

Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

## **The Rise of China: Pakistani Perspectives**

Author

Sangit Dwivedi

Published

2015

Journal Title

Griffith Asia Quarterly

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/340313>

Link to published version

<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/tep/141524>

## The Rise of China: Pakistani Perspectives

Sangit Dwivedi\*

**Abstract:** *Pakistan and China friendship, described by the leadership of both countries as higher than mountains, deeper than oceans and sweeter than honey is a unique case in the international system. The relationship is based on the geostrategic and geo-economic calculations. An important contributing factor in strengthening the relation would be how both countries perceive each other. Pakistan needs to understand the mindset of rising China, the compulsion and limitation of the relationship. However, people-to-people contact is required between the two countries. At present, the relationship is mostly at the state-to-state level. In recent years, the role of media has been enhanced. Scholars, analysts, students, youth visit both countries reflecting the future prospect of relationship. Scant scholarly attention has been devoted to how Pakistani media, elite or general public perceive China's ascendancy. The present research paper seeks to define opinion and response of Pakistani views on the core opportunities and challenges posed by China's growing power for them. It ends with a discussion of the possible scenarios of future Sino-Pak relations.*

### Introduction

"No Asian countries can achieve development in isolation from each other."

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang.<sup>1</sup>

An important global development in the twenty-first century is the shifting of power in the world economy, symbolized by the rise of developing countries - grouped as Brazil, Russia, India, and China (BRIC). The twenty first century is increasingly being identified as an 'Asian' century, with the balance of economic, political and cultural power shifting from the West to the East. Whether an "Asian century" will finally arrive after five centuries of Western dominance of world affairs depends importantly not only on whether India and China can continue their respective rises but also on how each of these two Asian giants will deal with its own and the other nation's ascent.<sup>2</sup> Especially noteworthy is the rise of China, the most populous nation on earth. China has been moving up the ladder, militarily, economically, and politically, has its own priorities, strategies, successes, and failures.

China's emergence as a rising power will critically shape the international relations. This remarkable rise in the last three decades has had a mixed global reaction. Journalists, politicians, academia and experts are discussing the emerging new scenario

---

\* Dr. Sangit Dwivedi is an Assistant Professor in the department of Political Science, Bharati College, University of Delhi, India. Her area of research expertise is International Relations and International Politics, particularly in relation to Chinese foreign policy in South Asia and the North-East Asian strategic environment. She has published on these issues in *North Korean Review*, *Asian Journal of Political Science*, *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, and the *Indian Journal of Political Science*.

in the region. While many countries have welcomed this rise, some of China's neighbours have viewed it with great concern. In the context of Pakistan-China relations, the winds of change are blowing. Given China's support to Pakistan in military and nuclear field, China's gradual elevation to the position of great power poses significant question. It also raises suspicion amongst Pakistani companies. Various developments in the international arena have led to Pakistan's inhibition of great power, however various factors complicate its ambition. There are different options in forming alliances where alliance partner face numerous problems. While the implications for the rise of China have been debated in global, regional, and bilateral context, much less or scant scholarly attention has been devoted to how Pakistani media, elite or general public perceive China's ascendancy.

The present research paper seeks to define opinion and response of Pakistani views on the core opportunities and challenges posed by China's growing power for them. It ends with a discussion of the possible scenarios of future Sino-Pak relations. The literature review indicates that the China-Pakistan relationship is indeed special, because it transcends the changes of the times and politics. Over the past 62 years since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China-Pakistan friendship nurtured by the great leaders like Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto has grown into a large tree. The results argue that in the current context, Pakistan and China both need each other as there is a strategic convergence of interests. Given the evolving international dynamics and China's rise as a major global power, it is important to reassess and review the strengths and challenges of Sino-Pak relationship in order to move forward in a positive manner.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The fundamental question that is raised pertaining to every research project is about its needs, objectives and practical implications. China had exclusively focused on state-to-state relations that remain unrivaled to this day. The contacts contributing to moderating the estranged state-to-state relations by offering private initiatives is known as track-II diplomacy. Pakistan-China interactions have historically been limited to mostly inter-governmental contact, with limited people-to-people interactions, which has been identified as one of the core weaknesses in the durability of the relations. A sustained robust relationship requires a profound mutual understanding of culture, language, and traditions which can take place only through regular people-to-people contact via student exchange programmes, increased tourism, think tank collaboration, interactions between the media, and joint ventures in creative arts like cinema, theatre, music, therefore is one of the key aspects that must be addressed. The objectives of this research can be specified on finding the answers to the questions like the nature of Sino-Pak relations in the post-Cold War era, the areas of convergence and divergence

between the two countries, the vision for the future of Pakistan-China relations etc. The paper examines the image that China and Pakistan have tried to create through a combined approach of multi-dimensional cooperation bolstered by an effective media strategy. It argues for a measured interpretation that recognizes the strength of the Sino-Pak entente.

