

# "Change" and "Constant" in international relations: a case study based on the China-Bangladesh perspective

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## ABSTRACT

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This paper has been prepared based on secondary data. The China and Bangladesh diplomatic relations were established in 1975. Since then, the relationship between China and Bangladesh has been going high. The China-Bangladesh relationship reached a new level with China's President Xi Jinping's two-day historic visit to Bangladesh in October 2016. Which was widely dubbed a "historic state visit," the start of a "new horizon," or "a new historical starting point" of China and Bangladesh relations. There is a lot of history in the thousand-year-old friendship between China and Bangladesh. The relationship between Sino and Bangladesh is changing very fast after the twenty-first century. But also, there has a constant relation between China and Bangladesh. In this paper, we tried to explain the thousand-year-old friendship between the two countries and explore the "Change" and the "Constant" in international relations based on the China and Bangladesh perspective.

**Keywords:** change and constant, international relations, Sino, Bangladesh

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

China and Bangladesh have a great relationship, even though China was initially against Bangladesh's freedom. Afterwards, it fought against Bangladesh's global recognition, including that of the United Nations. However, after the Shimla agreement, China started to soften its stance against Bangladesh. Later, following its official recognition by Bangladesh on August 10, 1975, China officially established diplomatic ties with Bangladesh by building a consulate in 1976 [1]. Bangladesh and China have declared themselves reliable and time-tested allies in the international community [2]. That chain of friendship has recently developed as a significant strategic relationship. India, Bangladesh's neighbour and China's regional rival, must be at ease with the growing Sino-Bangla friendship. Since the connection between China and Bangladesh is familiar but has always been there, the relationship is getting stronger daily. This route ran from the 4th century BC until 221 BC [3]. It went through what is now Yunnan Province, Myanmar, and Chittagong Port. Some say the name Chittagong was rooted in the Chinese phrase "Xi Da Province, Myanmar, and Chittagong Port. Some say that the name Chittagong was rooted in the Chinese phrase "Xi Da Gang" which means "The Great Port of the West". Zheng was a famous explorer from the Ming Dynasty. He went on seven trips to the Indian Ocean and went to Bangla at least twice [3]. They did business with the Arabs and the West from here. Some disciples of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are supposed to have arrived in Chittagong

before travelling to China [4]. BRI serves as a tool for promoting economic development and international trade. Conversely, the BRI is discussed in terms of one-

way cooperation with main benefits for China. Every project requires funds, and a massive amount is being used to finance this global initiative [4]. The Sino-Bangladesh traditional relationship reached a new height with China's President Xi Jinping's two-day landmark visit to Bangladesh in October 2016, which was widely dubbed as a historic state visit, the beginning of a new horizon, or a unique historical starting point of China-Bangladesh relations. As a result, this path was crucial in severing the China-Bangladesh alliance later on the eve of the 40th anniversary of Sino-Bangladesh ties. In this research, the author tried to explain the thousand-year-old connections between the two countries and find "Change" and "Constant" in international relations based on the Sino-Bangladesh perspective.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. History of the Sino and Bangladesh relations

The Bangladesh president Zia regime (1977–1981) began revitalizing Sino-Bangla ties. This relationship remained constant over the years [5]. China offered Bangladesh trade concessions. In 1977, Ziaur Rahman went to China twice, and China showed a strong. This amicable relationship became stronger under Hossain Muhammad Ershad's reign (1982-1990) [6]. During his

reign, he paid seven visits, the first of which occurred seven months after assuming office. In 1984, Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang designated Bangladesh as one of Asia's "five friendly countries" in his big annual address [7]. President Ershad made a record-breaking six trips to China during his presidency. During that time, Chinese leaders like President Li Xiannian and Prime Minister Li Peng went to Bangladesh [7]. During this time, economic cooperation between these two countries expanded as well. In 1983, the two countries set up the Joint Economic Commission (JEC) to improve how their

