

Socio-Political Ambivalence In Pakistan: A Resistance To Chinese Hegemony In Backdrop Of China Pakistan Economic Corridor

Sibgha Batool

Department of Political Science, the East China Normal University, China.

Corresponding email: sibghabatoolkhan@gmail.com

Abstract

The contrasting orientations and commitments refer to ambivalence which is a simultaneous amalgamation of feelings and perceptions towards and object, person, idea or feeling. It is the explanation of uncertainty and hesitance by the juxtaposition of the contrasting and contradictory expectations, preferences and values. For a common person, the issue of ambivalence is psychologically explained interchangeably used as agitation, indeterminacy, confusion and hesitation in social and political contexts which emerge from the increased interference of contrasting cultures, religious thoughts, philosophies and geographical differences. The causes of ambivalence are predictable and understandable. The volatile experiences also pose conflicting denotations in response to the pressures of the external players. The mutual cooperation between two nations China and Pakistan is important in the wake of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) significant for their social, political and regional cooperation which primarily aim at the notion of a win-win situation for all. It is important to review socio-political ambivalence in the background of CPEC requiring deep understanding and self-reflection. It is the most important project signed by two neighbouring countries which will affect both the countries specially Pakistan manifold. The socio-political development will affect every channel of socio-political paradigm including agriculture, technology, communication, job opportunities, economic prosperity with special concentration to the development of Pakistan for being less developed than China. The friendly ties between both the countries will be stronger than ever regardless of ideological differences as the influx of business and infrastructural growth is stratospheric in its volume which will continue for the generations to come. Although, it asks for challenges which include political insecurity and instability about fields like economy, security and politics. The vision of CPEC must encapsulate regional comprehensiveness instead of bilateral relations. It asks for both resilient and flexible power including energy, infrastructure, transportation, think tanks, strong cooperation, educational exchanges and mass media. This cross-sectional research included 200 respondents from Faisalabad who extended their opinion about the socio-political ambivalence of CPEC in Pakistan. The objective of this research is to assess the general public perception of the ongoing CPEC project for its socio-political ambivalence in Pakistan.

Keywords: Social, Political, Socio-political, Ambivalence, Society, China Pakistan Economic Corridor and CPEC.

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Introduction

The intergenerational relations and the long-lasting relations between countries include dualistic perspective which is a contest between conflict and solidarity (Pillemer and Lüscher, 1997). A country is like a family in itself as it holds its religious, cultural and social bonding. The term ambivalence has become the currency terms for the discussion of socio-scientific models to deal and discuss everyday language social and political affairs. According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the ambivalence is contradictory and simultaneous feelings or attitudes like attraction and repulsion towards an object, action or person. The history of inter-country relations between Pakistan and China dates back to the recognition of China by Pakistan in 1950. The globally admired relationship between Pakistan and China ended in signing a treaty to

further their cherished neighbourly relationship, cooperation and friendship in 2005 (Jahangir, Javaid, 2015). The geopolitical interest strengthens the durability of this bond (Dumbaugh, 2010; Ali et al., 2017). Initially, the collaboration began with the construction of the Silk route that boosted cross-continent trade (Dixit, 1987; Butt, 2007). The inter-country trade of Jute and Coal supported the fragile economy of Pakistan; moreover, both the countries have also signed boundary agreement that has also contributed in the smooth sailing relationship of both the countries (Chaudhary, 1970; Dobell, 1964). China has always stepped forward to help Pakistan in the hour of crisis such as sanctioning of interest-free loans and development of heavy infrastructural complexes in Taxila (Bhalla, 1986). With increasing trade opportunities and vested interests both the countries kept on extending their

relations which has led to the blended projects of CPEC encapsulating a range of projects relating to almost every sector (Zafar and Mustaf, 2017).

