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SILK ROUTE REVISITED

ESSAYS AND PERSPECTIVES ON
CHINA PAKISTAN ECONOMIC
CORRIDOR AND BEYOND

CHINA STUDY CENTRE
KARAKORAM INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
GILGIT-BALTISTAN, PAKISTAN

Exploring the China-Pakistan Educational, Cultural, and Bilateral Cooperation

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Introduction

Pakistan has a historical connection with its neighboring countries, especially with northern neighbors, which dates back around 4,000 years. The Silk Road, which connects China with Pakistan and other northwestern countries like Afghanistan and Turkey; all have intimate historical, cultural, and geographic links with Pakistan. Before the shaping of today's Karakoram Highway and other ways of transportation, the Silk Road, which comprises various routes and passageways, connected the Upper Indus Basin with the Tarim Basin in eastern Central Asia, assisting cross-regional trade and transportation of publics in the region. This historic route, which goes from the Karakoram Highway connecting Pakistan to China, through the passageway north to Kabul, and connects the Hindu Kush, is the "crossroads to Asia" revealed in the historical records of rovers who passed through these passages. These historical passages assisted as precursors to present corridors connecting this area in a broader sociopolitical choreography in the present day.

China and Pakistan marked the 70th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations in the year 2021. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, regardless of the changes in the world, the China-Pakistan friendship has always been unbreakable and solid as a rock. This begs why China-Pakistan relations are as good as the saying goes, "There are neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies, but only permanent interests." The friendly relations between China and Pakistan are ultimately because the two countries have common interests and mutual relations. China-Pakistan relations are not only based on interests but also involve the deep friendship between the two countries.

True Chinese rule started soon after the end of 2nd World War, the power of Britain was dwindling, and China was struggling for its dignity and survival and wanted to reclaim its regime. After many efforts, China declared its independence and became an independent country. On October 1, 1949, the new China was established. Soon after, Pakistan and China maintained friendly exchanges. On May 21, 1951, the two countries formally established diplomatic relations. As the first group of countries to establish diplomatic relations with China, Pakistan's support for China has always been at the heart of the Chinese people, and vice versa.

In the 1990s, the Indian side planned to attack and occupy Pakistani territory with the help of the Soviet military. Pakistan would have suffered greatly if China had not offered its help in time. After that, China-Pakistan relations improved. China-Pakistan relations are indispensable for the prosperity and well-being of both countries. This is called “old iron”.

In the 1990s, the United States proposed sanctions against China at the United Nations. During this historical period, the United States sought the support of several countries with good relations with China, aiming to create an opposing front against China and secure a victory in the vote. The United States also approached Pakistan, hoping to strain its relations with China. However, their plan did not materialize as Pakistan needed to make a clear statement. Like the previous UN vote, Pakistan expressed unconditional support for China. It strongly opposed the U.S. sanctions, stating, ‘We strongly oppose the sanctions against China as they represent an unreasonable interference in national sovereignty.’

Despite being subject to U.S. control in various areas, Pakistan’s decision to openly oppose the United States at the UN General Assembly did not impact China-Pakistan relations; regardless of any repercussions, whether military or economic, China and Pakistan have maintained close mutual contact and provided bilateral support. Pakistan’s internal and external development has remained strong. As the famous Chinese saying goes, ‘Helping a friend in times of crisis is like helping a friend in the snow. This holds true for both interpersonal relationships and friendships between countries. The foundation of China-Pakistan relations lies in their historical diplomatic ties. If China had not aided Pakistan during the war or if Pakistan had not joined hands with China at the United Nations General Assembly, likely, China-Pakistan relations would not have been as steadfast. Since establishing diplomatic relations, leaders from both countries have treated each other like brothers. It is hoped that China and Pakistan can maintain this special friendship.