Pakistan and China share a 'unique' bilateral relationship yet demonstrate sharp contrasts in terms of their political systems, economic models, and social structures. They have maintained a very cordial relationship in many areas of mutual interest and offers promising opportunities in an era of globalization. The paper examines the key factors influencing China-Pakistan relations and analyzes elite perceptions on this relationship in geostrategic, geopolitical, and geo-economic paradigms. The paper is divided into five parts. The first part begins with an assessment of evolving Sino-Pak grand strategy. To measure China's relative position in the world, Chinese writers have developed the concept of "comprehensive national power" on China's external strategy. It reviews how the 'all-weather' Sino-Pak friendship has been built to illustrate why China's engagement is contingent upon its own national security, regional ambitions and view of the changing world order, and not on unqualified support to Pakistan. The role of the media and elite is examined in the second section as it becomes increasingly important to know how the alliance is perceived by the public or popular masses of the two countries. The third part evaluates potential peer competitors such as India in the context of the Sino-Indian and Indo-Pak relationship, including history, geography, territorial disputes, mutual threat perception, alignment patterns, economic partnership and competition. The fourth section concisely summarizes Pakistani analyst's perspectives on a rising China in light of the changing economic relationship. It analyses the challenges and contradictions of the relationship because the official rhetoric highlights similarities and often ignores the challenges of the relationship. The paper concludes with an analysis of possible scenarios for the future of China-Pakistan relations and its regional implications.

### **The Sino-Pak Alliance**

There is a vital need to understand how the Chinese system is being operated and received in Pakistan. Pakistan's paradigm for understanding China may differ from the Chinese worldview. There is new leadership in China (the 18<sup>th</sup> Party Congress led by President Xi Jinping) and Pakistan (under Nawaz Sharif) which may be reflective of a new beginning in Sino-Pak relations. In the 1950s, Islamabad was among the first to recognise the People's Republic of China. Following the 1962 Sino-India war, both countries began to nurture a close relationship. China has provided moral and material support to Pakistan in terms of the country's interests, including Pakistan's nuclear program or economic cooperation. It represents a fine example of friendly state-to-state

interactions. The Sino-Pak entente has withstood the test of time and became more vibrant.

Today, China-Pakistan relations have acquired a new dimension. Beijing also supports Pakistan on international forums like the G-20, NSG and the UNSC. Similarly Pakistan provides parallel support to Chinese interests in Asia. The Pakistani government provides unequivocal and complete support to the Chinese government in its core areas of interests including China's territorial integrity and sovereignty and the issue of the peaceful rise of China as a major global power. Pakistan is an important link for China into the Muslim World. There are 22 major projects that China has initiated in Pakistan such as heavy mechanical complex, heavy electrical complex, tank rebuilding factory, aircraft rebuilding factory, machine tools, Gwadar port, Karakoram Highway and nuclear power plants. In addition, currently there are more than 120 smaller Chinese projects and about 12,000 to 15,000 Chinese engineers and technicians are working in Pakistan on these projects. China-Pakistan relations have long thrived on military and strategic cooperation. Over time, this cooperation yielded economic dividends for Pakistan and public goodwill for China. Although military and strategic interests still dominate their relations, need for stronger economic ties and active public diplomacy are growing in parallel. Beijing is responding to such needs with increasing trade and investment to help Pakistan's economy, while Islamabad is creating tax-free "Exclusive Industrial Zones" to attract Chinese investment.<sup>3</sup> Economic cooperation has accelerated with a free-trade agreement and China's assistance in the development of Pakistan's infrastructure. In 2012, two-way trade exceeded US\$12 billion. China is also the largest investor in Pakistan's deep-water port at Gwadar. Kasghar is the biggest city closest to the Pakistan-China border, and as such represents great opportunities for future collaboration. These initiatives, however, have benefited Chinese products. Pakistan's government reciprocally supports China on all issues and policies of their national concern. As a result, China is now pursuing active public diplomacy to engage both economic and political actors in Pakistan to keep its strategic advantage with Islamabad intact.

In rising Asia, China-Pakistan relations grow closer. As Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif told his Chinese counterpart, Li Keqiang, at Beijing "Our friendship is higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the deepest sea in the world, and sweeter than honey".<sup>4</sup> In Islamabad, China is seen as a regional counterweight to Washington and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Beijing supports Islamabad's position on Kashmir, while Pakistan supports China on the issues of Xinjiang, Tibet and Taiwan. China's rebalancing in South Asia is based on energy concerns, economic imperatives in Pakistan, and bilateral cooperation to contain Islamic insurgencies in the restless border regions. Nevertheless, Beijing's recalibration reflects China's rising strategic weight, and the shift of economic momentum to Asia. Xinjiang is now the point where both Pakistan

and Chinese interests are converging around economic development and security. As Pakistan and China strengthen their relations, questions have arisen about the changing nature of this alliance, the rhetoric that sustains it and the implications of Chinese influence in Pakistan. There are key limitations for this alliance. Firstly, the tangible financial support Pakistan needs from China is not as readily available as it used to be. Secondly, as Pakistan becomes more unstable and receives criticism from the international community on counter-terrorism and nuclear proliferation, China is finding it more difficult to support Pakistan. There are also indications that Pakistan is seeking to build a more diverse base of partners to avoid heavy reliance on one ally, either the United States or China. The impetus to strengthen Pakistan's relationship with Beijing is broad based. From Islamabad's perspective, China is a rising superpower with veto right in the UN and a close friendship with it can provide Pakistan with the leverage it needs in the world community. Pakistan and China have nurtured their diplomatic ties and the media in both countries are continuing to promote the image of a strong alliance.

