



A Review of Higher Education Exchanges under Belt and Road Initiative: China and Pakistan

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Abstract: China and Pakistan enjoy an all-weather relationship since the two countries established diplomatic relations in 1951. Over the past seven decades, the two sides developed iron-brother relationship which is recognize as the model of international relations. Entering into 21st century, the two countries starts to explore solid educational exchanges with each other, and a growing number of universities and colleges in China and Pakistan started educational cooperation programs, with more and more Pakistani students coming to China to learn Chinese culture, language and majors. Meanwhile, many Chinese companies in Pakistan are in desperate need of talents who are familiar with Pakistan local situation and capable of speaking English, Chinese and the local language. The growing exchanges between the two countries in higher education promoted friendly relations between the two countries, and there is an increasing need for talents under the background of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This paper will examine the educational exchanges between the two countries from four aspects: academic exchanges, China-Pakistan language programs, overseas students programs and educational platforms. The paper summarizes the direction for future educational cooperation between the two countries.

Keywords: China; Pakistan; higher education exchanges; CPEC

I. Background

In March 2015, China's National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce jointly released the "Vision and Action for Promoting the Construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road". With the proposal of the Belt and Road Initiative, China hopes to further develop economic partnerships with countries along the route based on peace and mutual benefit. China also advocates to enhance people-to-people exchanges and jointly build a community of shared interests and the destiny of mankind through Belt and Road Initiative(BRI) (Figure 1).



Figure1: China's Belt and Road Initiative (Source:FAO Global)

BRI brings new opportunities for China and the world. China continues to broaden and deepen its cooperative ties with countries along the route, aiming to build a community of interests with economic

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integration and cultural inclusion. Pakistan and China are good neighbours, partners and brothers. After Li Keqiang, Chinese Premier, visited Pakistan in May 2013, both countries agreed to construct China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)(Figure 2). CPEC has become the flagship project and model project of BRI. In April 2015, the two countries agreed to upgrade bilateral relations from a strategic partnership to an all-weather strategic partnership.



Figure 2: CPEC (Source: Wall Street Journal, US Global Investors)

As the relations between the two countries become closer, many Chinese companies who want to invest in Pakistan find themselves in desperate need of talents familiar with the local condition and capable of speaking English, Chinese and the local language. The growing exchanges between the two countries in higher education promoted friendly relations, and there is an increasing need for talents under the background of CPEC. Therefore, the discussions in higher education between the two countries are crucial to the building of CPEC.

II. Academic Exchanges

The relationship between China and Pakistan is defined as "all-weather strategic partnership" at the political and diplomatic levels, and both sides have frequent exchanges in politics, economy and trade. The future of the relations between the two countries is in the hands of the young. Colleges and universities are the birthplace of the young, the first productivity of science and technology, the cradle of national science and

technology and innovation, providing strong intellectual support and talent support for the development of the country and society.

By 2019, 15 Pakistan research centers have been established in China (Chart 1). They focus on various fields of Pakistan like culture, history, economy, politics, security, and society. Some of them provide consulting and language services for governments and companies from China and Pakistan. These centers conduct a wide range of academic programs, such as scientific research projects, staff/students exchange programs, consultation and decision making, conferences and seminars. They have built bridges of educational exchanges in science and technology cooperation, economic cooperation and talent training. Some of these research centers were established under the proposal and support of the Pakistani Government, while some were established with direct financial support from the Pakistani Government. Examples can be seen from the following centers. Pakistan Research Center of Tsinghua University, which focuses on research and academic exchange activities related to Chinese and Pakistani culture,

It was established with the support of the Pakistan government; the Pakistan Research Center of Peking University was established with the help of Pervez Musharraf, a former President of Pakistan; the Pakistan Research Center of Sichuan University was established with the proposal of Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz during his visit to Sichuan University; Fudan University was funded by Pakistan government to establish the Pakistan Research Center. The above centers are in close relation with Pakistan government or officials, and with the high-level official support, the comprehensive strength of universities can be significantly enhanced.

