

My concerns are few. As one example, Michael Spies employs novel terms such as “socionatures”, “actants”, or “symbioses”, but at the same time seems somewhat ill at ease using them. His comment in footnote 2 on page 38 – “to avoid unnecessary jargon, I will continue to use the terms ‘social’ and ‘society’, but they should be understood in the sense of ‘socionatural’ and ‘socionature’” – makes one wonder why he uses jargon, which he considers unnecessary, in the first place. I personally find the use of the term “symbioses” to denote turning points in the development of agricultural systems particularly confusing. “Symbiosis” as an established term in biology for alliances between organisms for mutual benefits should, in my view, be used only in this sense and not with any other meaning. Finally, the book title and subtitle suggest that Michael Spies considers Nagar as representative of northern Pakistan. It would have been good if he had added some explanation as to why he believes this to be the case.

Nevertheless, I read Michael Spies’s book with immense pleasure. He comes across as a solid and devoted empiricist with a genuine desire to do justice to the complexities of human-environment relations in particular settings and with little patience for approaches that are driven by the agenda of a particular discipline. This is one of the best books on human-environment relations that I have read thus far and a prime example of what geography can achieve when understood and practiced as a holistic science.

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SIEGFRIED O. WOLF, *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor of the Belt and Road Initiative. Concept, Context and Assessment*. (Contemporary South Asian Studies). Cham: Springer, 2020. Xvii, 395 pages. €71.68, ISBN 978-3-030-16198-9 (eBook) / €88.39, ISBN 978-3-030-16197-2 (Hardcover)

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become the best-known project of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or One Belt One Road (OBOR), popularly known as the New Silk Road, i.e. China’s programme to reconnect to Southwest Asia, the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond. The CPEC, as the author lays out, does far more than improve connectivity and ease transport from Western China across the Karakoram to the Arabian Sea, complemented by a host of projects in almost all sectors of the economy, especially energy. China has more in mind than safeguarding its energy supply lines and economically reviving its less developed and political restive western regions. Therefore the author asks, “is the CPEC part of Beijing’s alleged goal

to build a new world-order that would serve China's national interests?" (p. 271). Carefully and with thorough documentation he outlines the many shortcomings of the project and concludes that the "CPEC will not become any kind of a 'game changer' as regards social-economic development and political progress" (p. 327).

Unlike Pakistan, where people expect the CPEC to become the solution to the country's many economic and social ills, "China holds a more open and critical debate on the BRI and CPEC" (p. 325). While some in Pakistan fear a new dependency, even evoking the rule of a colonial power (p. 222), the Chinese seem to have underestimated the substantial structural problems of Pakistan's economy and society. As the author puts it, "there is also a concrete threat that overall Sino-Pakistan relations will cool down, even turn bitter in a middle- to long-term perspective. The so called 'all-weather friendship' could be transformed into a new relationship in which Pakistan will serve as an 'economic colony'" (p. 317).

As a political scientist and Director of Research of the South Asian Democratic Forum, a think tank based in Brussels, the author concentrates on the political aspects. For him "corruption is the biggest threat for the sustainability of CPEC projects, turning the whole development initiative into a 'sand castle' [... as] there is an obvious mismatch between official statements and the real situation in the country" (p. 260). His assessment is based on the monitoring of Pakistan's qualification for preferential treatment from the European Union under the GSP+ (see chapter 7, "The GSP+ conundrum and the CPEC's impact on EU-Pakistan economic and trade relations"), which "grants full removal of tariff on over 66% of the EU tariff lines" (see <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/tradehelp/gsp>). To be eligible, the applicants have to fulfil vulnerability and sustainable development conditions, on top of Standard GSP conditions.

In the first place, however, describing and assessing a project like the CPEC would require detailed and up-to-date information. Unfortunately, although whole libraries can be filled with studies written on the topic, there is no clear answer to what the CPEC actually is, where it is located, who is running it and who is to pay for it. It is not exactly clear what the corridor is and along which route it should develop, so that the author finally concludes that "we can declare the entire area of Pakistan as part of the CPEC" (p. 126). The CPEC is expected to develop the less developed and thinly populated areas in the west of Pakistan and at the same time to benefit all provinces, including the more advanced and more populous areas in the east (see also the book review in this IQAS issue on Tilak Devasher, *Pakistan. The Balochistan Conundrum*. Noida: Harper Collins, 2019). The problem of balancing regional development is not CPEC-specific and has been discussed extensively in development economics, but not in the case of Pakistan, a highly centralized state

despite being legally a federal republic. After the violent secession of the eastern “wing”, now Bangladesh, there was no place for location and space theory and regional development economics: “On the Pakistan side, state authorities are emphasising that the CPEC is a national endeavour which includes all provinces and areas under Pakistan administration. But due to the asymmetry in the allocation of [...] projects and uncertainties regarding [...] funds, severe doubts regarding the concrete geographical framework persist” (p. 126).

Readers will benefit from some prior knowledge of geography and history. It all goes back to the painful birth of Pakistan as a homeland for the Muslims of (undivided) India and the still unresolved status of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. (For the Pakistan government, at least, the status remains unresolved; according to the Indian constitution, all of Jammu and Kashmir is part of India.) Since the Karakoram Highway, the northernmost section of the CPEC, runs over parts of Kashmir that India claims as her own territory, it always will be a stumbling block in China-Indian relations. Immediately after achieving independence in 1947 the new countries of India and Pakistan began the first Kashmir war and “the military came to control national defence and military policy” (p. 302), developing into the mighty military-industrial complex that controls the country’s CPEC interests (pp. 281–306 and *passim*).

The book covers developments until 2018. It is richly annotated, has a list of abbreviations, a long bibliography and an index. The author concentrates on the socio-political, international and security aspects and provides ample good advice for decision makers in Pakistan. There is little on western China other than the Uyghur problem and hardly any comparison to other Chinese economic corridors. Attempts at determining winners and losers show often contradictory objectives. Still, to the reviewer’s knowledge it is the most encompassing study on the subject available and, thus, required reading for all interested in the political economy of economic corridors and Pakistan-China relations.

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TILAK DEVASHER, *Pakistan. The Balochistan Conundrum*. Noida: Harper Collins, 2019. Xxxi, 359 pages, INR 899.00. ISBN 978-93-5357-070-5

Balochistan is the largest but least populated province of Pakistan. Historically, it extended into Iran and Afghanistan. Balochi tribes also live in other provinces of Pakistan, such as Sindh, Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North-West Frontier Province). The northern part of the Province of Balochistan is mainly inhabited by Pakhtuns; Quetta – the capital and largest city – also