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CPEC and Cultural Connectivity: A Study of Media and Literary Productions

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Abstract

Keeping culture at the core, this study tries to establish the possibilities of connectivity between China and Pakistan on softer grounds along with economic activity. To elucidate these possibilities in depth, media and literature have been focused upon amongst a variety of cultural manifestations. By relying on methodological tools from semiotics and comparative literary studies, the data set is approached to trace the elements with shared cultural capital. One significant contribution of the study is that it highlights the cultural potential of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and suggests ways to promote collective cultural activity.

Keywords: CPEC, Culture, Media and Literature, China, Pakistan

1. Introduction

Culture is ubiquitous. This study reviews the possible avenues of cultural interactions between China and Pakistan to promote peace and prosperity in the region via



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highlighting the shared cultural products and underlying values. Using cultural apparatus, it proposes people-to-people interaction which in turn would accentuate mobility, connectivity, and mutual dependability. Out of plethora of cultural artefacts, the focus of this paper is on literature and media. Further, it aims at moving towards laying out a homogeneous cultural engagement policy for effective relatedness resulting in holistic human development.

This project relies on an eclectic framework based on means of cultural investigation and increased integration along with elements from comparative literary studies and translation studies. In the process, it also utilizes some semiotic tools to study the underlying significance of elements from media and literature. The data set is narrowed down by focusing on creative outputs from Pakistan and China which have the potential to contribute towards togetherness. The suggestive outcome of this project is promoting the culture of inclusivity and intercultural competence to fully reap the benefits of socio-economic activity taking place in the region. It also suggests the co-production of cultural products, especially in media and literature.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has the potential to upheave the economic status of the region with increased economic growth. Equally important, a soft side of this initiative is activity and engagement on the cultural front, which this paper systematically investigates. Furthermore, to streamline the practical dimensions on the cultural front and chalk out its cultural paradigms on strong footings, the current study is significant. This study not only provides a thorough review of the cultural possibilities of CPEC. It suggests that there is a need of and room for a joint cultural venture of shared interest.

2. CPEC and its Human Dimension

China's vision since President Xi Jinping came to power (2013) is to achieve the 'China Dream' in which one major part is strengthening relationships with and between different neighboring countries, where China holds the center. The construction of new roads, highways and infrastructure is being emphasized to enhance trade. China has proposed a revival of the ancient Silk route, some of which is already on the way. One of the routes is China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This connects China's Kashghar with Pakistan's Gawadar port and Karakorum highway (Hussain, 2018). CPEC is a flagship project in China's Belt and Road Initiative. CPEC is both an opportunity and a challenge for Pakistan. Although it mainly is economic cooperation project, yet people to people connection cannot be ignored. It naturally raises questions like: how will it affect the social fabric of Pakistani society? How will the interaction between Pakistanis and the Chinese take place? How will the cultural exchange be monitored? What will be the linguistic challenges of this cultural exchange? To what extent Pakistani people will be in need

of and interested in learning Chinese? How will the teaching of Chinese take place? Will there be equal interest in learning Urdu and regional languages of the geography where the project will pass through? How will religious and cultural differences between the people of Pakistan and China not become a hindrance in this people-to-people interaction? How can people be trained towards intercultural competence? How valid are the fears of people regarding Chinese cultural hegemony? What cultural products and processes will be used as elements of sharedness? What is the role of literary productions in this cultural exchange? What is the role of translation in literary exchange? How will the poetics of Chinese and Pakistani literature be thought to approach the literature from both parts of the world? What should be the dynamics of the cultural policy of CPEC? In this paper, culture with respect to literature and media has been taken up. It in no way claims to be a comprehensive study of these institutions, but rather an initial effort to move towards them to better negotiate cultural dynamics of connection and cooperation.

In the last couple of decades, growing numbers of, Confucius Institutes, Cultural Exchanges, Exhibitions, and Educational Exchanges, between China and Pakistan have laid the foundation of greater human interaction. However, the concrete outcomes are yet to be seen and benefits are yet to be reaped. According to Rizvi (2018), it is imperative at this point, to deliberate on how Pakistan especially its citizens can reap the benefits most. Pakistan is a heterogeneous society; there are multiple discourses in it based on ethnicity, education, and political affiliations. CPEC is also being debated over social media. Social media has also become important in realising the social reality of Pakistan. Politically informed audiences are using it as a tool to share their comments and critiques.

