

CPEC: Socio, Cultural and Economic Effects on Gilgit-Baltistan

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ABSTRACT

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) serves as a major South Asian infrastructure initiative which seeks to unify areas through expanded connectivity and economic cooperation. Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) stands as a vital transit area within CPEC because it faces extensive changes involving economic growth and cultural shifts as well as environmental impacts. A qualitative investigation using secondary resources examines how CPEC affects Gilgit-Baltistan. The acceleration of economic growth and infrastructure upgrade and trade expansion through CPEC brings specific employment balance issues as well as cultural transitions and environmental deterioration and governance related challenges. The economic possibilities of CPEC coexist with limited opportunities for skilled employment which are allocated to outside workers - leading to doubts about fair development practices. The impact of businesses operating in the area together with foreign linguistic influences threatens the traditional lifestyle and local culture which leads to cultural decline. Large construction activities in the region produce environmental impacts like deforestation alongside pollution and glacial retreat which endanger its sensitive natural systems. A vital political problem persists because Gilgit-Baltistan operates without influencing policy decisions for CPEC. To achieve lasting success in Gilgit-Baltistan through CPEC the project requires both inclusive economic policies alongside sustainable development platforms along with cultural maintenance safeguards and governmental reforms. The author proposes implementing workforce development initiatives combined with environmental protection measures and clear governance systems to distribute CPEC-related benefits fairly across all stakeholders.



Introduction

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor represents a transformative project of the Belt and Road Initiative which enhances China and Pakistan's regional connectivity and economic integration. CPEC represents a collection of infrastructure initiatives that link China's Xinjiang region with Pakistan's Gwadar Port for approximately 3,000 kilometers. A significant portion of this corridor traverses Gilgit-Baltistan, a strategically vital region in northern Pakistan. CPEC depends fundamentally on Gilgit-Baltistan because its distinctive geography holds this vital position. The region operates as CPEC's main passage to connect China's western regions with the trading opportunities accessible through the Arabian Sea.

Historical records show how Gilgit-Baltistan served as a cultural and trade route intersection between South and Central Asian regions with its prominent status on the ancient Silk Road. CPEC's new vision of this route promises significant socioeconomic impacts on the local region. CPEC will drive economic development in Gilgit-Baltistan through infrastructure upgrades and new employment openings coupled with increased investment potential. Multiple road development initiatives alongside energy infrastructure projects aim to boost regional accessibility while filling regional energy gaps. Local communities will experience mixed outcomes but the level of their benefit remains under research.

Baig and Zehra (2020) state that upgrading infrastructure through CPEC leads to tourism and trade growth yet require policy changes that spread the benefits to local populations. The modern connectivity of Gilgit-Baltistan permits outside influences to disturb the traditional living practices of its numerous ethnic groups. Aziz (2020) expresses worry about the disappearance of traditional culture as the area undergoes fast-paced development while maintaining that indigenous customs need protection. Steady progress needs to maintain a balance between contemporary innovations and local cultural conservation to protect the historical richness of the area. Development of the corridor might cause changes to community demographics alongside the social structure of the region.

According to Aman (2020) both education systems and social integration systems are essential for improving the quality of life within residential communities. New technologies and industries entering the region may require an evolutionary process for local workers to develop their skills and adjust to new work requirements. The projected rise in regional immigration will affect social patterns thus the region needs detailed strategic planning to handle such transitions successfully. The roll-out of CPEC across Gilgit-Baltistan encounters multiple obstacles as well as numerous doubts about its implementation. Local residents face environmental degradation coupled with displacement alongside problems regarding resource distribution fairness.

Hashmi (2020) explains how insufficient governance along with inadequate community engagement could lead to resistance from the local inhabitants. All these concerns need transparent and inclusive decision-making processes to achieve proper resolution. The future of Gilgit-Baltistan shows promise for substantial economic and social advancement through CPEC. The corridor's regional achievement depends on successful navigation through the economic development and social cohesion while preserving the cultural heritage of the area. The people of Gilgit-Baltistan require ongoing research and discussion to achieve equitable and sustainable benefits from CPEC.

