

DEVELOPMENT OF BANGLADESH-CHINA RELATIONS (1975-2017): PRIORITIES AND REALITIES

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Introduction

The Relationship between Bangladesh and China dated back to more than thousand years; and the affable relationship continued through centuries by the promising bilateral trade activities and socio-cultural exchanges between these two countries along the Southern Silk route and Water Silk route.¹ In order to acknowledge such a friendly relationship, China, after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, had given recognition to Bangladesh in 1975; and formally commenced diplomatic relationship by opening up a consulate in Dhaka in October 1976. From the very beginning of this diplomatic relationship, various politico-economic and socio-cultural essentials were exchanged and disseminated between these two countries. Since the inception of the foreign relationship between Bangladesh and China in 1975, these two countries have celebrated 40 years of their relationship in the year of 2015. The relationship between Bangladesh and China demonstrates a peaceful and vigorous atmosphere on the basis of mutual social, economic and political activities. With a view to maintaining affable relationship, Bangladesh has wholeheartedly supported *One China policy* in the international arena like the United Nations Organization. Such an exemplary support from Bangladesh has helped China become a trusted friend thus providing significance to the Bangladeshi diplomatic issues in the world forum. But, at the very beginning, this solicitous type of relationship was not so warm and it had experienced ups and downs for a period of time. Therefore, this paper sheds light on the argumentative issues to evaluate the historical development of bilateral relationship between these two countries. In order to understand their bilateral and multi-dimensional relationship properly, it has also attempted to show the real scenario of diplomatic, political and economic ties between Bangladesh and China.

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Theoretical Groundwork and Methodology

Understanding and examining the reality of Chinese foreign policy along with its top priorities in terms of dealing with Bangladeshi diplomatic policies will be a challenging task. But if we critically examine the nature of Chinese attitudes to the third world country like Bangladesh, then we would be able to evaluate its approach to Bangladesh through realistic overview and its applications. According to Colin Elman, the dominant worldview is a concerned thinking of realism.² Kenneth Waltz (1979) observation of realistic foreign policy depends on offensive and defensive formation of realism that may explain the case of China policy and its world politics. Waltz's defensive realism indicates to build up moderate policies and to accomplish domestic and foreign policy objectives of a country to achieve diplomatic goals in the world bodies.³ This is also observed by Colin and Jack Donnelly; and used as a relationship building framework between Bangladesh and China.⁴ However, it is argued that Bangladesh-China relationship can be evaluated within the theoretical framework of realistic view point. Keeping this in mind, this paper has summarized relevant empirical findings and analyzed arguments in the process of making foreign policy decisions between China and its tiny friend Bangladesh. This paper is mostly based on secondary sources and the researcher's own knowledge and experience. The main objective of this paper is to deliver a comprehensive study and provide a critical analysis of the multi-dimensional diplomatic, socio-economic and political relationship between China and Bangladesh. The objective also includes finding out the diplomatic challenge and its influence on foreign policy of Bangladesh. In order to conduct a reliable research on the reality of relationship between Bangladesh and China, the researcher has followed qualitative method. While conducting this research work, a good number of books and original documents including news articles, journal articles and encyclopedias were also consulted.

In order to examine the foreign policy of Bangladesh and China, the researcher has analyzed the key issues in relation to the applicability of respective foreign policies. To make it much more comprehensible, further political, economic, military and socio-cultural ties between Bangladesh-China have been discussed below:

1. Diplomatic Relations

In terms of diplomatic relations, Bangladesh has a glorious past with the Asian Giant China from the ancient past. Those relations were

maintained till the Pakistani era and several diplomatic missions were exchanged between themselves. However, this relationship was disturbed due to Chinese alignment with Pakistan during the liberation war of 1971 and good relationship of East Bengal (Bangladesh) with India and the USSR. On the other hand, the global politics of USA and USSR and regional politics of India, China and Pakistan also set the fate of Bangladesh.⁵ For those reasons aforementioned, after the independence of Bangladesh China, Pakistan and their allied friends didn't give recognition to Bangladesh for a long. Finally Pakistan gave recognition to Bangladesh in 1974 for arranging OIC conference in its premises, but China did not recognize Bangladesh until the brutal death of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in 15 August, 1975.⁶ Even after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, when Bangladesh tried to enroll its name in the United Nations and other world forum, China took its stance against the membership of Bangladesh and exercised its Veto Power while Bangladesh tried to obtain the membership of the United Nations in favor of Pakistan.⁷ John F. Copper mentioned that, China did these due to their concern about Tibet and Xinjiang and also concerned about the future of Taiwan.⁸ According to Copper, China was anxious about the fate of Tibet, Xinjiang and Taiwan; and they thought that if Bangladesh could receive membership in the United Nations, then China's hostile parts might be influenced by the tidal force of independence in Bangladesh which would ultimately destroy the integrity of China.⁹ But, after the signing of a tri-party treaty on 9th April, 1974 between Bangladesh-India and Pakistan in New Delhi, China stopped its opposing attitude in the world forum and finally gave recognition to Bangladesh on 4th October, 1975 by opening up a consulate in Dhaka in 1976, which paved the way for the formal inception of diplomatic relationship between Bangladesh and China.¹⁰ After the inception of the diplomatic relationship between Bangladesh and China, both the countries had maintained friendly relationship between themselves. But, factually the relationship was dependent on their foreign policy. For these reasons, a brief introduction needs to be given about the foreign policy of China towards Bangladesh and foreign policy of Bangladesh towards China in this regard. This part will be focusing on China's foreign policy pattern over the time and its implications for Bangladesh.