While the Chinese universities start to establish more and more Pakistan research centers, some universities and institutions, on the other hand, began to establish China Study Centers to conduct various studies on China and use them as a platform to promote academic and educational exchanges between the two countries. According to the research results of a round table held by the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad Pakistan on March 7, 2019, 16 China study centers (Chart 2) have been established in Pakistan, and 15 of them are already in successful operation [1].

Pakistan Research Centers in China

| No. | Year | Province | University/institution name | Research Fields |
|-----|------|----------------|---|---|
| 1 | 2007 | Beijing | Tsinghua University | Pakistan culture, China-Pakistan historical exchanges, international relations, media development |
| 2 | 2007 | Shanghai | Fudan University | Economic/historic environment, business management, international relations and strategic research |
| 3 | 2008 | Beijing | Beijing University | Pakistan issues and South Asian subcontinent |
| 4 | 2008 | Sichuan | Sichuan University | Pakistan academic research, funding projects, academic conferences |
| 5 | 2011 | Jiangsu | Jiangsu Normal University | Pakistani history, language and culture, religion and social relations, economic and trade, domestic and international political situation |
| 6 | 2013 | Sichuan | West China Normal University | Pakistan's security, diplomacy, politics, economics, culture, history, religion and ethnic issues, the relations with neighboring countries |
| 7 | 2015 | Inner Mongolia | Hongde College of Inner Mongolia Normal University | Pakistan's culture, history, economy, politics, and education |
| 8 | 2016 | Beijing | Beijing Technology and Business University | Science and Technology Research and Exchange Research |
| 9 | 2016 | Xinjiang | Kashgar University | Pakistan's economy, history and culture and the Relationship between Kashgar and Pakistan |
| 10 | 2016 | Yunnan | Yunnan Nationalities University | Pakistan's politics, economy, culture and society, South Asian regional studies, South Asian countries |
| 11 | 2017 | Hubei | China University of Geosciences (CPEC Research Center) | Making consultation report, providing decision-making consulting services, teaching and training |
| 12 | 2017 | Guangdong | South China University of Technology | CPEC, China-India-Pakistan Relations, China-Pakistan Projects |
| 13 | 2017 | Jiangxi | School of Foreign Languages and Trade, Jiangxi University of Science and Technology | Country and regional studies |
| 14 | 2019 | Yunnan | China (Kunming) South Asia Southeast Asia Research Institute | "Belt and Road" initiative and the CPEC |
| 15 | 2019 | Hebei | Hebei Normal University | Enhance mutual understanding and academic exchanges between Chinese and Pakistani scholars and youth. |

Chart 1, 15 Pakistan Research Centers in China (*Source: Official website of Chinese universities*)

| China Study Centers in Pakistan | | | | |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--------------|------|
| No. | Name | University/Institution | Location | Year |
| 1 | China-Pakistan Study Center | Institute of Strategic Studies | Islamabad | 2018 |
| 2 | Chinese Study Center | National University of Science & Technology | Islamabad | 2016 |
| 3 | Center of Excellence in China Studies | Government College University | Punjab | 2014 |
| 4 | China Pakistan Management Initiative | Suleman Dawood School of Business, LUMS | Punjab | 2017 |
| 5 | Pakistan Institute of China Studies | Sargodha University | Punjab | 2019 |
| 6 | China Study Center | University of Peshawar | Peshawar | 2016 |
| 7 | Center for Research on CPEC | Karakoram International University | Gilgit | 2017 |
| 8 | Pakistan Council on China | Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad | Islamabad | 2007 |
| 9 | The China Study Center | COMSATS University Islamabad | Islamabad | 2013 |
| 10 | Area Study Center, Far East & Southeast Asia | University of Sindh-Jamshoro | Sindh | 2019 |
| 11 | CPEC Economic Forum | Independent | Islamabad | 2017 |
| 12 | China Study Center | Sustainable Development Policy Institute | Islamabad | 2018 |
| 13 | China Study Center | University of Balochistan | Baloch | 2018 |
| 14 | CPEC-Center | University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir | Azad Kashmir | 2018 |
| 15 | Pakistan-China Institute | Independent | Islamabad | 2009 |