### **The Role of the Media in Sino-Pak Relations**

According to Ambassador Masood Khan, 'The media in Pakistan and China read the pulse of the people of the two countries. Frequent contact and communication among them will help us strengthen broader people-to-people contact and deepen our friendship. The media in Pakistan and China are vibrant. As their ties grow, they will help us negotiate a better transition to a fast globalizing and shrinking world.'<sup>5</sup>

The media in China and Pakistan share important responsibilities and have recently assumed a powerful role in promoting the image of a strong partnership. Both the governments have employed the media to play a significant role in building and maintaining a positive image of Sino-Pak bilateral relations. Official statements have declared the Pakistani and Chinese media to be a reflection of the 'aspirations for deeper ties' between the two countries.<sup>6</sup> The rhetoric surrounding the Sino-Pakistani relationship based on an 'all-weather' friendship is regularly contrasted by both foreign and domestic media with Pakistan's 'fair-weather' relationship with the United States. Officials highlight that they have an alliance based on mutual trust and as 'good brothers sharing weal and woe' which is largely reinforced by the media in Pakistan and China.<sup>7</sup> In addition to *Beijing Review* running a special webpage to celebrate their anniversary, discussions around setting up a media university in Pakistan with Chinese support are treated as an example of the closer cooperation.<sup>8</sup> If there are any criticism, they tend to come from the English language papers in Pakistan, which cover the stories about the effects of Chinese investment in Baluchistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Sindh.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, there is growing discontent among the local population in these areas



who contend that they rarely see the benefits of Chinese investments as Chinese companies bring their own equipment and personnel. Chinese investments, joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing and supply of weapons are most commonly used by the international media to analyse Sino-Pak relations. The scope of think tanks such as the Pakistan-China Institute in Islamabad and its publications, *Nihao-Salam* and *Youlin*, help sustain the image of a solid relationship. The establishment of a China-Pakistan Media Centre, the Pak-China Media Alliance, a Confucius Institute in Pakistan, and China Radio International's hosting of a daily Urdu service, as well as various other blogs, educational and cultural exchanges, are examples of recent initiatives taken to help build people-to-people links.<sup>10</sup>

Pakistani public communicate more easily with Indians as well as Americans because of their familiarity with Hindi and the English language. They are drawn to Indian and US cultures, especially movies, music, and television programming. With respect to China, language is such a huge barrier that even Sino-Pak friendship cannot surmount it. Having been aware of this barrier, the Chinese are now investing in language and education in Pakistan. They are opening a Chinese Language Center (CLC) in Islamabad to boost linguistic ties by preparing young Pakistani scholars, professionals, and government and business leaders for training in China.<sup>11</sup> Pakistani media have also been critical of China's treatment of its Muslim minority especially Uyghur Muslims. China is, however, wary of the connection between the insurgents of Xinjiang with their Islamic helpers from across the border in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> In 2013, China invited a group of Pakistani journalists to visit Xinjiang and introduced the "three evils of extremism, splittism, and terrorism." Chinese officials also briefed the visiting Pakistani journalists on the first-ever Sino-Pak joint military exercises, labelled as "Friendship 2004." These exercises were held in August 2004 in northwest Xinjiang with an aim "to root out the evil of extremism, splittism, and terrorism." Such trips had a great impact. One of the journalists wrote that China and Pakistan should engage in serious efforts to root out the monster of separatism and extremism from Xinjiang was a moral need.<sup>13</sup>

However, China's no-bid contract for a \$700 million Chasma II nuclear power plant and its 69 defective locomotive engines supplied to Pakistan Railways have contributed to Pakistani media's skeptical view of China. The Gwadar port project, which most Pakistanis view as the plunder of Baluchistan's natural wealth, has mixed reactions all across Pakistan. Besides, Chinese companies are engaged in several development projects in Baluchistan, including the exploration of oil and natural gas, the building of extensive road network, and the Saindak Gold and Copper mining project. Criticizing China, a newspaper published a report about the Saindak Gold-Copper Mining Project: "In the Saindak project, the Chinese get 74 percent, the federal

government (of Pakistan) 25 percent, and the province (i.e., Baluchistan) only 1 percent.”<sup>14</sup>

To weaken the media criticism with stronger cultural ties, China is mobilizing Pakistani civic organizations and civic leaders. On April 6, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao went to Lahore to honor the Pak-China Friendship Association. He honored Mr. Mukhtar Ahmad Khan as legendary digger of the well of Sino-Pak friendship. Anticipating future challenges, Prime Minister Wen asked the people to help grow the tree of Sino-Pak friendship strong, as “only a strong tree can weather hailstorms.”<sup>15</sup> Chief Minister of Punjab (Pakistan), while referring to the Indo-Pak war of 1965, summed up Beijing’s strategic advantage succinctly: “...the people of this city cannot forget the day when Lahore was attacked forty years ago. It was their friendship with China that stood between Lahore and the enemy as the Great Wall of China.”<sup>16</sup> China and Pakistan met at a forum held by China International Publishing Group and the Pakistani embassy in China to mark 60 years of diplomatic relations. The forum focused specifically on the media's role in the relationship. Masood Khan, the Pakistani ambassador to China, proposed that media organizations of both countries develop a formal and institutionalized relationship to further promote dialogue. He suggested that leading media in China should take an initiative in this regard. China and Pakistan signed a memorandum of understanding on media exchange on June 8. Adnan Akram, assistant director of External Publicity Wing of Ministry of Information of Pakistan said regular visits from the media delegations between two countries have been written into the memo to promote contacts.<sup>17</sup> CIPG President Zhou Mingwei said media communication would play a unique role in boosting relations. According to Tang Mengsheng, a professor at Peking University, Chinese and Pakistani media should not only focus on hot topics but also introduce more about the cultures of two countries.<sup>18</sup> It is important to analyze and understand these implications on the traditional patterns of Chinese companies operating in Pakistan.

