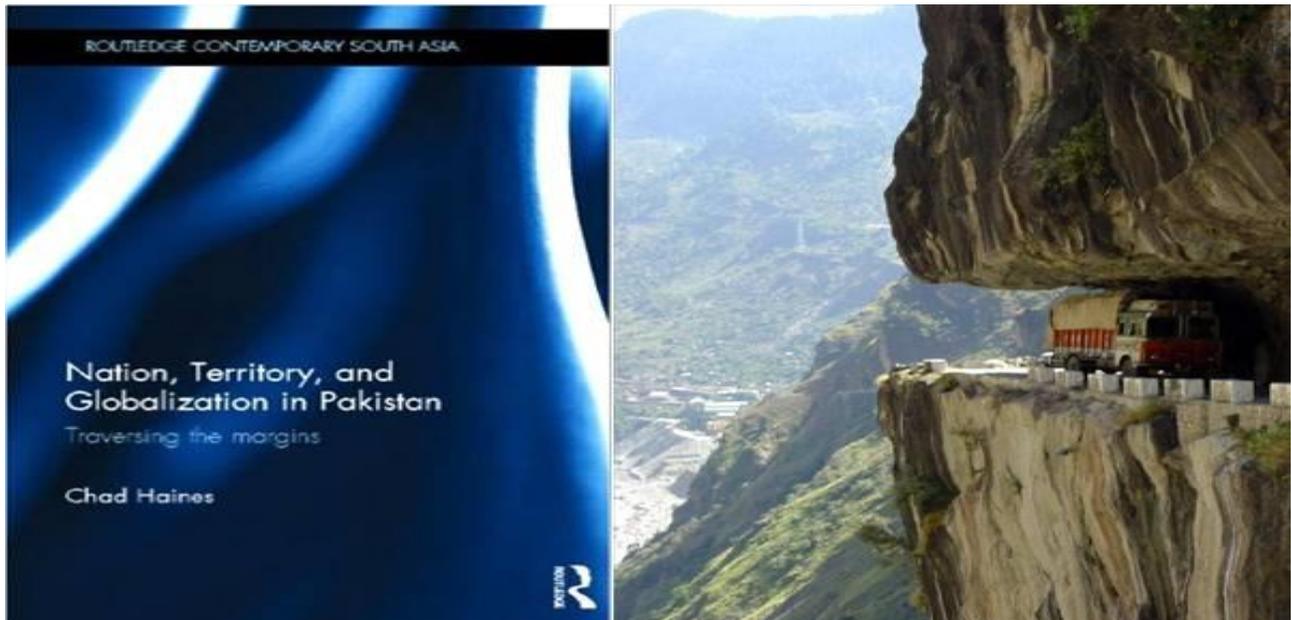


What CPEC can learn from KKH

A new book explores the potential of the future with a historic example

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In the past few decades, the salience of geography and geo-political factors in the modernization and development of states in developing countries has been underscored in the works of Robert Kaplan, *Revenge of Geography* (Random House 2012), David E. Bloom and Jeffrey Sachs, *Geography, Demography and Economic Growth in Africa* (Brookings, 1998) and more recently Jeffrey Sachs' critical review of *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, Poverty* by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (Crown Business, 2012) in 'Foreign Affairs' (Sept/Oct 2012), titled, *Government, Geography and Growth: The True Drivers of Economic Development* underscore. Literature focusing in particular on theories of "new economic geography" has emphasized the role of spatial factors in contributing towards economic development and regional inequality that in turn are inextricably linked to the interaction of economies in a globalized state of affairs. Geographical factors such as territorial location, size, shape, borders and access to oceans or seas thus directly impact aspects such as development, security and formation of the nation-state. In geopolitics there are two schools of thought, one asserts that geographic location determines, the other claims it influences the security, development, formation and growth or decline of nation states. Geographical location consequently offers risks and opportunities, leading to questions such as why and how are some nation-states able to convert them into sustainable development while others suffer from uncertainties?