a. Chinese Foreign Policy towards Bangladesh

Foreign policy pursued by a country is usually considered as the extended version of its domestic policy where national concern always gets first priority. So, the duty of analyzing foreign policy of a particular country is challenging and ambitious that requires rigorous kind of procedures of managing foreign policy- the actors and their influences shape and determine the outcomes of the policy taken or implemented.¹¹ According to the international relations theory, Chinese foreign policy can be categorized into two segments. First one is pursuing with assertive techniques to protect its political and economic security, and strategic interests to become the dominant power in the region- Asia. And second one is to trying confidently upholding its policies towards the United States and European powers.¹² Before emerging as the People's Republic of China replacing the then Republic of China in October 1949, China had experienced imperialistic aggression and repression for more than 100 years.¹³ Therefore, preservation of the heard-earned independence becomes the basic principle of Chinese foreign policy which has never been changed after 1949. After the foundation of PRC by the leadership of Mao Zedong, China adopted Policy of “Lean to One Side” (1949-1959). At that time, China built a philosophy of maintaining one to one relationship with the other nations.¹⁴ But in the early 1960s, the Chinese government started to reconsider the changing pattern of the balance of power, which was shifting from Soviet Union to the United States. Chinese foreign policy then began to focus on maintaining a communication channel with Washington was commonly known as the policy of Revolution towards Self-Reliance (1960-1969).¹⁵ At that time, China had given priority in maintaining a strong coalition with the Third World and it came into the light when China was present at the Bandung Conference of Asian and African states. China had taken strategies to provide support “national liberation struggle” for Third World countries into a 3rd force in global politics during the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁶ During this period China started a friendly relationship with Pakistan and as a part of the then Pakistan, Bangladesh (the then East Pakistan) also maintained friendly relations with China. Plenty of great leaders from Bangladesh visited China. Among them Hussain Shoheed Shuhrawardy, Mawlana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani and Father of the Nations Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman paid two times political visit in China.¹⁷ On the other hand Zhou En Lai, the then Prime Minister of China paid a friendly

visit in East Bengal and received the most prestigious *Honors Causa* 'Doctor of Laws' from the Oxford of the East, University of Dhaka in 1956.¹⁸ That friendly relationship was continued till the War of Independence of 1971.¹⁹

In the early 1970s Mao Zedong lifted restrictions over the United States to improve bilateral relations perceiving grave threat from the Soviet Union. As a result Henry Kissinger had visited to Beijing in July and October 1971 which was then followed by high-profile meetings with the Chinese leaders by Nixon in February 1972 to extend mutual cooperation over Soviet threat issues.²⁰ That was the inauguration of U.S.-China-Soviet triangular diplomacy though later Mao did not pursue the strategy of *détente* (cooperation) with the U.S. to its fullest coverage. Mao wanted to make China the role model for the "liberation" of all the exploited nations and inhabitants of the world throughout his life.²¹ As a friend of Soviet-Indian block, Bangladesh suffers some sort of mistrust from China and on the other hand due to Pakistan policy China was working in favor of Pakistan and opposing Bangladesh joining to the world bodies like United Nations. Another factors also worked in behind the opposing of Bangladesh by China for Soviet influence on this country and to eradicate the risk of movement in Xinjian and Tibet.²² According to V. K. Tyagi, these hostile situations prevailed till the brutal murder of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the Father of the Nations, Bangladesh. Because, after the assassination, Bangladesh come out from the Soviet-Indian block and gradually started participation in the shadow of the U.S.A and its partners, which gave a confidence to China. And after the assassination of Bangabandhu China gave recognition to Bangladesh and started diplomatic mission.²³

After Mao's decease in 1976, Deng Xiaoping (1978-1990) the architect of China's foreign policy became China's de facto leader following a small power movement.²⁴ Continued the notion of CCP (Chinese Communist Party) Deng took initiatives to promote a planning for China's rapid economic progress.²⁵ In 1982, Deng took a sovereign overseas policy at the 12th National Congress of CCP which aimed at balancing between the two superpowers (the USA and the USSR) and reducing China's support to the Third World to make an end to the revolutionary movements abroad.²⁶ Under Deng's leadership China gradually appeared as a promising superpower by adopting the policy of

*Low-profile Diplomacy.*²⁷ During this period Bangladesh-China ties became started in smooth motion and it has created a tri-polar balance in this region. Because, Dhaka repeatedly declared its policy to seek balanced ties with the entire major actors of world politics like the USA, Soviet Union and China as well. Beijing actually accepted that stand to offset which had eradicated Soviet hegemonic position in South Asia and also Soviet-Indian influence in Bangladesh.²⁸ Due to Chinese friendly policy of Bangladesh and their low profile foreign policy, China started trade and commerce in Bangladesh which enhanced their ties.