Chart 2, 15 China Study Centers in Pakistan (*Source: Official website of Pakistani universities*)

Judging from the established year of the China study centers, we can see that the centers are formed mainly in Belt and Road and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Some centers, like the China-Pakistan Research Center of the Institute of Strategic Studies in Islamabad and the Pakistan-China Institute in Islamabad mainly serve as think tanks to publish research results and provide consultant services to the Government. Most of the centers in Pakistan universities carry out Chinese language programs and conduct research on different fields of China such as society, politics, economy, national defense and diplomacy, environment, science and technology, etc. They are highly valued by the Chinese Government and universities, who have been

frequently invited to attend the inauguration ceremonies and events held by these research centers on many occasions.

III. China-Pakistan Language Program

With the language barriers, it is difficult for countries to conduct people to people exchanges. Due to China's BRI and the increasing regional influence of China, the Chinese language is becoming more and more popular worldwide. Urdu, the official language of Pakistan, is one of the major languages of the South Asian subcontinent. It is used by more than 100 million people and is widely spoken in India and Bangladesh. Those who can talk to Chinese, Urdu and English are very popular under the background of CPEC since they are the bridges of a different culture.

As CPEC is moving forward, the leaders of the two governments decide to promoted language programs. On

February 18, 2014, when Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain visited China, the leaders of the two countries jointly signed the Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Deepening China-Pakistan Strategic and Economic Cooperation, in which the two sides agreed on “Recognizing the important role of language in promoting humanistic exchanges, both sides agreed to promote the opening of more Confucius Institutes in Pakistan. China's State Hanban will send 60 Chinese language teachers to Pakistan this year and invite 140 Pakistani Chinese language teachers to receive training in China.”[2]

On November 2, 2018, Prime Minister Imran Khan paid his first visit to China after taking office, and the two governments signed “Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan on Strengthening China-Pakistan All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership and Building Closer China-Pakistan Community of Shared Future in the New Era”, in which the two countries agreed “Both sides expressed satisfaction at the growing cooperation in the field of education and agreed to intensify educational linkages especially between higher education institutions... to encourage respective universities to develop bilateral linkages including through joint degree and exchange programmes... to promote the teaching of Pakistan Studies and Urdu language at Chinese Universities and Sinology and Chinese language at Pakistani Universities... to negotiate agreements on mutual recognition of higher education degrees, diplomas and certificates as early as possible.” [3]. With the encouragement of the two governments, a growing number of Pakistani students begin to learn Chinese. So far, there are five Confucius Institutes and two Confucius Classrooms in Pakistan (Chart 3). They not only carry out Chinese language teaching but also promotes Chinese culture by cultural activities among the students of the two countries.

Confucius Institutes/Classrooms in Pakistan

| | Name | Cooperative institution | Founding Year |
|----------------------|---|---|-------------------|
| Confucius Institutes | Confucius Institute NUML at | Beijing Language and Culture University | April 4, 2005 |
| | Confucius Institute Karachi University at | Sichuan Normal University | May 22, 2013 |
| | Confucius Institute Faisalabad Agricultural University at | Xinjiang Agricultural University | February 19, 2014 |

| | | | |
|----------------------|--|--|--------------------|
| | Confucius Institute Punjab University at | Jiangxi University of Science and Technology | June 17, 2015 |
| | Confucius Institute Sargodha University at | Henan Normal University | April 2019 |
| Confucius Classrooms | Muzafargarh Listeners' Club | Central Broadcasting and Television Main Station | September 12, 2008 |
| | Cadet College Petaro | Sichuan Normal University | October 8, 2015 |

Chart 3, Confucius Institutes/Classrooms in Pakistan (Source: Official website of The Center for Language Education and Cooperation, China)

