

**Shah Nawaz Mangi**Government College University Hyderabad, Pakistan, Hyderabad  
e-mail: shahnawaz.mangi@gcu.edu.pk**ECONOMIC LANDSCAPE:  
NAVIGATING PAKISTAN'S JOURNEY WITH CPEC**

This research paper examines the role of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in reshaping Pakistan's economic landscape. It aims to shed light on arising insights within the rivalries dilemmas amidst global powers, particularly those countering China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through diplomatic strategies. As CPEC is an element of the BRI, the study is vital in understanding the ongoing race for influence and power. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) highlights the economic cooperation between China and Pakistan, performing as a beacon of regional mapping and economic dynamics as the largest and most comprehensive bilateral initiative. The findings of this study would spark a fresh discourse on Pakistan's economic legacy, contributing significantly to the narrative within South Asia. However, the research would employ a descriptive method of inquiry, collecting secondary data from manifold reputable journals. The research would be beneficial in exploring alternative facets of Pak-China relations and addressing additional regional challenges. Yet, it benefits in pinpointing novel avenues for scholars, experts, and policy-making institutions. Ultimately, the findings are crucial in highlighting issues concerning peace, cordiality, and cohesion within the region. Moreover, the research outcomes would further unlock opportunities for future investigations.

**Keywords:** Economics Landscape, Role of CPEC, Pakistan, China

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e-mail: shahnawaz.mangi@gcu.edu.pk**Экономикалық ландшафт: Пәкістанның СРЕС-пен жолы**

Бұл зерттеу Пәкістанның экономикалық ландшафтын өзгертудегі Қытай-Пәкістан экономикалық дәлізінің (СРЕС) рөлін зерттейді. Ол әлемдік державалар арасындағы бәсекелестіктің жаңа аспектілерін, әсіресе Қытайдың «Бір белдеу, бір жол» (BRI) бастамасына қарсы дипломатиялық стратегиялар арқылы әрекет ететіндерді анықтауға бағытталған. СРЕС «Бір белдеу, бір жолдың» бір бөлігі болғандықтан, бұл зерттеу ықпал мен билік үшін қазіргі күресті түсіну үшін маңызды. Қытай-Пәкістан экономикалық дәлізі (СРЕС) Қытай мен Пәкістанның экономикалық ынтымақтастығын айқындайды, аймақтық карта мен экономикалық динамика үшін қозғаушы күш қызметін атқарады және ең үлкен екіжақты бастама болып табылады. Бұл зерттеудің нәтижелері Пәкістанның экономикалық мұрасы туралы жаңа пікірталас ашады және Оңтүстік Азиядағы нарративті айтарлықтай байытады. Зерттеу сипаттамалық әдісті қолдану арқылы жүргізіледі, көптеген беделді журналдардан алынған екінші реттік деректер жиналады. Бұл Пәкістан-Қытай қарым-қатынастарының балама аспектілерін зерттеуге және аймақтық мәселелерді шешуге пайдалы болады. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу ғалымдарға, сарапшыларға және саяси институттарға жаңа бағыттарды анықтауға көмектеседі. Зерттеу нәтижелері аймақтағы бейбітшілік, тату көршілік және ынтымақтастық мәселелерін түсіндіру үшін маңызды. Сонымен қатар, зерттеу нәтижелері болашақ зерттеулер үшін жаңа мүмкіндіктер ашады.

**Түйін сөздер:** Экономикалық ландшафт, СРЕС рөлі, Пәкістан, Қытай.

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Данное исследование изучает роль Китайско-пакистанского экономического коридора (КПЭК) в преобразовании экономического ландшафта Пакистана. Оно направлено на выявление новых аспектов соперничества мировых держав, особенно тех, кто противостоит Инициативе «Один пояс, один путь» (BRI) Китая с помощью дипломатических стратегий. Поскольку

КПЭК является частью BRI, это исследование важно для понимания текущей борьбы за влияние и власть. Китайско-Пакистанский экономический коридор (КПЭК) подчеркивает экономическое сотрудничество между Китаем и Пакистаном, выступая в качестве маяка для регионального картографирования и экономической динамики, а также являясь крупнейшей и наиболее всеобъемлющей двусторонней инициативой. Результаты этого исследования откроют новую дискуссию по поводу экономического наследия Пакистана, существенно обогащая нарратив в Южной Азии. Исследование будет проводиться с использованием описательного метода, собирая вторичные данные из многочисленных авторитетных журналов. Оно будет полезно для изучения альтернативных аспектов пакистано-китайских отношений и решения дополнительных региональных вызовов. Более того, исследование поможет определить новые направления для ученых, экспертов и политических институтов. В конечном итоге, результаты исследования важны для освещения вопросов, касающихся мира, добрососедства и сплоченности в регионе. Кроме того, результаты исследования откроют новые возможности для будущих исследований.

