

## The Political Foundations of Economic Development in China: Lessons for Pakistan

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### Abstract

*China's unique governance system involving centralization - decentralization mixture, political meritocracy, and the institutionalization of leadership succession has facilitated its economic miracle during the reform era. Substantial political reforms have been implemented in Chinese polity during past four decades ranging from the power succession system to decentralized local administration. Both these parts of political reform have provided China not only with enhanced political stability and legitimacy but also with the fruits of good governance and efficient administration. The Chinese development is a state-led development with regional decentralization. Pakistan also needs a proactive role of state in a decentralized framework to stimulate economic development. The Pakistani state needs to devolve its economic, fiscal and administrative functions to lower levels of government. The element of political decentralization by encouraging citizens' participation in public decision making is also critical for improving governance standards.*

**Keywords:** Decentralization, Economic Development, China, Institutionalization, Power succession.

### Introduction

China has accomplished tremendous economic growth over last four decades by implementing political and economic reforms which often contradicted the western neo-liberal standards. Since the reforms started in 1978, China has lifted approximately 800 million people out of poverty and announced the end of poverty in 2021. China has managed to sustain average GDP growth rate of 10% annually from 1980 to 2016, doubling its GDP every seven years. In 1980 its GDP was \$ 300 billion and according to World Bank, it was approximately \$ 12.23 trillion in 2017. China surpassed the US in purchasing power terms in 2014. Overall, it is now the second largest economy in the world (Husain, 2018).

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China's impressive economic performance has generated a debate over its development approach which varies from the western standard in several key areas such as extensive state intervention in the economy and lack of complete private property rights.

This paper attempted to navigate China's reform trajectory to address two questions. First, which major political reforms led to China's sustainable rapid growth and development? Second, what potential lessons does China's development experience offer to Pakistan?

Following widespread chaos of Cultural Revolution (1966 -1976), substantial political reforms have been implemented in Chinese polity during past four decades ranging from the top of the system - power succession - to decentralized local administration at its bottom. Both these parts of political reform have provided China not only with enhanced political stability and legitimacy but also with the fruits of good governance and efficient administration. Many China scholars have lauded the success of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in meeting the challenges of market liberalization and socio-economic modernization by enacting diverse socio-political reforms that have ensured the survival of one-party rule (Schubert, 2006). The resulting unique governance system under the CCP involving centralization - decentralization blend, political meritocracy, and the institutionalization of leadership succession has facilitated its economic miracle during reform era. The Chinese development is a state-led development with regional decentralization. Ideologically, it has generally followed a pragmatist approach given by Deng Xiaoping which combined the principles of socialism and free market economy. The reforms brought decentralization of both the political decision making as well as economic resources to sub-national levels of government.

This study also probes to what extent China's reform plan can be promoted as a development model with specific reference to Pakistan. Pakistan is facing a serious economic crisis with a huge ever-increasing foreign debt, rising fiscal and trade deficits, declining exports, and rising imports. Agriculture sector is looking stagnant, and industry is shrinking. At this juncture, Pakistan needs a comprehensive plan of political reforms that is consistently implemented, and Chinese experience does offer some potential lessons.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review for this study is organized as an argumentative literature review. The whole literature reviewed revolves around two main arguments outlined here. Firstly, China's economic growth experience is result of a

comprehensive reform program including political as well as economic reforms in the Chinese system. These reforms are rooted in China's unique historical, ideological and cultural context. While these reforms also borrow elements from the western neo-liberal capitalism as well as the East Asian or Singapore model, Chinese reforms do not necessarily confirm to the global neo-liberal model or Washington Consensus. The Second and the counter argument is that China's tremendous economic success is simply the result of the liberalization of its economy on the western lines without any significant political reforms. The works of Kenneth Lieberthal, Harry Harding, Lowell Dittmer and Andrew J. Nathan provided valuable insights into China's Post-Mao political reforms. John P. Burns and Maria Edin analyzed the cadre management reforms after 1978. Chenggang Xu extensively wrote on the governance structure of China and major economic reforms after 1978. Sally Lord Ellis analyzed the economic decentralization process with specific focus on the devolution of foreign trade system unleashed during reform era. Jianxing Yu and Xiang Gao explained the role of administrative decentralization in the expansion of China's local autonomy and economic growth.

