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Research Article

Analysis of Public Opinion About China-Pakistan Economic Corridor

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Abstract

Along with the full implementation phase of China-Pakistan economic corridor, both China and Pakistan are encountered with some resistance and difficulties, meanwhile, the public opinion in China is the foundation for the implementation of China-Pakistan economic corridor under the present situation. Therefore, on the basis of relevant study and the analysis of online public sentiment over the last year, the study intends to discuss the Chinese people's opinion about China-Pakistan economic corridor strategy and conduct a supplementary investigation into the online public sentiment of university students. In the end, this study was analyze and compare the study data, summary the main public opinion and discuss its causes and provide some suggestions on how to deal with and guide the public opinion.

Key words: CPEC, public opinion, economics, corridor, policy, news, microblog

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Data Availability: All relevant data are within the paper and its supporting information files.

INTRODUCTION

Since Prime Minister Li Keqiang has visited Pakistan in May, 2013 and put forward China-Pakistan economic corridor strategy. China and Pakistan have reached a series of consensus on the implementation of the strategy, moreover, the strategies of "Silk road economic zone" and "Sea silk road" (for short, one zone and one road) have elevated China-Pakistan economic corridor strategy to flagship status and demonstration projects¹.

Since the last two years, both China and Pakistan have introduced a series of cooperative policies, aiming at accelerating the development of China-Pakistan economic corridor project into the full implementation phase², meanwhile, some potential risks are gradually exposed³. Faced with this series of opportunities and challenges, the domestic public shows a different attitude, the study will discuss the opportunities and risks in the China-Pakistan economic corridor from the perspective of public opinion and propose some countermeasures.

There are many literatures focused on studying China-Pakistan economic corridor strategy from various aspects, most of them are concerned with four aspects: The significance of China-Pakistan economic corridor, the advantage of China-Pakistan economic corridor, the risk of China-Pakistan economic corridor and the suggestion of China-Pakistan economic corridor. Scholar Niu⁴ and Chen⁵ believe that China-Pakistan economic corridor has strategic significances, mainly reflected in the protection of energy security, the promotion of Western development, the strengthening of peripheral diplomacy, the promotion of globalization, the development of economic and the maintenance of border security. Meanwhile, along with globalization and the development of economic cooperation, Pakistan's concepts of "Energy corridor" and "Trade corridors" provide an opportunity for China-Pakistan economic corridor. The good China-Pakistan relations, prominent geopolitical advantages, abundant resources and similar culture also provide the basis for the implementation of China-Pakistan economic corridor. In addition, Pakistan's determination of revitalizing the economy and maintaining security, Chinese strategy of developing Western China, enhanced cooperation between the two countries, etc., promote the development of China-Pakistan economic corridor⁵⁻⁷. Although, both countries are making great contribution to the economic corridor, the corridor is still facing a lot of risks and challenges, for instance, whether Pakistan is able to ensure the safety of the economic corridor. Avoiding terrorism, regional separatists, the invasion of religious extremist forces; the

political stability in Pakistan, whether foreign countries interfere, whether Pakistan domestic investment environment could support construction or afford expensive transportation construction and maintenance costs caused by the steep natural environment, different industry structure and trade imbalance between the two countries; misunderstanding caused by cultural barriers; the carrying capacity of the ecological environment along the corridor, etc. These are the real risks in the implementation of China-Pakistan economic corridor⁸⁻¹². Given above facts, scholar Chen Yun proposes to expand the scale of imports from Pakistan and the scale of investment in Pakistan, establish China-Pakistan transportation network and cultivate Pakistan's industrial cluster and export processing base for Xinjiang. Scholar Chen Liqun believes that it is necessary to strengthen the cooperation of strategy, economic and trade, energy, industry, the humanities and other aspects, improve interoperability level, accelerate the economic development of the region which depends on Gwadar Port increase support for Pakistan, etc.

Some other studies discuss the background of China-Pakistan economic corridor, in particular the status of China-Pakistan trade⁸, combined with "One zone and one road" strategy^{1,13,14}.