economies work together [7]. The 1990s were pivotal in both global and local history. Following the conclusion of the Cold War, people saw the re-establishment of democracy in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh National Party, headed by Khaleda Zia, took power. However, Khaleda Zai wanted to keep the close ties with China that her husband, Ziaur Rahman, had built for her party. She went to China soon after taking office to show that this was true, and the Chinese Premier Li Peng agreed with her [7]. Bangladesh authorized the establishment of a business office in Dhaka on February 28, 2004. Bangladesh has emphasized the "One China Policy" since the commencement of diplomatic relations [8]. However, this statement appeared to be a policy misnomer. That office was, in reality, the Consulate. Bangladesh later removed the office in response to Chinese pressure. Through its spokesperson, Qin Gang, the Chinese Foreign Ministry declared that Beijing highly valued Hasina's visit and anticipated it would "contribute to the steady development of Sino-Bangladeshi relations." By making these connections seem substantial, the speaker emphasized that it was a process, not an event and that there was a slow change. This point was emphasized further in the official statement issued during the trip, which alluded to such a "deeper developed by a team of collaboration," the adjective nearer suggesting a step forward from the preceding phrase, "a comprehensive partnership of cooperation [8]. It's an intriguing aspect of Chinese diplomacy. During the visit, special attention was paid to the system, which

is typical of China and likes to fund projects that become famous landmarks. Both parties signed four essential papers. These were

1. an Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation.
2. a Framework Agreement on Preferential Loan Provisions.
3. a protocol on Remitting the Bangladesh Interest-free Loan Due in 2008
4. an Exchange of Letters on the Construction of the Seventh Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge.

They committed to "intensify" cooperation to begin building new infrastructure like the eighth international bridge (over the Meghna) and China's development of the Bangladesh-China Friendship Exhibition Center [8]. Environmentalists in India and Bangladesh are worried about China's plans to take water from the Brahmaputra River. This river flows through India and into Bangladesh [9]. The river is the highest in the world, with an average height of 4000 meters. Before it flows into India, it flows through Tibet for 2057 meters [9]. China is now suspected of diverting the fluids to the dry

Yellow River. India should be glad that Hasina brought up the issue with the Chinese and that they "discussed the need for regular exchange of information and consultation on the use of the water resources of the river Yarlungzangbu/ Brahmaputra to ensure sustainable and mutually beneficial cooperation in this regard." The two sides also agreed to consider 7th whether it would be possible to set up an institution for these kinds of talks that would include all countries along the river. Sheikh Hasina returned to China in March 2010 and met with Chinese Vice President Xi Jinping, who eventually became President [9]. During this visit, Chinese government signed the contract to build the China-Bangladesh Friendship Bridge at Kajirtek, Madari Pur. It agreed to begin the eighth one, the second Meghna Bridge. In addition, a contract for building the China-Bangladesh Exhibition Center was inked. In May 2013, Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang went to Bangladesh, where he spoke about his hopes for friendship and cooperation in the area [10]. Begum Khaleda Zia, the leader of the BNP, went to China in October after the General Secretary of the China Communist Party asked her to. She promised to make things better between China and Bangladesh.

Although China is a one-party communist nation, it has a friendly and long-lasting approach toward democratic countries. Before Bangladesh's 10th National Election on January 5, 2014, and after the main opposition alliance skipped the election, Chinese Ambassador Li Jun voiced concern about the election. They asked for a free vote that everyone could participate. China has voiced alarm over post-election violence. Many hailed this election as a new beginning for China-Bangladesh relations since China maintains close ties with the Bangladesh Nationalist Party. However, on January 12, 2014, the Chinese government congratulated the Prime Minister of Bangladesh and the Chinese President. However, it said that a new election should be conducted. In June 2014, Bangladesh's Prime Minister returned to China and brought good news back to Bangladesh. China aims to invest in labour-intensive sectors [11]. A Chinese construction firm has just begun building the long-desired Padma Bridge.

