progress, which has been placed on hold and then restarted in a more condensed package (ANI, 2023).

Despite the epidemic, CPEC has expanded. The Gwadar East Bay Expressway, the Kalot hydropower complex, and the Thar TEL power plant all went into operation last year. Leaders from countries reaffirm to speed up the ML-1 project, promotion of the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) project, Gwadar Port, and the building of corridors with cooperation. CPEC remains the torch bearer for BRI growth (Rana, 2022).



6.9. China's Reconciliation Policy with India and its Impact on CPEC

China's non-interventionist and shared wealth approach can create a substantial bloc in Asia to challenge American power if it makes peace with India and then mediates a settlement between Pakistan and India (Jacob, 2020).

India and Pakistan are both substantial developing nations in a crucial stage of growth and friendly neighbors of China. China is dedicated to deepening its cordial ties with both nations and is likely to collaborate with them to further the development and peace in the area (Zaidong, 2023).

6.10. US led Indian Bloc and Its Impact on CPEC

Currently, the US takes China and Russia as its rivals. The US is apparently attempting to use Australia and India against them. Various agreements encompassing Logistics (LEMOA), Communication and Security (COMCASA), and Exchange and Cooperation (BECA) are testimony to this fact. One danger associated with this contention is a nuclear war (Kalyankar, 2023).

China maintains that any regional cooperation framework should support the current tendency towards peace growth, and it should be able to strengthen the mutual trust among the regional nations. She maintains that overtly discriminatory or exclusive approaches harm third parties (Wenbin, 2020).

China upholds the values of joint participation and mutual benefits. Partnerships between nations should emphasize fairness, consultation, and comprehension. Leading nations should take the initiative in laying out a new path for international involvement that emphasizes partnership and dialogue over alliance and conflict. Making "small cliques" is turning events around. Making "small parties" goes against historical precedent. The US promises to "shape the strategic environment around Beijing" by developing the so-called "Indo-Pacific strategy" to encircle and contain China. The attempt to unite against China will receive no backing and is destined to fail (Gang, 2023).

6.11. Transparency in the Financial Cooperation

In an interview, US Ambassador Donald Blome stated that all investments in Pakistan, whether from the US or China, should be open and scrutinized equally (Desk, 2022).

Economic and financial collaboration between China and Pakistan has been successful. The best individuals to ask are the Pakistanis. Consider doing something practical and helpful for the Pakistani people rather than unfairly criticizing China-Pakistani collaboration (Wenbin, 2022).

6.12. Measure of Success of CPEC and the Development in Balochistan

Balochistan is the remotest but the most essential part of CPEC as it links China from Kashgar to the Arabian Sea through Gwadar port. It is considered that CPEC would bring employment opportunities for the people of Balochistan. Moreover, CPEC would help in developing more



infrastructure, resolving energy crises, and improving the security environment in Balochistan (Shafiq et al., 2020).

6.13. CPEC is going to become another East India Company

China and Pakistan have a long history of friendship. China's Vision 2025 and BRI ideology are combined in CPEC. Pakistan and China have previously collaborated on other fronts. For many years, we have been involved in a strategic collaboration. With the introduction of CPEC, the geo-strategic and geo-economic alliance between the two nations underwent a paradigm shift. China's massive investments in the energy, infrastructure, and proposed industrial sectors offer tremendous opportunities to both rather than giving either partner country any additional mileage. Therefore, it is clear that CPEC and East India Company can be compared. China is making many genuine efforts to assist Pakistan in raising its socioeconomic indicators (Report, 2023).

The subcontinent's share of GDP in the 18th century was significantly greater in comparison to Britain's share of global GDP. This was the primary draw to win the larger share, but as of now, China holds more significant stakes in GDP, which is at 18.3% (23000 billion USD), whereas Pakistan's GDP is just 300 billion USD only (Altaf, 2023).

China differs from the East India Company in that China operates through mutual welfare and economic prosperity rather than the military might and application of brutal force with no regard for the welfare of the locals. Numerous Chinese projects that are operational in various countries are attesting to this fact (Dogar, 2017).

6.14. Some industries from China will soon be relocating to Pakistan

The light engineering sector is anticipated to relocate to areas with low Capital expenditures (CAPEX) and operating expenses (OPEX) due to the saturation of 85 million jobs in that sector. Therefore, the businesses in this sector may be moved from China to Pakistan and elsewhere (Akbar, 2023).