At the present, most studies, which concern with China-Pakistan economic corridor are based on the government or policy makers, however, without the participation of the public no policy could be introduced. Although, the public has no decisive power in the foreign affairs, policy makers could not ignore public opinion. It is very necessary to understand public opinion, explain public policy, formulate scientific and reasonable public policy and obtain their understanding and cooperation for the implementation of each public policy. Given that, the study intends to study China-Pakistan economic corridor from the perspective of public opinion, educe the general emotional tendency of the public, summarize the main public opinion and discuss its causes and provide some suggestions on how to deal with and guide the public opinion, so as to improve public understanding of the economic corridor strategy and help the policy implement smoothly.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Public opinion is the consensus opinion of the public, it is also the government that must be treated with caution. By reflecting the diplomatic dynamics, commenting on the diplomatic gains and losses and proposing the diplomatic suggestions and restraining the diplomatic behavior, public

opinion has an important impact on the foreign policy and provides an important way for public to participate in foreign policy decision¹⁵.

In the new media era, public opinion has many ways to express. Through forums, microblog, wechat and post bar, the public could express their opinion effectively and timely. Meanwhile, its features of timeliness and diversity could easily lead to extreme, emotional, conformable and chaotic opinion¹⁶.

Therefore, through online public sentiment monitoring system, this study has collected information from news, microblog, wechat, forums, blogs, questions and answers and videos since 1 November, 2014 to 19 November, 2015. In order to make up for the defects of online acquisition, a questionnaire survey are conducted among university students as a part of supplementary investigation. The reason why the study chooses university students is based on Lippmann's point of view. He believes that "Public opinion is a collection from large number of important people who expresses their opinion on important issues"¹⁷. University students have higher humanistic quality and treat the issues more objectively and rationally, which is typical in the elite group.

Through online public sentiment system, the author collects 11874 posts, which mention China-Pakistan economic corridor. After removing similar posts, the effective posts are 6996. This investigation collects a total of 1298 copies, the invalid questionnaires are 103 and the effective rate is 92.1%.

RESULTS

Time distribution sequence and major events: Through online public sentiment system, the study analyzes a large number of posts (Fig. 1) in the past year. Using "China-Pakistan economic corridor" as the study term, the post release time is mainly concentrated in the past 6 months. In addition, the

number of post has an explosive growth in April, October and November, 2015, which marks the major policies that are introduced by two countries in order to promote the China-Pakistan economic corridor into the full implementation phase.

According to Fig. 1, the data from November, 2014 to April, 2015 is relatively stable, mainly concentrated in three days: 8th, 10 November and 2 February, 2015. The daily highest number of post reaches near 400 in April, however, the data in October and November is relatively fluctuating, the highest number is 626, the lowest number is nearly 0. The study lists the time table (Table 1) of major events concerned with China-Pakistan economic corridor on the basis of Fig. 1.

Among these events, the public is interest in two events and gives positive feedback, 1st is Pakistan intends to set up 10,000 security forces for the China-Pakistan economic corridor and the 2nd is Pakistan government officially transfers the right to use the Gwadar port free trade zone to China (the lease term is 43 years).

Distribution of public opinion: The main source of online posts, which are collected by online public sentiment system is the news, followed by wechat, microblog, forums and blog (Fig. 2). Among them, posts from personal space were mainly concentrated on 10th November, 2014 (most were blogs) and November, 2015. The former attracted some scholar's comments because of the \$42000000000 investment. The latter were mainly from wechat, microblog and forum, most posts were citizen's comments and forwarding news (58.19%). The nature of China-Pakistan economic corridor strategy is a political and diplomatic event with no conflicts caused by national complex, thus, many people do not know or concern this strategy. Once Pakistan makes some friendly initiatives (such as security forces, etc.). Chinese citizens will have a certain sense of national pride, so as to increase the attention to economic corridor construction process.

