

Beyond national cultural differences, examining cooperation and conflict in a Chinese mining company in Pakistan

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Abstract

This article is an attempt to analyse that how conflict and cooperation in cross-cultural set up needs more complex tools than comparative cross-cultural management (CCM) on national level can provide. This study demonstrates that the existing knowledge produced in the field of cross-cultural management do not rest simply on considering culture rather it might be due to conflicts of interest but the constitution of power at micro level among the workers of different nationalities which promotes discrepancies. This brings about the need to investigate how individuals interacting across cultures and organizational borders and hierarchies in such contexts 'make sense' of the organizational and managerial framework imposed on them along with related cultural and organizational challenges.

Introduction

Recently, Chinese corporations have become major investment factor in many parts of the globe, and this can be considered a ‘rupture’ to the traditional paths of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), namely from the industrialized world to developing countries, from West to East, from Global North to Global South, and, to speak in terms of World Systems Theory, from Center to Periphery (Wallerstein, 1974; see also Cairns and Śliwa, 2008). We can even observe “reverse” FDI (Kim and Lyn, 1987) from China to Europe and North America. This development challenges ‘normal’ internationalization paths, as well as the general frameworks of world business.

In this paper, we trace the effects for the specific case of a Chinese-Pakistani mining project which involves historically ‘uncommon’ paths of FDI, namely a combination of reverse and transverse FDI. A Chinese mining corporation investing in Pakistan is transverse, as it does not involve the dominant actors of IM and IB today, namely the ‘Global North’, the ‘West’ and the historical ‘Center’ of world business. It is also reverse, as the Chinese mining corporation has won this pitch from the Pakistani government against the competition of two Australian mining corporations who can be considered the ‘common’ investors in this case. Therefore, the Chinese mining corporation also challenges established dominances in world business on a wider level.

Earlier in 1947, United India was divided into two. The two-nation theory was justified for the creation of Pakistan. In this regard, Islam and Muslim-ness have been important social categories (Shaheed, 2010). However, comprising four distinct ethnic streams Pashtuns, Punjabis, Baloch and Muhajirs, which altogether did not contribute to a unifying national character sharpening the socio- ethnic cleavages. (Chengappa, 2008; Khan 2009). The separation of Bangladesh was the manifestation of economic marginalization of Bengalis by a sub national

group (Punjabis) dominating the state machinery (Alavi, 1989). Colonial law and administrative arrangements have evolved the national_employment politics and HRM practices in present-day Pakistan.

The Current regional quotas in civil and military jobs distribution are based on population ratio of the administrative units/provinces, with Punjab province as its main beneficiary with more than 50% jobs, followed by Sindh 19 % of which Sindh Urban gets 40 % and Sindh- Rural 60 % respectively). Khyber Pakhtunkhwa gets 11.5 %, Baluchistan and federally administered areas with 6% each. Besides these, ten percent quota has been specified for military servicemen. (Jhatial, Cornelius and Wallace, 2013). Baluchistan, the largest state in terms of area is the least developed part of Pakistan. Deposited with large amount of natural resources, it has never got its due share in its resources A recent empirical insight suggests that from 1965 to 2015, wealth worth of 7 trillion rupees have been transmitted outside Baluchistan to other parts of the country. (Bengali, 2017).

In our contribution, we show how these levels intersect to shape perceptions of difference in actual cooperation, and how they are also linked to the cultural explanations given to this difference by those involved. This is the critical contribution of our piece for an intersectional approach to culture, namely to understand that some aspects of international management and business are ‘culturalised’ which are power-effects rooted in structure. For instance, we can see how the hegemony of a ‘foreign investor’ from a presumably ‘more developed’ country plays out on the level of interpersonal interactions and how the local setting based on differences of sub-cultures are power laden too, keeping in view the structural and historical discrepancies between them.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

A large body of scholarship produced by researchers on multinational project teams acknowledges that national culture has a principal role in organizing employees' understanding and executing of their work as expected from them. The question of shared interests or conflict of interest in heterogeneous groups revolves around the differences of national cultures and cultural differences (See Moran and Harris 1981; Hofstede, 1983;).

The essentialist perspective on national culture borrowed from Hofstede work's, that culture is 'collective programming of mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another' (Hofstede, 1991) predicates that one way of acting or one set of outcomes is preferable to another. Nevertheless, when management practices are inconsistent with these deeply held values employees are likely to feel discontented, distraught, uncomfortable, and unpledged (House et al., 2004; Randel, 2003). As a result, they may be less willing to perform well.

