

A CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE ROLE OF PUBLIC DIPLOMACY IN PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS

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Abstract

Public diplomacy (PD) promotes inter-state relations by means of enhanced communication, dialogue, and consensus-building amongst the general publics, thus acting as an effective tool of soft power. However, it is not a central deterministic factor in all relationships; some ties are long lasting even when public diplomacy is not very effective e.g. Pakistan-China relations. This study rationally disproves the assertion that China's influence in Pakistan is a weak one merely because it lags in terms of public diplomacy. It has been argued instead that instruments of influence may vary according to varying identities and contexts and so, generalizations are not very plausible. The significance of public diplomacy in Pakistan-China relations has increased only during the last couple of decades. However, with megaprojects like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in the pipeline, it has a bigger role to play in the time ahead – hence the need for focused efforts to this end.

Keywords: Public Diplomacy (PD), CPEC, Positive Image, Influence, Political Commitment

Introduction

‘Higher than the Himalayas’ and ‘deeper than the oceans’ are the phrases commonly used to describe the bilateral relationship between China and Pakistan which is now more than half a century old. This relationship has survived several vicissitudes in regional as well as international environments and yet, unlike most other bilateral equations, has remained relatively stable. The relationship has evolved through successive phases as the two sides have held firmly to their foundations; never giving up on the basic understanding of the mutually beneficial and inter-linked nature of their well-being. The critics, however,

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view China-Pakistan relationship otherwise – for them Pak-China bilateral equation is limited to political and strategic considerations and is not very well-founded. The critics refer to the under-explored dimension of Public Diplomacy (PD) to lend credence to their argument. However, for a keen observer of the China-Pakistan relations, China's influence in Pakistan is neither weak nor limited solely to an inter-governmental level.

This article entails a critical appraisal of China's Public Diplomacy towards Pakistan and of the critique on it. It explains the uniqueness of China-Pakistan ties, which is as appreciated and acknowledged at people-to-people level as at the inter-governmental level. Focusing on China's influence in Pakistan, it elaborates how China is perceived in Pakistan rather than vice versa. The first part introduces the concept of public diplomacy and its association to the broader idea of soft power. Afterwards, it explores the reason(s) for China's strong influence/appeal in Pakistan (measured by positive public opinion) despite public diplomacy not being a much focused aspect of the bilateral equation. This case defies the usual pattern (as given in the Western-originated discourses) where creating an international appeal/influence requires massive public diplomacy campaigns for targeting publics in other states. A description of the historical record of China-Pakistan public diplomacy is followed by a discussion on emerging trends. It is suggested that China now needs to have a more planned and effective campaign for generating positive opinions in lieu of certain recent developments related to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Conceptualizing Public Diplomacy

Public Diplomacy constitutes an important part of inter-state relations in contemporary times and governments are allocating larger shares of budgets towards this. Given its much older existence in practice, PD's emergence as a distinct concept and as a sub-field of study in IR discourse is a relatively new phenomenon where it is often discussed in association with the idea of soft power. Just as the concept of soft power has become vital to the measurement of states' over-all influence and power equation (especially in the post-cold war era), the scope and effectiveness of their public diplomacy campaigns have become a way of gauging what share soft power has in the inter-state influence equation.¹ Additionally, as the salience of hard-power faces a downward curve, soft power - of which public diplomacy is one aspect - is being designated as the primary indicator of a strong and lasting influence. It is believed to have the potential for encouraging compliance through attraction rather

¹ Hwajung Kim, "Cultural Diplomacy as the Means of Soft Power in an Information Age," *Cultural Diplomacy*, December 2011, http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/pdf/case-studies/Hwajung_Kim_Cultural_Diplomacy_as_the_Means_of_Soft_Power_in_the_Information_Age.pdf.

than through coercion. However, even though PD is a component and indicator of soft power, the latter is not limited to PD and may have other constituents too.

This distinction is important because an obsessive concern with Public Diplomacy (PD) promotes a tendency to miscalculate the degree of influence in relationships. This means that ties which are otherwise productive and mutually beneficial might be marked as tactical, short-term and lacking influence if and only because PD is missing. This is also because hard power (including economic means), is equated to a coercive force today rather than a source of lasting influence since it may force even the unwilling actors to comply due to its threatening nature. A lasting and non-coercive influence of a state on others requires an element of soft power in modern times, of which PD is taken to be an integral component.

Public diplomacy is aimed at the public of other states with the aim of promoting positive opinions and a favourable image in the eyes of target audience, making bilateral relations more enduring. However, public diplomacy cannot always be the sole indicator of effective bilateral relationships and a state might enjoy a good image in the eyes of other state's public even when an effective PD effort is non-existent. Sino-Pakistan bilateral relationship represents a similar kind of equation.

Public diplomacy, being a recently evolving sub-field of IR, has not matured yet into a self-explanatory one. The field lacks consensus in terms of definitions, theoretical underpinnings and the practices that fall within its scope. Due to the varied contexts in which it is carried out, there exists ambiguity regarding who performs it and who takes decisions regarding this. However, there is a consensus over two things: first, that general public(s) are its main targets, and second that it has a potential to transform relations by reducing friction and tensions - these features make public diplomacy a suitable tool for mitigating conflicting tendencies and building confidence among states even when its success can't be always guaranteed.