With mutual assistance, we will strive towards a better future. I firmly believe there is a genuine fondness between the people of my country and China. When I lived and studied in China, I was affectionately called the “Batie Brothers” (iron brothers) by the Chinese! The bond of friendship between China and Pakistan is being increasingly realized through collaborations in various fields, including politics, economics, trade, connectivity, maritime affairs, humanities, aerospace, defense, and international and regional security. The friendship between Pakistan and China has established a strong foundation of public support. Moreover, China is committed to supporting Pakistan’s efforts in promoting Chinese language education and will contribute to educational initiatives in Pakistan over the next five years.

Academic and Research Cooperation

Pakistan and China have long been allies, sharing borders and a cultural history

that dates to the ancient Silk Road. Both nations have consistently worked towards inclusion, peaceful coexistence, and regional progress. China has continuously supported Pakistan in various areas, emphasizing education and research, which are highly valued by both countries.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) provides a unique opportunity for educational and research institutions in the Belt and Road nations to engage in joint research. This collaboration spans trade and finance, human resource development, technological skills, industrial innovation, evidence-based policy formulation, and soft skills. CPEC, rightfully known as a “Game Changer” program for Pakistan, offers three crucial corridors for regional development: physical, intellectual, and technological. Pakistani universities should prepare themselves to seize these opportunities.

China has effectively utilized higher education as a means of soft influence to garner the sentiments and attention of the Pakistani people. The former Chinese ambassador to Islamabad highlighted that the next phase of the partnership between China and Pakistan would focus more on the people, with students, colleges, universities, and institutions playing key roles in cooperation. More than 28,000 Pakistani students currently study in China, ranking third in the number of students sent to the country.

According to the Latin American News Agency’s April 14, 2019, report, China has become one of the top destinations for Pakistani students seeking to study abroad. Official data confirms this trend, and Pakistani media reports indicate that over 7,000 Pakistani students studying in Chinese universities have scholarships. China’s “One Belt One Road” initiative and the “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” flagship project offer several preferential policies. Pakistani students are pursuing studies in Chinese engineering, medicine, information technology, and other fields in China.

Chinese Scholarships for Pakistani Students

The government offers higher education opportunities to Pakistani students, and the scholarship amount is determined based on your province or place of residence in China. The governments of major cities provide numerous opportunities to foreign students, particularly from the Asian continent where Pakistan is located. According to records, the Chinese government grants over 1,000 Pakistani students the opportunity to study in top universities in China every year.

List of awarded Chinese Government Scholarships in 2021:

1. China Scholarship Council (CSC).
2. Confucius Scholarship.
3. Yunnan provincial government scholarship.

4. Chongqing city mayor scholarship.
5. Jilin provincial government scholarship.
6. Shanghai government scholarship.
7. Sichuan provincial government scholarship.
8. Heilongjiang provincial government scholarship.
9. Anhui provincial government scholarships for international students.
10. Chinese government scholarship.
11. Chinese University scholarship.
12. Guangxi government scholarship.
13. Hubei province scholarship etc.

Why do Pakistani Students Choose to Study in China?

With the deepening of economic and cultural exchanges between China and Pakistan, more Pakistani students are choosing to study in China. In recent years, the Chinese government has provided scholarships to Pakistan, encouraging many students from Pakistan to pursue their studies abroad. China has become the first choice for many Pakistanis, who consider it their second home.

There are several reasons for this trend:

1. The cost of studying in China is significantly lower compared to developed countries like Europe and Japan. Moreover, many Chinese universities offer special scholarship programs for international students, and outstanding academic achievements can further reduce tuition fees. This condition is highly attractive.
2. China boasts a vast territory and abundant tourism resources.
3. Over the past decade, China has opened its doors to foreign tourists, allowing international students to explore various choices and experiences.
4. China's rapid economic development is renowned globally, offering international students promising career opportunities after graduation.
5. China's investment in higher education has enhanced the reputation of its universities worldwide. The quality of education, both in terms of software and hardware, is commendable.
6. China provides a safe social environment. For those who have experienced danger and turbulence, the value of peace cannot be overstated. Many foreign visitors have expressed their love for this secure and pleas-

ant country. Compared to the internal conflicts in many nations, China's safe social environment offers great reassurance to international students.

