

Xi Jinping Thought and Its Implications for South Asia: A Comparative Analysis of India and Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: President Xi's political thought (XPT) hybridizes Leninist essentials with the moral philosophies of Chinese intellectual heritage, particularly with Confucianism, forming a fused ideological structure. The paper conceptualized this synthesis as a New Mandate of Heaven that draws simultaneously on both traditional Chinese philosophies and philosophical underpinning of Marxism-Leninism. President Xi's political thought is operationalized through five analytical dimensions: (1) political governance; (2) ideological foundations; (3) economic policy; (4) Chinese nationalism; and (5) global governance. Moreover, the paper examines its implications for the two nuclear South Asian states, Pakistan and India. The analysis concludes that Pakistan's approach adopts a broadly receptive posture and aligns with XPT. In contrast, India's policy is informed by a set of strategies that resist, perceiving XPT as a threat to its power projection in the region.

KEYWORDS: Political Thought, Leninist, Confucianism, Synthesis, South Asia

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Introduction

In March 2018, President Xi's political thought—formally known as the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era—was codified into the constitution of the People's Republic of China (PRC), coupled with passing an amendment removing the two-term limit for the presidency made him China's lifelong leader (Xinhua, 2018). All of China's paramount leaders from Mao to Xi have put forward their political thought as a response and corrective mechanism to the major challenges of their respective eras. In China, a paramount leader's political thought serves as a comprehensive vision that guides all the policy and ideological directions of the party and state. Mao's thought can be framed as Personalist Leninism; Deng exercised his authority as a pragmatic Leninist informed by economic pragmatism; Jiang's thought widened the party's ideological base in order to meet the trends of globalization and to manage the side effects of reform and opening. Hu embraced the challenge to mitigate the rising inequalities and social discontent. These thoughts have reflected Chinese solutions to the contemporary challenges while continuously Sinicizing the Marxist-Leninist ideology and while keeping China on the fast track of progress. The Hu Jintao era, especially his last years, emphasized the revival of ideological importance for regime's survival and social growth (Bell, 2008). China needed an indigenous ideology, Chinese traditional philosophies spearheading by Confucianism, for social harmony and order, rather than relying solely on Sinicized Marxism (Lee, 2022).

Once denounced by the early leaders of Communist Party of China (CCP), Chinese traditional philosophies, particularly Confucianism, became a vital focus of state patronage during the final years of Hu Jintao's leadership. President Xi's tenure has foregrounded Confucianism both as the moral face of China and indispensable glue for reinforcing social harmony (Kubat, 2018). Substantial state's attention and resources have been devoted for promotion of Confucianism, both within China as an ideology that ensures harmony and social order and abroad as a cultural emblem intended to project China's civilizational identity and soft image.

This paper pushes forwards the idea that XPT blends the ideological contour of the Sinicized Marxism-Leninism with Confucianist philosophy. This hybrid ideological framework is termed *New Mandate of Heaven*. It explores that how XPT synthesizes the core essentials of the two dominant ideological traditions. The concept builds on the traditional Chinese notion of the *Mandate of Heaven (Tianming)*—a foundational Chinese political doctrine of ancient China to legitimize emperors of China—and infuse it with the core essentials of Leninism—such as party supremacy, democratic centralism, ideological discipline, and organizational control.

In Xi's discourse Confucianism underpins the philosophical core of China's normative vision for global governance, soft power, and social cohesion. Concurrently, core essentials of Leninism—such as vanguard party, democratic centralism, state capitalism, monopoly capitalism, dialectical adjustment, ideological discipline, and internationalism—guide President Xi's political thought in political governance, economic policy, and ideological foundations. XPT— a hybrid framework of Leninist governing logic and Confucian legitimacy—serves as the guiding principle of China's strategic behavior towards South Asia, particularly Pakistan and India.

This paper examines how India and Pakistan interpret and respond to XPT. The paper operationalizes XPT through five analytical dimensions: (1) political governance; (2) ideological foundations; (3) economic policy; (4) Chinese nationalism; and (5) global governance. The response of the two leading South Asia, Pakistan and India, will be analyze against these dimensions. The paper concludes that XPT caters two different responses from the two nuclear states of South Asia. Pakistan extends a receptive alignment, while India shows strategic resistance. India views and positions itself as a potential counterpart to China in the Asia Pacific region and a regional hegemon in South Asia. The analysis builds on official documents, policy initiatives, elite discourse, secondary literature, and empirical developments in diplomacy, economics, and security. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of ideational, institutional, and strategic patterns that cannot be captured through quantitative methods.