**Ключевые слова:** Экономический ландшафт, роль КПЭК, Пакистан, Китай.

## Introduction

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) highlights the economic cooperation between China and Pakistan, performing as a beacon of regional mapping and economic dynamics as the largest and most comprehensive bilateral initiative. It was signed on 15th April 2015 by Xu Shaoshi, Chairman of China's National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. From Pakistan, this was signed by Ahsan Iqbal, the Federal Minister for Planning, Development, and Reform under the government of Muhammad Nawaz Sharif (Khan & Ahmed, 2024). However, a great milestone of economic treaty, a leading element of China's enterprising Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) diplomacy, foreran a new epoch of cooperation, connecting China's expansive industrial capacity with the growing economic potential of Pakistan in Asia (Khatti *et al.*, 2022). Since its beginning, it has grown into a multi-dimensional project, surrounding an assortment of projects transiting energy, transportation, telecommunications, and industrial sectors, creating jobs, and ending unemployment and economic growth across its roadway. Moreover, it has reshaped the economic landscape by promoting vast infrastructure growth, trade chances, and investment opportunities. Nonetheless, the key factor of this project positioned Pakistan as a pivotal player in the South Asian region boosting geopolitical significance.

Underscoring the significance of the CPEC, the present study focused on the reshaped economic landscape of Pakistan and the role of China on geopolitical grounds worldwide. Furthermore, the study will stimulate research scholars to unearth new facts and reevaluate outdated established works, fostering informative analyses in the research domain. The findings would pave the way for

academics to grasp these relationships, especially through a CPEC lens. It will enrich contemporary literature on the economics of Pakistan and the People's Republic of China (PRC), placing a weighty responsibility on scholars to unearth hidden facets and historical contexts for analytical scrutiny.

## Literature review

The underexplored discourse in scholarly discussion surrounds the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) interim, which has brought global attention to Pakistan's landscape under the diplomacy of BRI. This initiative has flared extensive investigations, with myriad studies examining its impact on various regions and dimensions. However, the study of Abbas (2019) Offered insights from a Pakistani industrial perspective on CPEC's concerns in the region and utility. It focused on opportunities and challenges for Pakistani industries emerging from CPEC projects and economic growth. However, the BRI's impact on Afro-Eurasian economics and regional economic dynamics in reshaping development strategies across is the focus of Forough (2019). Besides, Wolf (2020) investigated BRI diplomacy, highlighting the Afghanistan concern in the CPEC. It focused on the challenges of Afghanistan and opportunities for China's insight into regional stability and prospects. Meanwhile, the exploration (Liu & Lim, 2020) focused on Malaysia's response to BRI diplomacy, focusing on political economy and regional power dynamics. Concurrently, the study (Javed & 2021) pinpointed the economic benefits of the project, underscoring its effect on Pakistan's economy, energy security, and regional trade integration accordingly. In a similar content, the research investigation of (Ullah *et al.*, 2021) inspected the problems and benefits of CPEC for local communities and debates on development strategies and local participation. Besides, the