3. Globalization of Chinese Cinema

Chinese cinema is increasingly refashioning itself to cater to Westernized global audiences. The co-productions with Hollywood media houses have also played their role in the expansion of its reach. This transnational media approach is positively influencing the consumption of Chinese culture. Moreover, there is a large number of Chinese living in Great Britain, France, Malaysia, and Canada etc. as an audience of Chinese films. Especially feature films like *Crouching Tiger, Hero*, *Kung Fu Hustle* have had a widespread appreciation. Chinese entrepreneurs are refiguring their services to suit viewers in Asia, North America and beyond. The state-of-the-art production of Chinese cinema is winning far-reaching acclamation. This is not limited to cinema; they are producing TV shows, News and other information and entertainment avenues for global audiences. Chinese film in particular is emerging as a competitor of Hollywood in the 21st century considering its growing audience and production quality. That in turn is not only challenging financial hegemony, but also cultural and social control of the West. Likewise, US news channels are not now

single-handedly controlling the flow of information either, which is threatening their media imperialism (Curtin, 2007).

From the 1980s onwards, due to the end of the Cold War, the changed political status of Taiwan and Hong Kong, tech advancement in Singapore, the popularity of youth culture in the region, and the influence of the diaspora Chinese community, the industry has dramatically changed. “Scholars in cultural studies and postcolonial studies also began to question media imperialism, especially the presumption that commercial media industries had clear and uniform effects on audiences” (Curtin, 2007: 6). They feared people were constructing their realities from Western media than peer groups, family, or education. The Hollywood narratives were causing harm to a social value system. Recent empirical studies show that the hegemony of Western media might be ending soon based on the emergence of alternative media. People are increasingly showing interest in local and regional content that they can relate to. “Cultural studies scholars pointed out that media imperialism’s privileging of “indigenous culture” tends to obscure the complex dynamics of cultural interaction and exchange” (Curtin, 2007: 7).

4. Chinese School of Comparative Literature

“The study of world literature might be the study of the way in which cultures recognize themselves through their projections of ‘otherness” (Bhabha, 1994: 12).

Moving away from Sinocentrism, since the 1980s the field of literary studies in the Chinese academy is reinvigorating itself on comparative grounds. This comparative lens is beyond Eurocentrism and Sinocentrism. In strengthening this academic tradition, the journal of comparative literature was inaugurated in 1984 and eventually a full fledged Chinese Comparative Literature Association, a year after in 1985. Based on Chinese cultural history, researchers and academics have developed indigenous approaches like ‘cross-cultural study’ by Shunquin Cao and ‘holistic method’ by Jingyao Sun. This marks the development of theoretical and methodological approaches of Chinese critical literary tradition. However, this should not be equated with an effort to promote Chineseness or Chinese national identity, but rather a rendition of bridging local and global. Referring to a survey by Tang and Zhang, Lin reports that there are more than 1000 books written in the last four decades on comparative literature, which not only take the discipline of comparative literature forward but also strengthen Chinese comparatist tradition. French school focused on a comparatist tradition, which studied primarily the literature of the Western world; scholars from the US pushed the boundaries of discipline forward to other domains too, however, the literature from the Third world remained ignored. Whereas the Chinese school of comparative literature addresses this gap. They not only study

Chinese literature with Western theory but also expanded the horizons of this tradition by bringing in local contexts, resources, realities and experiences (Lin, 2015).

“[W]ith the shift of attention to cultural heterogeneity and variations in literary exchanges and dialogues, to the cross-civilization literary comparison between the East and the West, comparative literature as a discipline and practice worldwide should become more open to and compatible with the Chinese school of comparative literature.” (7)

5. Chinese Literature’s Route to World Literature

Studying the reception of Chinese literature in Pakistan is one way of connecting through culture. Departments of English in various universities in Pakistan are introducing Anglophone Chinese literature and English translations of Chinese literature. Students are also doing their thesis and dissertations delineating various aspects of Chinese literature, writing critical commentaries, and engaging with the content as a facet of world literature and rendering comparative poetics.

Chinese culture, literature, and aesthetics with the growing global influence of China are becoming more and more internal to the literature of the world. Commonality is the essence of globality; the world no longer sees China as another and vice versa. China’s ‘New Literature’ connects with the world and through this connection tries to understand humanity. Chinese literary scene has moved from local to international. This connection is in two ways, where the Chinese are reading world literature and the world is reading Chinese literature. From 2009 onwards, the Confucius institute has been playing an important role in communicating Chinese literature worldwide. In this regard, a book series and a journal by the name of Chinese Literature Today have been influential in reaching out to wider audiences using the English language as a medium. Translation to many scholars is a way to project national literature to people worldwide. As a grafting activity, the translation of Chinese literature in different languages of the world is giving it a rebirth. On the other hand, a great amount of literature from other languages is also getting translated into Chinese. Yet another concept is ‘Chinese world literature’ where Chinese living in different parts of the world, use the language of the country to infuse and reflect Chineseness in their works (He, 2015).

