



**EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL DIMENSIONS
OF ETHNIC DYNAMICS IN PAKISTAN-CHINA RELATIONS:
PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND STRATEGIC COOPERATION**

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Abstract

The study analyzes the economic, ethnic, and diplomatic dimensions of Pakistan-China ties amid evolving geopolitical dynamics. Understanding the complex dynamics of China-Pakistan relations is essential given the shifting global power landscape. This study analyzes the influence of regional stability, ethnic and racial interactions, and collaboration on public perceptions of the bilateral relationship. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study collected the data via semi-structured interviews and standardized questionnaires with academicians, policymakers, analysts, and graduate students. Structured questionnaires were used to ensure an understanding of the subject matter and to gather quantitative data. The data was examined, and relationships among variables were established by multivariate regression analysis. Economic cooperation ($\beta = 0.148$, $p = 0.027$), ethnic contacts and integration ($\beta = 0.201$, $p = 0.004$), diplomatic connections ($\beta = 0.258$, $p = 0.002$), and commercial relations ($\beta = 0.268$, $p = 0.011$) have a beneficial influence on Pakistan-China relations. In light of the populace's overwhelming support for the alliance, it is essential to cultivate strong diplomatic contacts and enduring cultural and economic ties to promote positive public attitudes. The qualitative findings demonstrate how the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has improved regional connectivity and infrastructure while also tackling political stability, ethnic interaction, and sustainability. The study illustrates that cultivating these traits

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promotes cooperation and tackles emerging regional challenges amid shifting global power dynamics.

Keywords: Pakistan-China Relations; Economic cooperation; Ethnic interactions; Diplomatic ties; Mixed-methods research; Public perception.

1. Introduction

China and Pakistan's longstanding strategic cooperation has strengthened despite the world's rapid change. According to Kiran (2023), the two nations have traditionally collaborated on multilateral platforms to solve global and regional issues. An important milestone in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was the 2013 launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). South Asia's economic and political atmosphere benefits from the enormous CPEC and energy project. This 2,000-kilometer corridor connects China's Kashgar to Pakistan's Gwadar port for trade and connectivity. The CPEC aims to transform Pakistan, though environmental and economic issues plague it. These projects strive to modernize Pakistan's infrastructure and boost its economy (Rashid et al., 2023). Pakistan's foreign policy has shifted from security to geoeconomics. This new strategy includes the CPEC, a BRI flagship project that intends to boost Pakistan's energy, infrastructure, and industrial sectors and promote regional cooperation. Whether Pakistan joined CPEC to strengthen ties with China, boost economic development, or get geoeconomic advantages has been a contentious issue. Although China's investments have improved Pakistan's economy, expert assessments suggest that Pakistan is participating to enhance its geoeconomic position, particularly compared to its northeast, north, and east neighbors (Fazal, 2023). CPEC facilitates regional development and cohesion, improving regional linkages, economic growth, and employment opportunities. To improve Pakistan's transportation infrastructure and energy capacity, CPEC would spend \$62 billion on energy projects, transportation networks, and industrial zones (Ismail et al., 2023).

China's foreign policy has focused on the Belt and Road Initiative, which has gained prominence under Xi Jinping. China aims to strengthen its global economic influence by building enormous infrastructure, trade, and investment networks. Research on the BRI has examined China's strategic ambitions, internal political dynamics, and the initiative's global impacts (Zhang, 2022). Due to the BRI's economic advantages and the CPEC's attempts to strengthen Sino-Pakistani relations, more Pakistanis are learning Chinese. Due to Pakistan's strong ties with China and the rising demand for Chinese-Urdu translators in the labor market, more young Pakistanis are registering for Chinese language programs, which might have far-reaching social and economic effects. Pakistan desires more international business

integration to improve economic growth and competitiveness. The CPEC encourages Pakistan's corporate and industrial sectors to accelerate strategic planning and execution to compete globally. China aggressively pursues CSR activities (Siddique et al., 2023), and Pakistan increasingly incorporates them into their business plans as CPEC advances both economies. CPEC is crucial for Pakistan and China. This route links China to Central Asia, West Asia, South Asia, and Europe, making Gulf oil shipping to China cheaper. This strengthens Beijing's prominence as an import/export corridor and worldwide trade center. CPEC also signifies that improving China-Pakistan's economic imbalances might boost bilateral trade (Khan et al., 2023).

CPEC-funded transportation infrastructure development is intended to enhance Pakistan's GDP and China's quality of life. China's GDP is expected to grow by 0.01% and Pakistan's by 0.3%, with welfare benefits of USD 2.6 billion and USD 1.8 billion, respectively. Pakistan's agricultural and total exports to China are expected to rise by USD 4.7 billion to USD 6.6 billion and USD 9.6 billion to USD 13.7 billion, respectively. Rice output is expected to climb from 2.1% to 2.6%, and fruit production from 1.2% to 1.7%. These altering trade dynamics are expected to change Pakistan's manufacturing sector due to China's growing demand for fresh produce and other perishable foods. Pakistan's income distribution is predicted to level, with unskilled people receiving higher wage increases than skilled ones (Ali, 2022). Pakistan's location in South Asia and China's desire to expand into the resource-rich Gulf, EU, and Africa make CPEC geopolitically crucial. This corridor symbolizes China-Pakistan's longstanding relationship, built on mutual respect and cooperation. CPEC is expected to boost economic development and achieve both nations' global strategic objectives (Khan et al., 2021). Despite its early benefits, the China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement (CPFTA)'s disproportionate growth in imports compared to exports has exacerbated Pakistan's trade deficit. Pakistan must understand the Chinese market, maximize tariff lines, and focus on its comparative advantages to enjoy the full benefits of CPFTA. Without these strategic improvements, CPFTA may harm Pakistan's economy (Shah, 2020).

