

Regional Railway Integration of Pakistan through CPEC: Impacts on Market Economy within the Balochistan Province

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This study has no aim to hurt any ideological or social segment but is purely based on academic purposes.

Abstract

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) emerges not solely as a conduit linking Pakistan and China but as a far-reaching endeavor aspiring to interconnect diverse East Asian, Southeast Asian, Central Asian, Eurasian and Middle Eastern nations through a complex network of road, railway and maritime routes. Within this expansive paradigm, Pakistan Railways propounds a series of strategic initiatives under the CPEC umbrella. These encompass proposals for the refinement of extant railway infrastructure, notably the Pak-Iran Railway Track (ML-4), and the conception of new railway tracks within the national domain. Additionally, propositions for establishing railway links with China and Afghanistan are articulated. This study accentuates the pivotal role of Balochistan within the pantheon of CPEC railway projects. The envisioned linkage of Basima, Mastung, Kalat, Panjgur, Turbet, Khuzdar, Pasni, Ormara, Gwadar and Zhob to the extant railway lattice in Pakistan is scrutinized for its potential to rapidly galvanize local markets and industries within the Balochistan region. The study further anticipates transformative effects stemming from the enhancement of the Pak-Iran railway track and the extension of the Rohri-Chaman track towards Kandahar and, subsequently, Turkmenistan, visualizing each railway station as an emergent international marketplace poised to impact the local sociocultural fabric. Nevertheless, a conspicuous impediment manifests in the form of a “difference in gauge” within these railway projects, positing that the unaddressed intricacies of gauge incongruity present formidable barriers to the seamless integration of Pakistan Railway with Iranian, Afghan or Chinese Railway systems. Addressing this conundrum is imperative for the efficacious realization of these ambitious transnational railway activities.

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Introduction

The prime motive of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is to connect China with Pakistan and then towards Afghanistan and Iran. For this purpose, China and Pakistan have proposed massive extensions of exiting road and railway infrastructure. Connectivity between China and Pakistan railways is although one

and the foremost plan but this connectivity has further plan to extend towards Iran and Afghanistan. For this purpose, both countries jointly intended to take numerous initiatives where Balochistan has the core status due to strategic location (CPEC, 2021).

At the time of independence, Pakistan Railways was linked with India¹ and Iran² but later, different sorts of issues disturbed or forced to stop railway service between respective countries (Pakistan-Railways, 2019). As Post-1947 railway structure in Pakistan has been divided into four main lines and twenty branch lines, firstly, Pakistan Railways has planned to upgrade all the existing tracks³ while; the next target is to construct new railway tracks. This process would not only boost Pakistan Railways as the once again efficient, reliable and secure tool in logistics⁴ but provide accelerated regional connectivity with Afghanistan⁵, China⁶ and Iran (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

By investigates different surveys for Sindh-Pishin Railway (1879-1885), Kandahar State Railway (1881-1885) and Trans-Balochistan Railway (1902-1905) during British Indian times, this study observes that prime motive of installing railway structure in the province was not only to explore local markets (and their future potential) but to link them with mainstream railway network within British India regarding managing flow of products and materials from sources to the users. Currently, the major portion of Sindh-Pishin Railway is known as ML-3 while, Trans-Balochistan Railway (including Noshki Extension Railway) has been renamed with ML-4. Other the other hand, Kandahar State Railway has been abundant (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

¹ Although, Post-1947 railway structure in Pakistan connects the country with India via branch lines of Hyderabad-Khokhrapar, Samasata-Amruka, Lahore-Wagah and Narowal-Chak Amru, but now, rail service between both countries is only continued through Lahore-Wagah branch line that links Lahore to Amritsar (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

² Till 1990s, Quetta to Taftan (and then Zahedan) railway track was the major source of trade between Iran and Pakistan but later, security conditions as well as issues in track fitness reduced mutual trade between both countries via this track. In January 2018, a meeting between Zahedan Railways Director General; Majid Arjouni and Board Secretary of Pakistan Railways; Zubair Shafi Ghouri was held where decision about starting 15 freight trains between Quetta and Zahedan on the demand of business community. Moreover, both countries also decided to restore passenger trains from Quetta to Qom and Mashhad for pilgrims. However, these decisions could not be implemented yet (Ahmad, 2018).

³ Initially, Pakistan Railways has to upgrade all the four main lines where Karachi-Peshawar railway track (ML-1) has been upgraded in 2020 for enhancement of trains' speed up to 160 kilometer per hour whereas; upgradation of Main Line 02 (Kotri to Attock, also called ML-2), Main Line 03 (Rohri to Chaman, also known as ML-3), Main Line 04 (Quetta to Taftan and then Zahedan, usually discussed as Pak-Iran Railway Track or ML-4) and other branch lines is still pending (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

⁴ David L. Cahill says that the logistics is a part of supply chain management that controls, implements and plans the efficient, effective and reverse flow of storage of goods, services and related information between point of origin and point of consumption in order to meet the requirements of the customers (Cahill, 2006, P.20).