## 2.2. Literature gap

Sino and Bangladesh have had a good relationship from 1976 until 2022, and many cultural and economic delegations have exchanged visits to keep the cultural and economic partnership strong. From 1976, the two sides' connection flourished [11]. Although significant at the governmental level, the good relations between the people of these nations were just as crucial. China's rapid growth and growing influence on the international stage are remarkable. As a result of the political and economic ties that were made between 1991 and 2022. In 2013, China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) during President Xi's visit to Central and Southeast Asia [12]. BRI is a strategic vision for trade and investment flows. On the concept of connectivity, as reflected by the ancient Silk Road. China's rise in the international environment and its opening to the world, both economically and politically, have attracted significant attention worldwide [13]. There is now a long-lasting friendship between the Sino-Bangladesh. Currently, China is Bangladesh's biggest trade partner, direct foreign investor, importer, and supplier of military equipment. China will also offer duty-free access to ninety-seven percent of Bangladeshi goods in 2020. It is still under process [14]. We review most of the good relations between China and Bangladesh from the literature review. But still, there are some gaps between Sino- Bangladesh. This paper explored the constant and change in the international relations between Sino and Bangladesh.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

This paper has been prepared based on secondary data. The pertinent secondary information was accumulated from relevant articles, newspapers, different position papers and government action plans.

## 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 4.1. Change in international relations between China and Bangladesh

Bangladesh's relations with China have come a long way since the country's 1971 independence from Pakistan, China's ally. China and Bangladesh have had diplomatic ties since October 1975 [12]. Since then, they have had a close relationship, often called a "trusted friendship" or an "all-weather friendship." Within this time Sino-Bangladesh improved their friendship, and there have been many changes in the current era. The relationships have been mostly about business and defense cooperation for decades. Still, the way things are going now, this cooperation will likely grow to include the political, social, cultural, and maritime sectors. In these areas, China's help to Bangladesh has

grown a lot in the past few years. China has invested heavily in Bangladesh's infrastructure, electricity, energy, and communications. The "Belt and Road Initiative" at the end of 2013 paved the way for a new phase in China-Bangladesh relations, with Bangladesh becoming a key player in both the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. Bangladesh has become a key hub for shipping and land travel between the Indian Ocean and China's landlocked regions, especially Yunnan [14]. This has made the relationship between the two countries more of a win-win situation.

If we look at how Sino and Bangladesh got along in the past, we can see that their ties were based on trade and military cooperation. Since 1975, trade and economic cooperation between China and Bangladesh have been a significant part of their relationships [14]. In 2005, China became Bangladesh's leading trading partner for imports. This was especially true in the defense industry, where China sold weapons, military gear, and other specialized equipment. The "Defense Collaboration Agreement," signed in 2002 and was the first agreement of its kind for Bangladesh, made China and Bangladesh's military work together even better [14]. The traditional China-Bangladesh relationship reached a new high with China's President Xi Jinping's two-day historic visit to Bangladesh in October 2016. Which was widely dubbed a "historic state visit," the start of a "new horizon," or "a new historical starting point" of China-Bangladesh relations [15]. Even though top officials from both countries had visited each other's country many times over the past 42 years of diplomatic ties, and Chinese president's visit to Bangladesh was the turning point in the relationship between the two countries. During this visit, both countries agreed to work together in several areas, such as connecting by land and sea, building infrastructure, increasing industrial capacity, sharing energy and power, transportation, information and communication technology, agriculture, and others.

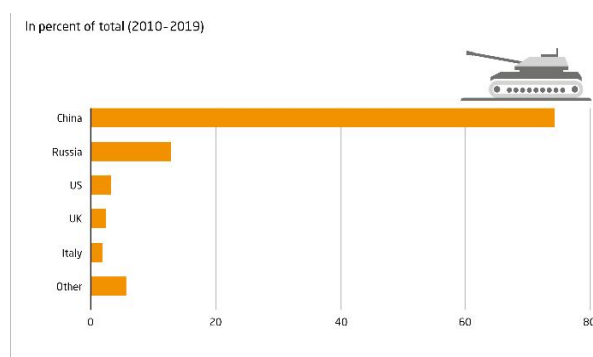
As a result, collaboration in regional and sub-regional connectivity is one of the critical changing characteristics of Sino-Bangladesh relations in the twenty-first century. Though the two countries cooperation in the area of connectivity began in 1999 with the launch of the Kunming Initiative, later renamed the China-Bangladesh-India-Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIM-EC), the 2013 launch of the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI) places a greater emphasis on the improvement of China-Bangladesh bilateral relations in that regard [15]. During President Xi's 2016 visit, Bangladesh formally joined the BRI. Bangladesh views the BRI as a huge opportunity to help it achieve its national development objectives of being a middle-income country by 2021 and a developed country by 2041 [15]. Furthermore, both parties have