Pakistan's foreign policy has transitioned from security to geoeconomics in recent years. China is a significant player in this transition with its flagship project, CPEC. CPEC, part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), improves Pakistan's energy, infrastructure, and industrial sectors to promote economic growth and regional cohesion (Fazal, 2023). South Asia-China connections started in the third century BC and focused on culture and religion rather than trade. Despite their lengthy history, influential political engagement between the

two nations did not begin until the late 1940s, when British colonial rule in the Indian subcontinent ended and the People's Republic of China was created. Before this, their contacts were limited. After the Communist state was established in 1949, China's foreign policy changed, resulting in more involvement with Asia and beyond. China's top foreign policy priority was South Asia to counter Western influence, build Afro-Asian unity, and challenge the post-colonial world's dependence on the UN (Bhatti et al., 2022). China has been utilizing diplomacy to increase its global influence in recent years. This strategy depicts China as a benign global actor by increasing diplomatic connections with Central Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia. China's relationship with South Asian states has evolved over the last decade to include economic cooperation, development aid, and cultural exchanges. These projects are based on China's soft power foreign strategy (Jayasundara, 2023). Pakistan and China established diplomatic relations in the mid-20th century. China supported Pakistan during the 1965 Indo-Pak War, deepening the bilateral connection that had started to develop in the previous decade. This collaboration became a strategic partnership in the 1980s and 1990s, including economic, financial, technical, and military sectors. President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) created the CPEC, strengthening the relationship. Despite robust ties, Pakistan-China relations face regional and global challenges (Shah, 2023).

Based on the given discussions, the study has the following research objectives:

- I. To analyze the perspectives of key players about the economic partnership between Pakistan and China, focusing on the opportunities and obstacles presented by projects like the CPEC.
- II. To examine the impact of ethnic and racial exchange programs on improving mutual knowledge and cooperation between Pakistan and China, mainly via educational collaborations and ethnic diplomacy.
- III. Evaluate the diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China, identify the factors that bolster their collaboration, and examine strategies for improving trade dynamics and investment opportunities.

This study is crucial to understanding China-Pakistan's complicated relationship in light of global geopolitical developments. The mixed-methods research collects and analyzes quantitative and qualitative data from key stakeholders to improve economic cooperation, ethnic and racial contact, and diplomatic relations. The findings indicate how these factors affect Pakistan-China relations. The findings benefit strategic decision-making and difficult global problem cooperation.

2. Islamic Factor in Pakistan-China Relations

Pakistan's geographical proximity to the Muslim world and position as the Islamic Republic has long woven Islam into Pakistan-China relations. China has always used Pakistan's religious and geopolitical links to establish relations with Muslim-majority countries. Pakistan's support for China's OIC observer status illustrates this dynamic. Pakistan must depict China to Muslim nations as a beneficial partner, even if there are issues like the Uyghur issue (Gallagher, 2021). Despite religious divides, Pakistan and China have prioritized economic development, regional stability, and security.

Although Islamic solidarity drives Pakistan's foreign policy, its relationship with China is pragmatic, prioritizing economic and geopolitical goals are also crucial. China's investments in Pakistan, notably via CPEC, are vital for regional connectivity and economic growth. The Uyghur Muslim minority in Xinjiang has been accused of human rights violations, but Pakistan has avoided condemning China's approach. Pakistan took this pragmatic approach because it realized that jeopardizing its ties with China due to religious disagreements might undermine its economic and strategic aims. Thus, Islamic concerns are acknowledged but downplayed in favor of bilateral engagement. Pakistan's religious groups have highlighted the Uyghur situation and Xinjiang Muslims' suffering (Abujad & Linzy, 2024). These concerns have not gained traction because the leadership controls the narrative and emphasizes Pakistan-China relations. Interviews with experts and politicians suggest that economic dependency and strategic alignment reduce religious sentiments. This shows the state's ability to handle religious sensitivities to preserve a good relationship with China despite complex issues.

Pakistan and China have strengthened their ties through religious and cultural diplomacy despite their distinct faiths. China has backed Pakistan in worldwide forums on Islamic unity, while Pakistan has supported China's policies internationally. Because of this common understanding, we have formed a relationship in which our religious and cultural differences are recognized but do not hinder our collaboration (Khan & Adnan, 2024). Pakistan's politicians must tread a delicate line with Islam. They must please religious groups and Uyghur sympathizers at home. Pakistan's economic and geopolitical interests rely on its ability to handle a complex relationship with China. A delicate balance demands sensitively handling delicate problems while creating an inclusive narrative emphasizing stability, progress, and peace. By being calm, Pakistan has maintained its strategic partnership with China without disturbing its constituents.

3. Literature Review

3.1. Economic Partnership as a Catalyst for Strengthening Pakistan-China Bilateral Relations

The strategic partnership between China and Pakistan has long dominated South Asian geopolitics, affecting internal and global dynamics. CPEC is a symbol and tool of China's geopolitical policy, a cornerstone of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and a sign of the alliance's depth. In their historical study of China-Pakistan relations, Khatti et al. (2022) focus on regional crises and Baluchistan's strategic relevance to Islamabad and Beijing. Their study on the challenges and threats of the bilateral relationship highlights Baluchistan, a strategic buffer and part of the CPEC route, as geopolitically crucial. The study clarifies the "Iron Brothers" narrative, which depicts China-Pakistan's close connection. The study's historical context may aid scholars and policymakers working on Sino-Pakistani ties. It also identifies key study areas, particularly on the issues hindering South Asia from being peaceful and secure. Tasleem (2022) examines the overlap between foreign policy and home politics to discover how domestic politics might affect bilateral relations. Governments ruled by a small elite may make foreign policy easier because national identity is more malleable under such regimes. However, foreign policy is more sensitive to electoral pressures and less likely to alter when it aligns with the main political parties that most people favor. This method helps understand Pakistan's relations with India and China since domestic politics influence foreign policy. Qian (2023) studies CPEC in a more complex global context, noting geopolitical, energy, connectivity, and cognitive issues Pakistan and China must face. The study advises distinguishing CPEC from the BRI by emphasizing its bilateral nature and promoting regional engagement with Afghanistan and Iran to integrate connectivity and energy pipelines. India may push back due to Pakistan tensions and the Kashmir issue. The study also emphasizes bridging the knowledge gaps between China and Pakistan to promote CPEC initiatives. Abb (2023) analyzes Pakistan's centrality in the BRI, notably as CPEC's site, using intersecting center-periphery dynamics. The study claims that BRI and CPEC are dynamic processes shaped by national governments and local parties, not static examples of Chinese power moving beyond. Since Pakistan's stakeholders may influence Chinese policy inside CPEC, Beijing's strategies and local players' flexibility and reactivity determine its success. Understanding the local adaptation and contestation of global projects like the BRI requires this perspective. Rashid et al. (2023) analyze the CPEC and highlight its dual role in boosting economic growth and peace. CPEC created a 2,000 km transportation network from Kashgar to Gwadar Port to improve Pakistan's infrastructure, trade, and energy. The study

