

China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Relation to Cultural Exchange -Truck Art

Nomana Masood

Associate Professor in Fine Arts, Govt. Postgraduate College for Women, Gulberg Lahore

nomana888@gmail.com

Dr. Ahmad Bilal

Director Post Graduate Research Center of Creative Arts, College of Art & Design, University of the Punjab, Lahore

Abstract

The significance of China-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) is evident in economic development and in the promotion of local culture. CPEC has created new resources for cultural exchange and has developed a new scope for Pakistani Truck art to flourish. The colorful painted trucks on the silk routes and other communication links under this project have become a source of cultural flow between the two states. This research concentrates on establishing socio-cultural and economic interconnection between the two countries through cultural exchange programs. The Truck art exhibition in Beijing held in 2023 for three months reflects the multidimensional aspects of Truck art as a cultural icon, to turn into a major exponent in the trade relations between China and Pakistan. The extrinsic analysis of Truck art along with the cultural, economic, and social aspects highlights the evolving role of Truck art in the promotion of local culture, skill and knowledge. The outcomes of the research suggest that the cultural crossover is impacting countries



positively. The introduction of the Truck art in China as the representative of Pakistani culture is a source to open new gateways for the cultural productions and is beneficial in creating new markets for the local consumer goods. This cross-cultural project is a source to present before public the possible future cultural products, to encourage the viewer to concentrate upon the relationship between cultural heritage and technological innovations.

Key Words: China-Pakistan economic corridor, Truck art, local craft, creative economy, diversity, reinterpretation

Introduction

Pakistan and China are long term friends, and this association is turning into economic bond. CPEC depicts the development, benefits, and multidimensional cooperation between both the countries. As Pakistan is under many challenges regarding security, economic, political, and social instability, CPEC concentrates on stabilizing and integrating Pakistan's economy into an evolving trade bloc of CPEC and BRI (the Belt and Road Initiative) partner countries (Muhammad and Ali 2019). Cultural exchange programs and cooperation for the promotion of culture and language of both the countries are in progress. For this purpose, many efforts are made by embassies of both countries to promote culture, heritage, and tourism. Cultural exchange programs are impacting both countries through language promotion, heritage, religious and cultural tourism (Asif et al. 2019). These cross-cultural exchanges support cultural trade, mutual knowledge and practices to provide wider benefits from knowledge exchange to creative productions. This cultural interconnection is a source to promotes the indigenous crafts, cuisine, traditions, and festivals. To celebrate the year of tourism exchanges between China and Pakistan in 2023, a Truck art exhibition themed "Phool Patti: Jingle Journey" was organized at Silk Road International Arts Center for three months (SDPI 2023). "Phool Patti" is the local terminology for Truck art, known for its vibrant colors and simplified

imagery, depicting the local myth and culture. The depicted imagery is derived from nature, but nature is not replicated and presented in the highly individualized style of truck artisans. This typical style, colors and imagery is transferred from generation to generation, thus developing Truck art in a signature style of its own. The reinterpretation of truck art motifs in fashion design trends, clothing, crockery and cutlery, and the décor of commercial buildings as cultural icons is evident in contemporary society. This exhibition in China highlights the multi-dimensional aspects of Truck art and creates a relationship between the traditional craft and its contemporary transformation in the digital era. The displayed items depicting the reinterpretation of Truck art in consumer goods points towards the fact that this exhibition aims not only to reflect the softer image of Pakistan but creating new market for consumer goods. The introduction of local crafts and traditions in the BRI connecting countries will bring revenue and improve the living standards of the local artisans.

Aim of Research

This research aims to examine the potential benefits of CPEC in exerting cultural influence on diverse societies and the promotion of local crafts like Truck art. The available online information is insufficient to create a meaningful understanding of other cultures. Whereas the cultural exchange programs are helpful in transferring firsthand knowledge of other cultures. The concentration of this research is on interpreting Truck art as cultural icon under cultural exchange programs, which in return creates new markets for cultural productions.