With the cease of the Cold War, China carried the *Tao guang yang hui* (韬光养晦) policy- concealing its capacities, focusing on public strength-building, in addition to propositioning its time setup by Deng Xiaoping in early 1990s.³⁹ To generate a nonviolent regional atmosphere and favorable economic progress, China devised a ‘*mulinzhengce*’ (i.e., good neighborhood policy) for maintaining ties with other Asian countries.³⁰ China’s foreign policy behavior has altered towards a further forceful direction after it has experienced quick economic enlargement over the previous three decades and after it surpassed Japan as the world’s 2nd biggest economy within 2010.³¹

Assuming the position of CPC chief in late 2012 incumbent Chinese president Xi Jinping announced the branded of his administration as *The Chinese Dream* to put forward by the policy of Hu Jintao *Harmonious World*.³² This foreign policy motto was adopted by the current leader of PRC that resemblances *American Dream*.³³ Under “Chinese Dream” prophecy the foreign policy of China has been conceptualized into two segments, one is “New Type of International Relations” (NTIR) and the other is “New Type of Great Power Relations” (NTGPR). Using NTIR which looks like a provisional Chinese overseas policy initiative, China is trying to develop relationship with Russia and India for preserving mutual core interests. On the other hand using NTGPR concept China is trying to build incorporative relationship between key powers in the 21st century. Thus, *Chinese dream* can be thought of as a revision of China’s foreign policy approach from ‘keeping low profile’ to ‘appropriate profile’.

During the period of this research (1976-2017), China with the abovementioned foreign policy, acted specially neighborhood policy and soft power policy to the South Asian nations. By focusing on the neighborhood policy, China adopted policy of peace and stability to the

South Asian nations.³⁴ Currently China's policy towards South Asia is concerned about 1. Preserving Chinese interest to the world body, 2. Improving bilateral relations with South Asia (which dependent basically on three factors, they are; a. Sino-Indian relations, b. Sino-Pakistan relations and c. relations with other South Asian states and d. special attention to peace and stability of South Asia).³⁵ China's policy towards South Asia is an ongoing notion of theory and practice of contemporary geo-political changes of the world, which also depends on various challenges like trust/mistrust, universal prosperity, regional peace and progress and mutual developments. Though, some scholars opined that China is now bearing soft power diplomacy towards South Asian nations and working on youth exchange program, cultural exchange program and enhancing people to people connections. Another scholar noticed that, China's continuing goals of South Asia are to balance India and preserve Chinese interest in this region though there is a perspective of India-Pakistan and China-Pakistan relations.³⁶ Now it is also shown that the relationship lies within the fold of China-Myanmar relationship due to Rohingya issues.

Adopting neighborhood policy and soft power policy to the South Asian states especially in Bangladesh, China always formulated its friendly and peaceful policy.³⁷ So, from the very beginning, China followed peaceful and harmonious foreign policy to its near neighboring country.³⁸ But geographically, Bangladesh is covered by India of its three sides and there are 4,096 kilometer border crossing between the two states has good relations with India from the historic past. According to the inland demand, Bangladesh is semi dependent upon its big neighbor, India. So, according to the dependency on India the nature of Bangladesh-China relations are interrelated to the relationship of Bangladesh and India.³⁹ In this regard, when China has adopted any foreign policy towards Bangladesh it should make remarks on the Bangladesh-India relationship that means 'India Factor'. According to Zhang Xianyi, the honorable Chinese Ambassador in Bangladesh, China despite some barriers always maintained mutual respect, good neighborhood, and friendly ties with its trusted friend Bangladesh. China always seeks common ground while resolving differences remain the basic and significant characteristics of state to state dealings.⁴⁰ He also mentioned, in recent years China also believes in people to people connection from both parties and they believe that it will strengthen the friendly relations between Bangladesh and China

and nowadays China's foreign policy towards Bangladesh is in a new avenue of friendship. Actually to implement the Chinese interest in South Asia and to furnish *Chinese Dream* to the world order China as strategically and politically keeping the friendly relationship with Bangladesh and taking initiatives to made an interfaith relationship.⁴¹

Bangladesh Foreign Policy towards China

Foreign Policy of a state is principally an outcrop of its social, economic and political impulse in world politics. According to *Business Dictionary.com*, Foreign Policy is a course of accomplishment which implement by one country with regard to its state connections with other states. Foreign policies of states are established as a methodical way to contract with various issues that may occur with other states.⁴² According to the definition as a state, every country must need to have a foreign policy of its own. From that standpoint Bangladesh as an independent state endure a foreign policy to deal with the other nations. According to the Constitution of Bangladesh, the foreign policy of Bangladesh holds the policies prescribed bellow:

- a. As a sovereign state, Bangladesh should base its international relations on the principles of respect for national sovereignty, and equality, non-interference in the internal affairs of the other countries, peaceful settlements of international disputes, and respects for international law and the principles pronounced in the United Nations Charter and basis of those principles.
- b. The state shall endeavor to consolidate, preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic solidarity.⁴³

On the basis of the motto, Bangladesh nourishes its foreign policy as "Friendship to all, malice to none" in the world body and working together. For this reason after the independence Bangladesh, it adopted various foreign policies for the last 48 years due to its transitional period. According to Imtiaz Ahmed, Bangladesh carried several stages to develop its foreign policy. According to him, the first stage could be considered as the Diplomacy of Recognition; second stage was Economic Diplomacy; third stage is about Soft Power Diplomacy which is working with energy, climate diplomacy and cultural diplomacy.⁴⁴ In the first step, Bangladesh was working hard to receive its recognition from the sovereign states.