states that CPEC has immense potential to transform Pakistan despite environmental risks. The extensive public understanding and excitement about the CPEC project's benefits across Pakistan's numerous sectors shows its strategic importance in sustainable development. Hussain et al. (2024) discuss CPEC's geopolitical effects on China's strategic relations with Iran and Pakistan. The study describes how China would balance India's might in South Asia and supply its energy needs via CPEC's land route. Though frequently called an "all-weather friendship," this two-way relationship has survived significant regional political shifts. This study indicates that China and Pakistan have long cooperated in politics, economics, and security because they respect each other and share aims. Based on the literature, the study's first research hypothesis is as follows:

H1: The perception of Pakistan-China ties is positively connected with economic relationships, suggesting that more financial cooperation enhances overall bilateral relations.

3.2. Ethnic Dynamics and Strategic Synergies in Pakistan-China Relations

Rahman et al. (2023) stated that Pakistan-China ethnic dynamics profoundly impact their strategic synergy. To build long-term collaboration, the two nations must recognize ethnic linkages in a complex geopolitical situation. Khan and Hurraira (2024) note that Pakistan and China's ethnic mix, predominantly the Uyghur minority, greatly impacts cultural exchange and understanding. Cultural events and intellectual exchanges foster collaboration and discourse. Recognizing ethnic diversity as a strength may increase stability and cooperation between the two states. Economic ties may be affected by ethnicity. Shared cultural values encourage business and commerce. Cultural diplomacy initiatives emphasize cultural and historical linkages to foster understanding and commercial cooperation. The CPEC has improved local ethnic groups' living standards and enhanced relations between the two nations (McLaughlin, 2024). Both nations may benefit from each other's cultural variety in economic planning and growth by considering ethnic considerations. Ethnic interactions in Pakistan-China relations affect regional stability and diplomatic relations. Addressing ethnic minority concerns is crucial to improving diplomatic relations between the two countries. This process improves bilateral relations and regional stability by eliminating ethnic strife. Bilawak Khaskheli et al. (2023) examine how global health strategy has changed from eliminating pandemics to adapting to them. Russia, Pakistan, and China's strategies to address changing global health attitudes are evaluated using legal and governance studies. International collaborations like CPEC rely on robust health infrastructures. Therefore, the findings have crucial implications for strong health measures at all levels to navigate a

pandemic. Rukh and Rehman (2024) extensively analyze South Asian stock market cointegration, focusing on India, Pakistan, and China. They found cointegration in 2002–2018 daily stock market index data. This suggests that Pakistan's investors might consider investing in the Indian and Chinese markets as well. This research challenges the established quo of financial advising and highlights regional profit possibilities. Using the industry-level S-curve phenomenon, Iqbal et al. (2023) examine the short-term impacts of currency depreciation on China-Pakistan trade. According to their analysis, currency depreciation cannot stabilize trade balances alone; the S-curve effect is industry-specific. The study recommends a commodity-based CPI for bilateral trade and notes that its vast reach makes it unsuitable for trade research. These findings are helpful for policymakers considering the impact of industry-specific trade policies during currency fluctuations. Xin and Kiran (2023) examine China-Pakistan collaboration strategically and historically in a changing world. They alert of global political developments that might affect bilateral trade. The study argues that China and Pakistan must cooperate to maintain their partnership and overcome geopolitical challenges. China-Pakistan relations are a turning point in global history. Pakistan formally recognized China in 1950, becoming the first Islamic and third non-socialist nation (Hussain & Abdyrahmanov, 2022). The discussion leads to the study's second research hypothesis, i.e.,

H2: Ethnic and racial contacts profoundly affect the perspective of Pakistan-China ties, indicating that heightened ethnic exchanges foster mutual understanding and respect between the two countries.

The ethnic and racial exchanges refer to Pakistan and Chinese organizations' attempts to foster understanding and cooperation among their ethnic groups. Educational collaborations, cultural exchange programs, and community efforts are the primary ways these exchanges occur. Pakistan's students at Chinese colleges and Chinese students in Pakistan's universities help build understanding, knowledge, and connections between the two countries' ethnic groupings. Ethnic diplomacy—promoting cultural and ethnic inclusion in bilateral relations—is also crucial to these meetings.

3.3. The Role of Diplomatic Relations in Shaping Perceptions of the Pakistan-China Alliance

Xuyang (2022) examines institutional determinants that affected China-Pakistan relations under Pakistan's First Military Government (1958–1971). This challenging time was critical as the two countries strengthened their political trust, economic integration, and cultural exchanges. Their collaboration relied on military cooperation, economic aid, and

socioeconomic ties, as this study explain. With the CPEC, this long-standing relationship has strengthened confidence and collaboration. Larik et al. (2022) also study the geopolitical implications of India-China relations for Pakistan. They argue that improved China-India relations would reduce military conflict and stabilize Afghanistan, benefiting Pakistan. Closer connections between China and India might lead to regional cooperation, prosperity, economic progress, and a rejuvenated SAARC. Geopolitical changes affect the US-Pakistan relationship, notably Russia and China's rise. Ahmad and Khalid (2023) analyze how the post-Afghanistan evacuation situation has created uncertainty in US-Pakistan relations, which have always been transactional and unpredictable. Pakistan, meanwhile, is striving to repair relations with Russia and improve its security and economic connections with China. Pakistan faces new challenges and opportunities as the US pivots toward India to counter China. Gul (2023) cites 9/11, geopolitical concerns about China's growth, and the US exit from Afghanistan as influencing South Asia's geopolitical importance in the 21st century. Due to their shared hostility towards India, China and Pakistan have been friends for nearly 70 years, responding to global and regional challenges together. The US's departure from Afghanistan, marked by an absence of final agreements with the Taliban, and India and the US's deepening strategic ties highlight the need for Pakistan and China to devise counterbalancing plans in the face of resistance to their economic projects, such as CPEC. Qazi et al. (2022) examine Sino-Pakistan's "all-weather friendship," using the Himalayas and Indian Ocean as metaphors. However, they say idealistic formulations like this downplay the reality that national interests drive state relations. The study utilizes a linear model to predict Sino-Pakistan relations over the next decade, focusing on President Xi Jinping's third term. This prospective study aims to illuminate the evolving dynamics of the partnership and their potential impact on the area. The following literature leading the study's third research hypothesis, i.e.,