pledged to collaborate on achieving sustainable development and shared prosperity within the BRI framework. Through cultural exchanges and people-to-people connections, the visit also contributes to developing China-Bangladesh ties. China and Bangladesh's business and investment ties have gotten stronger of the agreements made during this tour. The two countries are now on a new footing. Since the visit, Dhaka and Beijing have inked eight agreements totaling more than USD 9.45 billion in Chinese funding. The primary projects being handled with Chinese capital are the Padma Bridge rail connection costing USD 3.3 billion, the Payra power plant for USD 1.9 billion, creating digital connectivity worth USD 1 billion, and the power grid network strengthening of USD 1.32 billion. These financial aids via investment have exceeded prior Chinese investment records in Bangladesh. To recap, China's USD 38 billion investment in Bangladesh, together with USD 24.45 billion in bilateral support for infrastructure projects and USD 13.6 billion in joint ventures is the most incredible amount of financial assistance ever promised to Bangladesh by any one country [16]. Also, China's desire to get involved in Bangladesh's "blue economy" during this state visit has helped to move the long-term relationship between China and Bangladesh in a good direction. Bangladesh's ambition to be linked to China's iconic 21st Century Maritime Silk Road under BRI has enhanced maritime cooperation between the two nations. Most importantly, calling the relationship between China and Bangladesh a "strategic partnership of cooperation" instead of a "comprehensive partnership of cooperation" gives it more energy. The above innovative approach to strategic collaboration denotes concentrated involvement and cooperation across all matters of common interest and mutual benefit, including political, economic, cultural, and security issues at the bilateral, national, and international levels, as well as other local and global matters.

#### **4.1.1. Sino-Bangladeshi ties have continued to develop**

The driving factors of improved ties were convergences in their strategic calculations (for example, their joint assessment of India as a single danger) and economic forces. In 1978, the first high-level Chinese visit led to better relations between the two countries [15]. With the inauguration of China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, momentum accelerated (BRI). During President Xi's 2016 visit to Bangladesh, Dhaka joined the BRI, and ties was elevated to a strategic partnership. Due to Bangladesh's participation in the BRI, China invested USD 38.05 billion. This amount is almost equal to 10% of Bangladesh's GDP and is the most money that any single country has ever given to Bangladesh. Currently, China is Bangladesh's biggest trade partner, direct

foreign investor, importer, and supplier of military equipment. China will also offer duty-free access to 97 percent of Bangladeshi goods in 2020 [16]. Defense cooperation has been the cornerstone of Sino-Bangladesh relations: Chinese financial imprint is a relatively new and expanding feature of the relationship, although military cooperation remains the central aspect. Since the early 1980s, the two armed services have exchanged high-level official visits and done joint exercises [17].



**Figure 1** China is Bangladesh's most important arms supplier. Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

China is now Bangladesh's biggest trade partner, and the two countries work together by training and practicing. Dhaka is also China's second-largest weapons exporter, after only Pakistan. Between 2010 and 2019, China supplied 72 percent of all Bangladeshi weaponry. Under the reform process, countries are expected to make even stronger ties with each other [17].

#### **4.1.2. Cooperation with built on significant infrastructure projects**

Chinese firms have executed several large infrastructure projects in Bangladesh in transportation, energy, electricity, and communication, favorably contributing to the two nations' economic and social growth. Since 1986, the Chinese government has aided Bangladesh in building seven bridges under the China-aid framework, known as the 1st to 7th Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridges. In 2017, work on the eighth Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridge began. With these bridges, traffic in Bangladesh is much less backed up, and flood damage has been greatly reduced. With a cost of \$3.1 billion, the Padma Bridge rail connection project is the most expensive G-to-G project in the "Belt and Road Initiative." It was made possible by a loan from the Chinese government [18]. The Multilane Road Tunnel in the Karnaphuli River Project is the only tunnel under a river in South Asia. Aside from that, Chinese firms are working on projects like the Padma