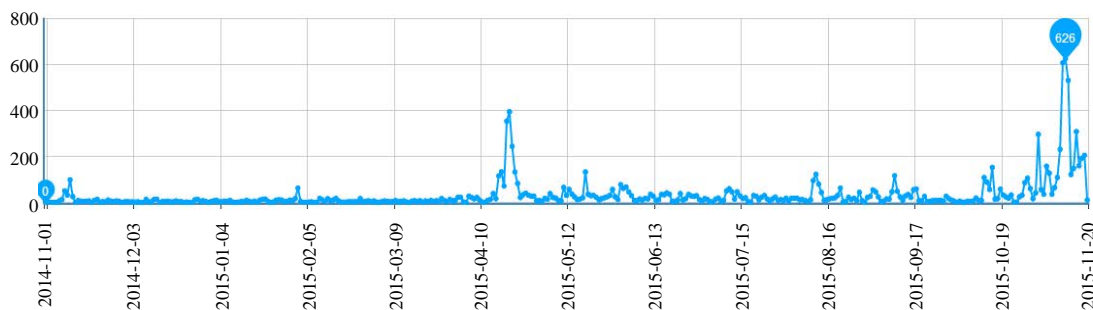


Fig. 1: Post release time

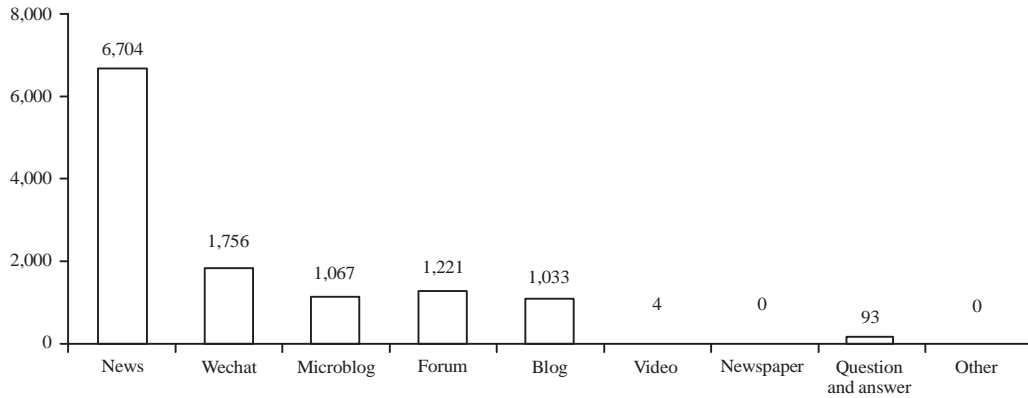


Fig. 2: Type of post source

Table 1: Time table of major events concerned with China-Pakistan economic corridor

Date	Events
2014-11-08	Xi Jinping, Li Keqiang met with the Prime Minister of Pakistan Sheriff, stressed to build the flagship project named China-Pakistan economic corridor
2014-11-10	China and Pakistan signed an investment agreement of \$42000000000, involving energy and 20 more
2015-02-02	Beginning of "One zone and one road", China-Pakistan economic corridor was expected to be the first one
2015-04-17	Seminar of "One zone and one road" and China-Pakistan economic corridor was successfully closed, four pragmatic results had been achieved
2015-04-19	Xi Jinping published a signed article named "Long live the friendship between Pakistan and China" on both <Fighting> and <Daily news> in Pakistan
2015-04-21	Xi Jinping presented an important speech entitled <Constructing the common destiny between China and Pakistan, developing a new journey of win-win cooperation> in Pakistan and proposed that China-Pakistan economic corridor was made as the center task, plus the cooperation with Gwadar port, transportation infrastructure, energy and industrial forming the "1+4" layout
2015-05-19	China denied "Carat canal" memorandum of cooperation that was signed in Guangzhou with Thailand
2015-08-12	China-Pakistan economic corridor forum fell to the end 20 memorandums of cooperation were signed, worth about 10350000000 RMB, while the "Karamay declaration" was adopted
2015-09-10	China rent the Gwadar port, established the first special economic zone in Pakistan
2015-10-13	China and Pakistan entrepreneurs international seminar was opened in Beijing
2015-10-29	Guangdong twenty-first century maritime silk road international fair was opened on 29th, Dongguan. Before the fair, Zhuhai signed four cooperation agreements, concerning "One zone and one road" flagship project, with Gwadar Pakistan in Dongguan, including port construction and trade cooperation
2015-11-02	Pakistan railway set up 10,000 security forces for China-Pakistan economic corridor
2015-11-11	Pakistan government officially transfers the right to use the Gwadar port free trade zone (about 152 ha) to China, the lease term is 43 years
2015-11-17	China-Pakistan economic corridor media forum was held in Islamabad, Pakistan

According to the assessment of emotional tendency of the posts, there are 6462 positive comments (92.4%), 198 negative comments (2.8%) and 296 neutral comments (4.2%). The overall tendency is positive, but there are still some negative evaluation. In addition, the ratio of positive post from microblog is 91.7% and the negative ratio is 3.6%, which accords with overall tendency.

Typical opinion: The study reorganizes the hot microblogs on the basis of the total number of their comment, forwarding and like. Eight of the top 10 microblog have positive attitude, 2 have negative attitude. Among them, at micro world reposts the news about "Pakistan will provide a specialized team for security", most of the following comments are positive, there are also some people objectively expresses that this is a benefit exchange (at Coldly see the world 0730). The at Global

Broadcast at Phoenix weekly, at Blue Whale Finance reporter working platform, at Military Flying Leopard and at Rumour and Truth have posted or reposted the news about "Pakistan leases Gwadar port to China for 43 years".