Literature Review

CPEC is a mega co-project by China and Pakistan to increase economic development and free trade. The project has the potential to generate multiple business and employment opportunities for local people as well as international outreach (Saad, Xinping, and Ijaz 2019). It consists of multiple projects in diverse sectors including health, education, industrial zone,

economic sectors, infrastructure, and to provide employment across the length of the route of the CPEC project (Tehsin, Khan, and Sargana 2017). The most important purpose of CPEC is to build a stable route between Pakistan, China, and Europe (Khwaja, Saeed, and Urooj 2018). CPEC is one of the multiples constitute of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to revive of ancient Silk Route. This route is a source to establish economic relationships with diverse countries and contributes to sharing culture, knowledge, language, and beliefs. This trade relationship will affect the culture, beliefs and local knowledge and promote multicultural and diverse societies (Muhammad and Ali 2019). The governments of China and Pakistan are promoting cultural exchange programs. Both Beijing and Islamabad are playing an active role in conducting various exchanges and cooperation in art, literature, education, information, sports, youth affairs, cultural relics, archives, publications, health, and women affairs. Chinese art troupes related to dance, folk music and acrobatic were also performed in Pakistan. National language of Pakistan is already introduced in China as Peking University, Beijing already has Urdu department. Similarly, in Pakistan, Chinese language is being introduced in many schools from the primary level (Asif et al. 2019). This promotion of national languages of both the countries and cultural exchange programs and tourism are paving way for cultural crossover. This cultural exchange is introducing diverse traditions and beliefs and is impacting on the masses of both countries.

Culture is classified as the representation of **human creative experiences through symbols while living in diverse parts of the earth. The origin of language in humans can be described as symbolic communication and culture also stemmed from this evolutionary development to shape the social identity** (LibreTexts 2023). **Cultural components include** language, beliefs, values, norms, food, dressing style, festivals tourism, art, and music, thus promoting diverse cultural identity in various parts of world (Unsa, Amar, and Anbrin 2021). Pakistan is a culturally rich country and bearer of many arts and

crafts. These crafts are a source of income for many families and these traditional techniques are transferred from generation to generation (Dar 2009). The rich cultural heritage of Pakistan is a stimulus for introducing creative and innovative ideas in the craft sector. In this way, craft sector can improve its production and can attract the contemporary consumer. Truck art of Pakistan is one of these crafts that has developed and passed through many generations of artisans and every generation has contributed to its aesthetics and technique (F. Ali 2021b). These trucks on silk route with brightly colored painted imagery reflect and introduce the Pakistani popular culture to connecting countries through the route developed by CPEC between Pakistan, China, and Europe. These painted trucks are not only useful for transportation but are representative of Pakistani culture, traditions, socio-political and religious beliefs, local myth and people of Pakistan (Elias 2003). Both China and Pakistan have diverse cultures but cultural relationship between the two countries is traced back from the time when trade and tourism was done on camels through the silk route. Cultural relations between the two countries were amicable but after signing CPEC, intense exchange cultural programs and cultural delegations are recorded (Unsa, Amar, and Anbrin 2021).

Truck art has an individual locally developed style and represents colorful and decorative imagery. These images are categorized into various types, like religious, mythical, secular, cultural, and everyday life scenes. Mostly natural motifs are depicted in a stylized manner, painted flatly in vivid colors. Two-dimensional qualities and decorative aspects are prominent with respect to visual reality (Painters 2020). Symbolic motifs suggest that local artisans are representing diverse ideologies while creating a relationship between personal and cultural identity. Truck art is an indigenous craft, and its iconography is frequently employed by the artisans originated from their visual knowledge. The purpose is not to imitate natural motifs, but these motifs are painted for their symbolic significance, highlighting the beliefs and norms of the society.

Viewers are attracted to these visuals because of the simplification of form, ingenuousness, and childlike expression. The juxtaposition of imagery is often influenced by current popular trends in style and aesthetics (Zaidi and Fund 2009). Prevalent motifs are flora and fauna, wistful nature, legendary creatures, everyday life scenes, modern means of transport, and icons of popular culture. The traditional knowledge and skill of Truck art comes under the category of intangible cultural heritage (ICH). The promotion of the Truck art as the cultural icon of Pakistan has been turning this craft into the major exponent of trade. The reintroduction of the traditional Truck art in consumer goods is converting this craft into desirable goods having enticing aesthetics (D.S.A. Ali 2021a). The repetition of truck art motifs in branded clothing, export quality crockery and cutlery, and interior and exterior décor of commercial buildings is providing a delightful experience to the targeted consumers (Malik 2018). This reinterpretation has introduced the Truck art globally and its collaboration with the production sector is opening new ventures for this local craft. The transformation of Truck art into cultural productions and the development of CPEC can play a significant role in creating a new market for the Truck art goods. This in return will provide more work assignments for the artisans, improving the lives of local citizens.