Generalizing and defining a concept as diverse as Public Diplomacy is a hard-task. The US Information Agency has the longest experience in the field - more than 40 years. According to the US Department of State, Public Diplomacy refers to, "*Government-sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries; its chief instruments are publications, motion pictures, cultural exchanges, radio and television.*"²

Hans N. Tuch, author of the book 'Communicating with the World (1990)', defined public diplomacy as, "*Official government efforts to shape the communications environment overseas in which American foreign policy is played out, in order to reduce the degree to which misperceptions and misunderstandings complicate relations between the U.S. and other*

² "Dictionary of International Relations Terms," *U.S. Department of State*, 1987, 85.

nations.”³ Edward R. Murrow Centre for Public Diplomacy defines it as “...the cultivation by governments of public opinion in other countries; the interaction of private groups and interests in one country with those of another”⁴

An agreed focus on ‘communicating with the foreign publics and emphasis on the ‘role of government’ in promoting this is evident from the definitions. Hence, PD is not a non-governmental activity as is mistakenly assumed. In the first place, it is the central governments which formulate and provide the broader policy guidelines over the matter; non-governmental channels might then be brought into use for effective implementation of those policies. Governments can choose any means at their disposal for enhancing their capacity to communicate with the public in other states. Although both traditional diplomacy and public diplomacy are aligned with states’ national interests, for PD the interests are somehow associated with improved positive images and favourable public opinions – something not always a central concern for formal diplomacy.

By virtue of its commitment to bringing improvement⁵ and betterment in inter-state ties by targeting the public sentiments, public diplomacy is an effective confidence building measure that contributes towards enhancing one’s soft influence too. A few precedents do exist that demonstrate PD’s usefulness. US’ global public diplomacy, spearheaded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) presents an accurate example. The message on the agency’s insignia, “From the American People”, makes its objective very clear. USAID exports a good image of the American people, and of American state as a bi-product, by engaging in activities that ensure promoting a positive US image in the minds that benefit from agency’s initiatives. Fulbright scholarship program is one more instrument of American public/cultural diplomacy that influences young minds by providing them avenues for higher education and learning opportunities in the US. Hollywood is yet another tool that selectively projects American lifestyle/values to generate an ideal US image for world-wide audiences; hence the appeal for the American model.

Franco-German reconciliation after World-War II also can be taken as a Public Diplomacy success story. Elysee Treaty, which served as the basis for normalization of bilateral ties had increased people-to-people

³ “What is Public Diplomacy?” *Public Diplomacy Alumni Association*, <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org/archives/1.html> (accessed July 5, 2015).

⁴ “What is Public Diplomacy?” *The Edward R. Murrow Centre of Public Diplomacy*, <http://fletcher.tufts.edu/Murrow/Diplomacy> (accessed July 5, 2015).

⁵ “About US Public Diplomacy: What Public Diplomacy Is and Is Not,” *Public Diplomacy Alumni Association*, http://pdaa.publicdiplomacy.org/?page_id=6, (accessed July 6, 2015).

contacts and interactive exchange at its core.⁶ This PD tactic led to an increased understanding and cordiality between the two sides in a relatively short span, with relations getting better ever since. German Youth organization created under the treaty has contributed to more than 8 million cross-border exchanges since its creation⁷. Around three hundred French-German Friendship associations are engaged today in promoting exchanges between the two peoples⁸, thus showing PD to be a critical facilitator in the normalization and integration process. Through these precedents, PD's potential to make inter-state relations smoother and lasting can be established.

Pakistan-China Relations

China has enjoyed a long-standing influence in Pakistan. However, the critics sometimes challenge the depth of Sino-Pak relations on grounds that inter-state strategic needs define these ties rather than deep inter-societal linkages or public to public relations. A historical recap tells that the motivating force underlying Pak-China ties has been the desire to further their respective interests and to maintain regional geo-political balance.⁹ Since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations on May 21st, 1951¹⁰, they have grown closer, friendlier as well as multi-faceted. Although strategic concerns vis-à-vis the then existing cold war strategic environment dominated the initial phases, economic and socio-cultural linkages grew with time, and are critical today for deciphering the contours of this multi-dimensional relationship.

In the military dimension, China has been and continues to be the sole reliable weapons supplier of Pakistan.¹¹ Both have engaged in joint military R & D projects; modernization of Pakistan's military and strategic

⁶ "Franco-German Reconciliation and Public Diplomacy," July 9, 2010, <https://pdnetworks.wordpress.com/2010/07/09/franco-german-reconciliation-and-public-diplomacy/>.

⁷ Lily Gardner Feldman, "The Franco-German Elysée Treaty at Fifty: A Model for Others?" *American Institute for Contemporary German Studies*, January 24, 2013, <http://www.aicgs.org/issue/the-franco-german-elysee-treaty-at-fifty-a-model-for-others/>.

⁸ "France in Pakistan," <http://www.ambafrance-pk.org/> (accessed August 13, 2016).

⁹ Mohammed Ahsen Chaudhri, "Strategic and Military Dimensions in Pakistan-China Relations," *Pakistan Horizon* 39, no. 4 (1986): 15-28.

¹⁰ "Chronology of Key Events in Sino-Pakistan Relations," *Xinhua News Agency*, April 5, 2005, <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2005/SouthasiaTour/124766.htm>.

¹¹ "China Top Pakistan Arms Supplier: Sipri," *The News International*, December 15, 2015, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/81991-China-top-Pakistan-arms-supplier-Sipri>

hardware would not be possible without Beijing's assistance. As for economics, trade relations began in the early 1950s and the first formal trade agreement was signed in 1963.¹² The conclusion of a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA) took much longer (first of its kind with a developing South Asian state). It has proved beneficial for both sides since enforcement in 2007 - bilateral trade volume increased from around \$6 billion in 2006 to \$16 billion in 2014.¹³ Public diplomacy efforts, rooted in greater inter-governmental collaboration have increased with time, promoting greater socio-cultural interaction through expanding people to people contacts; the following section elaborates it further.