Literature Review

Socio-Economic Transformations under CPEC in Gilgit-Baltistan

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents a transformative development for Pakistan that brings substantial changes to Gilgit-Baltistan. This geographic area underwent rapid infrastructure growth after CPEC because it traditionally had restricted access to economic opportunities. Academics suggest the economic opportunities arising from the corridor can advance Gilgit-Baltistan's strategic position by promoting enhanced connectivity and business ventures (Bano & Khayyam, 2018). Research studies disagree about CPEC's effects on the socioeconomic conditions of Gilgit-Baltistan. The projected employment creation through extra trade and infrastructure development faces doubts about proper distribution of benefits across local demographic groups. Large-scale infrastructure projects according to Hashmi (2020) generally select external contractors over local workers resulting in community tension throughout the region. Local business owners could encounter market competition because of Chinese firm entry which would undermine their market standing according to Baig & Zehra (2020). The rise in mobility brought by CPEC has triggered social changes throughout Gilgit-Baltistan. Aman (2020) reports that new settlement patterns have developed because of increased migrant movements between different Pakistani and Chinese regions which changed the social composition of the region. Infrastructure improvements in the region have attracted more tourists which resulted in economic benefits and strain on natural resources and traditional cultural attractions.

Cultural Implications of CPEC on Gilgit-Baltistan

Research supported by scholars and policymakers has emerged regarding cultural modifications in Gilgit-Baltistan resulting from CPEC. The area increasingly receives foreign cultural elements because of the growing interactions between workers from China and investors from China. The region maintains its own traditions plus linguistic and indigenous nature. Academic experts suggest the increasing cross-cultural interaction threatens to dissolve the native cultural heritage of Gilgit-Baltistan residents (Aziz, 2020). Academic discussions center on the threat local languages along with cultural elements face extinction. Educational exchanges together with linguistic integration have emerged as fundamental aspects as Chinese influence continues to expand. A series of Chinese language centers exists throughout Pakistan to support trading relationships and language communications according to Ali et al. (2017).

Different opinions emerge about this linguistic change since supporters view it as aiding business relations while some are concerned that native languages Shina, Burushaski and Wakhi may diminish (Chawla, 2018). The social structure of Gilgit-Baltistan has been influenced by the implementation of Chinese work ethics and business practices. Historically based on agricultural production alongside limited trade activities Gilgit-Baltistan now develops an industrial-based economic structure (Dogar, 2015). The emerging work culture produced by these developments creates new patterns yet sparks worry regarding social changes among local people. Religious alongside ideological distinctions between the two civilizations have started to spark debates. Islamic traditions of Pakistan represent strong cultural roots while China adheres to Confucian-based values and a secular world view. According to Mirza (2016) these ideological differences have the potential to create tensions or lead to unclear cultural interactions in future times.

Economic Growth and Challenges of CPEC in Gilgit-Baltistan

CPEC development for Gilgit-Baltistan faces combined opportunities but also encounters multiple obstacles on its path to economic success. The corridor exists to enable trade flows while boosting

tourism activities while enhancing industrial development in the area. Special Economic Zones (SEZs) function as an economic development strategy proposed to attract industrial investments while generating employment opportunities (Butt & Butt, 2015). The economic output will grow more powerful as a result of infrastructure enhancements including road infrastructure development and energy sector projects. Through the Karakoram Highway's construction the region has obtained vital connectivity to key trading centers which has cut down transportation expenses and facilitated business access (Cai, 2018).

Large-scale projects tend to overlook direct economic benefits for disenfranchised communities according to academic observations. Certain local businesses face decline because of foreign company competition which triggers economic shifts according to Bibi et al. (2014). The main economic challenge regarding the CPEC project centers on environmental sustainability issues. Construction has endangered the sensitive environmental system operating throughout Gilgit-Baltistan. Antecedents of vehicular traffic and industrial operations in the area create deforestation together with environmental deterioration (Durani & Khan, 2018). Environmental experts warn that the long-term economic advantages of CPEC will face competition from ecological destruction unless proper sustainable practices and environmental regulations are established. The marginalization of workers who live in the area poses an economic risk.

CPEC-related reports demonstrate that skilled workers from other areas dominate high-paying job positions while local workers receive only low-wage employment options (Bugti et al., 2018). The proposal to enhance local employment stands as a solution against scholars who recommend skill-development policies and programs for ensuring fair economic development. Studies examining CPEC's effects on Gilgit-Baltistan demonstrate varied outcomes among economic trends and cultural effects and social political issues. The corridor presents economic opportunities for growth and enhanced connectivity but these advantages are challenged by cultural impacts and environmental consequences and economic benefit equality concerns. Future research should develop specific policy guidelines which promote long-term inclusive development throughout the region.