H3: Diplomatic relations and public perception of Pakistan-China relations are positively correlated, demonstrating that cautious approaches build confidence and deepen the relationship.

This study contributes to Pakistan-China relations by bridging information gaps on the psychological, social, and ethnic difficulties of the bilateral relationship. The public's perspective of this alliance's cultural and ethnic factors has been studied less than strategic, political, and economic factors. By studying how public opinion, ethnic dynamics, and regional stability affect Pakistan-China relations, the study provides a thorough understanding of their complexity. The study shows the role of public perception in Pakistan-

China relations. Public attitude must be examined in light of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to understand the social underpinnings of strategic collaboration. This research examines how various social groups interpret economic cooperation, diplomatic engagement, and ethnic integration to illuminate what fosters trust and collaboration. This study investigates Pakistan-China interactions from an ethnic and psychological standpoint, making it unique. Cultural contacts and ethnic integration are less obvious but no less significant aspects of bilateral cooperation than economic and geopolitical concerns. This study examines how these factors affect public opinion to illuminate the mechanisms that support or undermine this strategic partnership. The study's findings might help Pakistan and Chinese officials strengthen relations. The research proposes improving bilateral collaboration by analyzing public opinion-forming elements, including economic cooperation, ethnic exchanges, and diplomatic connections. According to the research, CPEC must promote inclusive development, cultural exchange, and public concern. These insights help align public opinion with government aims and mitigate cultural or ethnic diversity issues. Finally, the study contributes to regional and global debates on how public opinion, ethnic dynamics, and strategic partnerships affect international relations. Multi-faceted engagement may strengthen regional alliances, as demonstrated in Pakistan-China relations, particularly given shifting global power dynamics. This research helps other countries with intricate bilateral ties by showing how micro-level public emotions impact macro-level regional stability and development.

4. Methodology

This study examined the complicated relationship between China and Pakistan with the aid of researchers, legislators, analysts, and political players. A mixed-method research uses qualitative and quantitative methods to cover economic, cultural, diplomatic, trade, and investment areas. This approach may reveal the complex dynamics of the bilateral relationship between the two countries.

4.1. Research Population

The study interviewed faculty, administrators, graduate and postgraduate students, and other stakeholders with relevant knowledge about China and Pakistan's politics to better understand their experiences. The research analyzes educational institutions' views on Pakistan-China relations to highlight their influence on public opinion and discourse on international relationships.

4.2. Qualitative Data Collection

To study Pakistan-China relations, qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders was used. Participants were carefully selected for their diverse perspectives and skills to provide a thorough picture of the two countries' relationship. Diplomats, high-ranking government officials, professors, and others familiar with China-Pakistan relations were interviewed. These individuals were chosen for their contributions to international diplomacy, academic bilateral ties, and foreign policy. A semi-structured interview kept the conversation on track while allowing for free comments. This method's adaptive questioning allows interviewees to freely discuss racial and ethnic interactions, diplomatic ties, and policy changes. The study captured perspectives that quantitative research often overlooks by prompting participants to examine their personal experiences and professional expertise. Every interview had a set framework and themes for discussion and conclusion. These topics included the history of relations between the two nations, the effects of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on trade and security, diplomacy's role in shaping public opinion, and ethnic dynamics in each nation. To ensure uniformity and comparability, all respondents were given the same fundamental questions with the option for follow-up questions on specific topics. The interviews lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour and were conducted over three months. Every interview was taped and transcribed word-for-word. After that, the study found patterns, insights, and recurring commonalities using thematic analysis. Quantitative data and insightful qualitative information from these interviews provided a detailed picture of Pakistan-China relations' shifting dynamics.

4.3. Quantitative Data Collection

Academic staff and students at various institutions were also questioned to gauge public opinion on bilateral relations. The sample includes Abbottabad University of Science and Technology (AUST), Hazara University, COMSATS University Islamabad (various campuses), the University of Wah, and several KPK and Punjab government postgraduate colleges for boys and girls. The data collection methods and sample attributes used in the study of Pakistan-China relations are delineated in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively. .

Table 1: Qualitative Data Collection - In-person Interviews

Institutions	Academic Staff	Graduate Students	Postgraduate Students	Administrative Staff	Total Sample Size (n)
University of Haripur (UoH)	17	5	10	7	39
Abbottabad University of Science and Technology (AUST)	11	16	9	4	40
Hazara University (HU)	10	7	9	8	34
COMSATS University Islamabad	16	6	5	9	36
University of Wah (UoW)	6	4	7	3	20
Government Boys Colleges (GBC) (Various)	3	-	-	3	6
Government Girls Colleges (GGC) (Various)	4	-	-	3	7
Total	67	38	40	37	182

Table 2: Quantitative Data Collection – Online Surveys

Category	UoH	AUST	HU	COMSATS	UoW	GBC (Various)	GGC (Various)	Total
Academic Staff	11	16	15	10	6	4	5	67
Graduate Students	7	11	8	6	4	-	-	36
Postgraduate Students	9	10	9	7	5	-	-	40
Administrative Staff	3	2	5	2	2	3	3	20
Total	30	39	37	25	17	7	8	163