After winning the independence war against Pakistan in 1971, which was aided by India and its friend Soviet Russia, many countries due to the world politics did not recognize Bangladesh as a sovereign state.⁴⁵ During that period China as a trusted friend to Pakistan and a power to anti Soviet allies did not recognize Bangladesh at once and finally recognize Bangladesh in 1975 and started its mission in Dhaka from 1976.⁴⁶

After getting recognition from the world bodies, Bangladesh as a lower income country started working for its second foreign policy to develop its economy. To fulfill this policy Bangladesh attached positively with China and several diplomatic initiatives had been furnished. To make a strong diplomatic relation, Bangladesh adopted a de facto looking *East Policy* and *One China policy* to bring itself closer to the Chinese part.⁴⁷ During the time of being, China started engaging to the economic development program of Bangladesh with significant contributions to its communication and infrastructural development.⁴⁸ With the business dealing and development work China started aid and investment in Bangladesh. Now total FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) of China is higher than that of other outward FDI's in Asia and Africa. According to the Board of Investment of Bangladesh, (BIB) there were 219 foreign investment projects running till 2011 and a large number of them from China.⁴⁹ That indicates the great economic relations between Bangladesh and China.

In the third stage, Bangladesh adopted the policy of energy and climate diplomacy as a part of Soft Power Diplomacy. Taking the shortage the energy sector in perspective Bangladesh undertakes the policy of energy and climate diplomacy to ensure its energy climate haggard like; flood, erosion, cyclones, and storms.⁵⁰ According to Chinese ambassador Mr. Li Jun, China wholly understands and respects the anxiety of Bangladesh over it. In the international negotiate bodies, China always acted as a supportive force for Bangladesh and tried to carry some responsibility in its own.⁵¹ In this regard, Bangladesh and China exchanged two letters. The main issue of that exchange program was to exchange on technical teachings to the 2nd Batch of disaster salvage and sharing equipment's and related feasibility learning of flood prevention and organization in Bangladesh, which can play a potential role to enhance the environmental security of Bangladesh.⁵² With this, in the last visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in June 2014, both Bangladesh and China

decided to undertake realistic initiatives towards security, encouragement and expansion of marine wealth and its further developments. They also made consensus to obey the international law through maritime specific survey, explore and concentrate on the acute climate issues and observing transformation on ocean acidification.⁵³ In this visit, China also agreed to support Bangladesh in identifying climate change barriers as well more cooperation on maintaining natural calamities, which also includes urban adversity rescue activities, assistance and rehabilitation support between the both countries.⁵⁴

With the above discussion it's give us a partial data of Bangladesh policy towards China and its impact on the common life of Bangladesh which is more charitable and more furnished. On the other hand Bangladesh as a peaceful state carrying the friendship relationship due to preserve its economic, social, cultural and political interests. According to Bangladesh Embassy, Beijing, China:

Bangladesh-China relations are based on shared values, commonalities in core national objectives, mutual respects, and similitude in history ... both our countries relentlessly strive to ensure peace and prosperity for their respective peoples through hard work and international collaboration with a spirit of mutual respect and share.⁵⁵

Munshi Fayeze Ahmed, an ex-Ambassador of Bangladesh who worked in the Beijing Embassy of Bangladesh said, "the relationship between Bangladesh and China is a time-tested, all-weather friendship."⁵⁶ According to the Chairman of *Centre for Foreign Affair Study* and former ambassador to China of Bangladesh Mr. Asfaque Rahman, China is a very safe choice for determining foreign policy. Bangladesh should reward China for their policy towards their neighbors. China works with their neighbors on the basis of mutual understanding. As a responsible Power, China has been building a very good relationship with its neighboring countries in various aspects that includes; trade and commerce, cultural affairs, investment and security relationship etc...

2. Political Relations

China and Bangladesh is now a trusted partner in world politics. Since 1976, the political relationship between Bangladesh and China has been running with various folds, which can be defined by a mixture of noteworthy factors. Firstly, the small state dilemma; secondly, ideological

and regional basis; thirdly, same way of path which means developing and less developing process of the both countries; fourthly, Chinese policy of 'Peaceful Co-existence' and finally, keen interest of the government of the both countries.⁵⁷ According to Chinese Ambassador Mr. Li Jun, closer comprehensive partnership between Bangladesh and China from strategic point of friendship, parity and mutual settlement are the fundamental motto of Bangladesh-China political relations.⁵⁸ With those policies both Bangladesh and China enhance their bilateral relations in various aspects. It was formulated by nurtured through high level frequent visit and share some common issues in international politics. By adopting those policies during the period of Ziaur Rahman (1977-1981) an overseas policy of non-alignment and vigorously developed good relation with China has been carried out.⁵⁹ To improve the relation, he made a visit to China in January 1977 as the Chief Martial Law Administrator and in July 1980, when treaties of covering loans and aviation's was signed by the both countries.⁶⁰ There was a reciprocal visit by the Chinese Vice-Premier Li Xiannian to Bangladesh which led to further development between the ties. During the period of Ziaur Rahman, the agreement of Economic and Technological Cooperation, agreement of Trade Payment, agreement on Loans and agreement of Aviation Transportation were signed between the administration of Bangladesh and the management of China followed by a discussion about the allocation of Ganges water issues was signed.