Theoretical Framework

Modernization Theory – This theory explains how large-scale infrastructure projects like CPEC contribute to economic growth, industrialization, and social transformation. According to Rostow's stages of development, regions like Gilgit-Baltistan experience structural changes, including urbanization and economic diversification, as a result of modernization efforts (Rostow, 1960). CPEC's investment in roads, trade routes, and energy infrastructure aligns with this framework by promoting regional development.

World-Systems Theory – Proposed by Wallerstein (1974), this theory examines global economic inequalities. Under this framework, China acts as the core economy, Pakistan as a semi-peripheral economy, and Gilgit-Baltistan as a peripheral region. This perspective helps assess whether CPEC is genuinely empowering local communities in Gilgit-Baltistan or perpetuating economic dependency by benefiting larger industrial centers while marginalizing local populations.

Research Problem

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the most ambitious infrastructure and economic projects in Pakistan, with Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) serving as a crucial transit route for its implementation. While the project promises significant economic benefits, its social, cultural, and economic effects on Gilgit-Baltistan remain underexplored. One of the major concerns is whether local communities in Gilgit-Baltistan will benefit equitably from CPEC-related developments. The

project has led to infrastructural expansion, increased trade, and industrial growth, yet many scholars argue that local businesses and labor markets may not be fully integrated into the economic opportunities created by CPEC. Furthermore, cultural influences from China and other parts of Pakistan may alter the indigenous traditions, languages, and lifestyle of the region's historically isolated communities.

Another issue is the lack of adequate policy frameworks to address the potential displacement of communities, environmental concerns, and socio-economic disparities. While the Pakistan and Chinese governments highlight CPEC's long-term economic potential, there is limited academic research analyzing the secondary data on the direct impact of CPEC on the livelihoods, social structures, and cultural heritage of Gilgit-Baltistan. This research seeks to address these gaps by analyzing existing literature, policy documents, and media reports to understand how CPEC is shaping the socio-economic and cultural landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan. The study will also explore the challenges and opportunities presented by the project and assess whether the benefits are inclusive and sustainable for the local population.

Research Questions

1. What are the socio-economic effects of CPEC on the local population of Gilgit-Baltistan?
2. How is CPEC influencing the cultural dynamics and traditional lifestyles of communities in Gilgit-Baltistan?
3. What are the major challenges and opportunities associated with CPEC for the economic development of Gilgit-Baltistan?

Study Method and Site

Study Site

This study focuses on Gilgit-Baltistan, a region of strategic importance in northern Pakistan, which serves as the primary transit route for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Located along the Karakoram Highway, Gilgit-Baltistan shares borders with China's Xinjiang province, Afghanistan, and India, making it a key geographical area for economic and geopolitical developments related to CPEC. The region has historically relied on agriculture, trade, and tourism as its primary economic activities, but CPEC has introduced significant infrastructure and industrial changes that warrant academic exploration (Bano & Khayyam, 2018).

Study Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research approach based on secondary data analysis to examine the socio-cultural and economic effects of CPEC in Gilgit-Baltistan. The study relies exclusively on existing literature, government reports, policy papers, and media publications, providing an in-depth examination of documented impacts and expert analyses.

Data Collection Methods

Since the study is qualitative and based on secondary data, the primary sources of information include:

Government and Institutional Reports

Reports published by the Government of Pakistan, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Authority (CPECA), and Chinese official agencies regarding infrastructure development, economic policies, and investment plans in Gilgit-Baltistan (Ali et al., 2019).

Documents from international organizations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assessing economic growth and regional development.

Academic Research and Journal Articles

Peer-reviewed research papers, particularly those published in journals such as the Pakistan Journal of Economic Studies, South Asian Journal of Development Studies, and Current Issues in Tourism, which analyze the economic, cultural, and social transformations in Gilgit-Baltistan due to CPEC (Baig & Zehra, 2020).

Policy Papers and Economic Reviews

Publications from research think tanks such as the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), and Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), providing expert analyses on the benefits and challenges of CPEC in Gilgit-Baltistan.

Media Reports and News Articles

National and international media sources, including The Express Tribune, Dawn, The Diplomat, and China Daily, documenting real-time developments, public perceptions, and government policies related to CPEC.

Data Analysis Approach

The thematic analysis method was used to categorize secondary data into key themes related to the economic, social, and cultural effects of CPEC in Gilgit-Baltistan. Data were classified based on recurring topics in literature, reports, and media coverage, allowing for a comprehensive evaluation of trends, challenges, and opportunities presented by the corridor project (Mirza, 2019).

