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Maqsudul Hasan Nuri

Building a China-Pakistan 'cultural corridor'

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FOREIGN VIEWS

MUCH debate has swirled around the pros and cons of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) being launched in Pakistan. Its economic potential is discussed at length and it is considered a "game changer." The net result of regional connectivity is invoked that would ultimately benefit the entire region.

Scarcely mentioned are possible socio-cultural implications of the project along the eastern and western regions where the CPEC routes would traverse.

China describes itself as a "socialist country with Chinese characteristics." It advocates "peaceful development." Confucian norms and roots in Buddhism also help shape China's cultural life.

Can China radiate some of its value systems in Pakistani society in the next decades while completing the momentous CPEC project?

Confucian values epitomize discipline, consistency and a result-oriented approach. Also, family values, respect for authority, harmony, work ethics and management are emphasized.

Wherever Chinese workers have gone on development missions overseas, they have demonstrated these virtues. The Western world, perturbed by dynamism and competition, sometimes decries

this as "Chinese neo-colonialism," little realizing that China has hardly ventured beyond its borders to occupy foreign land or built any colonies.

Over the last six decades, Pakistan-China friendship has stood the test of times. Pakistan is no stranger to Chinese work ethics and value system; the latter has already built dams, and defense- and energy-related projects in Pakistan.

If and when the CPEC matures and fructifies after long gestation, it is bound to have lasting socio-cultural spillover in Pakistan. For, any major economic development often brings in its wake significant socio-cultural changes.

When Pakistani and Chinese workers have a chance to work together and interact on construction projects, there is going to be some sharing of cultural values. Besides transfer of skills by China, cultural and social values might be disseminated. Should the project see completion in time and benefits trickle down to common people, goodwill towards China will correspondingly increase.

Besides, education for the locals to study in China will get a fillip and many young people will be tempted to travel and get education in different fields. In return, they might be infused with Chinese values and its phenomenal progress. This admiration is already underway.

China's aid philosophy and strategy

is different from the West. In Africa, Latin America and Middle East they have followed a generally non-interventionist approach in domestic policies of their host countries; avoided partisan and condescending behavior; completed projects in time; and followed an austere working and living style. In addition, projects are cost-effective and are designed and customized to suit local conditions. This has generally endeared them to the local population.

Soft power

True, China is involved more economically and not as socially in Pakistan. But the Chinese education system, language, cultural mores may impinge upon Pakistani culture. The Chinese language is already getting attention and its soft power will affect as engineers, doctors and teachers go for education in China.

Already, people are familiar with Chinese music, dance troupes, fairs, sports and cultural activities in Pakistan, and Confucius Institutes in universities are imparting language, history and cultural courses.

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shown that wherever development goes apace, cultural/social norms and values intermingle and benefit each other.

Pakistan has a multi-cultural and multi-lingual past: it boasts of a rich heritage after having imbibed foreign influences: Arabic, Turkish, Iranian, Greek and Indian. The CPEC's western and eastern routes, once completed, could create an economic stake for Pakistan's neighbors, such as Afghanistan, Iran and India. If the going is good they might be willing to also partake from the economic dividends. As a consequence, this would dampen distrust between South Asian neighbors and pave the way for regional connectivity.

Thus the CPEC, if pursued to its logical conclusion, with pre-requisites of effective law and order, national focus and consensus, timely implementation, transparency and accountability, benefits accruing to smaller provinces — may well turn into a "cultural corridor." Here China and Pakistan will mutually gain.

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One Belt, One Road: A new model of interregionalism



Andreas Grimmel

FOREIGN VIEWS

THE One Belt, One Road Initiative (OBOR) first proposed by the Chinese government in 2013 is one of the most fascinating and ambitious interregional cooperation projects worldwide.

It is truly "megaregional" in its aim to involve up to 65 countries and represent about 70 percent of the global population. As such, it might not only significantly shape the international trade architecture, but also contribute to more open and inclusive global governance.

In this prospect, the European Union (EU), as one of the biggest common markets worldwide and a significant actor in

international relations, will have the chance to be a major partner in this project of connecting East and West more closely. To make this cooperation work in practice, however, is probably the most contentious challenge of the project.

The necessity for closer relations and economic exchange that is shared amongst Chinese as well as European policymakers will, sooner or later, have to address the question of how their rather divergent approaches of regionalism — network versus norm-based — can be brought together, by which means a sustainable interregional cooperation can be organized and lead to concrete actions.

The highest hurdle in this process will not lie in divergent interests between China and the EU's member states, but in the political as well as legal architecture of the EU itself. It must not be neglected that in the course of its history, the European Union has not only developed a number of independent supranational

institutions equipped with far-reaching competences, but also an autonomous legal order.

Walter Hallstein, the first President of the Commission of the European Economic Community, once aptly remarked that a "community of states under the rule of law can only be a community of law."

The EU is such a community and not only its political representatives but also the European Court of Justice will continue to define and safeguard the EU's legal autonomy.

This foundation of the EU — though often downplayed by its critiques — will show its significance in the upcoming process of exploring compatibilities and find common rules for exchange. It will limit the possible organizational designs OBOR can take if Europe plays a central role as a partner in China's far-reaching initiative.

More concretely, even though the EU is willing to commit to more free and fair trade with China, it can hardly decide to roll back the legal basis and its

normative standards it is founded on. The endless negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and the deadlocked positions in this process — especially about product standards, consumer and environment protection — have shown the obstacles here.

More than just cooperation

Given this background, the pragmatic and open approach of the OBOR is much welcomed, but might also prove as rather opposed to the EU's model of regional integration.

This does not mean that there is not much room for cooperation and innovation. On the contrary, mere cooperation and increased connectivity will not be enough for the EU to make a more serious commitment towards the OBOR than it has done so far.

The EU will insist on a more holistic approach that would not only comprise economic cooperation, but also legal institutionalization, such

as a standing OBOR dispute settlement body.

To explore the chances for such an open and pragmatic yet rule- and institution-based approach will be the eminent task that China has to face together with the EU in the coming months and years.

Both sides would be well advised to take this task seriously and to move towards each other, since the result has the potential to be nothing less than a new and innovative model of interregionalism.

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