Management practices that reinforce national cultural values are more likely to yield predictable behaviour and high performance because congruent management practices are consistent with existing behavioural expectations and routines that transcend the workplace., and the argument in favour is that the employees are not distracted from work performance by management practices that ask them to behave in ways that are consistent with extant national cultural values. (Newman and D.Nollen, 1996).

On the contrary there are studies that argues that heterogeneous working groups due to variety of values, behaviour and perspective leads to group positive outcomes regarding group efficiency, creativity and decision-making etc. (See for example Maznevski, 1994). Moreover (Jack et al.,

2008) in their study attempted to extensively address the challenges of differences in cross cultural settings. (Minkov and Hofstede, 2012) in their study addresses the question of subcultures and international cultures and. By using World Survey data from twenty-eight countries e.g. East and Southeast Asian, sub Saharan African, Latin American and Anglo World on national level on basic cultural values and find no significant support of intermixture of transnational groups. The authors suggest transnational groups for future research such as Gypsies of east European countries and those of Pashtun in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Tajiks of Afghanistan and Tajikistan, Punjabis of India and Pakistan etcetera.

(Belhoste and Monin 2013, spotted two main approaches in academia that have tackled the question of differences in cross cultural setting, one the essentialist perspective, closely related to cognitive/ positivist approach and second, the social constructionist approach. And by applying the social constructionist approach that conceptualize national differences on basic of a nation's history, economy, geography and political setup (see Chevrier, 2009). They further identified three perspectives on differences in cross cultural set up, the national distance perspective through which, individuals based on their international experience see themselves and groups by the standards of nationality and locality. The social differentiation perspective based on the status of others in the organization and lastly, the functional distinction where a member position groups based on members function inside the organization. They maintain that the transition from one perspective is a matter of time, based on the growing country experience, work experience and organization tenure.

Although, studies of international management have also attempted to evaluate the role of ideologies, power relations and societal structure shaping workplace relations, management discourses and organizational phenomena (Peltonen,2006; Jack and Westwood, 2006) studies

also have applied post-colonial theory to unveil the ethnocentric western views that establish management practices which has facilitated as a mean to control other (Frenkel & Shenhav, 2006).

In her ethnographic study on multinational workgroup (Barinaga, 2007) addresses cultural diversity as discursive formation; she stresses that national culture becomes a discursive resource in two related and intertwined procedures first it is used by group fellows by defining their worth and secondly by establishing interdependence among group members national culture enters a variety of language games performed in everyday group life.

Cross-cultural differences do not speak for themselves, they need to be analysed and such analysis demands what Brecht has called crude thinking, which means a referral of theory to practice and to actuality. Unless such crude thinking is adopted and perspective of the unvoiced to be listened CCM, itself has little significance other than description of events and individual actors, whose actions triggered differentiation on national cultural differences. Such writings may make interesting reading but does not help to understand the mechanism of the intersectionality, social and power struggle in organizations and the changes that these struggle effect, the power relation that they generate and the different means of control and coercion that they produce. As a result, cross, cultural management discipline is reduced to mere differences.

To be clear at this point our argument is not that the critical dialogue in cross cultural management studies never existed but the over simplification of national cultural differences and ignoring the mechanism through which those differences surface need to be considered to unfold the saga behind national cultural differences.

This article develops an argument that the perception and realities of differences are result of power-effects on multiple, intersecting levels, such as differences in working conditions, business structure, organisational structure, sub cultural disparities on national level and gender imbalance. The affirmation is supported by an ethnographic study of a multinational Chinese overseas company showing that it may not only be the matter of time and culture for cross cultural teams to adjust rather it is convoluted narrative that affects cooperation in cross cultural management.

In order to make this contribution, first we will outline the relevance of our study than, we are going to highlight the methodology adopted for this study and provide details to the background of our case study. Next, we reflect upon power, CCM, and researcher perspective. We conclude with recommendations to students, researchers and practitioners.

