



A Survey Study of the Pakistan Study Centers of Chinese Universities under the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative

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Introduction: The "Belt and Road" Initiative (BRI) represents a significant endeavor by China to establish a new paradigm of international relations focused on mutually beneficial cooperation and the creation of a shared human destiny [i]. With a longstanding history of friendship, Pakistan holds a pivotal role as a traditional ally and a key participant in the "Belt and Road" initiative [ii]. It serves as an important pivot, connecting, and demonstrative country in this grand strategy. In 2013, the leaders of China and Pakistan forged a consensus on the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" (CPEC) to enhance economic cooperation between the two nations and facilitate their shared development [iii]. The CPEC envisions comprehensive collaboration in transportation, energy, and maritime economy to foster stronger interconnections and mutual progress. Furthermore, in April 2015, during President Xi Jinping's visit to Pakistan, both nations elevated their relationship to an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, signifying the depth and significance of their cooperation [iv]. The Roundtable Summit of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, held in May 2017 in Beijing, provided fresh momentum and opportunities for strengthening China-Pakistan connectivity and enhancing pragmatic cooperation [v].

Developing academic and research collaborations between countries plays a crucial role in fostering international understanding, promoting cultural exchanges, and enhancing bilateral relations. [vi] In the context of the BRI, a comprehensive global development strategy initiated by China, the establishment of Pakistan Study Centers (PSCs) in Chinese universities has emerged as a notable milestone in strengthening the academic ties between China and Pakistan.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the PSCs established in various Chinese universities and institutions. With the BRI aiming to enhance connectivity, infrastructure, and economic cooperation along ancient trade routes [vii], it has also fostered significant academic cooperation. The PSCs in Chinese universities serve as important platforms for promoting research, knowledge exchange, and fostering a deeper understanding of Pakistan's history, culture, society, politics, and economy.

Specifically, the study is going to answer the following questions:

What are the historical context and motivations behind the establishment of PSCs in Chinese universities?

What is the significance of the geographical distribution of PSCs across China, and how does it align with China's foreign policy, international engagement, and academic endeavors?

What are the different stages in the development of these PSCs, and how do they correlate with the growth of Pakistan studies in China, particularly within the context of the BRI and CPEC?

What are the specific academic programs, research areas, and achievements of these PSCs, and how do they contribute to the academic, cultural, and policy aspects of China-Pakistan relations?

What are the challenges for the PSCs in China and what corresponding recommendations can be put forward?

1. Literature review

The study of Pakistan in China began in the 1950s with the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. However, the existing research on Pakistan in China lacks depth and primarily focuses on

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offering a general overview of Pakistan's history, economy, and culture. Chinese academics have heavily relied on research conducted by other countries, especially the Soviet Union and India, while not fully utilizing the research findings of Pakistani scholars. Additionally, translations of Pakistani research predominantly occurred in the late 1950s and early 1960s, indicating a need for more comprehensive and updated research efforts in the literature on Pakistan in China.

In 1951, Panlang [viii] translated the book "India and Pakistan" by Soviet scholar Dyakov. The 67-page book provides a brief overview of the history of India and Pakistan before 1947. Another Soviet scholar, Ljubchikov [ix], contributed a booklet on Pakistan, which is only 34 pages long. However, this booklet lacks the necessary detail on all aspects of Pakistan.

In 1957, "Pakistan Today," edited by Maklang [x], offered a somewhat more detailed account of Pakistan. During this period, there was a focus on translating books on Pakistan's economy and culture. For instance, "The Agricultural Labourers of India and Pakistan" provided an overview of the situation of agricultural laborers in Pakistan and India. Additionally, the book "Pakistan's Economy and Foreign Trade" describes and comments on Pakistan's economy and foreign trade situation[xi]. These works were written by Urdu students from the Department of Oriental Languages at Peking University and the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Languages. Furthermore, two collections of poetry, "The Breakdown of the Prison: Modern Urdu Poetry from India and Pakistan" and "Selected Poems of the Peace Soldiers of India, Pakistan and Burma," introduced some of Pakistan's most famous poems to China[xii][xiii]. The translation team of the Department of Foreign Languages at Sichuan University achieved the greatest translation feat of this period with the four-volume book "A Brief History of Pakistan." [xiv]

From the 1950s to the year 2000, the strengthening of Sino-Pakistani relations sparked the interest of Chinese academics in the study of Pakistan. Notably, two significant books, namely "Pakistan" and "Pakistan Chronicle," offer an extensive examination of Pakistan's history, culture, economy, and politics. These works serve as valuable resources for enhancing our understanding and conducting research on Pakistan [xv] [xvi]. Additionally, Liu Lesheng's edited volume, "Pakistan," and Yang Cuibai and Li Dechang's edited volume, "Contemporary Pakistan," provide timely and comprehensive information across various dimensions of Pakistan [xvii] [xviii]. These publications vividly depict Pakistan's profile and serve as essential references for gaining insights into and studying its overall condition.

Mr. Li Dechang's contributions [xix], "Political Development of Pakistan" and "Economic Development of Pakistan," are indispensable sources for comprehending and studying Pakistan. The former explores the political evolution of Pakistan from 1947 to 1987, while the latter focuses on its economic progress, analyzing the successive governments' formulated economic strategies. These books thoroughly describe the economic development plans, achievements, and challenges in sectors such as agriculture, finance, and external relations. Qiu Yonghui's work, "Economic Reforms and Democratisation Waves in South Asian Countries: A Study of India and Pakistan," sheds light on the economic reforms in India and Pakistan and their correlation with the democratization wave [xx]. Furthermore, Chen Hongguang's reportage literature, "The Chinese in Pakistan," provides valuable insights into the lives of Chinese residents in Pakistan, representing the first Chinese book to depict their experiences [xxi].

During this period, China has made significant efforts to translate and publish a wide range of works on Pakistani culture, encompassing novels, folklore, literature, and biographies [xxii] [xxiii] [xxiv]. These publications have played a pivotal role in deepening scholars' understanding of Pakistani culture.