An Overview of China's Public Diplomacy in Pakistan

Talking about efforts to reach each other's public, the first Pakistan-China Cultural Cooperation Agreement and its Executive Program was signed in March 1965.¹⁴ Unfortunately, the program remained un-implemented for the next decade because of the Cultural Revolution in China (1966-1976). Things got normal only with the Chinese reform and opening-up initiated by Deng Xiao Peng. The signing of the two-year Executive Program for Cultural Exchange took place in 1979.¹⁵ Exchange visits of cultural delegations began afterwards, where the participants promoted/presented their respective cultures, values and traditions through folk songs, dances and music. These activities helped in furthering the people-to-people contacts by enabling a better understanding of each other.

For enhancing cross-cultural understanding, a number of literary writings have been translated from Chinese to Urdu and vice versa; e.g. "Analects of Confucius", "Selection from the Chinese Poetry" and "Selection from the Chinese Literature".¹⁶ Cultural ties and education diplomacy have been burgeoning; since the year 2000, bilateral education exchange programs and scholarships have unprecedentedly progressed. The number of Pakistani students pursuing higher studies in China has steadily

¹² Jamal Afridi and Jayshree Bajoria, "China-Pakistan Relations," *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 6, 2010, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-pakistan-relations>.

¹³ "FTA Bearing Fruit: Bilateral Trade Volume Grows, Still in Favor Of China," *The Express Tribune*, April 19, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/872227/fta-bearing-fruit-bilateral-trade-volume-grows-still-in-favour-of-china/>

¹⁴ "Survey on China-Pak Cultural Exchanges & Cooperation," January 17, 2005, <http://pk.chineseembassy.org/eng/cultureservice/t179992.htm>.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Speech by Ambassador Luo Zhaohui at the Publication Ceremony of the Three Chinese Books Compiled by the Pakistan Academy of Letters," June 7, 2007, <http://pk.chineseembassy.org/eng/zbqx/t328163.htm>.

increased as Chinese government offers ever-larger number of scholarships. From 2007-2014, there was a threefold increase in the number of Pakistani students in China from 4,450 to 13,360,¹⁷ which grew to 19,000 in 2017.¹⁸ This is critical for reducing the socio-cultural gap and promoting greater connectedness between the two peoples. Making younger minds better understand each other's way of life can bring the future generations closer.

Furthering the cultural exchanges, Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari inaugurated a photo exhibition on Mohenjo-Daro in Shanghai in July 2010¹⁹ that showed Pakistan's cultural heritage. Same year in December, Premier Wen Jiabao inaugurated the 'Pak-China Friendship Center' in Islamabad - a milestone for Sino-Pak public diplomacy - a gift from people of China to their Pakistani counterparts.²⁰ On proposal of the Chinese Premier, 2011 was celebrated as the Year of China-Pakistan friendship; vigorous exchanges in all fields including culture, education, sports, etc. marked 60 years of their bilateral ties. Punjab-Jiangsu cultural center²¹ was established in Lahore as a tool of cultural exchange that teaches Chinese cuisine, painting and courses on Mandarin.

In 2010, China and Pakistan signed an MOU for the establishment of cultural centers.²² The concept of 'Sister Cities' was also employed for promoting a greater sense of identification (similarity) between the two peoples. Lahore and Xi'an were declared as sister-cities in 2009, both being the epitomes of historical and cultural heritages of Pakistan and China respectively.²³ Karachi and Shanghai, being respective industrial and commercial centers on both sides were given this status back in 1984.

¹⁷ "International Students in China," <http://www.iie.org/Services/Project-Atlas/China/International-Students-In-China#.V--4aCF97IU>.

¹⁸ APP, "19,000 Pakistani Students Studying in Chinese Universities," *Dawn*, March 2, 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1317973>.

¹⁹ Mohenjo-Daro is a cultural heritage site in Pakistan and is one amongst the most ancient signs of Asian civilization.

²⁰ "Gilani, Jiabao Inaugurate Pak-China Friendship Center," *The Express Tribune*, December 18, 2010, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/91478/gilani-jiabao-inaugurate-pak-china-friendship-centre/>

²¹ Muhammad Arif and Bai Gui, "Role of Chinese Language in Pakistan China Relations," *International Journal of International Relations, Media and Mass Communication Studies*1, no.1 (April 2015): 7-27.

²² "Pakistan," *China Culture Center*, <http://en.cccweb.org/Pakistan.html>.

²³ "Introduction on Exchanges between Xi'an and Lahore," November 13, 2009, http://english.shaanxi.gov.cn/articleScity/sistercities/citylevel/cityxian/200911/11558_1.html.

Working on the Communication Gap

The communication barrier that exists despite all these efforts is a major concern when it comes to close ties between the people of two countries. The inability to fully understand and speak each other's language leaves a gap, which is then criticized as an evidence of superficial nature of ties. Chinese are in a comparatively better position to understand Pakistani culture as English is used for official communication, but Pakistanis lack this edge because it is hard to understand Chinese culture without having an ability to comprehend Mandarin. However, despite these hindrances, the inter-societal linkages have grown with time as the two sides, being cognizant of the issue have efficiently directed efforts towards minimizing this communication gap.