Methodology

Our contribution is based on qualitative interviews and ethnographic research conducted at the Pakistani site of the Chinese corporation between May 16th, 2016 and May 24th by the first author. From the material, we can see perceptions of difference, but also how presumed cultural characteristics of ‘the Chinese’ and ‘the Pakistani’ are constructed. Two themes are noteworthy: Firstly, we can see that power-discrepancies rupture trust and create inferior ‘others’, for instance, Chinese management perceived the capability of Pakistani workers to meet Chinese quality standards as low (and, obviously, this picture looks different from the Pakistani side). Secondly, we can also see how power discrepancies create archetypical roles, which are normally played by actors of different nationalities: China, also being a recipient of FDI from the

‘developed world’, is often stereotyped as a Low-cost, low-quality manufacturer of cheap goods in ‘the West’. However, now that it is ‘the Chinese’ who play the superior role, it is ‘the Pakistani’ who are described with the help of the exact same or similar attributes. Therefore, we conclude that it is the structural power, for instance, the direction of FDI in an international cooperation and how this relates to the established hierarchies of world business that actually decides upon the roles in this play. This informs us that we should refrain from ‘cultural explanations’, such as the notions of national-cultural capabilities or work-styles, and rather focus on the actual issue at hand, namely power-discrepancies which are largely structural.

The actual research was conducted by the first author at the site of Chinese mining company in Pakistan. Due to the unrest and deteriorated security situation, the first author struggled hard to access the field, the initial plan was to cover more projects operated by both Pakistanis and Chinese but only succeeded getting entry to the mining project. The entry was mainly possible due to the use of social, personal and political influence (see Buchanan & Bryman 2009)

Our research perspective is critical, which means that we wish to reflect upon historical imbalances of power in contemporary CCM and to this end, we employed interpretative methods. Specifically, the first author conducted twenty-nine in-depth ethnographic interviews with fourteen Chinese and fifteen Pakistani employees of a multinational Chinese overseas copper extraction company dealing with iron and steel industry products. There were no female interviewees from the Pakistani side and few from the Chinese side. The interviews were conducted in English except few in Urdu on Pakistani side.

An in-depth ethnographic interview provides the opportunity to look through the window that interviewees provide, to see how they see their environment, to glimpse the categories and logic by which he or she sees the world. It can take us into the life world of the individual, to see the

content and pattern of daily experience. (See McCall, 2005). Each interview had lasted for an average of two hours and sometimes more than that. Snowball sampling (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009: 601)) was used to get access to the interviewees, which means that interviewees who had already been interviewed were asked to name a suitable interviewee. Most of the interviewees had eight years of work experience; few had less than three years more than that.

The first author is ethnic Pashtun born and raised in north western Baluchistan where basic needs such as schooling, health care and water is as elusive as pursuit of Holy grail, where women are still confined to homes and justice is still in the purview of tribal elites. The exposure to the American education system in a metropolis of Punjab and interaction with people from diverse backgrounds and different socio-cultural and academic environment compelled him to have a different approach to look at the world. He Speaks Pashto, English, and Urdu fluently. English and Urdu are the official language of Pakistan (see Rahman, 1998)

In his field work the author could not avoid being categorized as Pakistani by Chinese employees, a Pashtun by rest of Pakistanis due to the diversity along with recruitment, promotion inside the organization. Also, he is a male and the interviews were conducted in in a male dominated setting. Nevertheless, the self-presentation as a student in university of Paris placed him beyond these divisions.

The author was received by vice president upon arrival and later accommodated in a block specified for Pakistani managerial level employees. The Pakistani employees told him that Chinese are reluctant to be interviewed but he encountered a Pakistani engineer and vice president who proposed his help in arranging the interviews. The engineer X and the author shared the same ethnicity and Pashtunwali “way of the Pashtun” a customary law widely practice among Pashtun requires to do (Maylmastiya) treating the guest with honour that covers help,

care, respect and hospitality for the guests. For details (See Benson and Siddiqui, 2013; Coulson et al. 2014).

On the next day, the process of interviews started and the engineer X was accompanied as a facilitator in process of interview this proved to be leverage in understanding the situation and procedure in variety of contexts. Engineer X employee of outsource company responsible for explosives had significant amount of knowledge due to the nature of his job. This proved to be a useful icebreaker for the awkwardness that might have otherwise been present in his absence. Due to the political economic and regional insecurity involved in the project what was important to get an access at all. This states that it is important to consider the power implication of the researcher role as shaped accordingly by the actors involved in the setting. The researcher may not have control on such disruptive process in such settings (see Mahadevan, 2011)

To avoid any categorization, the author presented himself as a university student in Paris and the interviews are related to his university project. Also, to avoid biasness that could arise in such conditions, the verbatim were not recorded where engineer X would stay in the same control room in the interview process due to extreme heat or storm condition outside.