Entering to 21st Century, studies on Pakistan became popular. One of the most significant developments in Pakistan Studies during the 21st century is the deepening of Pakistan-China relations, driven by CPEC. Scholars have extensively studied this relationship, highlighting its strategic importance in the context of the BRI. Authors like Dossani and Row [xxv] in "CPEC: Master Plan" have explored the economic implications of CPEC, emphasizing its potential to transform the region's economic landscape. Despite being close allies and engaging in high-level cooperation in various domains, there has been limited progress and scholarly work concerning Pakistan Studies in China. It is observed that the number of Chinese scholars specializing in Pakistan studies is small, and only a few possess proficiency in Urdu. Consequently, the overall academic and research contributions to the field of Pakistan Studies from China have been relatively sparse thus far [xxvi]. Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Beijing states on its website that there will be only 7 Pakistan study Centers in China by 2017 [xxvii]. Few research has been conducted on the topic of PSCs in Chinese universities.



2. Research Method

This study employs a mixed-method research approach to comprehensively examine the PSCs established within Chinese universities in the context of the BRI. The research design integrates qualitative and quantitative methods to gain a holistic understanding of the establishment, objectives, activities, and impacts of these centers.

2.1 Literature Review

A literature review is conducted to examine existing research on PSCs, the BRI, and the CPEC. Academic databases, including CNKI, Google Scholar, and other relevant sources, are searched for studies, publications, reports, and academic papers related to PSCs and their contributions to BRI and CPEC. The review identifies gaps in the current literature and areas necessitating further investigation.

2.2 Data Collection

Official Website Analysis and news report

The official websites of the PSCs are visited to collect data, on their objectives, research areas, publications, collaborations, and historical development. News reports by authentic media are adopted for references when some of the official websites are not functioning properly.

2.3 Interviews and Meetings

Considering some PSCs do not have an official website, structured interviews are conducted with the heads and staff of the PSCs. Interview questionnaires are designed to ensure consistency and cover topics including objectives, achievements, challenges, and long-term goals. Meetings both online and in person are organized with members of the PSCs to gain insights into their roles, contributions, and experiences in academia, diplomacy, and research activities.

2.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is employed to analyze interviews and meeting notes. Common themes, motivations for PSC establishment, roles in BRI and CPEC, and the impact on academic and diplomatic relations are identified. Data from official websites is summarized and statistically analyzed. Figures and tables are created to visualize trends and patterns in PSC activities. Comparative analysis is performed to contrast the objectives, research areas, and achievements of different PSCs. Variations across geographical regions in China are examined, and factors contributing to the success of specific centers are identified.

2.5 Case Studies

Select PSCs are chosen for in-depth case studies to provide a comprehensive understanding based on the study's purpose. Some cases are discussed to illustrate how PSCs work and the challenges they face.

2.6 Implications and Recommendations

Based on the research findings, implications, and recommendations for both the Chinese and Pakistani academic community regarding the role and enhancement of PSCs in supporting BRI and CPEC are proposed.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The research adheres to ethical standards, including obtaining informed consent for interviews, respecting privacy and confidentiality, and avoiding conflicts of interest.

3. Overview of the Pakistan Study Centers

Pakistan is an important neighboring country for China, holding a unique and significant place in Chinese diplomacy[xxviii]. On January 4, 1950, Pakistan became the first Muslim country, the second Commonwealth country, and the third non-communist country to recognize the People's Republic of China[xxix]. On May 21, 1950, Pakistan and China formally established diplomatic relations[xxx]. Since then, China and Pakistan have maintained a close cooperative relationship that has deepened over the years, leading to the establishment of an all-weather strategic partnership.

China and Pakistan's relationship dates to the mid-20th century when Pakistan's recognition of the newly established People's Republic of China[xxxi]. Their diplomatic, economic, and military ties have grown stronger over the years, evolving into a full-fledged strategic partnership[xxxii]. The closeness of this relationship is evident across various domains, including trade, infrastructure development, counter-terrorism cooperation,

and international affairs. The two countries engage in extensive collaboration in joint economic projects, cultural exchanges, and military exercises[xxxiii].

In the backdrop of BRI and CPEC, domestic universities in China have increasingly turned their attention to the comprehensive study of Pakistan[xxxiv]. During the span from 2007 to 2022, Chinese universities established as many as 21 research centers for the in-depth exploration of various aspects of Pakistan. These centers are actively engaged in high-level, multidisciplinary research projects and exchange programs, reflecting their commitment to serving China's national strategic interests and elevating the internationalization of higher education within the country. The proliferation of these PSCs in China underscores the significance of Pakistan in the context of the BRI and CPEC and highlights the broader implications for the evolving China-Pakistan relationship. The 21 PSCs, listed in chronological order of their establishment, are in different provinces across China, as seen in Table 1.

No.	Year	Province	City	University/Institution	Key Research Areas
1	2007	Beijing	Beijing	Tsinghua University	Policy research, cross-cultural communication, international relations, media development research
2	2008	Beijing	Beijing	Peking University	Pakistan and the South Asian subcontinent, promoting Pakistan's culture and language exchange [xxxv]
3	2008	Sichuan	Chengdu	Sichuan University	Academic research on Pakistan, related academic lectures, funding for research projects, academic conferences [xxxvi]
4	2009	Shanghai	Shanghai	Fudan University	Economics, historical environment, business management, international relations, and strategic studies [xxxvii]
5	2011	Jiangsu	Xuzhou	Jiangsu Normal University	Pakistani history, language and culture, religious and social relations, economic and trade, domestic and international political situations [xxxviii]
6	2013	Sichuan	Nanchong	China West Normal University	Pakistani security, diplomacy, politics, economics, culture, history, religion, and ethnic issues, as well as the interactions between Pakistan and neighboring countries and major world powers [xxxix]
7	2014	Inner Mongolia	Hohhot	Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences	CPEC, educational exchanges, and research projects on security, energy, and economics. Academic calibration with Pakistani institutes and centers. [xl]
8	2016	Beijing	Beijing	Beijing Technology and Business University	China-Pakistan science and economics, research and exchange studies [xli]
9	2016	Xinjiang	Kashgar	Kashgar University	Economic, historical, and cultural research on Pakistan and the Kashgar-Pakistan relationship [xlii]
10	2016	Yunnan	Kunming	Yunnan University for Nationalities	Political, economic, cultural, and social research on Pakistan, South Asian regional studies, and studies on specific South Asian countries [xliii]
11	2017	Hubei	Wuhan	China University of Geosciences (Wuhan)	Providing national situation reports, decision-making consulting services to China and Pakistan governments/enterprises, and providing teaching and training for the cultivation and reserve of talents for China and Pakistan [xliv]
12	2017	Guangdong	Guangzhou	South China University of Technology	CPEC, China-India-Pakistan relations, and projects related to the BRI [xlv]
13	2017	Jiangxi	Ganzhou	Jiangxi University of	China-Pakistan education cooperation and exchange, equal and cultural use of China-Pakistan relations,