Bridge and Cox's Bazar Railway. These projects will alleviate local transportation and improve regional connections when they are finished. They will play an important role in electricity after completing numerous large infrastructure projects such as the Gulashaw 365 MW,

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Cox's Bazar Railway. These projects will alleviate local transportation and improve regional connections when they are finished. They will play an important role in electricity after completing numerous large infrastructure projects such as the Gulashaw 365 MW, Payra 1,320 MW, S Alam 1,320 MW, Patuakhali 1,320 MW, and Barisal 350 MW power plants [18]

In high-tech, the creation of a Level IV National Data Center, the most modern data storage facility in Southeast Asia and South Asia, supported by Chinese government concessional loans. Installing a single-point mooring with a double pipeline project would directly import crude oil from seagoing boats to the Chittagong refinery through an undersea oil pipeline, saving around \$500-800 million in crude oil transportation costs and losses per year. The PGCB's Power Grid Network Strengthening Project and the development and strengthening of the power system network in the DPDC region would make it possible for Bangladesh to have an intelligent power grid. Also, the Bangabandhu International Conference Center opened in 2002 [19]. Moreover, the China-Bangladesh Friendship Exhibition Center, which will open soon, and other large, functional landmark buildings have helped Bangladesh's social and economic growth and shown that the friendship between China and Bangladesh is strong and growing.

## **4.2. Constant in international relations between china and Bangladesh**

On October 4, 1975, China and Bangladesh established diplomatic ties. Since then, Sino-Bangladesh has been getting along better and better over the last year. Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing countries in the world, with a GDP growth rate of more than 6% and global power development. The country is also growing the fastest in the Asia-Pacific region. The Bangladesh government is constructing development infrastructure to realize the dreams of "My Bangla," "Vision 2021," and "Vision 2041" in medium and developed nations. Aside from this procedure, China goes to great lengths to assist Bangladesh in building infrastructure in various ways, including through pressure, recognition, and projects. In 2016, the Chinese government sent Bangladesh almost \$100 million in free mail, more than the bills in Bangladesh [20]. Moreover, Bangladesh is one of the nations most influenced by China. However, some constant matters exist in which matters should be more developed.

### **4.2.1. Cooperation with built on significant infrastructure projects**

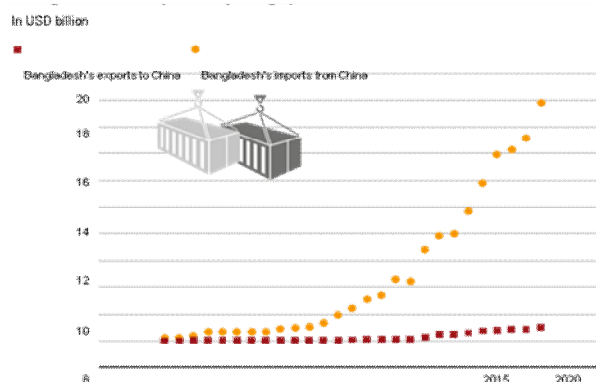
Chinese companies are seeing great potential in investing in Bangladesh's economy. China's investment in Bangladesh has proliferated, especially in the previous decade. According to statistics from the Bangladesh Bank, Chinese FDI stock in Bangladesh increased from \$70 million in 2011 to \$833 million in 2019, a growth rate of 10.9 times, or an average annual compound growth rate of 36.3% over the eight years [18]. China has led all other FDI sources into Bangladesh over the last three fiscal years, starting with FY2018. Chinese investment in Bangladesh mostly goes into heavy infrastructure projects like power plants and motorways rather than consumer goods like clothing, shoes, and hats. Bangladesh's banking, mobile payments, and car sectors have also attracted Chinese investment. Future Chinese investment in Bangladesh is expected to increase quickly trade between China, and Bangladesh has come a long way in the last 45 years. There was just \$3.06 million worth of bilateral commerce in the first year of diplomatic ties. The level of bilateral trade in 1974 was much lower than it is now, at \$18.33 billion. Bangladesh is now China's second biggest trade partner in South Asia, and China is now Bangladesh's largest trading partner. Over the past five years, the trade between the two countries has grown by 24.6%, a steady growth rate. As of July 1, 2020, China will offer zero to ninety-seven per cent lower taxes on goods made in Bangladesh. This is helping reduce trade deficits and making it easier for the two countries to start trading again after the as Bangladesh's social and economic growth moves away from democracy in the 21st century, it risks becoming even more politically and economically isolated from the West.

