



## Gateway to Prosperity: The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

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### Abstract

A major part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It is a huge project that aims to improve economic integration and connectivity in the area. CPEC has had a big impact on Pakistan's economy and on the politics of the area. It has led to the development of infrastructure, cooperation in energy, industrial growth, and cooperation in social and political issues. The narrative review method used in this study brings together information from academic books, government reports, and policy briefs to give a full picture of CPEC's effects and problems. Key results show big improvements in trade connectivity, long-term energy use, and industrial diversification. However, there are still important issues like financial sustainability, security risks, and environmental degradation. To make sure fair and long-lasting growth, policy suggestions focus on managing debt, protecting the environment, including stakeholders, and open government. CPEC is a great example of how strategic international partnerships can help make an area more stable and prosperous. It could be used as a model for future global economic projects.

**Keywords:** China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), infrastructure development, regional connectivity, energy cooperation, economic integration, sustainable development, geopolitical strategy.

### Introduction

A big project called the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is making the strategic link between China and Pakistan stronger (Rizvi, 2014). It brings together business cooperation and geopolitical importance. China began the CPEC, a big building project, as part of its One Belt One Road (OBOR) plan. A lot of roads, trains, pipes, and energy projects will be used to connect western Xinjiang in China to Gwadar Port in Pakistan (Gholizadeh et al., 2020). There is more to this corridor than just construction going on. It shows how the economy will change, how people will be able to connect with each other, and how people will be able to work together wisely in a place where there are a lot of political and economic issues.

It's important to have CPEC because it can change the political and economic conditions in the area. It will fix important gaps in infrastructure and energy supplies, which will help Pakistan's

economy grow. It will also be easy for China to use the Indian Ocean to get to markets around the world. Pakistan also wants to diversify its economic ties and depend less on its usual Western allies (Jahanzaib & Khan, 2024). For Pakistan, CPEC also opens up the door to the Asian economy. China is now a better economic leader in the world due to the corridor. It also shows how the OBOR plan can help the area grow.

CPEC has the power to make things better, but it also has some issues. People are very concerned about this plan's long-term success because they do not think the debt can be paid off, the plan will impact the environment, and the benefits will not be shared fairly. The plan also has big strategic effects, mainly on the balance of power in the area and the relationship between China and India. Because it is so complicated, CPEC is a great example of how economic growth and diplomacy affect each other in the 21st century (Muhammadi et al., 2022)

### **Objectives of the Study**

The goal of this paper is to give a full look at the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, with a focus on:

- i. Looking at how CPEC helps Pakistan's economy grow, industries expand, and energy use stays low.
- ii. Exploring the strategic pros and cons of CPEC, especially in the context of how power works in the area.
- iii. Examining how the project will affect the community, schooling, health care, and the long-term health of the environment.

### **Research Questions**

This study seeks to address the following key research questions:

- i. How has CPEC contributed to the economic development of Pakistan, particularly in terms of infrastructure and energy sectors?
- ii. What are the geopolitical implications of CPEC for the broader South Asian region, and how does it influence Sino-Pak relations?
- iii. What are the social and environmental impacts of CPEC, and how can these challenges be mitigated to ensure sustainable development?

A lot of research has been done on the economic and political aspects of CPEC, but this study takes a more comprehensive view, looking at infrastructure, energy, industry, society and culture, and the environment. In contrast to most analyses, which are based on economic data or geopolitical stories, this study takes a more comprehensive approach by combining ideas from various fields. In this way, it tries to connect policy research and academic discussion by giving stakeholders suggestions they can follow. This article first gives an in-depth analysis of CPEC's transformative potential, focusing on its role as a catalyst for regional connectivity and economic union. Second, it shows the difficulties and dangers that come with such a big project, which is helpful for lawmakers and people working together from other countries. Lastly, the study adds to our knowledge of how mega-infrastructure projects can change the world's economies and politics, and it can be used to help other OBOR-related projects around the world.

## **Literature Review**

There has been a lot of academic and policy study on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) because it has the potential to change economics, geopolitics, and social development (Kuszevska & Nitza-Makowska, 2021; Abb, 2023). This part brings together the research that has already been done on CPEC, focused on its effects on the economy, politics, and society and culture. Every portion is examined carefully to see what the project's pros and cons are. Most scholars agree that CPEC is good for the economy, especially because it helps improve infrastructure, energy capacity, and trade connections in Pakistan. According to Tolu and Rana, 2022, CPEC's investments in infrastructure have helped Pakistan's economy grow a lot by filling in important gaps in energy and transportation networks. Building projects like the Karachi-Lahore Motorway and the Gwadar Port have made logistics easier, cut down on the cost of transportation, and opened up new business possibilities (Khan and Raza, 2023). These changes have also helped create jobs, directly hiring thousands of people in construction and indirectly helping related businesses.