				Science and Technology	Pakistan's image in China, mining investment in Pakistan, China-Pakistan non-ferrous metal cooperation, and government advisory services ^[xlvi]
14	2017	Hebei	Bao Ding	Hebei University	Intercultural communication, covering "Belt and Road" people's hearts and cultural connectivity, civilization dialogue and communication, contemporary media, and cultural conflicts, media development and civilization exchange, and mutual learning. ^[xlvii]
15	2017	Ningxia	Yinchuan	Northern Minzu University	Pakistani customs, ethnic culture, clothing and architecture, ethnic minority policies, intangible cultural heritage protection, economic policies, social ecology, and other aspects
16	2017	Beijing	Beijing	Communication University of China	Establishing and promoting an academic system and innovative mechanism for Pakistani studies, serving the BRI; dedicating efforts to the high-level talent development and exchange in the fields of culture, arts, and media between China and Pakistan. ^[xlviii]
17	2018	Shaanxi	Xi'an	Northwest University	The diverse nature of economic and trade cooperation between China and Pakistan, the multi-faceted industrial investments, infrastructure development alignment, and the enriched cultural exchanges. ^[xlix]
18	2018	Wuhu	Anhui	Anhui Normal University	Compilation of research works on Pakistan, hosting academic conferences and presentations on Pakistan. Research on CPEC and its impact on Anhui's development, publishing the "Pakistan Research Brief." ^[l]
19	2019	Yunnan	Chongqing	South and Southeast Asian Research Institute	Serving the "Belt and Road" initiative and the CPEC construction
20	2019	Hebei	Shijiazhuang	Hebei Normal University	Enhancing mutual understanding and academic exchanges between scholars and young people from China and Pakistan ^[li]
21	2022	Chongqing	Chongqing	Southwest University of Political Science and Law	Security in political, economic, ethnic, religious, social, and cultural fields; promotes high-end think tanks for exchanges and cooperation between China and other countries.

Table 1, 21: Pakistan Research Centers in Chinese Universities. (Source: Developed by the author by collecting data from various databases)

3.1 Geographical Distribution

Geographically, these centers are dispersed across various provinces and regions of China (Figure 1), reflecting the nationwide significance of the China-Pakistan relationship within the context of the BRI) and CPEC.

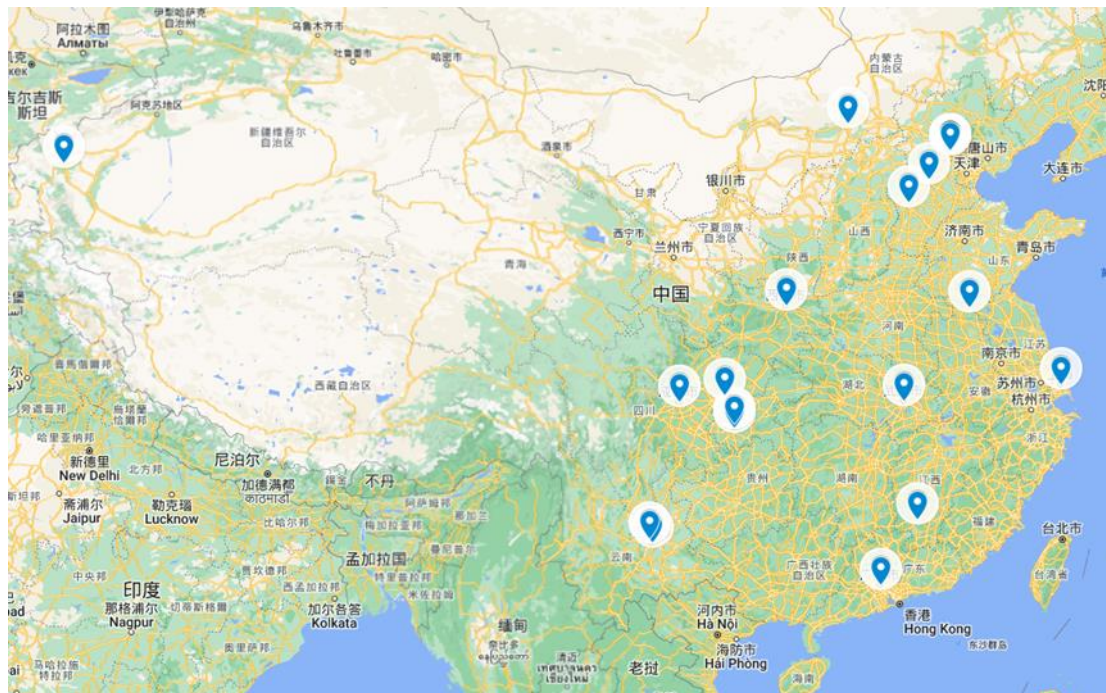


Figure 1, the distribution of PSCs in China (Source: from the author)

Note: some areas have more than one PSC

Northern Provinces: Major urban centers such as Beijing and Shanghai host some of the earliest-established centers. Tsinghua University in Beijing, for instance, focuses on Pakistan's culture and China-Pakistan historical exchanges. Meanwhile, Fudan University in Shanghai focuses on economics, historical environments, business management, international relations, and strategic studies. These institutions serve as important hubs for academic research and policy consultations. Inner Mongolia starts with educational exchanges and has started much academic calibration with Pakistani institutes and centers.

Western China: Some are in western provinces such as Xinjiang and Yunnan. These regions are particularly relevant due to their proximity to Pakistan and the CPEC. For example, Kashgar University in Xinjiang concentrates on the CPEC and regional studies, contributing to decision-making support and economic development. Yunnan University for Nationalities emphasizes Urdu language education, Pakistan studies, and cultural research, strengthening educational and cultural ties.

Southern China: Guangdong, Jiangxi, and Hubei provinces are home to study centers, with each specializing in different aspects of China-Pakistan relations. These centers engage in academic exchange, high-level research, and cultural cooperation, promoting deeper people-to-people connections and understanding between the two countries.

Central China: Sichuan, Anhui, Chongqing, Hebei, and Ningxia have their centers with a focus on international relations, particularly related to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. These centers contribute to research and insights into international relations and the broader context of China's regional and international strategies.