In the course of Interviews, the author also observed that employees from other parts of country would mention the strife in between the Pakistani group as mentioned in one of the Pakistani employee explained that,

As an outsider the locals do not like me here they do not bear the non-local employees, they are less skilled and educated, if I want to dismiss someone I cannot take independent decision I would face pressure from tribal elites and politicians.

Another Manager stated that,

I am from another province but I will admit that despite contributing to country economy, only few selected people reap the fruit of such projects and the local employees are completely neglected.

However, the details and positions based on ethnicity of these employees were not available and not interrogated to avoid suspicion on the field.

Coding was done manually. First, interviews were clustered into themes, which emerged, from an iterative deductive-inductive process (e.g. Spradley, 1979). Quotes were separated, and clusters were formed of both working groups (Pakistani and Chinese). The first theme, which emerged from the material involved, was organizational structure, system and authority which could be linked to for instance the question of (business structure, hierarchies, and power struggle). The second culture was that the level of trust highlighting formal and informal relationships in-groups. Third cluster was about National culture, highlighting identity and stereotyping in groups. Fourth, was working condition and discrepancies in salaries and facilities. The last cluster was that of gender.

Findings and interpretations

The long interviews from the Chinese and Pakistani management revealed an interesting insight into power discrepancies in a cross-cultural management context. The results suggest that if China is keen in what resources it can obtain from Pakistan in the best possible way, and Pakistani partners expects an agent of progress, developmental and technical support in exchange for natural resources, then at an organizational level, employment conditions and wages may be kept to a minimum for Pakistani employees. The interviews appeared to be highlighting the

national cultural differences at first but upon critically examining it could be argued that these differences are largely due to power discrepancies between the two groups.

Organizational Structure system and Authority

The company uses divisional organisational chart (cf. Appendix 1) according to the specific task in that environment, each division has the necessary resources and functions within to satisfy the demands based on the working of an organization. There are 1,300 Pakistani employees and around 360 Chinese working on this project. Most of the upper management positions are occupied by Chinese with fewer middle managers and bulk of the lower staff deployed are Pakistanis.

The Pakistani interviewee was of the view that,

“The Chinese employees are authoritative and autocrat. Here Decisions are made by Chinese even a Chinese labour is more influential than Pakistani top management. They are the bosses here. Most of the top-level managers are Chinese so they have complete control over the decision making”

Another employee stated that,

“The Chinese have all key positions in the organization and there are no Pakistani employees in the Finance Department, even Pakistani senior management does not know about the monthly production target or the decisions taken by the company.

These quotes imply that one group dominates decision making in the project and this domination has categorised Chinese as authoritative and autocratic, resulting an unequal relationship between them. Moreover, it suggests that Pakistanis are concerned about having no

representation in financial department which could reduce the financial transparency and accountability resulting in distrust of the company. One of the possible reason may be that the management do not want to leak the confidential business matter of the company. They may not want to share the information of the profits being generated.

The majority of the Chinese interviewees believed that the Pakistani workforce do not like to work unless Chinese supervise them. One of the Chinese manager said that,

“Whenever a task is assigned, we have to give them every detail and check their work. They want spoon-feeding. On the other hand, when Chinese are given a task, they stick to their work and get it done but Pakistanis employees are only concerned about their pays, leisure and most of the time they drink tea and do not care about the goals and objectives of the project.”

It suggests that unequal structural organisational setting have formulated two distinctive groups instead of a unified team on the same project. The predomination of Chinese on higher management positions have resulted in categorisation of the Pakistanis, as not well trained and inexperienced. In the same way, this process has led Pakistanis to believe that Chinese want to keep direct control of the main functions without incorporating them in the project.

Another Chinese assistant manager was of the view that,

“Based on the actual position of this project the company have changed the management style, it does not have the same organizational structure as we do have in China. We are operating in a cross-cultural team so the management have to keep more check and balance; in his opinion, the company have changed it for this project specifically.

The description of the above quote suggests a cultural explanation at first but at the same time, it affirms that Chinese instead of recommending cooperation between the two groups suggested to

hold firm control over Pakistani employees and the project. It is pertinent to mention that when one group exercises authority and deems the other group as incompetent creates a major issue, especially in organisational approach, which prerequisites mutual understanding at every level. Most of the time, social structures reveal such discrepancies in organisation. Categorising Chinese structured and organised, and at the same time describing them as arrogant, patronising and authoritative has more to say about the power imbalance. In the same way Chinese interviewees called Pakistani as independent, careless and disorganised suggesting that the Pakistanis might be resisting and challenging the current organisational arrangements. The way the team members of one group were excluded and side-lined were illustrated in the following lines.