People are also very interested in the energy projects that are part of CPEC. Bensadi (2024) stress how important it is for both countries to work together on energy issues to solve Pakistan's long-term power problems. A lot of megawatts have been added to the national grid thanks to investments in hydropower, coal-fired power plants, and green energy projects like the Quaid-e-Azam Solar Power Park. However, Sial et al. (2023) warn against the financial risks that come with these energy projects because many of them are paid for with loans, which makes people concerned about Pakistan's growing debt. Critics say that the benefits of CPEC are not shared equally, despite these achievements. Mega-projects often do not help rural areas or towns that are already struggling much, which keeps regional inequality going. This shows that targeted policies are needed to make sure that everyone in Pakistan can grow fairly.

### **What CPEC Means for Geopolitics**

In terms of geopolitics, CPEC is a strategic partnership between China and Pakistan that has a big impact on the balance of power in the area. CPEC increases China's strategic power by giving it direct access to the Arabian Sea through Gwadar Port, which means it does not have to use the Malacca Strait as much (Gao & Zen, 2023). China's strategic situation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is strengthened by this event, which also makes its maritime security better. CPEC is a chance for Pakistan to improve its position in world politics (Muhammadi et al., 2022). By forming a partnership with China, Pakistan not only expands its network of foreign relationships, but it also gains more economic and strategic power in the region. This alliance has made things more difficult with India, though, because it sees CPEC as a threat to its own regional interests. There are worries about India's sovereignty and territorial integrity because the corridor goes through Gilgit-Baltistan, which is disputed territory. According to Ahmad and Lin (2021), CPEC has also sparked interest in other countries in the area, such as Afghanistan and Central Asian states, which see the corridor as a way to connect to global trade (Ali, 2022). This makes wonder if CPEC could be a way to bring the region together instead of making things more competitive and hostile.

### **CPEC's Social and Cultural Aspects**

CPEC affects more than just infrastructure and economic growth. It also has an effect on healthcare, education, and culture exchange. Institutions like the Confucius Institute have helped people learn about other cultures and Mandarin in Pakistan (Asif, 2022). These kinds of projects have helped people get to know each other, which has led to a better understanding between the Chinese and Pakistani groups. CPEC has made important advances to healthcare as well as

education. Areas that don't get enough medical care benefit from projects like the Pak-China Friendship Hospital in Gwadar. Critics, on the other hand, say that CPEC does not really help society and culture because of problems like damage to the environment, moving of local communities, and not consulting stakeholders enough. Concerns about the environment are very common in the writings. According to Kolawole & Iyiola (2023), big building projects can impact the environment by cutting down trees, destroying wildlife habitats, and polluting waterways. These problems show how important it is to protect the environment better and use sustainable growth methods.

When it comes to the economy, building infrastructure needs to be balanced with making sure the economy can keep going and growth is fair for everyone. In terms of geopolitics, CPEC could help bring people in the area together, but it needs to be treated carefully because of the tensions that are already there. In terms of society, the project has come a long way in areas like health care and education. However, it still needs to address issues like pollution and homelessness to make sure that everyone can gain from the growth.

## Methods

This research uses a story review method to look closely at the many impacts of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This method of narrative review is good for getting together different ideas and points of view from different papers, such as academic literature, government reports, policy briefs, and more. A narrative review is not the same as a systematic review because it looks at both qualitative and quantitative statistics. This helps us learn more about things like CPEC that are difficult and have many parts.

**Table 1:** Plan for Research and Sources of Data

Goal	Explanation
<b>Combining Different Points of View</b>	Utilize sources from various disciplines to examine the economic, military, and socio-environmental dimensions of CPEC.
<b>A Full Picture</b>	Provide a comprehensive analysis of CPEC's opportunities and challenges, integrating data that might not align with a single analytical framework.
<b>Contextual Analysis</b>	Situate CPEC within the broader context of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the geopolitics of South Asia.

