

# Myanmar's Strategic Positioning in the Belt and Road Initiative: Lessons from CMEC and CPEC

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## Abstract

This paper examines Myanmar's strategic positioning within China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) through a comparative analysis of the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Although both corridors aim to enhance China's overland access to the Indian Ocean and promote regional connectivity, their strategic outcomes have diverged significantly. The paper asks why similarly designed BRI corridors have produced divergent strategic outcomes in Myanmar and Pakistan, and how host-state agency shapes these outcomes. It argues that these differences stem less from corridor design than from host-state agency, domestic governance capacity, institutional coordination, and security contexts. Drawing a qualitative comparative approach informed by realist and liberal institutionalist perspectives, the study shows how Pakistan has institutionalized CPEC as a core element of its strategic partnership with China. In contrast, Myanmar's engagement with CMEC has evolved incrementally and adaptively. The findings demonstrate BRI corridors operate as flexible platforms rather than uniform geopolitical instruments. For Myanmar and similarly positioned states, corridor participation offers a range of strategic options shaped by domestic context, rather than predetermined outcomes.

Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC), China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Strategic Connectivity, Host-State Strategic Agency, Regional Geopolitics

## 1. Introduction

Since its launch in 2013, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has developed into a comprehensive global connectivity framework whose implications extend beyond economic cooperation to encompass strategic influence and geopolitical considerations.<sup>1</sup> Structured around

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<sup>1</sup> Amaziroh Queendaline Chiebuka, Oyedele Opeoluwa Janet, and Odike Christabel Oluchi, "The Belt and Road Initiative: China's Vision for Global Connectivity and Soft Power Influence," *Asian*

overland and maritime routes linking Asia, Africa, and Europe, the BRI has enabled China to expand infrastructure networks and enhance connectivity and economic linkages across critical regions.<sup>2</sup> While officially framed as a development-oriented initiative, the BRI has increasingly been interpreted as a mechanism through which China enhances its regional influence, particularly in strategically sensitive domains such as energy security and maritime access.<sup>3</sup> Within this framework, economic corridors constitute the core instruments through which connectivity is operationalized and translated into wider strategic outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

BRI comprises multiple economic corridors across Eurasia. Among these, the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) occupy prominent positions.<sup>5</sup> Both corridors link China’s inland regions to the Indian Ocean, offering alternative routes that reduce reliance on the Malacca Strait and strengthen China’s access to key maritime spaces.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, these corridors are embedded in distinct political, security, and institutional contexts, shaping their respective trajectories and strategic implications.<sup>7</sup>

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<https://doi.org/10.9734/ajess/2025/v51i11745>

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, *Belt and Road Economics: Opportunities and Risks of Transport Corridors* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2019), 3,  
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/715511560787699851/pdf/Main-Report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Sarah Y. Tong, *China’s Belt and Road Initiative and Its Energy-Security Dimensions*, RSIS Working Paper no. 320 (S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, January 3, 2019), 5-9,  
<https://rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/WP320.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Lili Liu, John S. Wilson, and Xubei Luo, *Connectivity Along Overland Corridors of the Belt and Road Initiative* (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2018), 4,  
<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/264651538637972468/pdf/Connectivity-Along-Overland-Corridors-of-the-Belt-and-Road-Initiative.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Waleed Ahmad, “Two Sides of a Same Coin: Comparing CPEC and CMEC,” *Policy Watcher*, September 7, 2023, <https://policywatcher.com/2023/09/two-sides-of-a-same-coin-comparing-cpec-and-cmec/>

<sup>6</sup> Gabriel Lane, “Navigating the ‘Malacca Dilemma’ in 2025,” *Risk Analysis & Insights, Titan, Asia-Pacific*, March 4, 2025, <https://atlasinstitute.org/navigating-the-malacca-dilemma-in-2025/>

<sup>7</sup> Rafia Ashar, “The Story of Two Corridors: China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,” *ISSRA Insight*, December 1, 2023,  
<https://issra.pk/pub/insight/2023/THE-STORY-OF-TWO-CORRIDORS/THE-STORY-OF-TWO-CORRIDORS.html>

Myanmar occupies a critical geostrategic position within the BRI due to its location at the crossroads of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean region.<sup>8</sup> Through CMEC, China gains overland access to the Bay of Bengal via Myanmar's transport, energy, and port infrastructure, notably through connections to Kyaukphyu.<sup>9</sup> For Myanmar, CMEC represents both an opportunity to enhance national connectivity and a strategic engagement that must be managed within a complex domestic and regional environment shaped by political transition, internal security considerations, and competing external pressures.

CPEC, by contrast, represents the most advanced and institutionalized example of China's corridor-based engagement under the BRI.<sup>10</sup> Connecting China's Xinjiang region to Pakistan's Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea, CPEC has been pursued within the context of a long-standing strategic partnership between China and Pakistan, embedding physical connectivity within a broader framework of strategic alignment.<sup>11</sup> Its scale and scope have positioned it as a flagship corridor, offering important insights into how sustained political alignment and institutional continuity influence the strategic outcomes of BRI projects.<sup>12</sup>

Despite a growing body of literature on the BRI, most existing studies focus primarily on its economic dimensions, financing structures, or debt implications, while comparatively less attention has been paid to how domestic political dynamics and security environments in host

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<sup>8</sup> Yun Sun, "China's Belt and Road in Myanmar: Myanmar Is in a Key Location for the BRI. So Why Are Chinese Investments Not Materializing?," *The Diplomat*, December 26, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/chinas-belt-and-road-in-myanmar/>

<sup>9</sup> Gregory B. Poling, "Kyaukpyu: Connecting China to the Indian Ocean," *CSIS Briefs*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/kyaukpyu-connecting-china-indian-ocean>

<sup>10</sup> Hong Zhang and Ammar A. Malik, "Delivering Promises for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Lessons Learned and the Path Forward," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, December 16, 2024, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/12/16/13728/>

<sup>11</sup> Mustafa Hyder Sayed, "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A Case Study," *IDS Bulletin* 50, no. 4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2019.142>

<sup>12</sup> Ayesha Siddique and Saeed Shafqat, "How Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are Reshaping China's Soft Power," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 44, no. 3 (January 2021): 61-94, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsa.2021.0007>

states shape the strategic outcomes of BRI corridors.<sup>13</sup> In particular, the divergent trajectories of CMEC and CPEC raise important analytical questions regarding why similarly structured corridors generate uneven strategic leverage for participating states.