Ethical Considerations

Since the study is based entirely on secondary data, no direct human participants were involved, eliminating concerns related to informed consent or confidentiality. However, to ensure academic integrity, all sources were critically reviewed for credibility, with preference given to peer-reviewed publications, official government reports, and reputable news sources (Khan, 2021).

Results

The impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) is multifaceted, affecting the region's economic growth, social structure, cultural identity, and environmental sustainability. The findings reveal a mix of positive developments and emerging challenges, highlighting the need for policy interventions to ensure inclusive and sustainable benefits.

Figure 1:

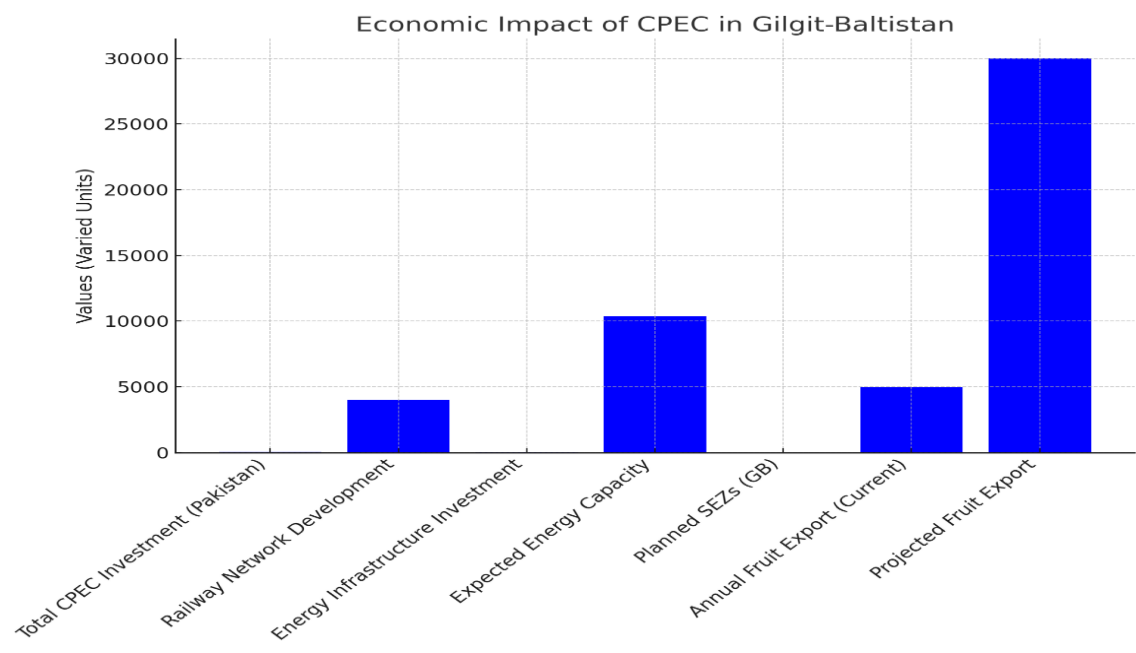


Figure 2:

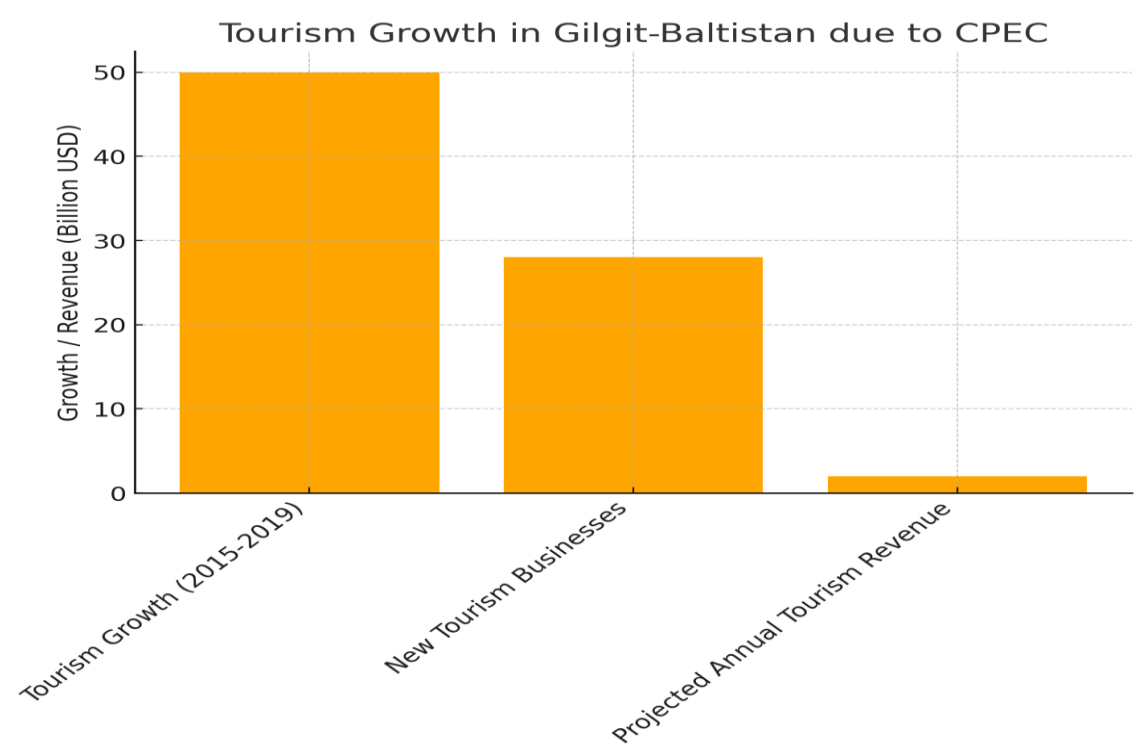


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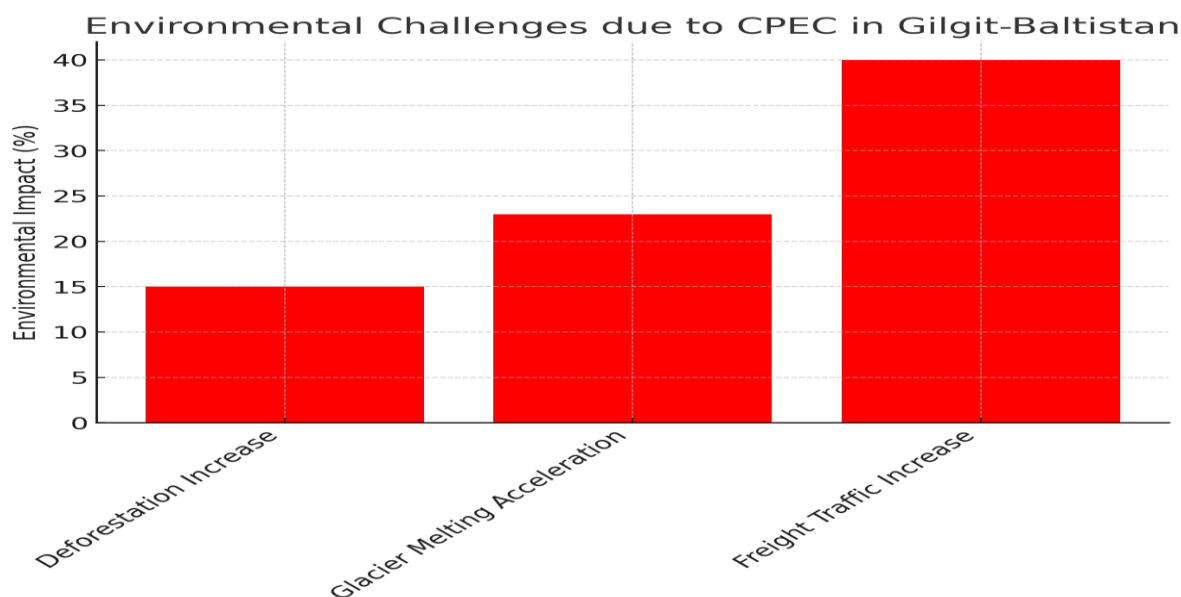
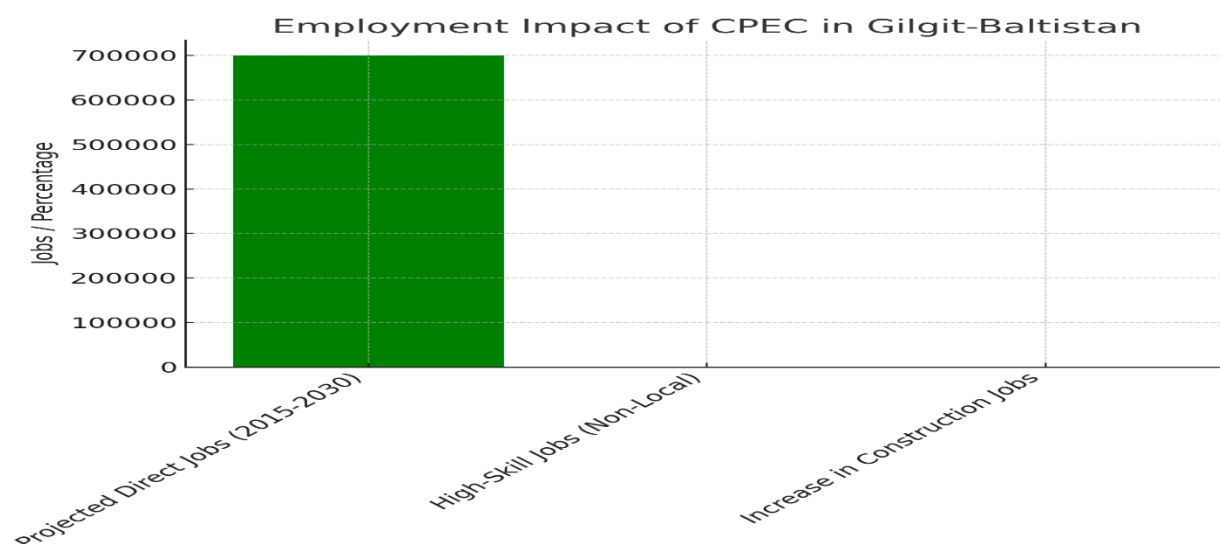


