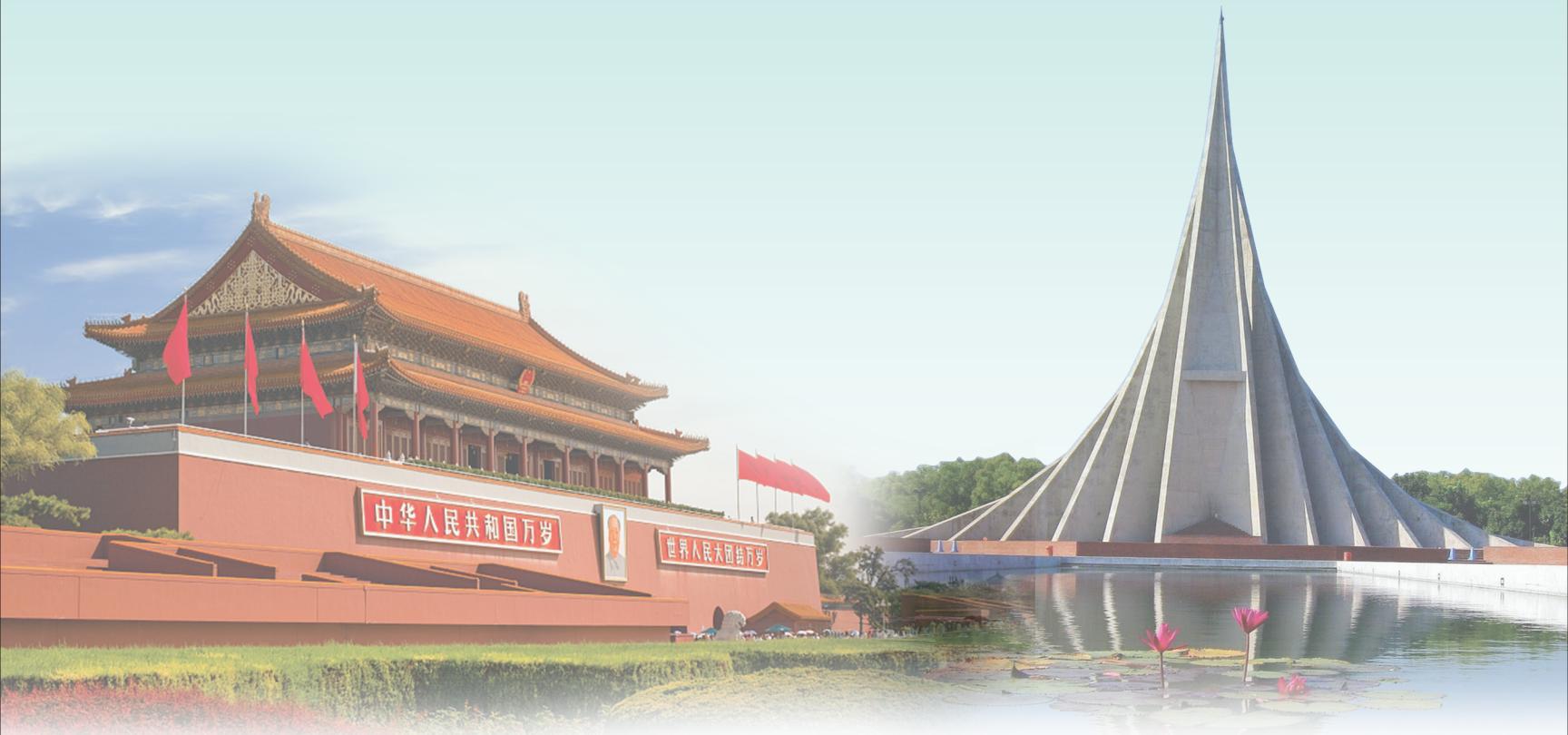


# NATIONAL IMAGE OF CHINA IN BANGLADESH

March 2025



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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

远亲不如近邻

*Distant relatives are not as good as close neighbours<sup>1</sup>*

This report begins with a classic Chinese proverb mentioned above to emphasise the Chinese view towards its neighbouring countries. Historically and geographically, Bangladesh and China have maintained closer economic, cultural and political ties, which have gradually deepened and widened. As Bangladesh and China celebrate the 50th year of their diplomatic relations in 2025, this study underscores the evolving dynamics of their bilateral partnership. Over the decades, their relationship has expanded beyond economic and political cooperation to encompass strategic, cultural, and people-to-people engagements. While overall sentiment toward China in Bangladesh remains positive, concerns and areas for improvement necessitate a strategic approach towards strengthening cooperation.

This study on the national image of China in Bangladesh is part of a broader effort to assess public perceptions and attitudes toward China, particularly in light of evolving bilateral relations. The 2024 survey was conducted in October-November, 2024. It may be noted that this survey is a follow-up to the previous two surveys, which were conducted in January-February 2022 and September-October 2023, to understand Bangladeshis' perceptions of the image of China. The 2024 survey was based on a modified questionnaire; the latter was done primarily for two reasons: a) to assess the perceptions of the people on the people-to-people cooperation, which constitutes the hallmark of the 50 years of China-Bangladesh ties; b) to comprehend the people's perceptions vis-à-vis China in the post-July, August 2024 backdrop. The survey has been carried out in the same setting as the previous ones to ensure consistency and comparability.

The survey was carried out across all eight divisions of Bangladesh, ensuring diverse representation across different socio-economic and demographic groups. It explored various topics, including trade and investment, diplomatic relations, people-to-people connectivity, security cooperation, and China's engagement in regional and global issues. Special attention was given to assessing shifts in public

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<sup>1</sup>Translation, cited from

[https://www.google.com/search?q=google+translate&oq=goo&gs\\_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqDQgCEAAgYgwEYsQMYgAQyBggAEUYOTITCAEQLhiDARjHARixAxjRAxiABDINCAIQABiDARixAxjABDIKCAMQABixAxjABDIGCAQQBRhAMgYIBRBFGDwyBggGEEUPDIGCAcQRg80gEIMTc2N2owajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8](https://www.google.com/search?q=google+translate&oq=goo&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUqDQgCEAAgYgwEYsQMYgAQyBggAEUYOTITCAEQLhiDARjHARixAxjRAxiABDINCAIQABiDARixAxjABDIKCAMQABixAxjABDIGCAQQBRhAMgYIBRBFGDwyBggGEEUPDIGCAcQRg80gEIMTc2N2owajeoAgCwAgA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8)

perception following recent developments, such as Bangladesh's evolving economic landscape, regional geopolitical changes, and China's involvement in infrastructure projects. The July 2024 mass uprising and subsequent political transition in Bangladesh added a new dimension to this study.

The relationship between Bangladesh and China has historically been influenced by various factors, including economic cooperation, regional geopolitics, and shared strategic interests. However, significantly enough, the July Mass Upsurge could alter the trajectory of these relations in several critical ways, demanding a more profound and updated exploration. China remains Bangladesh's largest trading partner and a key investor in infrastructure projects, playing a crucial role in the country's economic growth and modernisation. As trade relations expand, there is an opportunity to further enhance market access for Bangladeshi products and create a more balanced economic partnership. The deepening military and security ties reflect a strengthening strategic alliance and foster greater transparency and collaboration, which can further reinforce mutual trust and security cooperation. Additionally, improving trade practices and ensuring sustainable economic engagements will contribute to long-term stability and confidence in bilateral relations. Public sentiment also indicates enthusiasm for diversifying trade partnerships, which can complement Bangladesh's financial resilience and growth trajectory.

# Introduction

## 1.1 Background

2025 marks a significant milestone in Bangladesh-China relations as the two countries celebrate fifty years of diplomatic ties. This commemoration holds special significance when Bangladesh is undergoing profound political, economic, and social transformations in the backdrop of the student-peoples uprising of July 2024. The political transition in Bangladesh has introduced new dynamics in domestic and foreign policies, making it even more important to understand how the public perceives key strategic partners such as China. Against this backdrop, this survey on the 'National Image of China in Bangladesh' provides valuable insights into Bangladeshis' perceptions, attitudes, and aspirations regarding China, particularly in the evolving political landscape. This survey is also important on the occasion of fifty years of diplomatic ties between Bangladesh and China as an important policy document to accelerate people-to-people contact between these two countries. In this technologically connected era, foreign policy is no longer the exclusive domain for policymakers; voices from the people do make a difference in how policymakers shape policies. To realise the notions of shared humanity, people-to-people connectivity is crucial.

Bangladesh-China relations have evolved significantly since diplomatic ties were established in October 1975.<sup>2</sup> Initially centred around political and economic cooperation, the relationship has gradually expanded to include cultural, social, and strategic dimensions. Over the years, China has emerged as Bangladesh's largest trading partner, a major investor in infrastructure development, a key player in the defence sector, and a driving force in Bangladesh's digital economy.<sup>3 4</sup> These multi-faceted engagements have positioned China as one of the most influential external actors in Bangladesh's development trajectory.

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<sup>2</sup> 'The changing dynamics of China-Bangladesh relations', 11 November 2018, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/global-affairs/news/the-changing-dynamics-china-bangladesh-relations-1658695>

<sup>3</sup> 'China Bangladesh's top trading partner in FY24', 11 December 2024, Cited in- <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/trade/china-bangladesh-top-trading-partner-in-fy24>

<sup>4</sup> Yasmin, L. (2023). Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh's rising geopolitical agency and China's regional and global ambitions. *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 12(1), 87–109.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/24761028.2023.2300109>

A critical aspect of Bangladesh-China relations is the emphasis on a 'People-to-People' (P2P) relationship, particularly as the two nations celebrate their 50th anniversary of diplomatic ties in 2025.<sup>5</sup> Beyond governmental and institutional cooperation, P2P exchanges have played a vital role in fostering mutual understanding and cultural appreciation. Academic collaborations, student exchanges, cultural programs, and trade partnerships have strengthened the bonds between the people of the two countries, contributing to a more dynamic and multifaceted relationship.

The significance of this milestone is further amplified by China's active role in Bangladesh's major infrastructure projects, including the Padma Bridge, the Karnaphuli Tunnel, the Dhaka-Chattogram Highway expansion, and numerous energy and telecommunication projects. Additionally, Bangladesh's support for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has further solidified economic ties, reinforcing China's position as a crucial development partner.<sup>6</sup> The trade volume between the two countries has consistently risen, with China offering duty-free access to a growing percentage of Bangladeshi exports, thereby fostering more substantial economic interdependence.<sup>7</sup>

Strategically, China has also played an important role in Bangladesh's defence sector. China remains Bangladesh's largest supplier of military equipment, with key agreements covering naval and air defence systems. Notably, in 2024, China assisted in establishing Bangladesh's first submarine base, and the historic first joint military exercise, 'China-Bangladesh Golden Friendship 2024,' underscored the depth of strategic cooperation between the two countries.

Moreover, China's diplomatic engagement in resolving regional issues, such as the Rohingya refugee crisis, has also shaped Bangladesh's perception of its role in South Asia. As China continues to act as a mediator in regional conflicts, its influence in Bangladesh extends beyond economic and military cooperation to diplomacy and peacebuilding.

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<sup>5</sup> 'Joint Statement between the People's Republic of China and The People's Republic of Bangladesh on the Establishment of Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership', 11 July 2024, Cited in- [http://ug.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgxw/202407/t20240711\\_11451960.htm](http://ug.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/zgxw/202407/t20240711_11451960.htm)

<sup>6</sup> 'How China's Belt and Road changing Bangladesh's economy and infrastructures', 1 October 2023, Cited in- <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/how-chinas-belt-and-road-changing-bangladeshs-infrastructures-709826>

<sup>7</sup> 'China gives duty-free access to all products of Bangladesh' 13 September 2024, Cited in- <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/china-gives-duty-free-access-all-products-bangladesh-3701946>  
Khandakar, T.R, & Romaniuk S, N (2024) 'Why Bangladesh-China Defense Ties Are Poised to Strengthen After the Monsoon Revolution', The Diplomat, Cited in- <https://thediplomat.com/2024/10/why-bangladesh-china-defense-ties-are-poised-to-strengthen-after-the-monsoon-revolution/>

## 1.2 About the Survey

The 2024 survey was conducted in October-November, 2024. It may be noted that this survey is a follow-up to the previous two surveys, which were conducted in January-February 2022 and September-October 2023, to understand Bangladeshis' perceptions of the image of China. The 2024 survey was based on a modified questionnaire; the latter was done primarily for two reasons: a) to assess the perceptions of the people on the people-to-people cooperation, which constitutes the hallmark of the 50 years of China-Bangladesh ties; b) to comprehend the people's perceptions vis-à-vis China in the post-July, August 2024 backdrop. The survey has been carried out in the same setting as the previous ones to ensure consistency and comparability.

As stated above, this survey report attempts to comprehend people's perceptions about China's national image in Bangladesh. The study was conducted among 5,335 respondents from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. The survey also considered the geographic location and demographic composition of various regions of Bangladesh to explore how people perceive China as one of the major powers and key players in global affairs.

The survey findings provide insights into Bangladeshis' perceptions of China on key issues, including economic development, infrastructure projects, trade relations, defence cooperation, and diplomatic engagements. By capturing these public sentiments, the report serves as a valuable resource for academics, policymakers, and diplomats who seek to understand better how Bangladeshis view their country's relationship with China. The findings will help shape future policies and engagements between the two countries and contribute to a more informed discourse on enhancing and sustaining Bangladesh-China relations in the coming years.

## 1.3 Significance of the Study

As Bangladesh and China celebrate fifty years of diplomatic relations, this study serves as a timely assessment of how Bangladeshis view China's role in their country. Despite the political transition in Bangladesh following the July-August 2024 uprising, China has remained a steadfast partner, reinforcing its strategic cooperation with the new interim government. This survey aims to contribute to a more informed and effective engagement between Bangladesh and China in the coming years by presenting empirical insights into public perceptions.

Understanding the national image of China in Bangladesh is critical for several reasons. First, public perception influences diplomatic and economic engagements, shaping future cooperation. Second, given

China's growing role in Bangladesh's development and security sectors, analysing how the Bangladeshi public views this partnership can help policymakers navigate and enhance bilateral relations. Third, the study provides insights into how domestic political changes, such as the 2024 regime transition, impact perceptions of China and its role in Bangladesh. The findings will be valuable for academics, diplomats, and policymakers seeking to strengthen Bangladesh-China relations based on public sentiment.

The survey questionnaire, which formed the basis of this study, covered diverse aspects of China-Bangladesh relations. Respondents were asked about their general impression of China, views on political and economic relations, perceptions of China's global influence, cultural and educational engagements, and specific bilateral concerns such as trade, defence cooperation, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Additionally, the study aimed to assess how Bangladeshis perceive China's role in resolving regional issues like the Rohingya crisis and its contribution to global peace and development.

#### **1.4 Objectives of the Study**

The primary objectives of this study are:

- To assess the overall perception of China among the Bangladeshi population.
- To examine public attitudes toward China's political, economic, and strategic engagement with Bangladesh.
- To identify key factors shaping Bangladeshis' views on China, including historical, cultural, and geopolitical influences.
- To analyse shifts in public perception over time by comparing findings with previous surveys conducted in 2022 and 2023.
- To provide policy recommendations based on survey insights for strengthening Bangladesh-China relations.

#### **1.5 Structure of the Report**

The report comprises eight chapters, including the introduction, a summary of the survey findings, and a conclusion. Chapter 2 outlines the survey's methodological framework. Chapter 3 delves into the China-Bangladesh relationship; Chapter 4 analyses key findings related to China's image and its developmental role as Bangladeshis perceive it. Chapter 5 examines public opinions on specific aspects of Bangladesh-China bilateral relations. Chapter 6 provides policy recommendations for policymakers in both countries.

## Methodology of the Survey

The follow-up 2024 survey was conducted nationwide in Bangladesh from 12 November to 10 December 2023. The sampling method follows a representative approach by collecting data from major geographical centres of the country and covers respondents that represent the population in this context. The total sample size for Bangladesh's 2024 China image survey was 5355 (2681 offline & 2674 online). The study chose this sample size based on the probability sampling method. The purpose of selecting this sampling method was to ensure that the chosen sample was representative of the entire population and, thus, the statistical conclusions were valid. The survey also used the cluster sampling method. The sampling divisions are clustered using the following two approaches. First, the respondents were clustered based on age, profession, and gender. Second, the respondents were clustered following the hierarchical clustering method (HCM), which divided them into urban and rural areas. Urban-based respondents were from district headquarters, divisional headquarters, and metropolitan cities.

Conversely, rural-based respondents were from sub-districts, unions, and wards. In this phase, the survey was conducted in all eight divisional headquarters and 12 metropolitan cities in Bangladesh. It collected data from 50% (32) of Bangladesh's districts, with particular emphasis on rural areas.

### Map: Location of the respondents (Division wise)

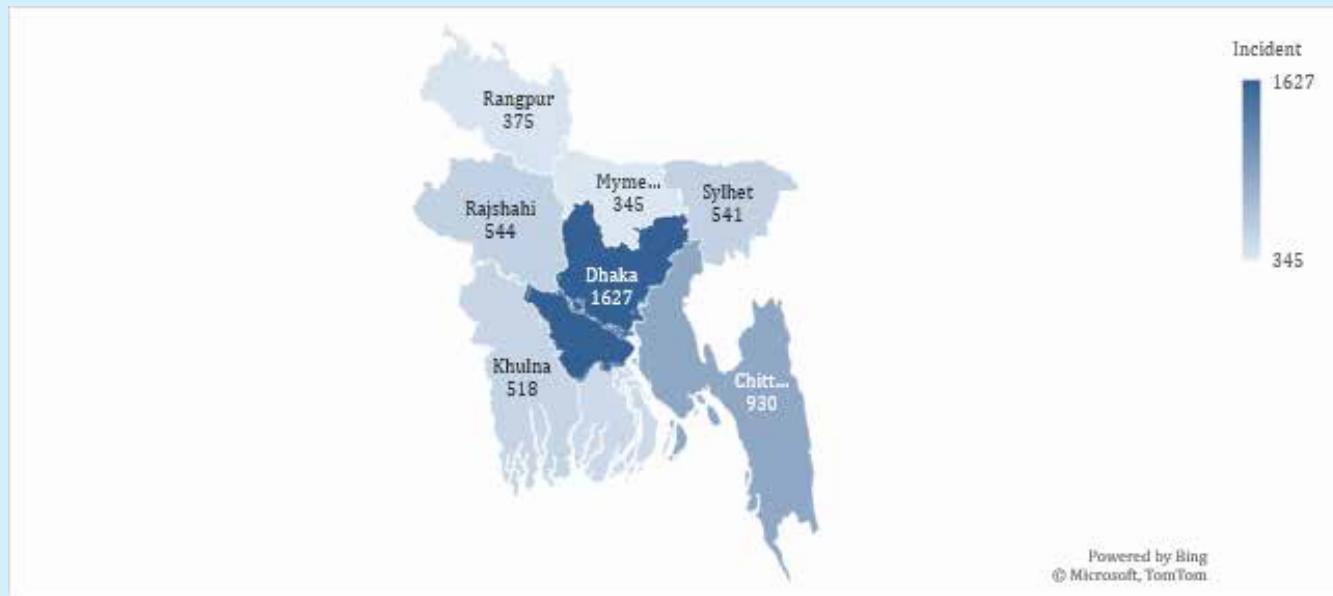


Figure 2.1 Gender Profile of the Respondents

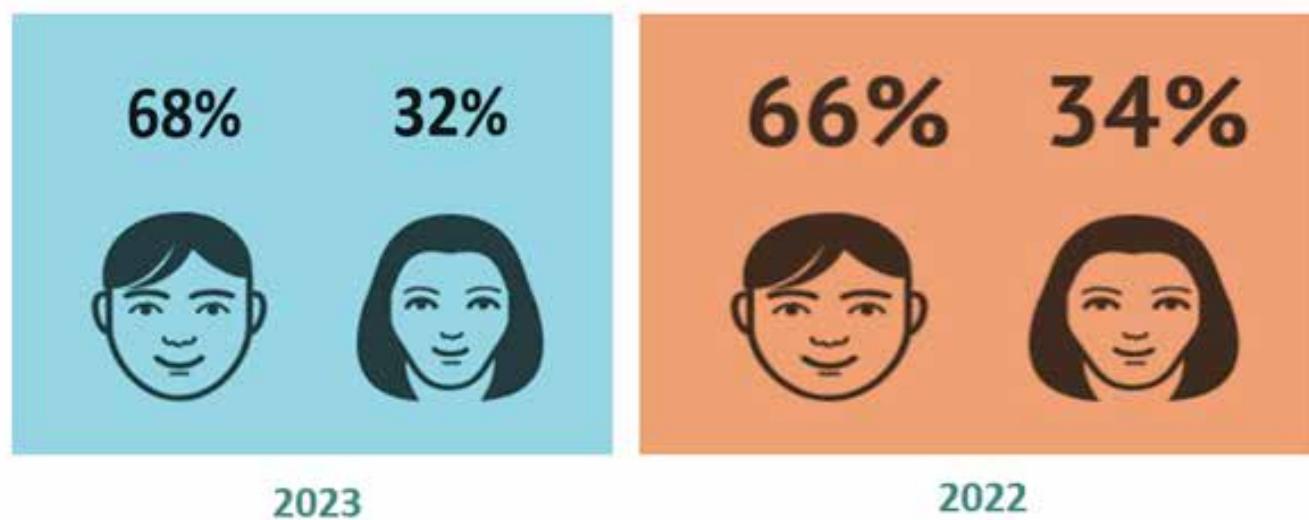
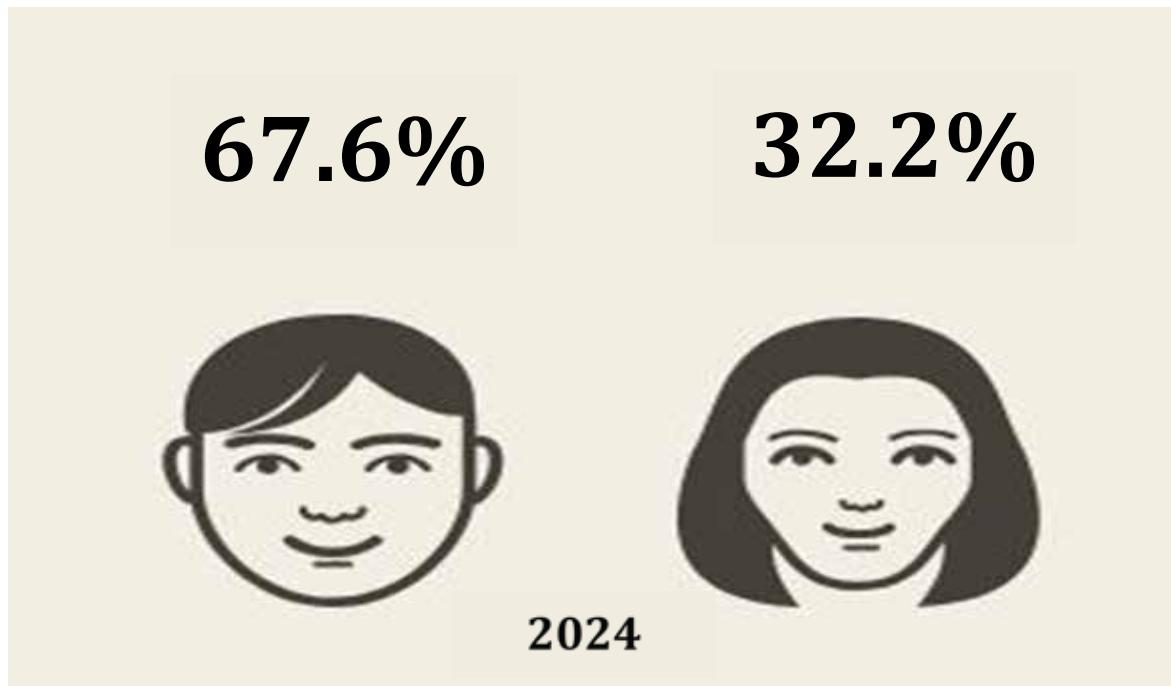
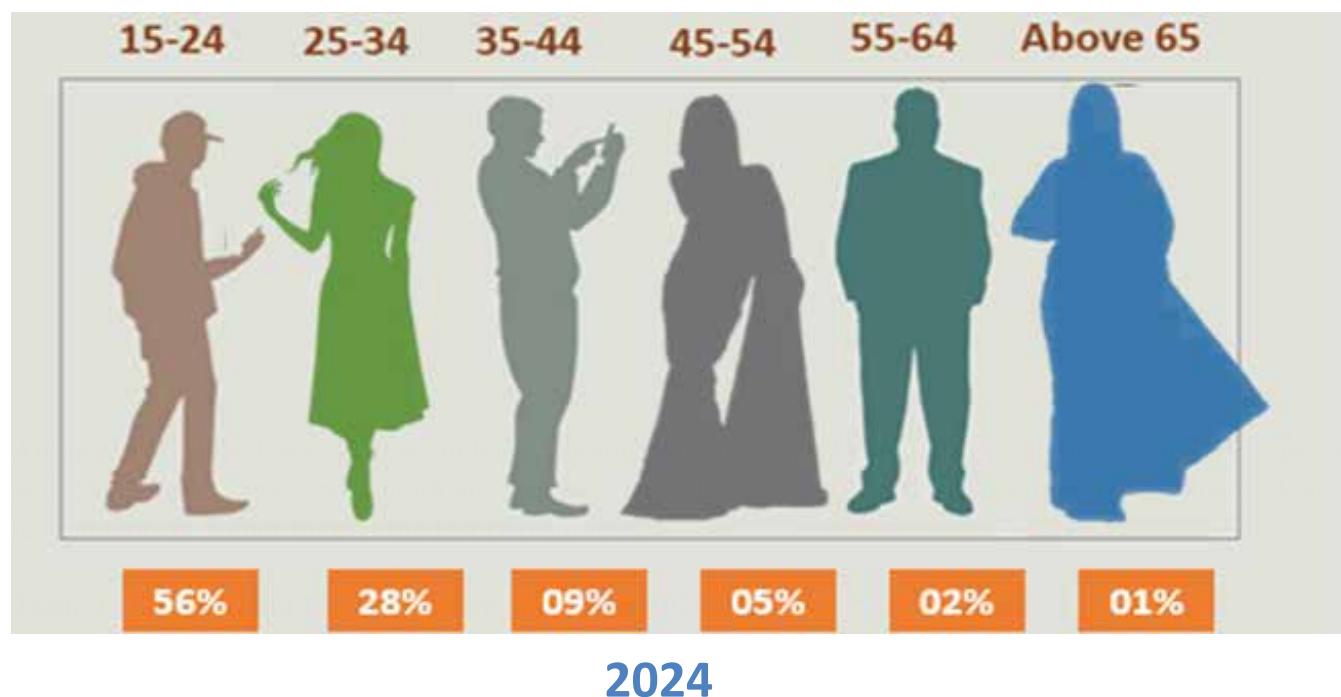
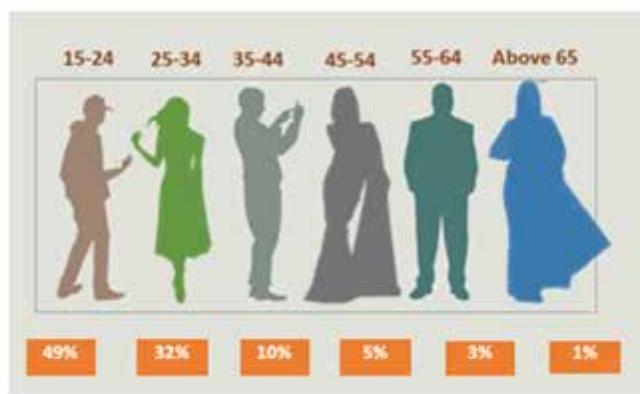


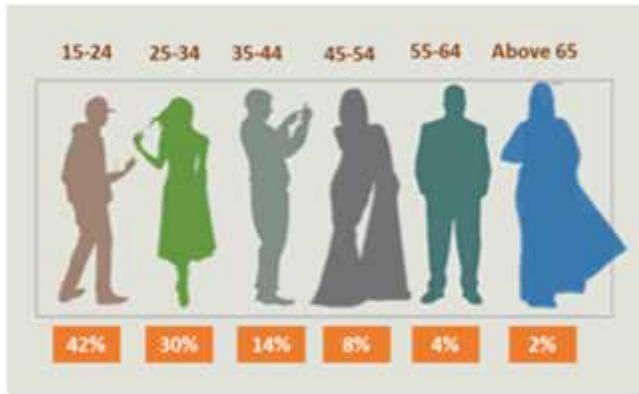
Figure 2.1 shows the distribution of survey respondents. Among the 5355 survey respondents, 67.6 percent were male, and 32.2 percent were female. In the previous two surveys, the gender division was almost similar (see gender dimensions in 2022 and 2023). After conducting three national-level surveys, we have identified that the existing gender roles and cultural barriers often limit access to women in public engagements like surveys. They sometimes hesitated to participate in surveys due to societal norms that discouraged them from speaking publicly or interacting with the data enumerators. However, the survey team tried to overcome these barriers. Secondly, access to women in rural areas was challenging as they were engaged in household chores and agricultural fields. Many were willing to participate in the survey, but their family and household engagements barred them from doing so. Figure 2.3 shows that 88 per cent of the survey respondents were aged between 15 and 45. However, particular emphasis was given to conducting surveys among young people aged between 15 to 35 (76 per cent). Twelve per cent of the respondents were dedicated people aged 35-45 years. At the same time, a little over 12 per cent of the respondents were aged between 46 and 64.

