

No. 04/2025 Dated:12 June 2025

Turning Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) to Pakistan's Advantage

By Asif Khan

SYNOPSIS

"One flower cannot make spring, it takes a hundred flowers to bloom."

(Chinese Proverb)

A great power often relies on a web of allies to project its influence globally. Besides committing to material wellbeing of its partners, an aspiring power also needs ideological appeal (set of norms and values) to bond them together. For instance, the US-led Western order has been based on the ideological framework of democracy, free market and human rights. Since China decided to "go global" in 2000, it lacked such an ideological bond that's why lacked high-quality strategic partners. Against this backdrop, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) to promote respect for civilizational diversity and international people-to-people interaction. The initiative was presented during a meeting between the Communist Party of China (CPC) and world political parties in March 2023. It aligns with other diplomatic initiatives launched by China in the post-COVID era, including the Global Security Initiative (GSI) and the Global Development Initiative (GDI). Combined, these initiatives aim to transform the structure of global governance, shifting it from one centered on power competition to one built on shared interests and collective advancement.

Salient Features of GCI

The GCI is composed of four dimensions:

1. Respect for diverse civilizations
2. Shared values of humanity
3. Innovation and preservation of civilizations

4. Enhancement of people-to-people exchanges

How China Projects the GCI?

- Civilizations have coexisted and collaborated from ancient to modern times, contributing to shared progress.
- No nation has developed in isolation, and cultural contact has been a driving force of innovation among civilizations.
- The initiative negates the idea of civilizational superiority or civilizational clash
- The initiative reinforces China's preference for soft power diplomacy in international affairs over coercive methods.
- China has historically avoided major wars and conflicts that neither advance its interests nor suit its historical legacy.
- China never views the rise of developing countries as a challenge to its existing power. Instead, it perceives their rise as a significant collective achievement.
- Beijing understands that both its rise and decline would have serious bearing on the international system. Its decline will slow down global progress, whereas its rise will contribute favorably to global governance and the international system. However, it cannot rise alone or in conflict with other nations, insisting on a collective and shared pathway for the future. This is inspired by an old Chinese idiom: "One flower cannot make spring, it takes a hundred flowers to bloom."

Pakistan's Response to GCI

The GCI has garnered much international support, along with the Global Security Initiative and Global Development Initiative. Many countries that were historically subjected to Western imperialism, specifically in the Global South, largely support this notion. At the inauguration, South African President Cyril Ramaphosa endorsed the GCI, highlighting its alignment with South Africa's values of unity, inclusivity, and mutual respect. He praised China's non-interference policy as key to supporting the growth of developing nations.

Pakistan has also voiced support for the civilizational initiative. In June 2024, during his visit to China, Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif expressed Pakistan's strong appreciation and full support for the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative, and the Global Civilization Initiative proposed by President Xi Jinping. He emphasized that these initiatives provide strategic guidance to address global challenges and contribute to creating a more peaceful and better world.

In a seminar organized by the ISSI in Islamabad in August 2024, Ms. Xiang Yang, Director of the China Study Centre at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST), highlighted the collaborative efforts between China and Pakistan. Discussing the topic of GCI, she mentioned cultural exchanges, innovations, and initiatives, such as the establishment of Zhenghe College at NUST, which symbolizes the historical and ongoing exchanges between the two countries.

Recommendations

- Through the GCI, China foresees the future world order as one based on historical interaction among ancient civilizations. In this regard, it is recommended to project Pakistan as the cradle of Indus Valley Civilization, one of the most prosperous of its times with a long history of robust socio-cultural and economic exchange with the Chinese civilization. Official speeches and communication in the future may include references to Pakistan's rich pre-independence journey of civilizations starting from Mehar Gargh.
- By employing GCI, the Buddhist heritage in Pakistan can be recognized as a vital part of its historically pluralist identity. Iconic sites like Takht-i-Bahi and Taxila can highlight Pakistan's historic role as a center of diverse cultural exchange. Embracing this legacy enables Pakistan to foster national unity through an inclusive, civilizational narrative that promotes harmony and cohesion.
- The GCI places a lot of emphasize on preserving local cultures without compromising the spirit of international cooperation. Pakistan and China may work on some initiatives aimed at cultural security under the ambit of GCI. By utilizing GCI as a medium,



Pakistan can revive its traditional crafts through structured investment and access to global markets.

- In the context of GCI's focus on sustainability in tackling collective global challenges, this issue is particularly relevant to Pakistan. According to data from the Climate Risk Index (CRI) for the 2025 report released by the European think tank Germanwatch, Pakistan was ranked as the most vulnerable country to climate change in 2022. To mitigate these impacts, Pakistan is adopting climate-resilient agricultural policies under SIFC. Future project proposal under SIFC for Chinese investors may situate such projects under GCI to align them closely with the Chinese global outreach.

Conclusion

The Global Civilizational Initiative (GCI) and other initiatives have gained Pakistan's support. Prime Minister of Pakistan, Shahbaz Sharif, put emphasis on this type of initiative, providing strategic guidance to address global challenges and contribute to creating a more peaceful and better world. It promotes cultural exchanges and gives rise to multiple innovations and new ideas.

Asif Khan is a researcher affiliated with the Consortium for Asia Pacific and Eurasian Studies (CAPES), Pakistan.