South Asia's Strategic and Economic Significance in the Xi Era

The President Xi era marks a global initiative from development to civilization to security, though rhetorically it is open for the entire globe, it is specifically designed for the developing world. The underlying philosophy of all Xi's initiatives encourages cosmopolitanism, promote civilizational dialogue, and promotion of non-Western philosophies. Given that the postwar world order was largely constructed by Western powers, China, as a new and influential stakeholder, faces significant obstacles in its efforts to reform Western-centric regulatory and financial institutions. As the responsibilities and shares in global economic growth of the non-Western powers grow, so do their demands for larger shares for global agenda setting. Correspondingly, Xi

has adjusted China's regional strategy in Asia. In Asia, South Asia is one of the most important regions, as two world nuclear archrivals reside in it. Both in terms of geography and market, South Asia holds significant sway in Eurasia.

South Asia has almost 11000 km of coastline. If Afghanistan is taken as part of South Asia, it has three landlocked countries—Afghanistan, Nepal, and Bhutan—whereas five states have coastlines: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Maldives. It is bounded by the Arabian Sea to the west, the Bay of Bengal to the east, the Indian Ocean to the south, and the towering Himalayas to the north, separating it from Central. Some of the world's strategic and commercial ports, such as Mumbai, Kochi, Visakhapatnam, and Paradip in India; Karachi and Gwadar in Pakistan; Colombo and Hambantota in Sri Lanka; and Chittagong and Mongla in Bangladesh, reside in it. In Pakistan and Sri Lanka, China has been investing in and leasing or operating ports—Gwadar, Hambantota, and Colombo. Whereas it has offered a concessional loan to upgrade Mongla Port, Bangladesh. China's investments in ports across South Asia are commonly described as forming a so-called 'string of pearls' (Pehrson, 2006). In 2015, India also initiated the ambitious "*SagarMala*" project to modernize, upgrade, and develop new ports along its approximately 7500 km coastline (Pradhan et al., 2022).

The South Asian region is home to approximately 2.04 billion people, almost 25% of the world population, demonstrating a huge consumption base. In terms of economic size and base, India dominates the region, followed by Pakistan with an overwhelmingly young population. The region hosts key industries such as IT & software services, pharmaceuticals, automotive and manufacturing, textiles and garments, tourism, fisheries, tea, agriculture, minerals and food processing, and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) infrastructure-linked industries. However, due to poor infrastructure and political reasons, the intraregional trade is low. Given these developments, the region occupies strategic and economic importance for global peace and economic health. China's investment in infrastructure and alternative financial institutional structures is defining the regional order in Asia in general and in South Asia in particular. Therefore, President Xi's policies have had a profound impact on the two nuclear states of Pakistan and India.

India and China: Historical Ties, Contemporary Conflicts, and Global Ambitions

Although India and China initiated their relations in the 1950s by signing *Panchsheel*, or the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, soon the train of goodwill swerved the path of peace into border skirmishes, finally culminating in the 1962 Sino-Indian War. China never accepted the McMahon Line, drawn in 1914 by the British Indian Empire, and considers the North-East Frontier Agency, modern-day Arunachal Pradesh, as part of Tibet. It is known in China as Zangnan, or South Tibet. Recent strategic documents, analyses, and China's posture indicate that China's leadership has also begun treating its sovereignty claim over Arunachal Pradesh as a matter of core concern in its foreign policy calculus (Shamim, 2025; U.S. Department of Defense, 2025; Verma, 2024). President Xi is vocal on the One China policy and pledged the unification of China as key ingredient of "great rejuvenation" of the Chinese nation by 2049. Thus, it can be argued that China's position on Arunachal Pradesh aligns with its broader unification agenda under the banner of national rejuvenation.