There are various challenges in the relationship between the two countries including social ideas, developing in China and misunderstood in Pakistan. Strategic relations are in order but trade relations lag far behind, and are not proportionate to other sectors of the relationship. Lack of trust, regarding the quality of Chinese products in Pakistan, is another issue, which is questionable. While there are almost 358 Joint Agreements, Memorandum of Understandings, Joint Declarations and arrangements covering almost every sector of civil society, lack of political will to implementation negate these endeavours. The security situation in Pakistan adds to challenges in both trade relations and implementation issues. Limited people-to-people interaction, limited Chinese art and literature are keeping the relationship slightly one-dimensional.



Utilizing already trained human resources from Pakistan to run Chinese projects may be an effective solution to the problem. The distance from Gwadar to Shanghai is 3000 miles, while the distance to Shanghai from the Melaka strait is 9000 miles. This important port can be utilized as an energy corridor and for broadening bilateral interaction. Xinjiang is the link between Pakistan and China, and Pakistan is the link between China and the Muslim world. The Chinese, who are looking forward to relocate some of their intermediate industries, should shift to Pakistan with necessary arrangements. Thus, trade relations between the two countries can be improved as Pakistan's exports will increase. Another impediment to Pakistan-China relations is the bureaucratic red tape. If Pakistan acts in accordance with Article 38 of the Constitution and carefully crafts its policies in line with the principles drawn out in Articles 29 to 39 dealing with social justice, people-to-people contact between the two countries will increase significantly. Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed said that Pakistan always welcomed the peaceful rise of China since it is a source of strength and security for the neighbours in Asia, especially Pakistan. He said that a stronger and multifaceted partnership to further promote people-to-people contact would be a force multiplier for Pakistan-China relations. "Those who talk of the 'China threat' or 'containment of China' are enemies of peace in Asia."<sup>19</sup> He stated China has to play a more active role to promote regional peace, especially in Afghanistan, and economic growth and prosperity through trade and investment. According to a survey of 39 nations conducted by the Pew Research Center, some 81 percent of Pakistanis hold positive views about China.<sup>20</sup> The survey indicates that a conflict between China and its neighbours over territorial disputes is likely and that despite territorial issues, China's economic standing is considered good even among Asian countries. The countries included in the survey have historical roots, past animosities and territorial disputes. Many people said that Chinese growing economy is good for their country. In general terms, China's favourability quotient has remained at the highest in Pakistan at 78% followed by Bangladesh at 77%. Pakistan participates in all regional cooperation initiatives led by China whether they are strategically important or economically crucial, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Boao Forum for Asia (BFA).

In the journey towards achieving prosperity, China and Pakistan should be looked upon as partner. China and Pakistan are ally in the common interests. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif delivered a plenary speech titled "Reviving the Silk Road." The forum reflected the major contours of the Asian Century under the dynamic leadership of a rising China. Sharif opined that "the revival of the Silk Road can help in bringing economic growth and prosperity in the region."<sup>21</sup> Since its inception in 2001, the non-governmental BFA has become an important source of contact between the Chinese government, businessmen, economists, academics, and media personnel.<sup>22</sup> The Chinese

private sector has been taking a keen interest in investment in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor program. So far \$52 billion have been pledged for many of these infrastructural projects. If this happens, Pakistan will become one of the largest recipients of Chinese investment.

With the fast rising optimistic outlook of the Pakistani economy in the past 10 months, the future of Sino-Pak economic relations appears bright. People-to-people links to strengthen such efforts have yielded mixed results. Despite all the anti-American sentiment in Pakistan that is whipped up by local and foreign media, people-to-people contacts and educational and cultural exchanges between the two countries tend to be qualitatively more attractive, particularly for the elites and middle-class Pakistanis for whom the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia are typically first choices for university attendance.<sup>23</sup> Despite attempts by both governments to bolster language and cultural links, Pakistanis do not see learning Mandarin as a substitute for learning English, especially in provinces such as Sindh and Baluchistan, which are away from China and completely disconnected from it both socially and culturally.

Despite the mismatch in perception and intentions between Chinese and Pakistani citizens, the mechanisms to exercise power and influence a regional agenda remain firmly in the hands of their respective elites, governments and military establishments. According to the Pakistan Tourism Development Cooperation, approximately 28,000 Chinese visited Pakistan in 2010. The majority of people-to-people contacts are between Gilgit-Baltistan and Xinjiang through businessmen, traders, engineers and students. It is illustrative of the strategic nature of cooperation, as Pakistanis see China as a partner that they need and depend upon. Beijing's influence on Islamabad is rooted in history, areas of mutual cooperation, political support, engaging with multiple state and non-state actors. China's Ambassador to Pakistan Liu Jian has described Pakistan's development as a shared burden: 'our [China] progress and difficulties of Islamabad are our problem which we will mutually overcome soon.'<sup>24</sup> Polling data in 2012 show that nine out of ten Pakistanis believe China is a partner, underscoring how, despite the limited interaction between Pakistanis and Chinese at unofficial levels, there is still a strong domestic perception that the Chinese presence in Pakistan is beneficial. However, even though roughly half of the Chinese population has negative perceptions of Pakistan, there is little public debate in the country about China's role there.<sup>25</sup> China is seen as an 'all-weather friend' and enjoys a 90% approval rate in Pakistan, according to a Pew Global Poll taken in June 2012.<sup>26</sup> As one might expect, the jointly approved official statements display more characteristics of posturing than reflecting the existing divergence in perceptions. Although Sino-Pakistani relations have gone through stormy waters and are not free from misunderstandings, they are typically resolved swiftly and behind closed doors.<sup>27</sup> China also has continuously

engaged with multiple political players in Pakistan to ensure its interests are secure, regardless of whether Pakistan is under civilian or military rule.<sup>28</sup> It recognizes the need to keep lines of communication open with a diverse range of political actors, owing to the unpredictable nature of the Pakistani political establishment. While China and Pakistan may be willing to deal with non-state actors, questions remain over the extent to which it can depend on these actors to help secure its interests. It would be inappropriate to ignore the India factor in the Pakistan-China relations. Many strategic thinkers and commentators call it a triangular relationship.