Daniel A. Bell gives his own account of the "China Model" as a set of political reforms introducing political meritocracy for selecting and promoting top level political leaders, electoral democracy at the local level and experimentation in the middle. The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China issued a White Paper "China: Democracy That Works" on the centenary of CCP, to explain the official Chinese perspective on democracy as distinct from western electoral democracy. Jean-Pierre Cabestan surveyed more than 100 years of CCP's existence as a communist party to comprehend its organization and basic principles, especially its viewpoint on democracy. Baogang He, in series of research projects, analyzed the phenomenon of consultative or deliberative democracy in China and its implications for China's authoritarian political system.

Ali Cheema, Asim Ijaz Khwaja and Adnan Qadir made the historical analysis of local government systems in Pakistan and identified a common theme that local governments have always been practiced by authoritarian regimes of military dictators to legitimize their hold over the state. The author has also covered the views of Pakistan's development experts including Nadeem-ul-Haque.

### **Research Methodology**

Basically, this is an exploratory and descriptive research carried out using qualitative methods. The Research Design intended for this study is the single case study design. The case study design is chosen as it is often preferred in

exploratory research. It may allow getting in-depth and contextual knowledge of the Chinese case and exploring its key characteristics. Both primary and secondary data sources are consulted to support the study. Primary sources include official websites of various Chinese institutions and departments as well as semi-structured interviews with Chinese and Pakistani officials and academicians. Secondary sources include books, newspapers, and journals.

### **The Political Foundations of China's Economic Development**

Apparently Chinese reforms look like purely economic without complimenting political changes. But as a matter of fact, economic reforms were built on drastic political adjustments which not only changed the central leadership but also the internal power structure of the Party State. "Even though China faced serious economic and political problems when Mao died in 1976, the post-Mao reforms should not be seen as inevitable consequence of China's condition at the time. Instead, the reforms have been the result of extraordinary political engineering by a coalition of reform-minded leaders led by Deng Xiaoping. That coalition used Deng's personal prestige and the unresolved grievances of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) to push Mao's immediate successor, Hua Guofeng, off the political stage and begin a massive restaffing and restructuring of the Party and State bureaucracies leading to a large scale program of political and economic reforms (Harding, 1987)."

Merely the ordinary market reforms suggested by Washington Consensus have not led to China's miraculous development. In fact, China drove through its reform path in flagrant disregard of western neo-liberal suggestions. Evaluating the reforms in China and India against the Washington Consensus recommendations, Dani Rodrik observed: "their policies remained highly unconventional. With high levels of trade protection, lack of privatization, extensive industrial policies, and lax fiscal and financial policies through the 1990s, these two economies hardly looked like exemplars of the Washington Consensus. Indeed, had they been dismal failures instead of the successes they turned out to be, they would have arguably presented stronger evidence in support of Washington Consensus policies (Rodrik, 2006)." Deng Xiaoping described post-Mao Chinese reforms as the "second revolution" carried out by the CCP. The impact of these reforms on China's growth and development has vindicated this description.

Although the main theme of the post-Mao reforms in China is liberalization; steady implementation of this reform agenda with marvelous socio-economic growth was made possible by a stable political order marked by a newfound ideological flexibility, reduced political coercion, institutionalization of power

and enhanced public involvement in the political process. The resulting political system successfully managed China's transition to modernity while maintaining the country's political stability. The significant aspects of China's current political system are discussed below.