People with negative attitude worries about the risks faced by China-Pakistan economic corridor, a microblog of at USTC Hubugui elaborates the difficulties and risks faced by China-Pakistan economic corridor. His post also suggests that China should summarize experience and lessons and carefully promote the implementation of the economic corridor. The at Mei Xinyu reposts the news about "A Chinese man was kidnapped in Pakistan more than 1 years after being rescued" from at breaking news, he expresses his concerns about the safety of the economic corridor.

In addition, at Global Eyes GW reposts the article entitled, "The first shot of one zone and one road is not loud enough?",

which suggests that the government should be ready to face the reality. The at Barron-Maddie comments that “One zone and one road is a dead end. This cooperation is destined to be failed, as Chinese government does not open eyes and see the outside world and Chinese management mode and development routine are not applicable to foreign countries”.

Given the above typical opinion, most of them are consistent with the present mainstream public opinion but there are some relative negative and extreme public opinion. These opinion on China-Pakistan economic corridor form a certain force of public opinion, which cannot be ignored. On one hand, the objectivity of the opinion should be accepted, which could help us keep an eye on the potential risks of economic corridor and make the prevention plan. On other hand, government should strengthen policy advocacy, dispel public concerns and ensure the implementation of the policy.

Public opinion trend of university students: Based on sample survey of university students, 38.7% of them claims that they have already know about China-Pakistan economic corridor, 7.3% of those who know about China-Pakistan economic corridor claims that they have had a comprehensive understanding, 46.6% of those claims that they have had a normal understanding, 15.5% of those claims that they have had a little understanding. Only less than half of university students who could easily access the frontier information

have heard about China-Pakistan economic corridor, not to mention the general people's understanding of this issue. Thus, it can be inferred that the popularization of the official propaganda is low. By analysing the ways to get information (Table 2), the study finds out that university students mainly get information about China-Pakistan economic corridor through the new media, such as TV and Internet. In addition, some of them hear about China-Pakistan economic corridor through the university entrance examination review process.

University student’s cognition of China-Pakistan economic corridor can be learned through questionnaire survey (Table 3-5). Most of them believe that China-Pakistan economic corridor could improve the economic development in both counties, protect Chinese energy resource and create a good environment for the surrounding environment, however, there are still some people worries about the huge investment that could become taxpayer’s nightmare and there is no obvious economic benefit. In addition, security is also very worthy of concern.

Generally speaking, 81.7% of the university students claims that they are optimistic about the prospects of the economic corridor and there are also 6.2% of them claims that they do not concern (Table 6), which accords to data from online public opinion monitoring system. However, university students are slightly negative and are more inclined to be objective and dialectical to the problem.

Table 2: Ways to get information

Ways	Newspaper and broadcast	Television	Word of mouth	Internet and new media	Other	Total
Frequency	68.0	148.0	79.0	147.0	23.0	465
Ratio (%)	14.6	31.8	17.0	31.6	4.9	100

Table 3: What main influence do you think the Chinese 46 billion US dollars investment for the corridor would have on China?

Options	Improve economic development	Taxpayer’s nightmare	No obvious economic benefit	Protect energy resource	Create a good environment	Other	Total
Frequency	712.0	185.0	162.0	490.0	502.0	47.0	2098.0
Ratio (%)	59.6	15.5	13.6	41.0	42.0	3.9	175.6

Table 4: What influence do you think China-Pakistan economic corridor would have on Pakistan?

Options	Improve Pakistan economic	Improve the relationship between two countries	Solve the energy crisis	Increasing terrorist targets	Other	Total
Frequency	701.0	875.0	192.0	192.0	28.0	1988.0
Ratio (%)	58.8	73.3	16.1	16.1	2.3	166.6

Table 5: What is the main obstacle to China-Pakistan economic corridor?

Options	Terrorist threats	High cost, no economic benefits in short term	Poor natural environment	Over India area complex international factor	Unstable domestic political situation in Pakistan	Poor domestic investment environment in Pakistan	Culture barriers	Other	Total
Frequency	322.0	599.0	409.0	652.0	318.0	240.0	91.0	40.0	2671.0
Ratio (%)	27.0	50.2	34.3	54.7	26.7	20.1	7.6	3.4	223.9

Table 6: What do you think of the prospect of China-Pakistan economic corridor?

