The expansion of 3-wheeler transport services: the case of ‘Qingqis’ in Pakistan

Paul Starkey
University of Reading, UK

Dr Zahara Batool
University of Leeds, UK

M. Waqas Younis
University of Lahore, Pakistan

Growth in 3-wheelers and ‘auto-rickshaws’
- Motorised 3-wheelers have been used in small numbers since 1884
- In the 1930s and 1940s, they were mainly for urban small freight
- In the 1950s, ‘Bajaj’ 3-seater auto-rickshaws were launched in India
- This led to widespread use of auto-rickshaws as low-cost taxis
- Auto-rickshaws are now found in Africa, Asia and Latin America

Motorcycle rickshaws in Pakistan: beneficial yet controversial
In Pakistan, motorcycle-based 3-wheelers started to be assembled in the 1990s by Plum Qingqi. ‘Qingqi’ became a generic term for all motorcycle rickshaws.
- Pakistan now has two million motorcycle rickshaws, and they are increasing.
- Half of the bodies have been made by informal sector, un-authorised workshops.
- They operate route-based transport services in rural and peri-urban areas.
- Typically, motorcycle rickshaws are criticised by non-users, as dangerous, non-compliant, low-status vehicles that should be banned.
- They are praised by users as providing low-cost, convenient transport services, with women and children being major beneficiaries.
- Increasing use of motorcycles by men is reducing demand for transport services
- On village-to-town roads, passengers are few and buses are not economically viable.
- Motorcycle 3-wheelers are the only low-cost transport services available to villagers.
- There are numerous regulatory issues relating to these vehicles, their manufacturing standards and their operations (including over-loading).
- There is much non-compliance with regulations and lack of enforcement of safe driving practices for ALL forms of transport including 3-wheelers and motorcycles

Crucial gender issue
While men increasingly use motorcycles, 3-wheelers are indispensable for rural women who use them for 55% of women’s journeys on transport services.

School transport
Motorcycle 3-wheelers with sideways facing seats are often used to take children to school. This is considered safer than travelling on the backs of motorcycles.

Alternative vehicles
Motorcycle 3-wheelers may be gradually replaced by battery-powered vehicles with three or four wheels.

This research project is being implemented by IMC Worldwide. At the request of the National Transport Research Centre (NTRC), it was commissioned by the Research for Community Access Partnership (ReCAP) funded by UK Aid.