7. Pakistan is a friendly cooperation partner and a good neighbor to China. The Chinese people are familiar with Pakistan. In recent years, China has provided significant assistance to Pakistan, with "Made in China" products playing a vital role in Pakistan's economic growth. Therefore, studying in China contributes to cultural exchange and further cooperation and development.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

The CPEC project is a game-changer for Pakistan's social, economic, and cultural development (Alam et al., 2019). Nations can prosper together when they work hand in hand, cooperating and coordinating. Through collaboration, they can even address more significant and multidimensional challenges. The partnership between China and Pakistan is built on mutual trust, respect, and a commitment to territorial integrity and shared interests (Baig et al., 2020). Over time, it has become evident that a strategic partnership involves many collaborations.

Under the CPEC umbrella, both nations can continue to cooperate in the future, pursuing shared economic, political, and security objectives. China recognizes that ensuring political stability in Pakistan is best achieved through economic growth. This realization has led to significant Chinese investment in CPEC, which could help alleviate Pakistan's economic deficit (Ghanem et al., 2021). Pakistan finds itself at a crucial moment in its destiny, with great economic prospects on the horizon. However, it must overcome the challenges posed by geographical limitations and the atmosphere of political transformation.

All Pakistani institutions must prioritize this exceptional opportunity with a forward-looking mindset. China's economic and military interests in Pakistan naturally extend from its expanding influence beyond Asia. China's involvement in Pakistan's growth is no longer a secret. The recent CPEC project is expected to transform and uplift Pakistan's underdeveloped regions (Baig & Zehra, 2020). China's investment in the Gwadar Port and the CPEC project is crucial for Pakistan's economic development. Chinese authorities have rightly understood that Pakistan's security and economic prosperity are also in China's best interests (S. A. A. Shah, 2023).

However, specific issues such as Pakistan's domestic problems, rising provincialism, constitutional uncertainty regarding the status of Gilgit Baltistan, and terrorism may hinder both countries from fully realizing the promise of CPEC. Additionally, the competition between India and Pakistan could limit the pace of growth that CPEC offers to China and Pakistan. The United States and its Indo-Pacific strategy support India's efforts to counter increasing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean region. The strategic relationship between India and the US, aimed at curbing Chinese economic progress, can overshadow the economic

objectives of both China and Pakistan. Therefore, China's top priority should be resolving long-standing disputes with its two South Asian neighbors, India, and Pakistan. It should also focus on building a win-win scenario with India to prevent it from aligning against China at the behest of the US.

Bilateral Aid

Another area that reflects support is the Chinese government's assistance to Pakistan, which began in the 1960s. From 1965 to 1971, Pakistan received approximately \$445 million in aid from China. However, the Chinese financial aid was in the form of loans and credits to Pakistan (Akber Ali, 2016). Nonetheless, the aid continued to flow and helped Pakistan import advanced industrial machinery from the People's Republic of China (S. M. Ali, 2020).

Between 2004 and 2009, China provided bilateral aid to Pakistan, amounting to around \$217 million. This aid included assistance during the 2005 earthquake in Gilgit Baltistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Azad Kashmir. In the aftermath of the devastating floods in 2010, which claimed thousands of lives and caused extensive damage to homes and infrastructure in Pakistan, China donated a \$250 million aid package to the affected regions. This was the largest philanthropic assistance the Chinese government and people ever provided to any other country. Furthermore, China also provided \$4.7 million worth of aid to those affected by the 2011 floods. In 2015, China extended \$10 million in aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and flood victims in North Waziristan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

China's Assistance to Pakistan: Covid19 in Perspective

From the very beginning of COVID-19, starting from December 31, 2019, when China informed the World Health Organization (WHO) about several cases of pneumonia with an unknown cause in Wuhan, to its global spread in March 2020, when WHO declared it a global pandemic, China has supported Pakistan in various scientific and technical fields. For Pakistan, China's continuous support is a testament to the depth of their bilateral relations.