**Figure 2.3 Age Range of the Respondents (%)**





2023



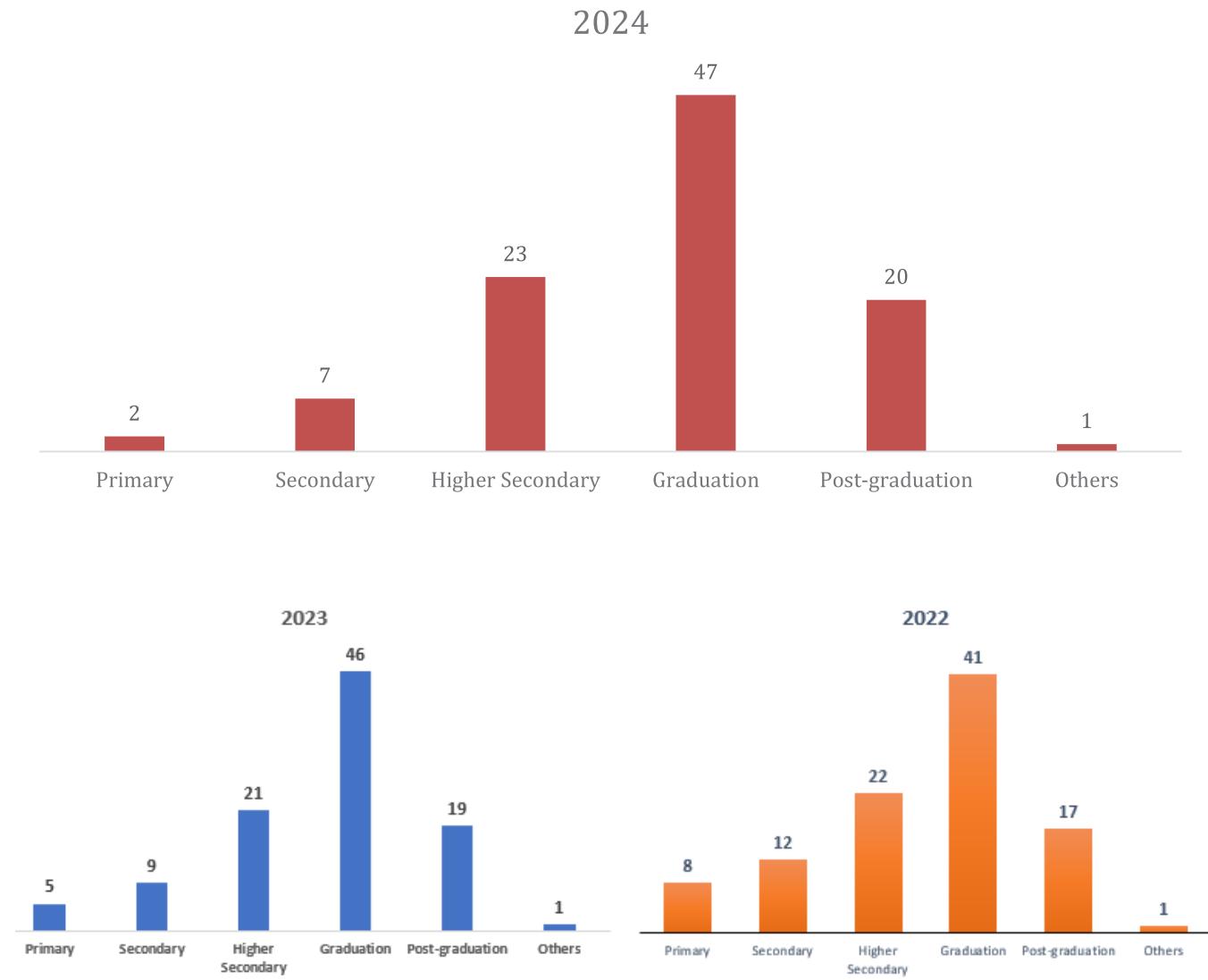
2022

Among the respondents, 47 percent have a graduation degree, 23 percent have higher-secondary degrees, and 20 percent have post-graduate degrees (see Figure 2.4). The percentage of graduate degree respondents is higher than in the last two surveys.

**Table 1: Educational Level of the respondents-2024 (%)**

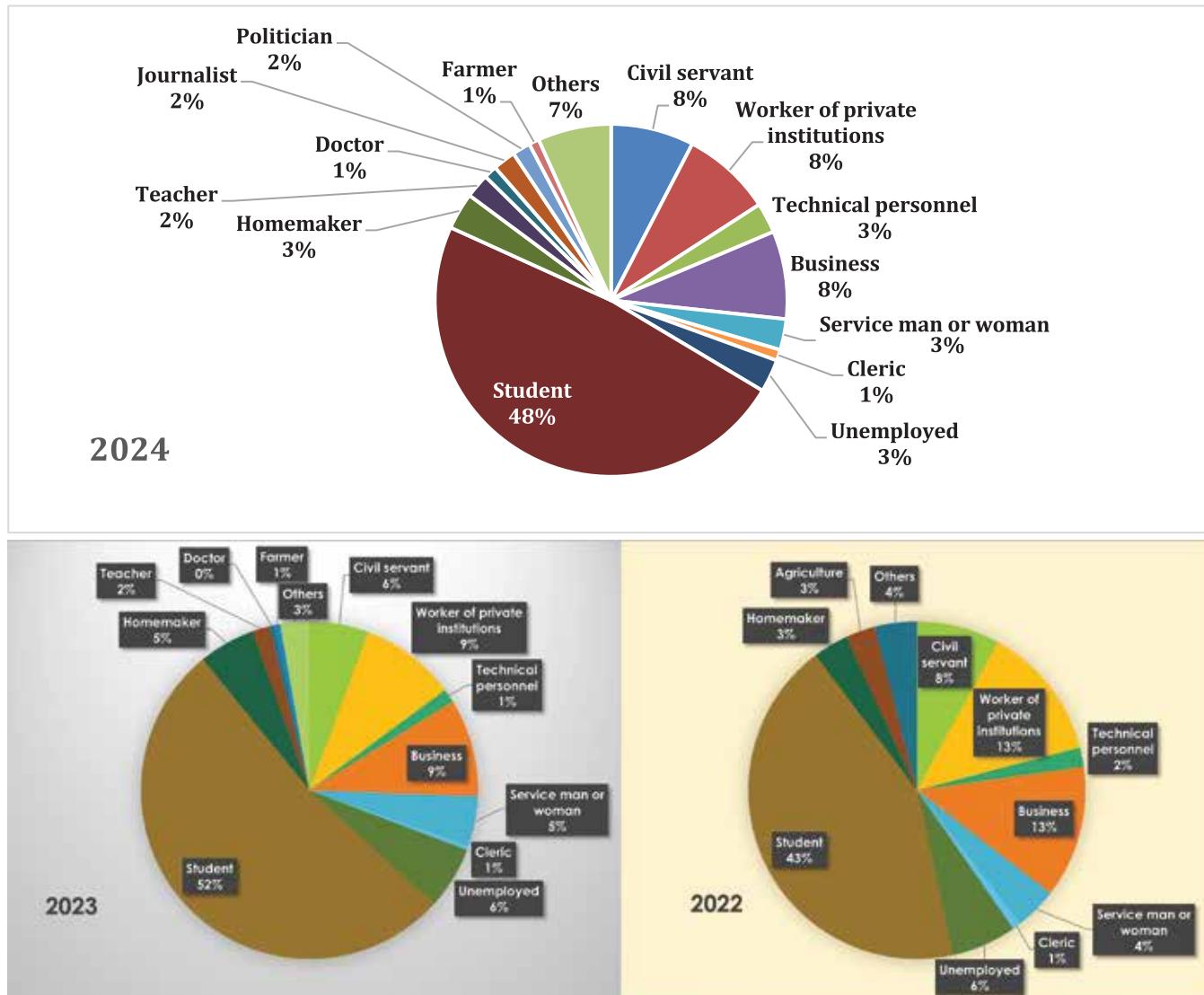
Education Level	Total	Percentage
A. Primary	102	2
B. Secondary	388	7
C. Higher Secondary	1206	23
D. Graduation	2518	47
E. Post-graduation	1086	20
Others	55	1
	5355	100.00

**Figure 2.4: Educational Level of the Respondents (%)**

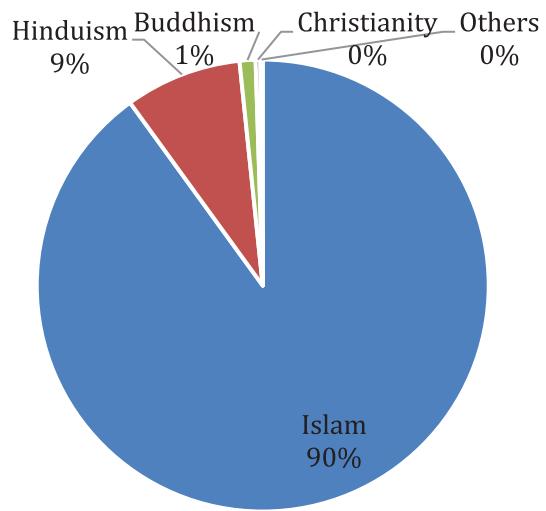


More than 48 per cent of the survey respondents were students. In addition to the student group, eight percent were job holders in the public sector and eight per cent in private companies. Another eight percent were businesspeople. Two percent were homemakers, two percent were politicians, and two percent were journalists (Figure 2.5).

**Figure 2.5: Occupation of the Respondents**



**Figure 2.6: Religion of the Respondents**



The religious/faith profile of the respondents shows that 90 percent were Muslims, 8.3 percent were Hindus, 1.1 percent were Buddhists, and 0.3 percent were Christians.

## Bangladesh-China Bilateral Cooperation: An Overview

Bangladesh-China bilateral cooperation is one of South Asia's most pragmatic and comprehensive bilateral relations. Despite not sharing borders, both countries have built close and cooperative ties, stretching several key areas. Major bilateral areas of cooperation are but are not limited to diplomacy, defence, economy, trade and investment, connectivity, energy, health, education, culture, and politics. Relations in these key areas are gradually evolving and shaping the bilateral ties positively. A concise overview of cooperation in these key areas is provided below in this section.

### 3.1 Diplomatic

Bangladesh and China officially established diplomatic relations on 4th October 1975, when the latter officially recognised the former on 31st August 1975, about four years after achieving independence from Pakistan. In between these years, China was quite adamant about recognising Bangladesh. Even in 1972 (and later in 1973), Beijing used its first veto power of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to prevent UN membership in Dhaka. Such moves by China were primarily motivated to reassure the close ties with its 'all-weather friend' Pakistan, which it had previously supported during the Liberation War of Bangladesh in 1971.<sup>9</sup>

A detente between Bangladesh and Pakistan relations was struck when Islamabad decided to formally recognise Dhaka in 1974 before the conference of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) states. This cessation of hostilities and establishment of diplomatic relations with Pakistan removed a significant obstacle to establishing formal relations between Bangladesh and China. In 1974, Beijing extended its food aid during Bangladesh's famine and provided \$4 million in donations to Bangladesh after the flood.<sup>10</sup> It also invited Bangladesh to participate in the same year's Canton Fair.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, we can see that China started to ease the tension with Bangladesh through aid, assistance, and cultural invitations. This established an informal channel of bilateral cooperation even before Bangladesh achieved a formal

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<sup>9</sup> Anu Anwar, "China-Bangladesh relations: A three-way balance between China, India and the US," The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 18 August 2022.

<sup>10</sup> Mohammad Shakil Bhuiyan and Wang Yi, "Understanding Bangladesh–China Relations from 'Win-Win Cooperation' and 'NOISE' Analysis Perspectives," Chinese Journal of International Review, 6 June 2024.

<sup>11</sup> "Evolving Sino-Bangladeshi ties lead to promising future," 12 July 2024. Cited in <http://epaper.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202407/12/WS66907721a3106431fe82d141.html>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

diplomatic recognition of China. Eventually, Beijing also didn't veto Bangladesh's bid for UN membership in 1974, which made the country a full UN member state in September of that year. As a result of formal recognition, both countries set up their respective embassies in 1976 and started solidifying their relationship by identifying common interests, values, and priorities.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, the two countries have a long history that extends beyond the formal diplomacy of the 20th Century. Ancient trade along the Silk Road linked South Asia, including Bangladesh, with China, facilitating cultural and economic interchange. These ancient links to common heritage and cultural affinity created a strong potential for Bangladesh and China to foster strong diplomatic connections with each other.<sup>13</sup>

A significant milestone in bilateral cooperation and diplomatic ties came in 1978 when Chinese Vice Premier Li Xiannian visited Dhaka in March 1978. For the first time, this marked a top-level Chinese official and delegation visit to Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup> During this visit, both countries agreed to cooperate in economy, science, and technology. Since then, the level of cooperation between the two countries has constantly risen, including Bangladesh, which has taken various initiatives to uphold and develop bilateral ties.

Within only eight years, Li Xiannian again visited Dhaka, this time as the Chinese President along with his team of high-level officials in March 1986.<sup>15</sup> He was the first Chinese President to visit Bangladesh, symbolising a growing friendship between the two countries just a decade after establishing formal diplomatic relations.<sup>16</sup> In 2000, Bangladesh celebrated 25 years of diplomatic ties by releasing a postal stamp commemorating the bilateral relationship. In 2005, Both countries also observed the 'China-Bangladesh Friendship Year.'<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lailufar Yasmin, "Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh's rising geopolitical agency and China's regional and global ambitions," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 3 January 2024.

<sup>13</sup> Mohammad Shakil Bhuiyan and Wang Yi, "Understanding Bangladesh–China Relations from 'Win-Win Cooperation' and 'NOISE' Analysis Perspectives," *Chinese Journal of International Review*, 6 June 2024.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> "Xi's visit a strong political message," 29 September 2016. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/6190/xi-s-visit-a-strong-political-message>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Mohammad Shakil Bhuiyan and Wang Yi, "Understanding Bangladesh–China Relations from 'Win-Win Cooperation' and 'NOISE' Analysis Perspectives," *Chinese Journal of International Review*, 6 June 2024.

Bilateral relations reached a new high when Chinese President Xi Jinping officially visited Bangladesh in October 2016. This marked 30 years since a Chinese President visited Bangladeshi soil in 1986 visit of President Li Xiannian. During Xi's visit, both countries upgraded their bilateral relations and labelled it a 'strategic cooperative partnership.' The visit culminated in both governments signing 27 new agreements and, in addition, 13 new deals between Bangladeshi and Chinese companies.<sup>18</sup> Dhaka also formally announced the joining of BRI as the first South Asian country to do so.

In 2019, a high-level visit by a Bangladeshi delegation led by then Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina also resulted in both countries signing nine bilateral agreements covering issues such as aid for Rohingyas, economic and technical cooperation, investment, power, culture, and tourism.<sup>19</sup> Five years later, in July 2024, a similar visit was followed up by a high-level delegation from Bangladesh, including the Prime Minister, where both countries signed 21 instruments and announced seven projects.<sup>20</sup> During this visit, both countries also proclaimed to upgrade their bilateral ties from a 'Strategic Cooperative Partnership' to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership.' This heightening of bilateral ties just within 8 years indicates the relationship between the two countries has become much stronger than before.<sup>21</sup>

China has also expressed positive support for Bangladesh's bid to join the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a Sectoral Dialogue Partner and become a partner country of BRICS.<sup>22</sup> <sup>23</sup> Reciprocally, Bangladesh had invited China to participate as an observer in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Besides cooperating in regional and global forums, Bangladesh also committed to the 'One China Policy' during the Taiwan Strait Crisis of 2022.<sup>24</sup> Bangladesh reiterated a similar commitment in 2024 during the high-level bilateral meetings held in Beijing between the top leaders of both countries.

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<sup>18</sup> "Xi Jinping's milestone visit: transforming dynamics" 19 October 2016. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/perspective/xi-jinpings-milestone-visit-transforming-dynamics-1300573>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>19</sup> Mohammad Shakil Bhuiyan and Wang Yi, o. cit.

<sup>20</sup> "Dhaka, Beijing sign 21 instruments, announce 7 projects," 10 July 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/dhaka-beijing-sign-21-instruments-announce-7-projects-3653501>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>21</sup> ibid

<sup>22</sup> Mohammad Shakil Bhuiyan and Wang Yi, "Understanding Bangladesh–China Relations from 'Win-Win Cooperation' and 'NOISE' Analysis Perspectives," Chinese Journal of International Review, 6 June 2024.

<sup>23</sup> "Bangladesh wants enhanced economic, security ties with China: Touhid," 14 October 2024. Cited in <https://www.bssnews.net/news/216104>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>24</sup> Mohammad Shakil Bhuiyan and Wang Yi, op. cit.

Despite these positive developments and optimistic outlook, the diplomatic relations between the two countries also face challenges and caveats. The primary contention remains due to Beijing's response to the Rohingya Refugee Crisis. China had previously blocked any UNSC resolution on the Rohingyas from being adopted by vetoing in favour of Myanmar.<sup>25</sup> However, in 2022, Beijing changed its stance and abstained from voting rather than vetoing a UNSC resolution regarding Rohingyas, which eventually favoured the resolution to be passed in the council.<sup>26</sup>

Despite being a close ally of Myanmar, China has also failed to facilitate a meaningful solution to the crisis through trilateral talks with Bangladesh.<sup>27</sup> Experts perceive such a stance, if continued, might promote frustrations and a negative image of China. Although Beijing has facilitated multilateral dialogues on the issues and repatriation arrangements of a very small amount of Rohingya refugees, these are too little, too inadequate.<sup>28</sup>

As the State Administration Council (SAC) loses ground to the Arakan Army (AA) in Rakhine, a new geopolitical reality is emerging for Bangladesh, especially concerning its national security and finding a durable solution to the Rohingya refugee crisis.<sup>29</sup> Given such a scenario, Dhaka will welcome diplomatic support from Beijing to facilitate a ceasefire to promote peace, stability, and order in Rakhine, especially in areas adjacent to its borders with Myanmar. Such expectations of Bangladesh on China are even reflected in the words of the current Foreign Advisor, Md Touhid Hossain. In a joint seminar organised by the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) and the Centre for China Studies (SIIS-DU), he directly pointed out China's significant influence over Myanmar and that it (China) should have a more substantial role in facilitating the repatriation of the Rohingyas.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> “China and Russia oppose UN resolution on Rohingya,” 24 December 2017. Cited in <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/24/china-russia-oppose-un-resolution-myanmar-rohingya-muslims>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>26</sup> Sebastian Strangio, “UN Security Council Adopts Rare Resolution on Myanmar,” The Diplomat, 22 December 2022.

<sup>27</sup> “Bangladesh wants enhanced economic, security ties with China: Touhid,” 14 October 2024. Cited in <https://www.bssnews.net/news/216104>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>28</sup> Anu Anwar, “China-Bangladesh relations: A three-way balance between China, India and the US,” The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 18 August 2022.

<sup>29</sup> Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan, “Bangladesh’s Foreign Policy on Myanmar: The Need for Broader Engagement,” Australian Outlook, 2 December 2024.

<sup>30</sup> “Relations with China should be considered holistically,” 15 October 2024. Cited in <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/6eqo5o7e3h>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

In January 2025, Foreign Advisor Md Touhid Hossain visited China. This was his first visit to any foreign nation as a foreign Advisor and signifies the importance of a bilateral relationship with China.<sup>31</sup> In a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, Touhid requested China lower the interest rate on Preferential Buyer's Credit (PBC) and Government Concessional Loans (GCL) from 2-3 percent to 1 percent, waive the commitment fee and extend the loan repayment period from 20 to 30 years. Dhaka also requested that Beijing improve Bangladeshi patients' access to medical treatment. In response, China 'agreed in principle' to extend the loan repayment period and promised to consider the request to lower the interest rate. Beijing also agreed to construct a 1,000-bed hospital in Dhaka and designate three to four hospitals in Kunming to treat Bangladeshi patients medically. Both countries also reaffirmed their comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership.

### **3.2 Defense and Security**

Defence cooperation has been one of the principal cornerstones of bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and China. Interestingly, it has been one of the key priorities of the bilateral ties since the two countries started to forge formal relations in 1975.<sup>32</sup> Due to a domestic political shift in 1975, Bangladesh explored China as a reliable guarantor for military hardware and defence aid. Experts argue that Dhaka, since 1975, moved more towards the Pakistan-China axis from the Indo-Soviet axis. Soviet military cooperation became less tenable, and China took the opportunity to fill the vacuum. Defence cooperation with China also gained momentum due to the strategic calculations of Bangladesh, where the country had a relatively hostile atmosphere, persisting with its neighbours India and Myanmar throughout the decade.<sup>33</sup>

Defence aid from China became central to bilateral ties, as it supplied 78% of Bangladesh's arms from 1975 to 1980.<sup>34</sup> Since the Early 1980s, the armed forces of both countries have engaged in frequent high-level official visits and joint training to bolster military cooperation. The defence and security relationship reached a significant milestone when both countries signed a defence cooperation agreement

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<sup>31</sup> "Touhid-Wang meeting on 21 January: Issues to gain priority" 6 January 2025. Cited in <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/pkzj5bsnqb>. Accessed on 9 January 2025.

<sup>32</sup> Anu Anwar, "China-Bangladesh relations: A three-way balance between China, India, and the US," The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 18 August 2022.

<sup>33</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. "Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh's rising geopolitical agency and China's regional and global ambitions," Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies, 3 January 2024.

<sup>34</sup> Mohammad Shakil Bhuiyan and Wang Yi, "Understanding Bangladesh–China Relations from 'Win-Win Cooperation' and 'NOISE' Analysis Perspectives," Chinese Journal of International Review, 6 June 2024.

in 2002, including military training and defence production. This deal helped institutionalise defence cooperation between states instead of taking a piecemeal approach.<sup>35</sup> Notably, China is the first and only one of two countries to have such defence deals with Bangladesh.

At present, Bangladesh is the second largest buyer of Chinese weapons. Bangladesh accounted for 11% of China's total Chinese arms sales from 2019 to 2023. As the 26th largest arms buyer in the world, Bangladesh, from 2019-2023, purchased about 72% of its overall arms from China.<sup>36</sup> According to SIPRI, from 2010-2019, Bangladesh spent a massive \$2.59 billion in arms purchases from China, which outranks any other exporter of arms to the South Asian country by a significant margin.<sup>37</sup> Dhaka has purchased key weapon systems from Beijing, including maritime patrol vessels, corvettes, tanks, fighter jets, and surface-to-air and anti-ship missiles. Bangladesh Army uses modern and state-of-the-art Chinese weapons like VT-5 light tanks and MBT-2000 Main Battle Tanks. Bangladesh Air Force has introduced sophisticated Chinese jet fighter trainers like K-8 and Short-Range Air Defence Surface Air Missile Systems (SHORAD SAMs) like FM-90s. Bangladesh Navy has purchased / a pair of Chinese Ming Class Submarines worth \$205 million and a new generation of Chinese Type 056 Stealth Corvettes for its surface ship fleet.<sup>38</sup>

Introducing Chinese submarines named BNS Nabajatra and BNS Joyjatra has made the Bangladesh Navy a 'Three-Dimensional Force.' Moreover, Bangladesh also commissioned its first submarine base in Pekua of Cox's Bazar to accommodate these submarines. It cost \$1.2 billion in construction with direct Chinese assistance and can accommodate six submarines at a time.<sup>39</sup> Beijing has also assisted Bangladesh in achieving its goal to develop an indigenous Defence Industrial Base (DIB) by facilitating the Transfer of Technology (ToT) to Bangladesh Ordnance Factory (BOF) and Bangladesh Machine Tools Factory (BMTF) for small and medium-sized arms like rifles, rocket launchers, MANPADS, light utility vehicles, etc. In 2012, with Chinese assistance, the Bangladesh Navy also introduced its first domestically produced petrol vessels in the fleet, which were manufactured in Khulna Shipyard.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lailufar Yasmin, *op. cit.*

<sup>36</sup> "TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL ARMS TRANSFERS, 2023," March 2024, Cited in <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2024/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2023>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>37</sup> Anu Anwar, "China-Bangladesh relations: A three-way balance between China, India, and the US," The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 18 August 2022.

<sup>38</sup> Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan, "Revisiting 'Forces Goal 2030': Bangladesh's Military Modernization Plan Under the New Government," *The Diplomat*, 6 December 2024.

<sup>39</sup> Shafi Mostofa, "China in South Asia: Bangladesh is Tilting towards China," *South Asian Voices*, 19 July 2023.