6. Localization, Globalization, and Traveling Chinese Culture

CPEC as a move towards challenging the Western cultural hegemony and Asian version of postcolonialism has great potential. The greater connectivity that will develop between participating countries can provide an alternative that is not hegemonic in nature, though there are doubts that China may become just another face

of the colonial structure. However, from the Chinese perspective, China is expanding its reach. According to Wang and Ma:

“Fostering the mutual exchange of literary heritage will make all of us more globally oriented, but also appreciative of other cultures. After all, Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature” (Wang & Ma, 2006: 7)

China despite being one of the four major civilizations of the world, with a history of 5000 years, due to its closed-door policy has not been able to become a shareholder in cultural globalization. There has been a fear that cultural globalization might swallow relatively smaller cultures. Lately, literature has played its role in crossing boundaries and connecting with the world on shared aspects. Globalization is being treated with its challenges and opportunities with a focus on media, literature, and popular culture with a comparative lens without ignoring the dangers of cultural assimilation. Revival of Confucianism is becoming a source of connection between East and West which in turn is strengthening Asian cultural identity and bringing forth Asian postcolonialism.

“Faced with the impact of Western postmodernism, contemporary Chinese consumer culture marked with various types of 'postmodern' or 'quasi-postmodern' manifests itself in different forms: the weekly supplements of various newspapers have become a sort of 'cultural snack'; TV programs which have attracted more audience strongly challenge the film industry which needs greater investment and more advanced technology, making Chinese cinema be confronted with a double challenge: from Hollywood (Western culture) and local (mass media and consumer culture)” (Wang, 2006: 112-13)

At the same time, due to cultural diplomacy and the growing economic influence of China, the West and other nations are showing interest in learning the Chinese language. Here is a greater opportunity for Chinese bilinguals to play their role in narrowing down the cultural divide and bringing people together through Chinese and English. There is also a need of finding a new model for rewriting Chinese literary history in Chinese and English (Wang & Ma, 2015).

7. Variation Theory and Reception of Chinese Literature in English Speaking World

Since Chinese literature is taken up by many of the English departments in Pakistani universities, the situation can be equated with its spread in English speaking world at large. In this increasing global reach, translation is playing a major role. Ulrich Weisstein presented the idea of ‘creative transmutation’ than a mere literal translation (1973: 31). The similar concept in the Chinese context Shunqing Cao suggests is

‘variation’ (Cao, 2015). According to cultural studies scholars, there prevails a cultural heterogeneity between the East and the West, which challenges the universality of Western culture. According to Yamin Hu (2004) the crossing of boundaries of literature from a certain country to the other is not a straightforward process. There are multiple negotiations taking place in the reception, repulsion, and assimilation of a work. Rather than over-emphasising similarities between literatures and cultures, it should look for variations. “Variation studies refers to the study of patterns of intrinsic (literarily and culturally) difference and variability in literary exchanges between different countries, and of heterogeneity of literary categories among literatures that have no factual contacts with one another” (Cao, 2015: 4). Focusing on variations, the difference between literatures from a myriad of cultures makes the whole process more meaningful.

Chinese literature travels in the West and the rest of the world mainly through translation. Variationist translation strategies are more sensitive to cultural transmission and its dynamics than merely relying on linguistic translation since linguistic rules of the Chinese language are very flexible in terms of grammar, mood, tone, voice etc. It helps avoid literary misreading. People from the West also have tried translating from Chinese to English, for example, Gary Snyder, and also reflected on the process of creation and translation comparatively. “Study of literature across China and the English-speaking world has to take into account the phenomena of variation caused by different determinants: cultural tradition, ideology, readership, the idiosyncrasy of the translator, etc.” (Cao, 2015: 5). Chinese translators have also played their role in introducing global, especially Western literature to Chinese audiences. “Lin Shu is famous for his introducing Western literature to a whole generation of Chinese readers in the early twentieth century. Despite his ignorance of any foreign language, he collaborated with others to translate eventually more than 180 works of Western literature, most of which are novels” (Cao, 2015: 7). “Translation, with variations available, can help the original work achieve a rebirth in another culture and at the same time can seed new expressions, new thought, and new horizons in the literary tradition of another country.” (Cao, 2015: 7). According to Lydia H. Liu "Since the modern intellectual tradition in China began with translation, adaptation, appropriation, and other interlingual practices related to the West, it is inevitable that this inquiry [of translingual practice] should take translation as its point of departure" (Liu, 1995: 25). There is also in this cultural exchange through translation a consistent fear that Chinese literary voice might not be surfaced. Variationist approach addresses all such concerns. “Variation can be also understood as the process of cultural filtration, localization, and domestication, which contributes to the solution to the problem of why some translated works done by Chinese scholars are closer or more faithful to the original Chinese works” (Cao, 2015: 8).