⁵ Pakistan Railways has proposed connectivity with Afghanistan via Chaman-Kandahar Railway Track and Landi Kotal-Jalalabad Railway Track (Dawn, 2003).

⁶ As Branch line from Taxila to Havelian has been proposed for extension towards Khunjerab and then Kashgar regarding connecting with Chinese Railway. This extension will be called ML-5 or Khunjerab Railway. Expected date of this railway track will be the end of 2030. Cost of this track will be almost \$12 billion. Feasibility report of this track has been finalized by an Austrian Engineering Firm TBAC in 2008 (CPEC-Info, 2017).

This study firstly looks at which markets and industries in Balochistan have been linked with ML-3 and ML-4. This analysis further motivates the study to know about emergence of new markets by construction of new railway tracks within Balochistan under CPEC that would boost as well as internationalize local markets and industries.

So, the markets and industries associated with ML-3 are the next subject of this study.

Markets associated with ML-3 or Rohri-Chaman Railway Track

Rohri-Chaman Railway Track begins from Rohri Junction and go to an end towards Chaman Railway Station through crossing historical Bolan Pass. This line is maintained and operated by Pakistan Railways. It has 35 railway stations from Rohri to Chaman. From Rohri Junction, this track passes from Sukkur, Arian Road, Gosarji, Habib Kot, Shikarpur, Sultankot, Abad and Jacobabad Junction within Sindh, and then enters in Balochistan from Dera Allah Yar city. Although, within Balochistan, track links with 38 other railway stations that have been connected with somewhat small, medium or large-scale markets/industries (IPFS, 2019). However, this study looks at some significant markets/industries in this regard.

1) Sibi Junction

Sibi has the significant role in provincial as well as national economic growth due to its famous livestock market and tourism-based economy. Several tourist spots like Sibi Fort, Victoria Hall (also called jirgha Hall), Nari Gauge, Sohbat Sarai, Sibi Mela and Baba Hotel attract thousands of tourists not only from entire Pakistan but around the globe. Similarly, thousands of local and foreign visitors visit shrines and tombs located in respective city⁷. For visiting respective places, visitors usually prefer Pakistan Railways (Travel-Culture, 2019).

2) Mushkaf

This city is famous for wheat cultivation and cattle industry. Pakistan Railway also provides cargo service to the people belong to respective businesses (Pakistan-Railways, Freight Trains, 2019).

3) Mach

Mach is well-renowned city in entire world because of coal reservoirs. Coal from Mach is supplied not only within Pakistan but also export towards Iran, Afghanistan and other countries around the globe. Moreover, Pakistan Railways also provides special cargo service to this industry (Pakistan-Railways, Freight Trains, 2019).

4) Quetta

Because of having the status of capital, Quetta has the biggest market of dry fruits and carpets/rugs among all the other cities within the province. Moreover, city has also tourism-based economy due to Hanna Lake and Wali Tangi Natural Park whereas; Pakistan Railways plays a vital role in facilitating tourists and traders for their arrival in this city (Travel-Culture, 2019).

⁷ Most visiting places in Sibi are the shrines of Haji Humbal, Pir Akhwand Kurak, Pir Bukhari and Baidaari Baba.

5) Killa Abdullah

Killa Abdullah is basically a fort of Sardar Abdullah Khan Ahmadzai (Khan of Qalat) whereas; this city has tourism-based economy due to famous Khojak Tunnel. For visiting this tunnel, tourists usually prefer train traveling (Balochistan, 2019).

6) Shela Bagh

This railway station is also known as the gateway for Khojak Tunnel, and, majority of tourists visit this place only by Pakistan Railways (IPFS, 2019).

7) Chaman

Chaman is considered as the gateway of trade between Pakistan and Afghanistan. From this railway station, Pakistani industries are associated with Afghan markets whereas; by this railway station, Afghan goods are supplied in entire Pakistan via cargo trains (IPFS, 2019).

Like ML-3, ML-4 has also been associated with several small, medium or large-scale industries/businesses that are being discussed below;

Markets associated with Main Line 04 (ML-4 or Quetta-Taftan Railway Track)

Quetta-Taftan Railway Line starts from Quetta and ends in Iran (at Zahedan Railway Station). This railway line is also maintained and operated by Pakistan Railways, having length up to 325 kilometres with 23 railway stations from Quetta to Taftan (the last railway station at Pak-Iran border) (Revolvy, 2019).