The nature of the trade relationship is not encouraging for India. The Sino-India bilateral trade touches a 127.71-billion-dollar figure in 2025. However, this trade tilts in China's favor. The significant Indian imports from China lead to a trade deficit exceeding \$99.2 billion in 2024-25 (Seli, 2025). India is one of the most

important destinations for Chinese exports following the US, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea. India a key importer of Chinese goods, constituting approximately 19% of total Indian imports.

In 2020, the India's Ministry of Information Technology banned 59 Chinese, including TikTok and WeChat (Sharma, 2020). Additionally Chinese investment in India is subjected to strict security clearance (Singh & Ohri, 2025). Instead, India has been pursuing initiatives like “Make in India” and production-linked incentives (PLI) in order to reduce import dependency on China and as a part of its diversification efforts. India also refused to be part of Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), raising questions for lack of “respect sovereignty and territorial integrity” (The Economic Times, 2025).

Whereas on the other end of the spectrum, due to its national power ingredients such as economic importance, strategic location, geography, population, and military size, India has been increasingly seen by America as the fulcrum of America’s Asia-Pacific policy, primarily aiming at countering China’s growing influence. The US repeatedly positioned India as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Several foundational strategic agreements have been signed between India and US: the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) for classified data sharing; the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) (2016) for reciprocal logistics support; the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) (2020) for secure communications; and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), which provides India with high-precision geospatial intelligence. The US designates these agreements as foundational agreements, which it usually enters into with its closest defense partners (NATO allies, Japan, South Korea, and Australia). In 2016, the US designated India as a “Major Defense Partner (MDP)”. It was a unique designation US allocated to India. India is also assigned a unique position in Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)- U.S., India, Japan, and Australia- the central pillar of US Indo-Pacific policy. The QUAD partnership is widely viewed as a security alliance specifically designed to counter the increasing influence of China (Wei, 2022). Despite a number of US closet allies in the region, India is the only country that is often designated as the “linchpin,” “anchor,” and “centerpiece” of US Indo-Pacific policy. India also actively participates in naval exercises in the Indian Ocean region. Malabar Naval Exercise—a QUAD-level strategic exercise—is worthy to be mentioned. In the nuclear realm, despite India never signing the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of nuclear weapons (NPT), it has been given a special exception within US domestic law and the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) for allowing the materialization of the US-India civil nuclear deal. In 2006, the US Congress passed the Hyde Act, a special waiver to ensure nuclear trade with India.

However, at a global level, both countries, China and India, actively advocate the reform agenda in the old-fashioned global financial institutions of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Both are part of a new network of financial institutions, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement (CRA), and the New Development Bank (NDB), that emphasizes a secure alternative to the Western-centric economic monopoly. Both states emphasize multipolarity, reform in the UNO Security Council, increased voice of the developing world, and advocacy for reform in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and digital norms.

All-Weather Allies: The China-Pakistan Partnership

Unlike Sino-Indian history, China and Pakistan share a cordial and friendly history. In 1960s, Pakistan ceded an almost 5000 square kilometer area in Aksai Chin to China; that put the trajectory of mutual relations on a friendly road. Their mutual friendship is designated as “iron brothers,” “all-weather friends,” and “higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the ocean, and sweeter than honey.” Unlike India, where relations between the two are marred by competition and conflict, the relations between Pakistan and China are based on long-term alignment and strategic partnership. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been designated as the flagship project of China’s transcontinental connectivity initiative of Belt & Road Initiative (BRI). CPEC acquires a critical position in China’s infrastructural initiative. The Gwadar port in Balochistan connects China to the Arabian Sea, a critical part of BRI.