After the inception of relationship by General Zia assuming the state power on March 24, 1982, General H. M. Ershad (1982-1990) paid great attention to maintain bilateral relationship with China. This can be guessed from the fact that he visited China five times; 1st time in Nov 1982, 2nd in July 1985, 3rd in July 1987, 4th in Nov 1988 and finally in June 1990.⁶¹ During Ershad regime Chinese President Li Xiannian paid a friendly visit in Bangladesh on March 1986 and Nov 1989. Premier Li Peng also paid an official visit to Bangladesh during this period. Within those visits several agreements on mutual cooperation and agreement of trade were signed. In 1983, a joint commission was formulated between Bangladesh and China due to expansion of economic relations, exchange of trade, technical and scientific cooperation's. From that period, within the field of trade relations military affairs in border perspective was set up and Bangladesh purchased military weapons and got technical support from China.⁶² President Ershad maintained whole hearted good relationship with China during his government, on the other side China also maintained warm

relations with its counterpart. So, some researchers considered Ershad's regime as a breakthrough in the relationship between Bangladesh and China.⁶³

In March 1991, there was a major change occurred in Bangladesh, that was the beginning of the democratic government in Bangladesh. After the wining of the general election of 1991, Begum Khaleda Zia upheld the state policy of maintaining and improving relations with China. After securing the state power of Bangladesh Khaleda paid an official visit in China in June 1991 and got recognition from the China.⁶⁴ Later in October 2001, June 2002 and May 2004 she paid official visits in China. In 2002 the Premier of China Mr. Zhu Rongji made a visit in Bangladesh. In April 2005 Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao made another fruitful visit and both countries declared the year 2005 as the "*Bangladesh-China Friendship Year*". Besides these, many visits of high officials of the two parties including Speaker, Ministers and Party leaders of China and Bangladesh paved the way for good relations. During Begum Zia's 10 years regime (1991-1996 & 2001-2006), various MOUs, Agreements and bilateral deeds were signed between the two states.

After ascending to the state power, the incumbent Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina maintained a very strong relation with China. During her three times regime (1996-2001, 2009-14 and 2014 to till date), she tried to keep very friendly relationship with China. For this reason, after securing the state power in 1996, she paid an official visit in September 1996 and expressed gratitude to China. Later she continued her visit and met Chinese leaders in September 2000, March 2010, June 2014 and June 2019. In those visits, she tried to stress on maintaining very cordial relations and signed various bilateral agreements. From the China's side Mr. Li Peng, Chairman of the Standing Committee of NPC (National People's Congress of China) visited Bangladesh in April 1999. The then Vice-President of China Mr. Xi Jinping made an official visit to Bangladesh in June 2010. Member of CPC Political Bureau, Secretary of CPC Beijing Municipality Committee, Yunan Province Governor, High officials paid a visit to Bangladesh during this time span. Currently, Bangladesh-China are enjoying the prime time and so that the development agendas are furnishing in right time with right person.⁶⁵ In the present, China is going to implement its 12th Five Year plan with scientific improvement and economic development, on the other hand,

Bangladesh is going to implement its *Digital Bangladesh* and *Vision 2021* to become a developed nation where China as a development partner wants to work with Bangladesh to fulfill its dreams.⁶⁶ Apart from that, in May 2015, Chinese Vice-Premier Liu Yandong visited in Bangladesh and paid a short visit in Dhaka University and North South University and gave public lectures about educational development program and bilateral affiliations between the two countries. The President of China His Highness Xi Jinping made a friendly visit in Bangladesh in 2016 and the Premier of China Mr. Li Keqiang is also interested to visit Bangladesh in the near future which would enhance this bilateral relationship and open up newer horizon of the socio-cultural relations.

3. Economic Relations

Bangladesh and China have been maintaining a healthy economic relationship through three silk Routes from the historical past. However, China's great economic rise in last three decades and the steady economic growth of Bangladesh since the early 1990s have strengthened the trade relation and expanded the economic ties between the two nations. Currently China is a great economic partner of Bangladesh. To continue their economic relation, they established a joint economic commission in Nov 2, 1983. As an instance of economic relations, several agreements of economic cooperation were signed between the two countries. According to the Board of Investment of Bangladesh up to April 2015, there are 291 Chinese projects are constituting investment in Bangladesh and that of 642 million US\$ and among the projects 104 are conducted by complete FDI from China and 187 are in joint venture program.⁶⁷ There are 26 Chinese projects are also in operation in April 2015 while 10 other projects were under implementation and 8 are in the pipeline. As mentioned above the Chinese Government had already funded Bangladesh in their big projects like China-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge, China-Bangladesh Friendship Centre and so on. With these, China provided soft loans to Bangladesh to establish its Detail Area Plan (DAP) project in 2005, Friendship Exhibition Centre project in 2008.⁶⁸ China was interested in funding Bangladesh for the Padma Bridge project but the Government of Bangladesh has decided to establish this project by its internal funding, though the project was furnishing by the direct technical support of China.

China is the major business partner to Bangladesh according to its imports and exports. Though, during the years of 1974-1991 there was a very poor trade relations and economic exchange between Bangladesh and China. In that period there have just \$1.41 billion free trade and \$232 million barter trade export from China to Bangladesh and \$55 million free trade and \$272 million barter trade export have been done from Bangladesh to China.⁶⁹ From the mid of 1980's, the bilateral trading activities are being enhanced each year. Bilateral trade relations between Bangladesh and China witnessed quick expansion in the last decade. Total trade volume between the two countries exceed 10 billion US\$ in the calendar year of 2013. Among them Bangladesh exported 605 million US\$ and imported 9.71 billion US\$ products from China.⁷⁰ Though there have a disparity in the mutual trade relation is in favor of China is existing till date. A chart showing bellow last 25 years bilateral trade statistics between Bangladesh and China:⁷¹

