**A momentous visit to China**

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A 15-member delegation from Pakistan, including diplomats, senior academics, researchers, and media persons, was invited by Fudan University, Shanghai, and funded by the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan. They visited China on a week-long trip from July 16 to July 23, 2023. The delegation was led by Ambassador Sohail Mahmood, Director-General of the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI). The author of this op-ed was also one of the delegates, representing Balochistan.
The visit proved to be exceedingly instructive and engrossing for various reasons.. The experience of traveling from Shanghai to Beijing by Bullet Train was amazing, filled with excitement and learning. A noteworthy dinner hosted by Pakistan’s Ambassador to China, Moin ul Haque, in Beijing was exceptional. The Ambassador provided new insights into China’s modernization and Pak-China relations in the evolving regional geopolitical landscape. Realistically speaking, the trip reflected everything the author had studied about China’s soft power, culture, and hospitality during their PhD dissertation.
The trip led to the development of three main hypotheses in the author’s mind. After witnessing China’s economic development, innovative infrastructure, technological advancements, and prosperity, it became evident that the US’ frustration in containing China is justifiable. China’s unstoppable progress challenges the US exceptionalism for the first time, as Beijing remains the primary player in the current political discourse in Washington. China’s historical initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), lifting 800 million people out of poverty, marks a significant event in the annals of international politics.
Notably, China defies Max Weber’s notion that economic development requires adopting the Western model. Being a non-Western country, China has made more progress than Western democratic nations. For instance, from 2011 to 2013, China used 6.5 gigatons of cement, surpassing the US’s usage during the entire 20th Century. These Chinese developments have caused considerable consternation for the US.
As for the second hypothesis, Pakistanis are held in higher esteem and respect in China than in Muslim countries or the West. During the trip, when the delegates introduced themselves to the common Chinese, they were referred to as “Ba Tie,” meaning “Iron brother.” This term is a part of China’s political discourse. Thirdly, the author believes that Pakistanis will have more job opportunities in China than anywhere else in the foreseeable future, as the Chinese are easily accessible to Pakistanis. While Pakistan’s elites may be obsessed with the West, the middle class would prefer China. Currently, more than 30,000 Pakistanis have obtained Chinese scholarships and are enjoying studying in China. China is known to exploit foreign talents for maximum dividends, and Pakistanis are likely to remain the biggest beneficiaries in this regard.
During the trip, the most amazing thing that dazzled the author overwhelmingly was the Chinese commitment to their work. They consider work as worship and avoid indolence during duties. Almost the entire population wakes up at 7 am and approaches their work with great zeal and zest. Every individual in the country aspires to achieve something remarkable in life. The Chinese lifestyle is thrifty, even the CEOs of companies appear in ordinary attire. They prioritize values, work ethic, and hard work over a luxurious lifestyle, which has made them the most successful nation in the 21st century.
It is pertinent to mention that China’s per capita income in 1970 was USD 150 billion, while Pakistan’s per capita income remained at USD 250 billion. Presently, China’s per capita income is nearly USD 12,732, while Pakistan’s is merely USD 1600. This stark difference calls for introspection and learning from the Chinese model to address Pakistan’s exacerbating economic condition. The lessons brought home from China’s visit include honesty in duty, a thrifty lifestyle, new ambitions in life, gender balance in the workforce, and a collective approach to social issues