The sample size was determined using standard research methods based on the quantitative and qualitative study aims. The mixed-procedures strategy needs unique sampling methods to provide robust and extensive insights into Pakistan-China relations. The

qualitative component of this study included semi-structured interviews with diplomats, parliamentarians, academics, and administrative workers. Data saturation and qualitative research criteria determined the sample size. One hundred eighty two on-line individuals from different educational institutions participated in qualitative interviews. The study included participants from diverse backgrounds and occupations to ensure our sample adequately reflected the study community. During the selection process, diplomatic dynamics, policy development, and ethnic contacts were evaluated. The sample size is appropriate since social scientists value depth over breadth in qualitative research. In the quantitative phase, 163 individuals completed preset online questionnaires. Statistical power analysis determined the sample size for this phase to ensure substantial correlations between variables. The sample is valid as feasible with a 5% error margin and 95% confidence. The sample size is practical in terms of time and resources yet has adequate statistical power to test hypotheses. The quantitative sample comprised policy- and intellectual-debate-influencing institutions, bolstering the findings. The study's sample size balances methodological rigor and practicality. While the quantitative sample provides a statistically sound basis for generalizing conclusions, the qualitative sample size ensures a complete exploration of complicated opinions. This dual strategy helps the study answer its research questions.

4.4. Data Collection Techniques

Data collection involved a combination of in-person interviews and online questionnaires to maximize reach and accessibility. This dual approach facilitates broader participation while ensuring that diverse voices are represented in the analysis. The research utilizes structured questionnaires that encompass both open-ended and Likert scale questions.

4.5. Mixed Methods Research Framework

The study is grounded in a mixed-methods framework, combining qualitative and quantitative research to elucidate the complexities of the China-Pakistan relationship. For the qualitative component, six open-ended questions has been posed during interviews, while the quantitative component employed five Likert scale questions aimed at assessing participants' perceptions.

Open-Ended Questions Include:

1. How do you view the current economic cooperation between Pakistan and China, and what are the main opportunities and challenges?
2. What role do ethnic interactions and integration play in strengthening Pakistan-China relations?

3. How would you evaluate the diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and China, and what diplomatic efforts are vital for enhancing ties?
4. How do you perceive the trade dynamics between Pakistan and China, and what factors contribute to the trade imbalance?
5. What are your thoughts on Chinese investment in Pakistan, and which sectors hold the greatest potential for future collaboration?
6. How do media reports, religious community, and public opinion in Pakistan relate to the Uyghur crisis, given the Pakistan-China ties' strategic importance?

4.6. Data Analysis

4.6.1. Regression Analysis

To quantify the relationship between various factors influencing perceptions of Pakistan-China relations, regression analysis has been employed. This statistical method allows for the assessment of how independent variables affect a dependent variable—specifically, the perception of the bilateral relationship. The analysis facilitates predictions about trends and patterns, thereby informing decision-making and policy development.

Dependent Variable:

- Perception of Pakistan-China Relations

Independent Variables include the following:

- I.** Economic cooperation
- II.** Ethnic Interactions and Integration
- III.** Diplomatic relations
- IV.** Trade relations and
- V.** Investment opportunities

The participants' diverse backgrounds and expertise enhanced the open-ended question data, providing an insightful analysis of Pakistan-China dynamics. Table 3 shows the research scales, dimensions and sample questions for the ready reference.

Table 3: Research Scales, Dimensions, and Sample Questions

Variables	Research Scale	Items	Dimensions	Sample Questions	Reference Scale
Perception of Pakistan-China Relations	Community Integration Scale (CIS)	6	- Economic benefits - Cultural alignment - Diplomatic success	The relationship between Pakistan and China is mutually beneficial for economic development.	Minnes et al. (2003)
Economic Cooperation	Organization -Public Relationship Scale (OPRS)	5	-Infrastructure development - Trade balance - Job creation -Technological transfer	Economic collaboration with China has significantly improved Pakistan's infrastructure.	Bruning & Ledingham (1999)
Ethnic Interactions and Integration	Cross-Cultural Adaptation Scale (CCAS)	5	- Cultural exchange - Ethnic harmony - Mutual understanding	Cultural exchange programs between Pakistan and China promote better ethnic understanding.	Epstein (2015)
Diplomatic Relations	Relationship Assessment of Diplomatic Interaction Outcome (RADIO) scale	6	- Peace-building - Conflict resolution - Regional influence	Diplomatic relations between Pakistan and China contribute to regional stability	Tam & Kim (2017)
Trade Relations	High Performance Partnerships Scale (HPPS)	5	- Export-import balance - Mutual benefits - Trade facilitation	The trade partnership with China has improved Pakistan's export potential	de Wall et al. (2015)
Investment Opportunities	Perceived Investment Value (PIV) Scale	6	- Sectoral growth - FDI impact - Innovation	Chinese investments have enhanced innovation and technological growth in Pakistan.	Puustinen et al. (2013)

5. Results and Discussions

5.1. Responses to Open-Ended Questions

Question 1: How do you view the current economic cooperation between Pakistan and China, and what are the main opportunities and challenges?

Many respondents highlighted CPEC and economic cooperation between the two nations as crucial to the area's prosperity. They believed CPEC would transform Pakistan's economy by improving regional connectivity and infrastructure. However, worry about these enterprises' potential debt burdens persisted. Participants also questioned the partnership's longevity due to the agreements' lack of transparency. Many respondents prioritized political stability, emphasizing the necessity for strong leadership and consistent governance to ensure these joint ventures' success. Even while these energy and infrastructure projects have tremendous potential, they noted the real challenge is ensuring they lead to Pakistan's capacity building, talent development, and knowledge transfer.

Question 2: How do ethnic interactions and integration contribute to strengthening Pakistan-China relations?

Cultural and ethnic contacts were crucial to Pakistan-China relations. Academic exchanges and ethnic festivals were suggested to foster mutual understanding and respect between the two nations. Respondents said these encounters brought people together across cultures and enabled deeper local engagement. Educational initiatives like scholarships promoted ethnic solidarity. These events reinforced the bilateral connection and improved people-to-people and information interaction. Respondents said better procedures are needed to overcome language and cultural barriers and maximize ethnic and cultural contacts.

Question 3: How would you evaluate the diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and China, and what diplomatic efforts are vital for enhancing ties?