From Quetta to Sar-i-Ab and Spezand Junction, this track links with ML-3. However, from Spezand, it moves towards the border of Iran. Till 1990s, almost all the major railway stations at this track had been involved in trading activities between both countries. Although, security conditions and issues of track fitness discouraged traders for replacing cargo trains by road transportation during 21st century, but it does not mean that markets associated with this track have lost their trade potential and economic worth (Ahmad, 2018). Therefore, this study now tries to explore noteworthy markets at this track.

1) Mastung

This city has major share in export of dates and carpets from Pakistan. This is because majority of inhabitants in this city belongs to either dates farming or carpet industry (Pakistan-Railways, Freight Trains, 2019).

2) Sheikh Wasil

This city is well-renowned for cattle industry whereas; dates farming and carpet industry has also vital share in provincial and national economic growth. On the other hand, tourists visit this city for visiting mysterious cages (Pakistan-Railways, Freight Trains, 2019).

3) Nushki

Nushki is one of the biggest markets at this track after Quetta and Mastung. Traders and farmers from other cities of Balochistan come here for sale their products (like carpets/rugs, fruits, vegetables, dates and other crops). Pakistan Railways also facilitates traders and farmers for supplying respective commodities from this railway station to entire country and to Iran (Revolvy, 2019).

4) Ahmedwal

Fruits market of Ahmedwal is famous in all over the country (Pakistan-Railways, Freight Trains, 2019).

5) Padag Road

There are lot of dates' gardens along with both sides of Pak-Iran highway and Quetta-Taftan Railway Track (Pakistan-Railways, Freight Trains, 2019).

6) Dalbandin

Dalbandin is also one of the major markets in Balochistan. This city has lot of fruits orchards. Not only by trains but by air trafficking, fruits are supplied in all over the country (Revolvy, 2019).

7) Nok Kundi

Nok Kundi is popular for cattle industry as well as dairy products. Not only sheep, goats, and cows but dairy products from this city are supplied in whole province and whole country (Revolvy, 2019).

8) Koh-e-Taftan

This is the last railway station at this track on Pakistani side, having a worthy status among logistics industry of Pakistan. Export and import between Pakistan and Iran via Pakistan Railways is managed as well as looked after from this railway station. (Revolvy, 2019).

There are three more railway stations (Mirjaveh, Khan Muhammad Chah and Zahedan) at this track where Pakistan Railways has an authority to administrate affairs of Mirjaveh Railway Station and Khan Muhammad Chah Railway Station while, Iranian security forces are responsible for their security. However, cargo services within Iran are available on this track only at Zahedan Railway Station and Mirjaveh Railway Station (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

Now, the study moves towards investigating different proposals for constructing new railway tracks within Balochistan under CPEC.

Proposals for Constructing New Railway Tracks within Balochistan

Construction of new railway tracks or upgradation of existing railway tracks within Balochistan facilitates provincial as well as national economy in different ways like;

- New tracks would connect not only Gwadar Port but Pasni and Ormara seaports with entire country and with Afghanistan, China and Iran. Moreover, respective tracks would facilitate local

markets of Basima, Gwadar, Kalat, Khuzdar, Mastung, Panjgur, Pasni and Turbat to be internationalized by regional connectivity (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

- Same principle will have to be applied upon ML-3 and ML-4. Local markets linked with respective tracks would be internationalized in case of upgradation (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

Therefore, proposals for constructing new tracks or upgrading existing tracks within Balochistan under CPEC are as follows;

- 1) A track will be constructed from Spezand Junction to Basima via Mastung and Kalat (Think-Transportation, 2019).
- 2) Another track will also be constructed from Jacobabad to Basima via Khuzdar (Think-Transportation, 2019).
- 3) From Basima, track will approach Gwadar via Panjgur and Turbat (Amin, 2017).
- 4) Similarly, there will be a new track from Karachi to Gwadar via Pasni and Ormara (Amin, 2017).
- 5) At the same time, Bostan railway station near Quetta will be connected to Kotla Jaam near Bhakkar. This project will be completed till the end of 2025 in two phases;

Firstly, a new track will be constructed from Kotla Jaam to Zhob while, secondly, already existed Bostan to Zhob track will be upgraded⁸ (The-Nation, 2017).

- 6) Rohri-Chaman Railway Track (ML-3) will be expanded up to Kandahar (Afghanistan) via Spin Boldak (Dawn, 2003).

In first phase, track from Chaman to Kandahar will be constructed. Then, it will be expanded up to Herat as a second phase while, track will further access to Turkmenistan at Khushka (Dawn, 2003).

- 7) Although, there is a plan to upgrade ML-4 from Spezand to Taftan, but it would be fully reconstructed till Zahedan if Iran will be official partner of CPEC too (Rafiq, 2017).