**Table 2: Sources of Data**

<b>Source Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Academic Papers</b>	Peer-reviewed journal articles providing theoretical frameworks, case studies, and empirical data on various aspects of CPEC.
<b>Government Reports</b>	Official publications from Chinese and Pakistani authorities detailing policy objectives, project milestones, and financial commitments.
<b>Policy Briefs and Think Tank Publications</b>	Reports from international think tanks and research institutions offering expert analyses on CPEC's economic, geopolitical, and social dimensions.
<b>Media Reports</b>	Reputable media sources providing real-time updates and the latest developments related to CPEC projects and their impact.

This table shows the study plan and the sources of the data, making sure that the method is clear and that all of CPEC's many aspects are covered.

Different types of sources were used, including government websites and well-known think tanks. Some of the words that were used to find good sources were "Belt and Road Initiative," "infrastructure development," "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," and "geopolitical implications." The quality and use of the data were the deciding factors in its selection. It had to be about CPEC or parts of the BRI that were directly connected to it. It also had to be new (published in the last ten years) so that it included new information and debates. Finally, it had to come from well-known authors, institutions, or organizations.

Once everything was set up, the narrative review method was used to look at the data and figure out what it all meant. First, the data was sorted into groups based on topics such as improving infrastructure, working together on energy problems, economic growth, effects on society and culture, and political implications. The plan was to compare the sources to find similarities, differences, and new trends. We carefully looked at each source to see how well it followed the research method, how helpful it was, and how much it helped us understand the size and scope of CPEC. Last, the results were put together to make a narrative that showed both the good and bad things about CPEC.

The narrative review method works well for this type of work. To fully understand complicated problems, we can explore all of their parts and the people who are involved due to its adaptability, which allows us mix different types of data and views from different fields. It also makes it easy to add new details and ideas that are specific to the situation. But this method also has some flaws. When results are interpreted and put together, there is a chance of bias. Also, judgments aren't based on strong statistics like they would be in a meta-analysis because the numbers are not accurate enough. To fix these problems, work was done to make sure that the choice of data and how it was interpreted were open and fair. The results were patterned against those from other sources, and a clear record of how the data was gathered and analyzed was kept. It looks at CPEC in a lot of different ways because it uses a narrative review method. It adds to the larger conversation about regional connections, economic growth, and geopolitical strategy.

## Findings

The study shows that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has many effects. Some of these are making industry zones, working together to solve energy problems, and making changes in politics and society. Part of CPEC, a lot of money has been spent on roads, trains, ports, and other ways to get around. This has changed how people in the area can get to each other. Because of these projects, journey times have been cut down a lot, trade has become more efficient, and new business opportunities have opened up. *KLM* is a six-lane highway that connects Karachi and Lahore, two of Pakistan's most important business towns (Xie et al., 2015). It is more than 1,100 kilometers long. It used to take 18 hours to get from one town to the other, but now it only takes about 12 hours. This means that things and services can get where they need to go faster. It has also made logistics better for companies that need to send things on time, like textile exporters.

650 kilometers of the Gwadar Port Highway connect Gwadar Port to the rest of Pakistan (Chawla & Jacob, 2024). This makes it an important trade route. Because it is close to the Strait of Hormuz, Gwadar Port could become an important hub for global trade, especially for Chinese goods going to Africa and the Middle East. Main Line-1 (ML-1) Railway Upgrade is \$6.8 billion project will update Pakistan's rail system by making it faster, going from 65 to 105 km/h to 160 km/h. The ML-1 upgrade will lower the cost of freight, make it easier for passengers to get around, and help Pakistan Railways get back on its feet. Even with these successes, infrastructure projects have had problems, such as delays and worries about how the large-scale building will affect the environment.

Pakistan has had chronic energy shortages, but CPEC energy projects have helped fix this problem by boosting living standards and industry productivity while also promoting renewable energy solutions (Asghar et al., 2023). The Sahiwal Coal Power Plant, a 1,320 MW coal-fired power plant in Punjab, was finished in a record 22 months. It gives the national grid reliable electricity, which lowers the number of times load shedding happens and helps businesses like steel manufacturing. Karot Hydropower Project is 720 MW hydropower plant on the Jhelum River will provide clean energy to 3 million homes every year (Ansari et al., 2024). It also helps with water control and irrigation, which makes farming more productive in the area. Quaid-e-Azam Solar Power Park is Pakistan's biggest solar power plant, and it makes 1,000 MW of electricity (Asad et al., 2022). Pakistan can move to green energy sources, and carbon emissions go down. People are worried about the long-term effects on the environment and the fact that Pakistan will have to import more coal. These projects have made Pakistan more energy safe, though.