China has done its part to address the issue by establishing Confucius institutes. Founded by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), these are non-profit public institutes which work for promotion of Chinese language and culture in all parts of the world.²⁴ The Confucius institutes are therefore considered an effective instrument for expanding Chinese influence across the globe.²⁵ Pakistan is no exception where the first Confucius Institute was established in 2005 in the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad; also the first of its kind in Muslim world. The institute has been efficiently serving the purpose of its existence. Hundreds of graduating students are eligible for admission in Chinese universities and for jobs in Chinese companies operating in Pakistan. The institute has stood out three times as the "Confucius Institute of the Year", in 2007, 2008 and 2010.²⁶ Apart from Cultural activities, 27 teaching centers are functioning across Pakistan under its sponsorship, with a total enrollment of about 6000.²⁷ Impressed by this tremendous success, Premier Le Keqiang signed up for establishing a second Confucius Institute in 2013²⁸, founded in Karachi University in 2014. The third one was established at the University of Faisalabad in

²⁴ "Confucius Institute Headquarters (Hanban)," <http://english.hanban.org/>.

²⁵ Sirirat Ngamsang and John Walsh, "Confucius Institutes as Instruments of Soft Power: Comparison with International Rivals," *Journal of Education and Vocational Research*, 4, no. 10 (October 2013): 302-310.

²⁶ "Confucius Institute," National University of Modern Languages, <http://numl.edu.pk/International%20Collaboration.aspx>.

²⁷ <http://numl.info/confucius-institute-islamabad.aspx>, (accessed September 9, 2015).

²⁸ A. S. Khan, "Geo-Economic Imperatives of Gwadar Sea Port and Kashgar Economic Zone," *IPRI Journal*. 13, no. 2 (2013).

2015.²⁹

Pakistan's Government has proposed to incorporate Chinese language as a part of the education system to prepare future generations for a more fruitful interaction with China. In 2012, the 'Education and Literacy Department' of the Sindh Government initiated a Chinese language course for the in-service public-sector teachers.³⁰ Next year, the Sindh government announced plans to make Chinese courses a compulsory part of curriculum from 6th Grade onwards (though not implemented so far). Explaining the rationale, Education Minister Pir Mazhar-ul-Haq said that amid increasing multi-dimensional bilateral collaboration, our younger generation needs, "*to have command over their (Chinese) language*".³¹

It was further proposed to incentivize students for learning Chinese by giving extra scores, scholarships and foreign visit opportunities. A strategic decision was made when Chinese language courses were made a mandatory part of the Cadet Colleges' curriculum. In 2013, Sindh government decided to promote Chinese courses in Cadet College Petaro along with the ordinary schools.³² This was a significant move because Cadet Colleges serve as breeding grounds for training the potential armed forces aspirants. Therefore, such a policy would provide our future passing-out batches with personnel capable of effectively communicating with their Chinese counterparts, thus ensuring well-thought and efficient correspondence in crucial defense and security matters.

All means at government's disposal have been utilized to promote Chinese language education in Pakistan. To this end, media and education have been interlinked in the first ever private sector initiative for teaching Chinese; a joint effort undertaken by China Radio International (CRI) in China and Roots Millennium Schools (RMS) in Pakistan. Under this CRI-RMS consortium, the CRI-Roots Confucius Classroom was launched in 2011³³ for teaching Chinese language to school kids from Grade 1-7. Native

²⁹ "Chinese Confucius Institute Starts Functioning at UAF," *The Patriot*, January 13, 2015, [http://dailythepatriot.com/chinese-confucius-institute-starts-functioning-at-uaf/](http://dailythepatriot.com/chinese-confucius-institute-starts-functioning-at-uaf)

³⁰ Muhammad Arif and Bai Gui, 21.

³¹ "Sindh to Teach Chinese Language in Schools from 2013," *Dawn*, September 11, 2014, <http://www.dawn.com/news/656505/sindh-to-teach-chinese-language-in-schools-from-2013>.

³² "Sindh Govt. Unveils Ambitious Plan to Teach Mandarin," *The Express Tribune*, September 5, 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/244885/look-whos-talking-sindh-govt-unveils-ambitious-plan-to-teach-mandarin/>

³³ "China Radio International CRI-Roots Confucius Classroom Celebrated Chinese Lunar New Year," February 2, 2014, <http://pk.chineseembassy.org/eng/zbqx/t1128236.htm>.

Chinese teachers were invited for teaching Chinese to around 3000 students as a part of their structured academic curriculum.³⁴ Karachi Campus of the Bahria University and Edu-Tek Institute of Professional Studies also offer Chinese language for higher education in Karachi. Talking of Media's role, the Urdu Service of China Radio International broadcasts Chinese language content to listeners across Pakistan, especially appealing to those in rural areas. The role of Media and communication technology in promoting the E-learning of Chinese Language can be seen in the first-ever video-based Chinese language program, initiated by NUML, promoting distant-learning via internet.

Allama Iqbal Open University (AIU), a leading distant-learning institute has signed an MOU with Yunnan Open University of China for establishing a 'Chinese language teaching center'.³⁵ In 2014, the Pak-China Institute (PCI), in association with the Confucius institute at NUML, launched an 'Online Chinese learning program'³⁶, where lectures were transmitted through video-conferencing to universities across Pakistan. Based on its success, the two organizers signed an MOU on June 20, 2014 for institutionalizing and regularizing the whole process.³⁷ The Cultural Section of the Chinese Embassy in Islamabad has shown considerable activism for promoting public interaction. Ambassador's Wife, Bao Jiqing, who heads the Chinese Embassy Women Group, started the China Culture Camp in 2014³⁸, which attracted around 40 students to attend courses on Chinese language, music and traditional calligraphy.