- ***Centralization-Decentralization Nexus in Governance***

China's unique governance system under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) involving the centralization - decentralization nexus, political meritocracy, and the institutionalized leadership succession has facilitated its economic miracle during the reform era (1978-2012). The centralization – decentralization dynamics in the Chinese political and economic governance have played central role in China's development. By centralization-decentralization nexus we mean an institutional setup in which the Center holds the ultimate control and intervening authority while the sub-national units are given the operational autonomy. Constitutionally, China is a unitary state in which central government is the only source of independent political power. The Constitution divides People's Republic of China (PRC) into four levels of administrative sub-national units which derive their political, administrative, and economic powers from the central government and operate in a hierarchical setting. The provinces, autonomous regions, and municipalities directly under the central government, considered equivalent to provinces, constitute the first level. Each province and autonomous region are divided into autonomous prefectures, counties, and townships, which constitute the lower three administrative levels. The municipalities directly under the central government and other large cities are divided into districts and counties (Ellis, 1981).

Chenggang Xu calls the Chinese governance system as “the regionally decentralized authoritarian (RDA) regime (Xu, 2011)”. It involves centralization of political control and regional decentralization of economic powers to the sub-national governments - provincial, prefecture, county and township governments. The national government directly controls provincial level top political appointments and indirectly influences lower-level political appointments. On the other hand, the sub-national governments largely control the national economy due to decentralization phenomenon. The provinces, prefectures, and counties have relatively self-contained economies and have powers to initiate and implement reforms; manage public service delivery; as well as to enact and enforce laws inside their boundaries. In the Chinese regime, sub-national governments exercise control over a great number of resources including land, firms, financial resources, energy, raw materials, and others. This characteristic differentiates the Chinese economy from a centrally planned

economy. According to World Bank, the lower government levels “implement China’s national development agenda”, since the sub-national levels of government control almost 70 percent of total public expenditure in China and 55 percent of the sub-national expenditure is administered at sub-provincial levels (Bank, 2002).

Some features of this unique governance system such as centralization – decentralization blend can be traced back to ancient Chinese tradition. Some part of this unique structure is owed to China’s socialist history under Mao – the Chinese Communist Party - which is providing the medium to connect the whole system. Another major part of the system is supplied by the western liberal tradition – the ideal of institutional rule to replace the personalistic rule, competitive elections and integrating China with the global economy during Deng Xiaoping era. The rudiments of China’s governance structure were formed at the start of Qin Dynasty (221 B.C) and it has developed over two thousand years. The emperor appointed sub-national officials to maintain his control. Given the primitiveness of transportation and communication, the sub-national governments were entrusted with most local affairs, with obvious condition of their loyalty to the emperor. The sub-national governments were responsible for implementing the most functions within their confines. The imperial governance structure has got an enduring footprint on China’s modern system. Mao also often alluded to the administrative tradition of the imperial China. This imperial governance structure was basically a self-contained governance structure at all levels of government, from central, provincial levels to the bottom administrative level of county governments (Xu, 2011).

During Mao era, the centralization-decentralization mixture continued to evolve with significant efforts for decentralization. Immediately after the communist revolution in 1949, a Soviet style centralized model of economic management and planning was adopted. Most of industries were managed by vertically organized central industrial ministries which controlled natural resources, industrial plans, and distribution networks (Ellis, 1981). By 1956, there was apparent local dissatisfaction with the Soviet model due to excessively rigid control by the central departments which hampered the potential of local regions and businesses leading to decentralization of administrative authority over eighty-seven percent of the state enterprises in 1958. The local units were given wider powers in the areas of taxation, price controls, economic planning, and financial management. But this move was soon reversed by 1960. China has actually searched for a balance between two policies. The decentralization policy with subnational units participating in the economic planning and decision making has always led to greater economic efficiency. The centralized

model, at the other extreme, provided for the central control of natural resources and government services with subordinate units following commands of the central bureaucracy. Two more attempts at decentralization were undertaken in 1964 and 1970. However, none of the three efforts significantly reduced the central control over the distribution of economic resources. Provincial governments and the enterprises under their control could not get the power to act independently and operated within the overall state plan.

The more meaningful and thorough decentralization took place after 1978 during the reform era. Not only the control over most of the state-owned enterprises (SOEs) was delegated to local governments, but there was also fiscal decentralization which allowed local governments to retain a considerable share of the tax revenue they collected. It resulted in more budget autonomy for local governments and gave them incentives for reforms and accelerated economic growth.