With the Chinese government's and health administration's support, the National Institute of Health (NIH) in Pakistan has established an emergency response center. This center is fully computerized and equipped with the necessary equipment to meet international standards and WHO guidelines. The Chinese government provided PCR test kits to aid Pakistan's efforts, with the first batch shipped in February 2020. This early and timely support from China enabled Pakistan to respond to emerging cases of COVID-19 effectively.

NIH collaborates with several Chinese companies to produce COVID-19 diagnostic kits in Pakistan. This collaboration will significantly strengthen Pakistan's fight against the coronavirus. NIH has played an active role in combating the pandemic. In February 2020, they developed screening and testing guidelines

for the country's health departments and created a national action plan to combat COVID-19. NIH teams were deployed to all entry points into Pakistan to ensure testing and the establishment of quarantine facilities. NIH and other national stakeholders took a structured approach to respond to the pandemic.

Initially, Pakistan conducted 300 tests per day, but now almost 190 laboratories nationwide are performing PCR testing, with NIH ensuring quality-assured testing. NIH has also engaged with Chinese health authorities to share information and experiences. In late March 2020, a Chinese medical expert team from Xinjiang visited hospitals in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, and a military hospital in Rawalpindi. They shared experiences and provided training on preventing, detecting, and treating COVID cases. In May 2020, another Chinese delegation, including physicians who had dealt with coronavirus cases in Wuhan City, visited Pakistan for extensive consultations and experience sharing.

Additionally, in collaboration with the Frontier Works Organization and the National Disaster Management Authority, NIH constructed a 250-bed infectious disease hospital in a record 40 days with Chinese support. Furthermore, NIH coordinated the phase III clinical trials of the SARS-CoV-2 vaccine jointly developed by CanSino Biologics Inc. and the Beijing Institute of Biotechnology. The trials were conducted in three hospitals in Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi, with NIH as the country coordinator.

Regarding Pakistan's cooperation with China in procuring vaccines, Dr. Ikram emphasized that China is the only country that has supplied Pakistan with nearly 1.5 million doses of vaccines, entirely through donations. Given their collaboration on Phase III trials in Pakistan, NIH expects to receive an additional 10 million doses from CanSino. NIH has maintained regular communication with the Chinese Center for Disease Control (CDC) through a special channel, strengthening cooperation between the two countries in the fight against COVID-19.

Pakistan became not only the first country in the world to receive COVID-19 doses from the Chinese government but also the country that has received the most COVID-19 vaccines donated by China to date. This serves as a vivid testament to the strong friendship between the two countries.

"A friend in need is a friend indeed." The depth and applicability of this saying can be observed in the decades-long relationship between Pakistan and China. Whether it's an earthquake, a war, or any dire circumstance, both nations have aided each other in times of need. Let's take the current COVID-19 epidemic as an example. It serves as the most recent proof of the strong bond between China and Pakistan, showcasing their community of destiny. During the COVID-19 outbreak, China and Pakistan collaborated and provided mutual support. When the virus first hit China, the Pakistani military, government, and citizens from all walks of life sent masks and other essential items for epidemic prevention. In return, Pakistan received a similar reaction and significant assistance when the

virus reached their country. Prime Minister Imran Khan expressed his gratitude to President Xi over the phone for China's efforts in combating the disease, acknowledging the support on behalf of the global community.

China's swift response in providing massive assistance to Pakistan should not come as a surprise. Their relationship, spanning over 50 years, is based on strong mutual benefit and strategic convergence principles. Although the amount of aid China has provided to Pakistan is still being determined, their relationship is not characterized by a patronage-based aid system but instead focuses on commerce and investment. China has also extended loans and financial support to other Asian and African nations. However, its relationship with Pakistan is built on mutual trust and shared objectives, maintaining unwavering harmony over the last seven decades.

China has shown its concern for Pakistan by acknowledging the devastating floods that have caused significant loss of lives and property. Through its actions, China has demonstrated that its relationship with Pakistan is genuine and goes beyond mere words.