Table 3.1 Bilateral Trade Statistics

Fiscal Year	Export (BD to China)	Import (China to BD)	Trade Ratio
1990-1991	2,012 (\$25.15)	9,929.6 (\$124.12)	1:4.93
1991-1992	1,696 (\$21.2)	11,725.8 (\$146.91)	1:6.92
1992-1993	1,306.4 (\$16.33)	17,204 (\$215.05)	1:13.16
1993-1994	516 (\$6.45)	16,325.6 (\$204.07)	1:31.63
1994-1995	955.2 (\$11.94)	23,945 (\$299.32)	1:25.06
1995-1996	1,464.8 (\$18.31)	48,048 (\$600.6)	1:32.80
1996-1997	1,550.4 (\$19.38)	51,312 (\$641.4)	1:33.09
1997-1998	4,630.4 (\$57.88)	49,771.2 (\$622.14)	1:10.74
1998-1999	2,220.8 (\$27.76)	43,726.4 (\$546.58)	1:19.68
1999-2000	652 (\$8.15)	42,711.2 (\$533.89)	1:65.50
2000-2001	764.8 (\$9.56)	53,400 (\$667.5)	1:69.82
2001-2002	443.2 (\$5.54)	61,792 (\$772.4)	1:139.42
2002-2003	1,560 (\$19.50)	75,060.8 (\$938.26)	1:48.11
2003-2004	2692.05 (\$45.65)	66762.83 (\$1132.72)	1:24.81
2004-2005	3448.85 (\$56.07)	101092.00 (\$1643.77)	1:28.58
2005-2006	4324.96 (\$64.35)	139485.90 (\$2078)	1:32.31

2006-2007	6420.35 (\$92.97)	177587.9 (\$2572.62)	1:27.67
2007-2008	7336.49 (\$106.95)	215178 (\$3136.70)	1:29.33
2008-2009	6677.73 (\$97.06)	237461 (\$3451.47)	1:35.56
2009-2010	12357.69 (\$178.63)	264217.9 (\$3819.28)	1:21.38
2010-2011	22750.06 (\$319.66)	420796 (\$5912.55)	1:18.49
2011-2012	31793.45 (\$401.94)	508867 (\$6433.21)	1:16
2012-2013	36612.95 (\$458.12)	505460 (\$6324)	1:13.8
2013-14	57927.35 (\$746.2)	586805.4 (\$7559.00)	1: 10.13
2014-15	61437.28 (\$791.00)	639456 (\$8232.99)	1:10.41
2015-2016	855092 (\$10,427.95)
2016-2017	1023760 (\$12,484.88)

*The chart shows millions in Bangladeshi Taka (in US Dollars)

This table mentioned above is showing huge trade gap between the two countries bilateral dealings. The table shows Bangladeshi trade volume has increased 5 folds in the last 10 years. In order to overcome this vast trade deficit, China grants a number of economic aids and signed the Asia-Pacific Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) to eliminate tariff obstacles from various products imported from Bangladesh to China.⁷² To reduce this big trade gap, Bangladesh Government always requests China to provide duty free access of its goods to China. As a result of bilateral diplomatic dealings, China said, China would build up closer comprehensive partnership with Bangladesh and they had already exempted 4,721 products duty free enter in Chinese market since 1 July, 2010 under the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA). Bangladesh also exported duty free products in China \$690mn in the last three years which was 45% of its total export amount and the duty saved value was \$361.5mn.⁷³ Considering these, Bangladesh needs comprehensive and sympathetic consideration to improve huge deficit of trade gap with China.

4. Military Relationship

In recent years Bangladesh enjoys a broad-based cooperation with China in defense sector. Bangladesh armed forces maintains a very cordial and friendly relations with People's Liberation Army (PLA), China. High level delegations from both sides conduct visits at regular interval. In the recent years, Chief of all three services from Bangladesh paid visits to

China on several occasions. The Chief of Army Staff of Bangladesh also paid a visit in China in December 2015. Every time they had elaborate discussion on bilateral defense cooperation with the senior military officials in China, including members of the Central Military Commission. A sophisticated Chinese armed forces delegation headed by the Vice Chairman of Central Military Commission of China (CMC), General Xu Qiliang paid an official visit in Bangladesh from 11 May to 13 May 2014. During his visit four protocol/agreements were signed. China has been playing a great role to the development of security in Bangladesh. In the sector of military equipment and military training of Bangladesh, China has been playing more important role than any other country in the region. Bangladesh and China have signed a Defense Cooperation Agreement in 2002 that have helped the south Asian country to institutionalize and modify the prevailing concurrences in the defense sector. The deal has assured to provide Bangladesh a complete outlines for collaboration in training, preservation and some other areas of armed forces hardware manufacture. Being India as a powerful neighboring country, this agreement was supposed to be an insurance policy for Bangladesh and from Chin's part it was an attempt to building pressure on India by strengthening the Military relationship with India's immediate neighbor Bangladesh. According to Ruksana Kibria a noted international relation analyst, the terms of the stated deals were intentionally left unspoken, bendable, and abstruse, to allow Bangladesh getting the benefits of a strategic partnership with a nuclear power meanwhile not getting involved in any formal defense arrangement, which could pose threat to its economy and defense in near future.⁷⁴