<sup>40</sup> Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan, *op. cit.*

Defence cooperation with China has significantly boosted Bangladesh's ambitious military modernisation drive, 'Force Goal 2030', and has portrayed China as its key defence partner of Bangladesh. Due to familiarity, legacy, and preference, AFB also favours modern Chinese weapons to be introduced into their armoury. Moreover, Beijing provides modern, high-tech, and sophisticated military equipment with comparatively lower costs than other alternatives. It also comes with no conditions attached to the internal political dynamics of the country. It provides access to critical military hardware, which other countries wouldn't have let Bangladesh have access to.<sup>41</sup>

In 2014, both countries signed four agreements on military cooperation, including a deal where the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would provide military assistance, including training and logistics, free of cost to the Armed Forces of Bangladesh (AFB). Another agreement provided that the PLA would assist Bangladesh in setting up a language lab at the Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).<sup>42</sup> Bangladesh and China also cooperate in the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs), where Bangladesh's expertise in UNPKOs as one of the top troops-contributing countries (TCCs) and China's contribution as one of the top donors in terms of money and one of the top 10 TCCs complement each other.<sup>43</sup> In May 2024, both countries held a historic joint military exercise, the first of its kind, reiterating their close defence ties.<sup>44</sup>

In October 2024, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) sent its warships Qi Jiguang and Jing Gangshan to Chittagong Port for a goodwill visit. This symbolised the existence of defence relations intact, irrespective of the change of power in Dhaka. This was the first visit by any foreign naval vessel after the interim government had taken over power in the country.<sup>45</sup> The new interim government has also expressed its will further to solidify its defence and security cooperation with China. In the seminar jointly organised by BIISS-CCS (DU-SIIA) in October 2024, Foreign Minister Touhid Hossain emphasised the government's willingness to continue bilateral defence cooperation. He affirmed that Bangladesh wants more defence cooperation with China and labelled defence cooperation as an essential element of bilateral ties.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> ibid

<sup>42</sup> "4 deals inked on military cooperation with China" 12 May 2014. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/4-deals-inked-on-military-cooperation-with-china-23812>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>43</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. "Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh's rising geopolitical agency and China's regional and global ambitions," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 3 January 2024.

<sup>44</sup> Saqlain Rizve, "China-Bangladesh Military Exercises Signal Shifting Geopolitical Landscape," *The Diplomat*, 6 May 2024.

<sup>45</sup> "Chinese naval fleet makes historic visit to Bangladesh" 12 October 2024. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/foreign-affairs/361672/chinese-naval-fleet-makes-historic-visit-to>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

<sup>46</sup> "Bangladesh wants enhanced economic, security ties with China: Touhid," 14 October 2024.

Cited in <https://www.bssnews.net/news/216104>. Accessed on 7 January 2025.

Therefore, both countries have exhibited a positive and constructive attitude toward promoting cooperation in peacekeeping, development, and conflict resolution. Since the early days of bilateral ties, military hardware purchases and supplies have been integral to defence cooperation. Gradually, with time, defence cooperation between the two countries has not only been limited to arms sales but has also become holistic.

### 3.3 Economy, Trade and Investment

Bilateral relations between Bangladesh and China over economy, trade, and investment have grown significantly. Before the 2000s, the economic aspect was not as significant an aspect of bilateral cooperation as it was in the case of politico-defense issues.<sup>47</sup> One significant development before the 2000s was when China granted Bangladesh's Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status in 1984 to facilitate equal and advantageous grounds for bilateral trade. In 2001, bilateral trade was guided under the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA) or the Bangkok Agreement. In 2006, China became Bangladesh's largest trading partner.<sup>48</sup> Since 2010, China has become Bangladesh's largest trading partner for 15 years, with an investment of about \$30 billion. The bilateral trade volume now stands close to \$25 billion and keeps growing steadily.<sup>49</sup> President Xi's 2016 visit to Dhaka took the trajectory of bilateral cooperation about the economy, trade, and investment to a new height. Bangladesh officially joined the BRI as the first South Asian state and signed 40 G2G and private sector agreements, most constituting bilateral economic, trade, and investment issues. The geographical position of Bangladesh as a connecting route between South Asia and South East Asia makes the country very significant as a BRI partner. During Xi's visit, Bangladesh also received \$38.05 billion in economic assistance and investment. This is equivalent to 10% of Bangladesh's GDP and is the most significant amount any nation has pledged to aid, invest, and assist Bangladesh.<sup>50</sup> The latest 2024 high-level meeting between the two countries' top leaders also yielded an auspicious outcome. Both countries announced the signing of 21 instruments and seven more projects.

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<sup>47</sup> Anu Anwar, "China-Bangladesh relations: A three-way balance between China, India, and the US," The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 18 August 2022.

<sup>48</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. "Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh's rising geopolitical agency and China's regional and global ambitions," Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies, 3 January 2024.

<sup>49</sup> "How China's Belt and Road changing Bangladesh's economy and infrastructures," 1 October 2023.

Cited in <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/how-chinas-belt-and-road-changing-bangladesh-infrastructures-709826>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>50</sup> Anu Anwar, "China-Bangladesh relations: A three-way balance between China, India, and the US," The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 18 August 2022.

These instruments and projects are connected to economic, trade, and investment cooperation. These include cooperation in strengthening the ties on the digital economy, conducting a joint feasibility study on the bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA), and optimising the bilateral investment treaty.<sup>51</sup>

Both countries have also developed mechanisms to trade in local currencies, removing the barriers to dollar transactions and promoting the exchange of domestic currencies for swift transactions. Dhaka has even considered paying the Russian loans on the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP) in Renminbi to avoid Western embargoes or sanctions and continue the construction of the critically important infrastructure.<sup>52</sup> China granted \$2 billion in Renminbi as loans and aid to Bangladesh after the July 2024 state-level meeting.<sup>53</sup>

Notably, Bangladesh has also received substantial export advantages from China. Under APTA, China granted 99% of Bangladeshi goods zero tariff access, up from the 97% granted previously.<sup>54</sup> As of December 1st, 2024 China has provided Bangladesh zero tariff treatment for 100% tariff lines. Bangladeshi exports to China have increased substantially. Despite a significant trade imbalance. Within 25 years, Bangladeshi exports increased from \$55.2 million to \$785 million, with an 11.2% annual growth.<sup>55</sup>

About 1,000 Chinese firms currently work in Bangladesh, employing more than 5,50,000 people.<sup>56</sup> Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) has also flown into Bangladesh's various Export Processing Zones (EPZs). China is the largest FDI provider to Bangladesh, and about 25% of the overall investment made in Bangladeshi EPZs is Chinese.<sup>57</sup> Most recently, in September 2024, Chinese company Tianhui Button (BD) Company Limited announced it would invest \$4 million to establish a garment accessories

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<sup>51</sup> "Dhaka, Beijing sign 21 instruments, announce 7 projects," 10 July 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/dhaka-beijing-sign-21-instruments-announce-7-projects-3653501>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>52</sup> "Bangladesh to pay Russia in yuan for nuclear plant," 17 April 2023. Cited in <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/bangladesh-pay-russia-yuan-nuclear-plant-2023-04-17/>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>53</sup> "China has agreed to pay \$2b to Bangladesh in grants, loans: PM," 14 July 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/diplomacy/news/china-has-agreed-pay-2b-bangladesh-grants-loans-pm-3656616>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>54</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. "Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh's rising geopolitical agency and China's regional and global ambitions," *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 3 January 2024.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid*

<sup>56</sup> "Report: Chinese enterprises in Bangladesh offer 550,000 jobs," 4 July 2023. Cited in <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/338976>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>57</sup> "China now largest FDI source of BD," 18 December 2022. <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/economy/bangladesh/china-now-largest-fdi-source-of-bd-1671331967>

manufacturing industry in Cumilla EPZ.<sup>58</sup> In December 2024, Chinese company Bangladesh Prothoma Power Supply Ltd announced investing \$12.24 million to establish a battery plate manufacturing industry inside the BEPZA Economic Zone or Mirsarai in Chattogram.<sup>59</sup> In the same month of 2024, the Chinese company Bangladesh BaoRui Textile Co Ltd announced it would invest \$19.53 million in the Mongla Export Processing Zone (EPZ) to establish a composite textile manufacturing facility.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, Bangladesh has allocated 783 acres of land to establish the Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone (CEIZ) in Anwara of Chattogram under a 2016 MoU signed by the governments of both countries. The establishment of CEIZ aims to provide exclusive benefits to Chinese companies and create employment opportunities for Bangladeshis. Critics have pointed out that Chinese investment in CEIZ is critical to financially sustaining the Karnaphuli Tunnel.<sup>61</sup> Already, China has established 107 industrial units and has invested \$1.6 billion, creating job opportunities for 133,000 Bangladeshis across all the EPZs of Bangladesh.<sup>62</sup>

In addition to these ties, a significant relationship has grown between the business community people of both countries. These ties are, in contrast, newer than other aspects but very sophisticated in the network. For example, Chinese businesses have invested in hotels and restaurant businesses in Dhaka, which also benefits the local Bangladeshi entrepreneurs. These businesses have invested in renting the local buildings and have transformed them into affordable residential hotels and restaurants.<sup>63</sup> Due to this type of nexus and interaction, business communities in Bangladesh positively perceive China as they benefit from its investment, trade, and exports across multiple sectors.

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<sup>58</sup> “Chinese Company to invest \$4 million in Cumilla EPZ” 12 September 2024. Cited in Chinese Company to invest \$4 million in Cumilla EPZ | Business. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>59</sup> “Chinese firm Bangladesh Prothoma Power to invest \$12.24 million inside Bepza EZ” 10 December 2024.

Cited <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/chinese-firm-bangladesh-prothoma-power-invest-1224-million-inside-bepza-ez-3773061>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>60</sup> “Chinese firm Bangladesh BaoRui Textile to invest \$19.53 million in Mongla EPZ” 2 December 2024.

Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/chinese-firm-bangladesh-baorui-textile-invest-1953-million-mongla-epz-3766706>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>61</sup> “Relations with China should be considered holistically” 15 October 2024. Cited in <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/6eqo5o7e3h>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>62</sup> “Bepza invites Chinese investors to seize golden opportunity in Bangladesh” 16 December 2024.

Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/organisation-news/news/bepza-invites-chinese-investors-seize-golden-opportunity-bangladesh-3777911>. Accessed on 9 January 2025.

<sup>63</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. “Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh’s rising geopolitical agency and China’s regional and global ambitions,” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 3 January 2024.

Overall, bilateral cooperation between Bangladesh and China over economy, trade, and investment remains high.<sup>64</sup>

### 3.4 Connectivity, Energy and Health

China has focused its development and infrastructure aid significantly on connectivity and energy. According to Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen, China has issued \$4.45 billion for 35 BRI projects in a decade, of which 56% and 36% were allocated to the transportation and energy sectors.<sup>65</sup> Since the 1980s, China has been constructing ‘Bangladesh-China Friendship Bridges,’ the first two of which were inaugurated in 1986 and 1989. Now, eight such bridges have already been built by China, and three more are on the pipeline and are proposed to be constructed. The latest such bridge was inaugurated in September of 2022 in Pirojpur.<sup>66</sup> Moreover, China has been part of critical infrastructure projects such as the Padma Bridge, the Bangabandhu (Karnaphuli) Tunnel, and the Dhaka-Ashulia Elevated Expressway, essential for securing smooth connectivity throughout various regions of Bangladesh.<sup>67</sup>

Besides, China has modestly invested in improving Bangladesh's energy sector. It has been involved in constructing several key power plant projects, including coal-fired and thermal plants, solar plants, and wind plants. Major coal-fired and thermal power plants built through Chinese assistance are Payra Power Plant 1st Phase (1320 MW), Barisal Power Plant 1st Phase (350 MW), and Banskhali Power Plant (1320 MW). China has also invested in renewable energy projects in Bangladesh. In the 2021 UN Climate Summit in Glasgow, Dhaka pledged to produce 40% of its electricity from renewables by 2041. Therefore, it will indeed look for significant foreign investment, as China is one of the potential partners to help Bangladesh's energy transition.<sup>68</sup> In Mymensingh, Chinese firm HDFC SunPower Ltd has invested in a 50 MW photovoltaic power plant with 1,69,000 solar panels. Its construction started in 2019 and ended in

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<sup>64</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. “Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh’s rising geopolitical agency and China’s regional and global ambitions,” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 3 January 2024.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid*

<sup>66</sup> *ibid*

<sup>67</sup> “China the ‘biggest player’ in Bangladesh’s energy transition” 21 September 2022. Cited in <https://dialogue.earth/en/energy/china-the-biggest-player-in-bangladesh-energy-transition/>. Accessed on 9 January 2025.

<sup>68</sup> “Feature: Chinese-built solar power plant shines in northern Bangladesh” 17 February 2024. Cited in <https://english.news.cn/20240217/667e17e5350842438a10579ad27032bd/c.html>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

2020.<sup>69</sup> In March 2024, Chinese firm Wuling Power Corp. completed Bangladesh's first centralised wind power project. Based in Cox's Bazar, this plant is expected to meet the demands of 1,00,000 households, thereby entering the era of commercial wind power for the first time.<sup>70</sup> In August 2024, Chief Advisor Professor Muhammad Yunus, who has long championed the transition to green energy and renewables, urged Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen to relocate solar panel factories to Bangladesh, which would help Dhaka in its drive to green transition.<sup>71</sup>

In addition, China has played an active role in pushing global cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic. It has advocated for making the COVID-19 vaccines a universal public good and cessation of its intellectual property rights. China delivered Bangladesh 153 million Sinopharm BIBP and Sinovac COVID-19 vaccines during the critical phase of the pandemic, especially given the situation when Serum Institute failed to deliver their promised vaccines to Bangladesh. China also gifted a significant amount of Sinopharm BIBP and Sinovac vaccines. It also gave almost 3 million face masks, 110,000 pieces of protective clothing, diagnostic kits, ventilator machines, and disinfectants.<sup>72</sup> China also deployed a physician team to help Bangladesh fight against the pandemic. The team has provided advice on pandemic management, patient care, laboratory testing, and direction and instruction to Bangladeshi healthcare providers.<sup>73</sup> Moreover, in 2013, the Chinese medical ship Peace Ark visited Bangladesh on a week-long goodwill visit and treated more than 7,000 people before its departure.<sup>74</sup> China also sent a team of medical experts and personnel after receiving a government invitation to treat the injured of the July-August mass uprising in September 2024. Within four days of arrival, the medical team examined and reviewed the medical records of 105 patients, visiting five hospitals in due course. This showcased the Chinese

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<sup>69</sup> "Chinese-invest first wind power plant in Bangladesh fully into operation" 25 March 2024. Cited in [<sup>70</sup> "Yunus urges China to relocate solar panel plants to Bangladesh" 25 August 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/yunus-urges-china-relocate-solar-panel-plants-bangladesh-3686071>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.](http://english.scio.gov.cn/m/beltandroad/2024-03/25/content_117082815.htm#:~:text=Chinese%2Dinvest%20first%20wind%20power%20plant%20in%20Bangladesh%20fully%20into%20operation,-Xinhua%20%7C%20March%202025&text=Xinhua%2FSun%20Nan),With%20the%20last%20wind%2Ddriven%20generator%20installed%2C%20Cox's%20Bazar%20wind,put%20in%20operation%20on%20Sunday. Accessed on 10 January 2025.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

<sup>71</sup> Mohammad Shakil Bhuiyan and Wang Yi, "Understanding Bangladesh–China Relations from 'Win-Win Cooperation' and 'NOISE' Analysis Perspectives," *Chinese Journal of International Review*, 6 June 2024.

<sup>72</sup> ibid

<sup>73</sup> "Peace Ark leaves" 26 August 2013. Cited in <https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/peace-ark-leaves>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>74</sup> "Bangladesh considers sending student movement victims to China for treatment" 26 September 2024. Cited in <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/health/359831/bangladesh-consider-sending-student-movement>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

goodwill to provide emergency humanitarian medical support and advanced treatment for the Bangladeshis.<sup>75</sup>

### 3.5 Education, Culture, and Technology

Bangladesh and China have significantly extended their bilateral cooperation in cultural and educational exchanges in recent years. Most recently, the Centre for China Studies (CCS) was inaugurated at Dhaka University in mid-2024 to promote research and academic study on different issues involving China and its nexus to Bangladesh. There are also two Confucius Institutes (CI) in Bangladesh based at the University of Dhaka (DU) and North South University (NSU). These CIs positively promote and facilitate cultural exchanges and strengthen bilateral understanding between local communities.<sup>76</sup> In September 2024, NSU hosted the first ‘Dhaka-China Day’ on its premises, co-hosted by the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka.<sup>77</sup> There are also G2G agreements between major Chinese media outlets like Xinhua News Agency and China Media Group (CMG) with Bangladesh Television (BTV) and Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS) over information broadcast and promotion of cultural outreach between the audiences of the two countries.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, although Chinese cuisine has been significantly altered to match Bangladeshi taste buds, it has been highly popular among locals. In addition, Chinese popular culture, such as movies and songs, is also becoming increasingly popular among Bangladeshi youths.<sup>79</sup>

Moreover, China has also become an educational hub for Bangladeshi students. More students are now enthusiastic about pursuing their tertiary education in China. In addition to this, the Chinese government also provides scholarships to many students each year. 53 and 55 Bangladeshi students received the Chinese Government Scholarship in 2022 and 2023 to pursue their undergraduate, postgraduate, and

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<sup>75</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. “Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh’s rising geopolitical agency and China’s regional and global ambitions,” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 3 January 2024.

<sup>76</sup> “1st Dhaka China Day event held in Bangladeshi capital” 27 September 2024. Cited in <https://english.news.cn/20240927/310665c37d7246df85979b655569f610/c.html>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Dhaka, Beijing sign 21 instruments, announce 7 projects,’ 10 July 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/dhaka-beijing-sign-21-instruments-announce-7-projects-3653501>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>78</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. “Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh’s rising geopolitical agency and China’s regional and global ambitions,” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 3 January 2024.

<sup>79</sup> “55 Bangladeshi students get Chinese Government Scholarship this year” 19 June 2023. Cited in <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/education/55-bangladeshi-students-get-chinese-government-scholarship-year-652262>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

doctorate degrees in China.<sup>80</sup> These scholarships cover accommodation, tuition fees, travel and living expenses, and medical insurance in top Chinese Universities. In 2024, both countries also renewed the previously signed MoUs for cooperation between their respective Ministries of Education.<sup>81</sup>

In addition to education and culture, China has bolstered its cooperation with Bangladesh in information and communication technology (ICT). Chinese giant Alipay has obtained a 20% share in Bkash, Bangladesh's largest Mobile Finance Service (MFS) provider. China also funded the three phases of the Info-Sarker project, which aims to reduce the digital divide between rural and urban communities by facilitating high-speed broadband connectivity across thousands of unions in Bangladesh.<sup>82</sup> Chinese tech giant Huawei is also a potential candidate that seeks to invest in Bangladesh's 5G infrastructure and provide technical support.<sup>83</sup> China has also helped Bangladesh construct South Asia's first Tier IV National Data Center, the seventh largest data centre in the world.<sup>84</sup>

### 3.6 Political

China's policy towards Bangladesh has always focused on non-interference in Dhaka's domestic politics. China's longstanding principle of non-interference in Bangladesh's domestic politics makes it easier for Beijing to adapt to changes in political circumstances and maintain good ties with different governments, political parties, business communities, and civil society in the past. It has a positive reputation amongst major political parties in Bangladesh.<sup>85</sup> It is argued that two major political parties, the Awami League and

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<sup>80</sup> "Dhaka, Beijing sign 21 instruments, announce 7 projects," 10 July 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/dhaka-beijing-sign-21-instruments-announce-7-projects-3653501>. Accessed on 8 January 2025.

<sup>81</sup> "China-supported ICT project completed in Bangladesh" 23 November 2022. Cited in <https://english.news.cn/20221123/0f739e2e5c0b4814b28ff3e9d902b647/c.html>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>82</sup> Joyeeta Bhattacharjee, "China–Bangladesh strategic linkages" ORF, 11 May 2021.

<sup>83</sup> "Bangladesh has 7th largest data centre in the world: Here's how it can earn foreign currency" 30 December 2021. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/tech-startup/news/bangladesh-has-the-worlds-7th-largest-data-centre-heres-how-it-can-earn-foreign-currency-2928846>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>84</sup> Raian Hossain, "Dhaka–Beijing Relations in Post Revolution Bangladesh: Continuity, Shifts & Uncertainty," KWENTUHAN, 9 October 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Anu Anwar, "China–Bangladesh relations: A three way balance between China, India and the US," The Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS), 18 August 2022.

BNP, rarely agree on anything except closer ties with Beijing.<sup>86</sup> For example, in 2019, Awami League and BNP agreed to launch the ‘Bangladesh-China Silk Road Forum jointly.’<sup>87</sup> China was also focused on setting up bilateral relations modelled after mutual respect and cooperation based on win-win outcomes. It welcomed the power transition of August and committed firmly to cooperating with the interim government. Chinese Ambassador Yao Wen also expressed that China respects the popular will of Bangladeshis and is ready to support future reforms. He affirmed that bilateral relations have remained unchanged despite any domestic changes in Bangladesh.<sup>88</sup> The Chinese Ambassador has also held talks and discussions with key Advisers of the interim government. He has also held formal talks and goodwill visits to the leaders of major political parties like BNP and Jamaat Islami Bangladesh after the interim government took power.<sup>89</sup> This shows that the momentum of the bilateral relationship between the two countries remains intact and optimistic despite the change in Bangladesh's political dynamics.

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<sup>86</sup> Lailufar Yasmin. “Understanding Bangladesh-China relations: Bangladesh’s rising geopolitical agency and China’s regional and global ambitions,” *Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies*, 3 January 2024.

<sup>87</sup> “China’s commitment to Bangladesh remains unchanged: Envoy” 26 September 2024. Cited in <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/chinas-commitment-bangladesh-remains-unchanged-envoy-950896>. Accessed on 10 January 2025.

<sup>88</sup> Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan, “PRC Seeking to Boost Ties with Bangladesh After Hasina’s Demise,” *China Brief-Jamestown Foundation*. 20 September 2024.

# **Findings I:**

## **Perceptions about Major Features of China and Its Development**

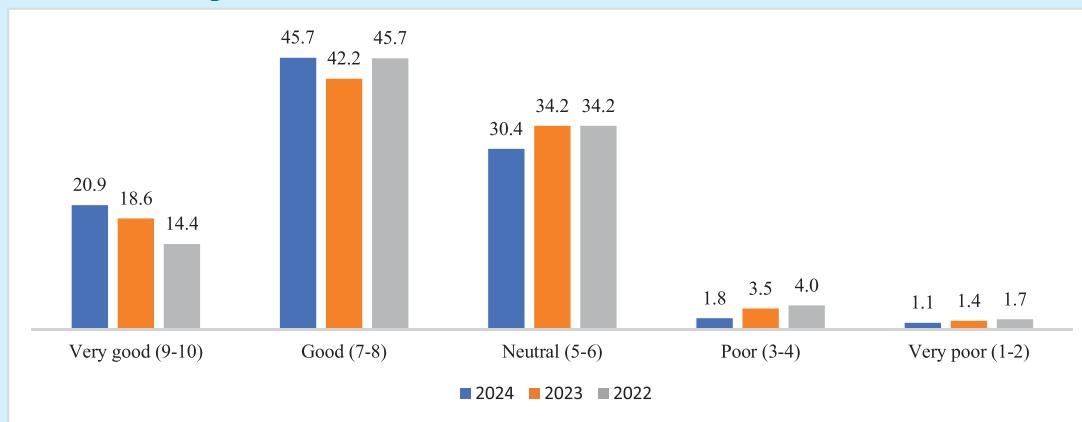
## Perceptions about Major Features of China and Its Development

### 4.1 General Impression on China

China's growing economic, political, social/cultural, and environmental footprints are increasingly becoming visible in recent years. The latter is essential in the making of public perceptions. These public perceptions toward China, or any country, bear on crucial policy choices on domestic governance and environmental policy to diplomacy and how best to respond to geostrategic competition. The country has emerged as a global powerhouse marked by sustained economic growth and technological advancement. Chinese consumer products have spread across borders and connected people in all aspects. Over the past decades, the Chinese development miracle has transformed the most agrarian economy into the world's largest economy, significantly influencing global trade, finance, and manufacturing. This industrial prowess is exemplified by its status as the "factory of the world," producing vast goods and technologies at competitive prices. This gives Chinese policymakers leverage to use soft power techniques to gain popular support worldwide.

Additionally, China's investments in cutting-edge technologies such as artificial intelligence, renewable energy, and 5G telecommunications have positioned it as a leader in innovation. Initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) highlight China's ambitions to extend its economic influence globally, connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe through massive infrastructure projects. The perception survey findings in the last three consecutive years in Bangladesh show a comprehensive picture of the general trend of impressions among the people in Bangladesh.

**Figure 4.1a: General Impression on China**



According to the 2023 survey, 45.7% of respondents rated their opinion “Good” (7-8), indicating a strong preference for positive impressions. While most people have ‘good’ opinions, a percentage of 20.9% of respondents had chosen their impression as “Very Good” (9-10). A significant segment of the public has had neither very positive nor negative, as exhibited by the 30.4% of neutral replies. There is still a tiny percentage of people who have opposing views; 1.8% rated it as “Poor” (3-4) and 1.1% as “Very Poor” (1-2). This tendency emphasises the chance to address the minority with unfavourable opinions while shifting neutral impressions toward positive ones.

**Table 4.a: Division-wise analysis of general impression on China**

Division	Very good (9-10)	%	Good (7-8)	%	Neutral (5-6)	%	Poor (3-4)	%	Very poor (1-2)	%
<b>Dhaka</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>18.93</b>	<b>724</b>	<b>45.22</b>	<b>529</b>	<b>33.04</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1.69</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1.12</b>
<b>Rajshahi</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>18.99</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>49.53</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>28.86</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1.68</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.93</b>
<b>Rangpur</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>20.05</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>42.28</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>34.69</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2.17</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0.81</b>
<b>Khulna</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>14.54</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>47.54</b>	<b>168</b>	<b>33.01</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>3.93</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.98</b>
<b>Barishal</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>24.20</b>	<b>191</b>	<b>40.55</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>30.57</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>2.55</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2.12</b>
<b>Chattogram</b>	<b>229</b>	<b>25.05</b>	<b>429</b>	<b>46.94</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>25.82</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.09</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>1.09</b>
<b>Sylhet</b>	<b>134</b>	<b>25.09</b>	<b>254</b>	<b>47.57</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>25.84</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0.37</b>
<b>Mymensingh</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>21.86</b>	<b>148</b>	<b>44.31</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>30.54</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1.50</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1.80</b>

The subtle dissimilarities in how people perceive China in different regions of Bangladesh may be better conveyed with the help of regional analysis. In the Dhaka division, where the population is the highest, 45.22% of the people rated it as ‘Good’, corresponding to Bangladesh's overall rating. In Dhaka, there is the ‘Very Good’ category at 18.93%, which, although it drops slightly below the general average, is not very low, while the neutrality score stands high at 33.04%. Even in negative attitudes, only 1.69% classified themselves as “Poor” and 1.12% as “Very Poor”. In comparison, Rajshahi has a positivity index of “Good”, more or less comparable with Dhaka at 49.53% and “Very Good” at 18.99%, with a slightly positive tilt. Of the divisions, Rangpur division has the highest neutrality rate, 34.69%, which suggests that the people of this division might not be as engaged in a particular opinion. Still, at the same time, it has the highest percentage of the ‘Very Good’ perception index of 20.05%. It appears that Chattogram and Sylhet are the areas which have received the best impressions. Chattogram bears the highest percentage of spots under the “Very Good” category—25.05% and Sylhet comes second with 25.09%. They also maintain healthy “Good” ratings of 46.74% and 47.57% respectively. The percentages breaking down identity as neutral or negative do not challenge these figures, as they indicate that positivity is much more heavily

weighted in these splits. There are good trends. There is a slightly higher tendency of neutrality in both the areas of Barishal and Mymensingh, indicating that the involvement is not deep enough in a positive direction, and maybe it can reach a deeper level to play a positive part in the perception.