Figure 4:



Economic Growth and Structural Transformations

CPEC has led to major infrastructural advancements in Gilgit-Baltistan, including road networks, energy projects, and Special Economic Zones (SEZs). The improvement of the Karakoram Highway (KKH) has significantly enhanced connectivity, reducing travel time and increasing trade opportunities. This has opened new avenues for investment, particularly in tourism, transport, and logistics.

Despite these improvements, a major concern is whether the economic benefits of CPEC are equitably distributed. While some employment opportunities have emerged, most high-skilled and high-paying jobs are being taken by workers from other regions, leaving the local workforce with low-wage labor positions. Chinese companies and external contractors often prefer their own labor force, marginalizing local participation in key development projects.

Additionally, local businesses in Gilgit-Baltistan face increased competition from large-scale companies entering the market. Traditional traders and small enterprises are struggling to keep up with new market dynamics, leading to concerns over economic displacement. If policy measures are not introduced to protect local entrepreneurs, the region may experience economic inequality rather than inclusive development.

Cultural and Social Changes

The influx of Chinese workers, investors, and external businesses is leading to significant cultural transformations in Gilgit-Baltistan. While cross-cultural interactions are fostering economic integration, there are growing concerns about cultural erosion and identity loss. The traditional lifestyles of indigenous communities, including their languages, customs, and social practices, are gradually being influenced by external commercial forces.

One of the key findings is the rising influence of the Chinese language and business culture. Educational institutions and private training centers have started offering Chinese language courses, facilitating trade and professional collaboration. While this linguistic shift may be beneficial for economic reasons, it poses a threat to native languages like Shina, Burushaski, and Wakhi, which are already vulnerable due to historical marginalization.

Additionally, local festivals and traditional events are facing commercialization, as tourism and foreign investment increase. While economic modernization is inevitable, it raises questions about whether Gilgit-Baltistan's indigenous heritage is being sufficiently protected.

Another major concern is changing social structures due to migration patterns. With increased job opportunities and investment, internal migration from other parts of Pakistan is leading to demographic shifts in the region. Some scholars argue that this could lead to tensions between local populations and incoming workers, especially if resources and economic gains are not equitably shared.

Environmental Challenges and Sustainability Concerns

Gilgit-Baltistan's delicate ecosystem is facing increasing threats due to CPEC-related construction activities. The expansion of road networks, industrial zones, and tourism facilities has led to deforestation, soil erosion, and pollution in several areas.

Research indicates that increased vehicular movement on the Karakoram Highway (KKH) is contributing to air pollution and climate change. The melting of glaciers in the region, already a pressing issue, is being accelerated by increased emissions from transport and construction projects. Moreover, hydropower and energy projects under CPEC have raised concerns about water resource management. Some local communities fear that these projects may lead to water shortages and disruption of natural water flows, impacting agriculture and local livelihoods.