Assistance Provided by Pakistan to China

It is a fact that all powerful countries will eventually become weak, and all weak nations will eventually become powerful due to the inevitability of change over time. As an all-weather ally, Pakistan has consistently demonstrated generosity by offering valuable support to its deserving brotherly country, China, during challenging times. This support was extended when China was striving to break the blockade, secure its rightful seat at the United Nations, and explore avenues for foreign affairs and openness. Time has proven the validity of these actions and rightly demonstrated the significance of these efforts (Christensen, 1999).

Simultaneously, Pakistan wields considerable influence over the Islamic world. Being the first Islamic country to establish diplomatic relations with China, Pakistan is recognized as a bridge-builder between China and other Islamic nations like Iran and Saudi Arabia. This distinction sets Pakistan apart as a pioneer in forging this important relationship. Similarly, China has shown respect and sincerity towards Pakistan, steadfastly supporting its independence, sovereignty, regional honor, and national dignity. China's unwavering support during Pakistan's challenges and crises, which threatened its national security and dignity, has earned China the respect and admiration of the Pakistani people (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016).

During the earthquake that struck Pakistan on October 8, 2005, China generously provided relief materials and financial assistance to the affected people. Pakistan reciprocated by sending relief supplies and a medical team comprising twenty professionals and paramedics to China. Relief commodities, including water, food items, and medications, were dispatched in multiple shipments to support

the affected regions in China. Pakistan donated over 10,000 tents to the earthquake victims, with plans to transport another 6,000 tents by road. Furthermore, specialized aircraft carrying relief supplies were sent (Mansoor, 2021). The Chinese ambassador to Pakistan expressed gratitude to the Pakistani government and people for their emotional and financial support, highlighting Pakistan as the first nation to provide humanitarian aid after the earthquake in China.

Similarly, when a devastating earthquake struck the Sichuan province in China in 2008, Pakistan promptly sent its aircraft carrying a vast reserve of tents to assist the affected areas. Both Pakistan and China have consistently supported each other when needed. China exhibited the same gesture of generosity when Pakistan faced severe floods in 2010 (Nawaz, Sharif, & Rabbani, 2015). China generously offered several medical teams for relief work and provided significant medical equipment. The strong bond between Pakistan and China is evident in their unwavering support and assistance during times of crisis, exemplifying the depth of their friendship and cooperation.”

Cooperation in Language Promotion

Language and culture play an exceedingly important role in developing strong relations between nations. Promoting culture and language is critical for exchanging views and transmitting information between countries, connecting societies, and fostering connections. The same holds true for Pakistan and China. Both governments have made significant efforts to promote their respective languages.

For instance, there are four Pakistan Study Centers in China, where many Chinese university students are researching the Urdu language and Pakistani culture. The Sindh provincial government in Pakistan declared Chinese language instruction a compulsory subject for sixth-grade students in 2013. The Sindh education division allocated over 625 million Pakistani rupees in 2012 for teaching Chinese. In August 2008, Pakistan and China signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to construct the permanent campus of the Pakistan-China University of Engineering Science and Technology. The Pak-China Institute, an independent Pakistani think tank focused on China studies, was founded on October 1st, 2009. A Confucius Institute was also established at Islamabad’s National University of Modern Languages in 2005.

During Chinese Premier Li Keqiang’s visit in May 2013, an agreement was signed to open another Confucius Institute at Karachi University. More than 500 Pakistani students have been sent to China for language learning through the Confucius Institute of Karachi University (Asif, 2022). With the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Pakistani students have gained better education opportunities in Chinese universities, directly contributing to improving Pakistan’s literacy rate (Kataria & Riaz, 2020). Moreover, the Chinese government has provided timely scholarships to deserving and competent students, significantly contributing to poverty eradication and creating new job

opportunities for Pakistani graduates.

Similarly, Pakistani students have shown great interest in the Chinese language to learn about Chinese culture, history, science, and technology. As China's economy and global exchanges have rapidly grown, there has been a high demand worldwide for learning Chinese as a second language. Taking inspiration from Western countries like the UK, France, Germany, and Spain, China established non-profit public organizations known as Confucius Institutes in 2004 to promote the Chinese language, culture, and history among foreign countries (R. Ahmad et al., 2020). These institutes adopt flexible teaching patterns and adapt to local conditions when teaching the Chinese language and promoting culture in primary schools, secondary schools, communities, and enterprises.