Furthermore, one of the most significant elements of the post-1978 economic decentralization was partial devolution of foreign trade and investment matters to sub-national units – provinces and municipalities. Before 1979 the provincial governments could not sign economic agreements with foreign companies without getting approval from central government. The foreign trade and investment were tightly controlled by the Ministry of Foreign Trade (MFT) and the Foreign Trade Corporations (FTCs) under MFT. To lesser extent, various central industrial ministries and their subordinate import export corporations also handled foreign trade and investment activities. The reformist leaders led by Deng Xiaoping believed that economic growth depended on increasing import of advanced technology and equipment which lacked due to shortages of hard currency. The reformers criticized MFT for failing to vigorously promote Chinese exports due to its monopoly, red tape, and excessively tight control of foreign trade and investment. During early 1979, it was decided to decentralize the foreign trade system given the lack of progress in achieving high targets of the Ten-Year Plan (1976-1985). Decentralization promoted the foreign trade. Delegation of trade functions to local units allowed foreign customers to directly interact with local trade practices and firms. They could now purchase quality products easily without hindrances of the central bureaucracy. In the decentralized foreign trade regime, provinces and municipalities retained nearly one-third of their export earnings, which MFT completely kept previously. The MFT, however, retained power to export certain commodities such as coal, petroleum, and tungsten (Ellis, 1981).

There has also been some careful political decentralization such as in the Chinese cadre management system. China had a highly centralized cadre management system in the pre-reform era. After 1984 reforms, it is greatly decentralized; to the extent that the appointment or removal power over almost two-thirds of the cadre positions formerly controlled by Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) are now delegated to provincial and lower-level party committees. The 1984 cadre management reforms altered the two levels down the hierarchy rule and replaced it by the one level down rule. The party committees were to exercise their nomenklatura authority on positions only one level down the administrative hierarchy (Burns, 1987). The increasing participation of citizens or their representatives in public decision making in China also constitutes a part of political decentralization (Thogersen, 2010).

The overwhelming trend during reform era was of economic and political decentralization. However, there has also been sporadic re-centralization of political control under Jiang Zemin in the 1990s in the aftermath of Tiananmen Square protests in 1989 and under Xi Jinping after 2012 to eradicate corruption and factionalism from the Party State.

- ***Institutionalization of Power Succession***

Deng Xiaoping believed that the overconcentration of power under one man had led Chinese communist party system to the extent of becoming dysfunctional under Mao Zedong. During reform era, there was a visible trend towards institutionalization instead of personalization of power. Deng led the efforts to institutionalize a consensus based collective leadership system with regular turnover of the political elites to prevent dominance of any one leader or faction within CCP. This institutionalization has contributed enormously in making CCP's authoritarian regime more resilient through time and more adaptive to its development goals. Institutionalization, in the Chinese context, may be referred to as constraining power struggles within CCP through formal and informal rules. These rules stipulated under leadership of Deng Xiaoping made Chinese political system peaceful, orderly, stable, and efficient. An un-regularized power system during Mao's rule had given birth to violent power struggles in CCP. The Party congresses and National People's Congresses did not meet regularly and rarely followed the stipulated schedules. The top-level leaders in CCP were not constrained by any effectual term limits or age limits; Mao did not transfer power in his lifetime and held the supreme authority until his death. The regularization of power transition under Deng Xiaoping and his successors created a specific Chinese power succession system – which regularly transferred power at the top



even without democratic elections. Setting term limits and age limits for top political leaders is central part of this system.

Indeed, terminating the terms of topmost leaders was the most difficult venture for the CCP in its drive towards institutionalization, as there was no similar precedent in the Chinese history. Mao Zedong occupied the office of Party Chairman until his death. The career paths of high-level political leaders were just determined based on their loyalty to Mao and there were no formal rules to regulate their terms in office. The Chinese State constitution was amended in 1982 to introduce term limits and that put into practice a tenure system. According to the amended constitution, the top Party State leaders could not hold office for more than two consecutive terms of five years. It formally ended the lifetime tenure practice of Chinese leaders. Deng Xiaoping was the first CCP top leader who transferred party and state leadership posts, in his lifetime, to his successors. Deng's initiative put the term limit rule effectively into practice (Zheng, 2014). The term limit rule was effectively followed till March 2018, when under President Xi Jinping, the NPC amended the 1982 state constitution and set aside the term limit rule for the President of the PRC.