3.2 Year Distribution

Before the year 2000, studies on Pakistan were limited, and most of them were overviews of Pakistan's general introduction, history, economy, and culture [lii]. China lacked specialized institutions and academic publications dedicated to Pakistani studies, failing to cultivate a thriving field of research on Pakistan [liii]. Without these dedicated research institutions, Chinese scholars predominantly examined Pakistan within the framework of South Asian studies. For instance, the China South Asian Studies Association, founded in 1978, aimed to foster academic activities and promote international exchanges and friendship, holding domestic and international academic conferences and publishing the first Chinese academic journal dedicated to South Asian studies, "South Asian Studies." Moreover, Sichuan University's South Asian Studies Institute founded the "South Asian Studies Quarterly" in 1985, serving as a primary platform for publishing research on Pakistan [liv]. However, it was only in the 21st century that China took a significant step toward the development of PSCs. On April 14, 2007, Tsinghua University officially established the Pakistan Cultural Communication Research Center [lv], becoming China's first institution exclusively dedicated to the study of Pakistan. This marked a



crucial milestone in the strengthening of China's academic and cultural ties with Pakistan and illustrated China's commitment to fostering a comprehensive understanding of this vital South Asian nation.

The establishment of PSCs over the past 16 years demonstrates China's ongoing commitment to enhancing understanding, cooperation, and cultural exchange with Pakistan (Figure 2). The pioneering centers set the foundation for the subsequent growth, and the recent expansion aligns with China's strategic goals regarding the BRI and CPEC.

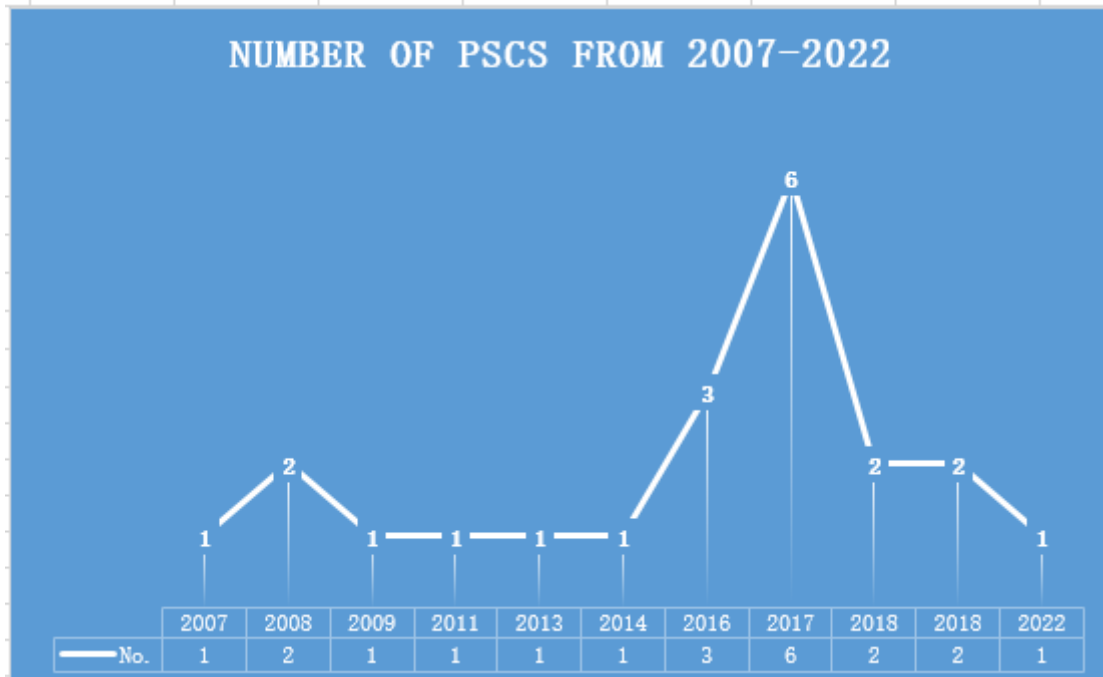


Figure 2, Number of PSCs in China from 2007-2022 (Source: from the author)

In 2007, the first PSC was established at Tsinghua University, Beijing, and there has been a gradual and consistent expansion of the centers over time. This expansion is a testament to China's increasing emphasis on Pakistan studies and international cooperation, particularly in the context of BRI and CPEC. The phased establishment of these centers signifies a strategic approach to building a comprehensive network of resources dedicated to the study of Pakistan. In the span of 16 years, the development of the PSCs can be put into three stages.

Pioneering Centers Stage (2007-2009): The initial establishment of the first four centers in 2007 and 2009 is indicative of the early recognition within China of the significance of Pakistan studies. Tsinghua University, Fudan University, Peking University, and Sichuan University played pioneering roles in this field. Their early engagement demonstrates their commitment to advancing understanding of Pakistan, China-Pakistan relations, and the broader South Asian region. These institutions likely set the stage for the subsequent growth of PSCs across China.

Steady Growth Stage (2016-2019): The period from 2016 to 2019 stands out as a notable phase of expansion, during which eight new PSCs were established. This concentrated growth is the direct result of the implementation of CPEC. As the BRI and CPEC gained momentum, these new centers were established to enhance research, cooperation, and exchanges with Pakistan, focusing on various aspects of the bilateral relationship, regional dynamics, and international collaboration. The steady growth in recent years is a clear indication of China's dedication to promoting educational and cultural exchanges with Pakistan.

Continued Expansion Stage (2022): The establishment of a new center at Southwest University of Political Science and Law in Chongqing in 2022 underscores the ongoing commitment to expanding PSCs. This signifies that the growth of these centers is not limited to earlier years but is part of a continuing effort to strengthen cultural exchange, academic research, and cooperation with Pakistan. The addition of new centers also reflects the enduring importance of Pakistan in China's foreign policy, international engagement, and academic endeavors.

3.3 Research Focus/Areas

As research centers, the PSCs in China all developed the academic research work between China and Pakistan. The difference among these centers lies in the specific research fields. Some centers focus on specific aspects of Pakistan, such as security, diplomacy, religion, and ethnic issues, while others have a broader scope that includes multiple disciplines. The Pakistan Study Center at China West Normal University, for example, focuses on Pakistani security, diplomacy, politics, economics, culture, history, religion, and ethnic issues, as well as the interactions between Pakistan and neighboring countries and major world powers. On the other hand, the Pakistan Study Center at Northern Minzu University researches Pakistani customs, ethnic culture, clothing and architecture, ethnic minority policies, intangible cultural heritage protection, economic policies, social ecology, and other aspects.