### **China and Pakistan: Is India Still Relevant?**

India's history as a nation has made it an adversary to Pakistan and China. India has fought wars with both countries. It also faces similar problems like disputed borders, competition over natural resources, and the threat of Islamic militancy. Since 1998 it has been in possession of a nuclear weapons arsenal that was built in order to meet a perceived threat from China in addition to the threat from Pakistan. Closer cooperation between Islamabad and Beijing is often motivated by their relations with New Delhi and, in turn, India remains watchful of the Sino-Pakistani alliance. India is regarded as the biggest threat by a majority of Pakistani citizens – a perception reflected in Pakistan's foreign policy. On the other hand, India is concerned about the transfer of military technology and defence cooperation between China and Pakistan. The Kashmir issue is the most problematic issue between Pakistan and India, and has led both nations to introduce nuclear weapons. Despite improvement in Indo-Pak relations since 2004, a resolution to the Kashmir issue seems to be impossible. Besides the animosity with Pakistan, India has also had problematic relations with China as a result of the 1962 war. India is worried about China's drive to secure energy and trade supply routes in Central Asia and the Indian Ocean. Since the Sino-Indian entente began in the 1970s, China has taken a more neutral stance on Kashmir. Chinese policy has been one of avoiding conflict between India and Pakistan. It is not backing up Pakistan's request to settle the dispute through an UN plebiscite, and has sought to build up economic cooperation with India. Chinese mediation in the 1990 spring crisis between the two countries is a good example in this regard. China's changing policy and showing neutrality towards the two countries was evident in 1998 when India and Pakistan tested nuclear weapons, during the Kargil war in 1999 and after the terrorist attack on the Indian parliament in 2001.

Sino-Indian relations have registered significant progress in the past five years and bilateral trade between China and India is growing very fast. Beijing and New Delhi have been engaged in a series of summit meetings, frequent high-level visits, and joint anti-terrorism training exercises. During Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to China in January 2008, the two countries issued a joint document on a shared vision for

the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, pledging to promote a harmonious world of peace and stability and further strengthen the 'Sino-Indian Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity'.<sup>29</sup> Given their combined human resources and economic potentials, their shared past experiences and paths to development, prosperity, and power, India and China can make important contributions to regional and global development. At the same time, unresolved territorial disputes, mutual suspicions of each other's intentions, and other contentious issues could threaten the sustainability and continuing improvement of bilateral relationship. India is concerned specifically about China's assistance in building Pakistan's civilian nuclear capabilities and supply of conventional weaponry, ships and aircrafts.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, India remains cautious of both its neighbours and of Chinese intentions in South Asia. Indian External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid, highlighted why India needed to improve relations with China and Pakistan but noted that the approach it would be taking towards each would be different.<sup>31</sup> Some Indian experts have argued for a more balanced understanding of closer relations between Pakistan and China and the need for them to be put into the context of the post-Cold War South Asia. India's current position as the world's largest arms importer<sup>32</sup> has provided the rationale for legitimizing Sino-Pakistani defence cooperation, which has gathered pace in order to counter India's perceived regional ambitions.

After the 2011 attacks in Xinjiang, reports suggested that China was looking to establish military bases in Pakistan's tribal areas.<sup>33</sup> China and India are both trying to contain militants trained in Pakistan who carry out attacks in their area. The resumption in 2012 of joint military exercises between India and China after a four year halt is a positive sign, but the possibility of border clashes remains. Similarly as confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan are established in the form of the granting of Most-Favoured Nation status, the leadership on both sides of the border continue to push forward peace talks. Fundamentally, as argued by Ahmed Rashid, China will not risk economic relations with India for its 'sweeter than honey' ally.<sup>34</sup>

The Sino-Pak relationship had its ups and downs and has been influenced by each country's bilateral relationship with India. Despite Pakistan and China's robust relationship in the strategic sector, their economic relationship has not prospered proportionately. China-India trade, on the other hand, is now larger than both trade between China and Pakistan and trade between India and the United States. During the late Cold War period, China may have had slightly different strategic alignments, but today, Beijing profits from regional stability and normal working relations with India, which not only constitutes the bigger market but also has vast potential. How these factors affect the Sino-Pak alliance and China's ability to influence Pakistan on regional security issues depends upon Pakistan delivering on China's core interests and acting as a balance for its relations with the United States and India. Although the Chinese

leaders are still wedded to stability and continuity with Pakistan, their patience and tolerance for Pakistan's shortcomings on security issues, will continue to check the relationship. Both India and China share a mirror image perception of each other. One prominent example of this perception is Pakistan's all-weather friendship with China. Many scholars in India believe that a nuclear Pakistan is the creation of China to a large extent. For China, the existence of a strong and confident Pakistan able to challenge India confers important strategic advantage. India and China must understand each other better and cooperate in international forums. China on its part should accept the importance of India in tackling international issues of common interests. For Pakistan, China is a powerful neighbor, defense partner, and economic partner, as well as important for the new issues related to connectivity and furthering commercial interests. As China is growing to be an incrementally more powerful world leader, it is in Pakistan's interest to side with it.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