**Table 4.b: Gender-wise analysis of general impression on China**

	Male	%	Female	%
<b>Very good (9-10)</b>	<b>821</b>	<b>23.04</b>	<b>280</b>	<b>16.50</b>
<b>Good (7-8)</b>	<b>1633</b>	<b>45.82</b>	<b>775</b>	<b>45.67</b>
<b>Neutral (5-6)</b>	<b>1003</b>	<b>28.14</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>35.06</b>
<b>Poor (3-4)</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>1.88</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>1.71</b>
<b>Very poor (1-2)</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>1.12</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1.06</b>

**Table 4. c: Age-wise analysis of general impression on China**

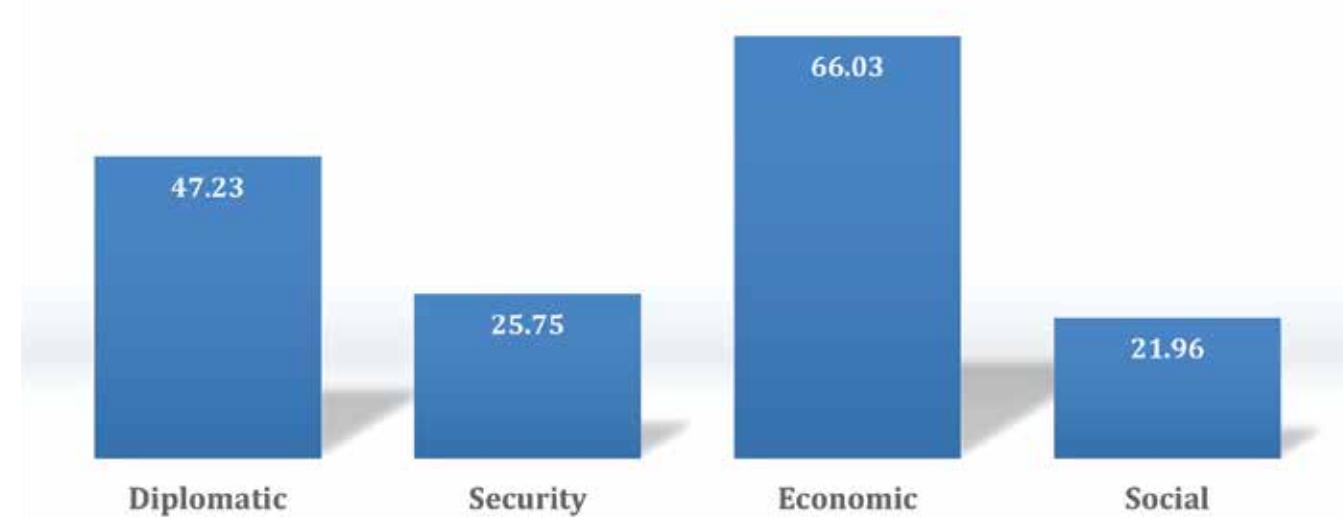
Row Labels	15-24	%	25-34	%	35-44	%	45-54	%	55-64	%	Above 65	%
<b>Very good (9-10)</b>	429	17	320	19	114	22	51	20	35	21	11	19
<b>Good (7-8)</b>	973	39	730	44	227	45	135	52	84	51	27	47
<b>Neutral (5-6)</b>	990	39	511	31	144	28	65	25	38	23	17	30
<b>Poor (3-4)</b>	94	4	55	3	17	3	8	3	5	3	2	4
<b>Very poor (1-2)</b>	39	2	26	2	5	1	2	1	2	1		0

An analysis of the data by gender shows quite interesting features. A higher percentage of males, 23.04%, gave the impression of “Very Good” compared to females, 16.50%, depicting a disparity between the genders in positive impressions. However, the “Good” is nearly similar across the two genders; it is 45.82% in males and 45.67% in females. The results show that a neutral attitude is even more typical for females, 35.06% versus 28.14% for males, so women probably have more of them. The negative impressions are negligible on both sides but marginally more on the side of ‘Poor’ classified males, 1.88%, as opposed to 1.71% of the females. Age has often been used as a criterion since the age difference significantly impacts cost distribution, and thus, several people can be used to differentiate the age groups. The youngest respondents, aged 15-24, show the lowest 17% of ‘Very Good’ impressions, while the respondents of the age groups 35-44 and 55-64 have considerably higher proportions of strong positive impressions: 22% and 21% correspondingly. The “Good” subcategory contains the most significant percentage of participants, particularly those in the 55-64 age range (51%).

Regarding the positions people choose, 39% of people aged between 15 and 24 are neutrals, followed by a decay in ageing. There is a positive correlation between age and decisiveness of the positions taken. Perceptions remain unfavourable for everyone, and the jointly reported “Poor” and “Very Poor” categories do not exceed 4%.

The results show an above-average impression of China with regional, gender, and age differences. The convenience establishes positive first impressions most distinctively in areas such as Chattogram and Sylhet with males and older people. The neutrality offers a better chance to command more shifts in perceptions among respondents, such as the younger ones and the specific zones of Rangpur and Barishal. The relative negativity remains very low; however, their presence should not be dismissed, as overcoming the concerns of these respondents could lead to higher overall positivity.

**Figure 4.1b. What Do You Suggest Improving the People-to-People Contact Between China and Bangladesh?**



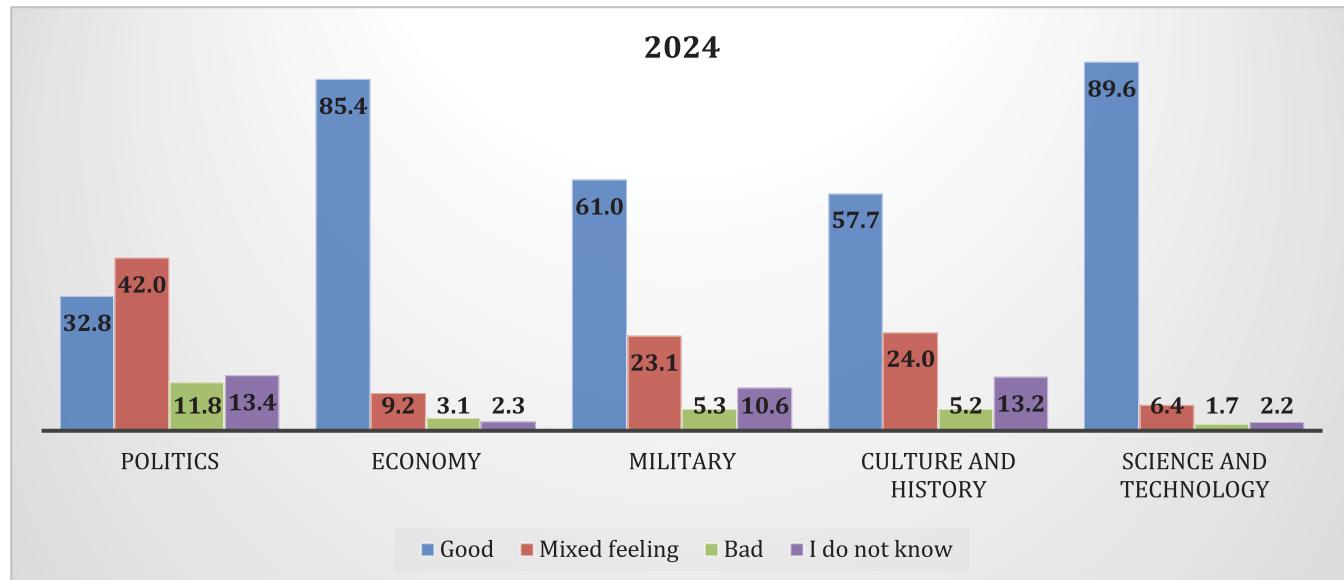
The economic sector concerning the 3,536 respondents, which embodies 66.03%, was the highest percentage regarding the area that needed improvement. This indicates that the overwhelming majority of those surveyed believe that milestones in economic relations, including trade, investment and cooperation projects, create the foundation for enhancing bilateral ties. The next line is diplomatic efforts, with 2,529 (47.23%) respondents stating that diplomacies are significant. This significant percentage depicts that social intercourses are recognised as built upon diplomacy as the base. A strong representation of this

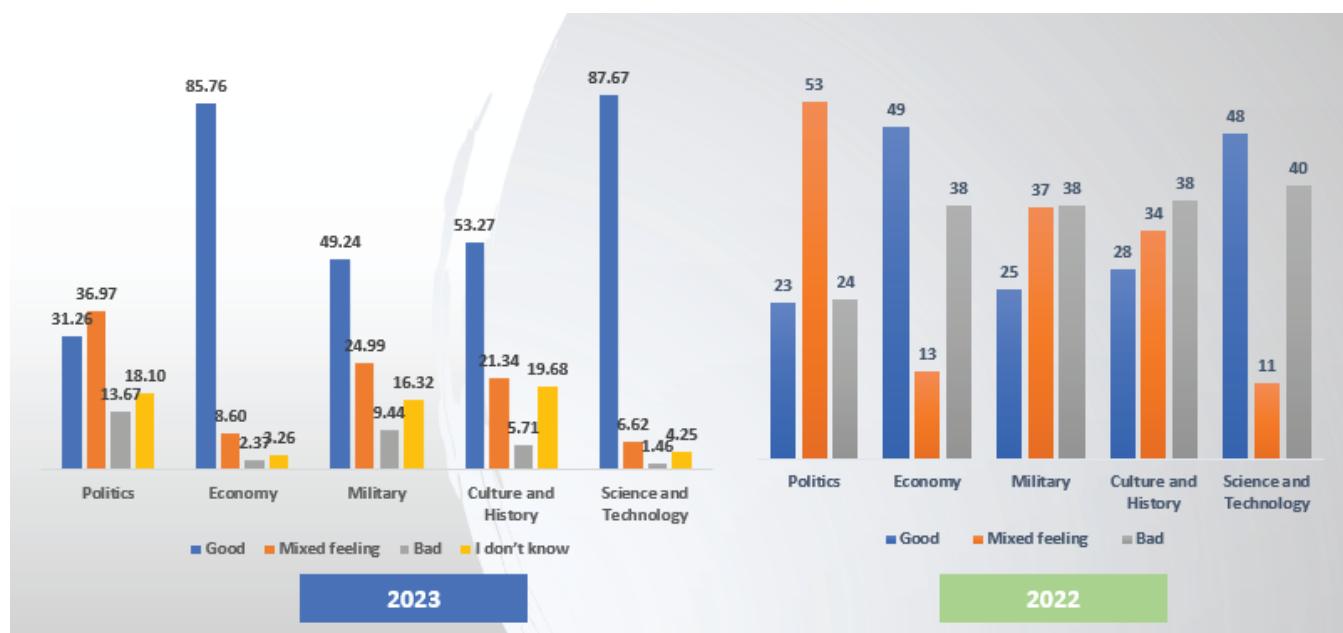
category supports the view that diplomacy is needed to solve the conflict, and cooperation can be considered long-lasting.

The security sector receives the backing of 1,379 people, 25.75% of all the survey takers. Although not as prominent as the economic and diplomatic approaches, security issues also come into play. Thus, the mitigation of security concerns through cooperation might increase the level of trust and promote direct people-to-people relations. Finally, the social initiatives are proposed by 1176 participants, which is 21.96% of all participants. This category, as qualified above, is the smallest, yet it plays a vital role in human interaction. Some social activities may involve exchange programs for students and cultural and friendly policies for grassroots organisations, including women and youth organisations. The data above suggest that women are more neutral, while the youth category is the lowest in 'good'; these findings call for investments and interventions in these categories.

Accordingly, the survey reveals a confident focus on economic and diplomatic approaches as the primary means of developing interaction at the people-to-people level between China and Bangladesh. Although less emphasised, security and social activities remain essential factors of a holistic process. Doing so in all four domains simultaneously might be the most effective way to advance efforts to bolster relations between the two countries.

**Figure 4.1c: What Areas of China Concern You the Most, and What Is Your Impression?**



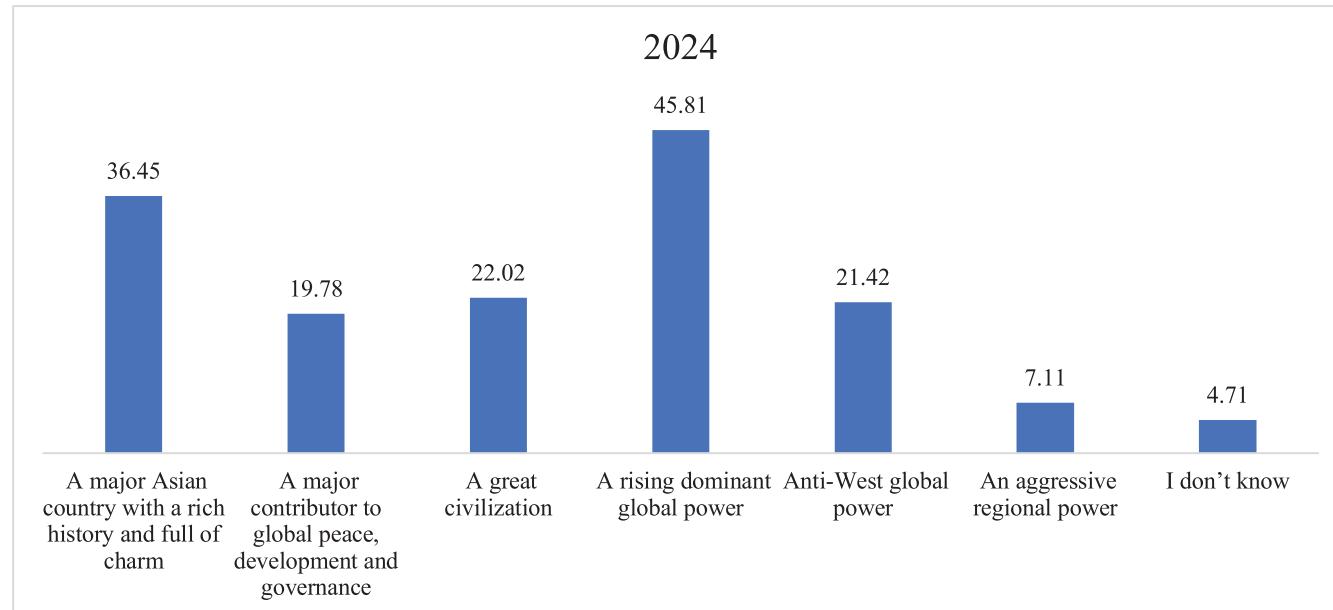


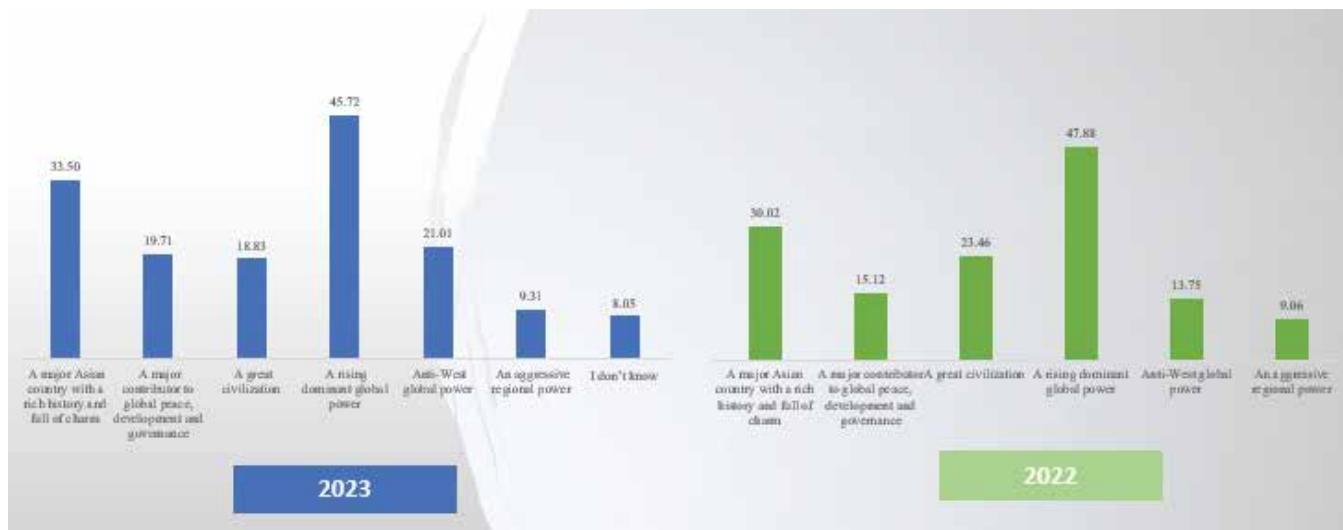
An astounding 89.63% of respondents (3,483 persons) rated China as “Good” in science and technology, making it their most favourable choice. When asked about China’s scientific and technical advancements, only 6.38% (248) had mixed opinions, and 1.75% (68) had unfavourable views. A low rate of 2.24% (87 people) suggests that most people are knowledgeable about China’s technical capabilities. Moreover, another area where people have a favourable impression is the economic realm, which 85.44% of respondents (3,170 people) regarded as “Good.” The widespread acknowledgement of China’s outstanding economic progress is probably responsible for this high approval rating. About China’s economy, 9.16% of respondents (340) had mixed thoughts, while 3.10% (115 people) had unfavourable opinions. With just 2.29% of respondents indicating “I do not know” (85 people), we can assume that most people are familiar with the Chinese economic dynamics. In contrast to the financial and technical spheres, where 61.01% of respondents (1,601 persons) have favourable opinions, the military sphere has a much lower consent percentage. A more significant percentage of respondents (23.19%, or 606) had mixed opinions toward China’s military. At 5.34% (140 people), negative impressions are still low, but 10.56% (277 people) are unsure, which may imply that people are less knowledgeable about military topics than economic or technical ones.

Among the participants, 1,482 (or 57.67%) had a favourable opinion of the cultural and historical aspects, while 616 (23.97%) had mixed opinions. Unlike economics and technology, this rate reveals a more nuanced respect for China's cultural legacy. Uncertainty is indicated by 13.15% of respondents (338 people), while negative impressions are low at 5.21% (134 people), with 32.77% of respondents having a good impression and 42.01% having a mixed impression. Politics stands out as one of the most divisive areas. 11.78% (325 respondents) of all areas have unfavourable opinions regarding Chinese politics. Fewer people may be comfortable or knowledgeable enough about Chinese politics to voice their views, given the uncertainty rate of 13.45% (371 persons).

A consistent trend across all areas shows that technical and economic elements are highly regarded, whereas political issues elicit a more varied and critical range of opinions. However, with "Good" ratings exceeding 85%, China's most highly familiar features are science, technology, and economic growth. With favourable scores of around 60%, cultural and military elements are central to the debate, while political views are the most split. However, people's opinions about China differ significantly in different areas. These differences indicate that individuals do not create consistent ideas about China but rather assess various elements of the country separately.

**Figure 4.1d: What Is the Image of China in Your Eyes? (%)**





The first concept that has persisted over all three years is the idea of China as “a rising dominant global power.” This perspective has shown intriguing variations, beginning at 47.88% in 2022, declining little to 45.72% in 2023, and continuing to be strongly present at 45.81% in 2024. Perception has been relatively steady in the most recent year, indicating a continuous awareness of China’s expanding worldwide impact—however, a slight fall of roughly two percentage points from 2022 to 2023. A clear rising trend is shown in the impression of China as “a major Asian country with a rich history and full of charm” across the three years. From a low of 30.02% in 2022, it soared to 33.50% the following year and 36.45% the following year. This six-percentage point supports respondents’ increasing awareness of China’s cultural and historical aspects over two years. When we look at China as “a great civilisation,” there are some noteworthy differences. The percentage of people who shared this opinion fell from 23.46% in 2022 to 18.83% in 2023 and rose to 22.02% in 2024. Possible explanations for this variation include shifting priorities about the cultural and political dimensions of China’s international standing.

The degree to which China is seen as “a major contributor to global peace, development and governance” varies, although substantially. This percentage was 15.12% in 2022, 19.71% in 2023, and 19.78% in 2024, when it remained constant. This points to an increasing acknowledgement of China’s beneficial impact on international affairs, with the most notable uptick in 2022 and 2023. Among the most noticeable shifts is the widespread belief that China is an “Anti-West global power.” This viewpoint climbed substantially from 13.75% in 2022 to 21.01% in 2023 and 21.42% in 2024. There may be an indication of increasing worldwide political division in this considerable rise of almost eight percentage points over three years.

Concerning the perception of China as “an aggressive regional power,” the percentages have stayed low yet shown some fluctuation. In 2022, it was 9.06%; in 2023, it rose to 9.31%; and in 2024, it fell to 7.11%. This is the lowest proportion of all replies in any category for that year, indicating that people are not worried about direct regional violence. China’s post-July August role in Bangladesh may also be a decisive attributing factor for this.

Reports of the “I don’t know” category, which indicates a lack of knowledge or opinion formation, fell from 9.06% in 2022 to 8.05% in 2023 and ultimately to 4.71% in 2024. Uncertainty seems to be declining, which might mean that people are getting firmer opinions about China’s global standing. Upon examining the whole trend, several significant patterns become apparent. One thing that has not changed since 2022 is the general acknowledgement of China’s growing influence on the international stage. Second, the fact that more and more people see China as a significant Asian nation with a rich past demonstrates that people are beginning to understand and value China’s cultural and historical importance. Third, the “Anti-West global power” figures are on the rise, which suggests that more and more people see China as fighting against Western hegemony. As a reflection of the ever-changing global public opinion and the intricacy of China’s worldwide presence, these alterations in perception over the last three years shed light on how China is seen across the world.

If we look at the data for 2024, half of the people surveyed (45.81 per cent; 2,453 people) saw China as “a rising dominant global power.” A further 36.45% of respondents (1,952 people) believe China is “a major Asian country with a rich history and charm.” Their impression ranks second most prevalent. As for more narrow cultural impressions, 1,179 people, or 22.02% of the total, deem China “a great civilisation.” Of the respondents, 1,059 people (19.78%) think China is “a major contributor to global peace, development and governance.” One striking difference is that 1,147 people (21.42%) saw China as an “Anti-West global power.” More than 20% of people see China’s ascent as a worldwide power struggle, especially with Western countries. This is a huge segment. China is seen by 7.11% of the sample (381 people) as “an aggressive regional power.” This is a lesser but still significant percentage.

Lastly, the minor portion, “I don’t know,” was picked by just 4.71% of the respondents (252 persons). This tiny fraction indicates that most people have strong feelings toward China, either positively or negatively. The survey participants are very knowledgeable and involved in matters about China, as shown by the limited number of indecisive responses. Perceptions of China’s increasing worldwide influence and approbation for its cultural legacy and international achievements coexist in this picture, which, through these data, we can comprehend. The majority of respondents seem to have complex views on China, acknowledging both its cultural importance and its modern global role, according to the statistics. Most

respondents developed distinct and mostly non-antagonistic opinions of China's international position, as shown by the comparatively low percentages of unfavourable or ambiguous replies.

## 4.2 Communist Party

**Figure 4.2: How Do You View the Communist Party of China?**



There is a complex dynamic of choices for the Communist Party of China (CPC) when we look at all the respondents for 2024. One thousand seven hundred seventy-two individuals, or 33.84% of the total participants, consider no position. Notably, this accounts for one-third of the total responses. “I do not know” responses came up at 32.31% (1,692 respondents), indicating either a deficiency of information about the CPC or reluctance to choose comments on the matter. Looking at the favourable impressions, we see that 18.46% (967 respondents) think the CPC is “Good,” while 6.45% (338 respondents) think it’s “Excellent.” 24.91% of replies are positive, meaning that around 25% of those who took the survey had positive opinions. On the other hand, 6.15% (322 people) think the CPC is “Poor,” and 2.79% (146 people) think it’s “Very poor,” for a total of 8.94% unfavourable impressions.

**Table 4.2: Gender-wise data on the impression of the Communist Party of China**

	Male	%	Female	%
<b>Excellent</b>	249	7.03	88	5.22
<b>Good</b>	681	19.22	286	16.96
<b>Neutral</b>	1243	35.08	525	31.14
<b>Poor</b>	248	7.00	73	4.33
<b>Very poor</b>	109	3.08	36	2.14
<b>I do not know</b>	1013	28.59	678	40.21

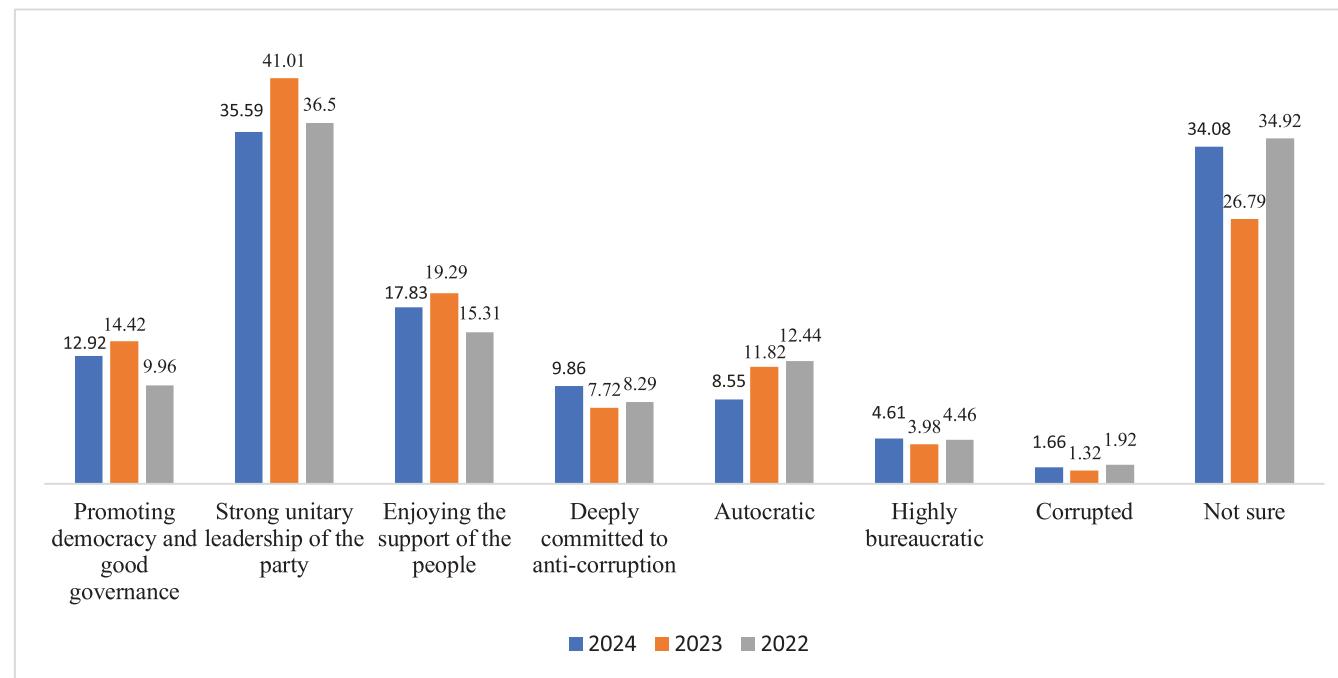
Throughout 2023 and 2024, there are intriguing trends shown by gender-wise research. Over 7% (249 people) of men who participated in the survey in 2024 gave the CPC a rating of “Excellent,” up from six per cent (208 people) in 2023. There was relatively little change in the “Good” category for men between 2023 and 2024, rising from 19% (663 persons) to 19.22% (681 individuals). From 34% (1,175 people) in 2023 to 35.08% (1,243 people) in 2024, there was a slight rise in the neutral posture among men. Female responders show different trends. While 5% of respondents in 2023 evaluated the CPC as “Excellent,” in 2024, that number rose to 5.22% (88 people). In 2024, 16.96% of women, or 286 people, fell into the “Good” category, down from 19% in 2023 (303 people). From 30% (484 people) in 2023 to 31.14% (525 people) in 2024, there was a slight rise in the percentage of females providing neutral replies.