Now, the study looks at local industries/markets within the Balochistan that would have to be internationalized via constructing new tracks or upgrading and expanding existing tracks.

Industries and Markets around Proposed Railway Tracks within Balochistan

1) Spezand Junction to Basima Railway Track

Although, Spezand joints ML-3 and ML-4 but this railway station has no proper facilitations like other major railway stations. In case of constructing Spezand-Basima section, importance of respective railway station would be enhanced because of nationwide popularity in cattle farming (ADB, 2005) (Pakistan-Economist, 2019).

⁸ Bostan to Zhob track was constructed during British Indian times, but it became dysfunctional during Zia-ul-Haq regime (The-Nation, 2017).

Furthermore, Mastung is famous for wheat cultivation and farming of apple, apricot, barley, cherry, canola, chilies, fig, grapes, garlic, onion, potatoes, pear, plum and pistachio. Moreover, city has tourism industry because of the shrine of Hazrat Sheikh Muhammad Taqi Noorani. Thousands of visitors visit this shrine every year (ADB, 2005) (Pakistan-Economist, 2019).

On the other hand, Kalat is popular for the cultivation of bajra, sunflower, pulses, maize, melons, coriander, almond, cotton, wheat, tobacco and cumin. Likewise, coal industry of Kalat is also popular in entire Pakistan (ADB, 2005) (Pakistan-Economist, 2019).

2) **Jacobabad to Basima Railway Track**

Jacobabad connects ML-2 and ML-3 whereas; this railway station would link with Basima via proposed Jacobabad-Basima section via Khuzdar. Khuzdar has tourism industry due to its worldwide popularity among geologists, research scholars and tourists. Thousands of geologists and tourists visit Chotok waterfalls and a cool water lake in Moola village of Khuzdar (ADB, 2005) (Pakistan-Economist, 2019).

On the other hand, Basima is famous for cattle farming in entire Pakistan whereas; some dates orchards are also located in this city (ADB, 2005) (Pakistan-Economist, 2019).

3) **Basima to Gwadar Railway Track**

As Spezand-Basima section and Jacobabad-Basima section will be joined at proposed Basima Junction, this railway station will access Gwadar city and Gwadar seaport via Panjgur and Turbat. Here, Panjgur has tourism industry as well as agricultural economy. City has lot of historical buildings (like Khudabadan Fort⁹), ancient tombs and other locations (e.g., an old water reservoir called Band-e-Gillar). Similarly, dates from local orchards are supplied nationally and internationally¹⁰ (ADB, 2005) (Pakistan-Economist, 2019).

On the other hand, Turbet has huge tourism industry because of not only having the status of the capital of the former State of Makran but for the followers of Zikri Mahdavia Sect. However, some of significant tourists spots in Turbat are Koh-e-Muraad, Former Palace of the Nawab of Makran, Nazim's Mosque, The Government's Farm, Fort of Punno, Dukurm Delay Action Dam, Hapdrok river, Mirani Dam, Kech Kaur River and Koh-e-Imam Gwarm Lake (Travel-Culture, Turbat, 2019).

4) **Karachi to Gwadar Railway Track**

Gwadar city and Gwadar seaport have also to be connected with Karachi along the coastal line of Balochistan and Sindh Province. As this track would pass from Pasni and Ormara, majority of population in both cities has been affiliated with fishing industry (Pakistan-Economist, 2019) (ADB, 2005). Furthermore, Pasni has also tourism industry because of Sokhta Koh¹¹ and newly inaugurated Shadi Kaur Storage Dam in Pasni (ADB, 2005) (Pakistan-Economist, 2019).

⁹ It was an historical fort of Nawab of Kharan.

¹⁰ Pakistan International Airlines facilitates export of dates by offering cargo service for Sharjah from Panjgur on weekly bases (Mera-Watan, 2019).

¹¹ Although, American archaeologist George F. Dales firstly surveyed this site in 1960 and explored its historical and archeological significance. However, Chris J. D. Kostman conducted research in 1992 entitled "The Indus Valley

5) **Zhob to Kotla Jaam Railway Track**

As Zhob-Kotla Jaam proposed section would be connected to already existed but closed Bostan-Zhob section, this track will pass from Dera Ismail Khan, Daraban and Drazanda in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province before entering into Balochistan. Significance of Zhob city in the national economic growth can be estimated by trade volume between Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Sindh, Balochistan, Punjab to Balochistan and Balochistan to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab. Road passes from Zhob is most convenient for cargo and goods vehicles regarding inter-provinces trade. Therefore, hotel industry along the national highway is also boosting gradually (ADB, 2020).