Installation of megaprojects is crucial for any struggling economy with heavy resources—both financial and material pumped in. The population enjoys multiple benefits of these huge projects to cope with their industrial and irrigation needs. Although these projects are crucial they also offer a dark side if them which is ignored or kept hidden because of the multiple other benefits. The conflict among stakeholders and environmental damage are the major concerns regarding CPEC projects especially concerning the distribution of profit-making opportunities and preserving the environment (Joshi and Huber, 2015; Yusran et al., 2017). The commissioning of coal-based energy production is one of those threats to already struggling environment. Scholars think that megaprojects create social instability, social disorders, leverage crime rate and cultural imbalance (Sabir et al., 2017; Bui, 2013). The threat to local manufacturers, the business community and unskilled manpower are also serious to address before the materialization of CPEC (Brown et al., 2009). Socio-political ambivalence may end into loss of employment opportunities available to the local population or may get biased, insecure or temporary (Moran, 2004; Sun, 2013). Local acceptance and participation are required at all levels for the success of megaprojects like CPEC otherwise it may lead to collapse. The studies portraying the mindset of people of Pakistan are in scarcity reflecting what they think about CPEC and its associated benefits. This research primarily aimed to map the perception of people of Pakistan about the mega project – The Game Changer. Revamping of the plan is easy when needs and ground realities are identified as no solution is possible in the non-existence of appropriate solution of the needs (Otieno, 2000; Albert et al., 2018). CPEC will equally benefit Pakistan and China.

CPEC has three sub-routes in Pakistan named as eastern, central and western routes saving China the distance travelled from the state of Malacca for oil import along with additional features of security and stability. These three routes span all over Pakistan starting from Gwadar port and entering in China at the point of Khunjrab. The eastern route (Gwadar to Khunjrab using Makran highway, Lahore and Islamabad) is the safest while the central route is the shortest (passing from mountainous areas of Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) (Khawaja et al., Durrani & Khan, 2018). It is important to know about the perceptions of the local community especially in terms of benefits and losses as they are the major stakeholders. The aspirations of the general public are the core concerns as they are the most anticipated stakeholders of the project and human resource for future job opportunities. A positive and welcoming attitude will benefit the cause of mega

project and its associated side projects. The general public will only render their support in the cause of megaproject if they foresee their benefits (Lee and Kang, 2018). According to Rasoolimanesh et al., (2017), it is important to gauge the consent of the general public over the development of mega projects as it is of key importance. In non-availability of any benefit, the local public is arbitrated as neutral or opposing the development of such megaprojects (Jurowski et al., 1997). The researcher also mentions the benefits for local communities with the development of roads and infrastructure (Barrios, 2008; Kanwal et al., 2019). The implications of mentioned studies are significant as the entire CPEC project is based on the development of roads network and infrastructure. It calls for the study that maps the public perception on the social, political, cultural and economic aspects. According to Bornstein (2010), megaprojects are aimed to achieve global objectives to benefit local communities for an extended period which are of great significance. This research paper also aims to identify underlying perceptions of the local community which would help in the formulation of policy guidelines to milk the potentials of such projects in the favour of local communities.

Methodology and Data Analysis

This quantitative cross-sectional research was carried out in district Faisalabad to know the perceptions of general communities regarding social, political, economic and cultural aspects of CPEC. A total of 200 respondents were enrolled in the research through convenient sampling technique (snowball sampling) hailing from different sectors like business, private and health. For this purpose, an easy to understand questionnaire was distributed to collect responses of these respondents. Most of the respondents were interviewed through questionnaire face to face while few of them were also contacted through social media platforms. The questionnaire asked for demographics of the respondents and also assessed socio-political, economic and cultural aspects of CPEC. The major variables included political, economic and social aspects along with demographics (age, gender, profession, background and educational credentials). For political aspects, we assessed the awareness level of the public, the involvement of excessive debt, huge taxation, political unrest, confused investment by non-China investors, misuse of political power, corruption, bilateral relation with other countries, western pressure and above all the unaware civil society of Pakistan. Economic aspects included questions regarding employment sources, energy security, clean energy sources, road communication, modernization of infrastructure, the establishment of new economic zones, accessibility of cheap automobiles, electronics, the setting of the huge farm industry, huge industrial zones and calculation of crash of the local market in the wake of

Chinese developments. The cultural aspects were gauged in terms of increased use of Chinese goods, increased conflicts, Chinese influence, the influx of Chinese population, cultural violations, cross-cultural marriages,

cultural invasion, cultural friction, shared culture, disintegrated society and related cultural perceptions. Data was statistically analyzed on SPSS. Detailed outcomes are reflected below in the tabular and graphical form.