Pakistani art and crafts are already introduced in the Chinese culture through cultural exchange programs. Similarly Chinese art is also exhibited in Pakistan in various universities of Pakistan under cultural exchange programs. Pakistani Truck art exhibition is also organized in China under cultural exchange program in 2023 and remained open for three months. The purpose of the exhibition is to promote the positive and softer image of Pakistan in China and to introduce the popular craft of Pakistan in this region of the world. Culture and craft are an integral part of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) of any area and the promotion of Truck art across the

length of the route of the CPEC will provide new opportunities for the truck artisans.

Theoretical Framework

With the help of the collected data from literature review and by analysing the socio- cultural and economic perspective, the author has concentrated on the introduction of Truck art globally through cultural exchange programs. A theoretical framework is created by following the content analysis and creating a relationship between the local culture and its representation through cultural productions, creating space to global market to earn creative capital.

Methodology

Methodology employed is based on qualitative research with the extrinsic analysis of the Truck art along with the cultural, social, and economic context. The reinterpretation of Truck art includes various truck motifs like birds, flowers, and decorative elements along with the depiction of catchy phrases. Author has visited the various truck stations at Lahore and has surveyed and interviewed about the truck imagery. Limited literature is available on Truck art and data is collected through observation and photographic documentation. Various books, and articles on the CPEC and economy have also been consulted.

Truck Art Exhibition in Beijing

This paper describes a Truck art exhibition, organized in April 2023 by the Pakistani Embassy in Beijing, Silk Road, International Arts Center and remained open till July 2023 (Figure 1). The exhibition was arranged as a part of the “China-Pakistan Tourism Exchange Year”.



Figure 1: Truck Art Exhibition in China Source: GLOBALINK Exhibition in China showcases Pakistani Truck Art, Xinhua, 30-Apr-2023. <https://english.news.cn/20230430/4da3b7a3aa6242048a586842529689da/c.html>

The Phool Patti- Pakistan's Truck art team created the artworks, showcasing diverse derived forms of Truck art, combining traditional and contemporary materials and technologies. The exhibition was divided into the following five sections and each section explores the presentation of truck art in diverse artistic forms and contexts (Solangi 2023).

The first section is titled "The Home Away from Home: A Unique Mobile Art Museum." It is an innovative project to celebrate and preserve the cultural traditions of Pakistani truck art. By transforming decorated vehicles into a mobile museum, it brings this vibrant art form to a wider audience. The project highlights the significance of cultural preservation and offers a unique experience that connects people with the local traditions and cultural beliefs behind the art. This section shared the cultural heritage of truck art, ensuring its legacy for future generations. Mobile museums represent the transformation of Truck art in the other vehicles other than trucks. The transportation goods depicted the use of typical Truck art cultural motifs in usual bright colors along with the emphasis of representing cultural icons of

both the countries. A model of openair rickshaw depicts Chinese architecture painted in typical Truck art style. On the upper side of the central motif, national animals of both the countries, panda and markhor are painted to glorify the identities of both the countries. Another prominent motif of Truck art is eye motif, depicted on the lower fronts of the vehicles, which appears on trucks as a signifier to avoid evil eye, a common myth in local culture.



Figure 2 Truck Art Rickshaw with Hybrid Imagery. Source: (Solangi 2023)Article by Daily City News titled The Talented Team Of Phool Patti Showcased First Pakistani Truck Art Exhibition In China. 29-Apr-2023, <https://citynews.com.pk/the-talented-team-of-phool-patti-showcased-first-pakistani-truck-art-exhibition-in-china/I8710/>

Second, “From Traditional Transportation to Cultural Symbol: The Evolution of Pakistani Truck Art” highlights the transformation of truck art

from representational art to a profound cultural symbol. This evolution reflects the adaptability of cultural traditions to transform the artistic and cultural expression. The vibrant transformation of Truck art cultural elements in furniture also directs attention towards its demand in the process of production and consumption. The reinterpretation of Truck art in cultural goods is seen as the evolution of local craft according to the demand of modern trends and globalization. These cultural productions are displayed as museum objects belonging to a foreign cultural system.