As a part of greater cooperative effort between the two countries, China provided Bangladesh with police equipment in March 2006. It was based on a mutual understanding between China's Public Security Ministry and Ministry of Home Affairs of Bangladesh. In addition, Dhaka has also procured 16 F-7 BG war planes from Beijing. China and Bangladesh decided to extend law enforcement cooperation during a visit of Home Minister of Bangladesh to China. In May 2006, Army Chief of Bangladesh met Chinese Defense Minister Cao Gangchuan. General Cao Told that, "China and Bangladesh have formed an excellent and well tested teamwork and synchronization on different international agendas and China will collaborate continue its relations with Bangladesh to maintain regional and peace and stability of the globe." He also opined

that, the forthcoming friendly military cooperation among the armies of Bangladesh and China will enhance the bilateral relationship. A noteworthy official visits in armed forces issues between Bangladesh and China provide us important evidence that, Bangladesh put much importance on military relation with China and in the same way; China also gives much importance on military relations with Bangladesh. Since 1974, there have been 84 visits to Bangladesh in comparison with 60 or 70 visits to India in the same periods.⁷⁵ Though, according to prominent security analyst Arnold Zeitlin, “It is an ordinary data among political circles in Dhaka that the armed forces of Bangladesh is not pleased with the excellence of Chinese ammunitions and it is likewise familiar that it cannot discover other merchandise as cheap”.⁷⁶

Overall, the main goal of the Dhaka’s sub-continental policy is to enhance its security. And China is only pleased to react and reaffirm its strategic existence in South Asia. China has become a key supplier of military hardware to the Armed Forces of Bangladesh. In 2006, Bangladesh Army was provided with 65 large caliber artillery systems and 114 missiles and related equipment by Beijing.⁷⁷ They also sold huge amount of armored personnel carriers (APCs), missiles, small arms and special weapons to Bangladesh. The South Asian Country also had a plan to buy 155mm PLZ-45/Type-88, 122mm Type-96 and MBRLs from China by 2011 which includes transfer of respective military hardware technology. Since 1977 China has been supplying fighter aircraft for Bangladesh Air Force. In later years China has provided Bangladesh F7, Q5 and PT Trainers fighter plane. In 2005 Bangladesh ordered 16F-BG and in 2006 China supplied that. In 2005, Bangladesh Air Force ordered 16 Chinese made F-7BG fighter planes and the deliveries began in 2006. Liang Guanglie, the Defense Minister of China stressed that, China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) always gives importance on building a trustworthy and cooperative relation with the Armed Forces of Bangladesh. Sino-Bangladesh defense cooperation is also very strong. China has appeared as a key supplier of military hardware to Bangladesh Armed Forces. Majority of the tanks (T-59, T-62, T- 69, and T-79), a greater number of artillery pieces, armored personnel carriers (APCs), small arms and personal weapons used by Bangladesh Army are made in China. The erstwhile commander of PLA Navy Admiral Zhang Liang Zhong has assured that, Bangladesh Navy has the same tactical and sophisticated security management as China. The capacity Bangladesh

Navy is enhanced by Chinese made Huang Feng class missile boats, 053-H1 Jianghu I class frigates with 4 x HY2 missiles, Type-024 missile boats, Huchuan and P 4 class torpedo boats, Shanghai class gun boats, Yuchin class LCUs and Hainan class sub chasers. China is a major supplier of Bangladesh navy.

Bangladesh-China relations enjoyed very warm status in their diplomatic arena from 2009. As a result of very warm diplomatic relations, Bangladesh imports its most arms and ammunitions from China and now Bangladesh is one of the major arms importers of China. On the other hand China also provided utmost support to strengthening the security affairs of Bangladesh and provides various training programs. Here a table is given below to shown the present status of Bangladesh-China military relations according to the weapons retailing and dealings amount. According to the Stockholm's International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) Bangladesh import of weapons data are given below:

Table 3.2 Bangladesh weapons import from China (1991- 2016) (In million US\$)⁷⁸

Year of Import	Import from China	Import from other States	Trade Ratio
1991	61	18	3.38:1
1992	87	26	3.34:1
1993	5	39	1:7.8
1994	20	41	1:2.05
1995	9	110	1:12.22
1996	7	-----	-----
1997	-----	25	-----
1998	-----	-----	-----
1999	33	152	1:4.61
2000	11	192	1:17.45
2001	2	264	1:132
2002	-----	41	-----
2003	-----	8	-----
2004	7	25	1:3.57

Year of Import	Import from China	Import from other States	Trade Ratio
2005	1	9	1:9
2006	184	37	4.97:1
2007	66	22	3:1
2008	10	3	3.33:1
2009	-----	-----	-----
2010	12	27	1:2.25
2011	102	35	2.91:1
2012	172	34	5.05:1
2013	506	156	3.24:1
2014	198	3	66:1
2015	436	189	2.30:1
2016	252	186	1.35:1
Total	2181	3817	1:1.75

From the above table it gives us a strong data and apprehension about Bangladesh-China well shaped and warm bilateral relationship. And believed that this relationship will help to build strengthen social and cultural relationship between the both countries.

5. Social and Cultural Relations

Contemporary Asian dynamics indicate that, China is very good friend to Bangladesh. Strategic position of Bangladesh has paid a great attention to the great power of Asia. China as a good friend of Bangladesh and a rising power of the world, China is formulating its strategic point of view for maintaining well shaped relationship to its South Asian friends e.g. Bangladesh. After being recognized by China, a cultural tie at the government level was established on 17 November of 1979. In that agreement, six spheres of cultural cooperation were specified. These were (a) Literature (b) Visual and Performing Arts (c) Education and Research (d) Science and Technology (e) Media, (f) Sports and Tourism. One of the notable sides of this deal was delegation exchange and goodwill tour of both sides.⁷⁹ On 18 November 1989 an Agreement on Mutual Exemption of visas between Bangladesh and China for their diplomats and officials

was signed for the indefinite period and till date these facilities have been enjoyed by their concerning classes.⁸⁰ To escalate the notion of the relationship an executive exchange program of the cultural agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has renewed on 11 January 2002, under the agreement of 1979 for the session of 2001-2003 which was effected on the same date of first signing.⁸¹ In December 2003 an Executive Exchange Program on Cultural Agreement between Bangladesh and China was renewed under the agreement till the consecutive years 2004-2008. Later this Cultural Executive program was renewed under the Bilateral Cultural Agreement for the year of 2009-2012 on 11 December 2008, and for the later years on 28 May 2014.⁸² With the cultural exchange program several education exchange MoUs and deals have been signed between Bangladesh and China during this time span as strengthen diplomatic relations.

