



**STRATEGIC RELATIONS BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND CHINA: AN
ANALYTICAL CASE STUDY OF THE CHINA-PAKISTAN ECONOMIC
CORRIDOR (CPEC)**

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the strategic bilateral relations between Pakistan and China through the lens of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It positions CPEC as both an economic opportunity and a strategic pillar of the Sino-Pak partnership. Using a qualitative content analysis of secondary sources such as journal articles and policy papers, the research applies the framework of Neo-liberal institutionalism to assess cooperation, interdependence, and policy challenges. Findings reveal that while CPEC enhances connectivity and regional integration, its success is hindered by governance gaps, security concerns, and uneven resource distribution. The study highlights the importance of linking documentary evidence to human security and critical security literature. It recommends strengthening institutional capacity, addressing gender and environmental dimensions, and ensuring transparent policy implementation to maximize CPEC's long-term benefits for Pakistan's economy and regional cooperation.

Keywords: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC, Strategic Relations, Neoliberal Institutionalism, Regional Cooperation.

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Introduction:

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents one of the most significant initiatives within the broader Belt and Road framework, linking Kashgar in China’s Xinjiang region to Pakistan’s Gwadar port. Launched in 2013 and formalized during President Xi Jinping’s 2015 visit to Pakistan, CPEC was initially valued at USD 46 billion and has since expanded to over USD 60 billion. Its projects span energy, infrastructure, and connectivity, positioning CPEC as both an economic stimulus for Pakistan and a strategic asset for China’s regional outreach.

While Pakistan views CPEC as a potential driver of economic growth and regional integration, the initiative also raises critical questions about debt sustainability, governance transparency, equitable distribution of benefits, and security challenges, particularly in underdeveloped regions such as Balochistan. This paper examines CPEC not as a rhetorical “game changer,” but as a complex strategic partnership shaped by political, economic, and social dynamics. By employing a qualitative content analysis and drawing on the theoretical lens of Neo-liberal Institutionalism, the study investigates how cooperation and interdependence are framed within Sino-Pak relations, and what obstacles must be addressed to realize CPEC’s long-term potential.

Problem Statement

CPEC is envisioned as a transformative project for Pakistan and the wider region, backed by significant Chinese investment. However, its success largely depends on the stability of the long-term strategic relationship between Pakistan and China. This relationship faces potential threats such as terrorism, political instability, regional interference, and weak governance. Conversely, it can be strengthened through cultural exchange, trade, and economic cooperation. Despite its importance, limited research addresses the factors that may either disrupt or reinforce this bilateral partnership. This study aims to analyze these elements to better understand their impact on CPEC and future Sino-Pak relations.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for both academic scholarship and policy formulation. While existing research has largely focused on the economic and infrastructural aspects of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), this study goes further by analyzing how CPEC contributes to the long-term evolution of strategic relations between Pakistan and China. It highlights not only the strengthening factors, such as cooperation in trade, education, and culture, but also examines the challenges, including governance issues, public perceptions, and administrative barriers, that may undermine bilateral ties. By addressing these underexplored dimensions, the study provides a more holistic understanding of CPEC’s role in regional geopolitics. Furthermore, the findings offers practical insights for policymakers to enhance bilateral cooperation, improve institutional coordination, and ensure the sustainable success of CPEC. The study is particularly valuable for stakeholders in foreign policy, economic planning, regional development, and international relations.

Research Questions

1. How does CPEC contribute to the overall evolution of strategic relations between Pakistan and China?
2. What challenges may weaken the China–Pakistan relationship within the context of CPEC?
3. What specific political, economic, or institutional factors can further strengthen bilateral cooperation through CPEC?

Limitation of the Study

Despite its relevance and analytical depth, this study has certain limitations. First, it relies primarily on secondary data sources, such as academic articles, policy papers, and official reports, which may limit the scope for firsthand insights or real-time developments. Second, the qualitative nature of the study does not allow for the measurement of impact through quantitative indicators, such as GDP contribution or employment data. Third, given the political sensitivity surrounding CPEC, especially in regions like Balochistan and Xinjiang, access to accurate and unbiased information remains a challenge. Fourth, the study is limited to the bilateral context of Pakistan and China and does not deeply explore the broader regional or global power dynamics that also influence CPEC. Lastly, by using the theory of neo-liberal institutionalism, public and administrative perceptions are discussed based on available literature.