Figure 3 Truck Imagery in Consumer Goods Source: GLOBALINK Exhibition in China showcases Pakistani Truck Art. Xinhua, 30-Apr-2023. <https://english.news.cn/20230430/4da3b7a3aa6242048a586842529689da/c.html>

Third, “The Inheritance of Truck Art: Architecture and Urban Landscape” underscores the potential of integrating the cultural elements of truck art into architectural and urban design. This style of representation preserves and promotes cultural heritage and create spaces that are visually appealing, culturally significant, and reflective of the community's identity. Unique and

meaningful Truck art designs are created by using the architectural space that bridges tradition and modernity.

Its example in the China exhibition depicts the truck frontal body and crown attached within an architectural compound and its side wall served as the Truck body. The 3D effect of the Truck art is enhanced by depicting the flora and fauna along with the depiction of geometrical patterns. This huge truck portrays a variety of fantastic landscapes, inspired by nature and appear as signifiers of artisan's dreamland or if artisans are dreaming in front of nature in their usual vibrant colors.



Figure 4 Original Truck body Combined with Wall. Source: Source: (Solangi 2023)Article by Daily City News titled The Talented Team Of Phool Patti Showcased First Pakistani Truck Art Exhibition In China. 29-Apr-2023, <https://citynews.com.pk/the-talented-team-of-phool-patti-showcased-first-pakistani-truck-art-exhibition-in-china/I8710/>

Forth “The Intersection of Aesthetics and Functionality: A Translatable Art and Design System” highlights that truck art is a decorative, rich and functional art form with principles that are enhancing various fields of design. Designers and artisans are creating innovative and culturally enriched products encompassing the traditional truck art while exploring new creative possibilities.

Exhibited artworks are painted in vibrant colors, ornate designs, bold motifs and calligraphy, all characteristic elements of Truck art. Animals and birds, flowers, landscapes, and cultural motifs are painted on pottery, utensils, and various decorative items. These consumer goods are adorned with floral patterns and birds’ imagery depicting local flowers and birds composed along with many colorful designs. Hand painted tea sets, colorful floral vases, decorative plates and lanterns represent the reinterpretation of Truck art imagery in goods to attract contemporary consumers.



Figure 5 Truck Imagery in Consumer Goods Source: GLOBALINK Exhibition in China showcases Pakistani Truck Art. Xinhua, 30-Apr-2023.

<https://english.news.cn/20230430/4da3b7a3aa6242048a586842529689da/c.html>

Fifth “New Perspective: Mapping the Truck Art in Multidimensional Space.” It represents an innovative approach to study and appreciate Truck art through digital technological methods. This approach promotes this unique art form to contemporary audiences and provides new ways to engage with cultural heritage. Under this section, digital documentaries of the evolution of Truck art and its historical background regarding the formation of Truck art into the cultural element of Pakistan are represented. The use of digital media and technology in creating cultural experiences is an emerging practice, the challenge is not the application of technology to existing practice to enhance the user experience, but to understand the “emergence, creation and conceptualization of cultural heritage” within digital engagements (Smith 2020).



Figure 6 A special Truck Art workshop conducted by artist Ali and his team in Silk Road International Cultural Centre. Source: The News, Pakistani

truck art exhibition grabs attention of Chinese students, October 20, 2024.

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/I068345-pakistani-truck-art-exhibition-grabs-attention-of-chinese-students>

Truck art craftsmen also conducted live mural paintings and workshops to demonstrate their skills. The aim of the exhibition is not only to explore the aesthetics of Truck art but represents its cultural and social significance as Truck art is representative of Pakistani society, history, beliefs, and traditions. The exhibition also examined the evolution of Truck art and its adaptation to new contexts like urban architecture, contemporary art, and consumer goods. The introduction of Truck art in China will further help in creating demand of local products in foreign markets, which in return will improve the living standards of the artisans. Various sectors of CIs will be strengthened, and job opportunities will be created.

Cultural exchange programs, exhibitions and co-operations are effective for the economic development of both the countries and should be arranged more frequently on government level. National and private local cultural sector should be involved in arranging these programs. This bilateral cultural communication will not only introduce the local cultures to the other countries but can also be part of projects related to CIs. New cultural products are required to be created which can gain popularity in the consumers of Pakistan, China, and other countries also. Thus, CPEC can play a vital role in the communal exports of cultural goods and can offer prospects for the local artisans and people to gain benefit of their craftsmanship in the adjoining countries along the BRI.