Table – I: Demographics

Demographics		Number	Percentage	Mean	± SD
Gender	Male	16	8.00	1.92	0.27
	Female	184	92.00		
Profession	Government Job	48	24.00	2.57	1.12
	Business	42	21.00		
	Farmer	57	28.50		
	Private job	53	26.50		
Background	Rural	28	14.00	1.86	0.34
	Urban	172	86.00		
Education	< 10 Years	30	15.00	1.86	0.34
	Bachelors	94	47.00		
	Masters	63	31.50		
	M. Phil	8	4.00		
	PhD	5	2.50		

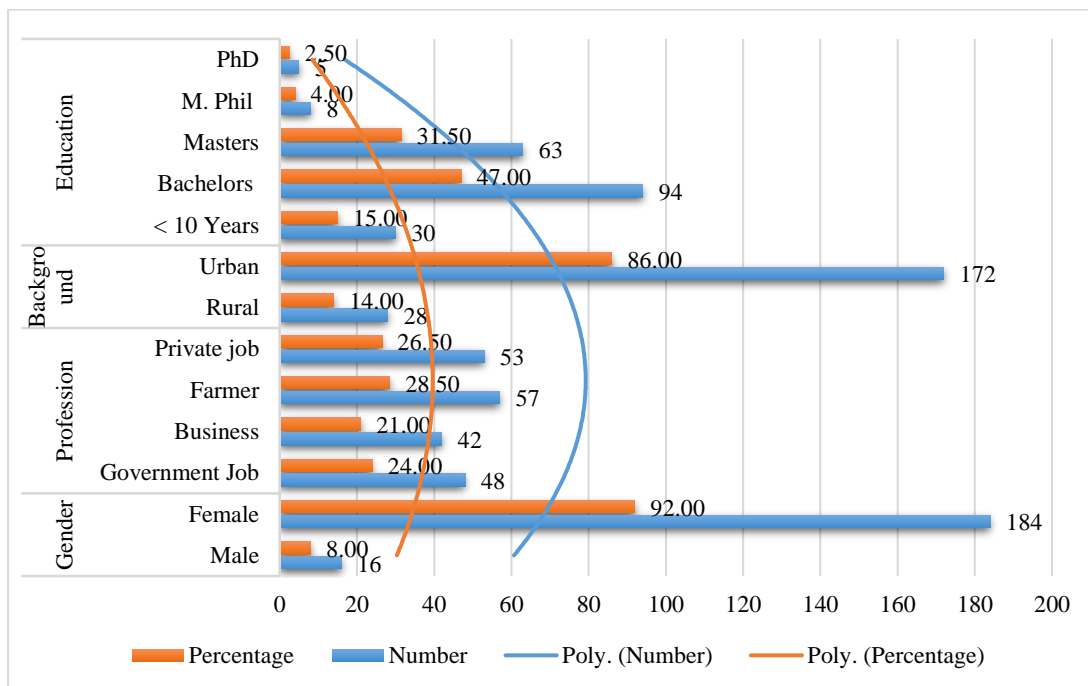


Table – II: Awareness about Political Aspects

Political Aspects	Mean	± SD
People were unaware of CPEC projects	3.54	0.57

Leverage on India	2.88	0.77
Excessive debt and taxation	2.62	1.33
Confused investment due to political unrest	2.7	0.53
CPEC and political point-scoring	3.71	0.49
Misuse of power and corruption	1.74	0.74
Impact on bilateral relations of Pakistan with other countries	3.12	0.53
Unawareness about CPEC’s potentials and grounds	3.94	2.77
The element of western pressure	3.45	0.83