Compared with the number of Pakistani students learning Chinese, the number of Chinese students learning Urdu is limited. By 2019, six colleges and universities in China have started Urdu majors. Honder College has been approved by the Ministry of Education to offer Urdu, but it has not created the enrolling programs (Figure 7). Considering security issues, many graduates are not willing to work in Pakistan in the long run.

| Universities with Urdu Major in China | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| No. | Name | Province |
| 1 | Beijing University | Beijing |
| 2 | Beijing Foreign Language University | Beijing |
| 3 | Tianjin Foreign Studies University | Tianjin |
| 4 | Xi'an International Studies University | Shaanxi |
| 5 | Guangdong University of Foreign Studies | Guangdong |
| 6 | Xinjiang Normal University | Xinjiang |
| 7 | Honder College of Inner Mongolia Normal University | Inner Mongolia |

Chart 4, Universities with Urdu Major in China (Source: Official website of Pakistan universities)

IV. Overseas Student Programs

Attracted by Chinese higher education, many Pakistani youths and even adults choose to study in China through different overseas programs. Data from the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of

China shows the number of Pakistani students coming to study in China has been on the rise from 2014 to 2018, with the country ranking rising from 8th after South Korea and Thailand. [4]

| The number of students coming to China in 2014-2018 | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|------|
| Year | Number of overseas students | Number of Pakistan students | Percentage(%) | Rank |
| 2014 | 377,054 | 13,360 | 3.5 | 8 |
| 2015 | 397,635 | 15,654 | 3.9 | 6 |
| 2016 | 442,773 | 18,626 | 4.2 | 4 |
| 2017 | 489,200 | 22,000 | 4.4 | 3 |
| 2018 | 492,185 | 28,023 | 5.7 | 3 |

Chart 5, The number of overseas students coming to China in 2014-2018(Source: Ministry of Education of China)

Some Pakistan students studying in China are either self-funded or through exchange programs between universities, but most of them through scholarship programs, such as the Chinese Government Scholarships, the Chinese Government's, the Scholarship for Youth of Excellence Scheme of China - Master Program (YES CHINA) offered by the Chinese Government, the UNESCO/People's Republic Of China Co-Sponsored Fellowship Programme, the Indigenous Scholarship Program for the students of Gwadar, the Punjab Government Scholarship Chinese Program, the Balochistan Government Scholarship Chinese Program, and many other scholarship programs funded by Chinese universities and companies. Such scholarship programs released the financial burden of the students and make it possible for them to come to China for language studies.

V. Educational Platform

To create a platform for international exchanges and cooperation in higher education between China and countries along the BRI, Chinese universities actively explored cooperation opportunities with foreign institutions. Eight international education cooperation alliance were established, as in Chart 6.

International Education Cooperation Alliance under BRI

| No. | Name | Members | Initiator | Year |
|-----|------|---------|-----------|------|
|-----|------|---------|-----------|------|

| | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|------|
| 1 | CPEC University Alliance | 18 Well-known business schools and universities in China and Pakistan | China Higher Education Institute, Pakistan Education Committee | 2017 |
| 2 | Silk Road University Alliance | 150 universities in 38 countries and regions | Xi'an Jiaotong University | 2015 |
| 3 | Belt and Road University Alliance | 173 colleges and universities in 27 countries and regions | Lanzhou University, etc. | 2015 |
| 4 | Belt and Road China-Poland University Alliance | 23 universities in China and Poland | Beijing University of Technology, Chongqing Jiaotong University, Opole University of Technology, Poland | 2017 |
| 5 | Silk Road Vocational Education Alliance | 156 institutions, enterprises, educational institutions, and social groups in 4 countries | Shaanxi China Vocational Education Association, School of Continuing Education, Xi'an Jiaotong University | 2017 |
| 6 | Belt and Road Vocational Education Alliance | 71 vocational colleges, industrial enterprises and educational institutions in 7 countries | Shaanxi Vocational and Technical College | 2017 |
| 7 | Belt and Road Standardization Education and Research University Alliance | 105 universities in 30 countries and regions | China Metrology University, etc. | 2018 |
| 8 | International Alliance of Belt and Road | 13 universities and industry enterprises in 4 countries | Zhejiang University, etc. | 2018 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| Engineering Education | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|--|