The Pakistani vice president said that,

They (Chinese) know every detail about this project, from production to induction of new employees. Meetings regarding production target are only attended by Chinese whereas we (Pakistani) employees are not invited or told about the daily or monthly production from the company.

The quote suggests that it is Chinese who are controlling the overall setting and Power Discrepancies emerge when employees perceive that they are an object commanded and controlled by opposite group or by a technological system of production, thus as subject they cannot alter their conditions. Powerlessness refers to when the employee realises lack of freedom and control on the job. (See Shepard, J. M., & Panko, T. R. 1974). In summary, we could say that both teams have clearly specified and showed distinctness in terms of us and them. Despite employees of the same company and working on the same project, they were not able to share the same goal due to power differences at organisational level. Pakistanis consider it their right to

criticise and raise their voice against disparities on the project whereas Chinese expected them to accept the established hierarchies and follow the orders.

Level of Trust

The distribution of the profit has aggravated the concerns of the Pakistani employees. The interviewees depicted a situation with less motivation for working on the project as they viewed that long-term goals of Chinese are extraction of the resources and exploitation.

The Pakistani Mechanical engineer was of the view that,

“I don’t want foreign investors/ companies to take our resources where I am a subservient to them in my own land, it’s unfortunate that we are unable to initiate and run a project like this by our own. In my opinion, we are the losing these resources without gaining much. If some foreign company wants to invest they must work here on our terms and conditions but it is opposite in this project.”

It appeared the extracted minerals have a sense of ownership for Pakistani employees as they are expecting cooperation based on partnership rather than Chinese as bosses and Pakistanis as their subordinates. The Pakistanis are questioning that who gets benefited from these kinds of projects.

Moreover, it is noticeable from Pakistani interviewees that Chinese do not trust the skills of Pakistani employees and have been excluded from different operations in the project which is a matter of great concern for them. A young Pakistani engineer explained and I quote,

“I am a Mining engineer but Chinese management have appointed me as a clerk and my responsibilities include data entry, counting the employees and drawing excel sheets. I want to

develop my career as professional mining engineer. I asked Chinese management to appoint me somewhere in production plant but I got an answer that, "I will be fired if I refuse."

Due to the remoteness of the area, extreme poverty and absence of other employment opportunities, the Chinese are exploiting the setting in their favour; it also shows the government ineffectiveness in complying with the job security of the employees. Also we could say that the induction of the employees are done in a way that does not fits their qualification.

Majority of Pakistani and Chinese interviewees both stressed on lack of trust towards each other. The Chinese employee was of the view that

I have never seen somebody honouring his word. I lost my cell phone in working hours and I am of the view, you cannot trust any employee here.

About the attitude of Pakistani employees toward safety rules, one of the Chinese remarked,

"They (Pakistanis) don't act the way I want them to act, they would do it the way they want t. They will never ask questions, which creates ambiguity and frustration when they do it wrong. Some time it could lead to fatal accidents. Life is not a joke and they do not care about their lives. Whenever I assign any task to an employee, I always ask myself should I trust this man or no, a minor mistake can risk the lives of many workers. I have to double check his task."

The mistrust about the skills of Pakistani employees was apparent from majority of the Chinese managers. Beside education, written procedure; workplace design and directions of manager's organisational culture play an important role to maintain workplace safety. Ignoring safety rules is a dangerous phenomenon and could lead to fatal injuries and accidents. Majority of the Chinese employees explained their concerns about the risky behaviour of Pakistani labourer.

Whereas Pakistani employees were of the view that the Chinese do not care about the safety rules and employee's conditions instead they are more concerned about the production.

The blasting engineer explained his concern in the following words,

Working with explosives is dangerous job I need to be extra careful to ensure safety Chinese are less concerned with the safety procedure instead they want to extract ore and maximize production.

Alessandro Ripa (2014) recounting his experience of his research project on Karakoram Highway where both Chinese and Pakistanis worked together. He describes the Chinese perspective of Pakistanis that Chinese regard Pakistanis as lethargic, ineffective, and non-productive, whereas Pakistanis reckoned Chinese business community as dishonest and arrogant in their behaviour. Though many Pakistanis consider China as a trustworthy friend, however, some believe that China is using Pakistan for its own vested interests and expanding its geopolitical and economic influence in the region.¹

The trust issue between Pakistani and Chinese employees could take long time to handle. The extent of management localization and the functions of local managers are still limited. Similarly, the results show that Chinese have assumed that they have short-term goals in this project. Their main focus is on production but at the same time, they have maintained harmony without losing control on the project. Whereas Pakistanis are concerned about the subservient position in the project.