Political Commitment: The Cornerstone of China's Influence in Pakistan

Although, the above-mentioned initiatives have contributed in deepening the China-Pakistan relations, these are not the sole determinants of China's influence in Pakistan as these efforts date back to recent past only, whereas, China's positive image in Pakistan is not a recent thing. Pakistanis have long held a favorable image of China and that

³⁴ Muhammad Arif and Bai Gui, "Role of Chinese Language in Pakistan China Relations," 22.

³⁵ "AIU to Establish First Chinese Language Center," *Daily Times*, June 20, 2014, <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/islamabad/20-Jun-2014/aiou-to-establish-first-chinese-language-centre>.

³⁶ "Promotion of Chinese Language," *Pakistan-China Institute*, <http://www.pakistan-china.com/promotion-of-chinese-language.php>.

³⁷ "Confucius Institute, Pakistan China Institute Sign MOU for Online Chinese Language program," *Nihao-Salam*, June 20, 2014, <http://www.nihao-salam.com/news-detail.php?id=NjYxNA==>.

³⁸ Muhammad Arif and Bai Gui, "Role of Chinese Language in Pakistan China Relations."

has been a constant trend. Opinion polls suggest that Pakistan is one of the most pro-China countries in the world³⁹. In 2008, when global opinions regarding China were generally less favorable, 76% Pakistanis viewed it positively.⁴⁰ The Pew Survey in 2010 found 85% of the respondents had favorable views about China, whereas in comparison, only 16% had similar views about US.⁴¹ More recently, in 2015, 53% of Pakistanis thought that China has or will in future replace US as the Superpower.⁴² These persistently positive perceptions of China in Pakistan cannot be attributed solely to public diplomacy, though it might have contributed its share.

Besides the strategic-economic symbiosis and the efforts at socio-cultural intermingling, it is the '*unstrained political commitment*' of Pakistan and China towards each other irrespective of changing circumstances that is the centrepiece of their relationship. A deeper analysis reveals that both have remained committed to their strategic partnership and supported each other amid tense situations; both have stood by the other's side in the hours of need, thereby showing the strength of their ties. Pakistan sided with China in 1960s and early 1970s when the latter suffered an international isolation. Pakistan also played a diplomatic conduit between China and other parties, resulting in normalization and successful negotiations in the case of US⁴³, Saudi Arabia and Afghan Taliban respectively.

Likewise, China never fell short of Pakistan's expectations in the times of need, contrary to the general 'public theatrics' that have "*been a poor indicator of the underlying substance*"⁴⁴ of these ties. China's support was there whenever Pakistan faced hardships or international pressures. China's support remained unchanged during repeated tenures of political instability in Pakistan. China was Pakistan's only reliable source of military hardware in 1990s after it faced Western sanctions because of concerns

³⁹ D. Chandra, *China-Pakistan relations: Implications for India* (New Delhi: Vij Books India Private Limited, 2016), 15-40.

⁴⁰ "Global Economic Gloom – China And India Notable Exceptions," *Pew Research Center*, June 12, 2008, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2008/06/12/chapter-3-views-of-china/>.

⁴¹ "Views of China," *Pew Research Center*, June 17, 2010, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2010/06/17/chapter-5-views-of-china/>.

⁴² "Views of China and the Global Balance of Power," *Pew Research Center*, June 23, 2015, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/06/23/2-views-of-china-and-the-global-balance-of-power/>.

⁴³ "Rapprochement with China, 1972," *Office of the Historian – United States Department of State*, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1969-1976/rapprochement-china> (accessed September 23, 2016).

⁴⁴ Andrew Small, "China-Pakistan: A Strategic Relationship in the Shadows," *Yale Global*, April 7, 2015.

over its nuclear program. The MOU sanctioning the production of JF-17 Thunder was signed in 1995.⁴⁵ Also, when Pervez Musharraf toppled the democratically elected government, Premier Zhou Rongji reiterated China's unfettered support by saying that a military government would not affect Pak-China relations.⁴⁶ A decade later, when international pressures mounted against Pakistan after Bin Laden's killing on the Pakistani soil, Wen Jiabao reinforced China's commitment by saying that irrespective of the changing international situations, "*China and Pakistan will remain forever good neighbors, good friends, good partners and good brothers*".⁴⁷

Besides the inter-governmental sphere, China has successfully shown its commitment to the 'People of Pakistan' too and that seems to have made a real difference. After the earthquake in Pakistan in 2005, China was among the first countries to help with \$6.2 million provided in aid in the first week; the total package was around \$20.5 million.⁴⁸ China's help was especially appreciated by people in badly hit areas. Cabinet Secretary Ejaz Rahim stated that, "*the tremendous work the Chinese rescue team has done in Balakot*"⁴⁹ cannot be forgotten; Chinese teams saved hundreds of lives in that area in harsh conditions. When the Pakistani nation was hit by floods in 2010, China again was amongst the first ones to help. In addition to financial aid, expert medical teams were sent too. China provided \$250 million⁵⁰ in aid; the largest ever to a foreign country and one to which Chinese society and common people greatly contributed.

Apart from disaster-relief assistance China has been among the biggest investors in commercial and development projects in Pakistan. It has invested in fields critical for long-term prosperity of Pakistani people - renewable energy projects for meeting Pakistan's rising energy demands being one.⁵¹ China has tremendously contributed to research and

⁴⁵ "JF-17 Thunder-Program," *Global Security*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/china/fc-1-program.htm> (accessed September 18, 2016).

⁴⁶ "Musharraf Assured of China's Support," BBC News, January 18, 2000, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/606773.stm.