political and economic implications of CPEC on Pakistan examine its impact on regional stability and governance structures in the investigation (Hussain *et al.*, 2021). Simultaneously, the research of (Khatti *et al.*, 2022) focused on the circumstance in the CPEC within bilateral relations of Pak-China relations. The study discussed the historical context and key events shaping contemporary ties. However, Ali (2022) investigated CPEC's role in regional connectivity and integration. Yet, the macro-environmental aspect and security challenge is an exploration of (Surahio, 2022). Also, it examines risk management, sustainability, environmental and security considerations. Henceforth, (Maqsoom *et al.*, 2023) examine topographical patterns of existing settlements along the CPEC route, striving to determine spatial connections and conceivable outcomes and opportunities. The study (Sheng, 2023) has an alternative to the BRI, concentrating on competition between international goods suppliers in the markets. It highlights the perspicuity of potential shifts in frameworks for regional evolution. Likewise, a consequence of CPEC on nation-building in Pakistan with an emphasis on Balochistan is the research direction (Khan & Ahmed, 2024). The province of Balochistan is fighting for its rights and self-independence, but the case of CPEC is globally getting a burning question for the world powers. However, the research (Mehmood & Cousins, 2024) concentrates on the position of public discourse, stakeholder engagement, and institutional frameworks in reshaping socio-technical imaginaries and coaxing CPEC policy decisions. Thus, Bharti (2024) has focused on the Indian perspective of BRI and its strategic positions within the project. The study has highlighted the geopolitical implications of India's strategic challenges and regional dynamics in South Asia.

Consequently, the above understudies infused a thorough understanding of BRI diplomacy within the regional dynamics, presenting useful insights into the socio-political, economic, and environmental extents. These studies have a variety of discussions and lack of CPEC journey with specifically Pakistan but equip details on the opportunities, challenges, and alternative stances surrounding China's enterprising infrastructure and connectivity initiative in the world.

### **Problem statement**

Highlighting the journey of Pakistan with CPEC mandates strategic forethought, inclusive approaches, and robust alliances. The China-Pakistan

Economic Corridor (CPEC) voyage depicts a pivotal chapter in the economic landscape of Pakistan. It has changed Pakistan's economic rotation, presenting exceptional options for infrastructural development, trade expansion, and regional connectivity in the South Asian bloc as a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative diplomacy (Khatti *et al.*, 2022). Yet, amidst the pledges lie tough challenges, including socioeconomic differences, environmental problems, and geopolitical anxieties (Sheng, 2023). Understanding the dynamics of deepening questions related to CPEC is crucial for the Intra-political scenario and development in Southern Asia, reshaping the broader geopolitical and economic dynamics within the interplay of BRI diplomacy. For instance, scholars in the domain of Pakistan have narrated various dilemmas of the research within CPEC (Abbas *et al.*, 2019; Ullah *et al.*, 2021; Khatti *et al.*, 2022; Ali, 2022 and Khan & Ahmed 2024). In a similar context, the understudied literature has focused on BRI diplomacy from several angles of the Intra-Political and economic circumstances (Forough, 2019; Liu & Lim, 2020; Wolf, 2020 and Bharti, 2024). Apart from all, there is a conspicuous absence of the Pakistani perspective among the variegated annals enlightened by various studies. This research gap focuses on the importance of including the discourse surrounding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) journey.

To bridge such disparities, problems, and gaps, this study aims to highlight Pakistan's journey with CPEC, highlighting the economic landscape. In this way, the research would infuse new insights for upcoming researchers to fill the lacuna and pave a path in the future.

### **Research Objectives**

Based on the above problems in the understudy discourses, the research presents the following objects to solve in this study.

1. To highlight the economic landscape of Pakistan
2. To examine the role of CPEC in the economic stability of Pakistan

### **Research Scope**

The economic scenario of Pakistan has experienced significant modifications with the inception of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), incising a key point in economic growth and opening innovative phases of BRI diplomacy. Fundamentally, the project depicts a strategic

partnership between Pakistan and China, promoting economic collaboration and regional connectivity in South Asia (Khatti *et al.*, 2022). Similarly, the CPEC signifies the possibility of remaking Pakistan into a dynamic economic corner, uniting Western China and the landlocked regions of Central Asia to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea (Sheng, 2023). This strategic location of Pakistan improves geopolitical preference while introducing opportunities for economic integration and regional cooperation (Bharti, 2024). This research study would suggest policymakers assume a holistic strategy that offsets economic imperatives with socio-political respects in navigating Pakistan's journey with CPEC. Simultaneously, resilient governance systems, transparency mechanisms, and stakeholder attention are crucial to managing circumstances regarding accountability and securing the effective implementation of CPEC projects within the prescribed period. Meanwhile, strategic collaborations with international stakeholders and regional concerns would enrich the stability of CPEC and promote greater cooperation in zones such as trade facilitation, infrastructure blossoming, and capacity establishment.