Against this backdrop, this paper examines why Pakistan has been able to institutionalize CPEC as a central pillar of its strategic partnership with China, while Myanmar's engagement through CMEC has remained more cautious, incremental, and context-sensitive. It further examines how domestic political capacity, security considerations, and regional geopolitical pressures condition the strategic outcomes of BRI corridors for smaller states.

This paper addresses three interrelated research questions: (1) Why have CMEC and CPEC produced divergent strategic outcomes despite similar design logic? (2) How do domestic governance and security environments shape corridor implementation? (3) What does this reveal about host-state agency under the Belt and Road Initiative?

This paper argues that while Myanmar's strategic value within the BRI is substantial, the extent to which this value is converted into long-term national leverage is shaped by domestic political dynamics, security conditions, and regional geopolitical constraints. In contrast to Pakistan's highly institutionalized engagement through CPEC, Myanmar's participation in CMEC reflects a more gradual and adaptive approach driven by internal constraints and external balancing imperatives. Consequently, BRI corridors do not produce uniform outcomes, but rather differentiated strategic effects across national settings.

Adopting a qualitative comparative approach, this study is theoretically informed by realist and liberal institutionalist perspectives within international relations. From a realist standpoint, large-scale connectivity initiatives such as the BRI are understood as instruments through which states pursue strategic interests related to power, security, and access to critical routes.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, liberal institutionalist perspectives emphasize how economic interdependence and formal

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<sup>13</sup> Katharine Adeney and Filippo Boni, "Global China and Pakistan's Federal Politics: 10 Years of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Commonwealth & Comparative Politics* 62, no. 3 (2024): 275–295, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14662043.2024.2354568>

<sup>14</sup> Saeed Azizi, "China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): A Strategic Framework for ASEAN Engagement," *Perspective* 3, art. no. 119 (September 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44282-025-00240-2>

institutional frameworks can facilitate cooperation and influence state behavior.<sup>15</sup> By integrating these perspectives, the paper analyses CMEC and CPEC to assess how domestic political structures, security environments, and regional geopolitics influence the strategic outcomes of BRI corridors.

In doing so, the study contributes to strategic studies literature by moving beyond predominantly economic assessments of the BRI and foregrounding the role of small-state strategic agency in major power-led connectivity initiatives. The findings offer policy-relevant insights for Myanmar's future engagement with China, as well as for other strategically located states seeking to balance development imperatives with strategic autonomy in an increasingly contested regional order.

## **2. China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC): Strategic Design and Domestic Contexts**

From a strategic studies perspective, economic corridors under the Belt and Road Initiative are widely understood to function not only as development objectives but also as broader instruments of state strategy.<sup>16</sup> They improve connectivity, diversify energy and trade routes, and extend regional engagement through infrastructure-led interdependence.<sup>17</sup> The China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) reflects this strategic logic by positioning Myanmar as China's primary land bridge to the Bay of Bengal and an important node linking South and Southeast Asia through overland and maritime connectivity.<sup>18</sup> However, the strategic outcomes of such corridors

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<sup>15</sup> Tana Johnson and Andrew Heiss, "Liberal Institutionalism," in *International Organization and Global Governance*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2018), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315301914-11/liberal-institutionalism-tana-johnson-andrew-heiss>

<sup>16</sup> B. V. Manikumar, Peteti Premanandam, and T. Naga Raju, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: Analysis and India's Strategic Response," *Educational Administration: Theory and Practice* 30, no. 1 (June 2024): 7896–7900, <https://doi.org/10.53555/kuey.v30i1.11020>

<sup>17</sup> Sana Javaid and Steven Legacy, "Belt and Road Initiative: Strategic Implications for Global Trade and Political Influence," December 2024, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386341894\\_Belt\\_and\\_Road\\_Initiative\\_Strategic\\_Implications\\_for\\_Global\\_Trade\\_and\\_Political\\_Influence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386341894_Belt_and_Road_Initiative_Strategic_Implications_for_Global_Trade_and_Political_Influence), <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.35480.51208>

<sup>18</sup> Kyi Sin, "Securing the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor: Navigating Conflicts and Public Scepticism," *ISEAS Perspective* 2024/79, ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, October 3, 2024,

are not determined by design alone. They are shaped by domestic governance environments, security considerations, and regional geopolitical dynamics within host states, which influence both the pace and form of implementation.

## 2.1 Strategic Rationale and Evolution of the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC)

CMEC is a core component of China’s BRI, aimed at strengthening cross-border connectivity and regional economic integration. Linking China’s Yunnan Province with Myanmar, the corridor provides China with overland access to the Indian Ocean while supporting infrastructure development within Myanmar.<sup>19</sup> Spanning approximately 1,700 kilometers, the corridor connects Kunming to Mandalay, Yangon, and the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (SEZ).<sup>20</sup> Strategically, it offers China an alternative route that enhances trade diversification and energy security, while for Myanmar it presents opportunities for infrastructure development and economic activity through transport, energy, and SEZ projects. Collectively, these objectives align with broader BRI connectivity goals, including expanded trade and investment, infrastructure development, and people-to-people exchanges.<sup>21</sup>

**The evolution** of CMEC reflects China’s gradual shift toward corridor-based engagement in Southeast Asia. Prior to the formalization of CMEC, China had already established a strategic infrastructure presence in Myanmar through the China–Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipelines linking Kyaukphyu on the Bay of Bengal to Kunming. The natural gas pipeline was completed in 2013,