⁴⁷ James Lamont and Farhan Bokhari, "China and Pakistan: An Alliance is Built," *The Big read*, June 30, 2011, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/417a48c4-a34d-11e0-8d6d-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3mgB5efHE>.

⁴⁸ <http://img.static.reliefweb.int/report/> (accessed November 1, 2015).

⁴⁹ "China's Aid to Pakistan Exceeds \$20 Million," Embassy of the People's Republic of China, October 30, 2005, <http://pk.chineseembassy.org/eng/nyddz/t219068.htm>.

⁵⁰ "China Pledges \$250m Flood Aid to Pakistan," *China Daily*, December 18, 2010, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2010wenindia/2010-12/18/content_11721909.htm.

⁵¹ Sarah Oliver, "What Chinese Investment could Mean for Pakistan," *Peterson Institute for International Economics*, May 22, 2015.

development in diverse fields including fisheries, agriculture, telecommunications, infrastructure development, heavy industries, mineral exploration, and many more, ultimately affecting peoples' lives. Also Chinese companies and corporations are not restricted to specific areas; instead their collaboration has aided Pakistan's government in promoting development in far-flung and previously ignored parts of the country. Around 120 Chinese companies and 20,000 nationals are helping the government in alleviating the standard of living across the country.⁵² This is an influential factor for the people of an unevenly developed country like Pakistan, hence promoting greater appeal for China.

It is imperative to mention that all national policies are guided by national interests, and China is no exception. Believing that China intends to help Pakistan without seeking anything in return would be irrational. But the favorable public opinion that China enjoys in Pakistan shows that its interests have been aligned with those of Pakistan and its people. China has dovetailed its policies with those of Pakistan's government in regards to the well-being and sustainability of Pakistani people. Substantial Chinese investment in development-infrastructure projects like Gwadar deep-sea port, Karakorum Highway and construction of dams (strategic significance withstanding) greatly facilitate common people by providing employment opportunities, technical expertise, faster transportation etc. Such investment is central to raising the over-all standard of living in the otherwise neglected and under-developed areas like Baluchistan and Gilgit-Baltistan.⁵³

Addressing the Claims against Chinese Influence in Pakistan

All the above mentioned aspects of China's engagement with Pakistan add up to determine China's influence in the country. As discussed, Public Diplomacy has played a positive role in bridging the socio-cultural gaps by bringing the two peoples closer but it is not the sole reason for cordial relations. Instead "*unshaken political commitment*" displayed in both intangible and tangible ways such as aid, investment, disaster relief, development funds, moral/political support etc. has ensured this cordiality. Critics assert that since economic carrots and strategic incentives are main drivers of China-Pakistan ties, there are clear limits to China's influence in Pakistan; they believe it to be predominantly

⁵² Jafar Riaz Kataria and Anum Naveed, "Pakistan-China Social and Economic Relations," *South Asian Studies*, 29, no.2 (Fall 2014): 395-410.

⁵³ Anwesha Ray Chaudhuri, "India and the Pakistan-China Nexus in Gilgit-Baltistan," *Institute of Defense Studies and Analysis*, March 16, 2011, http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/IndiaandthePakistanChinaNexusinGilgitBaltistan_archaudhuri_160311.html.

coercive in nature rather than being based on China's charm offensive and popular appeal with people of Pakistan.⁵⁴

Although the evidence of positive public perception about China in Pakistan is enough to challenge the validity of these claims, they still need a detailed deliberation. Most of the arguments criticizing China's lasting and effective influence in partner countries are based on the narrow understanding of the concept of soft power. These claims say that China lacks in terms of soft power⁵⁵ because what it calls soft power does not fit Western-originated definitions of the concept – according to which Chinese influence and its appeal with other nations needs to be based on its values, culture, foreign policy and ideas⁵⁶ rather than on its economic power. This is primarily because Joseph Nye's definition categorizes economic means as hard power source. In fact, such claims are ill conceived in their ignorance to the hard-to-generalize particularities of each case.

Such claims can be countered if US soft power or global appeal is taken as a standard, it manifests that hard and soft power are not completely isolated from each other. US soft power at the end of Cold War was largely a bi-product of the country's efficient utilization of its hard power resources since the end of WW-II. After 1945, a greater part of debilitated war-torn Europe turned towards US not because of its cultural or ideological appeal or people to people contacts, but because US was able and willing to provide for their utmost needs, i.e. resources for rebuilding their societies and states. The US' ability to provide public goods gradually increased its appeal across Europe⁵⁷ and Public diplomacy only had a latent and minimal role in the process, similar to what it seems to play in China-Pakistan equation. So, US economic (hard) power had set the base for its lasting appeal/influence with people in all parts of the world.⁵⁸

This finding implies that claims over China's lack of influence do not follow a logical path of reasoning because *what, how and why influences states is not a constant for all states*. Different states get influenced by different things based on their discrete identities and

⁵⁴ Lisa Curtis and Derek Scissor, "The Limits of the Pakistan-China Alliance," *The Heritage Foundation*, January 19, 2012.

⁵⁵ David Feith, "China's Soft Power Problem," *The Wall Street Journal*, December 17, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-soft-power-problem-1450376440>.

⁵⁶ Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (Autumn 1990): 153-171.

⁵⁷ David Stein, "An Enduring Tradition: 'Hard Power' Support for 'Soft Power,'" *US Global Leadership Coalition*, July 2, 2015, <http://www.usglc.org/2015/07/02/an-enduring-tradition-hard-power-support-for-soft-power/>.