The defense ties between Pakistan and China are extensive, including co-development and training. China provided approximately 81% of Pakistan’s arms in the last five years (Wong, 2025). Under a joint venture between China’s Chengdu Aircraft Corporation (CAC) and Pakistan Aeronautical Complex (PAC), the JF-17 Thunder fighter jet is co-developed. Pakistan’s continued development of advanced versions (block III) indicates significant technology transfer. It is equipped with new air-to-air missiles like the PL-10E and PL-15E. Pakistan is also set to get eight Type 39B “Hangor”-class submarines from China by 2028, in which the first batch will enter into service in 2026 (Xuanzun & Yunyi, 2025). The first four will be constructed by China, and the rest will be assembled at Karachi Shipyard & Engineering Works in Pakistan. In June 2025, the government of Pakistan at its X (formerly Twitter) also claimed that “Under Prime Minister Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif, Pakistan has achieved several major diplomatic achievements, including the offer of 40 fifth-generation J-35 stealth aircraft, KJ-500 AWACS, and HQ-19 defense systems from China, and the deferment of \$3.7 billion in debt” (Arab News, 2025). The cooperation between them in space is growing. In 2024, China’s historic Chiang’e 6 mission put Pakistani lunar satellite ICUBE-Q into moon’s orbit (CNSA, 2024). China-Pakistan joint military exercises (air, naval, etc.) such as the Shaheen (Eagle) Series, the AMAN Series (Multinational Naval Exercise), Exercise Indus Shield – Chinese, and the Sea Guardians series, as well as growing intelligence sharing and technical cooperation in reconnaissance. As the US treats India as China’s counterweight, so China positions Pakistan as India’s counterweight in South Asia.

People-to-people contact through educational, cultural, and youth exchanges is frequent. Both countries’ masses harbor warming sentiments of brotherhood and love for each other. At the UNSC, China several times protected Pakistan’s interests by utilizing its veto power. The relation between the two in every sector, ranging from economic interests, military cooperation, and diplomatic solidarity to strategic posturing, is profoundly based on equality, mutual respect, and well wishes.

The following five analytical dimensions, which are used to operationalize XPT, will be employed to examine the responses of both Pakistan and India to XPT.

Political Governance

China’s political system is informed by the Leninist essentials of a strong centralized party, democratic centralism, discipline, and the party and leadership as the core of all political activities and decisions. Unlike other countries where the state holds a higher position than the political party, in China this equation between the state and party is reversed. It was the Communist Party of China (CPC) who laid the foundation of modern

China, rather than vice versa. President Xi continuously focuses on the reformation of party, both through ideological education and anti-corruption campaign. To emphasize the importance of internal discipline within the Communist Party, Xi Jinping highlights the Party's commitment to self-renewal: "We must continue to advance the great new project of Party building. A hallmark that distinguishes the Communist Party of China from other political parties is its courage in undertaking self-reform" (Jinping, 2021).

China's political governance model is adaptive and based on experimentation. In China, a policy is first put into practice in order to measure its merits and demerits and if it yields positive results then only is deemed worthy for codification as a law. It exactly operates opposite to the Western lawmaking, where first the legislature goes for lawmaking and then only after for practice. Heilmann (2018) argues that the adaptation, experimentation are unique characteristics of Chinese governance system and termed it as "Red Swan" due to its unusual process. Similarly, Tolga Demiryol argues that the gradualistic approach of the China model is marked by "key policy changes [that] are introduced in a controlled manner, allowing the government to retrace and recalibrate policy choices" (Demiryol 2022, 264). Due to its ideological flexibility, gradualism, and pragmatism, despite being a Marxist-Leninist state, China does not explicitly export ideology in the Soviet sense. However, its developmental model through BRI carries the features of its narrative, governance, culture, and soft image to the developing world. The unconditionalities of its developmental model, the policy of non-interference, contain attractive features for authoritarian and hybrid regimes. Shambaugh (2013, 171) contends that "A cohort of Chinese analysts emphasize China's development experience, particularly its economic growth, as the core of its soft power. This is usually referred to as the "China Model", the "Chinese Experience", the "Chinese Path", or the "Chinese Example"."

Perceiving Threat: India and the Chinese Governance Model

India is a democratic state. The essence of the Indian political system rejects the one-party rule and centralized system and sees the CPC governance model as incompatible with Indian democracy. Instead, the Indian political system advocates political pluralism and strategic autonomy. Furthermore, India sees China's governance diffusion as strategic influence that threatens Indian interests in the region. India interprets Sino-Pak friendship as the CPC's extended influence, India's strategic encirclement, and denounce China model as an inconsistent with the democratic spirit of the Indian governance system. While for Pakistan, China's governance model is a source of stability and development, India views it as a civilizational threat.