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<https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2024-79-securing-the-china-myanmar-economic-corridor-navigating-conflicts-and-public-scepticism-by-kyi-sin/>

<sup>19</sup> Antonio Graceffo, “Myanmar Civil War Casts Shadow over China’s CMEC Corridor,” *Geopolitical Monitor* (Backgrounder), December 13, 2024,

<https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/myanmar-civil-war-casts-shadow-over-chinas-cmec-corridor/>

<sup>20</sup> “Chinese Government Signs for Grant for the Muse-Mandalay High-Speed Railway Project,” *AidData: China Database of Aid Projects*, accessed December ?, 2025,

<https://china.aiddata.org/projects/63147/>

<sup>21</sup> Kyi Sin, “Securing the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor: Navigating Conflicts and Public Scepticism,” ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute, <https://www.iseas.edu.sg/articles-commentaries/iseas-perspective/2024-79-securing-the-china-myanmar-economic-corridor-navigating-conflicts-and-public-scepticism-by-kyi-sin/>

followed by the oil pipeline in August 2014<sup>22</sup>, with full operationalization achieved by 2017.<sup>23</sup> These projects highlighted Myanmar's strategic significance as a land bridge enabling China to reduce reliance on the Strait of Malacca. Building on this foundation, the CMEC was formally established through a Memorandum of Understanding signed on September 9, 2018, expanding cooperation beyond infrastructure to sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, and construction.<sup>24</sup>

A major milestone in CMEC's development occurred during President Xi Jinping's state visit to Myanmar in January 2020, when 33 agreements related to CMEC were signed. This visit reinforced China's commitment to advancing infrastructure cooperation and deepening bilateral relations at a time of increasing international attention of BRI projects.<sup>25</sup>

Following the 2021 political shift, the State Administration Council approved several China-backed projects, including the US\$2.5 billion Mee Lin Gyaing power plant, signaling policy continuity in bilateral economic engagement. However, subsequent security considerations posed difficulties for implementation and highlighted the need to strengthen project safeguards.<sup>26</sup>

## **2.2 Strategic Significance of CMEC for China and Myanmar**

The strategic significance of the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) lies in its role as a multidimensional connectivity platform that enhances China's maritime connectivity while enhancing Myanmar's position within regional trade and logistics networks. Comprising transport, energy, logistics, and industrial infrastructure, CMEC positions Myanmar as an important gateway

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<sup>22</sup> Myo Aung Myanmar, *Myanmar–China Oil and Gas Pipe Line Collection*, SlideShare presentation, July 31, 2017, SlideShare, <https://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/myanmar-china-oil-and-gas-pipe-line-collection/86565275>

<sup>23</sup> Pei-hua Yu, "Myanmar–China Oil and Gas Pipelines," *The People's Map of Global China*, updated March 31, 2021, <https://thepeoplesmap.net/project/myanmar-china-oil-and-gas-pipelines/>

<sup>24</sup> Kyi Sin, "Securing the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor," *ISEAS Perspective* 2024/79.

<sup>25</sup> Lucas Myers, "The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and China's Determination to See It Through," *Asia Dispatches*, Wilson Center, May 26, 2020, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/china-myanmar-economic-corridor-and-chinas-determination-see-it-through>

<sup>26</sup> Kyi Sin, "Securing the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor," *ISEAS Perspective* 2024/79.

linking China's southwestern provinces to the Indian Ocean region, thereby reinforcing the corridor's importance within the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

For China, the strategic value of CMEC is most clearly reflected in the operational importance of the Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (KPSEZ) and deep-sea port. The Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone (KPSEZ) and deep-sea port, developed in partnership with the Chinese state-owned CITIC Group<sup>27</sup>, have been framed in official BRI planning narratives as a potential business hub intended to support broader connectivity among countries in Asia, Africa, and Europe.<sup>28</sup> The phased development approach and renegotiated ownership structure—reducing China's stake to 70 per cent—reflect Myanmar's efforts to balance infrastructure development with debt sustainability concerns.<sup>29</sup> Strategically, Kyaukphyu complements existing oil and gas pipelines linking the port to Kunming, reinforcing China's southwestern logistics and energy supply chains.

Energy-related objectives constitute another core pillar of CMEC's strategic value. The China–Myanmar oil and gas pipelines provide China with an alternative energy transit route that reduces reliance the Malacca Strait and diversifies its energy supply chains.<sup>30</sup> Operational since 2013–2017, the pipelines remain fully functional despite evolving security conditions in Myanmar, underscoring their operational resilience.<sup>31</sup> For Myanmar, the pipelines generate transit revenues and have facilitated infrastructure improvements and social development initiatives along the

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<sup>27</sup> Ministry of Commerce of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar. *Kyauk Phyu Special Economic Zone (KPSEZ)*. Accessed via the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand. PDF document. Source: Ministry of Commerce of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar.

[https://image.mfa.go.th/mfa/0/BwVYVon5N0/migrate\\_directory/business-20180228-130025-910238.pdf](https://image.mfa.go.th/mfa/0/BwVYVon5N0/migrate_directory/business-20180228-130025-910238.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Information, “Foster Economic Growth: Kyaukpyu SEZ Bridges Myanmar and China,” *Ministry of Information* (December 30, 2023),

<https://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/news/12614>

<sup>29</sup> Sandhi Governance Institute, *Kyaukphyu Special Economic Zone*, PDF,

[https://brimonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CS\\_KPSEZ.pdf](https://brimonitor.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/CS_KPSEZ.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Neslihan Topcu, “A Relationship on a Pipeline: China and Myanmar,” *China Currents* 2020, Vol. 19, No. 3, China Research Center, <https://www.chinacenter.net/2020/china-currents/19-3/a-relationship-on-a-pipeline-china-and-myanmar>

<sup>31</sup> Development Media Group, “Business as Usual at Chinese Projects in Arakan State,” *Burma News International*, published March 21, 2025, <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/business-usual-chinese-projects-arakan-state>

corridor,<sup>32</sup> though issues related to land acquisition, environmental impact, and local consultation have noted.<sup>33</sup>

Beyond maritime and energy considerations, CMEC is designed to enhance overland connectivity between South and Southeast Asia through an integrated transport and logistics network. Proposed rail corridors linking Muse, Mandalay, and Kyaukphyu are intended to position Myanmar as a land bridge connecting Yunnan Province to the Indian Ocean<sup>34</sup>, aligning with China's broader Trans-Asia Railway plans. While feasibility studies and environmental assessments have been conducted, implementation has proceeded slowly due to security-related considerations along key routes.<sup>35</sup> These delays highlight the gap between strategic design and on-the-ground realization.