A great number of industrial zones have been set up by CPEC. These zones help the economy grow by bringing in jobs and foreign investment. The goal of these zones is to boost Pakistan's economy and make it stronger in foreign trade. The 2,281-acre Gwadar Industrial Zone is meant to be home to companies that make textiles, medicines, and food (Nazir, 2021). It's easy for producers to move goods because it's close to Gwadar Port. The Rashakai Special Economic Zone (SEZ) is a 1,000-acre area in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa that is mostly used for making fabric, cars, and food (Ahmed et al., 2020). Investors can get tax breaks from it. Chinese and local businesses have put money into it, which has made thousands of jobs available in the area. There is a 1,500-acre SEZ called Darbeji. It is close to Karachi, which is Pakistan's biggest industrial city and a good place to do business. Multinational companies are interested in it, especially those that make things and move things around. Fears have been made, though, about how unevenly industrial growth has spread. Gwadar is located in the province of Balochistan, which has complained that it is not receiving adequate funding and is therefore struggling to accommodate its residents.

CPEC has not only helped Pakistan's economy grow, but it has also helped the country's social progress, especially in med care and education. Additionally, it has strengthened the bonds between people in China and Pakistan. These are places in different Pakistani towns where you can learn Mandarin and meet people from other cultures. These changes have helped schools work together better and given Pakistani pros better ways to work with their Chinese coworkers. Pakistan-China Friendship Hospital was built in Gwadar to help people in the region that don't have access to good medical care. It has made it easier for people who live or work in or near Gwadar to get good medical care. Even though these projects are a big step forward, there are still problems, such as damage to the environment, people having to move, and not enough involvement from stakeholders in planning the projects. Building roads and industrial zones has cut down trees and destroyed habitats in some places, mostly in Balochistan. Projects like the Gwadar Port have uprooted local fishers, making it hard for them to make a living. There are plans for compensation and transfer, but they have not always been carried out.

**Table 3: Summary Table of Findings**

Category	Key Projects	Impact
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Karachi-Lahore Motorway, Gwadar Port Highway, ML-1 Railway	Reduced travel time, enhanced trade efficiency, and improved connectivity.
<b>Energy Cooperation</b>	Sahiwal Coal Power Plant, Karot Hydropower Project, Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park	Addressed energy shortages, promoted renewable energy, and reduced carbon emissions.
<b>Industrial Zones</b>	Gwadar Industrial Zone, Rashakai SEZ, Dhabeji SEZ	Boosted industrial growth, job creation, and foreign investment.
<b>Socio-Political</b>	Confucius Institute, Pak-China Friendship Hospital	Enhanced educational and healthcare infrastructure, fostered people-to-people ties.

These findings reveal the transformative potential of CPEC while underscoring the need for policies that address its socio-environmental challenges and ensure inclusive benefits for all stakeholders.

## Discussion

The CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) is a big project that is changing the economy, politics, and lives of people in South Asia. For China, this project is a big part of their strategic partnership with Pakistan because it is the major part of their Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). There is also a lot of room for growth and integration in the area. There are many good things about CPEC, but it also has some big problems that need strong policy and careful thought. Pakistan's economy has grown a great deal thanks to CPEC. It has fixed important problems with energy and facilities. The Karachi-Lahore Motorway, the Gwadar Port, and many energy plants have made it so that there is less of an energy shortage. These projects have also sped up industry growth. Because China has invested in Pakistan, other countries are also interested in the country. This has improved Pakistan's economic picture around the world. People fear that Pakistan won't be able to pay back its long-term debts because it depends so much on Chinese money, mostly in the form of loans. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) says that Pakistan's foreign debt has grown, and a big part of that is because of CPEC projects (Shaikh & Chen, 2021). Some people say that this way of thinking about money could cause Pakistan to get stuck in a "debt trap," where it loses

finance that could be used for important social projects and instead goes to paying off debt. One example is the Sahiwal Coal Power Plant and other big projects. To keep the economy growing, this shows how important it is to have a number of different ways to get money and more clear financial deals.