Selective Adaptation: Pakistan Learning from China's Political Path

Pakistan has been a great admirer of China's political governance and Chinese path. Pakistan often strives for selective adaptation of China model. It does not mean that Pakistan wants to become a Leninist state, but several Chinese policies have greater admiration both within Pakistani elites and masses. Even in the 1970s, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, former president and prime minister of Pakistan, raised the slogan "Islam is our faith, democracy is our polity, socialism is our economy, and all power to the people." The slogan clearly resonated with China's mass line ideology and socialist economic system. Pakistani political elite always praised China's rapid implementation capacity, especially in the context of CPEC and defense technology transfer, consistency in policy, long-term planning, and centralized coordination. China's party-to-party diplomacy engages all the

ruling political parties irrespective of their internal disputes, particularly PMLN and PPP. A network of China's related think tanks and study centers is growing in Pakistan.

The reflection of China's growth policy first is visible in Pakistan's governance. Developmental governance slogans such as "growth," "stability," and "peaceful relations" are omnipresent in Pakistan. Pakistani political elite admire China's efficiency without adopting its political system. It can be portrayed as authoritarian learning without regime adoption. However, this learning is different from the past experiences, where military rulers totally overran the political affairs and mostly blended Pakistan's national interests in American initiatives, particularly during the time of Generals Zia ul Haq and General Pervez Musharraf. The hybrid regime of Pakistan adopts a balanced approach, mindful about its international reputation while emphasizing stability and growth. A systematic influence can be observed in Pakistan's political discourse from President Xi's principles of "stability and development first," "anti-corruption cleanup," and "efficiency and delivery."

Ideological Foundations

CPC is a Marxist-Leninist party. However, China did not blindly import the Marxist-Leninist essentials. President Xi, including his predecessors, tailored the Marxist ideals to the concrete realities of Chinese society and continuously adopted it with the spirit of the time in order for its optimal utility. Ideological contours are diffused with economy, nationalism and governance in Xi's political thought, and it even turns challenging for a thematic or content analyst to separate it. The concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics was introduced by Deng Xiaoping, and since then it serves as a guiding principle for the successors in general and for President Xi in particular, calling it "our own path" for the realization of the Chinese dream.

To realize the Chinese Dream, we must take *our own path*, which is the path of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. It is not an easy path. We are able to embark on this path thanks to the great endeavors of reform and opening up made in the past 30 years and more, the continuous quest made in the 60-plus years of the PRC, a thorough review of the evolution of the Chinese nation in its 170-plus years of modern history, and carrying forward the 5,000-plus years of Chinese civilization. (Jinping, 2013)

President Xi frequently utilizes different names, such as "Chinese spirit," "Chinese path," and "socialist modernization." Although state softness for Confucianism is a product of the Hu Jintao era, Xi elevated it to an integral aspect of its political thought in order to infuse it with socialist tenets for ossifying the CCP ideological front and legitimacy. Cultural confidence and cultural modernization through selective adaptation of the fine genes of contemporary cultures and avoidance of obsolete elements make distinguishing aspects of Xi's ideology.

Along with other intellectual achievements that have been generated in the formulation and development of the Chinese nation, Confucianism recorded the Chinese nation's spiritual activities, rational thinking and cultural achievements in building their homeland, reflected spiritual pursuits of the Chinese nation, and provided a key source of nutrition for the survival and continuous growth of our nation. (Jinping, 2014)

The CCP as a unifying force for China, the continuity of the CCP leadership lineage, Mao's mass line approach, adaptive ideological continuity, the Sinicization and modernization of Marxism, ideals as the source of party resilience, uncompromising ideological commitment, the internalization of ideological education,

civilizational dialogue rather than conflict, and Confucianism as a lens to understand China are dominant features of President Xi's ideological foundation.