Border Economic Cooperation Zones further illustrate CMEC's role in advancing cross-border economic integration. Zones such as Muse–Ruili, Kanpiketi–Tengchong, and Chinshwehaw–Lincang are intended to facilitate bilateral trade, investment, and broader socio-economic development along the Sino-Myanmar frontier.<sup>36</sup> Although planning has progressed through bilateral consultations, the pace and scope of implementation remain contingent on evolving domestic conditions in Myanmar's border regions.<sup>37</sup>

For Myanmar, CMEC presents both developmental opportunities and strategic considerations. Investments in ports, transport corridors, and energy infrastructure have the potential to generate

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<sup>32</sup> Lancang-Mekong Cooperation, "The China-Myanmar Oil and Gas Pipeline Project Plays a Strong Role in Bringing a Decade of Mutual Benefits for Both Countries," *Lancang-Mekong Cooperation*, June 9, 2020, accessed December 20, 2025, [http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/2020-06/09/content\\_41450428.html](http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/2020-06/09/content_41450428.html)

<sup>33</sup> Yu, "Myanmar–China Oil and Gas Pipelines."

<sup>34</sup> Frontier Myanmar, "China and Myanmar Resume Work on Muse-Kyaukphyu Railway," *Frontier Myanmar*, published March 1, 2023, accessed December 21, 2025, <https://www.xcept-research.org/publication/china-and-myanmar-resume-work-on-muse-kyaukphyu-railway>

<sup>35</sup> Bibhu Prasad Routray, "A Rail Line From China to Myanmar – Analysis," *Eurasia Review*, October 13, 2023, accessed December 21, 2025, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/13102023-a-rail-line-from-china-to-myanmar-analysis/>

<sup>36</sup> *Maritime Gateway*, "China and Myanmar to Develop Border Economic Zones," *Maritime Gateway*, August 30, 2023, accessed December 21, 2025, <https://www.maritimegateway.com/china-and-myanmar-to-develop-border-economic-zones/>

<sup>37</sup> Song Qingrun, "New Chapter of Cooperation as China-Myanmar Ties Turn 75," *China Diplomacy* (CGTN), June 9, 2025, accessed December 21, 2025, [https://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2025-06/09/content\\_117917908.shtml](https://en.chinadiplomacy.org.cn/2025-06/09/content_117917908.shtml)

employment, attract foreign direct investment, and enhance Myanmar’s role as a regional transit hub linking South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean region.<sup>38</sup> At the same time, Myanmar’s engagement with CMEC has been shaped by concerns related to debt sustainability, local impacts, environmental management, and security, resulting in a cautious and adaptive approach to corridor development.

Taken together, the strategic significance of CMEC lies not only in its ambitious design but also in how its implementation reflects the interaction between China’s long-term connectivity objectives and Myanmar’s evolving domestic and regional contexts. While flagship projects such as Kyaukphyu, the oil and gas pipelines, transport corridors, and border zones underscore CMEC’s potential to reshape regional connectivity, their uneven progress highlights the importance of governance environments and security considerations in shaping strategic outcomes.

### **2.3 Domestic Governance and Institutional Contexts**

The implementation of the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) has been shaped by Myanmar’s domestic governance and institutional environments, which have influenced project sequencing and decision-making processes. Even in earlier phases, CMEC progressed slowly; by early 2020, only nine of forty proposed projects were underway, reflecting institutional capacity limitations.<sup>39</sup>

Under the civilian government, CMEC negotiations demonstrated a cautious approach to large-scale infrastructure commitments. Concerns over fiscal sustainability led to the renegotiation of major projects, most notably the 80% cost reduction of the Kyaukphyu Deep-Sea Port from an estimated US\$7 billion to US\$1.3 billion, driven by public attention debt sustainability.<sup>40</sup> These renegotiations illustrated Myanmar’s attempt to balance development objectives with domestic accountability.

Following governance developments after 2021, governance dynamics shifted toward more expedited approval mechanisms amid external economic constraints. This context enabled

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<sup>38</sup> Myanmar Ministry of Information, “Foster Economic Growth.”

<sup>39</sup> Myers, “The China Myanmar Economic Corridor and China’s Determination to See It Through.”

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Lo, “Trouble for Belt and Road in Myanmar,” *Dialogue Earth*, October 21, 2019, <https://dialogue.earth/en/business/11585-trouble-for-belt-and-road-in-myanmar-2>

renewed agreements, including the 2023 addendum to the Kyaukphyu SEZ concession, highlighting adaptive engagement under complex external conditions.<sup>41</sup> Overall, CMEC's governance trajectory reflects evolving institutional contexts rather than a lack of strategic intent.

## **2.4 Security and Societal Considerations Affecting CMEC**

CMEC's implementation has also been significantly shaped by Myanmar's security-related and societal contexts. In recent years, evolving domestic conditions have affected the corridor's operating contexts, contributing to slower implementation of key projects such as the Muse–Mandalay railway and slowing overall progress.<sup>42</sup>

Security conditions along CMEC routes remain dynamic, with evolving local dynamics increasing operational complexity for infrastructure projects. Strategically important assets, including the China–Myanmar oil and gas pipelines, therefore require sustained attention to risk mitigation and diplomatic engagement.<sup>43</sup> These conditions underscore the sensitivity of corridor-based infrastructure in complex operating environments.