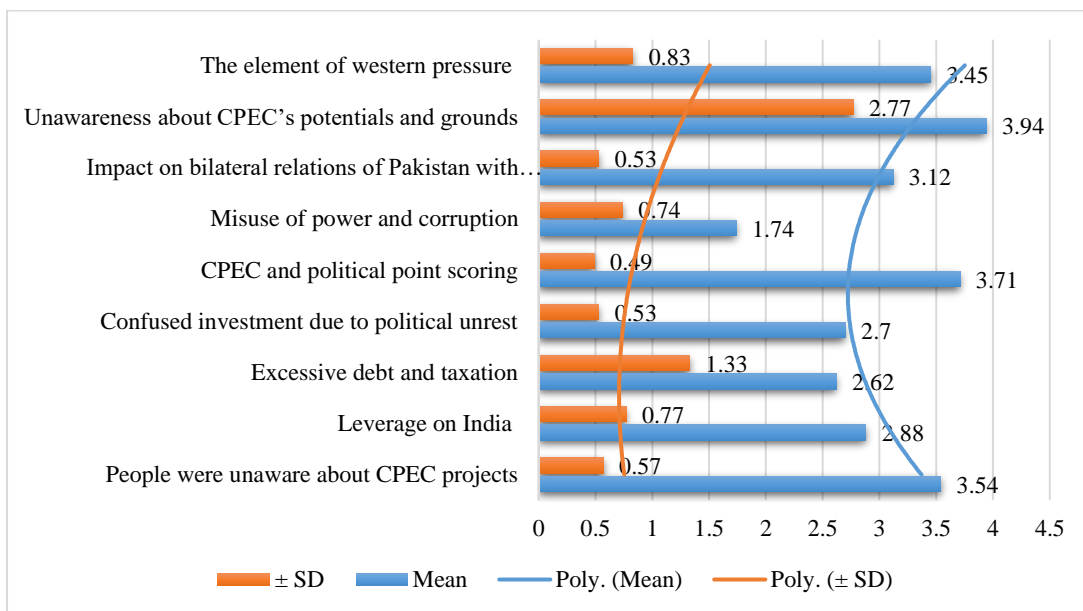


Table – III: Awareness about Economic Aspects

Economic Aspects	Mean	± SD
Increased employment	3.57	1
Clean and secure energy sources	2.27	1.12
Modernized road communication and infrastructure	3.31	1.27
Establishment of special economic zones	2.9	0
Availability of cheap automobiles and electronics	3.44	0.55
Biased employment for working and executive class	4.42	0.56
Setting up of big farms by Chinese will hamper local farmers	3.11	0.586
Big industries will produce cheap products	2.52	0.59
Pakistani product will enjoy access to the global market	2.79	1.21
Crash of local market	3.38	0.564