According to the 8th Confucius Institute Conference celebrated in Beijing, there are currently 443 Confucius Institutes and 646 Confucius Classrooms in over 120 countries or regions across the five continents. Pakistan also hosts five Confucius Institutes and multiple Confucius Classrooms. According to the Pakistan-China Institute, around 30,000 students in Pakistan are studying the Chinese language at various levels (Mahesar, 2019). In parallel, the Pakistan Embassy College Beijing (PECB) has started offering Urdu language courses. These classes, which began on September 9, 2014, are provided free of charge. The 16-week course held twice a week in the afternoon, consists of four modules focusing on listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.”

Confucius Institutes in Pakistan

The Chinese government has established numerous Confucius Institutes in Pakistan, which receive full support from the Chinese Ministry of Education. These Confucius Institutes and programs are always welcomed by the government and the people of Pakistan, who are strong allies.

Chinese language instruction is provided in Pakistan through five significant Confucius Institutes in partnership with Pakistani universities: the University of Punjab, the University of Karachi, the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), and the Agriculture University of the University of Sargodha. These Confucius Institutes offer Chinese language instruction and promote cross-cultural interactions among Pakistani students (Haidar & Fang, 2019).

These Confucius Institutes are the cornerstone of the robust friendship between Pakistan and China, which will be passed down to future generations due to the solid foundation of Sino-Pak ties. Over time, these institutions have evolved to provide much more than just Chinese language instruction. For instance, the NUML Confucius Institute launched the BS Area Study Center for China undergraduate program in 2018. This program includes numerous courses that enable students to explore the intricate facets of the Chinese language, history, art, and culture. Additionally, students and professors from these Confucius Institutes are

sent to China to enhance their understanding further and immerse themselves in Chinese culture.

Pakistani universities, especially those hosting Confucius Institutes, have prioritized research, logistical assistance, and collaboration with Chinese institutions, particularly since the initiation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. Officials from the Chinese and Pakistani education ministries agree that establishing these Confucius Institutes will improve ties between the two countries.”

Chinese Students Acquiring Urdu Language Eyeing CPEC Employment Opportunities

A well-known proverb states, “To speak another language is to own a second soul. China’s demand for Urdu language programs is growing. The teaching of Urdu in China began in 1951 with the establishment of the Urdu Language Department at Peking University in Beijing. Subsequently, Urdu departments were established in Xian, Sichuan, and Guangzhou institutions to promote the language in their respective provinces and universities. Since 2007, Urdu has been taught at Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), and two batches of students have graduated with degrees in the language. In an interview, Dr. Zhou Yuan, the director of the Urdu Department at BFSU’s School of Asian and African Studies, stated, “Of the total number of students who have graduated, a few have received scholarships for advanced education at foreign universities, while others have joined different companies.” She added that the third cohort of 20 students is currently learning Urdu (Altbach, 2009).

Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) has sent its third-year students to the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, and Government College University (GCU), Lahore, for a six-month program to improve their Urdu speaking and writing skills. The government of Pakistan and the Pakistani Embassy in Beijing provide financial assistance to Urdu learners through scholarships and exchange programs.

Furthermore, BFSU organizes Urdu calligraphy competitions, speaking contests, and cultural events to enhance students’ knowledge of Pakistan and its people. Yuan Yuhang (Urdu name: Shabnam), the Urdu instructor at BFSU, noted that such activities not only promote Chinese students’ enthusiasm for studying Urdu but also improve their proficiency in the language. Many Chinese students study Urdu in colleges and institutes across the country, particularly in Beijing. Some view studying Urdu as a practical tool for future work with Chinese firms involved in Pakistan’s China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Afzal & Naseem, 2018). Others are attracted to Pakistan’s local culture, cuisine, and geography, while some are captivated by the beauty of the language itself.