Societal responses further shape CMEC's implementation environment. Long-standing concerns over land acquisition, transparency, and benefit-sharing have influenced local perceptions of infrastructure projects. In the case of the Kyaukphyu SEZ, delays and renegotiations have reflected broader challenges related to community acceptance, local impacts, and stakeholder engagement.<sup>44</sup>

Environmental considerations add another layer of complexity. CMEC traverses densely populated and environmentally sensitive areas, including regions affected by prolonged local challenges, raising risks related to environmental degradation, natural hazards, and livelihood impacts.

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<sup>41</sup> Kyi Sin, "Securing the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor," *ISEAS Perspective* 2024/79.

<sup>42</sup> Pascal Abb, "The China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and the Limits of China's BRI Agency," *The Diplomat*, February 3, 2025, <https://thediplomat.com/2025/02/the-china-myanmar-economic-corridor-and-the-limits-of-chinas-bri-agency/>

<sup>43</sup> Moe Thuzar, "How Has China's Belt and Road Initiative Impacted Southeast Asian Countries?," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, December 5, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/12/how-has-china's-belt-and-road-initiative-impacted-southeast-asian-countries?lang=en>

<sup>44</sup> Kyi Sin, "Securing the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor," *ISEAS Perspective* 2024/79.

Existing analyses highlight the need for a more environmentally sustainable and inclusive ‘green BRI’ approach to mitigate long-term implementation considerations.<sup>45</sup>

## **2.5 Interim Assessment: Why CMEC’s Strategic Outcomes Remain Incremental**

Taken together, CMEC demonstrates how strategic infrastructure corridors are shaped not only by design but by domestic governance capacity, security-related contexts, and societal acceptance. While the corridor holds clear strategic value for China—particularly in supporting maritime access to the Bay of Bengal and diversifying energy routes—its outcomes in Myanmar have remained incremental rather than transformative.

Governance renegotiations, variable security condition, and local sensitivities have constrained implementation speed and project scale, resulting in selective advancement rather than comprehensive corridor integration. CMEC’s trajectory thus reflects adaptive engagement within a complex domestic context, where strategic ambition must contend with institutional and operational considerations.

This contrasts with the comparatively more institutionalized and consolidated progress observed under the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The following chapter examines how Pakistan’s governance structures, security arrangements, and political alignment have enabled more accelerated corridor implementation, offering instructive comparative insights for understanding variation within China’s Belt and Road corridors.

## **3. China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): Institutionalized Strategic Alignment**

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) represents the institutionalized expression of China’s corridor-based engagement under the Belt and Road Initiative, particularly with respect to

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<sup>45</sup> Nicolas Lo, “China’s New Infrastructure Corridor through Myanmar Faces Risks of Further Conflicts and Environmental Degradation,” *Business & Human Rights Resource Centre*, October 29, 2019, <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/chinas-new-infrastructure-corridor-through-myanmar-faces-risks-of-further-conflicts-and-environmental-degradation-2>

bilateral coordination mechanisms and sustained strategic alignment.<sup>46</sup> CPEC is the cornerstone of Pakistan and China's All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership.<sup>47</sup> Unlike many BRI corridors that have largely emphasized infrastructure-led development<sup>48</sup>, CPEC is embedded within a long-standing and multifaceted strategic partnership between China and Pakistan<sup>49</sup>, which can be understood as shaped by sustained political alignment, security cooperation, and centralized coordination mechanisms. This depth of alignment has enabled CPEC to move beyond project-level implementation toward a more structured and resilient corridor framework, allowing it to absorb political transitions, security disruptions, and external contestation. As a result, CPEC offers a critical comparative benchmark for assessing how institutionalized strategic alignment conditions the pace, scope, and strategic outcomes of BRI corridors.

### 3.1 Strategic Foundations and Evolution of CPEC

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) constitutes one of the flagship corridors under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aimed at enhancing regional connectivity, trade integration, and bilateral cooperation. Officially launched in 2015 through bilateral agreements initially valued at approximately USD 46 billion, CPEC seeks to link China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region with Pakistan's deep-sea ports at Gwadar and Karachi, creating a critical overland trade and energy corridor across South Asia.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hong Zhang, "China's Belt and Road Initiative in Pakistan: Bureaucratic Coordination and Chinese State-led Development Abroad," *Development and Change* (December 15, 2025), <https://doi.org/10.1111/dech.70039>

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, "China," Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, <https://mofa.gov.pk/china#:~:text=Pakistan%20and%20China%20agreed%20to,and%20connectivity%20in%20the%20region>

<sup>48</sup> Christoph Nedopil Wang, "Ten Years of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): Evolution and the Road Ahead," *Green Finance & Development Center*, October 12, 2023, <https://greenfdc.org/ten-years-of-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-bri-evolution-and-the-road-ahead/>

<sup>49</sup> Arendse Huld, "China-Pakistan Trade, Investment, and Strategic Partnership," *China Briefing*, March 24, 2025, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/china-pakistan-relations-trade-investment-strategy/>

<sup>50</sup> Shayan Rauf and Britannica Editors, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, December 19, 2025, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor>

Spanning over 3,000 kilometers, CPEC encompasses a comprehensive network of highways, railways, energy projects, and Special Economic Zones (SEZs) across Pakistan's key regions, including Gilgit-Baltistan, Punjab, Sindh, and Balochistan. Strategically, CPEC provides China with an alternative route for energy imports from the Middle East, reducing dependence on the Strait of Malacca, while offering Pakistan prospects for large-scale infrastructure development, energy security, and industrial upgrading, as outlined in CPEC's phased development plans.<sup>51</sup>

