

Foreword

It's my pleasure to contribute this Foreword to this important new book, which is a timely initiative given that CPEC has successfully completed 10 years since its launching in 2013. The Karakoram International University, Gilgit Baltistan is an important link in this educational relationship between Pakistan & China as the CPEC is a natural corridor of development and progress from Gwadar to Gilgit. CPEC has given new hope to the Pakistani people and CPEC is a manifestation of China's vote of confidence in the future progress and prosperity of Pakistan, coming as it did at a time when no country was willing to come forward to invest in Pakistan while China came forward, befitting its role as Pakistan's all-weather strategic partner and 'Iron Brother'. The benefits of CPEC are evident: over 200,000 Pakistanis gainfully employed, 40,000 Pakistani students studying in China, \$ 26 billion in Chinese investment so far, 6500 megawatts of electricity added to Pakistan to alleviate our chronic energy shortages, 600 kilometers of roads and motorways, Gwadar Port emerging as the principal point of commercial connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics, Coal finally mined & generating electricity from Thar going into the national grid leading to Women's empowerment in one of Pakistan's most backward regions, infrastructure uniting the Federation of Pakistan and skill training and capacity building of young Pakistanis.

However, the best of CPEC is yet to come, via Special Economic Zones, Agriculture, IT, and relocation of Chinese industry. Pakistan must also deliver on its two core commitments made to China: 'one window operation' for Chinese investors by slashing the bureaucratic red tape and 'fool proof security' for Chinese personnel and projects in Pakistan. In the changing global scenario, with the shift in balance of power from the West to the East, in the 'Asian Century', China's peaceful rise is a huge plus for Pakistan and other developing countries, as we are partners in the quest for a better tomorrow. Pakistan-China relations are even more relevant today as these are neither transactional nor tactical, this is a strategic bond based on mutuality of shared interests and common values and worldview. This book is, therefore, an excellent contribution to better understanding Pakistan-China relations so that in the second phase of CPEC, it is taken to new heights, Inshallah.

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Foreword

The latest publication of China Study Centre, Karakoram International University, titled “Silk Route Revisited: Essays and Perspectives on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Beyond,” edited by Faqeer Muhammad, Saranjam Baig, Khalid Mehmood Alam and Attaullah Shah, is a multifaceted appraisal of CPEC in the context of the age-old trade and cultural links between the two neighborly regions of China and ancient Pakistan (Gandhara)—that flourished through the historical Silk Route. Seen in this perspective, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) emerges as a 21st Century manifestation of the Silk Road which played an important role in shaping the world that we live in, especially Eurasia. It established global interconnectedness that transcended geographical boundaries and dominated the world trade and cultural exchanges for almost 1600 years (130 BCE to 1453 CE). The land routes were supplemented by Maritime (Silk Road) trade routes and together they formed “one of the most transformative superhighways in human history,” which, inter alia, became a channel for transmission of new ideas and trade goods, along with other trans-Eurasian cultural and commercial exchanges. Over the centuries, the Silk Roads connected peoples and cultures, later fondly remembered, and symbolized as “Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust.” Although the trans-Eurasian trade became active during the 2nd Century BCE, the term Silk Roads / Routes (Seidenstrassen) was coined by a German geographer, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877. It is used both singular and plural and as Road(s) / Route(s).

Ancient Pakistan (Gandhara) straddled some of these silk routes which connected it with China, South Asia, Central Asia, Persia, Greece, and Rome—and the long-distance east-west traffic. The Home page of the UNESCO Silk Roads Project explains the Silk Roads as under:

The term ‘Silk Roads’ refers to a vast network of land and maritime trade and communication routes connecting the Far East, Central Asia, the Indian sub-continent, Iranian and Anatolian plateaus, the Caucasus, the Arabian Peninsula and the Mediterranean region and Europe. The incessant movement of peoples and goods along these routes resulted in an unprecedented transmission and exchange of knowledge, ideas, beliefs, customs, and traditions over three millennia.

Ancient Pakistan was home to vibrant cultures and civilizations. The Indus Valley Civilization had linkages with Mesopotamia and Egypt, besides surprising similarities with newly discovered bronze-age urban culture of Erlitou in China (1900 to 1500 BCE). Gandhara Buddhist Civilization burst its boundaries and spread across the formidable Karakorum’s to China and Central Asia during the 1st Century of the new millennium—when spirited Buddhist monks found favorable avenues along the Silk Routes. The first Buddhist Chinese temple (known as the White Horse Temple) was established at Luoyang in 68 CE. Another favorable factor was the Kushan Empire, especially the reign of Kanishka the Great

(127 -150 CE) who not only patronized Buddhism but extended his sphere of influence to the city-states of Kashgar, Yarkand, Kucha, Nia and Khotan. This helped Gandharan migrants get settled there to spread Buddhism by translating Buddhist scriptures into Chinese. Some famous monks of Gandharan origin, like Kumarajiva, the translator of Lotus Sutra, made a mark in these kingdoms on the Silk Road. Moreover, the Kushans were the Great Yuezhi tribe which had moved from the western regions of China and established their empire in Afghanistan and Gandhara. They established good relations with the Han Dynasty in China. The discovery of Kharoshthi (Gandharan script) documents from the archaeological sites along the Silk Road—especially Nia, Kucha and Khotan--show the extent of Gandharan ingress into these areas. There are documents and coins with Chinese imprints on one side and Kharoshthi on the other.

The role of Silk Road in promoting cultural ties between Gandhara (ancient Pakistan), which had emerged as a vibrant center of Buddhism towards the dawn of the first millennium CE, can be determined from that fact that there are more than 50,000 petroglyphs (rock-carvings) in the northern areas of Pakistan which shows constant movement of traders, pilgrims, migrants, and adventurers on the trails across the Pamirs. These carvings are dominated by Buddhist motifs and images, besides inscriptions in many languages, including Chinese. Therefore, the Silk Road laid strong foundations of Pakistan-China relations and Buddhism played a significant role in these exchanges.

Majority of the essays in the book deal with various aspects of China-Pakistan relations and linkages, from educational and cultural ties, opportunities for trade and tourism to poverty alleviation. Terms like One Belt, One Road, Belt and Road Initiative, Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road clearly manifest the age-old romance with the Silk Road which once brought prosperity to this region and connected it to distant destinations. Pakistan's historical association with the old and new Silk Road remains the focus of the book encompassing CPEC and its potential to transform Pakistan. It is a valuable addition to the growing literature on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

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