India as a Civilizational Counterweight

India not only positions itself as a strategic and economic counterweight to China but also as a civilizational competitor. India equally put efforts to promote its culture abroad via arts, music, dance, cinema, yoga, and wellness diplomacy. India's increasingly majoritarian and securitized interpretation of Hindutva, which critics argue has narrowed pluralist space. Following Narendra Modi's, a Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) devotee, ascendancy to the prime minister's office, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) took charge of Indian affairs with a messianic sense of transforming India into a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation), rooted in the Hindutva ideology. Hindu ultranationalism at its core, the Hindutva ideology encompasses but is not limited to—the aspiration of a Hindu Rashtra, cultural nationalism that bracket external influences, especially Islam, as corrosive. It is marked by militarized patriotism, a Hindu-centric view of civilizational narrative that downplays the contributions of Muslims, secular reformers, and marginalized communities (Shipani & Singh, 2025). It also articulates a revisionist vision of global Hindu leadership, commonly framed through the aspiration of *Vishwaguru* (Noorani, 2021). India's regional posturing turned more militarized and expansionist, evident in the revocation of Article 370, the aspiration of Akhand Bharat—a Hindutvized subcontinent that includes modern-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar—two military skirmishes with Pakistan in 2019 and 2025, and military standoffs with China in 2017, 2020, and 2022. Notably, all of these developments unfolded within a single decade, more precisely since Modi assumed office. Unlike President Xi's vision of the Global Civilization Initiative, which emphasizes civilizational pluralism and a shared future, Hindutva advocates the primacy of "Hinduness," rectification of historical wrongs, otherness, and civilizational exclusivism. Hindutva stands on its basic assumption of suspicion of foreign ideologies. Therefore, both Confucianized Leninism and Hindutva-infused nationalism clash over historical claims to Asia, normative leadership and over sovereignty and territoriality.

Pakistan: Civilizational and Developmental Alignment

An absence of a border disputes, Pakistan admiration of China model and India as a shared adversary bring China Pakistan closer. Huntington (2011) viewed China and Islamic countries in a possible alignment in opposition to Western dominance. Whereas in South Asia, India not only clashes with a key nuclear Islamic state but also jumps on the bandwagon of the Western camp in several policies that are expressly designed to contain China's rising stature. Pakistani academicians, think tanks, political elites, and media frequently echo President Xi's slogans of "community of shared future," "win-win cooperation," "civilizational friendship," and "connectivity as destiny." The discourse around CPEC and China profoundly indicates the profusion of the CPC vocabulary, demonstrating the discursive penetration of Xi's ideological narratives. Pakistan is in ideological alignment not as a communist or socialist state but through developmental authoritarian learning and civilizational friendship narratives. Therefore, Pakistan is receptive to Xi's political thought as a weak ideological counterweight, friendship discourse, and China's developmental model, so consequently a convergence emerges.

Economic Policy

The broader function of economic policy is to ensure the optimal allocation of resources, maintain macroeconomic stability, and correct the distribution of income. Economic policy is comprised of a combination of objectives, instruments, and institutional frameworks. Key objectives—such as structural reforms, interest rates, employment generation, price stability, poverty reduction, and privatization—are pursued with specific economic priorities of a given nation. A variety of policy instruments, such as monetary and fiscal policy, regulations, taxation regimes, and subsidies, are employed to achieve set objectives. Both public and non-public institutions affect the effectiveness of policy instruments (Bénassy-Quéré, 2010, pp. 12–14).

China's economic model can be best described as state capitalism. In this system state retained the control of finance, energy, transport and infrastructure, and telecommunications. and high-tech/AI (via state guidance funds). President Xi stresses the need to launch major infrastructure or industrial projects to drive sustained growth, innovation as a driver of development, government and market synergy, commitment to reform and opening-up, high-standard opening-up, high-quality economic growth, and ecological conservation. BRI institutionalizes President Xi's vision of infrastructure first, then economic growth through connectivity, and stability. It reflects both Leninist developmentalism and Confucian governance informed by order and harmony. In the former, economic growth serves as legitimacy, and in the latter, order is ensured through material welfare.

India's Act East Policy and BRI Opposition

Unlike Pakistan, which sees CPEC as the cornerstone of its economic revival, India outrightly rejects and objects to CPEC. India is the only Asian country that rejects BRI. India views the Chinese investment in Gilgit-Baltistan as a challenge to its territorial claims. India displays strategic suspicion of BRI in general and CPEC in particular. China's investment in Pakistan will not only enhance China's geopolitical influence but will also place Pakistan in a more powerful position that will ultimately undermine Indian hegemonic dreams in South Asia. India frames CPEC as a joint economic-cum-strategic adventure of two of its adversary states, with whom India has territorial disputes, encircling it in the north and west. Hence, Indian resistance to CPEC is both ideological and strategic. To counter BRI, India upgraded its "Look East Policy" (1991) into the "Act East Policy" (2014) by strengthening the network of ties with ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, and Australia, focusing on connectivity, trade, and strategic alignment. Furthermore, at the G20 summit 2023, India signed an MOU with the EU and the US to launch the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC), connecting India, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, Israel, and the EU via rail routes and shipping ports as a counterbalance initiative to China's BRI (Ellis-Petersen, 2023). India has also agreed to the three pillars—tax, anti-corruption, and clean energy —out of four in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, a framework for setting rules and standards on economic issues (The Indian Express, 2022). It has been seen Washington's response to the China-led initiative of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