The foundations of CPEC are rooted in the long-standing strategic partnership between China and Pakistan, which dates back to the 1950s. Although early bilateral cooperation was predominantly diplomatic and security-oriented, economic engagement began to expand more visibly in the early 2000s, most notably with the signing of a bilateral Free Trade Agreement in 2006. These developments provided the institutional and policy groundwork for deeper economic and infrastructural cooperation, which later crystallized into CPEC.<sup>52</sup>

Following its launch in 2013 as a flagship component of China's Belt and Road Initiative, CPEC evolved into a multi-sectoral development corridor encompassing energy, transport, and industrial cooperation. By 2023, cumulative investments had risen to approximately USD 62 billion, with energy projects alone adding over 8,000 megawatts to Pakistan's national grid, helping to alleviate chronic power shortages and support broader economic and industrial activity.<sup>53</sup>

The evolution of CPEC is commonly conceptualized in phased terms. Official planning documents, particularly the approved Long-Term Plan (2017–2030), outline short-term (2014–2020), medium-term (2021–2025), and long-term (2026–2030) stages. The initial phase places

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<sup>51</sup> Sujan R. Chinoy, *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC): The Project and Its Prospects*, MP-IDS Occasional Paper No. 58, (Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, January 2021), 3–13, <https://www.idsa.in/system/files/opaper/op-58-cpec-SujanRChinoy.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> Arif Rafiq, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Barriers and Impact*, Peaceworks No. 135 (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, October 2017), 3, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/2017-10/pw135-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Neha Manhas, Neeraj Singh Manhas, and G. Hari Yadav, "Shifting Power Dynamics in South Asia: The Geopolitical Impact of China's CPEC on Regional Rivalries," *Discover Global Society* 3, art. no. 89 (2025), Introduction, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44282-025-00227-z>

primary emphasis on energy and transport infrastructure, while subsequent phases focus on industrial cooperation, trade facilitation, and broader regional connectivity.<sup>54</sup>

Overall, CPEC's strategic foundations reflect China's geoeconomic objective of securing overland access to the Arabian Sea while reinforcing Pakistan's role as a key node in regional connectivity under the Belt and Road Initiative. Although the corridor continues to face persistent challenges—particularly security concerns in Balochistan, administrative bottlenecks, and debates over economic asymmetries—its phased evolution underscores the depth of institutionalized strategic alignment between China and Pakistan.

### **3.2 Strategic Significance of CPEC for China and Pakistan**

The strategic significance of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) extends beyond its role as a development initiative, positioning it as a central pillar of China–Pakistan strategic alignment under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). For China, CPEC provides a critical overland corridor linking its western region of Xinjiang to the Arabian Sea, thereby reducing reliance on the Strait of Malacca and enhancing energy security and trade resilience. This geostrategic advantage elevates CPEC as a core component of China's broader geoeconomic and connectivity strategy across Eurasia.<sup>55</sup>

From Pakistan's perspective, CPEC represents a transformative opportunity to address long-standing structural constraints, particularly in infrastructure and energy. Investments exceeding USD 60 billion have significantly upgraded transport networks and expanded power generation capacity by more than 8,000 megawatts, while also envisaging industrialization through the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs).<sup>56</sup> These developments have enhanced Pakistan's geoeconomic relevance by positioning it as a transit and logistics hub connecting South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East.

Gwadar Port occupies a central place in CPEC's strategic logic. As Pakistan's only major deep-sea port, Gwadar enhances maritime connectivity and strengthens Pakistan's role in regional trade, while offering China direct access to the Indian Ocean. Beyond its commercial function, Gwadar

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<sup>54</sup> Chinoy, *China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)*, 4.

<sup>55</sup> **Chinoy**, *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)*, 3–10.

<sup>56</sup> Manhas et al., "Shifting Power Dynamics in South Asia."

is widely interpreted as a strategic node that expands China’s maritime reach in the Arabian Sea, contributing to broader regional power recalibration.<sup>57</sup> However, persistent security challenges and local grievances in Balochistan underscore the importance of domestic stability in sustaining the corridor’s long-term viability.

Beyond these physical security considerations, the recent 9th CPEC Media Forum underscores a broader transition toward CPEC Version 2.0, with growing attention to media cooperation and countering disinformation.<sup>58</sup> This shift signals an emerging emphasis on institutionalized narrative security and Track 1.5–style engagement alongside traditional state-led cooperation. For Myanmar, the implication is clear: as CMEC advances, early strategic communication and stakeholder engagement will be essential to managing public skepticism and safeguarding long-term corridor legitimacy amid contested regional narratives.

Energy cooperation constitutes another key dimension of CPEC’s strategic significance. By diversifying Pakistan’s energy mix through coal, hydropower, solar, wind, and transmission infrastructure, CPEC has addressed critical supply–demand gaps and improved industrial productivity. At the same time, these projects deepen economic interdependence between China and Pakistan through long-term financing arrangements and operational linkages.<sup>59</sup>

CPEC’s road and railway networks form the structural backbone of the corridor, linking China’s western regions to Pakistan’s ports and industrial centers. Flagship projects such as the Karakoram Highway (KKH) upgrade and the planned modernization of the Main Line-1 (ML-1) railway aim to ensure all-weather connectivity and facilitate large-scale freight movement across Pakistan, thereby supporting export-oriented industrial development.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Arav Menon, “The Gwadar Port: An Insight into the Economic and Community Impact of the Gwadar Port,” *ArcGIS StoryMaps*, April 21, 2025,

<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7104fad26c7248639f3ac3cddd5ca051>

<sup>58</sup> Tayyaba Arif, “9th CPEC Media Forum: Strengthening Media Ties for the CPEC 2.0 Transition,” *The Diplomatic Insight*, December 26, 2025, <https://thediomaticinsight.com/9th-cpec-media-forum-strengthening-media-ties-for-the-cpec-transition>