Expansion of Gwadar port and its commercialization, 4 x mass transit initiatives, and 9 x SEZs, laying of fiber connection, induction of thousands of megawatts of electricity are just a few of the projects Pakistan and China have launched as part of CPEC. Government development initiatives enabled 2017's economic growth rate to reach 5.3%, which was the highest in ten years (MoPD, 2017).

Industry relocation from other areas, the rapid expansion of the service sector serving transit trade, etcetera, will have positive effects on the growth rate. By 2022, it was anticipated that toll collection would generate about \$5 billion in annual revenue, which will help to address the potential balance of payment problems (PD&R) that have not been materialized so far. Gwadar port, Free trade zone, and SEZs would significantly increase growth and income (MoPD, 2017).



6.15. Pakistan is being driven from China; Provinces are aloof from Federal Decision Making

This concept is negatively perceived. Working together in a friendly environment, China and Pakistan plot the overall execution of the CPEC projects. A few examples of cooperative working in this area include the relevant MoUs, the Long Term Plan (LTP), the Transport Monographic Study, and the Cooperation Committee (JCC). There are 11x Working Groups (JWGs) (MoPD, 2022).

All meetings within Pakistan and abroad have included consultation with and invitations to all provinces, and the chief ministers took part in the JCCs to review and offer suggestions on the CPEC projects (MoPD, 2022).

6.16. Industrial Zones are not Receiving Incentives or Amenities from the Government

The focus of the Government is to modernize the 9 x SEZs. It is the reason that the Government is pushing multinational companies to take maximum advantage of CPEC. Once these multinational companies will be manufacturing the products at the doorsteps, it will reduce the cost of imports. Likewise, the Government is also trying to push local manufacturers to compete in the international market and activate their research and evaluation for the good of the country. The Government is also working to convince multinational companies to form alliances with local businesses in an effort to support already-existing industries. Existing industries must take advantage to be the frontline in seeking the opportunity (Abbas & Ali, 2017).

6.17. Energy Projects mostly include Coal Power Projects are harmful for environment

In 2013, Pakistan experienced its worst power shortage. By far the most efficient and reasonably priced supply, coal now accounts for 40% of all electricity produced worldwide. Our portion was 0% and would increase to 20% within the next few years. The use of high-tech environmental safeguards and other measures is being adopted (Kugelman, 2013).

6.18. The Cooperation in Transportation, Energy, and Industrial Parks is the Primary Focus of CPEC

The entire CPEC plan is related to the evolution of economic activity, as the name suggests. Ports, roads, railways, and industrial parks form the basis of an economy. A long-term partnership is also feasible in industries like finance, business, tourism, and human resource development (Naveed, 2017).

7. Redressal of Negative Perceptions

7.1. Different angle to Look at CPEC and its Projection

With BRI and especially with CPEC, China does not want to extend its physical connections but also wants to enhance its cooperative and collaborative policy by incorporating the weak economies of Asia. Everyone can gain from OBOR if there is an open debate about it (Jinchen, 2016).



7.2. Measures to Mitigate the Negative Perceptions

The Government should promote discussion about CPEC, confer with business executives, members of civil society, and residents who will be impacted, guarantee that landowners receive just compensation, promote employing local labor, and allow room for dissent. Beijing and the involved Chinese businesses ought to back such measures.

7.3. How to Build Positive Perceptions on CPEC

Here are some ways to build positive perceptions of CPEC:

1. **Highlight the economic benefits:** CPEC is expected to create numerous job opportunities and boost economic growth in Pakistan, as well as improve infrastructure and connectivity in the region. Emphasize these benefits and how they can improve the lives of ordinary citizens (Anwar et al., 2022).
2. **Focus on the potential for development:** CPEC is not just about building roads and power plants; it is also about developing industries and increasing exports. Highlight how CPEC can help create new industries and attract investment to Pakistan.
3. **Address concerns:** Some critics of CPEC have raised concerns about the environmental impact, transparency, and debt sustainability of the project. Address these concerns directly and transparently. Show how the project is being managed responsibly and how it will benefit the Environment (Aslam, 2021).
4. **Engage with the public:** Engage with the public through social media, public events, and other forms of outreach. Explain the benefits of CPEC and address concerns directly. Encourage feedback and listen to concerns from the public (Butt & Butt, 2015).
5. **Emphasize the partnership with China:** CPEC is a partnership project. Emphasize solid ties and the potential benefits of this partnership for both countries (Hassan, 2020).
6. **Show success stories:** Highlight success stories of CPEC projects that have already been completed or are underway. Show how these projects are creating jobs, improving infrastructure, and bringing economic benefits to Pakistan (China, 2018).
- 7.