Stereotype

¹Rippa Alessandro, (2014 july 17) Pakistan and China: A Precarious Friendship?
<http://thediomat.com/2014/07/pakistan-and-china-a-precarious-friendship/>

Stereotyping is a process by which a thought is developed about individuals and they are viewed as members of groups, and the information that we have stored in our minds about the group is ascribed to the individuals. It is a fixed and distorted generalisation made about all members of particular community. Power struggle or discrepancy and role conflicts can be the result of stereotyping (Marilyn and B Rosener 1991).

Majority of the Chinese employees generalized Pakistanis of always drinking tea and categorize them for staying idle. The Chinese manager said that,

Pakistani workforce knows nothing, they are only concerned about their pays, leisure and most of the time they talk and drink tea in the working hours.

Few of Pakistani employees termed Chinese as with having no religion. One of the stereotypes is of calling them as unclean as one of the employees said that,

Chinese eat everything, donkeys, dogs, pigs and insects.

This is a covert way to stereotype the entire Chinese nation and associating them to unclean animals because pig in Islam is forbidden and termed as dirty.

One of the Chinese employees narrated a story *that*

on their way back, they always bring gifts to the employees but they came to know that, Pakistani do not like to accept edible items from them so they stopped it.

As members of both groups have generalised each other on certain matters, mean there are misunderstanding between them regarding way of lives. The results suggest that Stereotyping have not decreased instead it has increased with time which might be the result of power issues

where each team tries to influence the other and realises that they are lacking power in the project.

Working Conditions

Salaries

For an effective team, a significant reward for their work is an important aspect. Majority of the Pakistani interviewees expressed their concerns of discriminatory policies of the company towards them. They were of the view that the Chinese employees have higher salaries, better transportation facilities, good food and special security arrangements have been made for them. The middle level managers stated that there is a huge gap in salaries between Chinese and Pakistani employees. Although majority of them refrained from quoting the exact amount. The Chinese interviewees also did not mention their salaries and allowances as few of the Chinese explained that they were not allowed to share information about their salaries.

A young Pakistani engineer said that

The average pay of a newly inducted Chinese engineer is something around 850 to 1500 \$ where as I get 260 \$ per month. He continued that few of the local employees get only 100 \$ per month which is even less than minimum wage² set by government of Pakistan.

The Pakistani employees do not get an original pay slip from the company. The current slip issued by the management is a simple piece of paper, which do not contain the monogram of the company. The Pakistani employee said that *they tried to get the original pay slip issued by the central office but the management refused to issue the original pay slip.* He continued that, *we*

²the gazette of Pakistan Islamabad Wednesday, February 17, 2016 (W.P. Ordinance 1969) minimum wages for unskilled workers (Amendment) Act, 2016. 13000 pm (W.e.f.. 1st July, 2015)

could not claim our right even if the company refused to pay us; nobody is going to believe that we are the employees of this company without the original pay slip with the company's monogram.

The company has failed to provide the original pay slip to its employees, which violates minimum wage act of 1936. These statements of the employees put serious concerns on the credibility of the Chinese company in complying labour laws.

Amenities and Facilities

One important issue highlighted by the employees was poor living standard and low-quality food for the employees. The Pakistani side complained that company do not provide standard and quality food nor they have better transportation facilities. The Pakistani interviewee stated that,

Food provided by the company is substandard and insufficient to fulfil their daily calories intake. They asked the authorities to address this issue but they did not pay a heed. Chinese have new Air-conditioned busses for transportation and we have to travel old buses or by foot from plant to our rooms.

Whereas the Chinese employee shared the following story and said,

Pakistanis food are different from Chinese..... we tried our best to implement a good menu and provide quality food but after the strike..... we realized that we should hand over kitchen to Pakistanis.

These quotes suggest that there are apparent disparities in the facilities provided to both groups and this take us to the question of who is the in charge and have the authority to implement the rules and control the overall setting?

Regarding facilities provided to the employees the assistant vice president took the first author to a small twenty bed hospital where the employees were treated for first aid and emergencies, the hospital had two separate wards, the Chinese ward was clean and tidy having air condition facility, whereas the Pakistani ward was in a miserable condition with few ceiling fans. Overall, there were apparent differences in facilities between the employees of both team and majority of the Pakistani employees complained about the discriminatory approach of the company in terms of transportation, health facilities, salaries and bonuses.