Literature Review:

China Pakistan Economic Corridor is really useful for this region and underdeveloped and poor areas of both countries will benefit as well the employment rate in both countries will also increase. Pakistan and China having strong ties have helped and supported each other in their hard times. Though Pakistan have signed formal preferential trade agreement (PTA) with China since 2003, but was not used up to its full potential. The bilateral trade among both the countries was 6.9 dollars in 2007 which reached to 16 billion 2014. The total *bilateral trade* in goods *between China and Pakistan* reached US\$23.1 billion in 2024 (Arendse Huld, 2025). Pakistan's relations with China are reliable and trustworthy. CPEC as an agreement of trade that will connect both countries with regional states and bringing them closer in the network of roads and railway tracks. Pakistan always appreciates Chinese investment to improve its economy and develop the infrastructure of its deprived areas (Kataria & Naveed, 2020).

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is the largest project in Pakistan after Indus water treaty of 1960. It is proven and established fact that the Economic Corridor is in all benefit of people of both countries. There was a controversy was created to destroy the project lately in Pakistan regarding the route of the project but Chief Minister Baluchistan narrated that there is no such problem and the project is well on its way. (Bengali, Baloch, Khan, Treen, Hafeez, & Yousaf, 2015).

The infrastructure building has been the corner stone of development for all the countries around the world. The Chinese investment in CPEC and Gwadar port has been heavy and it is for infrastructure building purpose, which is the initiative of "One road and one belt" as announced by the Chinese president Xi Jinping (Irshad A. , 2015). The CPEC gives us a view of bigger picture of great Chinese plan behind China's Silk Road Economic Belt foreign policy vision and of course it will impact the whole region including south East Asian and East Asian countries including countries routing their trade in Arabian sea. (Lain & Pantucci, 2015). CPEC, being part of China's One Belt One Road initiative, is of absolute importance for China's energy security as the international war politics and global players in South China Sea are major threat. Moreover, The CPEC can provide economic avenues to Pakistan and can develop regional and economic and trade among the Asian nations. But there can be some severe problems severe problems of regional security, internal stability and different political actors in the politics of Pakistan (Ali A. , 2016).

The One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative has received considerable attention from global scholars due to its wide-ranging socio-economic implications. Yin Pumin (2015) highlights that the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road will promote economic growth along its route. Zhai Kun (2015) describes OBOR as a global trade strategy aimed at connecting China with countries worldwide. Zhang Xudong (2015) emphasizes that this initiative will accelerate development both regionally and globally. Muhammad Haris (2015) notes that CPEC's Special Economic Zones will revitalize Pakistan's struggling industrial sector. Meanwhile, Hamid and Hayat (2012) suggest that Pakistan must adopt strategic measures to remain competitive, given its comparatively weaker economy. Hussain and Ali (2015) stress CPEC's importance in enhancing both economic and social ties between China and Pakistan.

Literature Gap

While existing literature emphasizes the economic potential, infrastructure development, and strategic significance of CPEC for both Pakistan and China as well as its regional impact. Further, most studies focus on economic benefits, trade volume, and infrastructure development, but **the long-term evolution of the *strategic partnership* between Pakistan and China beyond trade is not thoroughly analyzed.** Although economic cooperation is highlighted, **non-economic dimensions.** For example, cultural exchange, educational cooperation, administrative coordination that contribute to a deeper strategic alliance are **largely neglected.** Some works mention security issues, corruption, or political instability, but **there is no systematic analysis of the factors that either disrupt or reinforce the strategic Sino-Pak partnership in the context of CPEC.** While investment and development projects are widely discussed, **public trust, administrative readiness, and psychological barriers** related to CPEC implementation in both countries are **rarely explored.** Although challenges are identified (e.g., security, workforce, governance), **few studies assess Pakistan's policy responses** or propose strategic solutions to ensure the long-term success of CPEC and its role in bilateral ties.

Main Argument

While CPEC is widely recognized for its economic and infrastructural benefits, its long-term success as a regional game changer depends on how effectively it strengthens the strategic

partnership between Pakistan and China by addressing underlying political, administrative, and perceptual challenges through coordinated policy measures.

Research Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis to examine the strategic dimensions of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Content analysis is used here as a systematic technique for interpreting communication, allowing the researcher to infer meaning from textual and documentary sources. Data Sources and Selection Criteria Data were drawn from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, government reports, and reputable media publications published between 2013 and 2025. Sources were selected based on their relevance to CPEC and Sino-Pak strategic relations, credibility, and contribution to the theoretical and empirical debates. Materials lacking direct relevance or academic rigor were excluded to ensure reliability.