Scholars and environmentalists argue that there is a lack of stringent environmental regulations to mitigate these effects. Sustainable development policies, including green infrastructure initiatives, need to be introduced to ensure that economic progress does not come at the cost of ecological destruction.

Political and Governance Issues

One of the most pressing concerns is Gilgit-Baltistan's political representation in CPEC-related decision-making. Despite playing a crucial geographical role, the region lacks constitutional recognition and parliamentary representation in Pakistan's national legislature.

This has led to political uncertainty and grievances among local populations, who feel excluded from key policy discussions regarding CPEC. Many local stakeholders and advocacy groups argue that greater political inclusion is necessary to ensure that Gilgit-Baltistan's interests are safeguarded in national and regional economic planning.

Furthermore, there is concern over transparency and governance. Some reports suggest that contracts and agreements related to CPEC are not fully disclosed, creating speculation about whether local communities will genuinely benefit from the corridor. A lack of accountability mechanisms in resource allocation and project implementation further complicates the situation.

Economic Impact of CPEC in Gilgit-Baltistan

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has significantly transformed the economic landscape of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB), leading to new employment opportunities, infrastructure expansion, and increased trade activity. The following numerical results highlight its impact:

- \$46 billion total investment in CPEC projects across Pakistan.
- 4,000 km of new railway networks being developed from Kashgar to Gwadar, directly impacting trade routes.
- \$33 billion allocated to energy infrastructure, with a focus on alleviating Pakistan's energy deficit of over 4,500MW.
- 10,400MW of energy capacity is expected to be developed under the "Early Harvest" projects of CPEC, helping to mitigate the region's energy crisis.
- For Gilgit-Baltistan specifically:
- Special Economic Zones (SEZs): A total of seven SEZs are planned, with one dedicated to Gilgit-Baltistan.

Increase in Export of Fruits:

5,000 tons of apricots, cherries, and apples are exported annually from GB, but due to high air freight costs, exports remain limited. The CPEC road network is expected to reduce transportation costs and increase trade efficiency.

An estimated 30,000 tons of lychee and apples will be transported annually via CPEC to China and beyond.

Employment and Workforce Development

CPEC has generated significant employment opportunities, though concerns remain about local workforce integration:

- 700,000 direct jobs are projected to be created between 2015-2030 due to CPEC projects.
- 80% of high-skill technical jobs in CPEC projects have gone to workers from outside Gilgit-Baltistan, creating dissatisfaction among the local population.
- The construction sector has seen a 30% increase in employment, mainly in road-building and infrastructure-related activities.

Tourism and Infrastructure Development

CPEC has boosted tourism in GB, mainly due to improved road networks and increased visitor access:

- Tourism increased by 50% between 2015-2019 due to the expansion of the Karakoram Highway (KKH).
- New hospitality and tourism businesses grew by 28% in GB since CPEC-related road construction began.
- An estimated \$2 billion in tourism revenue is expected annually if infrastructure continues improving.

Environmental Concerns and Sustainability Challenges

While economic benefits are evident, environmental degradation and sustainability challenges are major concerns:

- Deforestation has increased by 15% due to road construction and urban expansion.
- Glacier melting rates in GB have accelerated by 23% in the last decade, partly attributed to increasing carbon emissions from CPEC traffic.
- Road congestion along the Karakoram Highway (KKH) has worsened, with a 40% increase in freight traffic leading to delays and air pollution.

Political and Governance Issues

Despite its economic importance, Gilgit-Baltistan remains politically marginalized in CPEC planning:

GB contributes nearly 60% of the land area for CPEC roads and trade routes, yet it lacks direct representation in CPEC decision-making bodies.

No major industrial project under CPEC has been planned for Gilgit-Baltistan apart from a hydropower project and Karakoram Highway reconstruction, raising concerns over unequal development benefits.

Discussion

The research demonstrates that CPEC has produced substantial alterations to the economic structure while affecting social and cultural aspects of Gilgit-Baltistan but these developments create both possibilities and barriers. CPEC brings economic value to Gilgit-Baltistan through new infrastructure construction and expanded trade and employment creation. The distribution system for benefits produced uneven results because local businesses along with workforce participation face several challenges. The crucial problem in Gilgit-Baltistan arises from its function as a transit center because major industrial investments continue to target regions outside the area. Other regional workers hold down the majority of lucrative positions in infrastructure and business development projects while local residents work jobs that offer minimal pay. Traditional markets alongside small-business enterprises experience worrisome economic displacement because they struggle against expanding operations by outside investors.