Thus, the research findings of the understudy would necessitate an examination of the CPEC narrative, forcing a revision suggested by meticulously planned dynamics. The suggestions arising from the presented investigation would delineate a strategic pathway for attaching to the methodologies of scholarly study. Consequently, the study would highlight a pivotal role in reaffirming its scholarly relevance. Furthermore, the purview of the offered research would confine concerted exertions to employ the CPEC legacy under the diplomacy of the BRI in the future.

### Research Methods

Research entails a systematic initiative to discern complex issues in a structured manner. It encompasses merely inquiry and exploration aimed at addressing specific queries (Khatti *et al.*, 2022). Also, it serves as a yardstick for evaluating methodologies and critically examining approaches. Likewise, rigorous investigation yields enduring insights grounded in robust data sources. An effective research methodology ensures problem elucidation and validates findings through a comprehensive literature review, an indispensable aspect of scholarly inquiry. According to the proposed study, the researcher embraced a descriptive process for the examination. In this way, it relates the role of

CPEC and the economic landscape of Pakistan, highlighting the BRI diplomacy. The domain of the study is linked to the economics in terms of the Intra-political scenario. The justification for picking this issue stems from the lack of scholarly attention explained above in the problem statement. Besides, the studies have also demonstrated inaccuracies in the Pakistani perspective. However, the method acquired and confirmed as well immersed in the proper data with accurate references.

With regard to data, the researcher involved the secondary techniques of organizing data, collecting from the most compatible and unpretentious sources, including reliable research journals.

### Results and discussion

The research findings revolve around the economics landscape and the role of CPEC, highlighting the core exploration of new discourses navigating the journey of Pakistan. Further, it focused on Pakistan's economic landscape and how global powers perceive the present changes. Similarly, superpowers are interested in Pakistan due to its strategic location and abundant natural resources. As a result, China particularly has shifted its focus elsewhere, projecting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). While CPEC has strengthened Pakistan's economy, it has also exposed exposure. The findings are highlighted in the following sub-sections:

#### *Economic landscape of Pakistan*

Pakistan is the economic gateway of Asia to enter the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe for China because of its strategic position. The country scuffles with substantial geopolitical considerations and economic challenges within the evolving economic landscape and hidden interest of the global super powers. Similarly, its dynamic participation in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) set has developed it as a main actor in the global economic competition and a pivotal facilitator for China's Belt Road Initiative diplomacy (Forough, 2019), which strives to tie over 130 Afro-Eurasian countries by business routes and extensive trade. According to the strategic scope of CPEC, it develops beyond economic tips addressing geopolitical situations such as China's Malacca Dilemma and navigating regional interplay (Liu & Lim, 2020), which prompts retorts from major players like Russia, India, and the United States. Nevertheless, India senses CPEC as a hazard to its regional hegemony and has devised counter-strategies, including subversion shifting and

the growth of alternative ports such as Chabahar on the Iranian border (Khatti *et al.*, 2022). Meanwhile, unlocking the full potential of regional economic relationships depends on Afghanistan's stability (Wolf, 2020). In rejoinder to the Belt Road Initiative BRI policy, the Group of seven countries G7 initiated the Build Back Better World Partnership (B3W) as an alternative infrastructure development plan accordingly (Sheng, 2023). This race has torn world order into different regional orders in the current changes. In a similar context, Build Back Better World Partnership (B3W) based on this to infuse financial aid to low and middle-income countries, its triumph is skeptical, given the predominant narrative against BRI of China and geopolitical competition in the current swings of the globalization. Thus, Pakistan faces the dilemma of connecting with either BRI or B3W, with implications for its economic fortune and geopolitical place (Bharti, 2024). Likewise, Pakistan traverses this challenging landscape, a balanced foreign policy prioritizing economic development and diplomatic engagement with both the West and the People's Republic of China is an essential policy. The main objectives of economic approach requires extensive domestic reforms and strategic connectivity with national policy purposes outlined in Pakistan's Vision 2025 for the global masters. It can help to overcome in economic ground from default position which is on question in the meantime.