The early age limit rules were also introduced in 1982. The CCP established the retirement rules which stipulated that the minister-level leaders shall retire at 65 years of age and those at the deputy minister level shall retire at 60 years. This rule was then slowly strengthened and extended to control the power tenure of top leaders. The retirement age for members of China's top ruling body - Political Bureau Standing Committee (PBSC) - of the CCP was set to be 70 years in 1997. This new rule made Qiao Shi retire in 1998 from the position of Chairman of National People's Congress and from his concurrent position at PBSC. The age limit for topmost leaders was lowered to 68 in 2002.

The most significant impact of these rules has been a regular replacement of political leaders. The smooth and peaceful change of political leadership bodes well for the stability of a political system. A political system with swift round of political elites regularly inducts young leaders and tends to be stable. Political mobility also makes an authoritarian system more responsive to ever new challenges (Zheng, 2014).

- ***Political Meritocracy***

One of the major political factors that enabled China's rapid economic development was selection and elevation of competent, well qualified and professional leaders at all levels of party-state. Famous sociologist Daniel Bell highlighted the significance of capable leaders in these words: "one wants men

in political office who can govern well. The quality of life in any society is determined, in considerable measure, by the quality of leadership. A society that does not have its best men at the head of its leading institutions is a sociological and moral absurdity. (Bell, 2015)” Political philosophers across the world emphasized the significance of selecting the capable leaders who could govern the state well. In China, political meritocracy lost its value following the communist revolution due to ideological hype of class struggle. During Mao’s Cultural Revolution, factionalism based on patron-client ties became major determinant of political and bureaucratic appointments while legal and rational considerations were neglected. The patronage trend made it difficult to place the best-qualified people in executive positions.

The theory of political meritocracy was revived during 1960s in Singapore whose leaders insisted on the meritocratic political system to elevate qualified and capable leaders with long term political vision even by constraining the prevalent democratic process. In the reform era, a key priority of Deng and associates was to revive meritocratic ideal by putting talented people into leadership positions (Lieberthal, 1984). Instead of rushing to western liberal democratic model, China developed a new political system with a blend of its meritocratic tradition and democratic elements. Canadian political theorist Daniel A. Bell calls China’s new political system as “vertical democratic meritocracy”, which is democratic at bottom levels of government and incrementally more meritocratic at higher levels. Political meritocracy involves selection of political leaders based on examinations and their promotion based on performance evaluation at lower levels of government (Bell, 2015).

Deng Xiaoping realized the significance of competent leadership to push the country forward on the development and modernization path. He, therefore, set meritocratic criteria of “revolutionary, younger, more educated, and more technically specialized” for selection of political and bureaucratic leaders (Nathan, 2003). In the reform era, Party’s organization departments at all levels and the Ministry of Personnel under State Council generally followed this criterion in performing their cadre management responsibilities.

- ***Pragmatic Decision Making***

As China under Deng stepped back from the ideological frenzy of Mao’s era, it decided to march forward on pragmatic basis. Deng Xiaoping declared in the spring of 1978 that China “must seek truth from facts and make practice the sole criterion of truth” (Lieberthal, 1984). He oversaw several steps to enhance political system’s ability to perform pragmatically. The reformist leadership increased freedom of lower-ranking cadres to state their views and undertook

several bureaucratic initiatives in this regard which positively contributed to a more pragmatic decision-making. There came a newfound stress on rationally allocating responsibility among members of the Party and government committees and the head of each committee was required to seeking consensus and prohibited from simply imposing his views on the members. The management decisions within state enterprise were now largely made on economic rather than political grounds. The decentralization drive during reform era also facilitated the pragmatic decision making. Delegating decision-making powers in certain matters to lower levels of Party state resulted in better governance since the central organs in Beijing lacked adequate information and poorly coordinated with each other. Furthermore, educated individuals were also brought into executive positions. Many of those with a higher education who had been purged during Mao's last years were given responsible positions. Moreover, with creation of leading groups in political agencies, which were educationally more competent, use of hard data as an element in decision making increased. All these measures contributed to the system's ability to reach sound decisions and adapt to changing circumstances.