⁵⁸ Zachary Keck, "The Hard Side of Soft Power," *The Diplomat*, July 24, 2013, <https://thediplomat.com/2013/07/the-hard-side-of-soft-power/>

particular interests determined by these identities. So, factors influencing each state will vary with distinct identity and interests, varying from state to state. This explains why the instruments of influence differ for the developing and developed states. For instance, developed states committed to greater social welfare would prefer engagement with actors having similar ideals and normative orientation and not those offering economic dividends at the cost of the former two. Contrarily, the developing countries would have an appeal for influx of funds and aid, which contributes to their ultimate goal of greater development. So, what influences states depends on their needs and interests, which in turn are determined by their identities. That explains why China's economic diplomacy with the developing world acts as a public diplomacy tool - promoting a positive image - but its much larger economic interdependence with Japan does not contribute to that end.⁵⁹

Lastly, talking of public diplomacy in general and China-Pakistan's case in particular, it must be remembered that it is not an end in itself, rather is a means to the end. The end goal here is to have a positive image in the perceptions of your counterparts' public and durable inter-state relations as a consequence of that. As far as the employable means are concerned, public diplomacy is just one of them. Therefore, no established protocols and strict rules exist regarding its conduct; instead, a concept of 'Public Diplomacy Enlightenment'⁶⁰ is relevant in this regard. This concept considers this age of public diplomacy synonymous to that of Enlightenment, where people knew what they wanted to renounce and what to seek instead, but lacked a set pattern to that end. Therefore, actors adopted diverse ways convenient to each for seeking that end. Public diplomacy is comparable as the end goals are known but no definite blueprint exists for reaching there; so, states utilize whatever means suit them.

The above discussion shows that states are not to be blamed for not following the ideal pattern because firstly, none exists, and secondly all states have different experiences in the fields of soft power and public diplomacy. Moreover, just because economic and strategic aspects supersede the socio-cultural ones in bilateral ties doesn't mean that the ties are not durable and the public perceptions are not positive. Same is the logic behind China's influence in Pakistan, where political commitment, both material and non-material, has been the prime binding force between them. In this particular case, the longevity of the ties is seen

⁵⁹ Jean-Pierre Lehmann, "Economic Ties Won't Ensure Peace between China and Japan," *East Asia Forum*, November 3, 2015, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/11/03/economic-ties-wont-ensure-peace-between-china-and-japan/>

⁶⁰ Andrew Kneale, "The Public Diplomacy Enlightenment," *The Journal of Public Diplomacy*, (Fall 2010), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/48334309_Not_quite_the_sum_of_its_parts_Public_diplomacy_from_an_Australian_perspective.

from the fact that the two sides did not give up collaboration even in the instance of differences over certain matters.

For instance, China has been concerned about rising extremism in Pakistan which it fears can inflame the Uighur separatist movement in Xinjiang; it also publicly expressed concern over killing and abduction of Chinese citizens by Pakistani militants;⁶¹ and its stance regarding Kashmir issue has been relatively neutral. Critics point towards these differences as indicators of tactical and fragile nature of the Pak-China relations. What critics fail to see is that differences have not overshadowed cooperation, and that both sides correspond and talk over the issues for addressing the other's concerns - ensuring that minor disagreements do not downgrade the decades long amity and geniality. This shows the level of trust between the two, rooted in strong political commitment, making the two believe in peaceful intentions of the other. That China has supported Pakistan in tough times without heeding to Western criticisms shows its level of commitment to Pakistan and that is why, "*Pakistan considers China as its most reliable and time tested friend*".⁶²

Generous financial help is one part of this commitment, but not the determining aspect. If wide scale economic engagement was the main reason for influencing perceptions, appeal for the US would surpass China's since US financial aid to Pakistan outnumbers Chinese aid and investment.⁶³ The level of trust between the parties plays a role in determining such outcomes. It can thus be established that China's influence in Pakistan results from its foreign policy ideals, values and sense of commitment. Chinese principles of 'respect for sovereignty' and 'non-interference' in the domestic affairs of other states makes it easier for Pakistan and most other developing states to engage with China. These principles make China appear more open to understand constraints of developing states. Such an appearance allows China to create a larger appeal in general publics, when compared to those who spend more money but also impose their ideals upon others. Its for this reason that Senator Hussain Haqqani said that even though both the US and China are

⁶¹ "Pakistan Faces Chinese Fury over Abductions and Killing of its Citizens," *The Hindu*, February 29, 2012, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistan-faces-chinese-fury-over-abductions-and-killing-of-its-citizens/article2946137.ece>.

⁶² T. Mahmood, "Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Quarterly Survey," *Pakistan Institute of International Affairs* 53, no. 2/3 (Spring 2000), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41393955>.

⁶³ Daniel Wagner, "Message to Pakistan: China Will Not Replace U.S. Aid," *The Huffington Post*, May 18, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-wagner/message-to-pakistan_b_863518.html.

crucial for Pakistan but if forced to choose, Pakistan “would probably choose China”.⁶⁴

Recent Trends: The CPEC and Public Diplomacy

Recently, Pakistan-China relations have been overwhelmed by China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – an endeavor worth around \$46 billion⁶⁵ and considered an integral component of China’s over-all ‘Belt and Road Initiative’. To align Pakistan with this inter and intraregional connectivity belt, the two sides have signed MOUs on a number of energy and infrastructure projects spread across the entire 3000 km long corridor running from Gwadar in Pakistan to Kashghar in China’s Xinjiang province. The projects within envision setting up efficient transportation and communication infrastructure for facilitation of trade, commerce and transit activities.⁶⁶ CPEC has been widely hailed by Pakistani state and society ever since its proposal as it cautiously dovetails China’s interests with the development needs of Pakistani people and thus, has increased China’s appeal within Pakistan. CPEC is taken to be an epitome of China’s commitment to Pakistan, especially at a time when Pakistan faced severe concerns over insecure and non-conducive investment environment.⁶⁷