A coding framework was developed to categorize data into key themes: *economic impacts, strategic relations, governance challenges, security concerns, and regional equity*. These categories were guided by the theoretical lens of Neo-liberal Institutionalism, which emphasizes cooperation, interdependence, and institutional capacity. Furthermore, the analysis followed a linear research model, progressing through theory specification, data specification, and data analysis. Texts were manually and later, systematically coded by using NVivo-14 software, which facilitated organization, thematic clustering, and comparison across sources. The procedure involved iterative reading, coding passages into categories, and synthesizing findings to identify both reinforcing and disruptive factors in the bilateral relationship.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher has used the theory of Neo-liberal Institutionalism which emphasizes on the importance of non-state actors. In his pluralist work Robert Keohane, who is considered the founder of Neo-liberal institutionalism, says, non-state actors are sub ordinate to state. Structure is fine, there is anarchy but international institutions can mitigate structure anarchy. Through regional and global integration states will enter into cooperative relations. even if another state will gain more from the interaction. in other words, absolute gains are more important for liberal intuitionists than relative gains emphasis by neo realist. they talk about the harmony of interests (Keohane, 1989).

This study adopts the theoretical lens of **Neoliberal Institutionalism**, which emphasizes the role

of international cooperation, economic interdependence, and institutional arrangements in promoting peace and mutual benefit among states. In the context of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), this theory helps explain how both countries pursue long-term strategic relations through structured cooperation in trade, infrastructure, and regional connectivity. The framework also informs the analysis of policy gaps and institutional challenges that may hinder the success of CPEC.

This study applies Neoliberal Institutionalism to analyze how economic interdependence through CPEC fosters long-term strategic cooperation between China and Pakistan. By applying neo liberal institutionalism the research highlights how CPEC is a *win-win initiative*, enhancing economic ties, infrastructure development, and strategic collaboration. Neoliberal Institutionalism explains *why states cooperate* despite an anarchic world system, particularly through **economic interdependence** and **mutual benefits**. In this research there are multiple **MoUs, trade agreements, and infrastructure projects**. This theory directly addresses how **international institutions and long-term agreements** like CPEC help reduce uncertainty and foster cooperation. CPEC is largely an **economic initiative** aimed at regional development, trade facilitation, and FDI, all key areas where Neoliberal Institutionalism provides strong analytical tools. Since this study aims to suggest **policy recommendations** for strengthening bilateral ties and overcoming obstacles, Neoliberal Institutionalism’s rational, institutional-focused lens is ideal for linking theory to practice.

Findings of the Research

The findings indicate that CPEC has transformed Pakistan–China relations from a primarily geopolitical alignment into a comprehensive strategic partnership grounded in economic interdependence and institutionalized cooperation. Infrastructure development, energy projects, and trade facilitation have deepened bilateral trust, while Gwadar Port provides China with strategic access to the Arabian Sea.

CPEC as a Catalyst in the Strategic Evolution of Pakistan–China Relations

The findings show that CPEC has transformed Pakistan–China relations into a comprehensive strategic partnership rooted in economic interdependence and institutionalized cooperation. This outcome aligns with **Neo-liberalist theory**, which emphasizes that cooperation and shared interests reduce conflict and foster stability. Mechanisms such as the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) and regular MoUs illustrate how economic collaboration has been institutionalized. At the same time, insights from **Critical Security Studies** highlight that despite economic gains, governance gaps, debt sustainability, and regional inequities, particularly in Balochistan, pose disruptive challenges that must be addressed. The evidence also supports theoretical claims about **regional connectivity**, showing how large-scale economic corridors reshape power dynamics by linking South Asia, Central Asia, and the Indian Ocean. Based on these findings, the study recommends strengthening institutional capacity and governance transparency, ensuring equitable distribution of benefits across provinces, addressing security concerns through inclusive policies, and expanding the theoretical-empirical linkage by integrating gender and environmental dimensions into strategic planning. This integrated approach is essential for realizing CPEC’s long-term potential and advancing regional stability.

CPEC a win-win situation for Pakistan and China:

CPEC is a win-win situation for both China and Pakistan. Middle East has the largest reserves of oil and Africa, Europe and America are in need of cheap Chinese products. The shortest routes for trade are Chinese dream Pakistan is the way to fulfill that dream. Pakistan provides the route for trade and China provides the trade activity. So, it’s a win-win situation for both countries.