8. Chinese-Western Comparative Poetics

Literature and its reach are mainly studied through translation and reception in other cultures. In the process, a core element, the 'general theory of literature' gets ignored. "Comparative poetics means research and exploration into fundamental issues of literary theory from a comparative and intercultural perspective" (Wang, 2014: 418). In the field of comparative poetics James Liu, Earl Miner, Stephen Owen and Wai-lim Yip are some influential names, who have contributed a great deal. James Liu taught at Stanford and gave some important books in English on comparative poetics. To his credit, he re-established Chinese poetics systematically and presented it to English speaking world (CAO, 2015). Liu expanded Abram's 'tetradic circle' (world, writer, works and reader as basic poetic elements) into six categories metaphysical, deterministic, expressive, technical, aesthetic, and pragmatic. This not only proved as a valuable addition to Chinese poetics but world poetics too. The second major contributor to comparative poetics, Earl Miner was a professor at Princeton University. He is considered a pioneer of Chinese comparative poetics. Miner re-examined Western literary thought and established an intercultural poetical system. Earlier Western mimetic poetics has been dominating the field of poetics, Miner's comparative poetics aroused widespread interest and discussion in Chinese and Japanese scholarship. The third name is Stephen Owen who taught at Harvard and is the author of two influential books, Chinese literary thought, and Chinese literary theory reader. Chinese literary theory reader is marked as essential readers in comparative literature programs in China and in the world. Owen does not limit his way of approaching the text as a novel research method to study literature but as an attempt to present the real evolutionary nature of literary thought and notions. He exhibited the idea of reaching Chinese literary thought through Chinese literature. A discourse that is a combination of life experiences and rational thinking in literary studies. The significant aspect of this approach is moving beyond the mere application of Western literary thought and applying it to Chinese literature, as well as generating a dialogue between Chinese and Western poetics (CAO, 2015). Yet another influential name in comparative poetics is Wail-lim Yip- a bilingual poet, translator and scholar. Yip raises questions on the validity of the English translation of Chinese literature. Like Owen he is of the view that the applicability of the Western poetic to Chinese literature is problematic and presented the idea of 'common poetics'. According to Yip "We must begin simultaneously with two or three models, comparing and contrasting them with full respect and attention to the indigenous 'peculiarities' and cultural 'anomalies'" (Yip, 1993: 17). This approach worked towards challenging the hegemony of Western literary thought. The mutual hermeneutic method, intercultural studies, and integrative approach are the important aspects of comparative poetics.

9. Conclusion

Globalization of Chinese Cinema, Chinese comparative poetics, and travelling of Chinese culture have room for decolonizing East and creating better ties within Eastern countries. Pakistani scholars should establish comparative poetics of Pakistani literature, in all its richness, and present it to the world using English as a medium, taking inspiration from Chinese comparative poetics. In the era of digitality and multimodality, there is a need of approaching and addressing the world with a transcultural makeup. Strengthening ties between Eastern cultures can work as a postcolonial strategy for challenging cultural hegemony. Fostering the mutual exchange of literary heritage will make all of us more globally oriented, but also appreciative of other cultures. After all, "Comparative Literature means the knowledge of more than one national language and literature" (Tötösy de Zepetnek & Vasvári, 2013: 5). Study of literature across China and the English-speaking world has to take into account the phenomena of variation caused by different determinants: cultural tradition, ideology, readership, the idiosyncrasy of the translator, etc. Theoretical matters including the past and current situation of Chinese literature in English is important in the cultural exchange that will take place through CPEC to promote dialogue between heterogeneous cultures.

The cultural connectivity between Pakistan and China must address the fears in the hearts and minds of Pakistani people judiciously and empathetically. No doubt, the economic superiority of China gives it a clear advantage over Pakistan, but this cultural linkage should be set on fairgrounds. The Chinese culture has had greater reception and demand over the last few decades now. In the past, in various geographies, cultural trade has paved the way for cultural hegemony and colonialism.

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