Proposals for Restoration of Abundant Railway Tracks within Balochistan

Within CPEC projects, two abundant sections of Pakistan Railways; Bostan-Zhob section¹² (also called Zhob Valley Railway) and Kandahar State Railway are going to be restored. In fact, during Musharraf regime, Ministry of Railway had planned to upgrade Zhob Valley Railway from narrow gauge to broad gauge and then construct two railway tracks from Zhob to Kotla Jaam (Punjab) and to Tank (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). However, neither Bostan-Zhob section could be upgraded or restored nor work on Zhob-Kotla Jaam and Zhob-Tank sections could be started till 2020 (Mughal, 2008) (Hanif, 2021).

On the other hand, Sibi to Zardalu railway track was planned to complete till February 2018. However, just 95% of rehabilitation work has been done at Sibi-Harnai section of this track yet (Engineering-Post, 2019). In January 2019, Ministry of Railway announced to restore this section within three months but in vain. Now, the Functional Committee of Senate on Problems of Less-Developed Areas has directed the Ministry of Railways to restore respective section within four months, and submit a report (Hanif, 2021).

Industries and Markets around Abundant Railway Tracks within Balochistan

1) **Bostan to Zhob Railway Track**

This track had significant weightage within tourism industry because of Khan Mehtarzai Railway Station. It was highest railway station in Pakistan till 1986, having 2224 meters above sea level (Mughal, 2008). Furthermore, Muslim Bagh Railway Station had also same space within tourism industry. Both cities experience heavy snow in some winters whereas; Muslim Bagh is not only famous because of chrome mines¹³ but also archeological sites¹⁴. The Next station is Killa Saifullah that once made Zhob Valley Railway as the most profitable narrow-gauge track within the Pakistan (Mughal, 2008). Gypsum, salt, ores of coal, copper, marble and gabbro were supplied by freight train to entire country till 1986, but now trucks are used for this purpose (SMEDA, 2020).

Civilization: In Search of Those Elusive Centers and Peripheries” that has enhanced the popularity of this site among historians, research scholars, archeologists and visitors around the globe (Kostman, 1992).

¹² This track was closed for passenger trains in 1985 while, freight trains till Muslim Bagh were remained continue until 1986 (Mughal, 2008).

¹³ Currently, almost 300 to 500 chromite is being mined daily in Muslim Bagh. Till 1986, it was crushed and then shifted to Karachi seaport via freight trains, but now, trucks are used for this purpose. From Karachi, this chromite exports in entire world, especially China (SMEDA, 2020).

¹⁴ Among archeological sites, some of popular sites are ruins of Mughalo Killa (in Karezgai village), and Khanki (near Shina Khura), Mughalo Brunj (in Murgha Faqirzai). Some other ruins are frequently visited by tourists in the villages of Zhar Hill, Ismailzai, Sharan and Toiwar (SMEDA, 2020).

2) Sibi to Zardalu Railway Track

Till 2007, Harnai was also the part of Sibi district. However, now it is separate district that is participating vital role in national as well as provincial economic growth due to coalmines. At this track, all the major railway stations like Harnai, Nakus, Sharigh, Khost and Zardalu were once engaged for coal transportation from mines to entire country via freight trains. However, train service was closed in 2006 because of security issues. How, Ministry of Railway claims that Sibi-Harnai section would be reopened till the April 2020 while, Harnai to Zardalu section would also be opened in the same year. This reopening would facilitate not only coal industry but cattle and carpet industries of Harnai, Nakus, Sharigh and Khost to be connected with other markets within the country but abroad too (Richter & Hasnain, 2008) (Kakar, 2015) (Hanif, 2021).

Internationalization of Local Markets in Balochistan under CPEC Projects

In case of upgrading existing tracks, restoring abundant tracks and constructing new tracks under CPEC projects, local markets within the Balochistan would be internationalized when Pakistan Railways would be connected to Afghanistan, China and Iran. This initiative would convert each significant railway station as an economic hub where offices and markets are estimated to be established around it (Pakistan-Railways, 2019). In fact, the prime motive of railway projects within the soil of Balochistan under CPEC facilitate regional trade in five dimensions, such as;

Afghanistan-China exports and imports¹⁵,

Afghanistan-Pakistan exports and imports¹⁶,

Afghanistan-Iran exports and imports¹⁷,

¹⁵ This is not specified that Afghanistan-China trade via railway would only be happened by ML-3. However, extension of this track towards Kandahar and then Turkmenistan would significantly facilitate Afghan imports from China. As per estimations, Afghanistan would use ML-3 for imports from China up to the amount of 1.17 billion (Trading-Economics, China Exports to Afghanistan, 2018) (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

On the other hand, Afghan exports to China are not estimated yet via railway connectivity but it is continued through Wakhan Corridor or by-air. However, it would be initiated via railway if newly proposed railway track would be constructed from Landi Kotal (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) to Jalalabad and then towards Mazar Sharif for connecting to Uzbek Railways (Trading-Economics, China Imports from Afghanistan, 2018) (Pakistan-Railways, 2019).