Efforts are underway to spread public awareness about it since the success of such megaprojects depends on public partnership. Even though the project is predominantly economic in nature, it does have an associated public diplomacy component. To that end, national broadcasting services from the two sides are cooperating for a coherent media campaign to amass public support for CPEC. CCTV news and documentary programs are being re-broadcasted in Pakistan. More than 300 officials from think-tanks and social organizations participated in the CPEC Forum held in August 2015.⁶⁸ Both sides have signed collaboration

⁶⁴ Jamal Afridi and Jayshree Bajoria, “China-Pakistan Relations,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, July 6, 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-pakistan-relations/p10070>.

⁶⁵ “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor an ‘Inspiring Model’: Pakistan PM Nawaz Sharif,” *The Economic Times*, September 27, 2015, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/china-pakistan-economic-corridor-an-inspiring-model-pakistan-pm-nawaz-sharif/articleshow/49124448.cms>.

⁶⁶ Tahir Dhindsa, “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Geo-Economic Initiative,” *Sustainable Development Policy Institute*, March 7, 2016.

⁶⁷ “No New Foreign Investor Entered Pakistan in Recent Years: OICCI,” *Dawn*, March 26, 2015.

⁶⁸ Shannon Tiezzi, “The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Gets Even More Ambitious,” *The Diplomat*, August 13, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor-gets-even-more-ambitious/>

agreements in diverse fields ranging from energy and power projects to trade and industry. Investing in these fields directly influences/facilitates the common people, affecting their perceptions and building a popular support for the entire initiative.

Senator Mushahid Hussain, the founding Chairman of the Pakistan-China Institute said that all parts and parties of Pakistan fully support China's initiative as generally beneficial. To ensure the peoples' participation, a Parliamentary Oversight Committee has been established to ensure transparency and participation of the local communities.⁶⁹ He believed that CPEC's success is guaranteed as it will change people's lives for better. The public has viewed CPEC very positively as it promises to promote development and prosperity in previously neglected and long-underdeveloped regions; the people really look forward towards being alleviated.

Chinese side has assured of such dividends; Ji Ping, Deputy Director of the Chinese Peace Development Foundation (CPDF) said that once completed, it would provide jobs to "the people of Gwadar"⁷⁰ as Baluchistan will become a trading hub. NGOs operating there are also trying to develop social sector. Chairman CPDF, B. Zhong, reiterated the commitment to social prosperity by promising "*quality education and health facilities*" to the people of the province⁷¹. Local representative of the people of Gwadar, Chairman Municipal Committee welcomed and reassured Chinese delegation of the public support by saying that people in the deprived port City, being happy with the work of Chinese, will welcome even greater number of Chinese firms.⁷²

CPEC is predominantly an economic connectivity project linked to the broader 'BRI' initiative, it has other distinct facets linked to people of Pakistan. For succeeding, CPEC needs a conducive environment for which local awareness and social relevance is required; its efficient completion and long-term success brings public diplomacy component into focus. In addition to building energy and communication infrastructure crucial to the needs of Pakistani people, China's investment in social services is trying to make the public a stakeholder in the entire process. The project will make the people across borders more connected, leading to positive opinion-building in the long run.

⁶⁹ "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Benefit all Regions in Pakistan: Pakistani Senator," *English.news.cn*, June 10, 2015, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2015-06/10/c_134312003.htm.

⁷⁰ "Balochistan Development: Economic Corridor will Ensure Jobs, Says Ji Ping," *The Express Tribune*, August 1, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/930281/balochistan-development-economic-corridor-will-ensure-jobs-says-ji-ping/>

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

Although concerns and skepticism over CPEC and its lopsided benefits for Pakistan and China exist in parallel and are also genuine and well-thought-out ones, but these still make a fraction of the whole. At the broader-national level CPEC is believed to be a game-changer for Pakistan and its people, especially for those in Baluchistan and Gwadar. Therefore, CPEC will remain an important part of the entire China-Pakistan public diplomacy debate in future, or to say, PD is inherently linked to the success of CPEC.

Conclusion

This paper has critically evaluated the public diplomacy aspect of China-Pakistan relations in order to gauge the extent of influence that China enjoys in Pakistan. Public Diplomacy is an evolving field - not yet mature; a means to an end; and improvement and durability of inter-state relations are the ends it seeks. Public diplomacy, being a recent phenomenon, is not a determining variable in Pak-China relations as they have sustained for around five decades.

The criticisms claiming China's influence in Pakistan to be tactical and short-lived are ill-founded at best. Just because Chinese influence in Pakistan has a definitional mismatch with the Western conceptions of influence/appeal or soft power, it does not downplay China's soft power or influence in Pakistan or other states. This is because what influences states varies from state to state, as the state identities and interests vary. So, even though public diplomacy efforts have existed between China-Pakistan, the fundamental strength of bilateral equation and of China's influence lies in its *unfettered political commitment* to Pakistan and its people.

In the evolving context of CPEC, which aligns economic interconnectedness to development interests of Pakistani people, Public diplomacy needs to be interwoven with economics to generate popular support and appeal to facilitate the long-term success of the entire endeavour. Greater investment in Public diplomacy is needed to build on the political commitment that has been the main reason for Chinese influence in Pakistan so far.