Pakistan's geographical position remains pivotal to its development and in that spirit infrastructure investment could play a critical role in promoting internal harmony and shaping its external relations. Yet precious few scholars have focused on the centrality of 'roads' as identity markers, drivers of competition, rivalry and connectivity among nations. It is in this broader geo-political context that American anthropologist, Chad Haines' book *Nation, Territory and Globalization in Pakistan Traversing the Margins* (Routledge 2012, Manohar 2016) provides some refreshing insights and interpretations on the importance of geographical location, its role in nation-state formation and its interface with forces of globalization.

A distinguishing feature of this research is its extraordinary focus on the Karakoram Highway (KKH) as a centerpiece of identity, booster of China-Pakistan friendship and promisor of economic growth and development in the case of Pakistan. Was the KKH indeed conceived as a potential 'game changer'? In Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's imagination it was, as Haines perceptively reminds us, "The KKH is two roads"—the Sinkiang-Gilgit road connecting Pakistan with Central Asia and the national highway integrating Pakistan. It has certainly increased mobility, connectivity and transport of goods and people, hence transforming locale and communities. In any case, it has been China's pioneering road construction engineering in the mighty Himalayan peaks, a project in which Pakistan contributed substantially. Haines's work becomes all the more relevant and timely as Pakistan deliberates, contests and evolves consensus on building another 'road': the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

Haines draws attention towards two critical aspects; Firstly, he explains how the colonial rulers' policy or inaction on creating 'undefined borders' and its thrust for infrastructure development created 'British India', and secondly, he explains how in the post-independence period 'undefined borders' and the KKH continue to resonate as identity markers, as sources of territorial integrity, providing marginalized communities an opportunity to relate with the nation, opening space and locality and enhancing state security (as it passes through 'disputed territory'). The KKH links the unequal and remote parts of the country to its economic "cores", making them interdependent. Haines persuasively argues that KKH is a "unique story", not simply as an iconic engineering landmark manifesting China and Pakistan's strategic partnership but, "in the production of its symbolic meanings as the Silk Route". Highlighting how it situates the Pakistani nation to "an ancient past", he points out that the KKH affirms, "a distinct national horizon from Pakistan's birth out of colonial South Asia and thus differentiating the country from the nation-state of India". That is what makes KKH a national identity marker and in this spirit the road is not simply a development project but also contributes towards solidifying a national identity. It recognizes the sacrifices of Chinese and Pakistani engineers, workers and defense personnel who laid down their lives for building this highway—a monument

of national importance. Yet this also reminds us (the people and maybe policy makers) how social, cultural and political lives have transformed in marginalized areas. The central thesis of the book is that the KKH has traversed the “Margins” in multiple ways, integrating it with the larger nation-state, yet it has also polluted the ecology of the region and the socio-cultural life and values of Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) and communities on location along the road. Center staging the KKH, Haines unbundles the paradox that forces of modernization and globalization unleash by transforming the socio-cultural values and politics of these marginalized communities and the region.

The book is reader-friendly, well structured and organized into five chapters with a concise introduction and summary conclusion. It provides food for thought to a wide-ranging audience. For those interested in the history of GB Agency and its links with Kashmir and colonial instruments of state formation, chapters one and two are instructive, insightful and informative. They also illuminate how ‘undefined borders’ encourage contested narratives about history, demonizing the ‘other’ all the while infusing nationalist sentiment. According to Haines, “undefined borders” and infrastructure development were twin pillars of colonial policy that had created “British India”. Pakistan inherited “undefined borders” and a network of railroad and irrigation infrastructure from its colonial rulers. In fact in most developing countries colonial rule created such projects to expand control over the occupied territories and centralized powers. Weaving relationships between marginalized territories and nation-state formation, Haines highlights the pivotal role that roads and routes play in accelerating mobility and intensifying connectivity. Analyzing the twin issues of the “problem of security” and the “problem of development” from colonial to modern times, Haines raises the salience of marginalized territories like marginalized individuals in society. “Margins,” he argues, “do not pre-exist state formation.” His analysis of marginalized GB leads him to aver, “the modern state is dependent on the production of the margins that give legitimacy to the centralizing powers.” The margins play an integral role in bringing together the territorial components of the nation state in an age of globalization. Roads and routes demolish physical barriers and connect margins with the core—the center. Thus, the nation-state is formed through the construction of both external and internal borders. In a nuanced way, it exemplifies how infrastructure development and geopolitics are intertwined.