Most of the centers engage in academic research, lectures, funding for research projects, academic conferences, and advisory services to governments and enterprises. For instance, the Pakistan Study Center at Tsinghua University conducts academic research on Pakistani culture, China-Pakistan historical exchange, international relations, and media development research. The Pakistan Study Center at Peking University promotes research on Pakistan and the South Asian subcontinent, while also facilitating cultural and language exchange. Additionally, the Pakistan Study Center at the South China University of Technology focuses on research related to the CPEC, China-India-Pakistan relations, and projects associated with the BRI.

Several centers emphasize the importance of promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding between China and Pakistan. This includes the Pakistan Study Center at Fudan University, which conducts research on economics, historical environment, business management, international relations, and strategic studies, with a focus on fostering cultural exchange and connectivity. The Pakistan Study Center at Hebei Normal University aims to enhance mutual understanding and academic exchanges between scholars and young people from China and Pakistan.

Some centers specifically contribute to the CPEC and the BRI by studying their impact and supporting related projects. The Pakistan Study Center at the South and Southeast Asian Research Institute is dedicated to serving the BRI and the construction of the CPEC. The Pakistan Study Center at Jiangxi University of Science and Technology engages in research on China-Pakistan education cooperation, and China-Pakistan non-ferrous metal cooperation, and provides government advisory services.

All the above PSCs exhibit a strong commitment to international collaboration and academic exchanges. Through partnerships with research institutions and universities in more than ten countries, these centers facilitate the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and insights on various issues, including politics, economics, culture, and security. This international engagement underscores China's dedication to fostering global cooperation, enhancing cross-cultural understanding, and promoting scholarly exchanges. Such collaborations contribute to the enrichment of research outcomes and the development of multifaceted perspectives in the field of Pakistan Studies, ultimately strengthening China's role as an active and responsible international partner.

In terms of think tanks and decision support, several centers have evolved into think tanks that provide essential decision-making consulting services to both the Chinese and Pakistani governments, as well as to enterprises operating in both countries. These centers serve as valuable sources of well-researched, informed, and unbiased insights into complex issues such as international relations, trade policies, security concerns, and economic cooperation. By offering their expertise and in-depth analysis, these centers play a pivotal role in shaping government policies and business strategies. Their contributions support the formulation of well-informed decisions that benefit the mutual interests of both China and Pakistan, further solidifying the strong partnership between these two nations.

In addition to their roles as research hubs and think tanks, these centers also play a crucial role in nurturing talent within the field of Pakistani studies. They offer various teaching and training programs designed to cultivate a new generation of experts and professionals. These programs extend beyond the academic realm and encompass cultural exchange, language acquisition, and specialized training in fields related to Pakistan. By investing in the development of scholars and professionals, these centers ensure the sustainability of expertise and knowledge transfer in Pakistani studies. This commitment to talent development reflects China's long-term vision for enhancing academic excellence and cultural understanding between the two countries, reinforcing the foundations of a robust and enduring partnership [lvi].



3.4 Achievements and Significance

Since the establishment of the first PSC in Tsinghua University in 2007, research work on China-Pakistan relations has been growing rapidly and much progress has been made, as seen in Table 2.

No.	University	Achievements	Significance
1	Tsinghua University	Organized academic research/visits to Pakistan. Served as a think tank for national decision-making	Pioneering institution promoting interdisciplinary research, academic exchange, and cultural understanding between China and Pakistan.
2	Fudan University	Promotes cultural exchanges and cooperation. Participates in policy advisory work and hosts various seminars on CPEC. - Sends students to Pakistan for short-term study programs. - Collaborates with Pakistani government, universities, and research institutions	Promotes understanding of Pakistan and China-Pakistan relations, serving as a platform for academic research and cooperation.
3	Peking University	Conducted cultural exchange and academic research in Pakistan studies. Featured experts in Urdu language, culture, and history.	Strengthens cultural ties and academic research between China and Pakistan, offering a unique platform for research and education.
4	Sichuan University	Research on politics, economics, culture, and foreign relations in South Asia, particularly India. Conducted research projects and published academic works.	Center for specialized academic research on South Asia, contributing to Sino-Indian studies and understanding of the region's politics and economics.
5	Jiangsu Normal University	Established a library of materials related to South Asian politics, economics, and security. Actively participated in academic research and cultural exchanges.	Facilitates substantial progress in academic research and international cooperation on South Asian issues.
6	China West Normal University	Research on Pakistan's security, terrorism, ethnic and religious issues, energy projects, and foreign relations. Offered consulting services.	Provides vital intellectual support for government decision-making and fosters academic exchange, political awareness, and mutual understanding between China and Pakistan.
7	Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences	Specialized in research concerning Balochistan province, cultural differences in Pakistani provinces, and Chinese culture in Pakistan. Promoted Chinese language education.	Enhances China-Pakistan relations, facilitates educational exchanges, supports businesses, and conducts research on current issues in Pakistan.
8	Beijing Technology and Business University	Held annual international conferences, published reports, fostered bilateral collaboration in technology and economics, and contributed to socio-economic development.	Promotes China's "Belt and Road" initiative, fosters cooperation between China and Pakistan in various sectors, and explores sustainable development along the Belt and Road.
9	Kashgar University	Became a National Ethnic Affairs Commission research center, organized international conferences, and provided decision-making support and expert consultations.	Contributes to understanding the CPEC and regional issues, supports high-level research, and aids in China-Pakistan economic development.