Accordingly, the economic scenario of Pakistan spins around its strategic location with the corner of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, offering trade edges and influential geopolitical. The country's alliance within these projects such the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) underscores its role as a pivotal trade partner, whereas its huge natural resources, including fertile and arable land, mineral minerals, and a coastline in the bucolic areas, presents scenarios opportunities for economic growth. However, underwent such as water scarcity, energy shortages, and security concerns persist, necessitating extensive improvements in infrastructure system, energy, and good governance in the country. Moreover, Pakistan's regional interplay crescendos, including relations with neighboring countries like Afghanistan and India, circumnavigate its economic prospects and stability collaboration. In consequence, Pakistan would have to emphasis on refining infrastructure system of the country within CPEC to reveal its complete possibility, managing energy and water challenges, fostering regional cooperation, and investing in human capital.

### *Role of CPEC in the economic stability of Pakistan*

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a partnership of different infrastructure projects. It aims to form a substantial economic relationship between Pakistan and China at the end of 2030 (Khatti *et al.*, 2022). Paramount to this evolution is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a gigantic project launched in 2015 with a coming with an investment of \$46 billion, presently valued at \$62 billion (Ullah *et al.*, 2021). However, the corridor comprises roadway, rail transportation, pipeline, and energy projects extending from the center of western China to the Arabian Sea Port of Gwadar in Pakistan. Besides, this project is an essential component of the comprehensive BRI policy, which promotes the network of trade corridors to connect China with markets in Asia, Africa, and Europe (Ali, 2022). In this way, CPEC is a significant opportunity for Pakistan, investing in positive economic development, job creation, and modern infrastructure. However, it has also been controversy with concerns raised about its environmental impact, debt sustainability, and geopolitical implications (Abbas *et al.*, 2019). Meanwhile, Pakistan stands at a crossroads for China, tasked with making strategic determinations to achieve economic independence and pursue an economical long way in South Asia. To maintain its uninvolved perspective and capitalize on economic opportunities from both Western and Eastern blocks. Yet, Pakistan necessitates specific domestic conditions, like a stable economy, political stability, and national unity within the diverse communities in Pakistan. Pakistan's geopolitical possibilities caused midpoints on potential economic profits, unlike India's historical non-alignment policy, significantly apparent in its alignment with the US, a decision that infused noteworthy economic and human expenditures.

The present role of CPEC tempts Pakistan to connect with distinct camps for short-term economic improvements after the downfall in 2023. However, the open options, including preserving an economic coalition in the Eastern alliance, specifically with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), or regaling with both blocs, each carry distinct implications for the current scenario of Pakistan after the 2024 elections (Khan & Ahmed, 2024). Hence, CPEC, as part of the BRI diplomacy, aims to strengthen regional connectivity by connecting Gwadar Port in Southern Pakistan to Kashgar, China. It is an attempt to enrich geographical connections, optimize energy and trade flows, and

promote cultural exchanges, finally inducing joint benefits for China and Pakistan.

The present study is limited to investigate Pakistan's economic landscape and navigating its influence with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It plays a vital role not only in Pakistan's economic development but also aligns with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) diplomacy, which aims to globalize the world under Chinese leadership. Thus, the study focuses only on CPEC's role in Pakistan due to its strategic limitation.

## Conclusion

This study paves implications for the future, emphasizing how crucial the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is to Pakistan's economic environment. As CPEC develops uninterruptedly, it will rebuild Pakistan's economic stability and deepen its alignment with China's BRI diplomacy in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Europe in the coming decades. Hence, it encompasses broad ramifications for regional geopolitics, trade relations, and infrastructure evolution. Similarly, when Pakistan

uses its strategic position within the CPEC, it will drive further exploration of the complex geopolitical environment in the future while maximizing the economic opportunities presented by improved connectivity. Consequently, it is crucial to understand the oriented method and broadly address the analysis implications for academia, policymakers, interaction scholars, and stakeholders of trade and business curious about Pakistan's growth journey with this project of BRI diplomacy of China.

The current study highlights the role of CPEC in the economic site of Pakistan by shepherding substantial investigations in the literature review. The research findings depict that Pakistan and China possess resilient economic integration, with China emerging as a principal component in Pakistan's infrastructure ventures via CPEC. This investigation further indicates that both countries share a special bond often referred to as the "Iron Brothers" in global discourse, indicating their strong bilateral relations. However, it recommends examining manifold nuisances within the dilemma of CPEC under the BRI diplomacy. Thus, the research would base new avenues for upcoming related domains in scholarly research.

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