For the tourist and those interested in tourism policy formulation chapter four, “Emplacing the Karakoram Highway: from tourist spots to truck stops” provides a captivating description about domestic and international tourists, their differing observations and interests. Along KKH, Haines perceptively remarks, people are simply like passers-by that one “encounters along the way” but the real attractions are physical in terms of nature, the “highway, the deep river gorges, the glaciers and the mountain peaks”. Haines is a sensitive

and perceptive observer as he draws attention towards the reality of how within a 'marginalized' geographical entity the sectarian divide reflects levels of wealth and poverty. He claims that Hunza attracts more tourists, given its location and the dynamism and support of its Ismaili community; and it is more popular and rich. On the other hand, Nagar depicts and signifies the depressed Shiites who appear "marginalized", relatively poorer and less attractive for tourists. Haines incisively remarks, "History, folk culture, nature," these are three qualities tourists come to "consume in Gilgit Baltistan." Based on this understanding he describes three types of tourists; domestic tourists are divided into two categories, first, family tourists, who are primarily interested in shopping (smuggled goods from China) rather than history, culture and the people of GB. The second group is that of students, who ostensibly visit these areas as part of study tours but even for them understanding the history, culture and conducting research remains peripheral. The third group is of international visitors, though declining on a yearly basis because of insecurity and terrorism, is more enthused about exploring the natural beauty of the region and its culture, history and the social transformation that the people of the region are going through. In a way the author laments that the tourism potential that the KKH offers remains unexplored. As we build CPEC and possible economic zones (which remains a delusion on KKH), could we design its tourism potential?

For the environmentalists, it insists on the urgency to preserve the beauty of nature, traditional values and values and lifestyles of the local people. In the 1960s and 1970s when the KKH was being built, environmental assessment impacts, transparency and issues of human rights were not prioritized; today these issues are of increasing concern under the gaze of the media and public scrutiny. Chapter four illustrates how ecology and the environment of GB has undergone a transformation and is impacting the culture and daily life of communities along the KKH.

As we plan, imagine and surround ourselves with ecstasy on the CPEC as a 'game changer', the book offers a terrific opportunity to policy makers, academia, and those who are interested about the future generations of Pakistan to learn and apply from the lessons of history and current status of the KKH. It is a must-read and could energize and improve our understanding on how harnessing geography could foster socio-political synergies and economic development in Pakistan.

I do hope this study would provoke some Pakistanis to reflect on how effectively we have cashed in on the opportunities that the KKH offers for ameliorating the socio-economic wellbeing of the communities along the KKH. In an era of globalization characterized by heightened connectivity, through technology and infrastructure development, it is necessary to understand how road infrastructure investments re-shape the geopolitical significance and growth potential of nation-states and regions. Under these changing dynamics "Traversing the margins" offers Pakistan an unprecedented opportunity to re-

charter its course to pursue national harmony through territorial integration and emerge as a hub of regional connectivity, peace and development. This demands understanding, analyzing and recognizing the idea of Pakistan around its territoriality and co-habitation of social classes and ethnic groups, who would thrive by celebrating diversity and strengthening national integrity and not by the euphemism of ideological unity. Federal spirit resides in recognizing the territorial basis of contemporary Pakistan. Re-imagining geography holds the promise of the 21st century for Pakistan.