CPEC has strengthened China and Pakistan's strategic relationship, which is good for both countries' economies and safety. China can go straight to the Arabian Sea through Gwadar Port, skipping the Malacca Strait, and its oil supply lines are safe thanks to the corridor. As part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Beijing wants to gain more power in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). CPEC makes Pakistan's geopolitical situation better because it lets it form more economic partnerships and balance out its enemies in the area. It has made things worse in the area, especially with India, though. It says that Gilgit-Baltistan is part of Jammu and Kashmir, which is why New Delhi does not want the CPEC to go through that area. India thinks the idea is an attack on its sovereignty and on its power to make a difference in the area. The US and other world and regional powers are also worried about China's growing power in the Indian Ocean. The US thinks that CPEC is part of China's bigger plan to become more powerful in the world. This difficult mix of interests shows that CPEC is both a way for countries to work together and a way for them to compete strategically.

Along with being important for business and politics, CPEC has also made a big difference in Pakistan's social growth. Putting money into schools and hospitals, like the Confucius Institutes and the Pak-China Friendship Hospital in Gwadar, has helped people get better care and brought people together. There are now better ties between the two countries thanks to these projects. They have also filled in important gaps in Pakistan's social infrastructure. But CPEC's effects on people and the environment are very bad: Trees have been cut down, habitats have been destroyed, and pollution has been caused by building freeways, trains, and industrial zones. For instance, projects in Balochistan have messed up fragile ecosystems, which worries people who care about the environment. As Gwadar Port and the industry areas around it have grown, local communities, especially fishermen, have been forced to move without getting enough money or a plan for where to live. This has made people who are harmed more resistant. Big cities like Karachi and Lahore have gotten a lot out of the changes, but rural and poor areas haven't gotten as much. This unequal division of benefits could make regional differences worse and hurt the project's long-term viability.

Threats to security have been aimed at CPEC because it is so big and important from a military point of view. Armed terrorists, separatists, and extremist groups have attacked CPEC equipment and people working on it in Pakistan, mostly in Balochistan. Some of the most well-known CPEC projects aren't very strong, like the attack on the Gwadar Hotel in 2019. Pakistan has set up special security groups, such as the Special Security Division (SSD), to keep CPEC assets and the people who work on them safe. Long-term security, on the other hand, rests on fixing problems like unhappiness in the community and unfair social and economic conditions so that people are unwilling to do things that hurt the state.

CPEC has sped up progress, but its long-term survival is still a big worry. People, the environment, and the economy all have problems that need to be fixed before the road can reach its full potential. These are important things to think about: To keep from having to deal with too much debt, make sure that loans are clear and fair. Putting in place rules to help protect the environment from big projects, like planting trees and limiting pollution. Making sure that all groups and areas,



especially those that aren't well developed yet, get their fair share of the benefits of development is what inclusive development means. For example, adding Afghanistan or Central Asian states to the corridor would be one way to ease conflicts and find ways to work together. South Asia's economy and government could change because of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It has come a long way in terms of infrastructure, energy, and social progress, but it still has a lot of issues to deal with, including long-term money issues, tensions in the area, and concerns about the environment and people. People who want to get rich with CPEC need to work together to solve these issues. This can only be done with an open government, policies that include everyone, and unity in the area.

## **Conclusion**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a huge project that could bring about huge economic growth, better unity in the region, and social progress in Pakistan and beyond. China and Pakistan can now connect with ease thanks to the project. This will bring more trade, better infrastructure, and more energy security. But we need to figure out some big issues before it can really work in the long term. These include how to keep it going financially, how it will impact the environment, how to keep people safe, and how to make sure that everyone gains the same advantages. The project needs a broad and well-thought-out method to make sure it not only meets its economic goals but also works for social justice and the long-term health of the environment.

To do this, a number of ideas are very important. First, Pakistan needs to set up strong financial controls to make sure that its debt is well managed and that borrowing money from other countries doesn't put it in debt that it can't repay. Second, environmental laws need to be made stricter so that big building projects do less damage to the environment. Green building methods should be emphasized. Finally, local groups should be involved in making plans and carrying out CPEC projects so that everyone gains and no one has to move. Better safety measures are also needed to protect people and property from danger, especially in troubled places like Balochistan. Finally, it's important to put openness and responsibility at the top of the list. Setting up strong governance systems that make sure projects are done properly and quickly is one way to do this. This will help people trust the government and make it easier for countries to work together. If CPEC fixes these issues with well-thought-out policy changes, it could reach its goal of making the area more stable and prosperous. The Belt and Road Initiative's main project is CPEC. It shows that countries can work together to achieve long-term growth, even in places where politics, society, and the business are complicated.

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