Recent steps taken by the U.S. show that this is a pattern. For example, the U.S. Department of the Treasury has permitted people who have broken human rights laws [20]. In December 2021, Bangladesh was one of 110 countries invited to the Democracy Summit, held during the pandemic [18] [21]. White House and led by President Joe Biden. This shift might encourage authorities to look towards deeper links with Beijing as a potential economic lifeline that would not be met with criticism for the failure of civil freedoms in December 2021, Bangladesh was one of 110 countries invited to the democracy Summit, held at the White House and led by President Joe Biden. This shift might encourage authorities to look towards deeper links with Beijing as a potential economic lifeline that would not be met with criticism for the failure of civil freedoms. But despite the fact that relations between Bangladesh and China are improving, there are still three big problems. Chinese leaders believe long-term strategic benefits can be gained from closer connections to India's neighbours. Before, Bangladesh has to deal with the difficulty of providing a haven for millions of Rohingya refugees.

Dhaka wanted Beijing to pressure the Myanmar government, but it did not happen. This is because China put its geopolitical and economic interests in Myanmar first. China's attitude toward the Rohingya problem will likely make Dhaka even more upset in the future, which could have severe consequences for Bangladesh. This might hurt China's reputation as a reliable partner with Bangladesh. Second, Bangladesh is worried about its widening trade deficit with China. Even if 97% of Bangladesh's exports have duty-free access to China, it is unlikely to close its trade deficit with the rest of the world's manufacturing hubs. Bangladesh's trade imbalance with China widened in 2018 as the country imported goods worth USD 17.75 billion from China but only exported goods worth USD 985.41 million [21]. Third, China's plans to build dams on the Brahmaputra are very worrying for Bangladesh because it is a downstream country. Bangladesh's agriculture, forestry, and fisheries rely heavily on the Brahmaputra for water, making it one of its most important rivers. These three industries account for 12.5% of Bangladesh's GDP.

If China uses this strategy, it could make it very hard to improve relations between the two countries. The growing strategic competition between the United States and China will affect Bangladesh's options and future. Their competition in South Asia is, increasingly played out on the ground of Bangladesh, between China and India. Bangladesh tries to have a triangular relationship with the US, China, and India to ease these pressures. China-Bangladesh business and economic cooperation have significant potential. China, which regards Bangladesh as a friendly neighbour, friend, and partner, recognizes that the South Asian nation has tremendous future economic potential but will need further investment in infrastructure and a more

welcoming business climate to realize that promise. China will keep pushing for regional infrastructure development, and Chinese investors will become increasingly involved in Bangladesh's economy. There is unlimited room for growth in China and Bangladesh's economic and technological cooperation in areas like fighting climate change, reducing poverty, improving public health, expanding human resource development opportunities, etc. As we look to the future, China will stand firmly with the people of Bangladesh and continue to support the sustainable development of Bangladesh in our economic growth and trade relations at a higher level.



**Figure 2** Bangladesh's export-import gap with China.

Source: World integrated trade solution statistics(WITS) and WTO database, Compiled by authors in February 2022.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The relationship between China and Bangladesh is changing in the twenty-first century. There are more ways to understand each other and more benefits. The BRI is currently more robust as well as vigorous than ever before. Regarding Business and investment, China views Bangladesh as a close ally. In addition to the indirect investment, Chinese direct investment is also happening in Bangladesh. At this time, about 186 Chinese firms are operating in Bangladesh. In addition, China is giving funding through grants, interest-free loans, interest-subsidized loans, and supplier loans. But there has a significant gap in the export-import rate between Bangladesh and china. Bangladesh needs to get more beneficial ways to export its products to China. Cause only importing goods is not for a country. It will affect the country's reserved funds.

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