Pakistan’s Benefit from CPEC:

China is the biggest trade partner and investor of Pakistan in the field of energy field, Infrastructure, Ports and telecommunications and developing port. Moreover, Chinese ensured 20 billion spending in the sectors of energy 30 billion in other field as foreign direct investment (FDI) in Pakistan, that will not only promote trade but also will bring economic activity among both countries. The current development in CPEC will make Pakistan a trade hub for the entire world on behalf of the biggest country in the world in terms of business volume. The outcomes in the field of military and politics of this major project will bring absolute benefit for people of both

countries. The energy shortage in Pakistan has been reduced after CPEC's project and it will be able to compete and even export the energy to its neighbors. (Irshad, Xin, & Arshad, 2015).

President of China Xi Jinping has explained both of the nations have helped with each other in several fields and brought benefits to the people. Presently, both of the countries are specially working to develop China-Pakistan Economic corridor to enhance prosperity and improve condition of the people and economy. China's thought of reviving the Silk route will bring developments and promote connectivity among countries situated on the road side. About CPEC, the president Jinping elaborated that Chinese development of Gwadar Port, energy sectors, infrastructure cooperation are the important areas to drive development across Pakistan and deliver benefits to its people.

President XI Jinping visited Pakistan and he signed 51 Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with Pakistan. It was the slogan that CPEC is not merely a road but, it is the transfer of goods and services between the two countries. The infrastructure will be developed and public services. CPEC will give a good standard of life to the people of Pakistan. The projects of 46 billion are increased to more than 62 billion of dollars. All the Chinese companies and institutions will work under the regulations of Pakistan. The project will be completed by 2030 then. The project is divided into three routes such as western route, Central route and eastern routes. (Rizvi, 2015):

CPEC is considered to be the project of development for most of the Pakistan. It is also the source of income generation, poverty eradication, employment and improves better the poor socio-economic conditions of Pakistani citizens. Moreover, CPEC is the guarantee of prosperity of the provinces of Pakistan whether they are small or large. The exports will increase by a great deal due to the construction of CPEC. The CPEC project investment will convert the provincial and national economies into better and will create the integration between the provinces and federation. The security condition of country is the dependent upon the increasing trade that brings stability and peaceful environment of economic interdependence. Moreover CPEC is eradicating the trade barriers prevailing among Pakistan and China (Esteban, 2016).

Strategic Hurdles in the Path of Progress: Challenges Threatening the China Pakistan Relationship under CPEC

While the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has reinforced bilateral cooperation, several challenges threaten to weaken the relationship and undermine the project's long-term success. One of the most pressing concerns is **security**, particularly in Balochistan, where separatist groups have targeted Chinese workers and infrastructure. Such incidents have raised concerns in China about the safety of its investments and citizens, leading to heightened security costs and diplomatic sensitivities. **Political instability** in Pakistan is another major challenge. Frequent government changes, inconsistent policies, and bureaucratic delays hinder decision-making and project implementation. Moreover, **inter-provincial tensions**, especially over the distribution of CPEC-related resources and route alignments have created domestic friction that could affect Pakistan's internal cohesion and its ability to deliver on bilateral commitments.

Besides, Transparency issues and governance weaknesses, including corruption and lack of oversight, also pose risks. Concerns about debt sustainability and the terms of Chinese loans have triggered public criticism and fostered skepticism about CPEC's long-term benefits, especially among civil society and opposition parties. Additionally, **external geopolitical pressures**, particularly from rival regional actors like India, and strategic concerns from the U.S. further complicate the relationship. India's opposition to CPEC, especially due to its passage through Gilgit-Baltistan (a disputed territory), adds an extra layer of diplomatic tension. In essence, while CPEC has great potential, its success depends on how well both nations navigate these complex challenges through mutual trust, policy coordination, and sustained commitment to transparency, equity, and regional peace.

Challenges in Building of Strategic Relationship with China:

The strategic relationship among China and Pakistan always refer to the future long term relationship where a win-win situation prevails for both the countries. There have always been some challenges in development of a healthy strategic relation which must be identified and root causes for them must be eliminated by making appropriate policies.

1. Environmental Changes:

That road networks changes light conditions on motorways and will disturbs soil conditions under massive renovation or construction.

- Roads building and usage may be negatively affect species, habitats, and landscape levels.
- Air quality will be affected by dust emissions from construction machinery which is being used in the project. Dust Emission may be carried long distances due to wind.
- Native plant in the area and the animal species of towns will be gone due to massive cutting of trees
- Destruction of agriculture land.
- Settlement of Affected People
- Noise pollution and disturbances may be reported to neighboring communities (Bilal, 2020).