Chart 6. International Education Cooperation Alliance under BRI (Source: Official website of the universities)

Silk Road University Alliance is the first one among them. It was established on May 22, 2015 by Xi'an Jiaotong University together with 21 Chinese universities as well as over 100 universities abroad. This platform promotes cooperation between countries and regions in the fields of education, science and technology. The National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), one of the leading universities in Pakistan, joined the alliance in 2015. After that, Pakistan has been working on an exclusive partnership between China and Pakistan. On August 28, 2017, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Business School Alliance (CPECBA), a joint initiative of the Chinese Society of Higher Education and the Pakistan Education Commission, was inaugurated at NUST in Pakistan, with the participation of government authorities, university leaders, researchers and scholars from both China and Pakistan. [5] The alliance was later renamed as "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor University Alliance", with members from 18 top universities in China and Pakistan (Chart 7), marking a stable joint effort of university cooperation between China and Pakistan. [6] The advantages of disciplines, scientific research and social resources of this alliance can be well integrated. The two countries can jointly cultivate talents to serve CPEC in finance, economy, innovation, entrepreneurship and academics.

CPEC University Alliance

| No. | Hosting Units | Chinese universities | Pakistan universities |
|-----|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | China Higher Education Institute | University of Science and Technology | National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad |
| 2 | Pakistan Higher Education Commission | Shanghai Jiaotong University | Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Lahore |
| 3 | | Fudan University | University of the Punjab, Lahore. |
| 4 | | Tsinghua University | National University of Modern Languages |
| 5 | | Zhejiang University | Institute of Business Administration (IBA), Karachi |
| 6 | | Beijing University | COMSATS Institute of Information Technology, Islamabad |

| | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|--|
| 7 | | Nanjing University | Institute of Management Sciences (IMS), Peshawar |
| 8 | | Shanghai University | Balochistan University of Information Technology, Engineering and Management Sciences (BUIITEMS), Quetta |
| 9 | | Hong Kong Polytechnic University | Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Islamabad |

Chart 6, CPEC University Alliance (source: internet)

Although the alliance was established, the comprehensive level of the member universities varies, the task distribution to the alliance members is unbalanced, and some universities fail to make practical achievements despite joining the alliance for reputation sake. Cooperation among universities is mostly carried out via seminars, mutual visits, student and teacher exchanges programs or language programs. It is hoped that the high-level platform is to promote talents cultivation and bring more significant social benefits for both countries.

VI. Summary

China and Pakistan have always been developing friendly relations with each other for over seven decades and have maintained close cultural ties. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor has been a powerful way to improve Pakistan's infrastructure construction and promote its socio-economic development. Education has always been an important part of China-Pakistan exchanges and cooperation, and with the promotion of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the exchange and cooperation between the two countries in higher education will certainly reach a new level. [7] The two countries have been working actively in the field of higher education, with more and more educational platforms bringing together the resources of high-level universities in China and Pakistan. The education between two countries is playing a greater role in promoting the high-quality development of the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" in the future.

As a developing country, Pakistan is facing social risks that are difficult to overcome in the short term, such as security, political changes, social problems, debt and legal risks, which should be fully considered before start cooperation programs. [8] While exploring the opportunities of higher education cooperation in Pakistan, China should, on the one hand, take advantage of the opportunities of Pakistan to carry out various forms of educational cooperation and joint programs; on the other hand, China should have a clear understanding of the risks in the exchanges and cooperation with his partner. China and

Pakistan are closely connected as a result of CPEC, the two countries should explore and promote more exchanges and cooperation in higher education to achieve quality education sharing and a win-win and mutually benefit.

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