When looking at the “I do not know” group, there is a clear gender gap. This option was chosen by 40.21% of the female respondents (678 people) in 2024, the same as 40.21% in 2023. On the contrary, there was a little decline in the percentage of men responding in this group between 2023 and 2024, falling from 30% (1,054 people) to 28.59% (1,013 individuals). This indicates that, compared to men, women are more prone to admit that they do not have a firm opinion on the CPC. There are little differences in negative

judgments across genders and years. For men, the percentage of “Poor” ratings fell from 7% (257 people) in 2023 to 7% (248 people) in 2024, while the rate of “Very poor” ratings fell from 4% (125 people) to 3.08% (109 people). “Very poor” ratings were almost unchanged, going from 2% (25 people) to 2.14% (36 individuals), while “Poor” ratings rose somewhat from 4% (64 individuals) in 2023 to 4.33% (73 persons) in 2024. However, according to the statistics, perceptions of the CPC mainly remained unchanged from 2023 to 2024, with slight ups and downs among categories. The most notable feature is the large number of respondents who chose indifferent or “I do not know”, which is especially true for female respondents and points to a need for more involvement with the CPC.

### 4.3. Chinese Government

**Figure 4.3: How Do You View the Current Chinese Government?**



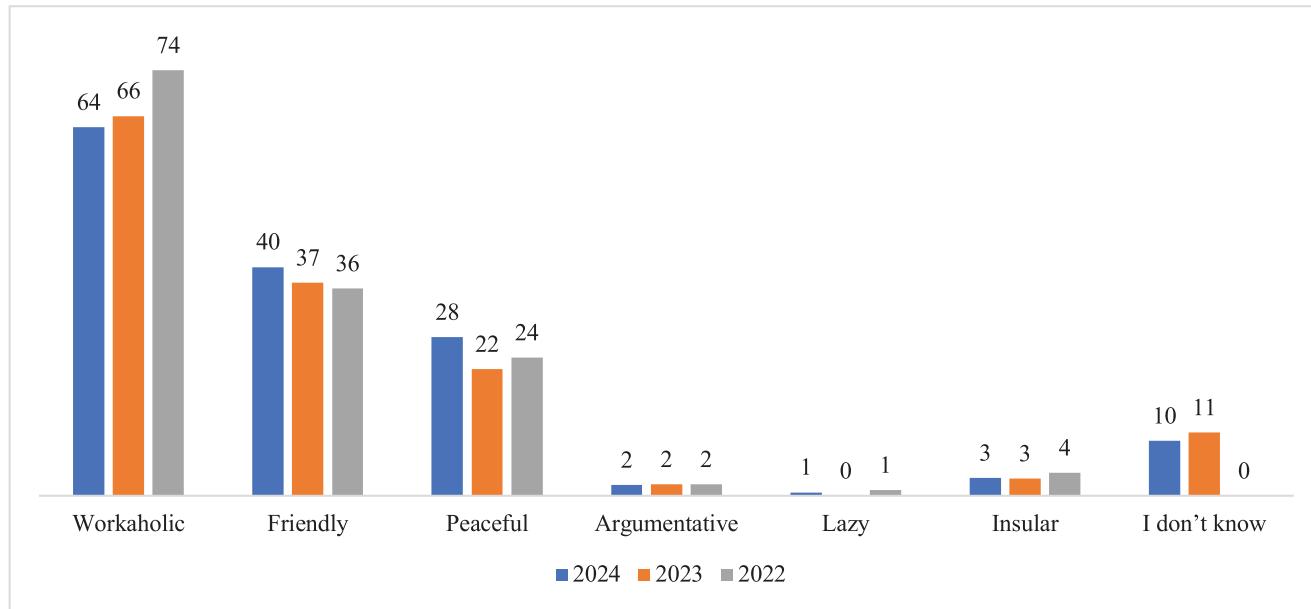
35.59% of respondents (1,906) identify the Chinese government as exhibiting “Strong unitary leadership of the party.” This significant ratio indicates that more than one-third of respondents recognise the centralised nature of China’s governance under the CPC. The second largest category is “Not sure,” comprising 34.08% of respondents, totalling 1,825 individuals. The substantial level of uncertainty is significant, indicating that despite China’s global prominence, many participants lack sufficient information or understanding to form decisive judgments regarding its governmental system. However, 17.83% of respondents (955 individuals) believe that the Chinese government is “Enjoying the support of the people,” making it the third most common perspective.

In examining perceptions of governance style, it is observed that 12.92% (692 respondents) think the Chinese government is “Promoting democracy and good governance.” Following this, 9.86% (528 participants) perceive it as “Deeply committed to anti-corruption,” suggesting that some respondents acknowledge positive governance attributes, albeit not constituting a majority. Critically, 8.55% of respondents (458) perceive the government as “Autocratic,” whereas 4.61% (247) characterise it as “Highly bureaucratic.” A minority, 1.66% (89 respondents), view the government as “Corrupted.” The lower percentages for negative characteristics indicate that overtly critical perspectives of the Chinese government are palpable by a minority of respondents.

Analysis of the overall pattern reveals that perspectives emphasising institutional characteristics, such as strong unitary leadership and bureaucratic nature, generally attain higher percentages than those centred on specific policy outcomes or value judgments. The high rate of responses indicating “Strong unitary leadership,” coupled with the similarly elevated percentage of “Not sure” responses, presents a noteworthy dynamic. The low percentages for strongly positive characterisations, such as promoting democracy, and intensely negative ones, such as corruption, suggest a balanced perspective among respondents regarding the Chinese government. Overall, the data illustrates a range of perspectives regarding the Chinese government, highlighting its structural characteristics over value judgments. The substantial proportion of “Unsure” responses shows considerable potential for enhancing public understanding of China’s governance system. In contrast, the variation in other responses reflects a multifaceted perception of the Chinese government.

#### 4.4. Chinese People Living in Bangladesh

Figure 4.4: How Do You View the Chinese People Living in Bangladesh? (%)



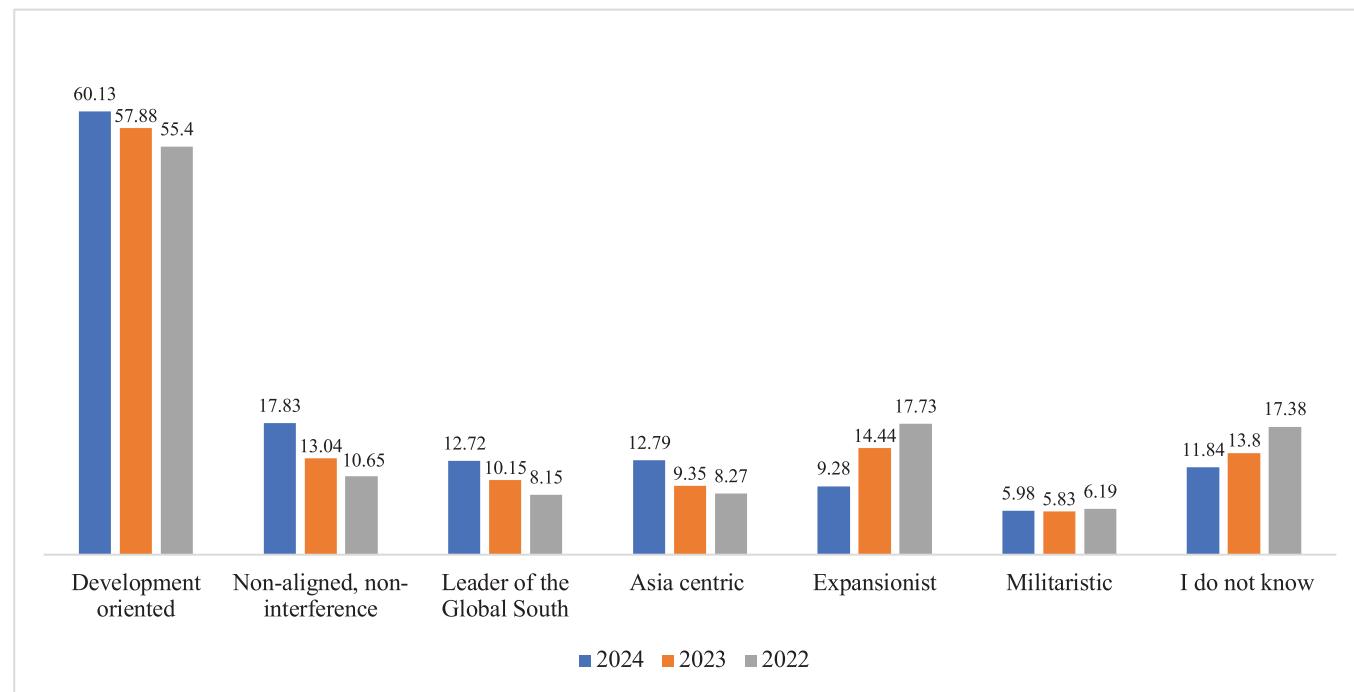
Among the results, 6,429 responses, or 64% of the total, label Chinese people living in Bangladesh as “Workaholics.” This high proportion shows that the general population appreciates the Chinese community’s hard work and commitment to their careers. Nearly 40% (2,128 people) ranked Chinese people as “Friendly,” making it the second most popular impression. With such a high proportion, it’s clear that many people in Bangladesh have had sound interactions with Chinese people. Moreover, we can see that 1,476 people, or 28% of the total, consider Chinese people “Peaceful.” This, coupled with the “Friendly” impression, reveals that positive social traits constitute a substantial part of the perceptions held by Chinese people in Bangladesh. The figures are much lower when we include unfavourable responses. Two per cent of those who took the survey think Chinese people are “Argumentative,” and an even smaller fraction—one per cent—think they’re “Lazy.”

An intriguing finding is that 3% of participants (165) think Chinese people are “Insular.” Although this proportion is minor, it is somewhat higher than other unfavourable views. Notably, 10% of people (512 people) said, “I don’t know,” which might indicate that many people have not interacted with Chinese people enough or are uncomfortable drawing broad conclusions about this group. This chart gives

valuable background information on the scope and boundaries of intercultural communication in Bangladesh. However, the favourable traits (Workaholic, Friendly, Peaceful) exceed the unfavourable traits (Argumentative, Lazy, Insular). While the large numbers for “Friendly” and “Peaceful” show good social integration, the high number for “Workaholic” shows great acknowledgement of professional achievements. The data suggests that Chinese people are mostly seen positively, with few unfavourable stereotypes, due to their strong work ethic and excellent social traits. Overall, it seems that the Chinese community in Bangladesh has done a good job of making themselves known.

#### 4.5. Role in Global Politics

**Figure 4.5a: Please Evaluate the Influence of China’s Role in The Promotion of Global Peace, Security and Developmen**

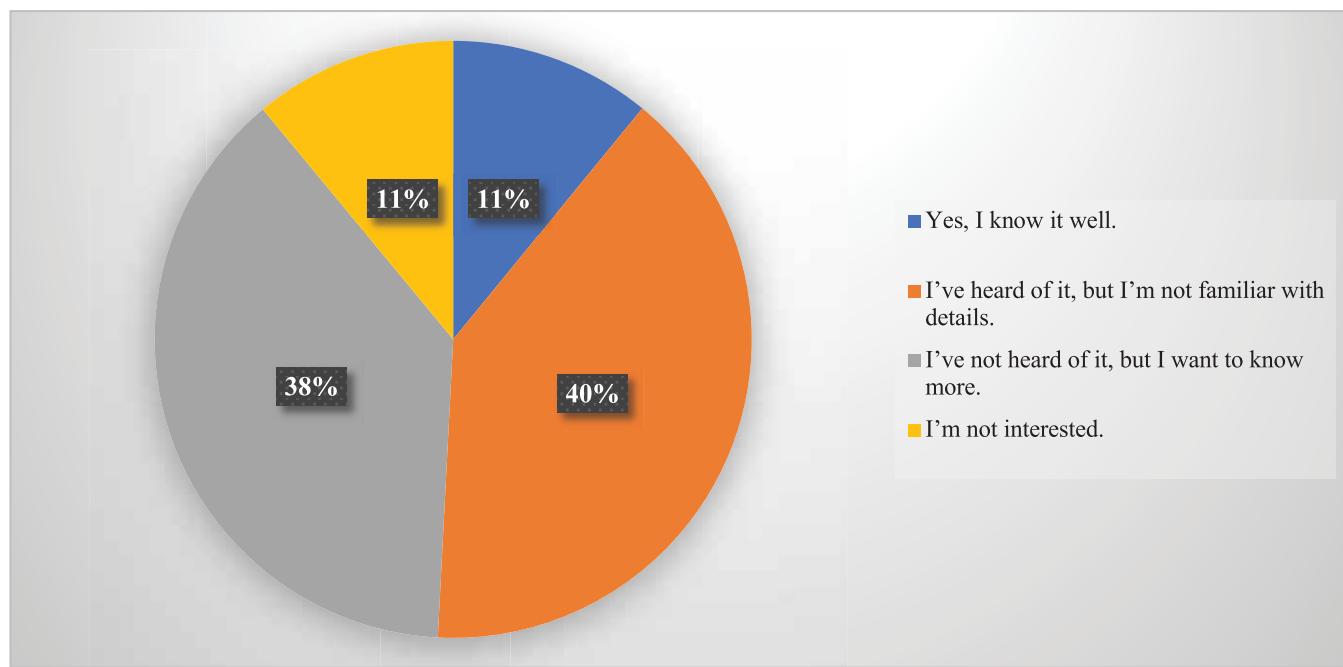


60.13% of the total participants (3,220 persons) think China's position is "Development oriented." This is the most appalling result. Such a large proportion suggests that China's focus on infrastructure projects and economic growth has made a big impression on Bangladeshis. Taking this number into account, it becomes clear that more than 50% of the respondents see the development initiatives taken by China as a significant area of international relations and worldwide impact. Of all the perceptions of China, the second most prevalent is "Non-aligned, non-interference," which 17.83% of the 955 respondents chose. Although the number is far smaller than those focusing on development, this proportion exhibits an understanding of China's declared foreign policy tenet of non-interference in other nations' internal affairs.

At 12.72% (681 respondents) and 12.79% (685 respondents), respectively, the views of China as a "Leader of the Global South" and "Asia-centric" were almost equal. This remarkably congruent distribution of views shows that people consider China's leadership in the Asia-Pacific region and its leadership in the global south equally essential components of its international influence. Perceptions of China's involvement that may be considered problematic include 9.28% (497 respondents) who perceive it as "Expansionist," and a smaller segment, 5.98%, see it as "Militaristic." These show some unfavourable views of China's global influence, but those are not extensive.

Notably, 634 persons (11.84% of the total) said, "I do not know," indicating that many are unsure how to classify China's involvement in international affairs. Notably, this number is more significant than the "Expansionist" and "Militaristic" groups, suggesting that more individuals are unsure about China's role than those with an unfavourable opinion. The positive and neutral viewpoints comprise more than 90% of the replies that offered a firm opinion (not including the "I do not know" replies). Based on this trend, most people see China's global involvement positively, particularly its development-focused strategy. From the low percentages for "Expansionist" and "Militaristic" perspectives to the high proportion for "Development oriented."

**Figure 4.5b: What Is Your Level of Knowledge About the Beijing Declaration on Ending Division and Strengthening Palestinian National Unity?**

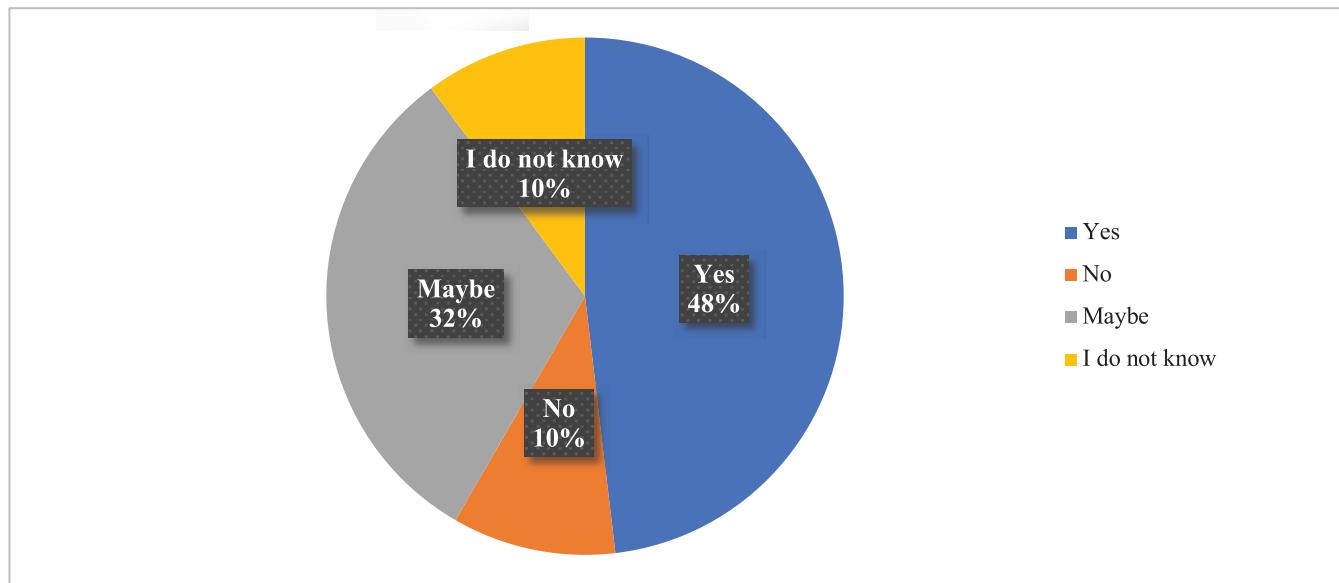


From the data, we can infer that only 10.92% (565 people) of the respondents consider themselves well-versed in the Beijing Declaration. Although the statement is important, the general community does not fully comprehend it, as shown by the relatively low number of persons with extensive knowledge. Of those who took the survey, 39.90% (2,064 participants) said they were aware of the proclamation but did not know much about it. Despite broad knowledge of the declaration's existence, this large proportion shows an enormous chasm between superficial knowledge and a thorough comprehension of its meaning and consequences.

Notably, 1,975 people (38.18%) said they were unaware of the announcement but were curious to learn more. This finding stands out because it indicates that those unaware of the statement are eager to learn more about it. A large potential audience, 78.08%, might be open to educational campaigns about the declaration. Among the respondents, 11.00% (569 people) said they were not interested in the declaration; this is the lowest but substantial group. There is an intriguing symmetry at either end of the awareness continuum since this number is extremely close to those who know the proclamation well.

When we examine the distribution as a whole, those familiar with the announcement, 50.82%, outnumber those uninformed about it or uninterested in it (49.18%). Among the most promising aspects of these statistics is that 77.63% are interested in knowing more about the declaration, which is a significant portion. This keenness to learn bodes well for educational campaigns highlighting the proclamation's significance and its effects on Palestinian solidarity.

**Figure 4.5c: Do You Think China Can Play a Crucial Role in Resolving the Israel-Palestine Crisis and Building Lasting Peace in The Middle East?**



When asked about China's possible involvement in settling the Israel-Palestine conflict, almost half of those who took the poll (48.13%, or 2,491 participants) think China can play a pivotal role. The high proportion indicates high trust in China's diplomatic skills and global clout. In the next section, 1,631 respondents (31.51%) chose "Maybe," representing either a high degree of ambiguity or moderate optimism on China's prospective involvement. There was a reasonable distribution of doubtful replies; 10.22% (529 participants) chose "No", and 10.14% (525 people) chose "I do not know." According to these statistics, while many people favour China's possible participation, there is still a sizeable minority that is wary or unsure.

#### 4.6. Description of the Chinese economy

This year's overall trend reflects an optimistic view of the Chinese economy, though with diverse opinions on its growth compared to 2023. 51.97% of respondents believe China's demand for overseas production is increasing, marking a 1.5% rise from 2023 (50.36%). The second most selected response (33.93%) identifies China as the largest economy by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP), though this has decreased from 35.56% in 2023 but remains higher than 30.35% in 2022. The survey's third most popular view on the Chinese economy stems from China becoming the most significant economic trading partner to more and more countries, including Bangladesh.<sup>89</sup>

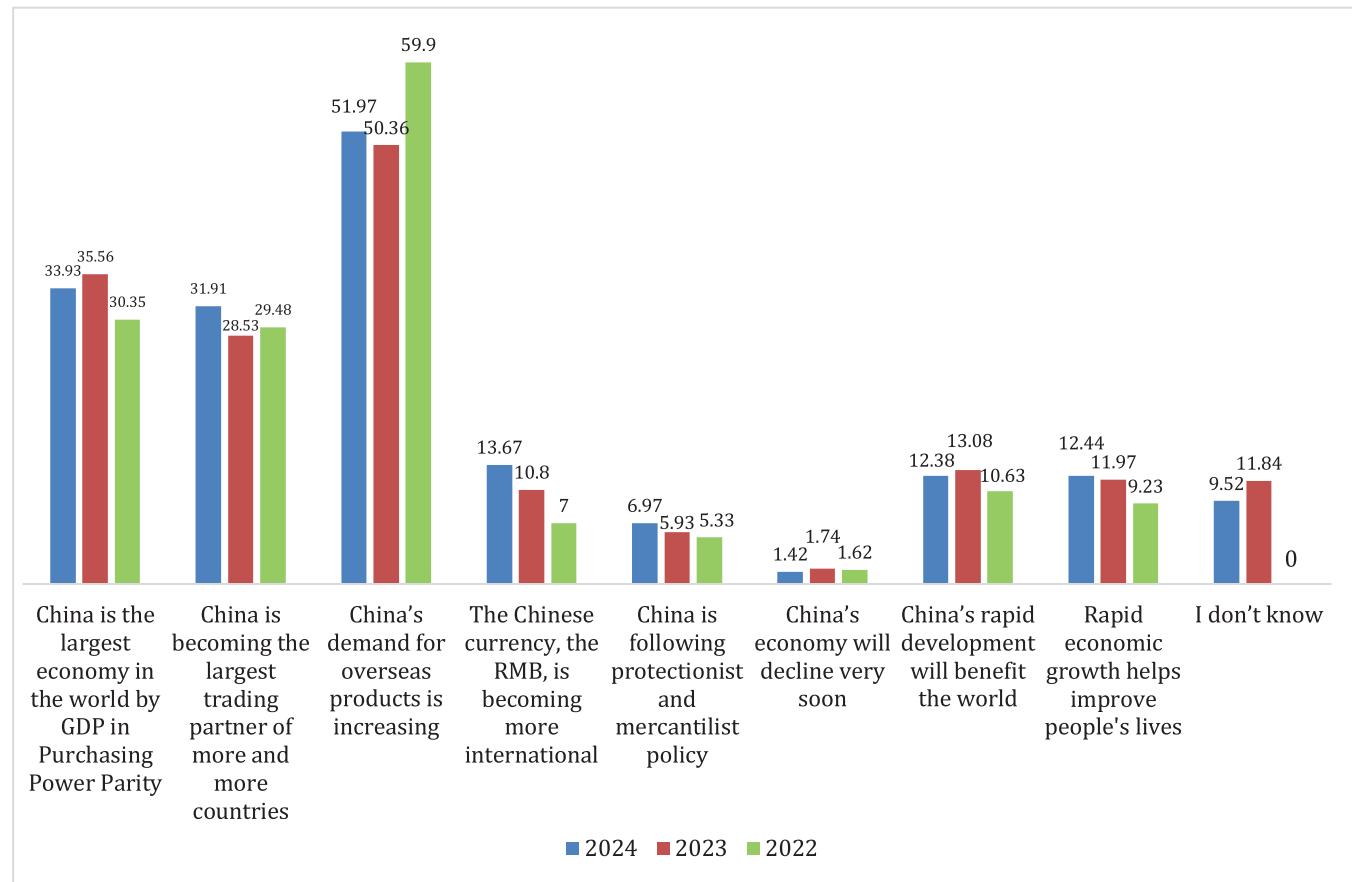
Two separate but interrelated concepts, rapid economic growth improving people's lives (12.44%) and China's rapid economic development benefiting the world (12.38%)- received similar levels of support from respondents. The latter view decreased slightly from 2023 (13.08%) but remained higher than in 2022 (10.63%). In contrast, the former view increased compared to previous surveys (11.97% in 2023 and 9.23% in 2022), indicating growing confidence in China's economic impact on individual well-being.

Two notable but subtle positive shifts emerged in public opinion. First, the perception that China's economy will decrease soon reached its lowest level in three years (1.42%), down from 1.74% in 2023 and 1.62% in 2022. This suggests that pessimism about China's economic future is diminishing. Second, awareness of China's economy has increased, as indicated by a 2% decrease in respondents selecting "I don't know" compared to 2023. This trend suggests that more people are informed about China's economic trajectory.

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<sup>89</sup> "China Bangladesh's top trading partner in FY24." 11 December 2024. Cited in [https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/last-page/china-bangladesh's-top-trading-partner-in-fy24-1733855492#:~:text=China%20main,tained%20its%20position%20as,Bureau%20of%20Statistics%20\(BBS\)..](https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/last-page/china-bangladesh's-top-trading-partner-in-fy24-1733855492#:~:text=China%20main,tained%20its%20position%20as,Bureau%20of%20Statistics%20(BBS)..) Accessed on 25 December 2024.

**Figure 4.6: Which of the following descriptions best suits the Chinese economy?**



Despite this optimism, concerns about China's protectionist and mercantilist policies are growing. 6.97% of respondents believe China follows such policies, marking a 1% rise from 2023 and a continued increase from 5.33% in 2022. This suggests that public scepticism regarding China's market openness is deepening. It is likely influenced by the US-China trade war and China's long-standing restrictions on direct access to its domestic market. Additionally, critics argue that China's selective economic liberalisation, which prioritises foreign investment only in sectors crucial to its prosperity, reinforces concerns about its trade practices.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup> "Protectionism Is Failing to Achieve Its Goals and Threatens the Future of Critical Industries." 29 August 2023. Cited in <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/08/29/protectionism-is-failing-to-achieve-its-goals-and-threatens-the-future-of-critical-industries>. Accessed on 25 December 2024.