Respondents believed Pakistan-China's diplomatic relationship was a solid strategic partnership built on trust and similar goals. They stated that international collaboration has strengthened this relationship, particularly on key issues like economic development and regional security. Participants considered that representing the aspirations and dreams of the two nations' people would strengthen the partnership, which was already strong. They further said government officials, academics, and civil society members should be diplomats. Respondents also stressed adaptive diplomacy. This strategy promotes multi-level discourse and engagement to address emerging concerns and use collaboration opportunities like technology and climate change.

Question 4: How do you perceive the trade dynamics between Pakistan and China, and what factors contribute to the trade imbalance?

Most people are delighted with the rising trade between Pakistan and China, but many worry about the trade gap. They argued that the difference is because Pakistan's export and manufacturing sectors don't fulfill Chinese market criteria. Participants stressed the need for

government action to address these concerns. They suggested strategies to improve quality control, export diversification, and local manufacturing. Reduced tariffs and simplified trade laws were also suggested to aid Pakistan's exporters. They indicated that strategic conversations may lead to a more equal and mutually productive economic collaboration.

Question 5: What are your thoughts on Chinese investment in Pakistan, and which sectors hold the greatest potential for future collaboration?

The majority of respondents viewed Chinese investment favorably, particularly noting its significant contributions to the infrastructure and energy sectors. They recognized Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) as crucial for the development of developing nations, and many emphasized that strategic investment in these areas could spur broader economic growth. Participants identified opportunities for collaboration in sectors such as renewable energy, technology, and agriculture, suggesting that diversifying investment could enhance the benefits of the Pakistan-China partnership.

Question 6: How do media reports, religious community, and public opinion in Pakistan relate to the Uyghur crisis, given the Pakistan-China ties' strategic importance?

The study asked the respondents how Uyghur public perception influences Pakistan-China relations. Interviews contrasted with qualitative responses. Respondents agreed that religious unity influenced public opinion. Others were concerned about Uyghur Muslims, but China's significance to Pakistan's economic and geopolitical security was greater. Balancing religious identity with realism about foreign relations in public perception is tough. Experts and politicians urged a diplomatic resolution to avoid damaging the strategic relationship. A more comprehensive narrative on religious and cultural tolerance might boost communication and apparent misunderstandings between the two nations. Sensitive subjects must be discussed often to ensure teamwork and trust. Table 4 shows the main survey results for ready reference.

Table 4: Key Findings from Survey Responses

Survey Questions	Emerging Themes
Economic Cooperation	- Significant advancements in infrastructure development - Enhanced regional connectivity through initiatives like CPEC
Ethnic Interactions and Integration	- Strengthened mutual understanding between nations - Increased academic exchanges and scholarship opportunities

Survey Questions	Emerging Themes
Diplomatic Relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Robust partnership characterized by strong mutual trust - Continuous support for each other's strategic interests
Trade Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Notable growth in trade volume, indicating positive engagement - Awareness of trade imbalances and need for improved local competitiveness
Chinese Investment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical contributions to infrastructure projects - Strategic improvements in the energy sector facilitating economic growth

Source: Author's survey.

5.2. Quantitative Outcomes of the Survey

Figure 1 shows the demographics of the survey. The majority of respondents (73.3%) were male, which may reflect local economic and political preferences. Professional and academic international relations issues are likely to include young individuals since 36.7% of the population is between 31 and 35. Professors and instructors account for the most significant sector of education (36.7%), indicating a considerable concentration of intellectual persons capable of providing well-informed perspectives on two-way interaction. 73.3% of people are "very familiar" with Pakistan-China ties, implying that many are informed. This implies a knowledgeable sample that may accurately reflect relationship dynamics. The data also shows a wide range of occupations; 46.7% of respondents were students, indicating interest in global issues. Because most participants live in cities, they may become more knowledgeable about global events and Pakistan-China relations. These features illustrate the study's ability to understand Pakistan and China's bilateral relationships thoroughly.