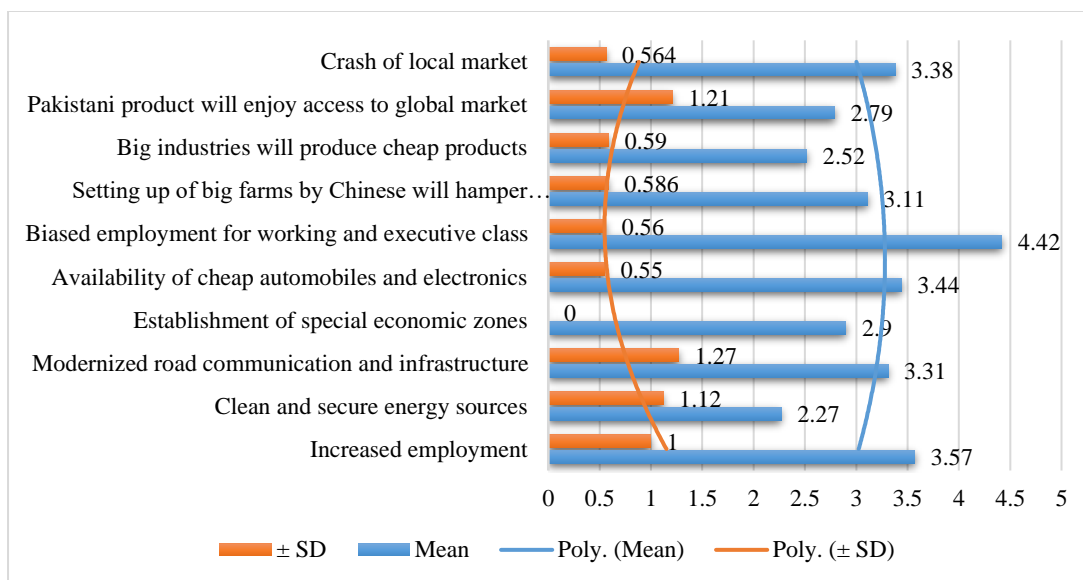
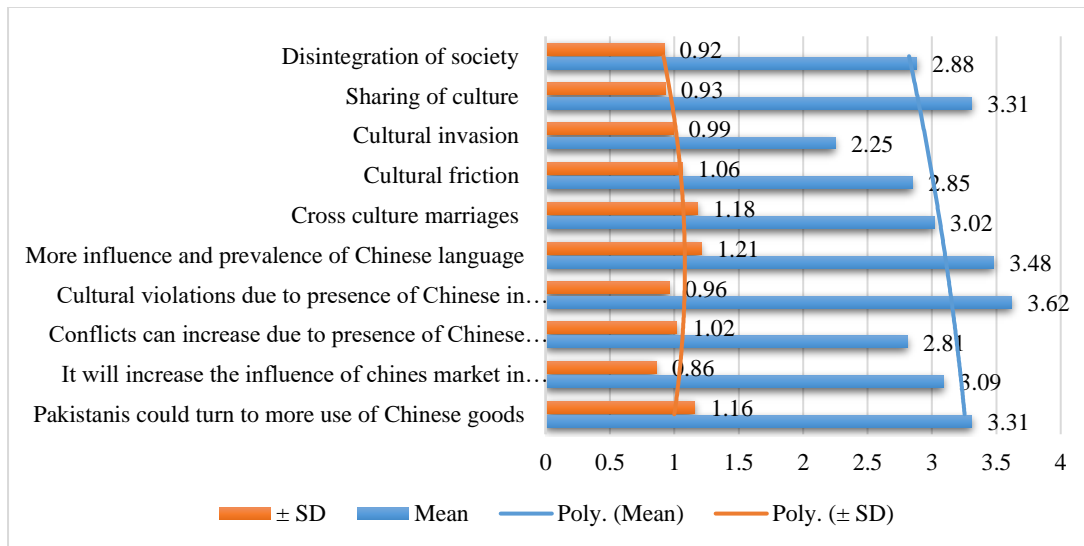


Table – IV: Awareness about Cultural Aspects

Cultural Aspects	Mean	± SD
Pakistanis could turn to more use of Chinese goods	3.31	1.16
It will increase the influence of chines market in Pakistan	3.09	0.86
Conflicts can increase due to the presence of Chinese in Pakistan	2.81	1.02
Cultural violations due to the presence of Chinese in Pakistan	3.62	0.96
More influence and prevalence of Chinese language	3.48	1.21
Cross culture marriages	3.02	1.18
Cultural friction	2.85	1.06
Cultural invasion	2.25	0.99
Sharing of culture	3.31	0.93
Disintegration of society	2.88	0.92



Discussion

It is anticipated that CPEC is a blessing in disguise for Pakistan as it has offered a solution for most of the problems of Pakistan ranging from energy crisis to development of roads network which will escalate its potential of business and trade in the years to come along with enhanced educational, health and social welfare uplift (Ali et al., 2017). CPEC flagship has the potential to spur huge revenues for the country (Makhdoom et al., 2018; Malik, 2018). There will be a rise in the economic activity making people stable in their economic state far better than ever (Abbas et al., 2019). The harnessing of CPEC geographical connectivity has the potential to increase the growth rate by 5.21% (Farooq and Haq, 2016). Scholars have worked on employment rate increase since 2013 in the background of different CPEC projects running across the country along with the influx of foreign investment (Salik, 2018; Waqar and Zaqa, 2018). CPEC projects are helping Pakistan to restore breath in the sectors of energy, infrastructure and development of road networks while strengthening the socio-political fabric of the country (Makhdoom et al., 2018). We have also come across some kind of scepticism on these projects with differing perspectives across the country which differs in terms of stakeholders and genders (Ali and Qazi, 2018). People do frighten due to the loss of their jobs in the wake of increasing Chinese influence through CPEC and implementation of its projects (PIPS, 2006). The scanty engagement of local public is a serious issue in the development of CPEC projects (Beg et al., 2018). If ignored people may get victimized due to reduced exposure to the economic activity because of biases in the employment opportunities in CEPC projects. Local industry will receive a serious impact of changed public opinion. More guidance is required at the local level about familiarization of CPEC project (Kanwal et al., 2019). It is common practice general public in Pakistan associates