China's rise is a source of hopefulness and confidence for the majority of population in Pakistan who see her as a counter-weight to India, which elevates Pakistan's strengths and helps expand geo-strategic influence in the region. It is Pakistan's faith in China that Tariq Fatemi, the adviser to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on foreign relations sees China as the only country that qualifies as a true friend of Pakistan.<sup>35</sup> For Pakistani experts, China is a developing country that believes in rising together and in enriching and harmonizing the neighborhood. For them, China's development strategy is peaceful and cooperative in which one poor country is helping the other. At the same time, Pakistan is returning the favor by helping China build long-term geo-strategic relations with the Muslim world. China was the only non-Muslim nation to attend the 2007 Karachi expo, dubbed as the Muslim Business and International Gala (Muslim-BIG), which received attendance from African, Asian and European Muslim nations.<sup>36</sup>

Many political experts in Pakistan perceive China's governance and economic model (compared to western democracy and capitalism) relatively compatible with the concept of Islamic democracy and socialism. In July 2014, Pakistan's Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif, visited Beijing and signed agreements seeking Chinese investment in mineral exploration, dry ports, cable and fiber optic, oil and gas lines, road and rail building, telecom, industrial development and dam building. As a result, China will invest US\$18 billion in a 200-kilometer long tunnel that will ensure rail service from Xinjiang and Qinghai to the Pakistani and Iranian ports. Most of these projects will be built in Gilgit-Baltistan, a Himalayan region contested by both India and Pakistan. Access to the Pakistani ports through Gilgit-Baltistan will help China avoid dealing with multiple countries and diverse transit fee structures. Overland access to the Middle East and Afghanistan through Gilgit-Baltistan will help China mitigate threats



arising from adversary presence in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. But the media image of China as benevolent developing brother trying to help the other poorer brother is not what common people see in places like Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan occupied Kashmir and Balochistan, where the Chinese companies are exploiting minerals and denying jobs to the resource-owners.

Dr. Siddiqa states that “the Chinese are competing with the Pakistanis in the mining industry denying jobs and revenues to the local. In fact, the Chinese prefer their own people than building human resource potential in Pakistan. The government entities like the Oil and Gas Development Corporation (OGDC) are not allowed to compete for drilling bids against the Chinese companies.”<sup>37</sup> The dumping of Chinese goods has almost destroyed the small and medium-sized industry in Pakistan. Chinese manufacturers have even started to make traditional shoes called *khusas* or *jutees*. Similar competition is faced by local farming industry where Chinese fruits and vegetables have flooded urban centers of Pakistan. Further, Pakistan railway claims to suffer “colossal loss of billions of rupees due to supply of faulty locomotives by Chinese firm” forcing the ministry to cancel the agreement and blacklist the Chinese company. Today, 38 years after the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH), Pakistan still ranks 6<sup>th</sup> and last among the trading partners of Xinjiang.<sup>38</sup> In the mining sector, a ten-year ban imposed on local mining companies in 2010 deprives the locals of revenue while the Chinese and other international companies continue their operation under the Northern Areas Mining Concession Rules of 2003. In places like Chupursan, Chinese companies work illegally without lease or licensing. This has caused clashes between the locals and the Chinese.

China has an absolute interest in Afghanistan to counter against the ills of extremism, terrorism, separatism, drug trafficking; its security and consequently economic interest lie in stabilizing and preventing a radical Islamist takeover of Afghanistan which is in direct contradiction to Pakistan’s relative interest in Afghanistan. Specific concerns about China’s Xinjiang autonomous region, where the government confronts what it has described as an Uyghur separatist movement, has become a critical arena of cooperation since 2001. China also continues to sell Pakistan nuclear reactors for its civilian nuclear energy projects, military aircraft and inexpensive conventional hardware. The genesis of the insurgency in Xinjiang lies in the process of nationalism that seeks to build a monolithic society assimilating the Uyghur identity into the national Chinese identity while the reactionary Uyghur nationalism seeks to connect with the larger ‘Muslim Ummah.’ The Chinese dread the possibility of this Uyghur nationalism transforming itself into a more potent state-subverting Islamic nationalism and this core concern dictates their policy towards Afghanistan.

Chairman of Pakistan-China Institute, Senator Mushahid Hussain Sayed said the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor is of immense importance for the revival of



Pakistan's economy, resolution of energy crisis and strengthening the Federation through development and infrastructure.<sup>39</sup> He said that relations with China were a factor of national unity in Pakistan since all political parties and provinces supported it, while Pakistan has always backed China in its 'core interests' including China's unity and territorial integrity, leading role of the Communist Party in China, China's peaceful rise and issues like Taiwan, Tibet and terrorism in Xinjiang, and strongly opposes any policy of 'containment of China' as Asia cannot afford a New Cold War.

China's rise emboldens smaller nations like Pakistan, which see her northern neighbor as the security guarantor. For China, soft power means using coercive economic interwoven with cultural and political engagement to gain "a more prominent position and role in competition for comprehensive national power."<sup>40</sup> In this regard, Pakistan is a success model of China where her soft power is working, she is being liked and trusted among the government circles. Between 2009 and 2011, a 10% increase in public sentiment in Pakistan was seen in favor of China.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, China is working on Pakistani media to cultivate further favorable public opinion about Beijing. No wonder, that both regimes define the relationship as 'Friendship higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the Oceans, stronger than steel, sweeter than honey, dearer than eyesight.' Media can play an important role in the diplomatic side of the relationship by informing citizens and the world about cooperation efforts between the two countries. The media reflect diverse views and opinions. Therefore, the media is not and cannot be monolithic in any part of the world. China and Pakistan should try to put across their points of view to develop their own independent and objective perspectives. Convergence of threat perceptions, strategic interests, and shared approach to major regional and global developments drives Sino-Pak diplomatic liaison. In this context, the agreement to establish annual meeting mechanism at the leadership level is of strategic significance. The people of the two countries have urgent demands to know each other beyond the barriers of different religion, culture and language. Thus, media cooperation has more opportunities and greater challenges. In addition to the public sector media, private channels should also explore linkages.

