

## Navigating China's cultural diplomacy towards Pakistan

China's cultural diplomacy has changed dramatically in tandem with its economic and political reforms. Following the open-up policy 1978, cultural governance changed from strict ideological control to encouraging foreign involvement and cultural industries. One of the major turning points was China's 2001 WTO entrance, which led to changes like the 2009 "Reform Plan for Cultural Industries" and the opening of the cultural market. By 2015, the added value of China's cultural services sector had grown by more than 14% a year to 13.64 billion RMB. China uses culture as a soft-power tactic, as seen by major initiatives like the Belt and Road cultural cooperation and Confucius Institutes abroad, which are now linked to diplomatic and economic policies worldwide.

The history of cultural diplomacy between China and Pakistan dates back to the Silk Road, which united the two countries between the second and the sixteenth centuries BC. These interactions allowed concepts like Buddhism to spread from India through Pakistan and into China, significantly impacting the art and architecture of both civilizations. Early trade and religious dissemination created the foundation for enduring cultural ties despite transportation and financial constraints.

China has deliberately moved toward cultural diplomacy to improve its standing internationally, especially through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China uses the internet to foster cultural relations in Pakistan, where the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a significant factor. The report claims that Chinese platforms such as CRI Urdu and China Xinhua Urdu have drawn millions of users; by the end of 2022, CXU alone had amassed over 1.3 million followers, demonstrating China's ability to reach large Pakistani audiences through Urdu-language media successfully.

Youlin Magazine, Pakistan China Institute (PCI), Nihao-Salam, and six other online sites were assessed for their contribution to promoting Chinese culture. CRI Urdu and CXU were among the most updated and dynamic sites, using interactive surveys, documentaries, and podcasts to increase user involvement. Interestingly, those who regularly engaged with these resources stated that their understanding of Chinese history and culture had improved by up to 70.75%.

The study found that participants who were older, female, and had higher levels of education were more positively impacted by Chinese cultural diplomacy initiatives than their peers. For example, there was a notable shift in how those participants with MS/MPhil degrees (35.3%) and those between the ages of 29 and 34 perceived China. To maximize soft power outreach, it is crucial to customise cultural messaging for various demographic groups.

The use of Urdu, Pakistan's lingua franca, to close gaps was crucial to China's success in cultural diplomacy. Similar to the US, UK, and Germany, which have long employed Urdu-based media like VOA Urdu and BBC Urdu, platforms like CRI Urdu and CXU significantly made Chinese culture accessible. China was able to connect with wider audiences and enhance interpersonal relationships in Pakistan thanks to its calculated localization.