CPEC and Pakistan's Growth Strategy

Economically Pakistan relies on China's investment, particularly China's investment under the banner of CPEC. CPEC as flagship project of BRI embodies President xi's vision of infrastructural development, and strategic

connectivity as essential element for growth. CPEC holds both strategic and economic importance. Under xi's infrastructure first approach, Chinese investment in Gwadar port, energy projects, stretching a complex network of highways-Eastern and Western routes, and Pakistan's Rail upgradation (ML-1) reflects that infrastructural development, strategic connectivity precedes economic take off. Furthermore, there are nine special economic zones officially designated under CPEC. In future this number can be increased. Various formats and the institutional arrangements such as Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) and working groups showcases profound structural cooperation between the two.

Chinese Nationalism

Rooted in the legacy of the Century of Humiliation, historical consciousness, pride in culture, and reinforce by national rejuvenation and sovereignty, Chinese nationalism has permeated its political culture since the turn of the 20th century. Despite Deng Xiopeng was a pragmatic Leninist, Dengism largely transformed Marxism-Leninism into a developmental nationalist ideology. Today, President Xi Jinping vividly invokes the collective memories of the foreign imperialism and the "Century of Humiliation" to legitimize his Chinese Dream of National Rejuvenation (Jinping, 2023). Reflecting this historical consciousness, China has remained uncompromising on its territorial disputes—regardless of the magnitude of the threat. President Xi Jinping's political vision of reclaiming China's historical status under the banner of national rejuvenation on all fronts includes reunification of all disputed territories, largely under the "one China, two systems" principle. The nationalist fervor is the underlying motivation for economic development, technological advancement, and socialist modernization in order to avoid any future humiliation and cope with post-humiliation traumatic disorder. Beijing embraces pragmatism as long as it does not cross paths with Chinese nationalism, making pragmatism a supportive factor rather than a key policy vehicle. President Xi claims:

A century ago, China was in decline and withering away in the eyes of the world. Today, the image it presents to the world is one of a thriving nation that is advancing with unstoppable momentum toward rejuvenation. (Jinping, 2021)

India: Competing Narratives

Similar to China, India sees itself as an inheritor of one of the oldest civilizations in the world. Callahan (2012, 23) contends that "the civilization/barbarism distinction continues to be the structure of feeling that frames Chinese understandings of identity and security." Similarly, an Indian diplomat contends that "China's world view is inherently hierarchical." He keeps claiming that "I believe that India is the only country with the potential to emerge as a great power in the same league as China and to even surpass it... China is now actively seeking to advance its presence in countries in India's neighborhood... Sensitivity to India's concerns is on the wane" (Saran, 2018).

China is sensitive to Tibet, frames it as national identity issue. Indian actions related to Tibet trigger civilizational-nationalist reactions in China. When it comes to core boundary issue China applies the maximum pressure and particularly on territorial integrity It remains uncompromising (Joshi, 2022). Since April 2017, the Dalai Lama's visit to Arunachal Pradesh, China, has been renaming areas—residential areas, mountains, rivers, lakes, and mountain passes—controlled by India but claimed by China to assert symbolic sovereignty, exert psychological and diplomatic pressure, normalize the claim within China, and influence global cartography.

Furthermore, the 2011 China white paper “China’s Peaceful Development 2011” delineated state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, and national reunification as China’s core national interests (The State Council, 2011). The policy of national rejuvenation shapes the trajectory of China’s core interest and its policy toward India. The two nationalist ideologies—with different and often contradictory regional visions, mutually exclusive national narratives, security dilemmas, and territorial issues—pose likely insurmountable obstacles.