### **Conclusion**

There is nothing novel about Pakistan and China getting closer. China's evolving policy towards Pakistan, Pakistan's limitations in delivering on Chinese regional interests and China's unwillingness to danger its bilateral ties with India illustrates why China is willing to act for Pakistan. The alliance has been described by officials of both nations as a mutually beneficial relationship based on multi-dimensional cooperation. However, it is clear that the Sino-Pak relation is not one of equals, China continues to dominate. While Pakistan's relations with the United States still influence the Sino-Pakistani

dynamic as Pakistan does not want to find itself isolated. China may find Pakistan as a partner that might not be able to deliver on its core interests. But China's concern is that Pakistan should not be weakened because of its unstable internal security situation that it can no longer act as a counter-balance to India. The Sino-Pak alliance presents both opportunities and challenges for the two countries. China has provided Pakistan with the political, economic and military support it has needed to balance its relations with the United States and India. Unless Pakistan is able to stabilize its internal security situation, it will find it increasingly difficult to deliver on Chinese interests in Pakistan and the region, and this will only exacerbate existing strains in the relationship.

The relationship between Pakistan and China does not rest on an ideology, values, history or cultures. At its core, it is a strategic relationship of mutual convenience whose parameters are largely determined by China. For the alliance to evolve, particularly in the direction Pakistan desires, the relationship will need to move beyond its heavy reliance on military-to-military and elite contacts and include a more diverse range of private-sector investments and people-to-people contacts. While China and Pakistan have shared regional interests, they both pursue a policy of non-interference in domestic issues and are careful not to conflict with each other's core national interests. If China and Pakistan want to maintain the image of a relationship that can stand the test of time, they will need to tackle their domestic security constraints while managing the ever-changing geo-political machinations in South Asia. Despite efforts at public diplomacy, it is China's ever-growing strategic advantage with Pakistan that overrides all other concerns.

Challenges remain in the 21st century for China-Pakistan friendship. However, the strategic interdependence of the two countries is compelling each to bond with the other. In recent years, the Pakistani people have overcome numerous difficulties and made continuous progress in national development. China is taking the lead to employ economic and public diplomacy with Pakistan to broaden its strategic state-to-state partnership into people-to-people bonds. With increasing trade and investment, China is helping in the expansion of Pakistani economy. Parallel to economic relations, it is also expanding in cultural linkages through education, think tanks, civic society, civil society and media to strengthen the bond of Sino-Pak friendship. The establishment and deepening of China-Pakistan comprehensive strategic partnership meets the common interests of both the peoples and enhances stability and development and prosperity in the region. Chinese and Pakistani people work together to uphold and grow the relations and take more pragmatic steps to bring more benefits to the two countries. China's rise is a source of optimism for the majority of people in Pakistan. It is the media's role to inform citizens about ongoing collaborative efforts. With the emergence of new media and the idea of the global citizen, citizens from all countries are interacting with each other. This change provides a great opportunity for Pakistan and

China to further collaborate. Media is not just reporting but influencing the decisions. Media exchanges and cooperation is significant in consolidating and developing the relations of the two nations. Moreover, in trying to measure Chinese power and influence in Asia with special reference to Pakistan, it appears important to differentiate elite and public opinion. Governments remain the key actors in the foreign relations of the two countries. In dealing with rising China, most Asian government officials carefully calculate their nations' interests as they endeavor to channel Chinese behavior in constructive ways.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Speech by H. E. Li Keqiang At the Opening Plenary of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2014, BOAO Forum for Asia, <http://english.boaoforum.org/ac2014news/13474.jhtml> Accessed on 1 November 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Holsag, *China and India: Prospect for Peace*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); Mohan Guruswamy, and Zorawar Daulet Singh, *Chasing the Dragon: Will India Catch Up with China?* (Delhi: Longman, 2010); and John W. Garver, *Protracted Contest: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Twentieth Century*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Tarique Niazi, 'New Challenges in Sino-Pakistani Relations', *China Brief*, 15 (4), p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> 'Development projects: Nawaz signs \$18 bn tunnel deal with China', *The Express: Tribune*, 5 July 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/572857/china-pakistan-friendship-sweeter-than-honey-nawaz/>

<sup>5</sup> Masood Khan, 'Remarks at the Press Briefing on "China-Pakistan Media River Civilization Tour"', China Radio International, Beijing, 13 July 2011.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Wang Chen, Special Envoy of the Chinese Government and Minister of the State Council Information Office, 8 June 2011, <http://pk.chineseembassy.org/eng/zbyhn/t829276.htm>

<sup>8</sup> '60 Years of China-Pakistan Diplomatic Ties', *The Beijing Review*, [http://www.bjreview.com.cn/special/node\\_53715.htm](http://www.bjreview.com.cn/special/node_53715.htm) Accessed on 23 August 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Lauren Frayer, 'China's Increased Investment Upsets Some Pakistanis', *NPR*, 21 August 2012, <http://www.wbur.org/npr/159531740/chinas-increased-investment-upsets-some>

<sup>10</sup> Andy Sennitt, 'China Radio International to expand Urdu Service', *Radio Netherlands Worldwide*, 23 February 2004, <http://blogs.rnw.nl/medianetwork/china-radio-international-to-expand-urdu-service>; and Pakistan-China Friendship, <http://pakistanchinafriendship.wordpress.com/about/>.