<sup>59</sup> *Overview of Energy Projects under CPEC* (2024), The China.pdf, SecurityLense, <https://securitylense.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/The-China.pdf>

<sup>60</sup> “China to Fund 85% of Karakoram Highway Realignment, Supports Multilateral Financing for ML-1 Project,” *Profit*, September 27, 2025,

Special Economic Zones (SEZs) represent the strategic shift of CPEC's second phase from infrastructure provision to industrial cooperation and value-added production. Distributed across Pakistan's provinces, SEZs such as Rashakai and Allama Iqbal Industrial City are intended to attract foreign direct investment, facilitate technology transfer, and embed Pakistan into regional supply chains.<sup>61</sup>

Taken together, CPEC's strategic significance derives from its high level of institutionalization and its integration of infrastructure development, energy cooperation, security coordination, and evolving narrative governance. More than a connectivity initiative, the corridor reinforces long-term China–Pakistan interdependence while advancing China's geoeconomic interests and enhancing Pakistan's role as a regional transit and logistics hub. The transition toward CPEC Version 2.0, with its emphasis on industrial cooperation and Special Economic Zones, further underscores the importance of adaptive institutional frameworks in sustaining corridor effectiveness under the Belt and Road Initiative.

### **3.3 Governance and Institutional Architecture of CPEC**

The implementation of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been shaped by a comparatively centralized and institutionalized governance framework, which scholars identify as a distinctive feature of CPEC within the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). At the core of this architecture is the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), which functions as the overarching decision-making body for project approval and implementation.<sup>62</sup> This centralized architecture has enabled relatively faster execution of large-scale energy and transport projects, particularly during the initial phase of CPEC.

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<https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2025/09/27/china-to-fund-85-of-karakoram-highway-realignment-supports-multilateral-financing-for-ml-1-project>

<sup>61</sup> Dr. Tauseef Javed, "CPEC Phase II: Analysing the Special Economic Zones," *Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research (CSCR)*, April 8, 2022, <https://cscr.pk/explore/themes/trade-economics/cpec-phase-ii-analysing-the-special-economic-zones>

<sup>62</sup> Hong Zhang and Ammar A. Malik, "Delivering Promises for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Lessons Learned and the Path Forward," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, December 16, 2024, <https://gjia.georgetown.edu/2024/12/16/13728>

However, governance dynamics within Pakistan have also influenced CPEC's trajectory. Political instability, shifting government priorities, and uneven provincial ownership have occasionally affected project distribution and coordination. Centralized planning and limited local-level participation have generated concerns regarding transparency, regional equity, and long-term sustainability.<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, unlike CMEC, CPEC's governance challenges reflect coordination and ownership issues within an otherwise consolidated institutional framework rather than fundamental institutional fragmentation.

### **3.4 Security and Societal Considerations Affecting CPEC**

CPEC's implementation environment is significantly shaped by localized security and societal conditions, particularly in Balochistan, where key strategic assets such as Gwadar Port are located. Sub-nationalist insurgency and targeted attacks on infrastructure and foreign personnel have increased operational risks and raised implementation costs, necessitating extensive security arrangements to protect corridor-related projects and Chinese workers.<sup>64</sup>

Societal perceptions also influence CPEC's progress. Long-standing grievances related to resource distribution, land acquisition, and perceived exclusion from economic benefits have shaped local responses to the corridor. While CPEC has generated macro-level infrastructure gains, limited integration of local stakeholders has constrained broader societal legitimacy. These security and societal dynamics underscore that, despite strong state-level alignment, corridor outcomes remain contingent on localized political and social conditions.<sup>65</sup>

### **3.5 Interim Assessment: Institutionalized Alignment and Strategic Outcomes**

Taken together, CPEC illustrates how institutionalized strategic alignment can facilitate more decisive corridor development compared to other BRI corridors such as CMEC. Strong bilateral coordination mechanisms, centralized planning, and sustained political commitment have enabled Pakistan and China to advance large-scale infrastructure projects with relative speed and scale.

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<sup>63</sup> Zhang and Malik, "Delivering Promises for the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor."

<sup>64</sup> Ian Oxnevad, "China's Success and Eurasia's Future Lie in Balochistan," GIS Reports Online, October 7, 2025, <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/r/china-balochistan>

<sup>65</sup> Oxnevad, "China's Success and Eurasia's Future Lie in Balochistan."

At the same time, CPEC’s experience demonstrates that institutional alignment alone does not eliminate implementation constraints. Security volatility, societal grievances, and fiscal pressures continue to shape the corridor’s strategic outcomes. CPEC thus represents a case of advanced but conditioned corridor development, where institutional strength enables progress, yet localized governance, security, and social dynamics ultimately delimit the scope and sustainability of transformative outcomes.

#### **4. Comparative Analysis of CMEC and CPEC: Divergent Strategic Outcomes**

Although the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are similarly designed to provide China with overland access to the Indian Ocean and reduce strategic reliance on the Malacca Strait, their strategic outcomes display notable variation. This variation reflects differences in domestic political orientation, institutional capacity, security contexts, and host-state strategic agency rather than corridor design alone.

##### **4.1 Strategic Alignment and Political Commitment**

A central distinction between CMEC and CPEC lies in the depth of political and strategic alignment between China and the host state. CPEC is embedded within a long-standing and explicit strategic partnership between China and Pakistan, often described as an “all-weather” relationship. This alignment has ensured sustained political commitment across changes in government, allowing CPEC to function as a core pillar of Pakistan’s national development planning and strategic outlook.

By contrast, Myanmar’s engagement with CMEC has been more measured and selective. While Myanmar recognizes its strategic value within China’s Belt and Road Initiative, CMEC has not yet been fully embedded within a unified national strategic vision. Instead, engagement has reflected a calibrated approach shaped by domestic political sensitivities, wider regional considerations, and attention to sovereignty and autonomy. As a result, CMEC has advanced incrementally rather than through rapid consolidation.