Moreover, students recognize the changing landscape and anticipate that mas-

tering the Urdu language will increase their employment opportunities in both Pakistan and China. This sentiment was echoed in the comments of several students when asked about their motivation to learn the language. During a research interview, students responded, “Choosing Urdu is in preparation for launching my own import-export firm.”

Dr. Zhou Yuan emphasized at a conference, “In recent years, more Pakistani youth have been studying Chinese, while few Chinese students have had access and opportunities to learn Urdu. Therefore, it is significant and necessary for BFSU to establish a professional Urdu language department where Urdu can be taught as a major subject.” Dr. Zhou added, “Our first phrase at the beginning of the academic year in BFSU is ‘long live China-Pakistan friendship.’ We often have Urdu poetry readings, which are adored by Pakistanis. Now, an increasing number of Chinese students are eager to study Urdu due to the expanding cultural impact of Pakistan and the strengthening relationship between China and Pakistan.”

Conclusion

Pakistan was one of the first nations to recognize the People’s Republic of China. According to international strategists, this event began a long and stable partnership between Pakistan and China. Immediately after establishing diplomatic relations in May 1959, Pakistan and China formalized their strong and amicable bilateral ties. Over the years, this relationship has evolved into an “all-weather strategic cooperative partnership.” Pakistan considers China as one of its closest allies and partners, while China refers to Pakistan as its “Iron Brother” (Begum, Ashraf, & Muzaffar, 2019).

Diplomatic relations have further strengthened this relationship over the last seven decades. In the 1970s, China implemented changes in the openness of its economy and government system, and since then, it has emerged as a regional and global economic and commercial powerhouse. China has now become one of the world’s largest economies. The brotherly bond between the two neighboring nations is characterized by mutual trust, respect, and goodwill. There is a continuous exchange of high-level visits between the two countries, and Pakistan and China have enhanced their strategic cooperation over the past few decades.

China is Pakistan’s largest economic partner and a significant player, especially in the infrastructure and energy sectors. In 2014, bilateral trade between the two nations exceeded 16 billion US dollars. The bilateral relationship reached new heights with the formal inauguration of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC is the flagship project of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s “Belt and Road Initiative” and aims to improve infrastructure and enhance connectivity between the two countries. Under CPEC, several projects for infrastructure development and energy production are underway. People-to-people interactions play a vital role in the bilateral relationship. The year 2015 was designated as the Year of Friendly Exchanges between Pakistan and China, and a range of high-profile

activities, including seminars, visits, and cultural events, were organized to showcase the people-to-people connections.

The relationship between Pakistan and China has traditionally been built on cooperation, shared principles, and consistent moral and financial support from both sides. As the world's largest economy, China has consistently provided substantial and appropriate assistance to Pakistan. Both fraternal countries are committed to supporting each other in times of need, whether during conflict or peace. The friendship between these two nations is an example for the rest of the world.

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The China Study Centre (CSC) at Karakoram International University (KIU) is funded by the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Government of Pakistan, which frames the core objectives to value the foreseeable consequences of the establishment of this Center with special reference to the benefits that will achieve from creating a social space, which facilitates to study and research on diverse arts, culture, history and polity of China, GB-Pakistan and surrounding mountainous region. Hence, there is a deep understanding that the study or promotion of culture, history, society and polity is a shared objective of proposed China Study Centre at KIU and other partner institutions.

The establishment of centre aims to provide a base to learn not only Chinese society, but a window of opportunity to take advantage of this platform via developing research collaborations in Xinjiang and mainland China. These collaborations are key to conduct research with high relevance to GB. As referred above that, historically the GB (Pakistan) and Xinjiang (China) offer much in common to share, which includes languages, heritage sites, oral and documented traditions, religious traditions, socio-political and economic pacts, ethnography mapping of mountain communities, cultural diplomacy, etc. The commonalities of these wide range areas are significantly important to consider as an opportunity for collaboration between KIU, Chinese Universities and beyond.

Price: PKR1200/-