- ***Local Policy Experimentation***

The decentralization drive during reform era provided requisite institutional framework to experiment various reform policies at local levels. The local governments were provided with both fiscal autonomy and decision-making powers to initiate and implement reforms. China's regional governments were "enabled and empowered" to take ownership of economic activities within their jurisdiction. They were granted economic resources and the decision-making power on economic activities conducted in their territory. This was a direct outcome of regional decentralization. Regions were granted high degree of autonomy. On successful results of reform experiments, the reforms were then acknowledged and promoted nationwide by national government and the local leaders were rewarded with political promotions and economic bonuses. This incentive system motivated local leaders for reform experiments. One of the most distinctive features of China's reforms is the pivotal role played by the dynamic local governments.

The initiation and coordination of reforms by local governments had clear advantages of direct local knowledge. Regional officials enjoyed a local information advantage as they had direct knowledge of the site; while for central leaders the real-time information required communication, which could involve faults. The local officials are better placed to make right decisions at the right time by virtue of the knowledge advantage. The vital role of sub-national

governments is underlined by the fact that all major reform initiatives in three decades of Chinese reform came from sub-national governments. Land reforms, for instance, were initiated by Zhao Ziyang, Governor of Sichuan province and Wan Li, Governor of Anhui province in few of their villages in late 1970s. They introduced the household responsibility system in agriculture, when CCP's official policy only authorized the collective farming. Likewise, special economic zone reform was demanded in 1979 by Xi Zhongxun from Guangdong province when some central leaders opposed the idea. On initial successful results, these reforms were extended across the country and the reform founders were upgraded to the rank of central leaders.

The listed political factors provided a suitable political framework to carry out wide ranging economic reforms. These reforms mainly include Household Responsibility System (HRS) which revolutionized Chinese agriculture, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and the Township Village Enterprises (TVEs) both of which gave a major boost to its industry, reforms in China's State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and finally the gradual privatization of state firms. All these major economic reforms were carried out within a political framework of decentralization, local experimentation and an incentive system based on political promotions of regional officials who conducted successful reform experiments.

### **China's Development Lessons for Pakistan**

Pakistan's economy has been unable to take off on a sustainable development path. Political instability marked by frequent regime changes and shadowy elections have been adversely affecting national economy for decades now. Economic policies have also often been shifting with political changes. Agricultural productivity is undermined by several factors including high land concentration due to lack of land reforms resulting in dormancy of agricultural land, absentee farming and flourishing real estate sector (Moosvi, 2023). While a small class of traditionally privileged industrialist families and military grab state subsidies, small and medium enterprises lack government incentives. Unstable political landscape and changing economic policies have dodged the prospects of foreign direct investment in the country, including under the promising China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Rana, 2023).

China has a distinct kind of development trajectory based on its unique history, culture and political conditions. While its development model cannot be simply replicated by other developing countries like Pakistan, it still offers following

political takeaways for Pakistan including regional decentralization, political meritocracy and consultative institutions.

- ***Decentralization and Empowerment of Local Governments***

One thing which is quite evident about Chinese development experience, and which reflects in all of its reform programs is the leading role of state. The Chinese development is a state-led development with regional decentralization. The reforms in China have been based on empowerment of local governments. Local administration in China belongs to local governments which are economically self-contained with substantive fiscal powers and responsibilities. Provinces and local units like municipalities and counties control revenues and expenditures within their jurisdiction. Local economies are largely self-sufficient and do not depend on fund transfers from provincial governments. This decentralization has stimulated its economic growth and development. On the other hand, local administration in Pakistan is executed by centralized bureaucracy mostly without any representative local government at all or sometimes with local governments that lack any substantial powers. Divisions and districts, including large cities like Karachi, Hyderabad, Sukkur, Lahore, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Bahawalpur, Peshawar, Sawabi, Mardan, Quetta do not have effective local governments with sufficient fiscal and administrative powers. Consequently, local economies are not well organized and managed and depend heavily on funding from provincial and central grants and funds. The Pakistani state needs to devolve its economic, fiscal and administrative functions like promoting agriculture, business, industry; managing and documenting local economy, public service provision as well as tax collection to lower levels of government.