¹⁶ Although, Pak-Afghan Trade has become very low (during 2007-2017) because of political differences between both states, and, Afghanistan has been ready to by-pass CPEC by longest North-South Transport Corridor established by Iran and India from Chabahar Seaport to Kabul via Mashhad and Herat but, economists still predict boost in mutual trade between both states after the extension of ML-3 towards Kandahar and then towards Turkmenistan. As per estimations, Afghan imports from Pakistan via ML-3 would be up to the amount of 1.09 billion (Trading-Economics, Pakistan Exports to Afghanistan, 2017) (Mazhar, 2018).

On the other hand, till the end of 2017, Pakistani imports from Afghanistan have become up to the \$369 million. It is estimated that ML-3 after extension towards Kandahar would be used for Pakistani imports from Afghanistan up to the amount of almost \$400 million (Trading-Economics, Pakistan Imports from Afghanistan, 2017) (Mazhar, 2018).

¹⁷ Afghan exports to Iran has worth up to the \$1.5 billion to \$1.8 billion annually (RASANA, 2020). Similarly, Afghan imports from Iran have worth up to \$2.8 billion annually (TOLONews, 2017). Although, Afghanistan is still intended to use Chabahar Port via railway and road regarding its international trade activities but experts analyze that extension of ML-3 towards Kandahar, upgradation of ML-4 till Zahedan, and construction of Spezand-Basima-Gwadar track would automatically force Afghanistan for using Gwadar or Karachi seaports as the shortest feasible

Iran-Pakistan exports and imports¹⁸, and,
China-Iran exports and imports¹⁹.

By observing exports and imports mechanism between the countries mentioned above, study finds Balochistan as the nerve center of all the regional trade whereas; railway connectivity between respective countries under CPEC would convert each and every railway station (and the linked-city) into an international market not only within Balochistan Province but in entire country (Pakistan-Railways, 2019). As internationalization of any region affect the socio-economic life including norms and traditions, this study now finds socio-economic impacts of regional railway connectivity and internationalization of local markets upon the people in Balochistan.

Socio-Economic Impacts of Regional Railway Connectivity under CPEC upon the People of Balochistan

Different surveys estimate how regional railway connectivity would affect socio-economic life of domestic population within the Balochistan. As Afghanistan and Iran are not connected with CPEC yet. Therefore, study could not find any kind of inspiration from Afghan or Iranian culture on socio-economic life of people in Balochistan. However, Chinese culture is gradually affecting domestic culture and lifestyle not only in Balochistan but entire Pakistan, that is being investigated below;

1) Impacts on Home-Construction Trends

As regional railway connectivity under CPEC would not only generate lot of opportunities for the people of Pakistan, Afghanistan, China and Iran, but its impacts upon home-construction trends have been continuing. Although, numerous homes have been constructed on Chinese traditional architectural designs in Ziarat, Killa Saifullah, Quetta and some other hilly areas, but completion of all the CPEC projects would enhance this trend not only within the Balochistan but entire country (Yousafzai, 2019).

routs. Moreover, ML-4 would also be proved as shortest route for Afghan trade from northeastern Afghanistan to Chabahar Port than the Kabul-Herat-Mashhad-Chabahar Road or proposed railway route (Khan, July-October, 2014).

¹⁸ According to WTO, Pakistani imports from Iran have worth of \$256 million while, exports have worth of \$218.6 million. However, all the trade occurs by road, by-air or by seaports. Although, Iranian economy is very much relying upon railway infrastructure but, Iran and Pakistan are unable to use ML-4 in this regard. This is because of difference in gauge. Iran uses standard gauge of almost 4.8ft while, Pakistan follows British Indian gauge of almost 5.6ft. As ML-4 is constructed by following British Indian gauge size, it is unable to connect with remaining railway infrastructure of Iran (Zuberi, 2019).

¹⁹ Iranian exports to China have worth up to \$667.19 million while, Iranian imports from China stood at \$736.69 million till the end of March 2020. Similarly, Chinese investment in the Iran have worth up to \$26.92 billion during 2005-2019. Apparently, analysts assume Iranian inclinations towards "International North-South Transport Corridor" (NSTC) and "Transit Trade Agreement between India, Iran and Afghanistan" (May 2016) as the rival acts against CPEC, but Iranian involvement in "Chabahar-Gwadar Memorandums of Understanding" (2016) and China-Iran 25 years partnership plan predict Iranian affiliation in China-Pakistan Economic Corridor in near future. This affiliation would facilitate China and Iran to initiate their trade via railway connectivity through Pakistan. Moreover, this railway connectivity would be more safe and shortest than the "Five Nations Railway Plan" (Erdrink, 2017) (Jalilov, 2020).