Pakistan: Shared Civilizational Outlook

Pakistan is receptive to China’s civilizational nationalism; at least three factors explain this compatibility. First, Pakistan’s political elites view China as a benevolent, development-oriented, orderly, and a stable power (Small, 2015). Second, China’s rise to superpower status offers Pakistan an acceptable alternative model for its political development in general and for its economic development in particular that relatively aligns with Pakistan’s need and desire for a hard and stable state. Third, China enjoys more popular support in Pakistan compared to the US. Both the nation and Pakistan’s elite see China as a non-intrusive and less demanding partner. The aid, usually from China, comes to Pakistan without any strings attached, especially democracy and human rights. This positions China as a relatively compatible patron in Pakistan’s political and economic calculus. Furthermore, China has no colonial history. Its narrative of peaceful rise, peace for development, and non-interference charms Pakistani elites. Given the memory of Western interventions, colonial history, and the perception of exploitation and unequal treatment, Pakistan’s stance resonates with China’s anti-imperial rhetoric. Therefore, Xi’s defined nationalism, expressed in anti-hegemony, anti-colonialism, and “South–South solidarity,” garners both public approval and sympathy in Pakistan.

Global Governance & Regional Order

President Xi promotes a comprehensive framework for a multipolar world, encapsulated in the Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Civilization Initiative (GCI), and Global Governance Initiative (GGI). His global governance vision advocates “a new type of international relations,” “a new type of economic system,” “rejection of zero-sum geopolitics,” “a community with a shared future for mankind,” “the five principles of peaceful coexistence,” “shared global responsibility,” “global environmental governance,” and “upholding the UN Charter and international order.” As President xi called:

We should foster a *new type of international relations* featuring win-win cooperation; and we should forge partnerships of dialogue with no confrontation and of friendship rather than alliance. (Jinping, 2017)

President Xi proposes a new normative system in which South-South cooperation is central, serving as a key mechanism to break the Western monopoly over global governance. Together, these initiatives express Xi’s strived to construct and reshape global norms, portraying China as the leader of the Global South, defender of sovereignty, and alternative to the liberal world order.

Balancing China: India’s Global Role

As a competitor civilization, and with the US allocating the status of India as China’s counterweight and net security provider, India largely constructed the narrative of strategic autonomy. It competes with China in the Asia-Pacific region, positions itself as a regional hegemon in South Asia, and is designated as the fulcrum of US Asia-Pacific policy. India joined US-led economic and strategic formats such as QUAD, especially designed

to contain China. India occupies a central role in the US's China balancing policy. Informed by Hindu-centric view of civilizational, India advocates revisionist vision of Global Hindu Leadership, often framed as the 'Vishwaguru' aspiration.

Backing Beijing: Pakistan's Global Vision

Pakistan's position's position deeply aligns with China's global governance vision and strategic outlook. Both at the regional and global levels, Pakistan consistently echoes the Chinese position, be it at the UN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), or other regional forums like the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Pakistan always supported China's stances on human rights issues, multipolarity, and development-first global governance. Pakistan views China as a reliable alternative and even in many cases as a shield against Western pressure and India's aggressive posturing.

Conclusion

Pakistan demonstrates strategic and ideological alignment, economic integration, and people-to-people and elite ties. India contests China as a geopolitical competitor, poses an ideological resistance, implements policy that often indicates economic decoupling, and pursues China's hard balancing by joining the US military framework in the region. The growing of China's stature and involvement in South Asia causes a security dilemma in Indian strategic circles. South Asian power dynamics are reconfiguring in favor of China and Pakistan, denting Indian hegemonic designs. On one side China and Pakistan, and on the other side India, are shaping through their weights different organizations, as the former shapes SCO and the latter pushes the Indo-Pacific framework and so forth. XPT meaningfully shapes China's strategy in South Asia. Its Leninist-Confucian hybrid nature legitimizes centralized governance models, state-led development, civilizational narratives, and anti-hegemonic worldviews, enhancing the ossifying multipolar power structure. In this evolving polycentric structure, as Pakistan largely aligns with China and India largely resists, an intensification of regional rivalry and normative as well as military competition is the likely future scenario of South Asia.

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