Overall, building positive perceptions of CPEC requires a focus on the potential benefits of the project, addressing concerns directly and transparently, and engaging with the public to create a shared vision of a brighter future for Pakistan (Mariah Ijaz, 2019).

7.4. Way Forward

The economic environment is steadily changing as a result of CPEC, and we must speed up this process. We also need to concentrate on seven different areas.

First and foremost, we must more thoroughly assess CPEC enterprises and negotiate all terms. To reduce our exposure and make sure that the projects are better structured to make it impossible to game the system, the second goal is to entice major Chinese firms to assume equity positions. Thirdly, actively seek out and engage Chinese sunset businesses in Pakistani Special Economic Zones to persuade them to relocate there. Fourth, link GCC exports to Chinese imports to transform Gwadar into a complex that combines a petrochemical facility



with a hub for the transshipment of goods and oil and gas if Saudi Arabia constructs the oil refinery at Gwadar. This can be materialized. Fifthly, revitalize the project TAPI with the Gwadar Oil project. Sixth, instead of waiting as it is currently planned for industries to be established in the SEZs, we immediately begin building links, providing training, and fostering synergies between our software industry and its Chinese peers. Compared to concrete and mortar, much less money and materials are needed. Seventh, more training should be provided to Pakistanis who will gradually be hired and gain skills they can use both at home and abroad, as was the case when the former USSR trained thousands of engineers and technicians for Steel Mills in Karachi in the 70s (Adeney & Boni, 2021).

In conclusion, the benefits of CPEC are linked to people's acceptability of the project. Benefits in the form of more jobs and a thriving economy will raise their standard of living and open up new possibilities for them and their offspring. The Pakistani people are confident that this will happen. However, in order to accomplish this national goal, we must first recognize the internal and exterior obstacles to be overcome (Website, 2023).

Pakistan needs to address internal and external predicaments. Therefore, along with corruption, relations with the US and other Western powers are equally important and must confront our fundamental interests with China (Younus, 2021).

Our interests are served by stronger partnerships and alliances that increase our importance in the world. American strategy in Asia and the Arab world hinges on the EU, which is an established economic force. Pakistan cannot afford to lose the support in its economic journey while giving space to India, which has grown more confident as a result of backing from the US and its allies in the West (States, 2022).

We must retain a strong sense of defensiveness while continuing to project our sincere desire for better, peaceful relations with India. Maintaining our respect abroad depends on this. The Indian airstrike, which would have marked a significant uptick in hostility, was avoided by an immediate attack in retaliation and striking her fighter jets. In an act of unilateralism, the pilot was returned, and Pakistan went for negotiations to advance amicable ties with India. Even though this has changed, we still need to strive to rebuild harmony with India, as is the case with the Kartarpur Corridor. As our economy grows over time, India may think about improving ties for its economic interests first, followed by other interests (Arshad & Haidong, 2017).

8. Conclusion

CPEC has generated both positive and negative perceptions among different stakeholders. On the positive side, besides economic uplift and increased connectivity, the main aspects associated with CPEC are infrastructure development and job creation. CPEC also has the potential to promote regional trade and cooperation, which can have positive implications for the broader region. Additionally, the partnership with China has the potential to deepen ties between the two countries.



On the negative side, some concerns have been raised about the transparency and environmental impact of the project. Critics have also pointed out the risk of Pakistan getting caught in a debt trap due to the significant financial burden of CPEC.

To build positive perceptions of CPEC, it is essential to address these concerns directly and transparently. This includes taking measures to ensure transparency, environmental sustainability, and debt sustainability, as well as engaging with the public to create a shared vision of the project's benefits. By doing so, Pakistan can maximize the potential benefits of CPEC while mitigating its potential risks.



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