Moreover, there has been a rising perception of the Chinese economy on the Chinese currency; the RMB is becoming more international (13.67%), showing a significant 3% increase compared to 2023 (10.8%) and about a 6.5% increase in 2022 (7%). The growing sentiment on de-dollarization and search for alternative currencies to reduce dependency on the US dollar and facilitate more straightforward exchanges between China and its major trading partners can make people more aware of RMB internationalisation. Countries like Brazil, Iran, Russia, Argentina, and even Bangladesh are making headways in using RMB for swift monetary transfers and flexible trade arrangements. In the latest state-level meeting, former Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Chinese President Xi Jinping agreed to enhance their cooperation in financial regulation and increase the use of local currency in bilateral trade.<sup>91</sup> The grants and loans agreed to be given to Bangladesh by China must also be settled and secured through local currency, i.e., RMB. Chinese attempts to internationalise the RMB have resulted in 29 active swap agreements. Bangladesh had previously decided to repay loans from the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP) project to Russia in Yuan using China's Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS), a limited alternative to SWIFT for RMB-based payments. This is one example of the Renminbi's internationalisation drive in recent years.

More than 120 countries are China's largest trading partners, including Russia, Japan, South Korea, Brazil, South Africa, and even Bangladesh, reflecting the increasing global reach and demand for Chinese overseas products.<sup>92</sup> China's positive strides might be credited with generating such a positive outlook regarding the Chinese economy among the respondents.

Besides the global outlook, the impression of the Chinese economy in Bangladesh remains substantially positive, which has also been echoed in findings from previous years. Bangladesh has been the first South Asian country to join the BRI. It has significantly developed and deepened economic, commercial, and trade relations with China in the past few years, evidenced by Beijing being the largest trade partner of Bangladesh for 14 consecutive years. The visit by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to China in July 2024 resulted in the uplifting of bilateral relations to a 'Comprehensive Strategic Cooperative Partnership'; more than 21 understandings and instruments were signed where significant

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<sup>91</sup> "Bangladesh, China agree to increase use of local currency in bilateral trade." 11 July 2024. Cited in <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/bangladesh-and-china-agree-increase-use-local-currency-bilateral-trade-896871>. Accessed on 27 December 2024.

<sup>92</sup> "China Is the Top Trading Partner to More Than 120 Countries." 17 January 2023. Cited in <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/china-top-trading-partner-more-120-countries>. Accessed on 27 December 2024.

focus had been given to both countries' economic and developmental aspects. These include investment and strengthening of digital economy cooperation, cooperation in economic development policy, public-private partnership for sustainable infrastructure development, etc.<sup>93</sup> These arrangements, and Beijing being Dhaka's largest trading partner in Fiscal Year 2024, have positively impacted Bangladeshis.

There are nearly 1,000 Chinese companies in Bangladesh, employing about 5,50,000 people.<sup>94</sup> This results in people-to-people interaction on the ground and in workplaces, forming a positive view of the Chinese economy. Moreover, the political changes in August 2024 have changed Bangladeshis' perceptions of Bangladesh's major foreign partners. Despite that, the positive impression of the Chinese economy signals a strong sense of widespread optimism about Chinese economic affairs.

Finally, the findings of a positive impression of the Chinese economy can also be corroborated with the results from other sections (Question Number 18 and 20), where 74.27% of respondents expressed their view on the importance of China-Bangladesh bilateral relations based on friendly and strong economic ties, and 60% of the respondents considered the construction of the Chinese Special Economic Zone as positive.

#### **4.7: Views on China's “Community with a Shared Future” proposal**

The Chinese government's proposal to create a community with a shared destiny for humanity is a revolutionary concept aimed at providing a new framework for international relations and improving global governance. The concept of humanity as a community with a shared future has been formalised as a key component of President Xi's philosophy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era.<sup>95</sup> It represents China's most recent attempt to answer the fundamental question of humanity's direction amidst growing economic interdependence and escalating political divergences. The vision suggests that China will be more proactive in global affairs. China's commitment to working with the

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<sup>93</sup> Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan, “PRC Seeking to Boost Ties with Bangladesh After Hasina’s Demise,” China Brief-Jamestown Foundation.

<sup>94</sup> “China, Bangladesh always cooperate toward a better future.” 9 July 2024. Cited in <http://epaper.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202407/09/WS668c736da3106431fe82cfaa.html>. Accessed on 27 December 2024.

<sup>95</sup> Jun DING & Hongjin CHENG, “China’s Proposition to Build a Community of Shared Future for Mankind and the Middle East Governance,” Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, 17 July 2018.

global community to build a better future underlines its long-term foreign policy of peace.<sup>96</sup> This devotion is academically anchored in ancient Chinese philosophy, specifically the interaction of diversity and oneness, order and chaos, and humanity and nature; it also integrates Marxist notions of social community and current Western international politics.<sup>97</sup>

In the 2024 survey, the view on China's proposal for building a community with a shared future for humanity, also known as a community for a common destination of humanity, received a more moderate and mixed view than the previous year. In 2024, respondents who expressed that 'Shared Future for Humanity' will be positive for the individual self, their country, and global and regional governance were 45%, 49% and 44%, respectively. Regarding having mixed views on the individual self, their country, and global and regional governance were 50%, 47% and 51%, respectively. In contrast, the respondents' negative perception of the Chinese proposal on the indicators for individual self, their country, and global and regional governance were 5%, 4% and 5%, respectively.

This is primarily a shift from the previous year (2023), where we saw an increased positive view on this issue for the individual self, Bangladesh, and global and regional governance (49%, 48%, and 47%, respectively) increased by at least a 4% margin in comparison to 2022. In contrast to 2023, this year, the positive view has decreased by 4% in the case of the issue's impact on the individual self (45%) and 3% for the issue's impact on regional and global governance (44%). A marginal increase of 1% in positive views is seen over issues impacting Bangladesh (49%) compared to the previous year. Therefore, in two of three indicators, the positive view of China's shared future for humanity has ebbed compared to last year's development.

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<sup>96</sup> Klaus Heinrich Raditio, "Deciphering Xi Jinping's Community of Shared Future for Mankind". E-International Relations, 9 September 2024.

<sup>97</sup> op. cit.

**Figure 4.7: How do you view China's proposal for building a community with a shared future for humanity (a community with a common destiny for humanity)?**



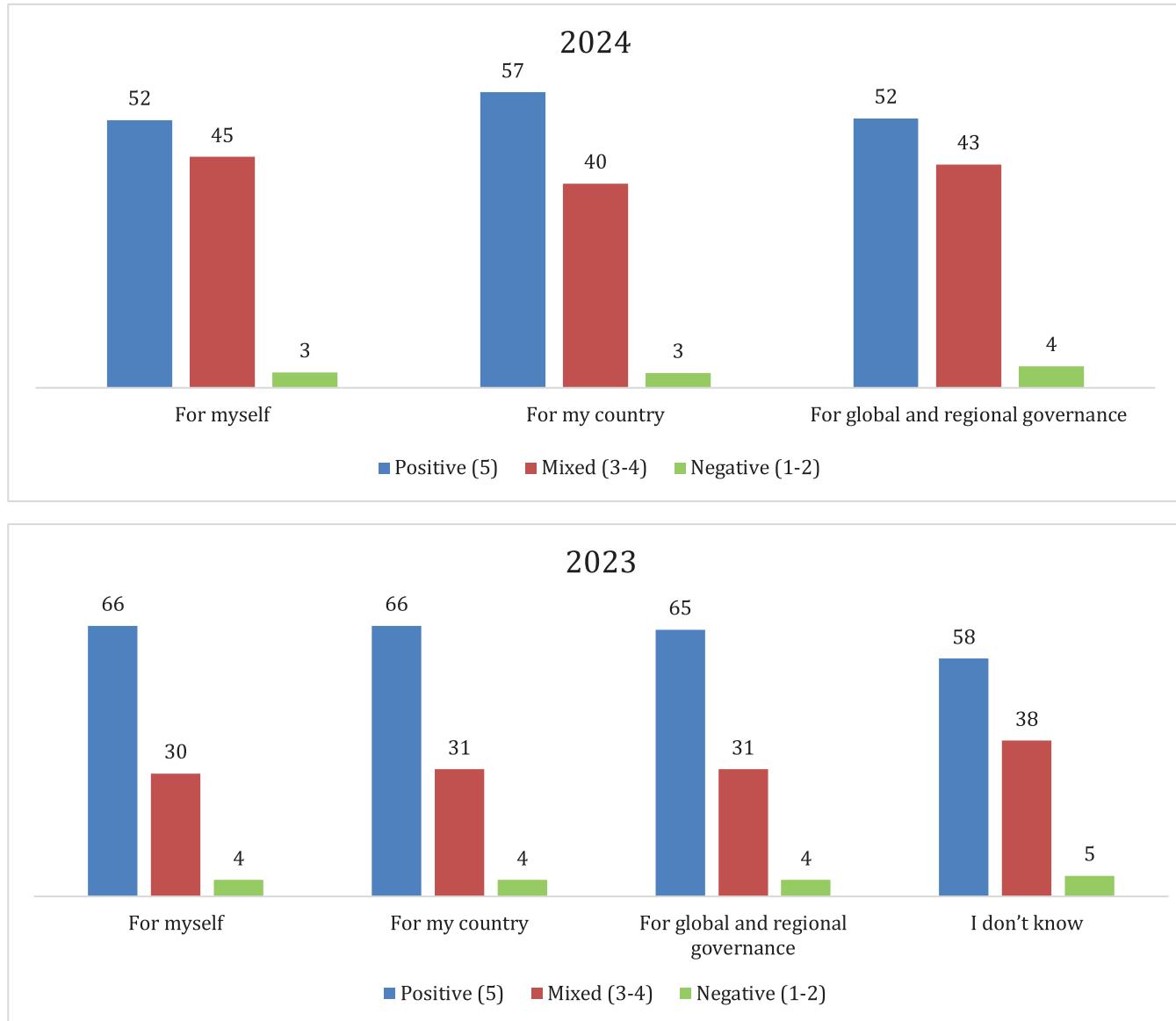
Interestingly, despite a decrease in positive outlook, the negative view on all three indicators in 2024 is the least compared to 2023 and 2022. The percentage of the negative view on each indicator has decreased and has stayed within 4 to 5%. Thus, the negative view on the concept has decreased compared to previous years.

In between an optimistic and pessimistic outlook on the shared vision of the Chinese for humanity, a more moderate and mixed view has seen a steep rise this year. In all the indicators, there has been a 1 to 5% increase in mixed opinions on the concept of a shared future for humanity. The phenomenon on this issue resembles a balanced picture compared to 2022, where positive perceptions were much lower, and negative perceptions were higher in all three indicators than in 2023. In 2024, we can see the prominence of mixed opinions, a higher percentage than in previous years in all the indicators regarding the issue.

It may be noted also that many respondents were not aware of it at all. The reasons may be linked to a lack of knowledge of this proposal's components, which include multilateralism, a fair and just international system, socialism with Chinese features, and so on. Respondents require a more detailed and systematic awareness of global politics and related challenges. Lack of interest in Chinese politics, foreign affairs, and media can also be linked to confused perceptions. Other possible explanations for such sentiments include dissatisfaction with China's role in Rohingya repatriation and Uighur treatment. Furthermore, the reason for a mixed sentiment can also come from the fact that China ranks foremost as an industrial and developed country in terms of pollution and release of Carbon emissions. Being a disaster-prone and one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change, such a factor generally creates a mixed idea about a shared vision of humanity where many communities already face climate imbalance.

#### 4.8. Views on the Global Development Initiative (GDI)

Figure 4.8: Perception of GDI to achieve the SDGs by the joint efforts of developing countries



The GDI has gained significance in the development sector and inside the UN framework. Over the past three years, the GDI 'circle of friends' has grown steadily. Over 100 countries and international bodies, including the United Nations, have endorsed and participated in the GDI, and over 80 countries have joined the Group of Friends of the GDI.<sup>98</sup> The Global Development Initiative (GDI) and building a global community with a shared future have harnessed current momentum and addressed past trends, charting a new path for all nations to overcome challenges and pursue development collectively. In the last three years, China has suggested several practical steps and performed specific efforts to carry out the GDI. Its endeavours to establish global cooperation for development have received increasingly positive feedback.<sup>99</sup> The initiative has consistently strengthened, its implementation mechanisms have gradually improved, and practical cooperation within its framework has steadily materialised. Thus, China's strategy to address the disparities in the development of the Global South and foster a better world has been presented.

However, Bangladeshi respondents in the 2024 survey viewed GDI less positively than the previous year. In 2024, respondents who expressed that GDI will be positive for the individual self, their country and global and regional governance were 52%, 57% and 52%, respectively. Regarding having mixed views on the individual self, their country, and the global and regional governance were 45%, 40% and 43%, respectively. In contrast, the respondents' negative perception of the GDI on the indicators for individual self, their country, and global and regional governance were 3%, 3% and 4%, respectively. In all three indicators (52% for individual self, 57% for Bangladesh, and 52% for global and regional governance), there has been at least a 9 to 14% decrease in positive views compared to the survey results of 2023 (66% for individual self, 66% for Bangladesh and 65% for global and regional governance). People showed a more mixed view of GDI in 2024. Notably, 45% of people have mixed feelings on GDI's impact on the individual self, 40% have mixed feelings in the case of Bangladesh, and 43% expressed their mixed feelings on the issue of global and regional governance in 2024. The mixed views saw a substantial 9 to 15% increase in all three indicators compared to the previous year (30% for individual self, 31% for Bangladesh, and 31% for global and regional governance). Apart from growing mixed feelings on the GDI, the respondents showing negative attitudes towards it have slightly

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<sup>98</sup> "China accelerates cooperation on advancing Global Development Initiative." 12 October 2024. Cited in <http://en.people.cn/n3/2024/1012/c90000-20228667.html>. Accessed on 28 December 2024.

<sup>99</sup> "3 years on, China-proposed Global Development Initiative gathers momentum for speeding up modernization." 24 September 2024. Cited in [https://2024focacsummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zpfh\\_1/202409/t20240924\\_11495373.htm](https://2024focacsummit.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zpfh_1/202409/t20240924_11495373.htm). Accessed on 28 December 2024.

decreased than it was in 2023, implicating a more moderate and balanced view on GDI than the previous year. Last year, all the indicators showed a 4% negative attitude towards GDI, which has now dropped to 3% for both the individual self and Bangladesh. Still, the pessimistic perception of the GDI for global and regional governance this year (4%) remains similar to 2023.

Despite the optimism, the sudden decrease in GDI's positive view can be attributed to Bangladesh assessing the possibility of joining the initiative. There was a strong perception that the high-level visit of Bangladesh's former Prime Minister to China in 2024 might result in Bangladesh finally joining the GDI and signing a MoU between the two states. That expectation fell short as the joint statement between Bangladesh and China in the high-level meeting held between the top leaders only stated that the countries discussed GDI and China is prepared to exchange GDI experience with Bangladesh.<sup>100</sup> The Chinese government has made substantial moves to persuade Bangladesh to join the GDI. Still, despite expanding bilateral cooperation to new heights, the former Awami League regime paid comparatively less attention or importance to GDI than other cooperation areas. Given this situation and the ambiguity of reaching a consensus, positive support for GDI may have decreased.

In addition, the decreasing positive view on GDI amongst respondents can also be because Bangladeshi news media, both digital and print, have reported on the issue scarcely often within the headline of economic and strategic cooperation. This underreporting of the GDI in the Bangladeshi press can be due to the previous and the current interim government of Bangladesh not prioritising the issue enough, whereby the public was more informed on other aspects of bilateral ties. Moreover, in 2024, most survey respondents were students and youths who received everyday news from social media and online news outlets. Therefore, the decrease in positive attitudes towards GDI can also be due to a lack of dissemination, promotion, and discussion on the initiative by the Chinese government on social media and online platforms, which are popular in Bangladesh.

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<sup>100</sup> "PM's China visit: No loans, but assurance of future cooperation," 12 July 2024. Cited in <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/0a7q8c66p5>. Accessed on 28 December 2024.

#### 4.9. Views on China's handling of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang

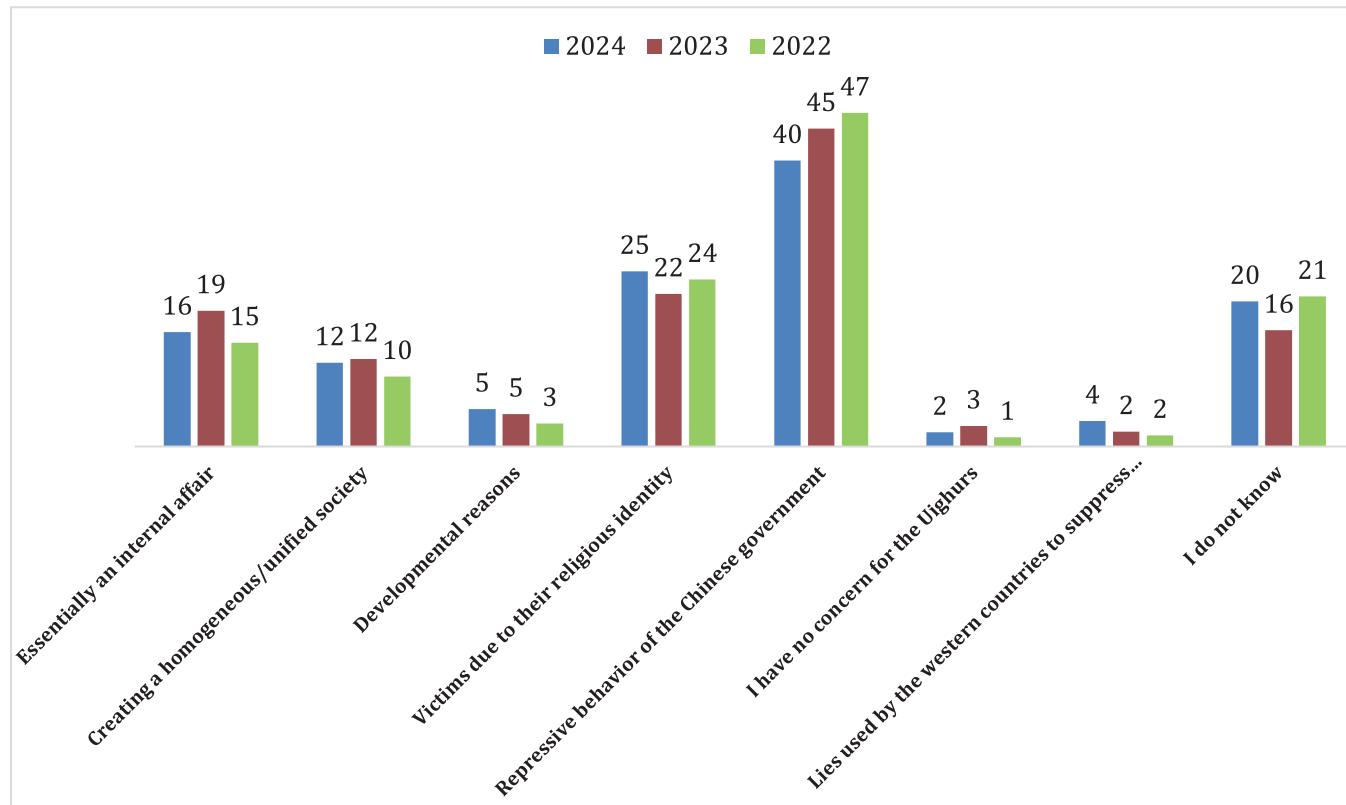
The Bangladeshi people's overall response to this issue is negative. The majority (40%) perceive the issue as the Chinese Government's repressive behaviour. Compared to 2023 (45%) and 2022 (47%), this view has decreased significantly, indicating that the popular notion of the Uighur issue as state repression has decreased.

However, there has been a rise in the view of Uighurs being victim due to their religious identity. This year marks the highest (25%) of such a view compared to previous years (22% in 2023 and 24% in 2022) and ranks as the second most popular perception on the topic this year. Besides, in 2024, there has been a decrease in people's viewing of the issue as an internal issue in China. This year, 16% of respondents think it's an internal issue compared to 19% last year. The respondents showed similar trends in 2023 this year on projecting the issue as developmental reasons (5%) and creating a homogeneous society (12%).

**Table: 4.9 Views on China's handling of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Essentially an internal affair	862	16
Creating a homogeneous/unified society	633	12
Developmental reasons	281	5
Victims, due to their religious identity	1322	25
Repressive behavior of the Chinese government	2161	40
I have no concern for the Uighurs	109	2
Lies used by the Western countries to suppress China	191	4
I do not know	1097	20

**Figure 4.9: How do you view China's dealing with the Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang?**



Moreover, people perceiving the Uighur issue as lies used by Western countries to suppress China has risen to 4% this year, indicating a small but significant 2% rise compared to previous years. Interestingly, a small but considerable percentage (20%) said they know nothing about this topic. This is reinforced by another small group (2%) who opined that they have no concern for the Uighurs. When we compare the findings of 2024 to those of previous years, we notice that these indicators have changed notably. Negative perceptions of this issue have decreased gradually since 2023.

The unfavourable reactions can be attributed to identity politics, the religious affiliation of the majority of Bangladesh's people, and media reporting and framing of the Uighur situation. These factors are intertwined and related to each other. Bangladesh is the fourth largest Muslim country, and a significant portion of the Muslim population believes that they are spiritually and religiously connected with other

Muslims spread across the globe. This transnational nature of shared sentiment and cohesion can be compared with the concept of nationalism based on the ‘imagined communities’ of Benedict Anderson. Therefore, a feeling of religious belongingness exists amongst Muslims around the world, including among Bangladeshi Muslims. Again, in Bangladesh, people widely agree that Western news media outlets are authentic sources of news and information. However, such a view might be decreasing given the Western media’s biased take on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Yet the influence of Western media over Bangladeshi people is significant. Therefore, we must take into account the Western media narrative surrounding the Uighur, which affects the mindset of Muslims in Bangladesh. The typical representation of Uighurs in China by the Western media is a community that is being persecuted and repressed by the Chinese government. Western media also strongly emphasise the reeducation camps in Xinjiang, and the use of Uighur forced labour in the region. This portrayal of Uighurs might have created a negative perception among the respondents. As most respondents in the 2024 survey have also been Muslims, the existence of the negative perceptions can be understood by taking the lens of the Western depiction of Uighurs in the mindset of the Bangladeshis.

To change the perception regarding the Uighur issue, the Chinese government needs to promote the transparency of its activities in Xinjiang. It is also vital for the Chinese government to arrange outreach programs, facilitate interaction sessions and platforms, and highlight its positive role in Xinjiang through online, print, and social media platforms. Moreover, China may also promote its English media outlets and increase their reach in Bangladesh. Media collaboration should be expanded with Bangladeshi private media outlets. The Chinese Embassy in Bangladesh needs to create an online presence and visibility on popular social media platforms from which most people in Bangladesh now become aware of the current developments in the world, like Facebook, Instagram and YouTube. Through these activities, China can project positive activities and developments in Uighur. Through these activities, China may also circulate testimonies and positive experiences of Uighur communities in Xinjiang. Finally, China needs to promote its culture, heritage, and vision clearly to Bangladeshis by setting up cultural and educational centres to have a better understanding and positive exposure of Uighurs and Xinjiang can be depicted to a broader audience.

#### **4.10: Top development partners of Bangladesh**

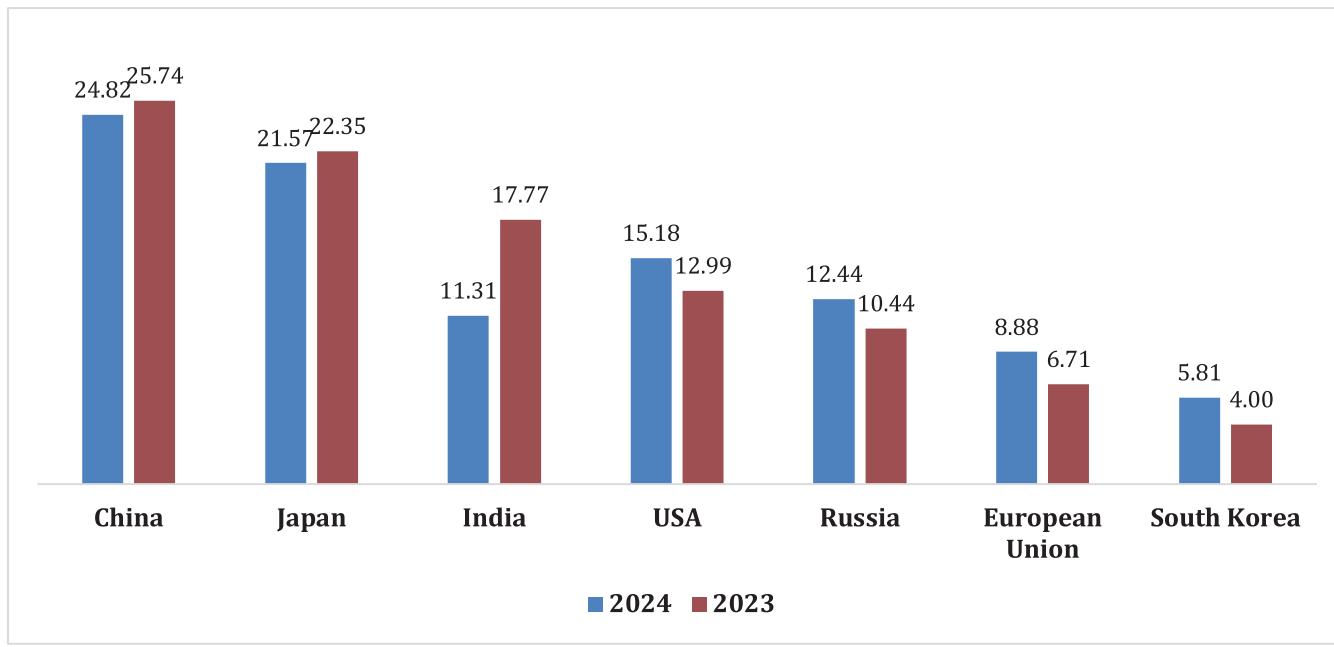
Like the previous year, China also ranks 1st in popular image as a development partner this year. However, the percentage of people ranking China in the top spot has decreased from 25.74% in 2023 to 24.82% in 2024. After China, the top-ranked development partners in the eyes of respondents this year are Japan (21.57%) and the USA (15.18%), respectively. Despite ranking second, the popularity of Japan as a development partner showed a slight decrease in trend compared to last year (22.35%).

At the same time, the USA's image as the highest-ranked development partner rose to 15.18% among the respondents, more than a 2% increase from the previous year (12.99%). Subsequently, in 2024, the respondents' view of Russia (12.44%), the European Union ([EU]8.88%), and South Korea (5.81%) as Bangladesh's primary development partner significantly increased by 1.5 to 2% compared to the previous year.

**Table 4.10: Top development partners of Bangladesh**

Country	Rank 1	Rank 2	Rank 3	Rank 4	Rank 5	Rank 6	Rank 7
China	2237	1332	690	275	132	56	35
Japan	1579	1422	639	356	200	74	28
India	323	462	711	499	384	253	852
USA	455	577	997	939	487	302	131
Russia	201	437	765	815	822	360	107
European Union	95	234	361	569	756	811	247
South Korea	41	100	169	291	480	708	973

**Figure 4.10: When someone refers to Bangladesh's development partners, which country comes first?**



In contrast, India, the third most (17.77%) perceived country as a development partner last year, has faced a 6% drop this year and has been ranked fifth (11.31%), outranked additionally by the US and Russia.