2. Peace & Security:

The regional as well as local security and peace situation is absolutely necessary in this regards for development of this project and its completion. The terrorist and criminal elements need to be eliminated for security and completion of this project.

3. Political Instability:

Prominent political instability and security threats in Pakistan are a hindrance for completion for this project for which Chinese are worried about. The attitude of politicians and other political institutions is unpredictable which threatens Chinese investment.

4. Lack of Skillful Work Force and Administrative skills:

Administrative machinery and skill level of Pakistani workforce are hurdles for successful completion and operationalization of CPEC. The lack of discipline and corruption among the work force and administration is the biggest challenge in completion of this project.

5. Strategic Challenges for International Relation and Foreign Policy:

The CPEC has highlighted Pakistan all over the world which will finally cause to increase the enmity for Pakistan among nations of the world. So by making conspiracies against Pakistan, they will try to flop/destroy the idea of CPPEC. There are certain countries that don't like collation of both countries I-e, INDIA, ISRAEL and United States. India, especially because CEPEC is like a project they cannot digest easily. They will be active and already are in action these days to make

new plans to hinder this project instead of supporting it or making collation with China and Pakistan (Ramay, 2015).

6. Survival of Local Industry:

It is an admitted fact that Chinese industries are efficient and work force is skillful and disciplined. The local industry of Pakistan cannot produce at a level of Chinese as they are not only efficient and but cost effective. The inflow of Chinese products and industry will shut down Pakistan local industry.

7. Chinese Cultural Invasion:

The Chinese culture is very strong and it will invade our country and local public will have to follow a lot of customs and learn their language which is very difficult.

8. Balochistan Issue

The government of Balochistan will be allowed by the federation to make reconciliation with the insurgents in Balochistan which is a big challenge to the CPEC. The resolution of this issue will contribute to the success of this project and for the secure trade corridor between China and Pakistan. There is also a big doubt in the minds of people of Balochistan that Chinese will take over the port and people of Balochistan will be left stranded. The deprivation in terms of political and economic issues is one of the major causes of rebellion in Balochistan and eliminating these deprivations is mandatory for the peace in Balochistan. The CPEC is a project that will also pass through FATA and in future the CPEC will impact Afghanistan as well depending upon the stability in the FATA region of Pakistan. Therefore security issue of Gawadar port and the whole region is a big concern for China and its investments in Balochistan. In addition to Balochistan issue, the Gilgit-Balistan is also looking for their part in the CPEC which is there right. The region has witnessed processions and strikes for demanding political and economic rights in terms of fair share in the CPEC. (Ali, 2016)

9. Indian Reservations

CPEC is a 'game-changer' and it will also change the destiny of people of the region. The idea of Gwadar when it is becoming the gateway to Central Asia is an ancient idea. India is afraid that Pakistan will become the choice of trade for Asian Republics and will become economic power. It can't be refused that CPEC which is investment of 62 billion dollars will contribute a lot in Pakistan. Pakistan will have to face security challenges because of the civil war between Afghan

government and Taliban. The bigger problem with India is that it is not able to bear that Chinese investment is going through Kashmir which is on Pakistan side. India has the view that corridor passes through the disputed and disturbed area. India has serious concerns over the corridor. Moreover India believes that CPEC will finish energy problems in Pakistan and that CPEC may be a project that will change the fate of Pakistan. (Sareen, 2016)

Pakistan requires strong security to make successful the project of CPEC. Pakistan was weakened by the political differences in the past. The instability also awakened economic growth of the past and slow down the developmental projects. Past experiences Pakistan has to stabilize it from inside, as stability is absolutely important for progress of Pakistan. Pakistan's instability in politics and economics is a great threat to the project. The western route is dangerous and in not secure than that of Eastern route which is considered more secure and beneficial for corridor. Whereas, few areas of Balochistan Makran, Gawadar, and coastal belt along with Karachi have medium level of threat to the route. It is important to give CPEC complete security and all stake holders of the project also requires full security (Safdar, 2014).

Pathways to Partnership: Political, Economic, and Institutional Drivers Strengthening China–Pakistan Cooperation through CPEC

CPEC offers a transformative platform for China and Pakistan to deepen their bilateral cooperation beyond traditional alliances. To fully realize this potential, certain **political, economic, and institutional factors** must be prioritized. On the **political front**, sustained high-level engagement, policy continuity across governments, and non-partisan national ownership of CPEC are essential. When political parties and provincial governments align behind a shared vision of CPEC, project implementation becomes smoother, and foreign confidence is strengthened. From an **economic perspective**, Pakistan must improve its macroeconomic stability, reduce its dependency on imports, and incentivize local industries to integrate into the CPEC framework, especially through Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Encouraging public-private partnerships and enhancing trade facilitation with China can also bolster mutual economic gains.