<sup>11</sup> Tarique Niazi, 'New Challenges in Sino-Pakistani Relations'.

<sup>12</sup> Rosheen Kabraji, *The China-Pakistan Alliance: Rhetoric and Limitations*, (Asia Programme Paper ASP PP 2012/01, Chatham House, December 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Ashfak Bokhari, 'Identity Crisis in Kashgar', *The Dawn*, 12 December 2004.

<sup>14</sup> 'Development and Violence (Editorial)', *The Nation*, 10 January 2005.

<sup>15</sup> 'Wen for Free Trade Zones', *The Nation*, 7 April 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Lauren Ratcliffe and Zhou Jing, 'Chinese, Pakistani media need regular linkage', *China.org.cn*, 16 July 2011, [http://www.china.org.cn/world/2011-07/16/content\\_23004182.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/2011-07/16/content_23004182.htm)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> 'Rising China a source of strength in South Asia', *The Express: Tribune*, 29 March 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/688415/rising-china-source-of-strength-in-south-asia/>

<sup>20</sup> 'America's Global Image Remains More Positive than China's: But Many See China Becoming World's Leading Power', *Pew Research Global Attitudes Project*, 18 July 2013, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2013/07/18/americas-global-image-remains-more-positive-than-chinas/>

<sup>21</sup> Ahmad Rashid Maik, 'Pakistan set to win multiple benefits from China's regional leadership', *Global Times*, 13 April 2014, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/854312.shtml>

<sup>22</sup> Nabeel A. Mancheri and S. Gopal, 'How Does India Perceive China's Rise?', *Foreign Policy Journal*, 18 December 2012, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2012/12/18/how-does-india-perceive-chinas-rise/>

<sup>23</sup> 'Pakistan Private Investment Initiative', *USAID Pakistan*, [http://transition.usaid.gov/pk/opportunities/PPII/PPII\\_index.html](http://transition.usaid.gov/pk/opportunities/PPII/PPII_index.html)

<sup>24</sup> 'Sino-Pak relations: Pakistan, China to solve issues mutually', *Express Tribune*, 30 October 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/457790/sino-pak-relations-pakistan-china-to-solve-issues-mutually/>

<sup>25</sup> 'Pakistani Public Opinion Ever More Critical of U.S.', *Pew Research Centre*, 27 June 2012, <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2012/06/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Project-Pakistan-Report-FINAL-Wednesday-June-27-2012.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Zhang Li, 'To Manage Conflict in South Asia: China's Stakes, Perceptions and Inputs', *Asia Paper*, (Institute for Security and Development Policy, October 2009), [http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2009\\_li\\_to-manage-conflict-in-south-asia.pdf](http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2009_li_to-manage-conflict-in-south-asia.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> Nida Naz, 'Prospects for Pak-China Relations in 2011: Political, Militant and Public Views', *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies*, 2011, <http://www.san-pips.com/download.php?f=166.pdf>

<sup>29</sup> 'India-China Relations', Embassy of India Beijing, China, 20 January 2014, <http://www.indianembassy.org.cn/>.

<sup>30</sup> 'China delivers warship to Pakistan army', *IBN*, 31 July 2009, <http://ibnlive.in.com/news/brothers-in-arms-china-gives-warship-to-pak/98275-2.html>.

<sup>31</sup> Sandeep Dikshit, 'Khurshid hits the ground running after swearing-in', *The Hindu*, 28 October 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/khurshid-underlines-difference-in-approaches-towards-china-pakistan/article4040865.ece>

<sup>32</sup> 'Rise in international arms transfers is driven by Asian demand, says SIPRI', *SIPRI*, 19 March 2012, <http://www.sipri.org/media/pressreleases/rise-in-international-arms-transfers-is-driven-by-asian-demand-says-sipri>

<sup>33</sup> Saurabh Shukla, 'China plans military base in Northern Pakistan, says report', *India Today*, 4 January 2012, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/china-military-base-in-pakistan-naval-base-at-gwadar/1/167084.html>; Amir Mir, 'China seeks military bases in Pakistan', *Asia Times*, 26 October 2011, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South\\_Asia/MJ26Df03.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/MJ26Df03.html)

<sup>34</sup> Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*, (London: Viking, 2008); and 'China will not risk economic ties with India for Pakistan, Ahmed Rashid', *Economic Times*, 12 February 2012, [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-02-12/news/31052205\\_1\\_china-pakistan-relationship-countries-trade-and-business-relationship](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-02-12/news/31052205_1_china-pakistan-relationship-countries-trade-and-business-relationship)

<sup>35</sup> Ahmad Rashid Maik, 'Pakistan set to win multiple benefits'.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

<sup>37</sup> Ayesha Siddiqi, *Sources of Tension in Afghanistan and Pakistan: A Regional Perspective*, (CIDOB Policy Research Project: Barcelona Center of International Affair, January 2012).

<sup>38</sup> Senge H. Sering, 'Pakistan, China's soft power and Gilgit-Baltistan', *The American Bazaar*, 3 November 2013 <http://www.americanbazaaronline.com/2013/11/03/pakistan-chinas-soft-power-gilgit-baltistan/>

<sup>39</sup> 'Pakistan, China are partners for peace in "Asian Century", says Mushahid', *Daily Times*, 24 September 2014, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/islamabad/24-Sep-2014/pakistan-china-are-partners-for-peace-in-asian-century-says-mushahid>

<sup>40</sup> Sering, 'Pakistan, China's soft power and Gilgit-Baltistan'.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.