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Ecologies of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Notes on infrastructural thinking and state formation

I focus on the Chinese Belt-and-Road-Initiative (BRI)'s Pakistani offshoot, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Informed by debates in infrastructure-nature and state formation domains, I proceed by underscoring infrastructure's agential role in producing state(s). I follow the proposition from the BRI studies scholars who argue that with the BRI investments, export of the 'China Model' of development/'Chinese Worldview' to its partners in the developing world also took place. With this premise, I take CPEC as an imaginary of the 'China Model' and a site where this model is put to practice and ethnographically track state-society transactions within environmental resource governance at three sites – Sahiwal coal power generation unit, Tharparkar coalfield, and Multan-Sukkar Motorway. I explore what kind of state emerges in Pakistan from the 'infrastructural thinking' under the 'China Model' couched in environmental governance. I seek to firm up the argument that (tentatively) runs in two streams. First, the 'China Model' of development is variously construed construct whose replication in Pakistan is articulated through the contingency of overhaul of the self and the state vis-à-vis infrastructure by juxtaposing nature of polity, organizational values, and work ethics in the two countries. The CPEC program is anchored more in the preferences of bilateral relations with China than the 'model' thinking. As CPEC projects are in view and in use (roads, power generation units and economic zones), a skilling conscious state emerges in Pakistan that is reworking and consolidating its ability to prepare human resources as conduits of an imagined future tied to technology, production, and trade. Second, as infrastructure is prioritized, 'environment' is rendered a routinized bureaucratic affair and not an active social-political category of state-society interface. In turn, the socio-ecological change is negotiated through securitization, costs-benefits and/or crisis narratives.