10	Yunnan University for Nationalities	Established Urdu language courses, set up a Pakistan research center, and researched various aspects of Pakistan's politics, economics, culture, and society.	Strengthens educational and cultural ties between China and Pakistan and offers research on various aspects of Pakistan.
11	China University of Geosciences (Wu Han)	Collaborated with institutions, supported high-level research, and promoted cultural exchange.	Provides valuable research, decision support, and cultural exchange between China and Pakistan.
12	South China University of Technology	Offered decision-making consultation services. Conducted research, and published academic papers, faculty, and student exchange programs. Provided national consultation reports	Offers expertise on the CPEC, cross-cultural conflict, and media communication.
13	Jiangxi University of Science and Technology	Programs on China-Pakistan educational cooperation; research on cultural equivalence and utilization, Pakistan mining investment, China-Pakistan non-ferrous metal cooperation. Provided advisory services.	Strengthens educational and cultural collaboration between China and Pakistan, offers relevant research, and contributes to mutual understanding.
14	Hebei University	Published research papers, organized conferences, and collaborated with other research centers.	Provides research and insights on international relations, particularly with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.
15	Northern Minzu University	Conducted research from an ethnological and anthropological perspective, offering expertise on various aspects of Pakistan. Provided advisory service to local government.	Strengthens research on Pakistan in the context of international relations and contributes to China's regional and international strategies.
16	Communication University of China	Hosted International Conferences. Conducted regional country research projects, provided decision-making consultation, published research papers, and collaborated with other centers.	Aims to become a top-tier academic institution in Pakistan research, supporting China's Belt and Road Strategy, and enhancing people-to-people exchanges between China and Pakistan.
17	Northwest University	Facilitated academic exchanges, hosted Pakistani academic groups, and participated in the "CPEC University Alliance."	Provides theoretical support and intellectual assistance for comprehensive cooperation between China and Pakistan, including economic, cultural, and academic exchanges.
18	Anhui Normal University	Cooperated on projects related to China-Pakistan agricultural collaboration and counterterrorism. Reports were adopted at the provincial level.	Actively contributes to the development of China-Pakistan relations, including academic publications, project involvement, and international collaborations.
19	South and Southeast Asian Research Institute	Hosted national-level projects, generated high-level academic and think tank results, and served China's overseas interests.	Provides comprehensive and high-quality research, connecting China with the world on various issues, including economics, politics, and security.
20	Hebei Normal University	Produced academic monographs, translations, articles, and reports, and worked on multiple projects. Hosted lectures, and conferences on Pakistan.	Offers academic publications, reports, and a platform for research and consulting services, contributing to the BRI.



21	Southwest University of Political Science and Law	Promoted educational, cultural, and social exchanges and cooperation between China and Pakistan. Research on challenges, problems, and solutions in regional cooperation.	with a series of major, key, and general projects at the national level, as well as high-end academic and think-tank achievements, the enter is dedicated to serving the protection of China's overseas interests.
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Table 2, Achievements, and significance of the PSCs in China. (Source: from the author)

These Chinese universities are not only fostering academic and research collaboration but also promoting cultural exchange, economic cooperation, specialized research, policy formulation, and international cooperation. Based on the above table, the following findings are highlighted. It is noted that some centers are discussed as examples, rather than listing all of them in detail.

3.5 Academic and Research Collaboration

Since the beginning period, Chinese universities like Tsinghua, Fudan, and Peking University have demonstrated a strong commitment to academic and research collaboration with Pakistan. Their endeavors extend to organizing research visits, serving as think tanks for national decision-making, and promoting interdisciplinary research. This engagement holds immense significance as it deepens the scholarly exchange between China and Pakistan, contributing to a more profound understanding of each other's cultures, histories, and policies.

Tsinghua University's pioneering role in organizing academic research and visits to Pakistan marks it as a trailblazer in building academic bridges between the two nations. Fostering academic exchanges, not only promotes research but also enhances cultural understanding, a fundamental component of robust international relations. Fudan University's multifaceted approach, which includes cultural exchanges, policy advisory work, seminars on the CPEC, and sending students to Pakistan, serves as a comprehensive platform for academic research and cooperation. It significantly contributes to building a stronger foundation for China-Pakistan relations by enhancing mutual understanding and knowledge sharing. Peking University's focus on cultural exchange and academic research, especially in Pakistan studies and Urdu language expertise, facilitates in-depth research and education. This institution plays a critical role in strengthening cultural ties and offering a unique platform for cultural and academic collaboration. Such exchanges foster not only academic growth but also people-to-people interactions, creating lasting bonds between the two countries.

3.6 Cultural Ties and Language Education

Yunnan University for Nationalities and Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences have emerged as key players in enhancing cultural ties between China and Pakistan. Their focus on Urdu language courses and research on cultural differences and Chinese culture in Pakistan holds particular significance.

Yunnan University for Nationalities' establishment of Urdu language courses and a Pakistan research center not only facilitates language learning but also strengthens educational and cultural ties. This is pivotal in fostering a deeper understanding of Pakistan's rich cultural heritage, language, and society, which, in turn, enhances cooperation. Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences' expertise in researching Balochistan province, cultural differences in Pakistani provinces, and Chinese culture in Pakistan aid in enhancing China-Pakistan relations. The promotion of Chinese language education aligns with China's global influence, making Chinese culture and language more accessible and appealing to Pakistan.

3.7 Economic and Political Cooperation

Several Chinese universities have played crucial roles in fostering economic and political collaboration between China and Pakistan, including Beijing Technology and Business University, Jiangxi University of Science and Technology, and Anhui Normal University.

Beijing Technology and Business University's annual international conferences and reports contribute to the promotion of the BRI, facilitating cooperation in technology and economics. Its role in exploring sustainable development aligns with China's long-term vision for economic growth and collaboration in various sectors, which is pivotal for the region. Jiangxi University of Science and Technology's programs on China-Pakistan educational cooperation, research on cultural equivalence and utilization, and support for mining investment, underscore the importance of academic research in strengthening economic ties. Such initiatives provide relevant research, and advisory services, contributing to mutual understanding and long-term economic development. Anhui Normal University's cooperation on projects related to China-Pakistan agricultural

collaboration and counterterrorism, with reports adopted at the provincial level, actively contributes to the development of China-Pakistan relations. Its efforts in academic publications, project involvement, and international collaborations are vital in maintaining a harmonious partnership.

3.8 Specialized Research and Expertise

Specific universities like Sichuan University, China West Normal University, and Hebei University have emerged as centers of specialized research and expertise, focusing on areas such as South Asian politics, economics, security, terrorism, and cultural differences.

Sichuan University's research on South Asian politics, economics, and culture is instrumental in contributing to the understanding of the region's politics and economics. It also strengthens Sino-Indian studies, a critical factor in China's regional relations. China West Normal University's specialized research on Pakistan's security, terrorism, and foreign relations is of utmost importance in providing intellectual support for government decision-making and fostering academic exchange, political awareness, and mutual understanding between China and Pakistan. Hebei University's contributions to research papers, conferences, and collaborations with other research centers provide valuable insights into international relations, especially with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. Such research enhances diplomatic ties, highlighting the broader relevance of China-Pakistan relations.

3.9 Think Tanks and Policy Advisory

Some of the universities have acted as think tanks and provided policy advisory services, such as Kashgar University, South and Southeast Asian Research Institute, and the Communication University of China.