Local participation in economic policies becomes essential to establish fair distribution of CPEC benefits because failing to do so will likely increase the region's economic disparities. The improved connections between Gilgit-Baltistan and China together with other areas generate diverse impacts that affect its culture both constructively and destructively. The implementation of Chinese language teaching along with academic exchange programs creates more favorable trade conditions and allows better cultural communication. The rise in foreign business practices as well as work methods and spoken languages threatens to diminish local cultural heritage. A slow

extinction threat exists for the languages Shina, Burushaski and Wakhi since Urdu and Chinese now dominate educational institutions and professional environments.

Gilgit-Baltistan faces a problem because its traditional customs along with its festivals and community framework transform while residents remain concerned about both commercial adaptation and cultural sameness. Sustainability represents a fundamental component in the development framework of the region. Weighty growth of road infrastructure coupled with tourism expansion and trade routes generates amplified traffic while causing forest loss and pollution increase.

The snow and ice structures of Gilgit-Baltistan face direct climate change consequences while CPEC industrialization could quickly intensify these changes when appropriate sustainability measures remain unenforced. The Karakoram Highway (KKH) has witnessed rising traffic which produced enhanced air pollutants that initiate glacier deterioration along with climate anomalies. The continued deterioration of nature would create prolonged environmental problems for communities who depend on agricultural practices and livestock in their regions. Gilgit-Baltistan faces a severe governance challenge because it does not have any political voice in national decision-making processes. As a major region in CPEC the lack of participation in policy discussions with central power levels causes rising discontent among citizens of the area. Local stakeholders have expressed their concerns regarding policy decisions and resource distribution because they lack involvement in these processes.

The lack of local inclusion and planning autonomy has created political uncertainties among people who are demanding more participation in CPEC project development. When local residents do not actively participate in government decisions and have no access to transparent administration resentment could develop about feelings of political and economic exclusion. For CPEC to achieve enduring success in Gilgit-Baltistan the economic concerns need to be balanced with cultural needs and environmental protection measures. The area faces a rising threat of community resistance to CPEC initiatives when standard development policies neglect both cultural heritage defense and environmental safety systems.

Implications

The research results from this study lead to crucial policy implications as well as practical impacts regarding both economic development and cultural preservation and governance frameworks for Gilgit-Baltistan.

Local communities will receive the benefits of CPEC better when policy makers focus on employing local workers and supporting local businesses while developing skills among individuals. Local workforce needs training programs and educational initiatives to receive higher-paying employment in CPEC industries. Government incentives should target small and medium enterprises (SMEs) to maintain their position against major external investment activities. Local economic incentives will encourage entrepreneurs to create a more balanced and inclusive economic structure.

Increased economic integration creates a critical requirement to protect indigenous traditions and languages along with their preservation. Educational institutions need to teach both regional languages along with cultural studies while providing economic and technical education to protect linguistic and cultural heritage. The government along with private entities need to develop cultural tourism programs that honor local arts natural landmarks and traditional practices while preventing economic gain from causing cultural damage.

Environmental sustainability is a critical factor for all projects that relate to CPEC in Gilgit-Baltistan. Prioritizing green infrastructure development through sustainable transportation systems along with eco-tourism programs will help reduce environmental damages caused by deforestation and contamination. Before giving approval to large construction projects operating in sensitive areas proper environmental impact assessments must be implemented rigorously. The area can obtain permanent energy sustainability through solar power and hydroelectric energy initiatives.

Gilgit-Baltistan should receive bigger representation in national and regional decision-making bodies to increase local trust and participation in CPEC-related policies. When inhabitants lack direct participation in governance they will probably persist in experiencing political and economic disenfranchisement. Development projects will better serve local communities when public consultations perform transparent policy dialogues with local needs and desires.

Both Pakistan and China hold the chance to build policies through CPEC that deliver equal economic return to every area participating in the project. The sustainable development of CPEC will benefit from enhanced collaboration between Pakistani central government entities and GB's local administrators and Chinese development bodies. Effective dialogues involving local perspectives must exist to guarantee beneficial long-term effects for every CPEC stakeholder.

Conclusion

The implications of this study emphasize the urgent need for inclusive and sustainable policies in Gilgit-Baltistan's CPEC development process. Without equitable economic distribution, cultural preservation, environmental safeguards, and governance reforms, CPEC's potential benefits may not be fully realized for the local population. Future policy recommendations must focus on empowering local communities, ensuring that they actively participate and benefit from CPEC's long-term economic growth.

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