Conclusion

CPEC is strengthening the economic and development relationship between the two countries and has opened a gateway to cultural connectivity which in turn paves way for the enhancement of CIs. In the contemporary world, CIs are the most powerful industries, affecting the living standards of common

people, creating new demands to attract consumers. The Truck art of Pakistan is emerging as the cultural identity of Pakistan, representing the positive and softer image of Pakistani culture along with gaining economic benefits. Transformation of its colorful imagery in consumer goods will help to boost CIs of Pakistan and attracting new consumers. Unique cultural products are created by reinterpreting the Truck art imagery, which are a source of attraction to tourists and foreigners. BRI can also provide opportunities for the promotion of various sectors of CIs involving with the reinterpretation of Truck art among the countries along it. At the same time, these industries will provide many job opportunities to the local people. Thus, one can say that these Pakistani colorful trucks on the roads are not only representative of local culture and society but playing a positive role in cultural exchange programs and are beneficial in gaining economic capital directly or indirectly.

References

1. Ali, Dr. Saeed Ahmad. 2021a. 'TruckArt' genre becomes vibrant folk ornate-identity of Pakistan globally. 2-4. Accessed 30/06/2022.
2. Ali, Farah. 2021b. "The Bold and the Beautiful: Portraiture in Pakistani Truck Art." Master of Arts, Ernest G. Welch School of Art and Design, Georgia State University.
3. Asif, Muhammad, Deng Zhiyong, Irfan Ullah, Maria Nisar, Ruqia Kalsoom, and Malik Akhtar Hussain. 2019. "The study on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a language and culture changer in Pakistan." *Journal of the Punjab University Historical Society* 32 (1): 35-49.
4. Dar, Saifur Rahman. 2009. *Crafts of the Punjab*. Vol. IV. Lahore: Punjab Small Industries Corporation.
5. Elias, Jamal J. 2003. "On wings of diesel: Spiritual space and religious imagination in Pakistani truck decoration." *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 43 (1): 187-202.
6. Khwaja, Mahmood A, Sumbul Saeed, and Maham Urooj. 2018. "Preliminary environmental impact assessment (EIA) study of China-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC) northern route road construction activities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan."
7. LibreTexts. 2023. *Sociology: Boundless*. California: LibreTexts.
8. Malik, Almas Fatima. 2018. "Promoting awareness about traditional motifs and patterns of Pakistan in truck art through textile and fashion design for the local and global market." *International Journal* 6 (1): 40-45.
9. Muhammad, Raza, and Lubna Abid Ali. 2019. "SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF CPEC ON PAKISTAN." *Margalla Papers* (23).

China- Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in Relation to Cultural Exchange...

10. Painters. 2020. *Gilāni Cārgo Addā*. edited by Nomana Masood. Lahore: Bund Road.
11. Saad, Ahmad, Guan Xinping, and Mariah Ijaz. 2019. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and its influence on perceived economic and social goals: Implications for social policy makers." *Sustainability* 11 (18): 4949.
12. SDPI. 2023. "E-Newsletter Pak – China Study Centre." Sustainable Development Policy Institute. Accessed 6 October. <https://sdpi.org/assets/lib/uploads/E-Newsletter%20for%20Pak%20China%20Study%20Centre-Vol.%205,%20No.%208%20Issue%2016-30%20April%202023.pdf>.
13. Smith, Rachel Charlotte. 2020. "Designing heritage for a digital culture." In *Design Anthropology*, 117-135. Routledge.
14. Solangi, Bilal Zafar. 2023. "The Talented Team Of Phool Patti Showcased First Pakistani Truck Art Exhibition In China." *Daily City News*, 2023. <https://citynews.com.pk/the-talented-team-of-phool-patti-showcased-first-pakistani-truck-art-exhibition-in-china/18710/>.
15. Tehsin, Muhammad, Amjad Abbas Khan, and Turrab-ul-Hassan Sargana. 2017. "CPEC and sustainable economic growth for Pakistan." *Pakistan Vision* 18 (2): 102-118.
16. Unsa, Jamshed, Jahangir Amar, and Khawaja Anbrin. 2021. "Cultural Implications of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)." *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 2 (4): 01-11. [http://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2021\(2-IV\)01](http://doi.org/10.47205/jdss.2021(2-IV)01).
17. Zaidi, Saima, and Prince Claus Fund. 2009. *Mazaar, Bazaar: Design and Visual Culture in Pakistan*. London: Oxford University Press