Kashgar University, as a National Ethnic Affairs Commission research center, offers in-depth research on the CPEC and regional issues. Its support for high-level research and economic development plays a pivotal role in shaping policies and strategies. South and Southeast Asian Research Institute's hosting of national-level projects and generation of high-level academic and think tank results significantly support China's overseas interests. These results aid in shaping policies on economics, politics, and security, connecting China with the world. Communication University of China's role in hosting international conferences, conducting regional country research projects, and offering decision-making consultation services aligns with its ambition to become a top-tier academic institution in Pakistan research. This supports China's Belt and Road Strategy, enhancing people-to-people exchanges between China and Pakistan.

3.10 International and Regional Cooperation

Most of the universities actively participate in international cooperation and academic exchanges, strengthening comprehensive cooperation between China and Pakistan. Northwest University and Southwest University of Political Science and Law are prime examples.

Northwest University's facilitation of academic exchanges and hosting of Pakistani academic groups contributes to theoretical support and intellectual assistance for comprehensive cooperation between China and Pakistan. These exchanges encompass economic, cultural, and academic facets, essential for long-term cooperation. The Southwest University of Political Science and Law's research on challenges, problems, and solutions in regional cooperation, major key and general projects at the national level, and high-end academic and think-tank achievements underscore its dedication to serving the protection of China's overseas interests. This comprehensive approach ensures that academic and policy work aligns with China's goals and interests in the region.

4. Challenges and Difficulties Against PSCs

Based on the data collected from the official website, interviews with the members/heads of the PSCs, and the documents provided by the centers, the following challenges and difficulties are found among the PSCs.

4.1 Institutional and Structural Challenges

Limited Funding and Resources: All the PSCs are not independent research institutes, and they are managed under certain departments of the universality, consequently, they are not financially independent. When conducting research work, they must apply from either the university or local government, which, in turn, may not consistently meet the demands of extensive research and activities. Without proper financial support, the PSCs face difficulties in organizing conferences, conducting academic research, publishing research results, or developing related programs.



4.2 Language Barrier

Urdu, Pakistan's national language, is not widely taught or understood within Chinese universities, where Mandarin and English predominate. This language barrier poses a significant challenge for students and researchers aiming to research Pakistan. Difficulties accessing primary source materials and effective communication with Pakistani counterparts may hinder comprehensive research.

4.3 Human Resource and Expertise Challenges

Lack of a Talent Pipeline: Since BRI and CPEC were put forward only in one decade, the current heads of the centers are mostly retired professors whose study focus was south Asia or international relations. A significant proportion of students graduating with expertise in Urdu language or Pakistan studies opt for careers in different fields, rather than the focus on Pakistan studies. They may choose alternative career paths or academic disciplines. This trend suggests that PSCs struggle to establish a continuous pipeline of young researchers and scholars specializing in Pakistan studies, potentially leading to a shortage of qualified faculty and researchers.

4.4 Research Focus and Depth Challenges

Published research output from PSCs often reveals a concentration on specific aspects of Pakistan studies, such as the CPEC, security, and educational exchanges.

Given the geopolitical complexities of the region, scholars and researchers affiliated with PSCs may face difficulties in conducting fieldwork for firsthand data or surveys, in Pakistan. In some cases, the security situation in the region can pose challenges to fieldwork and research activities in Pakistan. Researchers may lack access to in-depth, on-the-ground data and experiences, primarily due to their base in China. The narrow focus restricts the diversity and depth of their research efforts, potentially limiting their contributions to a comprehensive understanding of Pakistan's complex dynamics. Without in-depth fieldwork, research may lack the rich context and nuanced understanding necessary for comprehensive analysis, which, will affect the quality and depth of research produced by the centers.

4.5 Lack of Unified Information Sharing and Mechanisms

The PSCs in Chinese universities are established under different academic institutions. These centers vary significantly in terms of their establishment timelines, the number of researchers, research quality, center size, areas of focus, and societal impact. Each PSC independently formulates its research tasks, assessment methods, and future development plans, lacking a unified information-sharing mechanism. From 2007 to 2022, the PSCs in Chinese universities primarily conducted independent research without a collaborative research mechanism. So far, a comprehensive collaborating mechanism for all the PSCs is still up in the air.

However, a significant change occurred in 2023. In early 2023, the Pakistan Study Center at Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences jointly proposed the establishment of the "China-Pakistan Research Alliance" with The Centre for BRI and China Studies, Islamabad, Pakistan. In April 2023, leaders of PSCs from Inner Mongolia Honder College of Arts and Sciences, Jiangsu Normal University, Jiangxi University of Science and Technology, Northern Minzu University, Southwest University of Political Science and Law, Hebei Normal University, and Hebei University, along with their counterparts from Pakistan, including the Islamabad Institute for Peace and Diplomacy, University of Peshawar, Islamabad Institute of Information Technology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Azad Jammu and Kashmir University, and Khunjerab International University, successfully organized the inaugural meeting of the China-Pakistan Research Alliance via an online conference[lvii]. This marked the initiation of cooperation and information sharing among domestic PSCs. In June 2023, the Pakistan Study Center at Kashgar University in Xinjiang held the "2023The 2nd Muztagata Forum -International Symposium on CPEC" and introduced the proposal for the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Think Tank Collaboration Mechanism.[lviii]" Although more practical mechanisms are expected, the above updates signal a significant shift in the direction of unified cooperation among PSCs in China.

5. Implications and Recommendations

These study centers, numbering 21 from 2007 to 2022, have played a vital role in fostering academic collaboration, cultural understanding, and research exchange between China and Pakistan. With their diverse research areas and geographic distribution, the PSCs reflect China's commitment to comprehensively engaging with Pakistan and nurturing a deeper understanding of its socio-political landscape.

5.1 Strategic Significance of Pakistan

The establishment of 21 PSCs from 2007 to 2022 across Chinese universities underscores the growing strategic significance of Pakistan in the context of the BRI and the CPEC. These centers signify China's commitment to understanding and engaging with Pakistan comprehensively. They serve as platforms for in-depth research, academic collaboration, and cultural exchanges, fostering a deeper understanding of Pakistan's political, economic, and social landscape. The presence of these study centers highlights China's recognition of Pakistan's strategic importance as a key partner in its regional and global initiatives, emphasizing the need for enhanced academic and cultural exchanges to strengthen bilateral ties.