their benefits with CPEC rather taking it in national perspective (Pittafi and Rasheed, 2019). Most of the people (92%) were in favour of CPEC projects because of its underlying benefits as the project is implemented across the country (Jaffery and Jizhong, 2018). Abbas et al., (2019) are of the view the CPEC does not threaten the sovereignty and interest of common people. People even support CPEC because of novel opportunities of quality and improved education for the countrymen (Saad et al., 2019). The willingness of people is affected because of the nature of the job (daily wages or contract), transportation facility, inadequate skills, etc. To take the concerns of all stakeholders is the duty of CPEC implementation team which must consider the development of human resource at local levels (Ahmed et al., 2017). The socio-economic development of Baluchistan must be the prime concern of the planners at micro and macro levels (Saeed and Khetran, 2017). Doubts will prevail till a concrete solution for the benefits of the local community. The arrival of Chinese has already spurred cultural mess all across the country. Few notable cultural reservations include prevailing Chinese language, cross-cultural marriages, invasion of Chinese goods in the market, shared culture and increased Chinese presence in the society (Malik, 2019). Chinese language invasion is a threat for already struggling Urdu language (Malik, 2019). CPEC employment requires expertise in the Chinese language; moreover, private institutions have already started courses on the Chinese language. Hundred years old protected culture is endangered due to Chinese cultural influences which is rapidly expanding across the country (Ahmad, 2017). The overwhelmed Chinese involvement in the system will dominate systematic imbalance in Pakistan. Chinese cultural dominance will end up in the cultural conflict in the society which is already lying on the cultural and ethnic fault lines. Cases of illegal marriages, brawls, fights and conflicts are repeatedly being reported. Although, CPEC will leave

diverse cultural impacts no one can deny the economic perspectives of CPEC for both China and Pakistan (Sana Ullah, 2019).

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to draw out public and communal perception regarding socio-political, economic and cultural aspects of CPEC projects in Pakistan. The outcomes of the research summarize that mixed opinion prevails among the Pakistani community and the degree of awareness about the entire CPEC project differs concerning demographics discussed in this research paper. People were generally concerned about their benefits and losses instead of their impact on the national level. The perception was significantly influential in terms of profession and gender about CPEC. The general public is perplexed and posed mixed and divided stance over CPEC projects. It is also considered as a debt trap set by the Chinese to take over Pakistan. CPEC projects hired locals as labour which is felt like a constant threat by the general public. It is also considered that the bilateral relations will distort and western pressure can also harm the country's grace. Politicians and political parties also used CPEC for their point-scoring. Construction of road networks and the development of modern infrastructure for

setting up big farms are threatening local agriculture and horticulture, especially for small scale farmers. Small scale farmers and industrialist will suffer in the hands of large-scale industrialization. This uncertain issue has developed fear among the general public. Cultural influence can result in conflicts inside the country. The legislation is required to cope with inter-cultural marriages, inter-religion relations and prevalence of Chinese language which may dent indigenous Pakistani culture. The literacy rate is the major concern which is hindering in enhancing awareness and education people about the positives of the project. Even educated fear for being taken over by Chinese because of the ignorant attitude of the ruling elite who are engaged non-issues instead of channelizing the benefits of CPEC for the general public. Policymaking is inevitable to alleviate employment biasness under CPEC initiative which should safeguard the interest of both China and Pakistan on equality basis. Awareness programs must be launched with mutual consent of both countries. More research work in mapping and gauging the insight of local public in different areas including rural and urban population will help in the process of policy formulation and understanding the positive and negative impact on SPEC initiative on small size businesses and farmers. Culture must be taken as a variable which should receive zero impact of CPEC initiative.

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