Options	Very positive	Positive	Negative	Not concerned	Total
Frequency	200.0	777	144.0	74.0	1195
Ratio (%)	16.7	65	12.1	6.2	100

DISCUSSION

Given the above data analysis, it can be inferred that although public opinion is consistent with mainstream orientation and the government function of public opinion orientation has been worked well, the official media has dominated the online opinion and personal opinion is very hard to find. It can also be learned from the supplementary survey that the economic corridor strategy has not been popularized in the public or not been paid enough attention by the public. Public participation is not enough, the way of public participation are just national complex and argumentation after Pakistan has made some big moves. Besides that, public opinion is going to polarization. The conclusion has the same view with Almond¹⁸, which is the public has no fixed opinion about complex and remote foreign policy, just has the mood swings and presents the attitude of indifference. And public opinion lacks the support of knowledge and value structure, presenting a self-contradictory characteristic, it is difficult to be in harmony with a country's foreign policy¹⁹ and it is easily affected by opinion leader's political tendency²⁰. And the depth of foreign policies make it hard for the public to understand the true meaning and effect and it is quite difficult to expect the public to make positive response²¹. The fragmentation of the internet information also limits the public to get information²².

The study also found the difference from past studies. Firstly, the majority of the public look good in the prospect of China-Pakistan economic corridor, public opinion presents a rising trend as periodic wave with the advancing policies, although, this can be partly attributed to the pseudo-environment, which is the positive publicity of the media²³, making the public affected, but this also can reflect the public has the basic value and stability in face of the foreign affairs. Secondly, with the development of information technology and the popularity of education, civil fundamental quality is improved more and more and the public's understanding of China-Pakistan economic corridor policy is also deepened gradually and the public opinion is more dialectical, so the public can treat the economic meaning and the difficulty of construction of China-Pakistan economic corridor policy more objectively. Thirdly, in the development of the public opinion, new media plays a major role for the focus and independence of the public opinion, which as a tool to transfer opinion leader's information. But because of the big information flow, some public don't have time to absorb comprehensive information, so that they become the party of title and thumb up. Therefore, countries must pay a certain degree of attention to the tendency and influence of public opinion.

However, it can be inferred that when the government makes major foreign policy, the public opinion will hardly be considered. The government also rarely encourages the public to participate, which makes public opinion become a paper talk. This is also the main way in China to make policies over the years, that is based on the top-level design the government will make further adjustments in the subsequent implementation process. It is hard to judge whether this way is good or not, to some extent, it is the most effective and fastest way to make policies. However, as the awareness of citizenship gradually improved nowadays, this study suggests that before the policy is introduced the government should widely solicit public opinion, in particular take into account the results of some experts and scholars. The government also needs to build the relationship between the government and the public, improve public participation and avoid the policy to be the "Superior" building, which could become the gap between the government and the public. Although, public opinion exist various problems and defects, in the new media era, it is enough to cause large influence on foreign policy²⁴. Countries should attaches importance to public opinion, reasonable guiding it to avoid conflict of opinion, then make public opinion and foreign policy form good interaction.

In addition, the government should use diversified media tools rationally, guide and propagate the public during the process of policy making, introduction, implementation and feedback, prominent opinion leader, reduce the public's resistance and misunderstanding to the implementation of the policy and promote the operation of policy smoothly.

CONCLUSION

By analysing public opinion about China-Pakistan economic corridor, this study reaches the following conclusions. Since October, 2015 the project of China-Pakistan economic corridor has been taken into the full implementation phase, most of the public have a positive attitude but there are also some public worried about the difficulties in the implementation process. It is worth pondering that the official statement (that is news) dominates the public opinion, personal statement is hard to find and its distribution is irregular marked with major events. The study hopes that the government can encourage the public to participate in the process of policy implementation so as to enhance the friendship between the two countries, reduce misunderstanding and friction in the process of policy implementation and achieve a win-win situation.

In addition, the government should strengthen the scientificity, publicity and institutionalization of policy

decision making, enhance the government's sensitivity to public opinion, solicit more public opinion and improve the ability to respond to public opinion effectively.

There are still some limitations and problems in this study, for instance, there are demographic differences in online opinion and the questionnaire are not random enough, which may affect the reliability of conclusion: The online public opinion shows a trend of conformity and extremism, the value density and accuracy are also worthy of rethinking, etc. All the limitations and problems are left for further discussion.

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