5.2 Cultural and Academic Exchanges

The diverse research areas and achievements of the PSCs have led to increased cultural and academic exchanges between China and Pakistan. These centers have promoted educational collaboration, cultural understanding, and the dissemination of knowledge about Pakistan. Through language programs, cultural events, and academic conferences, the PSCs facilitate interactions and dialogues between Chinese and Pakistani students, scholars, and policymakers. These exchanges contribute to mutual learning, intercultural understanding, and the building of lasting people-to-people connections. The PSCs also play a crucial role in promoting Urdu language education in China, further enhancing cultural understanding and communication between the two nations.

5.3 Regional Distribution

The geographic distribution of the PSCs across different provinces demonstrates China's intention to cultivate a nationwide network of resources dedicated to Pakistan studies. This reflects the comprehensive nature of China-Pakistan cooperation and signifies the importance of the relationship between the BRI and CPEC. By establishing study centers in various regions, China aims to foster a deeper understanding of Pakistan's diverse regional dynamics, culture, and socioeconomic aspects. It also allows for localized research, engagement with local communities, and the exploration of regional cooperation opportunities. This regional distribution strategy showcases China's commitment to developing a nuanced understanding of Pakistan and strengthening ties at both the national and regional levels.

5.4 Historical Growth Stages

The three stages of development, from pioneering centers to steady growth and continued expansion, reflect China's evolving commitment to Pakistan studies. It aligns with China's strategic objectives regarding the BRI and CPEC and shows a deliberate and consistent approach to the establishment of PSCs. The initial establishment of pioneering centers laid the foundation for Pakistani studies in Chinese universities, paving the way for subsequent growth and expansion. As the centers matured, they diversified their research focus, expanded collaborations, and enhanced academic output. This historical growth trajectory demonstrates China's recognition of the long-term significance of Pakistan studies and its commitment to nurturing a robust academic ecosystem focused on Pakistan's multidimensional aspects. The continued expansion of PSCs signifies China's dedication to deepening academic research, fostering cultural understanding, and facilitating meaningful engagement with Pakistan.

6. Recommendations

Based on the above findings and discussion, the following recommendations are put forward.

1. **Resource Allocation:** Adequate financial resources must be allocated by Chinese universities and relevant authorities to ensure the sustained operation and development of the PSCs. Financial independence and ample funding will empower these centers to engage in extensive research endeavors, host conferences, and facilitate comprehensive academic activities.
2. **Language Proficiency:** Recognizing the language barrier with Urdu, universities should consider incorporating Urdu language courses into their academic offerings for researchers and students interested in Pakistan studies. Proficiency in the Urdu language is paramount for effective research and communication with Pakistani counterparts, enabling deeper insights and meaningful exchanges.
3. **Talent Development:** Deliberate efforts should be made to establish a talent pipeline specifically designed to nurture expertise in Pakistani studies. Encouraging students with a strong command of the Urdu language or a keen interest in Pakistani studies to pursue careers in this field is of utmost importance. Offering scholarships, fellowships, and academic incentives can attract and retain young researchers,



ensuring a sustainable pool of qualified faculty and scholars.

4. **Fieldwork Opportunities:** To enhance research quality, it is imperative to facilitate opportunities for in-depth fieldwork in Pakistan. This can be achieved through establishing partnerships with Pakistani institutions or providing support for on-the-ground data collection, even in areas with challenging security situations. Such fieldwork experiences will enrich research outcomes and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the intricacies within Pakistan.
5. **Collaboration Mechanisms:** While some collaborative initiatives have commenced, further efforts should be undertaken to establish a cohesive information-sharing and research collaboration mechanism among the PSCs. This will foster a unified approach to China-Pakistan studies, promoting effective collaboration, and enabling researchers to leverage each other's expertise and insights.
6. **Global Perspective:** PSCs should strive to develop a global perspective in their research endeavors. Understanding Pakistan within the broader context of international relations is crucial for conducting comprehensive analyses and generating insights with global relevance. This global outlook will enhance the academic standing and impact of the PSCs.
7. **Publications and Dissemination:** It is essential to provide support for the publication and dissemination of research findings originating from the PSCs. This includes facilitating the publication of academic papers, reports, and other forms of knowledge sharing. By disseminating their research outcomes widely, the PSCs can contribute to the broader academic discourse and maximize their societal impact.
8. **Long-Term Vision:** A long-term vision should be developed for the PSCs, ensuring their continued growth and relevance in the ever-evolving China-Pakistan relationship. This necessitates adaptability to new strategic developments and priorities within the BRI and the CPEC while upholding academic rigor and promoting multidisciplinary research approaches.
9. **Collaboration with Pakistani Counterparts:** Strengthening ties and fostering collaboration with Pakistani institutions and research centers is vital for the PSCs. This two-way academic exchange will facilitate a deeper understanding of each other's cultures, perspectives, and research interests, thereby fostering mutual learning and enriching the academic landscape.

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study provides a comprehensive overview of the total number of 21 PSCs established in various Chinese universities and institutions, in terms of their historical context, geographical distribution, development stages, research focus areas, achievements, and the challenges they face. The establishment of these centers reflects the strategic importance of Pakistan in the context of the BRI. The historical growth stages of the PSCs demonstrate China's evolving emphasis on Pakistan studies, culminating in a continued commitment to expanding these centers. These developments signify China's dedication to strengthening cultural exchange, academic research, and cooperation with Pakistan, which is of enduring importance in China's foreign policy and academic endeavors. The achievements of the PSCs are noteworthy, ranging from academic and research collaboration to cultural ties, language education, economic and political cooperation, specialized research, and policy advisory. These centers serve as crucial think tanks and foster international and regional cooperation, contributing to a deeper understanding of Pakistan and China-Pakistan relations.

However, the PSCs face several challenges, including limited funding, language barriers, the need for a talent pipeline, issues related to research focus and depth, and the lack of unified information sharing and mechanisms. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensuring the sustained growth and impact of the PSCs. The implications of this study highlight the strategic significance of Pakistan, the importance of cultural and academic exchanges, the regional distribution of PSCs, and the historical growth stages that have shaped these centers. Recommendations include allocating adequate financial resources, addressing language proficiency issues, nurturing a talent pipeline, facilitating fieldwork opportunities, establishing collaboration mechanisms, promoting a global perspective, supporting publications and dissemination, developing a long-term vision, and strengthening collaboration with Pakistani counterparts. To continue their valuable contributions, addressing the identified challenges and implementing the recommended strategies is vital. These centers are poised to remain integral in the academic, cultural, and policy aspects of the China-Pakistan relationship, contributing to a brighter shared future for both nations.

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