At the **institutional level**, strong governance, transparency, and regulatory efficiency are critical. Strengthening institutions like the **CPEC Authority**, improving inter-provincial coordination, and reducing bureaucratic red tape can ensure timely implementation of projects. Regular consultation mechanisms like the **Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC)** must be made more inclusive, with

representation from academia, civil society, and business sectors. Additionally, human capital development, particularly through **technical education and skill training**, can empower local populations to benefit from CPEC-related employment opportunities, further stabilizing the partnership through grassroots support. By addressing these political, economic, and institutional priorities, China and Pakistan can solidify their long-term strategic partnership and unlock the full potential of CPEC as a model of regional cooperation and development.

Role of Gwadar in national progress:

The development of Gwadar port is expected to bring the foreign direct investment and it will become the hub of trade and energy in the region and all the states connecting to it will benefit from it. The province of Balochistan is mineral rich and will be linked with other parts of the country with developed new roads (Haidery, 2015). China is making its position strong at international level and is providing an opportunity to China for dominating its position. When US will leave Afghanistan there will be an empty space and China is expected to take that over. China wants to influence trade and transit route to central Asian Republics at all costs for its silk route project. With the strong disagreement with India in terms of CPEC, the project is expected to be completed within stipulated time and then the Karakoram Highway will be linking Gwadar and Kashgar (Talwar & Shreya Talwar, 2015).

Infrastructure development:

The CPEC's infrastructure development, through roads, highways, ports, and industrial zones, aims to transform Pakistan into a regional trade hub by enhancing connectivity across Asia, Europe, and Africa, removing investment barriers, and equitably boosting manufacturing and economic activity across all provinces including AJK, FATA, and Gilgit-Baltistan (Ashfaq & Abid, 2016).

Qualitative Content Analysis of CPEC Strategic Relations (Using NVivo-14 Approach)

Benefits of CPEC	Challenges to Strategic Relations	Opportunities for Strength	Environmental and Social Concerns
Economic Growth	Security and Terrorism	Cultural Cooperation	Environmental Degradation
Employment Generation	Political Instability	Trade and Investment	Displacement and Resettlement
Infrastructure Development	Corruption and Weak Governance	Education and Skill Development	Cultural Impact
Regional Connectivity	Foreign Policy Challenges	Public Perception Management	Local Industry Survival
Energy Security	Balochistan and Regional Issues		

To analysis the data of content analysis the trial version of NVivo-14 has been applied by the researcher to organize key themes and subthemes from the data on CPEC and Sino–Pak strategic relations which is highlighted in the above diagram. In a Nutshell, **the Benefits of CPEC includes**, economic growth, energy, and regional connectivity, while the **Challenges** are security, political instability, and foreign policy. However, the **Opportunities to strengthen ties** are education, trade, and cultural exchange. On the other hand the **Environmental and social concerns** are displacement of internal peoples, air pollution, and impact on local industry.

Conclusion

The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents a pivotal development in the evolution of strategic relations between Pakistan and China. More than just an infrastructure or trade project, CPEC embodies a long-term vision of regional connectivity, economic integration, and bilateral cooperation. This study has examined how CPEC contributes to deepening the strategic partnership between the two nations through institutional cooperation, mutual economic interests, and shared geopolitical goals. However, the analysis also reveals that the full potential

of this partnership is contingent upon addressing key challenges such as political instability, governance weaknesses, regional security threats, and administrative inefficiencies. Equally important is the need to strengthen soft elements of the relationship, including public trust, cultural understanding, and institutional capacity building. Applying the lens of Neoliberal Institutionalism, the study underlines the importance of sustained cooperation, formal agreements, and mutual dependence in fostering a stable and enduring bilateral relationship. For CPEC to achieve its envisioned impact, both countries must remain committed to transparent policy-making, inclusive development strategies, and effective management of external and internal disruptions. In a nutshell, CPEC is not merely a corridor of roads and investments but a strategic pathway for long-term partnership and regional transformation. Its success will ultimately depend on how well Pakistan and China manage their differences, capitalize on shared interests, and build a resilient, future-oriented alliance.

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