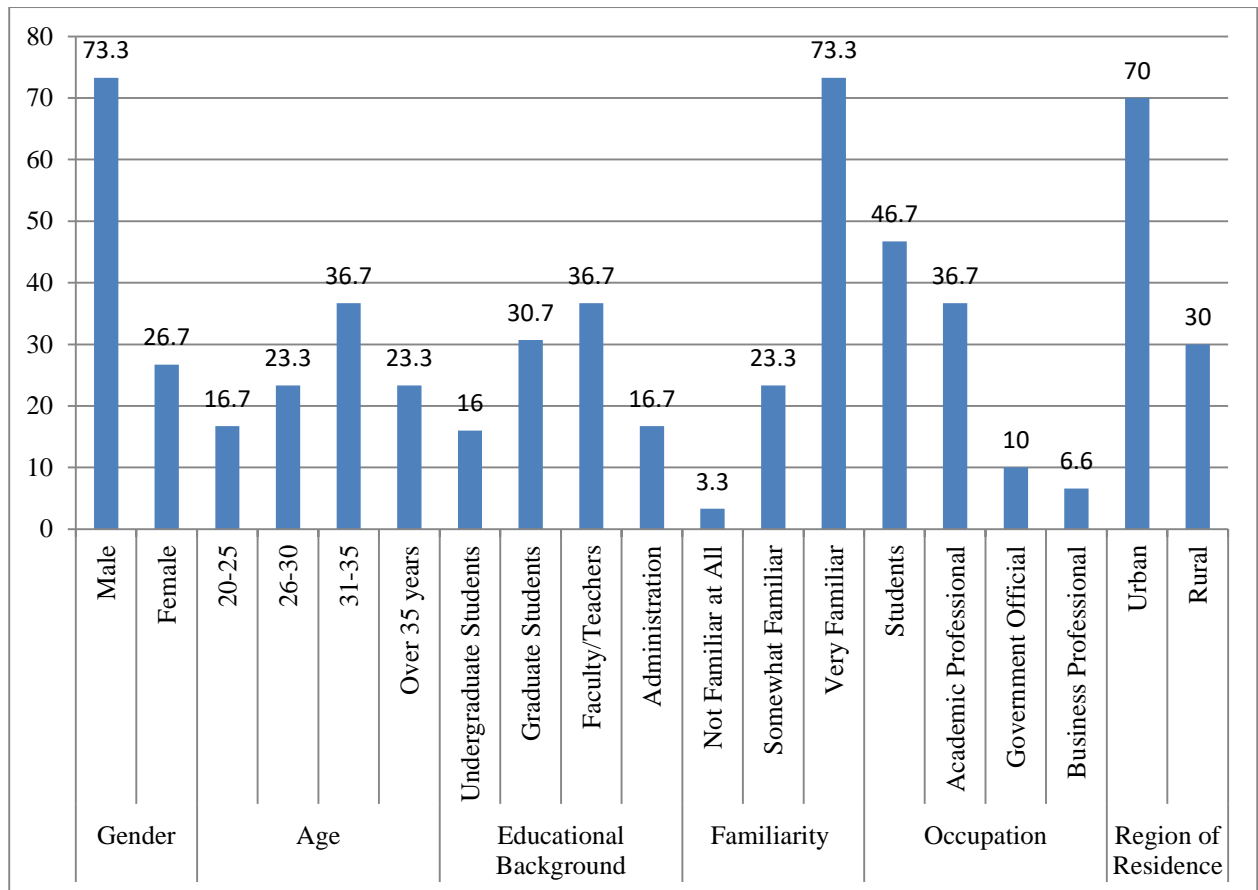


Figure 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Source: Author’s survey.

Table 5 shows the demographic traits and independent factors that best predicted public opinion on Pakistan-China relations from multivariate regression analysis. A significant connection ($\beta = 0.267, p = 0.001$) was found between educational background and perception of Pakistan-China relationships. This supports the earlier studies on how education affects respondents' opinions on international crises (Bosio, 2023; Chugh et al., 2023). Education may improve geopolitical comprehension and international relations judgments, according to Moscovitz and Sabzalieva (2023). More education is associated with more positive views of the Pakistan-China relationship, demonstrating the importance of education in diplomacy (Iqbal & Masroor, 2023). High familiarity with the problem is strongly correlated with the response variable. Understanding the complexities of Pakistan-China relations improves public opinion of the cooperation. Following these outcomes, public awareness campaigns on the Pakistan-China relationship's advantages and intricacies may boost support for better diplomatic relations.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics and Inferential Tests of Key Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	t-test (p-value)	ANOVA (F-statistic)
Perception of Pakistan-China Relations	4.1	0.845	-0.231	-0.121	t = 3.29 (p < 0.01)	F = 5.67 (p < 0.01)
Economic Cooperation	3.93	0.45	-0.154	-0.301	t = 2.75 (p < 0.05)	F = 4.32 (p < 0.01)
Ethnic Interactions and Integration	3.63	0.718	0.456	0.789	t = 1.95 (p = 0.05)	F = 2.67 (p < 0.05)
Diplomatic Relations	3.63	0.669	0.001	-0.059	t = 1.76 (p = 0.08)	F = 3.92 (p < 0.05)
Trade Relations	3.93	0.254	-0.1	-0.097	t = 2.32 (p < 0.05)	F = 4.76 (p < 0.01)
Investment Opportunities	3.73	0.521	0.212	-0.243	t = 2.55 (p < 0.05)	F = 3.34 (p < 0.05)

Source: Author's survey estimates.

Table 6 displays multivariate regression findings that determined the independent factors and demographic features that best predicted public opinion on Pakistan-China ties. The research indicated a positive association between educational background and perceptions (standardized $\beta = 0.267$, $p = 0.001$). This outcome complements previous research on how education influences perceptions of global issues (Bosio, 2023; Chugh et al., 2023). Education enables people to appraise international relations and understand geopolitical dynamics properly (Moscovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023). Higher education is associated with more positive attitudes about the Pakistan-China partnership, demonstrating the importance of educated perspectives in diplomacy (Iqbal & Masroor, 2023). A standardized β value of 0.318 ($p = 0.004$) indicates that a high familiarity with the topic is a considerable predictor. Understanding the complexities of Pakistan-China relations enhances public opinion of the alliance, emphasizing the need for knowledge and information. Research demonstrates that understanding the people involved in international partnerships

increases perspectives because familiarity improves engagement and comprehension (Zhou et al., 2023).

Table 6: Multivariate Regression Analysis

Variables	Coefficient value	t-value	Prob. Value
Demographic Variables			
Gender	-0.112	-1.532	0.128
Age	0.065	0.763	0.446
Educational Background	0.267	3.305	0.001
Familiarity with Topic	0.318	2.974	0.004
Occupation	0.204	2.111	0.036
Region of Residency	0.185	2.055	0.041
Independent Variables			
Economic Cooperation	0.21	2.221	0.028
Ethnic Interactions and Integration	0.475	4.203	0.000
Diplomatic Relations	0.412	3.912	0.0000
Trade Relations	0.542	5.621	0.000
Investment Opportunities	0.091	1.061	0.292
Statistical Tests			
R ²	0.801	F-statistics	37.213
Adjusted R ²	0.782	F-probability	0.000

Source: Author's survey estimates.

Employment is a significant factor, as shown by a normalized β value of 0.204 ($p = 0.036$). People in specific vocations may have a skewed impression of bilateral connections due to their expertise in foreign affairs (Alieva & Bluth, 2023). Academics, diplomats, and entrepreneurs may have direct experience with cultural exchanges and economic cooperation, providing a more nuanced viewpoint (Buyukgoze, 2023). Professional experiences influence one's views on international relations and foreign policy, which makes sense (Powers & Renshon, 2023). A residence region is a significant demographic factor, as indicated by a standardized β value of 0.185 ($p = 0.041$). This suggests that cultural or economic factors may influence people's perceptions of Pakistan-China relations depending on their area. This study reveals that regional connections may affect people's views toward international

cooperation, which supports previous research that found local surroundings had a significant effect on people's opinions (Han et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2023b).