Gender and reversed power-effects: an entry point to alternative standpoints?

An intersectional approach to culture requires us to consider how we are not only different but related, and to move beyond mono-causal or mono-level explanations of cultural differences. This means that we need to identify connection-points from which we can enter and start to comprehend different standpoints and the life-experiences of others. In unequal relations, wherein one group dominates the other, this would mean to identify aspects of marginality in one's own experiences. However, in this case, several factors add up to each other (organizational, political, economic, interpretative, and discursive) and result in an almost uncontested and incontestable superiority of 'the Chinese' over 'the Pakistani'. Hence, it is near impossible for an individual representing 'the Chinese' to step into the life-experiences of those categorized and forced to represent 'the Pakistani'. The only theme that emerged from our material was the perceptions of Chinese female managers and engineers. As has been said, there was no Pakistani woman working on the project, and gender-relations in Baluchistan can be considered highly unequal.

According to World Bank, the total population of Pakistan in 2015 was more than 189 million and half of the population is that of female. Even though the constitution of Pakistan (1973)

guarantees equality of its citizen irrespective of religion, caste or sex, studies report a high inequality in the status of women in Pakistani society, the urban areas of Karachi, Islamabad, Lahore being the exception (Islam, 2004). Also amongst the Pakistani interviewees, there was a consensus that the sole bread earner for the family should be men, and that women should stay at home taking care of the family, washing, cleaning and cooking.

The assistant vice president was of the view that,

Our Pakistani women would not like to work on this project, it is far away from the city life and their families will not allow them to work.

When interviewing the Chinese women employees, the first author perceived them to be in a “state of culture shock”, and the gender issue was a matter of concern for all of them. To quote one Chinese women employee: *“It’s very challenging for me to work in such an environment where there are very few female staffers. I need to be extra careful as few months back a group of young men were continuously staring at me. I heard them saying, that women should not come out of their houses. It was horrible, I got scared and now I avoid roaming alone inside the site of the project.”*

Also, violence against women in Pakistan is a frequent theme in media. (See Khan and Hussain, 2008). In his field notes, the first author wrote: *“Since there are no female Pakistani employees in the project the Chinese female employees are conscious and have developed a state of fear.”* Against this viewpoint, the Pakistani employees were of the view that they *“respect the female Chinese employees the way they respect their own women”*.

It remains unclear as to whether the company only hired Chinese women employees and no Pakistani women employees on purpose (to not violate cultural sensitivities), or if they failed to attract those qualified women who are drawn to the urban centres of Pakistan. Compared to

China, women in Pakistan seem indeed more dependent on their families regarding career or daily-life decisions, which may not be the case in present-day China (Nasir, 2005). For instance, China has one of the highest women's labour market participation rates in the world, with women making up 61 percent of the labour force, compared to 25 percent in Pakistan (The World Bank Group, 2017). However, this does not offer sufficient explanation. Rather, it must be assumed that the evolution of gender roles has their own history, and that the status of women is the result of different economic and political factors.

Limitation

It is important to acknowledge the limitation of this research; the study was conducted at the heartland of security problematic, having multiple risks including risk to life. Time and space was crucial. There were limitations for us in our movement in the province, which also restricted our access to other possible stakeholders of the research subject, e.g. Army officers, Chinese diplomats and businesspersons and the Baluch leaders including the armed rebels. To build on this, it would be therefore vital to do further research on other contexts in the ongoing projects of Chinese in Pakistan.