It is unfortunate that local governments in Pakistan have only been identified with the unconstitutional military rule. In fact, the three military regimes in Pakistan implemented local government reforms and each political government at Centre that followed ignored or undermined the local government reforms (Ali Cheema, 2006). It is time for major political parties in Pakistan to institutionalize a strong commitment to a functional local government system. A Constitutional amendment to provide recognition and protection to local government bodies as a legal third tier of state is necessary. After 13 years of 18th amendment in force, which provided federal to provincial devolution, it is long overdue to undertake provincial to local devolution. There is need for sufficient devolution of administrative decision making power and fiscal powers to local governments, who are accountable to provincial government. Local

governments with more autonomy may have potential to become powerful engines of growth and development as in China.

- ***Political Meritocracy***

Pakistan needs to follow the Chinese ideal of political meritocracy to have capable leaders at the helm of national affairs. It can be achieved by stipulating criteria of age, qualification, and experience for the legislative and executive positions. While minimum age for legislative candidature is fixed, there is no retirement age stipulated for parliamentarians. It is recommended to introduce retirement age for parliamentarians to pave the way for younger leaders. Similarly, the qualification criteria for parliamentary candidates were introduced during Musharraf regime but was annulled afterwards. Political parties also need to follow meritocracy to promote capable persons to their leading positions.

- ***Consultative Institutions and Consultative Governance***

There should be constitutional institutions at least at the federal and provincial levels, apart from legislative assemblies, to conduct multiparty political consultations to help build political consensus and achieve political stability. Practically, it should be mandatory under constitution, for every newly elected government in the Centre and Provinces, to hold political consultative conferences annually to forge consensus on crucial national issues. Pakistan already has a tradition of holding All Parties Conferences (APCs) on important national issues. Now is time to institutionalize this practice through a constitutional provision. In the current conditions of a polycrisis, there is an urgent need to reform our political culture by encouraging political dialogue and engagement under constitutional aegis. This measure may help cure the longstanding ailment of political instability and tensions.

Despite being a democracy, Pakistan has no practice of consulting professional experts and think tanks in making national policies nor does it have any mechanism of involving ordinary citizens in local matters. The seasoned economist and Vice Chancellor PIDE, Nadeem-ul- Haque, during an interview with The Centrum Media emphasized the significance of consultative governance for Pakistan's growth and development. He underscored the need for political leaders to consult academics, intellectuals and researchers before policy making (Nadeem-ul-Haque, 2023). Pakistan may learn from China's consultative style of governance and institute mechanisms of consulting think tanks, intellectuals, technical professionals while making public policies.

Moreover, Pakistan should create consultative forums at the local level to involve ordinary citizens in making local policy decisions such as in prioritizing

local development projects to improve governance standards. Such forums should be designed to pool opinions, resolve local social problems, gather support for local projects, reach consensus on policy, and order priorities. All local issues of development and governance including health, education, safety and security and infrastructure projects should be subjects of deliberation. Local government leaders or bureaucrats should oversee agenda setting and devising the procedure for these consultative or deliberative meetings. The political and bureaucratic officials should answer the questions of participants and adjust the policies considering public opinion. The city and district government bureaucrats, in addition to holding ‘Khuli Kachehris’ to listen to public complaints, should organize regular public gatherings to consult citizens on local growth and development. Citizens should also be given a role in deciding promotion, transfer, or demotion of bureaucrats at local level, by holding citizen evaluation meetings in which public evaluates performance of bureaucratic officials. Such meetings may be important source of public accountability of government officials and may lead to improvement in governance.

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