Economic cooperation and attitudes are strongly correlated, as shown by the standardized β value 0.210 ($p = 0.028$). This demonstrates how financial links influence foreign policy perspectives. Previous research has demonstrated that economic interdependence promotes collaboration and trust, implying that positive attitudes about the relationship rise with economic cooperation (Dutta & Sobel, 2023; Li & Lou, 2024). This emphasizes the need for funding economic initiatives to increase public approval of the bilateral relationship. Ethnic interactions and integration is a significant predictor, as seen by the standardized β value of 0.475 ($p = 0.000$). Saaida (2023) and Grincheva (2024) contribute to the burgeoning literature on cultural diplomacy's role in global tolerance and understanding. Samira and Karfa (2024) suggest intellectual and artistic relationships may foster mutual dialogue and cooperation on ethnic grounds. These results show that expanding cultural interactions between China and Pakistan may affect public opinion in both countries, according to Ali et al. (2023). Pakistan-China diplomatic relations improve perceptions. Research reveals that formal diplomatic meetings affect perceptions. Diplomatic ties promote trust and collaboration, which benefits society (Onditi, 2023). According to current views on international relations diplomacy, increased diplomatic efforts may improve public perceptions of the partnership (Thiel, 2023).

A significant positive association exists between economic links and attitudes on Pakistan-China ties (normalized $\beta = 0.268$, $p = 0.011$). Trade affects public opinion on foreign alliances. Strong trade agreements strengthen economic links and foster mutual benefit and cooperation. Arshad et al. (2024) discovered that individuals see China-Pakistan ties more favorably when considering economic interactions as helpful. Current international trade views indicate that economic interdependence promotes political cooperation and stability. As trade volume and economic advantages increase, public support for the relationship should rise (Chen et al., 2023). The extent to which trade benefits benefit local economies and the fairness of trade procedures may influence how individuals see trade dynamics. Stakeholders are more likely to value collaboration with China if it improves infrastructure, produces jobs, and opens new markets (Li & Wang, 2023). However, trade imbalances may spark criticism. Promoting open trade policies and exhibiting successful trade activities are two strategies for improving public opinion (Awapara, 2023).

6. Future Research and Recommendations

The study advises more research into how economic cooperation, ethnic interactions and integration, and diplomatic contacts have influenced Pakistan-China relations in the past, present, and future and how they have altered in response to shifting political and economic climates. Researchers should compare Pakistan's other bilateral relationships. This would provide clarity in Pakistan-China ties. This might include studying Pakistan's relationships with other major nations using comparable methodologies and drawing conclusions. Future studies might examine how media depiction and public opinion influence foreign policy choices and diplomatic tactics. Given the changing nature of international relations, future research should track cultural, diplomatic, and economic connections throughout time. This might help us understand the paths of these interactions. Further study on these topics might benefit policymakers and stakeholders in Pakistan-China relations. Table 7 summarizes the research hypotheses, lighting Pakistan-China relations factors.

Table 7: Summary of Hypotheses

Hypothesis	Description	Result	Remarks
H1	Economic partnership positively impacts Pakistan-China relations, enhancing bilateral ties.	Accepted	Strong statistical evidence supports H1.
H2	Ethnic dynamics and strategic synergies strengthen Pakistan-China relations.	Accepted	Robust data analysis confirms H2.
H3	Diplomatic relations positively influence perceptions of the Pakistan-China alliance.	Partially Accepted	Some evidence supports H3, but not conclusive.

The research data validated H1, which suggested a positive association between economic partnership and bilateral relationship perception, demonstrating that financial collaboration is essential to strengthening the partnership. H2, which investigated ethnic dynamics and strategic synergy, confirmed the importance of socio-political and strategic elements in developing Pakistan-China ties. H3, which examined how diplomatic encounters influenced partnership perception, had little support. According to studies, strong diplomatic relations improve perceptions. However, other factors may affect the dynamics beyond diplomatic efforts. Thus, H1 and H2 were substantially supported, whereas H3 was somewhat verified, showing that the Pakistan-China alliance is complicated. As diplomatic impacts are

complex, this finding suggests that evaluating the history of this key bilateral relationship should include more factors.

7. Conclusions

The study focuses on Pakistan-China ties in ethnic interactions and integration, economic cooperation, and diplomacy. Public opinion, economic partnership, and cultural diplomacy affect the Pakistan-China relationship, and this study evaluates them all. According to the findings, cultural exchanges and educational partnerships promote communication and cooperation between nations. The study also notes that long-term strategic partnership needs to address public opinion, including Uyghur concerns. The study addresses key questions of Pakistan-China relations in a changing world, emphasizing ethnic diplomacy and regional stability. Public support, cultural integration, and economic goals must be robust and flexible for this partnership. The study suggests that politicians promote cultural interchange, open communication, and inclusive development to maintain popular support and align with national objectives. The Pakistan-China collaboration has enormous potential for expansion and mutual benefit, as shown by quantitative and qualitative data indicating widespread popular support. However, financial sustainability and political stability are required for this partnership to survive. Governments should talk freely about CPEC and other projects to strengthen economic cooperation. Transparency in the project's finances and planned benefits may allay stakeholders' worries about the long-term viability of debt. Participation of local communities in project talks has the potential to build ownership and support for future endeavors. The government may improve economic partnerships by increasing openness. Improving and extending ethnic interactions and integration programs is critical. Both nations may strengthen their mutual understanding and respect by promoting student exchanges, art displays, and intellectual connections. Cultural diplomacy has the potential to promote bilateral ties while also countering harmful beliefs. Cultural connections boost public views and help individuals grasp common values and aims. Many levels of communication are required to foster diplomatic confidence and collaboration. To solve rising regional challenges, multilateral discussions, cooperative conferences, and high-level visits must take precedence. Creating policy research organizations and think tanks focusing on Pakistan-China relations may encourage intellectual discussion and innovative solutions to shared problems. Diplomatic relations may enhance and assist a partnership in overcoming future challenges

Ethics declarations

- Ethical approval

This study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Department of Research, The Sherwan Institute of Online Education (No. SIOE1232/2024), and relevant survey procedures were in line with the requirements of the Declaration of Helsinki. Written informed consent for participation in this study was provided by the participants.

- Consent for publication: Not applicable.

- Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

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