Conclusion

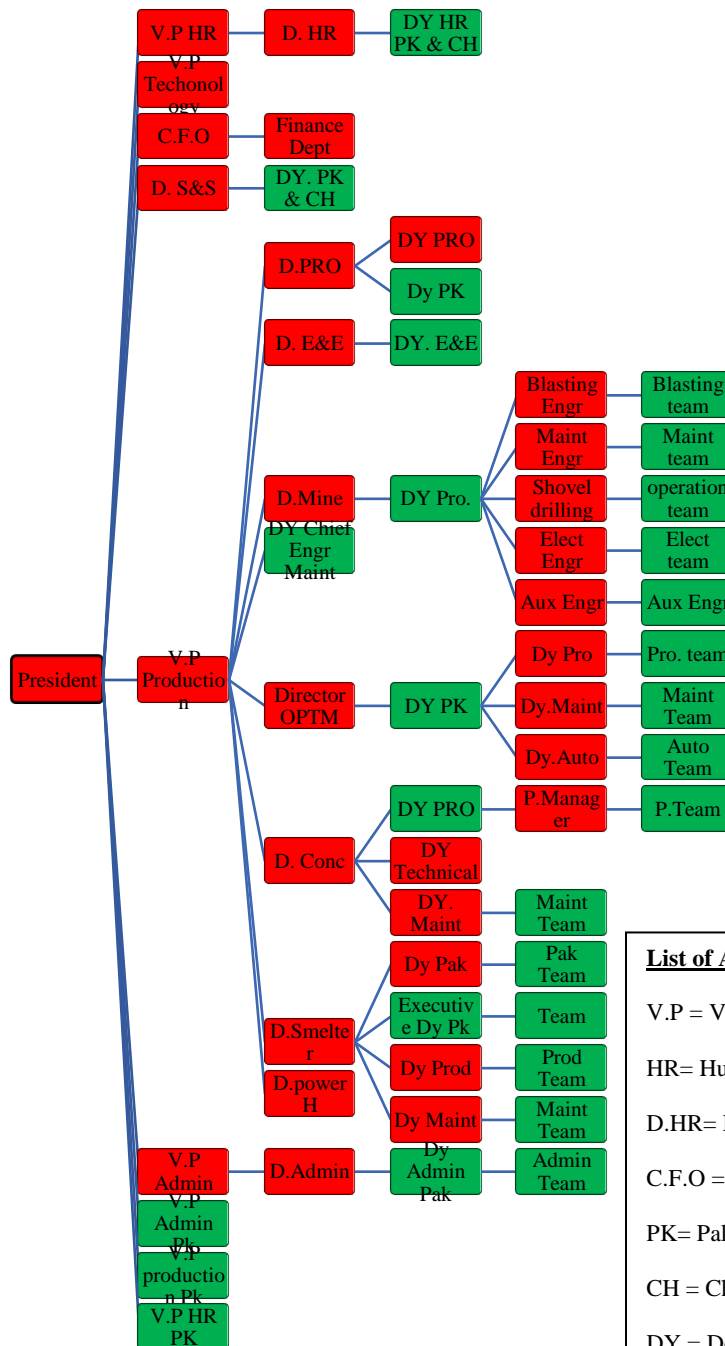
The interviews revealed that there is an autocratic and centralised style of management adopted by Chinese, meaning they have hold all the power with them regarding participation and decision making. The host country employees are unable to understand this excessive authority exerted on them giving it cultural meaning would mean that we have missed the question of who holds authority and decisions in the organization. Moreover, it was evident by their views that both groups do not share the principles of equality and equal treatment. The use of reward and

compensation to keep the team members motivated is not ample for the Pakistani team members despite employees of the same organizations they have low wages and inadequate facilities as compared to Chinese employees. The intergroup strife and the way Chinese deal also affirms that it is the Chinese who decide to manage the diverse group is power laden and we should refrain to give it a cultural meaning.

In order to understand cross-cultural management, we need to critically examine the role of the culture in management keeping in view its relationship with race, gender ethnicity, religion and geo-politics of the area. Simply looking into the dimensions of cultures will be bypassing how interaction in organization is shaped and how companies operate in least developed countries for execution of a successful project. Lack of mutual understanding on these lines would often result in poorer relationship and cooperation, which would lead to many problems including hurdles to the business activities among them, and more importantly, it might lead to the lack of synergy, which is vital to achieve the goals of the project.

Arguably, there are both benevolent and antagonistic cultural encounters as power discrepancies happening on the setting between them and it is not necessary that with the passage of time this pattern will change for good. By more interaction, their understanding of each other may increase but this 'increase' does not guarantee that they will altogether develop a pattern of benevolent relationship. A question of 'we' and 'they' will persist depending on how will they untangle these power differences.

Appendix I: Organizational chart



List of Abbreviation

V.P = Vice President

HR= Human Resource

D.HR= Deputy Director HR

C.F.O = Chief Financial Officer

PK= Pakistani

CH = Chinese

DY = Deputy Director

D = Director

S& S = Sales & Supply

D.PRO = Director Production

DY PRO = Deputy Director Production

Dy PK= Deputy Director Pak

E&E = Energy & Equipment

D.Mine = Director Mining

Maint= Maintenance

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