Priorities and Realities

According to the discussion aforementioned some questions may arise; 1. Has Bangladesh-China relationship reached its height or zenith? 2. What are the outcomes of Bangladesh-China ties after 44 years of its formal inception of diplomatic relation? 3. How does Bangladesh-China diplomatic relation influence other relationships between these two countries? Drawing attention on those questions, we firstly need to clarify the priorities those are formulated from Bangladesh side to achieve really. To find out the answer to the query of concern, we need to concentrate on Bangladesh's approach to *One China Policy* and *East Policy*. To examine the policy of Bangladesh, we need to focus on Bangladesh's interest in *Chinese Dream*, *One Belt One Road* (OBOR) initiative and BRICS.

From the very beginning of the establishment of diplomatic relationship, Bangladesh has concentrated on *One China Policy* and *East Policy* due to respect for China along with its interest. When China formulated *Triangular Diplomacy* (1970-1989) in the early-mid of 1980s, Bangladesh showed respect to China's foreign policy and supported its policies in the international organization like UNO. Later, during the period of *Taoguangyanghui* (তাও কুয়াং ইয়াংকুঙ্গী/hiding its capabilities/Low Profile Policy) (1990-2010), Bangladesh maintained strong ties with China and exchanged various economic deals. In the era of Chinese latest foreign

policy based on *Chinese Dreams* (2010-present), Bangladesh has wholeheartedly supported Chinese policy and observed its notions. Within the foreign policy framework of Chinese government, Bangladesh is working and supporting China in policy making issues like OBOR (One Belt One Route), BRICS etc.

On the other hand, some questions may arise regarding the responsibility of China to make the tie fruitful .e.g. is China supporting Bangladesh in the international forum like UNO? Is Chinese participation in Bangladesh helping its development? Following these questions, we need to examine whether Chinese participation helps different development programs of Bangladesh and supports other activities of Bangladesh.

China as an actor of Asian politics concentrates on South Asian politics and tries to engage in geo-politics from the very beginning. As a good friend of Pakistan and geo-politically an enemy of India, China is trying to elevate its position in South Asian politics. So, in order to hold its strong position and establish Chinese policy (rejuvenation of Silk Route and keep maritime position with BRICS establishment) in South Asia, China is providing various infrastructural facilities and financial supports to Bangladesh, Srilanka, Nepal and Pakistan. Importance of China to Bangladesh depends on basically economic, strategic and defense cooperation and its facilities.⁸³ As a development partner, China is working on Padma Bridge project, Chottogram River Dam project. Other 291 projects in Bangladesh are run by Chinese investment worthy of 642 million US\$ and among the projects 104 are conducted by complete FDI from China and 187 are in joint venture program.⁸⁴ According to import and export in the field of trade and commerce, China is a major business partner of Bangladesh. As seen a great deficit of trade, China exempted 4,721 Bangladeshi products as duty free for getting access to Chinese market since 1 July, 2010 in order to make a trade balance. But still a huge deficit is detected in this field.⁸⁵ In the formulation of political agenda, China concentrates on its own interest. As Kaplan observes, China is not still friendly to its perception about Ganges water sharing as well as Rohingya issues that need to be taken into consideration from Chinese part.⁸⁶

On the other hand though Bangladesh is a small country but it has priorities to China because of its geo-political strategic position. As a

country standing on the banks of the Bay of Bengal and its geo-physical location (surrounded by India on three sides) Bangladesh emerged as an important country to China. China's priorities also lay on about India-China relations basically the factor of Siliguri corridor and Assam. Another priority also get impetus from the Chinese side is to building a Deep Sea Port in the Bay of Bengal which is near to be abandoned due to the pressure of India. With the geo-physical importance Bangladesh imports most of its military weapons and emergency credential (food, beverage, machineries, garments products, accessories etc.) from China which includes heights imports of Bangladesh in a fiscal year also important to China. Moreover, there are more than 291 projects are running with the direct affiliation of China which is also a priority of China and they achieved as per their demand.

Conclusion

From the discussion aforementioned, it can be said that Bangladesh-China relationship depends on particular bi-lateral interests. In this regard, China always seeks its own interest which requires more attention from Bangladesh part. Though the priority lies in various economic dealings along with political issues like Rohingya crisis, Indian relations with Bangladesh and maritime regulatory process of China, and transboundary water sharing perspective of Ganges basin and Jangmu Hydropower; but there remains a trusted relationship between these two countries. If the above mentioned priorities get positive response from China side, the tie between Bangladesh and China will remain at its best; and it will influence other expected dealings for optimum outcomes in the near future. And if Bangladesh priority regarding economic cooperation will be increase with the fold of trade and development projects will help to construct balanced relations between them which will help to furnish an all-weather friendship between Bangladesh and China.

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