It may be noted that the previous year's top three countries (China, Japan, and India) saw a decrease in people's perceptions as top development partners. In contrast, the opposite trend is seen in the case of the USA, Russia, the EU, and South Korea. The slight downward trend in opting for China and Japan may be attributed to increased efforts by other development partners, such as the USA, Russia, the EU, and South Korea, to enhance their visibility regarding investment and aid allocation for Bangladesh's development.

The USA has already bolstered its support to provide a new assistance package for Bangladesh, including Rohingya aid. It has consecutively been the top foreign donor to assist the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, high-level dialogue during the United Nations General Assembly session between Chief Advisor Muhammad Yunus and President Joe Biden, bilateral visits by top diplomats, and pragmatic support for the interim government have enhanced the United States' positive perception.

Russia, a more cautious actor in response to the July uprising, also saw increasing positive perceptions, probably due to its increased cultural and educational exchanges and facilitation of the construction of the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant (RNPP).

In Bangladesh, the EU has focused on human rights-based advocacy, funding, and support for technology-based fields like digital governance, cyber awareness, and promoting the right to free speech in digital space. The EU is also one of the largest markets for ready-made garments; many people are engaged in it.<sup>102</sup> South Korea, on the other hand, has recently increased its investment, technical cooperation, and trade with Bangladesh. It has also focused on developing ties in sophisticated areas like defence and technology. South Korean music and dramas are also very popular among Bangladeshi youth. These reasons might have amplified Bangladeshis' positive perception of the EU and South Korea.

Finally, the downward spiral of India's ranking can be attributed to the post-uprising effect, where different perceived actions and media reporting by the Indian media on the uprising have raised dissatisfaction and anger to a certain extent amongst the Bangladeshis towards the Indian position.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> "USAID to provide over \$200m." 16 September 2024. Cited in

<https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/usaid-provide-over-200m-3704196>. Accessed on 28 December 2024.

<sup>102</sup> Mohammad Abdur Razzaque, Jillur Rahman, Rakin-Uz-Zaman, Sumaeya Akhter, Deen Islam and Abu Eusuf. "Bangladeshi Exports to the European Union: Exploring Opportunities for Diversification," FES-RAPID, August 2024.

<sup>103</sup> Khandakar Tahmid Rejwan, "Why India is so concerned about Bangladesh's political problems." East Asia Forum Quarterly, 14 September 2024.

## **Findings II:**

### **Perceptions about Specific Issue Areas of Bangladesh-China Relations**

## Perceptions about Specific Issue Areas of Bangladesh-China Relations

### 5.1. General impressions of China-Bangladesh relations

#### 5.1.1 Overall Bilateral Relations

Similar to previous years, most respondents positively viewed the China-Bangladesh bilateral ties. However, there is a declining trend of the relationship in comparison to earlier years by combining very good and good perceptions recorded from the respondents this year. 21.10% of respondents assessed the bilateral relations as very good, while 44.31% remarked it as good. This shows the respondent's views as very good (24.9%) and good (45.41%) on the issue last year decreased by 3.5% and 1%, respectively. This year, the two optimistic perceptions (very good and good) make 65.41% of the respondents positive towards the existing China-Bangladesh bilateral relations. Although this outlook may look significant, it still falls short in comparison to both 2023 (70.31%) and 2022 (68.07%) of the positive perceptions (very good and good) that the respondents had over the China-Bangladesh relations. Respondents attributing the ties as neutral in 2024 (27.82%) have remained relatively similar to last year (27.51%) but less than in 2022 (29.31%).

In 2024, a small but insignificant number of respondents (1.4%) opined that bilateral ties were poor, which is nearly akin to 2023 findings (1.39%) but less than 2022 (1.90%). Moreover, this year, only 0.6% of respondents remarked that bilateral relations were very poor, and this year's trend of negative remarks has decreased the most in comparison to previous years (0.78% and 0.72% in 2023 and 2022, respectively).

**Table 5.1a: General impressions of China-Bangladesh relations**

Indicator	Total	Percentage
Very good (9-10)	1130	21.10
Good (7-8)	2373	44.31
Neutral (5-6)	1490	27.82
Poor (3-4)	75	1.40
Very poor (1-2)	32	0.60

**Figure 5.1a: Please give your general impressions on China-Bangladesh bilateral relations.**



The overwhelmingly positive responses of 2023 could be linked to Chinese assistance in the recently completed Padma Bridge, Padma Bridge Rail Link, Karnaphuli Tunnel, Dasherkandi sewerage treatment plant, National ICT infrastructure network, power grid network strengthening projects, and other numerous megaprojects. This year, the reason for a more moderately optimistic and mixed view can be attributed to the visit by former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to China just before her fall. It received significant attention not just from observers but also from the ordinary people. Therefore, an image of China as an ally of Sheikh Hasina might have precipitated a prevalent mindset, which may have created a negative perception of bilateral relations after the uprising. More importantly, reports of severe corruption committed by the previous regime in the projects developed through Chinese developmental and technical assistance, such as the flagship Padma Bridge, may also contribute to a more nuanced view of bilateral relations.

Despite a comparatively less optimistic view than the previous year, an insignificant percentage of negative opinions, which has shown a declining trend, may be seen as a positive view of the respondents on China-Bangladesh bilateral relations. The weighted average of this response stands at 7.41%, and it has

decreased by 0.09% compared to 2023 (7.50%). However, compared to 2022, it increased by 0.13%. This also reinforces the argument that the image of bilateral ties remains positive but multifaceted. Potential factors contributing to these favourable perceptions include collaboration in energy production, zero-tariff access for Bangladeshi goods to China, cooperation in arms and defence, and partnership in economic and developmental aspects.

### 5.1.2 Importance of China-Bangladesh bilateral relations

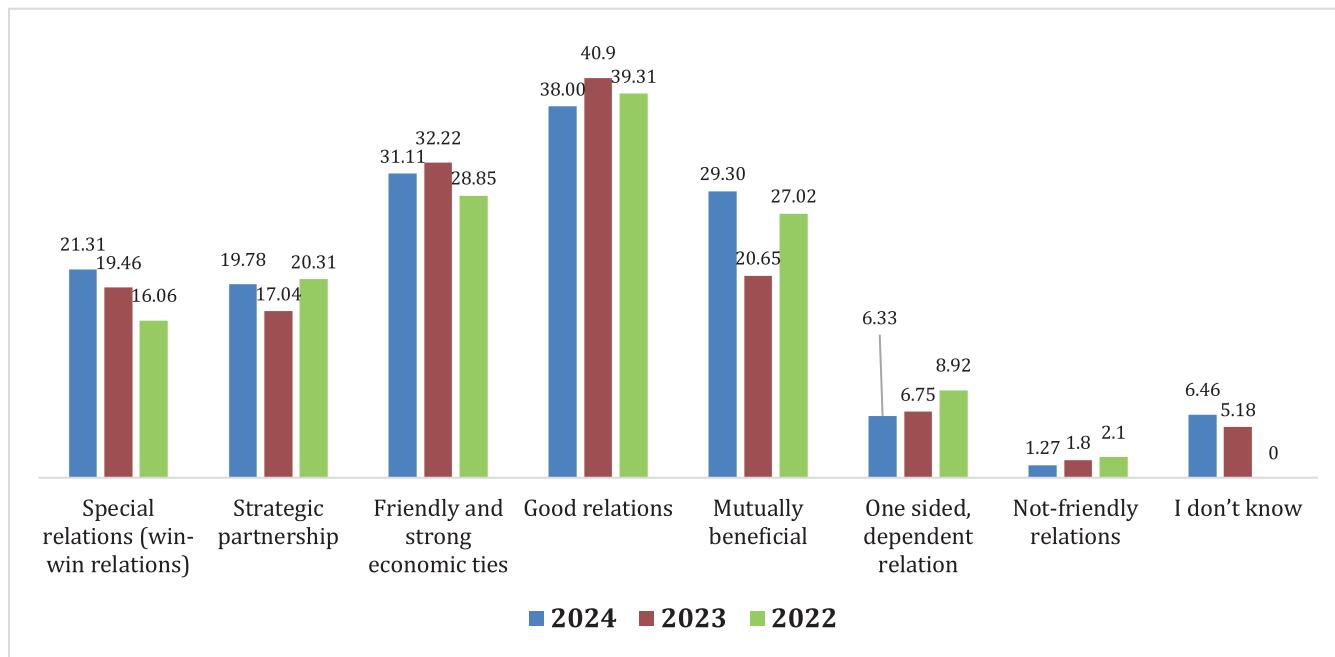
Compared to previous years, this year's respondents showed a diverse but positive view on the importance of China-Bangladesh bilateral relations. The ties between the two countries are characterised by a good relationship (38%), which has decreased by about 2% and 1.5% in 2023 and 2022, respectively. At least 31.11% believe the two countries enjoyed a friendly and strong economic relationship, with a significant increase in the popular perception that such bilateral ties are mutually beneficial (29.30%). At the same time, the respondents' views on China-Bangladesh relations, marked by friendly and strong economic ties, decreased by 1% from 2023 to 2024. The significance of the ties as mutually beneficial increased by 9%, which is higher than the previous two years.

Moreover, 21.31% of survey participants believe that bilateral ties are marked by a special relationship characterised by a win-win situation. This is significantly higher than 2023 (19.46%) and 2022 (16.06%), with an increase of about 2% compared to 2023 and 5% compared to 2022. The respondents perceiving the significance of bilateral relations as strategic partnerships has also risen to 19.78% from 17.04% in 2023.

**Table 5.1b: Importance of China-Bangladesh bilateral relations**

	Total	Percentage
<b>Special relations (win-win relations)</b>	1141	21.31
<b>Strategic Partnership</b>	1059	19.78
<b>Friendly and strong economic ties</b>	1666	31.11
<b>Good relations</b>	2035	38.00
<b>Mutually beneficial</b>	1569	29.30
<b>One-sided, dependent relation</b>	339	6.33
<b>Not-friendly relations</b>	68	1.27
<b>I don't know</b>	346	6.46

**Figure 5.1b: How do you view the importance of China-Bangladesh bilateral relations?**



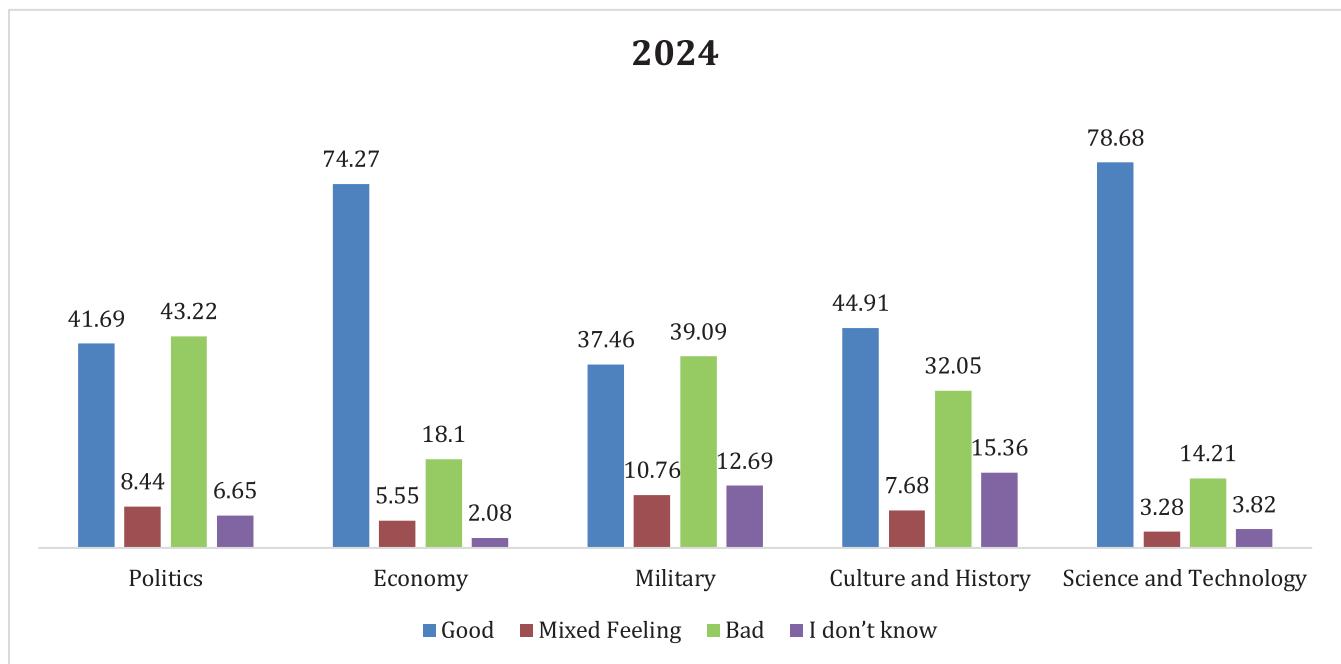
Some respondents in 2024 also believed the bilateral relationship is one-sided (6.33%), but such negative perception has shown a declining trend in comparison to 2023 (6.75%) and 2022 (8.92%). A small and insignificant number of survey participants also opined that the relationship was non-friendly (1.27%), although this pessimistic perception has been the least this year in comparison to 2023 (1.8%) and 2022 (2.1%). Besides, this year, it was also found that some respondents (6.46%) were unaware of the significance of bilateral relations.

### 5.1.3 Key areas of China-Bangladesh cooperation and impressions

Respondents were also asked to list the areas of the bilateral relations that concerned them the most. In 2024, amongst all the issues in bilateral relations, science and technology showed the most positive perceptions (78.68%) among the respondents, followed by the economy (74.27%), culture and history (44.91%), politics (41.69%), and military (37.46%). This pattern of favourable ranking is similar to 2023. Compared to last year, the positive perception of the military, science and technology, and politics has increased by 1.52%, 0.11%, and 0.5%, respectively. Apart from that, this year, there is a decrease in the rest of the indicators in comparison to 2023.

In comparison to 2023, an important observation is that in 2024, the mixed feelings in all five indicators saw a substantial decrease. In contrast, there has been a significant upward trend in bad feelings. This year people have the most mixed perceptions in the area of military cooperation (10.76%), which is followed by politics (8.44%), culture and history (7.68%), economy (5.55%), and science and technology (3.28%). From 2023, at least a 9% to a maximum 30% decrease in mixed perception in five indicators will be seen in 2024.

**Figure 5.1c: What areas of China-Bangladesh cooperation concern you the most? What's your impression?**





The trend of mixed feelings over cooperation in key sectors is even lower than those recorded in 2022. This declining mixed sentiment has, in contrast, given rise to bad feelings over the areas of bilateral cooperation in 2024. A significant 43.22% of respondents designated politics as the top issue of bilateral cooperation that they viewed as bad. This negative perception has been followed by 39.09% in the military, 32.05% in culture and history, 18.1% in the economy, and 14.21% in science and technology. In contrast to 2023, the trend of negative views on bilateral relations on five key aspects has increased at least by 10% to a maximum of 30%. Even compared to 2022, all the indicators show a more negative perception this year. A small number of people have no specific concern over politics (6.65%), economy (2.08%), and science and technology (3.82%). A small but significant percentage expressed their lack of knowledge of the military (12.69%) and culture and history (15.36%). Overall, compared to 2023, people unfamiliar with bilateral ties in all the five key areas of cooperation have decreased.

Overall, in 2024, the negative (bad) view of the five key areas of cooperation between China and Bangladesh has increased significantly. This increase in bad perceptions has replaced chiefly the existing mixed perceptions in previous years. The survey also shows that the positive impression has grown in only three key areas with a minimal margin. All these indicate that the popular view on key areas of bilateral relationships is becoming critical compared to the more optimistic outlook we have seen in previous years.

The increased negative trend in popular perceptions of key areas of bilateral cooperation might be attributed to several internal and external factors. One of the possible reasons behind increased negative views can be linked to the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government. One of the major themes during the 15 years of Awami League rule was centred around the concept of 'Development.' Democratic rights, freedom of expression, and suppression of free speech were convinced to be sacrificed by the previous regime to promote national development.<sup>104</sup> People were agitated as they lacked fundamental rights to free expression and opinion.<sup>105</sup> These developments, goals, and projects included billions of dollars in public service and infrastructure such as roads and highways, energy infrastructure, sustainability initiatives based on SDG goals, etc. As Bangladesh's most significant development partner, China was involved in major projects that naturally caught the eyes of mass people. The perception, therefore, might have been manufactured that with Chinese aid, Sheikh Hasina and the Awami League government were creating the impression that they had been successful in achieving success and completing various development projects. As people are now being critical of the different development initiatives led by the previous government, they have also developed and increased their critical view of China as it has been previously. Moreover, the reports on rampant corruption and embezzlement of public funds through these projects had created a very bitter image of large-scale infrastructure projects, which were intrinsically linked with the concept of 'Development' by the previous regime.<sup>106</sup>

Another critical aspect that might have decreased the positive view on bilateral relations between Bangladesh and China is the Rohingya Refugee Crisis. After nearly eight years since the mass exodus of Rohingyas took place inside Bangladesh, the crisis is far from being solved. There has been existing gridlock in negotiations, and the Arakan Army's complete control in the Northern Rakhine adjacent to Bangladeshi borders has created a new geopolitical tension. Already, a fresh wave of more than 50,000 Rohingya have entered Bangladesh, and the possibility of a large influx cannot be ruled out.<sup>107</sup> Under such a scenario, there is no hope for voluntary repatriation based on a durable solution to the refugee crisis.

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<sup>104</sup> "Ten years of Sheikh Hasina: 'Development minus democracy'" 28 December 2018. Cited in <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/28/ten-years-of-sheikh-hasina-development-minus-democracy>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

<sup>105</sup> "Sheikh Hasina: The pro-democracy icon who became an autocrat" 6 August 2024. Cited in <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg3ee303yxp0>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

<sup>106</sup> "\$16b siphoned off every year on avg during AL rule" 1 December 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/16b-siphoned-every-year-avg-during-al-rule-3765671>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

<sup>107</sup> "Bangladesh had to accept over 60,000 Rohingyas under certain circumstances" 22 December 2024. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

Moreover, the case is gradually heading towards a protracted refugee crisis, which is hurting the local community and their perception of Rohingyas. Moreover, there has been a rise of criminal and armed activities by various transitional Rohingya armed groups and gangs like the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA), Rohingya Solidarity Organisation (RSO), Nabi Hossain Group, Islami Mahas, etc. These groups are involved in human trafficking, arms smuggling, and channelling drugs from Myanmar into Bangladesh.<sup>108</sup> This heightens the risk and insecurity in the local communities and also creates a more adverse view of the innocent Refugees, who are mostly blamed as a whole rather than a particular criminal group. News such as Rohingyas issuing illegal national identity cards and passports and providing cheap labour has also caused a lot of criticism from the local community.<sup>109</sup>

Despite the Chinese commitment to Bangladesh in assisting in finding a durable solution to the crisis, there has been no visible outcome. Moreover, when the refugee crisis started to unravel in 2017, China had initially blocked resolution in the UNSC regarding the Rohingyas to support the then government of Myanmar. China's diplomatic support to the internationally isolated Myanmar government is also very well established amongst the mass Bangladeshi. This good relationship with a foreign government, which has caused a local crisis in Bangladesh, may be a significant factor behind the increased negative perception of the bilateral relationship.<sup>110</sup> Moreover, due to new conflict developments in Rakhine, people are now more conscious and concerned regarding another large Rohingya influx and possible security threats to Bangladesh. Other than diplomatic statements, China's inability to provide Bangladesh with visible support to solve the Rohingya crisis might have created a deep resentment amongst the people regarding the existing bilateral ties.

Finally, an external factor contributing to the increased negative perception is the news prevalent in the Western Media about China.<sup>111</sup> Due to easy access to the internet and improved digital awareness, more Bangladeshis prefer Western news sources as reliable platforms to understand global dynamics better. People are less aware of Chinese media and news platforms. Therefore, the exposure to Western media by

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<sup>108</sup> "Competing armed groups pose new threat to Rohingya in Bangladesh" 11 December 2023. Cited in <https://myanmar.iiss.org/analysis/rohingya>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

<sup>109</sup> "Rohingyas given NIDs, passports on forged docs" 27 February 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/crime-justice/news/rohingyas-given-nids-passports-forged-docs-3553266>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

<sup>110</sup> Rachel Lambert, "Hidden Parallels: The Impact of Beijing's Policies on the Rohingya Crisis," Asia Dispatches by Wilson Center, 18 January 2022.

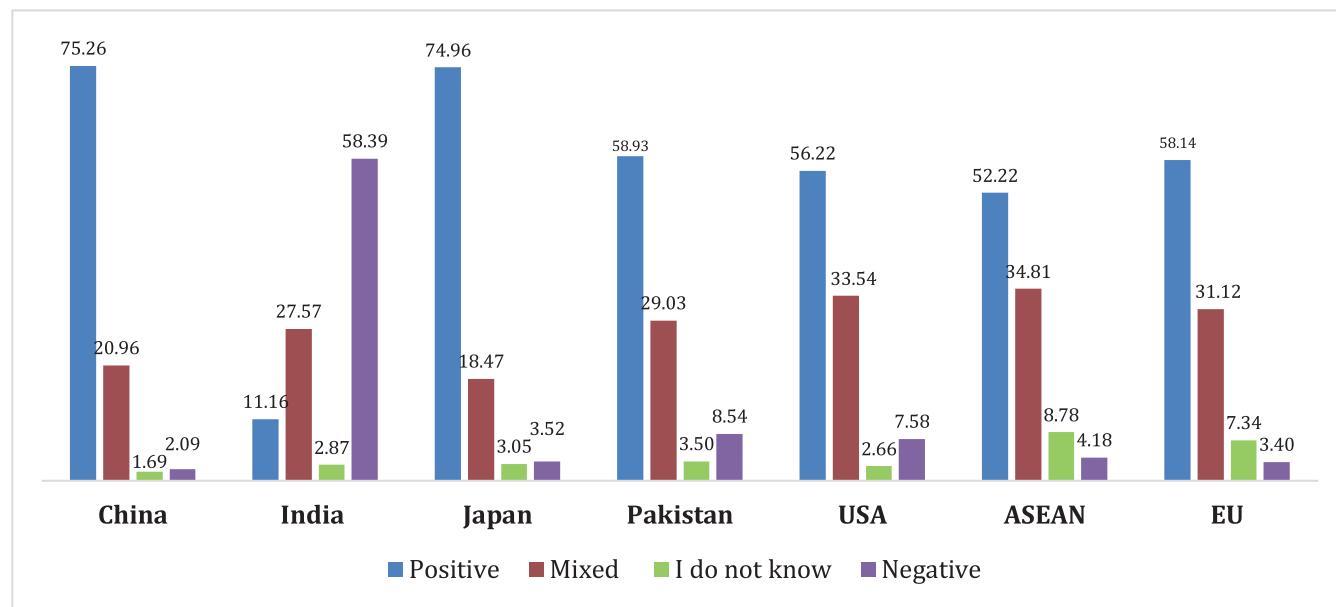
<sup>111</sup> "Western media and its compulsive anti-China bias" 18 October 2021. Cited in <https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/243378>. Accessed on 12 January 2025.

the Bangladeshis and the existing harmful content in those media outlets might have reinforced a negative or critical perception of China amongst the Bangladeshis. There is widespread news, documentaries, shows, and telecasts on Uighurs, Rohingya Refugees, Chinese support to Myanmar's military government, economic debt traps, and China's close ties with Sheikh Hasina. These contents project a negative image of China, affecting popular perception.

#### 5.1.4 Evolving Bilateral Relations of Bangladesh after the July Mass Uprising

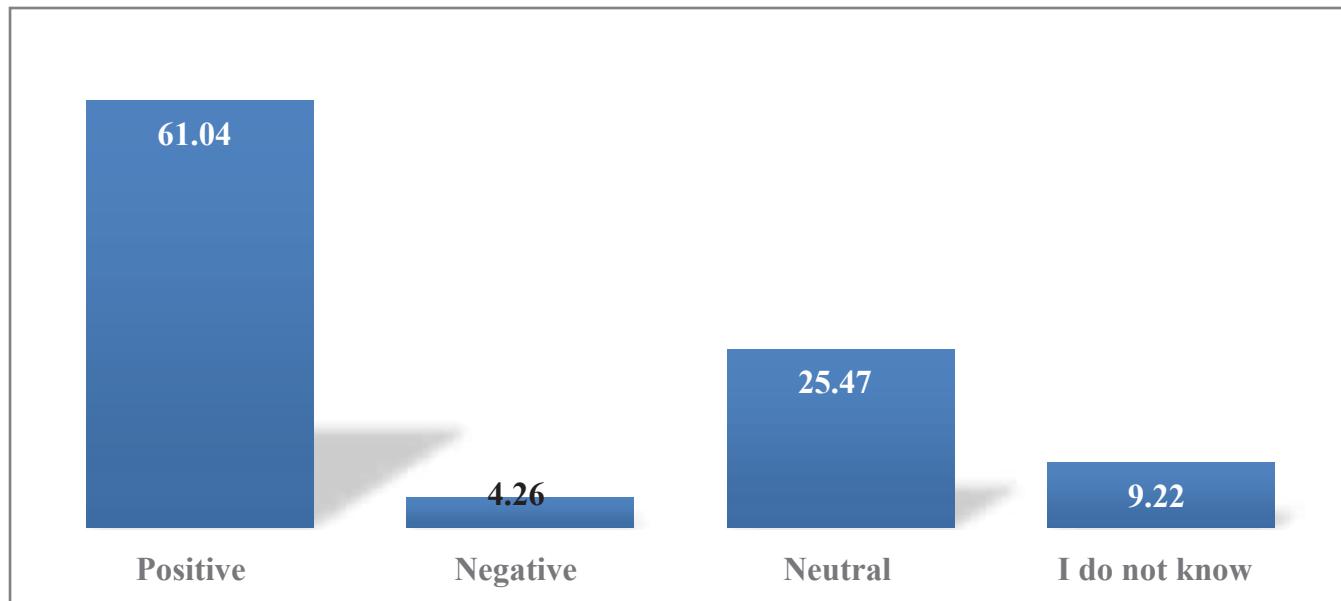
Respondents were asked to give their opinions and assessments on Bangladesh's evolving bilateral relations with its neighbours and other countries, particularly after the July mass uprising. Of all the relevant countries and regional associations, nearly 76% of the respondents said they see Bangladesh's bilateral relations with China positively. In comparison, about 21% have mixed feelings, 2% opined negative feelings, and 1.69% have no idea. Other notable important bilateral partners that received positive responses from the surveyed people are Japan, Pakistan, the EU, the USA, and the ASEAN. The lowest positive responses received on this question are clustered in India, which hovered around roughly 12%, and also received the highest negative responses, which hovered around 59%.

**Figure 5.1d: Perceptions about evolving bilateral relations of Bangladesh with other countries and regional bodies after the July mass uprising.**



When asked how they would evaluate the bilateral relations between China and Bangladesh, the respondents responded positively, particularly after the July mass upsurge. The highest number of responses recorded was positive (61.04%), followed by neutral (25.47%), unaware (9.22%), and negative (4.26%).