According to the survey (N=100) organized by “M & A Consultants”, it has been investigated in 2018 that why people in Balochistan are going to follow Chinese traditional architectural designs for their home construction (Yousafzai, 2018). As per the results of this survey;

- 1) 92% says that Chinese Trend for home-construction is suitable for weather conditions in mountainous areas.
- 2) 73% argues that Chinese traditional home-construction is attractive and ideal.
- 3) 23% illustrates that Chinese traditional home-construction is cheapest for constructing new home.
- 4) 69% expresses that Chinese-styled home construction facilitates to come close with Chinese people (Yousafzai, 2018).

On the other hand, this trend will facilitate different economic sectors in Balochistan too. According to the survey (N=100) managed by “Belt and Road Developers” during 2018, it is estimated that;

- 1) More than one million labours would get home-construction jobs.
- 2) More than 0.09 million students would come towards field of architectural designing, and, they will also adopt this field as a profession.
- 3) More than 1.25 million people would come close to Chinese people for their business interests.
- 4) More than 0.25 million are expected to visit China for learn about Chinese home-construction trends (Naaz, 2018).

2) Impacts on Living Styles

Living styles comprise on “how to live” or, simple means, “lifestyle”. Although, Pakistan and China have no railway link right now, but CPEC-cooperation and by-road affiliation of both countries has promoted Chinese historical lifestyle; called SIHEYUAN in all over the Pakistan (including Balochistan Province) (Yousafzai, 2019).



(Siheyuan exhibits in Gwadar by constructing Pak-China Government School) (Shakeel, 2019)

In addition, according to the survey (N=100), organized by “Belt and Road Developers” during 2018 in Balochistan, trends for adopting Chinese lifestyle are counted as;

- 1) 10% prefer Chinese-styled kitchenwares.
- 2) 27% love Chinese-styled electric lamps.
- 3) 09% like Chinese paintings.

- 4) 22% desire Chinese-styled bedroom fashion.
- 5) 65% wish to have Chinese-styled doors and windows art.
- 6) 37% want Chinese-styled furniture art.
- 7) 40% crave for Chinese-styled interior décor.
- 8) 51% seek Chinese-styled wood art (Naaz, 2018).

3) **Impacts on Food Business**

Chinese cuisines are being popular in all over the country including Balochistan too. Food lovers in Balochistan significantly claim that Chinese cuisine is healthy in nature. Till the end of 2020, several hotels serving Chinese cuisines have been opened in all over the province; especially in Quetta and Gwadar (Yousafzai, 2019).

Moreover, as hundreds of Chinese people are working in CPEC projects within Balochistan, local hotel industry also offers Chinese cousins for attracting Chinese labour towards them. In a survey, organized by "Belt and Road Developers" (with having N=100) during 2018 in Balochistan, when people were asked their love or preference for Chinese food, they replied as;

- 1) 89% people argue that Chinese food is healthy in nature.
- 2) 19% people say that Chinese food is tasty than Pakistani food.
- 3) 47% people express that It is just their habit to taste other cultural foods. Therefore, they like Chinese food too.
- 4) 05% people say that they only like Chinese food (Naaz, 2018).

In addition, this survey also examines that Chinese noodles and Chinese rice along with Chinese soybean products, Chinese desserts and snacks, Chinese sausages and Chinese soups are getting popularity among food lovers in Balochistan (Yousafzai, 2019).

4) **Impacts on Dress Designing Trends**

Three sorts of Chinese dresses are getting popularity in entire Pakistan including Balochistan²⁰ in recent days, such as; Hanfu (historical clothing among Chinese Han people), Cheongsam (a one-piece body-hugging dress for women, also called Qipao) and Changpao (body covering piece for men). Moreover, Chinese famous brand; MiniSo has opened its franchise in Quetta whereas; it has planned to open nine more stores throughout the Pakistan with generating \$1.5 million revenue (Trending.PK, 2018) (Yousafzai, 2019).

5) **Impacts on Business Language**

Since the inauguration of CPEC, people in Balochistan; especially students have become keen for learning Chinese language. This is not only because they are seeking jobs in CPEC related industries and fields but they also want to initiate business with Chinese markets and Chinese traders (Yousafzai, 2019).

²⁰ Usually, students, researchers or teachers in Quetta who earned their educational qualification from China, love to wear respective dresses (Naaz, 2018).

For this purpose, numerous Chinese language learning institutes have been established in different cities of Balochistan²¹.