##### **4.2 Governance and Institutional Capacity**

Governance structures further explain the uneven outcomes between the two corridors. CPEC benefits from a centralized and institutionalized governance architecture, anchored by the Joint Cooperation Committee and supported by dedicated coordination mechanisms within Pakistan's federal system. This structure has facilitated relatively timely project approval, sequencing, and implementation, particularly in energy and transport infrastructure.

In contrast, CMEC operates within an institutionally complex environment. Myanmar's governance capacity has faced limitations related to administrative capacity challenges, political transition, and varying degrees of coordination between central authorities and local stakeholders. Project renegotiations, phased implementation, and selective prioritization have reflected efforts to manage fiscal, social, and political considerations rather than a lack of strategic relevance. Consequently, CMEC's connectivity effects remain more limited and uneven across sectors and regions.

### **4.3 Security Environment and Corridor Resilience**

Security contexts represent another important differentiating factor. While CPEC faces persistent security considerations, particularly in certain regions, these have been addressed through extensive arrangements and sustained state-level commitment. Importantly, security-related pressures in Pakistan remain geographically localized rather than system-wide, allowing corridor operations to continue despite periodic disruptions.

Myanmar's security context, by contrast, is more diffuse and structurally complex. Local dynamics intersect with CMEC routes, influencing transport corridors, border areas, and hinterland connectivity. Although strategically important assets such as the oil and gas pipelines have remained operational, broader corridor integration has been influenced by elevated operational considerations and uncertainty. This has limited CMEC's capacity to generate comprehensive spillover effects at the national level.

### **4.4 Host-State Strategic Agency and Corridor Outcomes**

Ultimately, the comparative experience of CMEC and CPEC highlights differing expressions of host-state strategic agency. Pakistan has leveraged CPEC as a vehicle to institutionalize long-term strategic alignment with China, translating corridor participation into sustained geopolitical and economic benefits. Myanmar, by contrast, has exercised a more calibrated and pragmatic form of

agency, seeking to derive development gains while maintaining strategic flexibility amid domestic and regional considerations.

This comparison demonstrates that BRI corridors do not produce uniform strategic outcomes. Instead, outcomes are mediated by domestic political capacity, governance coherence, security resilience, and the strategic choices of host states. CMEC's incremental trajectory is therefore not a shortcoming of corridor logic, but a reflection of Myanmar's evolving strategic environment and gradual engagement approach.

## **5. Conclusion and Policy Implications**

This study has examined the China–Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC) and the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as two strategically significant Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) corridors designed to enhance China's access to the Indian Ocean while fostering regional connectivity. While both corridors share similar geopolitical logic and infrastructure objectives, their divergent trajectories highlight the decisive role of host-state agency, domestic capacity, and security environments in shaping strategic outcomes. The comparative analysis demonstrates that corridor performance is not determined solely by external investment or strategic intent, but by how effectively host states integrate such initiatives into their national political, institutional, and security frameworks.

CPEC's relative advancement reflects Pakistan's sustained strategic alignment with China, centralized governance mechanisms, and deliberate prioritization of corridor protection and continuity. Despite ongoing security considerations, Pakistan has treated CPEC as a core element of its national development and strategic planning, enabling continuity and institutionalization across political cycles. CMEC, by contrast, has progressed in a more incremental and selective manner. Myanmar's engagement reflects a complex domestic environment shaped by political transition, governance reform, and multiple external relationships. Rather than indicating strategic weakness, CMEC's measured pace underscores Myanmar's effort to balance economic cooperation with sovereignty considerations and regional diplomatic sensitivities.

From a strategic studies perspective, this comparison contributes to the broader literature on BRI by challenging deterministic interpretations of corridor politics. It demonstrates that BRI corridors

function as adaptive platforms rather than fixed geopolitical instruments, with outcomes shaped by domestic governance capacity, institutional coordination, and strategic choice. For states operating within evolving domestic conditions, corridor participation does not automatically translate into leverage or vulnerability; instead, it offers a spectrum of engagement options ranging from deep alignment to calibrated cooperation.

Several policy implications emerge from this analysis, particularly for Myanmar. First, enhancing institutional coordination remains important. Even within complex domestic settings, clearer inter-agency mechanisms for corridor planning, implementation, and oversight could improve coherence and reduce implementation challenges. Improved coordination does not require full-scale strategic alignment, but it does benefit from clarity of roles, transparency, and long-term planning.

Second, security considerations should be integrated into corridor planning processes rather than addressed separately. CMEC routes pass through areas with diverse local dynamics, making corridor resilience dependent on inclusive development approaches and stakeholder engagement. Targeted confidence-building measures, economic inclusion of local communities, and coordination between development and administrative actors could contribute to improved operational sustainability without adopting security models that may be less suitable given Myanmar's national circumstances.

Third, Myanmar's strategic agency lies in selective prioritization rather than comprehensive corridor expansion. Focusing on high-impact, lower-risk initiatives—such as port connectivity, logistics facilitation, and energy transit—allows Myanmar to derive tangible benefits while maintaining strategic flexibility. The continued operation of the China–Myanmar oil and gas pipelines illustrate that, even amid domestic complexities, strategically important infrastructure can be sustained through pragmatic engagement.

At the regional level, the CMEC–CPEC comparison carries broader implications for ASEAN–China connectivity and regional infrastructure governance. It suggests that corridor coordination cannot rely on standardized models alone but must accommodate varying domestic capacities and national priorities. Flexible frameworks that emphasize consultation, phased implementation, and host-state ownership are more likely to generate sustainable outcomes.

In conclusion, this study argues that the strategic value of economic corridors lies not in their scale or symbolism, but in their adaptability to domestic contexts. CMEC's trajectory reflects Myanmar's calibrated approach to external economic engagement, while CPEC illustrates the advantages and trade-offs associated with deeper strategic alignment. Recognizing these differences is essential for policymakers seeking to navigate regional connectivity, development priorities, and strategic competition in Asia.