A survey (N=100) was conducted by the “Belt and Road Developers” during 2018 in Balochistan which basic aim was to find the reason why educated people including students are curious for learning Chinese language in Balochistan. Results show that;

- 1) 87% learn Chinese language because they feel that Chinese language will be international language in near future.
- 2) 72% want to initiate my own business connecting with Chinese markets.
- 3) 54% want to import business products from China.
- 4) 38% have hobby to learn International languages (Yousafzai, 2019).

Moreover, regional railway connectivity would also motivate local shopkeepers and business to learn not only Chinese language but Persian and Dari language regarding interacting with Persian or Afghan traders (Yousafzai, 2019).

6) **Impacts on Cross-Cultural Economic-Orientated Marriages**

Increasing business and education-based cooperation between Pakistan and China is also encouraging cross-cultural marriages between Pakistanis and Chinese people. However, the ratio of cross-cultural marriages towards China with respect to specifically the people in Balochistan is very low (Yousafzai, 2019). It is observed by “M & A Consultants” that;

- 1) No one female belong to Balochistan have Chinese partner while studying in China.
- 2) Just 2% male students from Balochistan have Chinese life partner.
- 3) No one Chinese businessmen have relationship with any female belong to Balochistan.
- 4) 3% of businessmen in Balochistan have Chinese spouse.

Furthermore, according to this survey,

- 1) 76% want cross-cultural marriage for getting financially strong status.
- 2) 41% illustrates that they just want to enjoy cross-cultural affiliation (Yousafzai, 2019).

However, a major segment of the people in Balochistan has been engaged in cross-cultural relationship with Afghan and Persian families. This is just because of either cultural or religious assimilations (Yousafzai, 2019).

7) **Impacts on Small, Medium and Large Industries**

Regional railway connectivity under CPEC would provides several opportunities to small, medium and large industries in all over the Pakistan including Balochistan. It is estimated that;

- 1) Railway connectivity would engage 90% of non-agricultural labor force from Balochistan regarding traveling towards China, Iran and Afghanistan for earning (Editor, 2018) (CPEC-Portal, 2020).

²¹ Significant institutions that offering Chinese language course in Balochistan are; China Study Center at University of Balochistan Quetta, Pakistan Army Southern Command in collaboration with National University of Modern Languages in Quetta, and, IDSP University of Community Development Quetta (UoB, 2019) (IDSP, 2020).

- 2) Small, medium and large industries in Balochistan would assist country's GDP to be grown up to the 30% while, they would contribute 25% in total exports too (Editor, 2018) (CPEC-Portal, 2020).
- 3) \$60 million revenue per fiscal year would be generated from small industries in the province (Editor, 2018) (CPEC-Portal, 2020).

Moreover, all the small, medium and large industries would be engaged with Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in Hub and Bostan that would link them with Chinese but other regional markets (Editor, 2018) (CPEC-Portal, 2020).

Issue of Difference in Gauge in Regional Railway Connectivity under CPEC

Despite upgradation plans of ML-1, ML-2, ML-3 and ML-4, the mounted issue in regional railway connectivity is difference in gauge. In fact, Pakistan, India and Bangladesh are following British Indian gauge of almost 5.6ft while, majority of the countries in the world including Afghanistan, China, Iran, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are following standard gauge of 4.8ft (Noman, 2018). Although, Pakistan has shown its consent on an advice of Iranian Ministry of Railway for conversion of Quetta-Taftan-Zahedan British Indian gauge into standard gauge, but no one work has been started yet. Same is the case with ML-1, ML-2 and ML-3. Furthermore, extension of railway tracks from Landi Kotal to Jalalabad and then towards Mazar Sharif for connecting to Uzbek railway, extension of ML-3 towards Kandahar and then Khushka (Turkmenistan), and, extension of Taxila-Havelian section towards Kashgar (China) would also be useless if this issue would not be addressed (Noman, 2018) (Yousafzai, 2019).

Although, resolution of this issue requires huge expenses but if Government of Pakistan will follow Bangladeshi model for upgrading railway infrastructure, it would be more feasible than the reconstructing new tracks under standard gauge (Yousafzai, 2019).



(Bangladeshi model of upgrading railway infrastructure by introducing two-in-one gauge system)

Conclusion

As Balochistan has become the core of all the CPEC projects, regional railway connectivity would, no doubt, affect socio-economic life in the province. This connectivity is not only becoming a cause of emerging new markets but internationalizing entire provincial economy. However, each estimation is just considered as a myth if issue of "difference in gauge" will not be addressed. Pakistan Railways claims that ML-1 has been upgraded and it would be extended towards Kashgar via Taxila-Havelian section, but

neither Minister for Railway nor any other documented plan illustrates that how Pakistan can be linked with Chinese railway without considering issue of difference in gauge. Thus, there is the need to adopt rationality in this regard. Otherwise, the concept of regional railway connectivity and the dream for internationalization of local markets would remain a “fairy-tale”.

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