**Figure 5.1e: Perceptions about evolving bilateral relations of Bangladesh with China after the July mass uprising.**



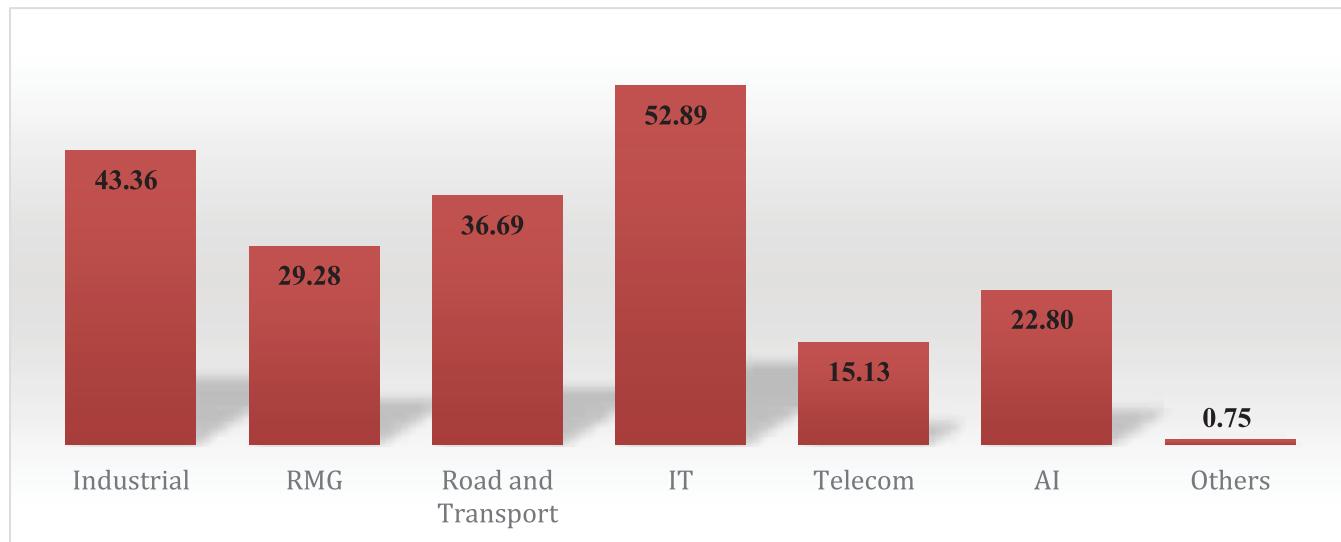
## 5.2 Trade, Development, and Connectivity

### 5.2.1 Expectations of Chinese Investment after the July student-people Uprising

Due to Bangladesh's political landscape change since August, the respondents were asked to highlight the sectors that might see an increased Chinese investment after the July mass uprising. Given such a query, most respondents viewed IT (52.89%) as the most potential sector where Chinese investment might see an increase. This response was followed by Industrial (43.36%), Road and Transport (36.69%), RMG (29.28%), AI (22.80%), Telecom (15.13%) and others (0.75%).

The general view of China as an emerging leader in the information technology sector and home to large IT-based conglomerates like Huawei, Tencent, ByteDance, etc., may have a ripple effect on the perception of the Bangladeshi people. Moreover, many people are directly or indirectly dependent on the sector. Thus, they most likely want to see Chinese investment in this sector expanded. Moreover, due to Chinese involvement in technical and developmental cooperation in several roads and transport projects, which has eased connectivity throughout the country, many respondents will also want to see an increased investment in the sector.

**Figure 5.2a: Will Chinese investment increase in the following sectors after the July mass upsurge?**



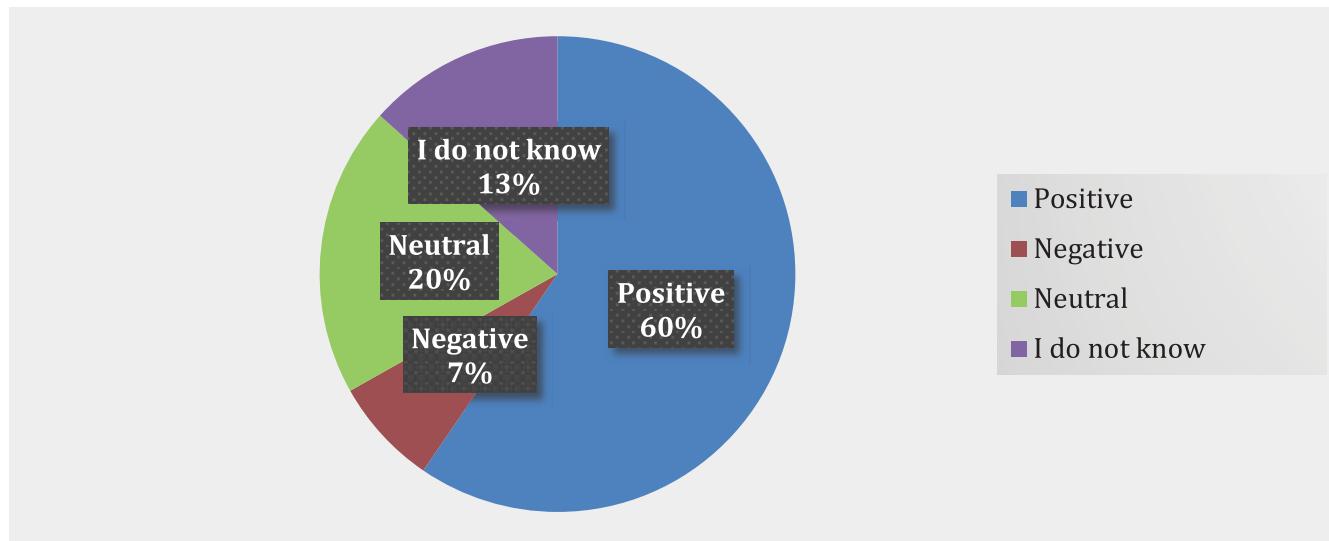
### 5.2.2 Evaluation of the Chinese Special Economic Zone

A Chinese Special Economic Zone (SEZ), the Chinese Economic and Industrial Zone (CEIZ), is set to be constructed in Anwara, Chattogram.<sup>112</sup> Despite the passage of 8 years since Bangladesh Economic Zones Authority (BEZA) took this initiative, and it is yet to be started, more than half of respondents (60%) perceived the project as positive. Besides such an optimistic outlook, about a fifth (20%) of the respondents viewed the establishment of SEZ as neutral. A few respondents (13%) had no idea about the

<sup>112</sup> “Construction of Chinese economic zone makes no progress in 8 years.” 9 July 2024. Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/business/news/construction-chinese-economic-zone-makes-no-progress-8-years-3652281>. Accessed on 1 December 2024.

Chinese SEZ. Very few, if not insignificant number of respondents (7%) expressed negative views on the construction of Chinese SEZ in Bangladesh. The prevailing positive outlook on the China-Bangladesh economic partnership can significantly support Chinese SEZs. Establishing a Chinese SEZ can boost such ties and expand employment opportunities for Bangladeshis. This also indicates that areas of economic cooperation remain the most positive and potential areas where bilateral relations can be strengthened.

**Figure 5.2b: How do you evaluate the establishment of the Chinese Special Economic Zone?**

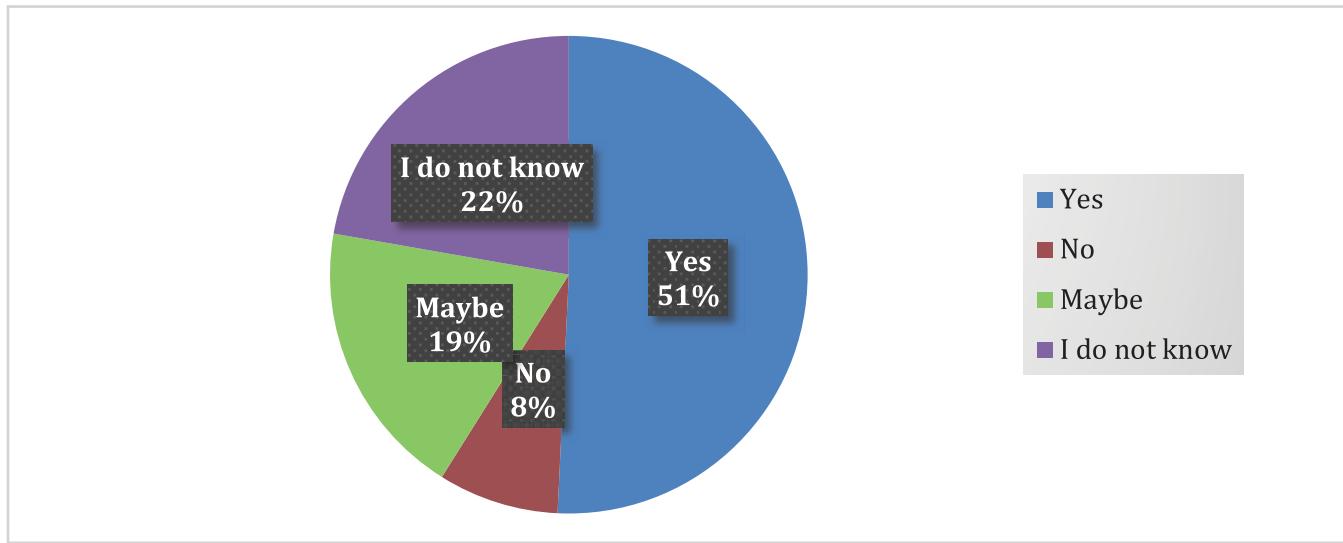


### 5.2.3 Whether Bangladesh should join BRICS

More than half of the respondents (50.75%) expressed their views positively on Bangladesh joining the BRICS. A significant proportion (22.24%) had no idea about BRICS, while a small percentage (18.84%) felt neutral about Bangladesh's intention to join the bloc. Few respondents (8.17%) were pessimistic about Bangladesh's prospects of joining the BRICS.

Reasons for the large volume of positive responses come from the fact that people are more exposed to the positive potential of BRICS and its appeal to seek a more moderate, balanced, and global south-oriented focus on the agenda. The growing dissatisfaction with the Western order has risen, given the role and impact of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the Russo-Ukrainian war. The appeal of BRICS as a lead voice for the non-West countries led by major and moderate powers is high on the appeal. Under such circumstances, popular support for Bangladesh to join the BRICS remains positive.

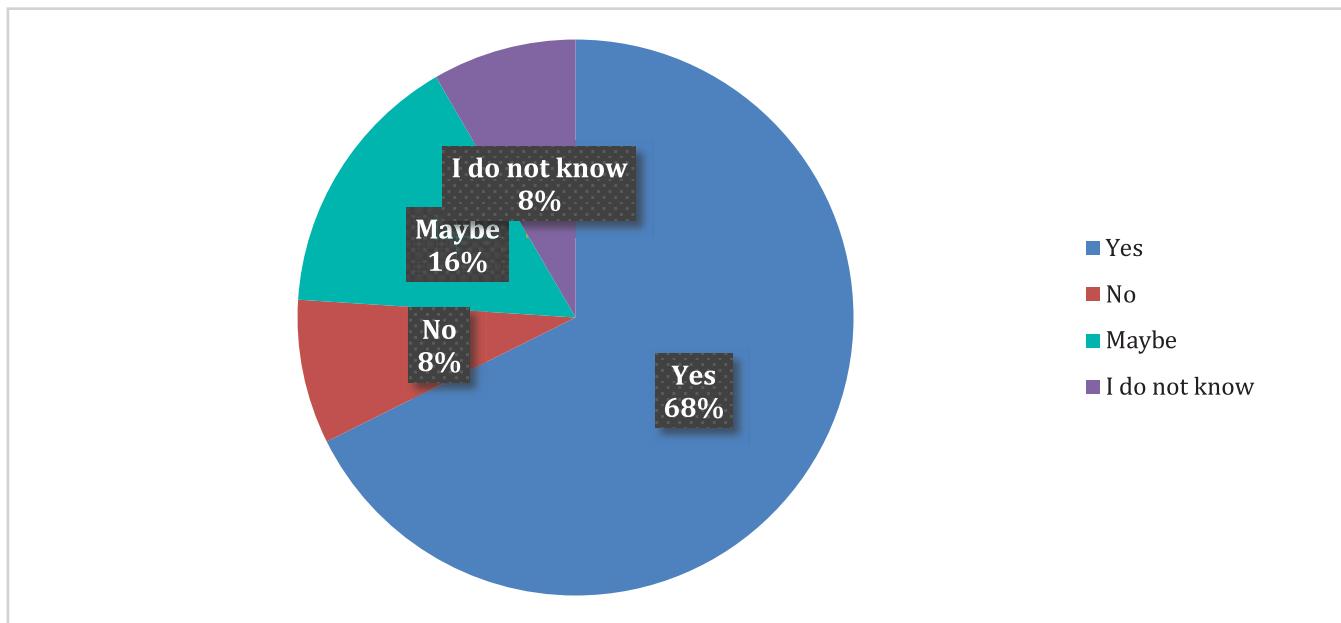
**Figure 5.2c: Do you think Bangladesh should join BRICS?**



#### **5.2.4 Bangladesh-China Free Trade Agreement**

Respondents positively view the possibility of Bangladesh and China signing a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Nearly 68% of the responses received a positive record, while the responses that thought otherwise were about 8%. 16% of the responses were neutral, and about 8% were unaware of this possibility. Such positive responses may be attributed to the fact that trade figures will multiply if Bangladesh and China sign an FTA.

**Figure 5.2d: Perceptions about China and Bangladesh signing a Free Trade Agreement.**

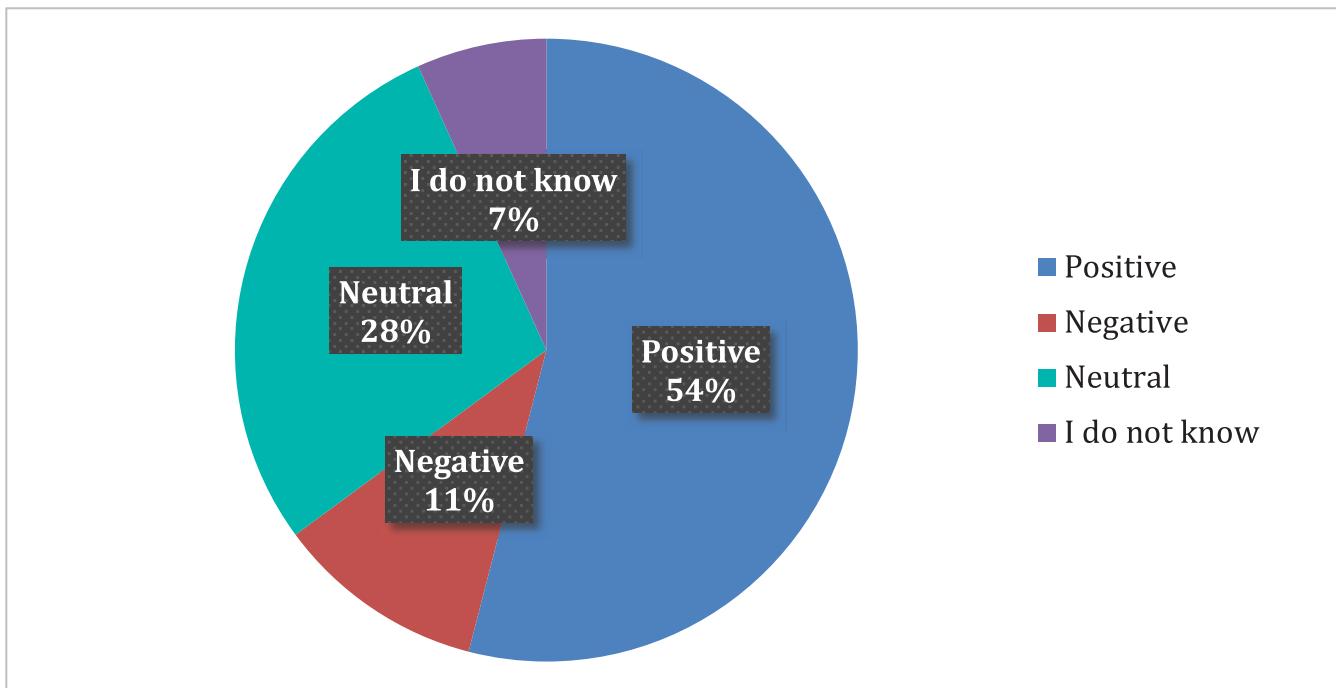


### 5.2.5 China's Consumer Goods: Price and Quality

Respondents see the price and quality of the China-made consumer goods in a very positive light. Nearly 54% of the respondents know the price and quality of China-made consumer goods as positive, while roughly 11% see it negatively. About 28% of the responses hovered around neutral, and 7% of the responses were utterly unaware of the price and quality of consumer goods made in China. The positive responses can be attributed to increasing demands for quality Chinese products at relatively affordable costs, better quality, availability at nearest shops, better selection, marketing, social media influence, peer knowledge, ease of operation, etc. qualities.

Of the surveyed unaware of China-made consumer goods, 5.53 percent were male, and 9.38 percent were female, for an average of roughly 11%. Surveyed people aged between 15 and 24 showed an average of 8.12%, the highest among all age categories, who were unaware of the price and quality of China's consumer goods.

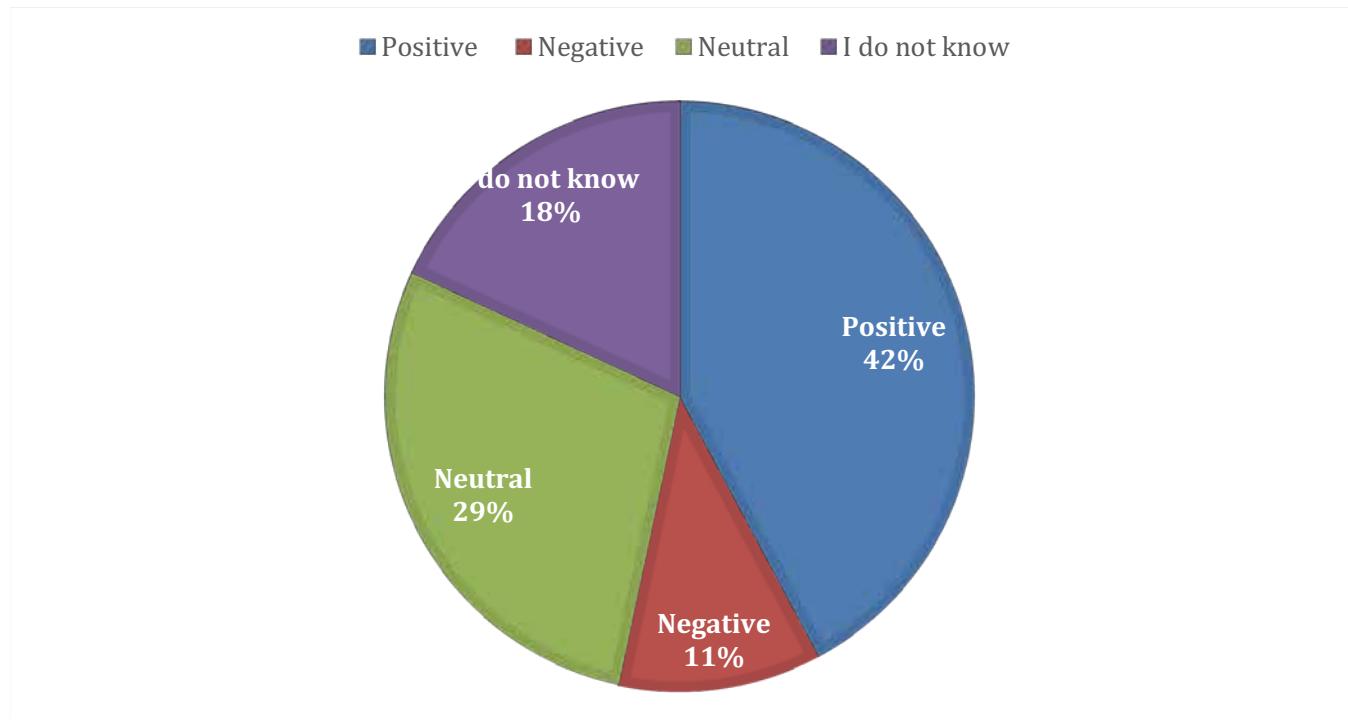
**Figure 5.2e: Perceptions about the price and quality of the China-made consumer goods.**



### **5.2.6 Chinese Food and Traditional Medicine**

The Bangladeshi people view the quality of Chinese food and traditional medicine positively. Many respondents (42%) positively attributed the quality of Chinese food and traditional medicine. Some respondents (29%) remained neutral on this question, while some (11%) expressed negative feelings. Around 18% of the respondents were uninformed about the quality of Chinese food and traditional medicine.

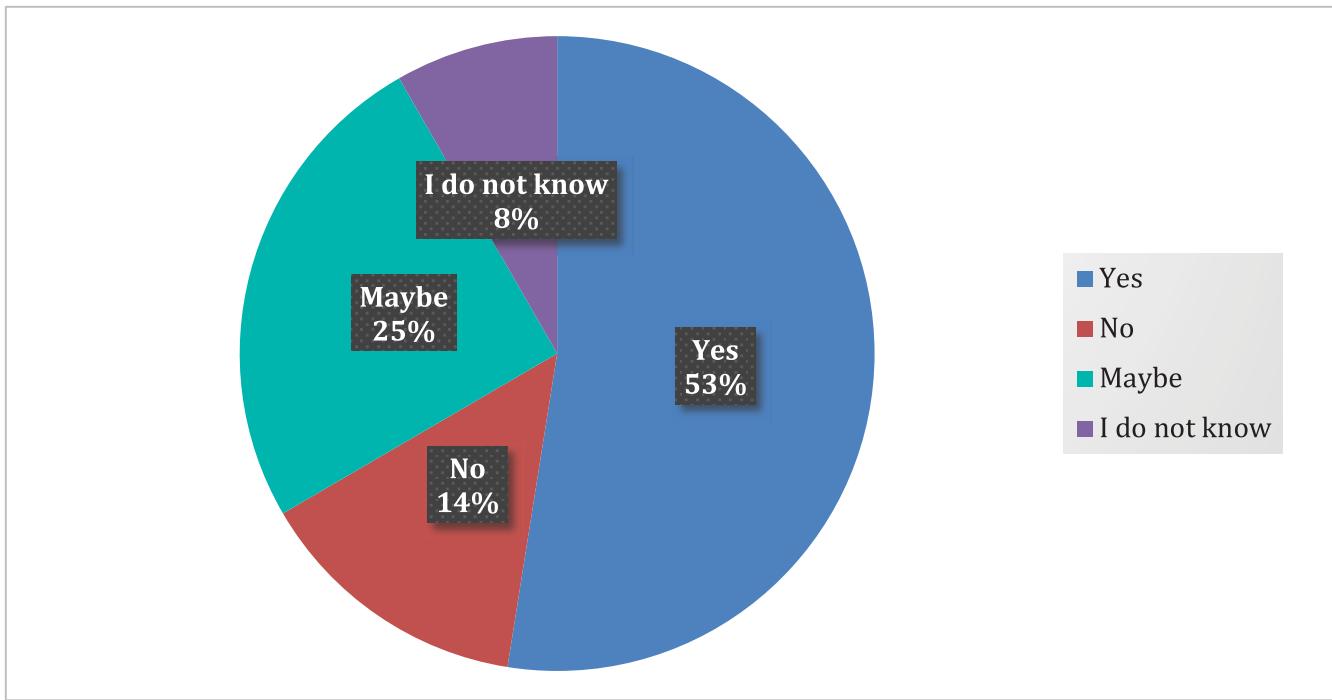
**Figure 5.2f: Perceptions about the quality of Chinese food and traditional medicine.**



### 5.2.7 Treatment in a Chinese Hospital

Respondents were asked if they would prefer to receive treatment in a Chinese Hospital. More than half of the respondents (53%) expressed positive opinions about their preference for getting treatments from China. Some respondents remained ambivalent about this possibility, while about 14% do not prefer treatment from China's hospital. Some people do not know this issue. The positive responses may be attributed to the robust COVID-19 vaccine supply and the health cooperation between Bangladesh and China. Bangladeshi people's gratitude for China's support in Bangladesh's fight against COVID-19 and related assistance for post-pandemic recovery might have played a role in expressing the desire to get treatment from China. Some people have faced many difficulties in getting treatment from India in recent days; this might have influenced their decisions to look for alternative destinations for treatment.

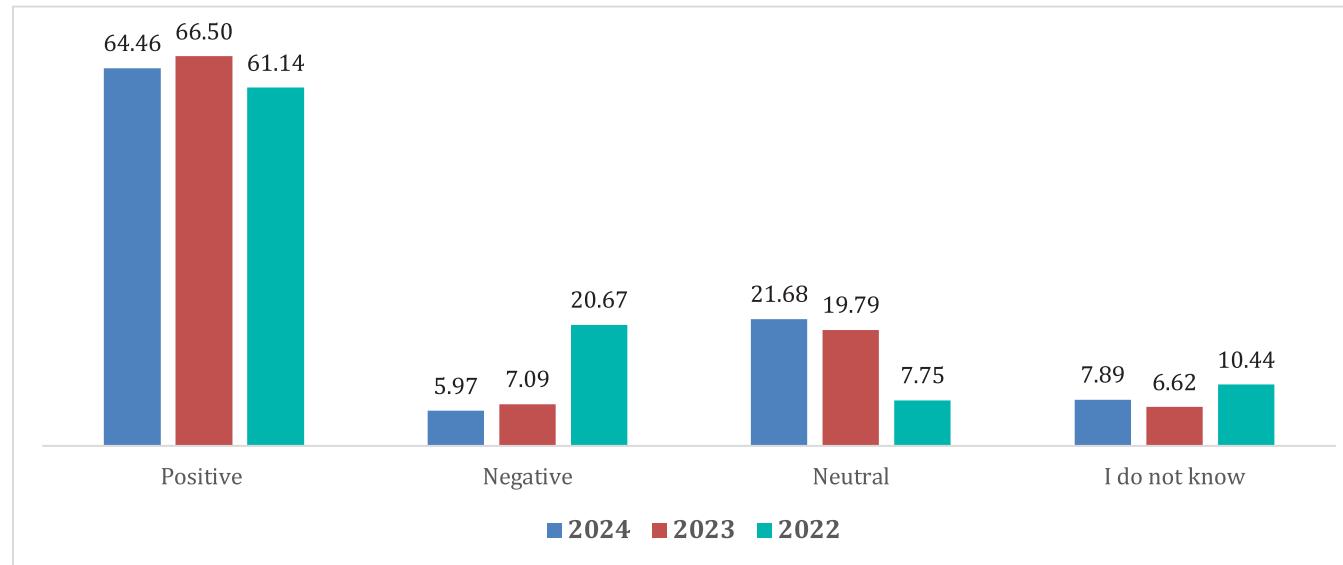
**Figure 5.2g: Perceptions about receiving treatment in a Chinese Hospital.**



### 5.2.8 China's Rise as Bangladesh's Top Trading Partner

A significant proportion of respondents (about 65%) viewed China's rise as Bangladesh's top trading partner positively, reflecting a 1% decrease from the previous year's figure of 66%. This indicates growing optimism about the economic benefits for both nations. Meanwhile, 22% of respondents took a neutral stance on China's role, showing a slight increase of 1% compared to last year (20%). On the other hand, 6% perceived this development as unfavourable, marking a 1% decline from the previous year. Additionally, 8% of respondents were uninformed about this shift, which has increased by roughly 1% from the last year.

**Figure 5.2h: Perceptions about China's rise as the topmost trading partner of Bangladesh.**



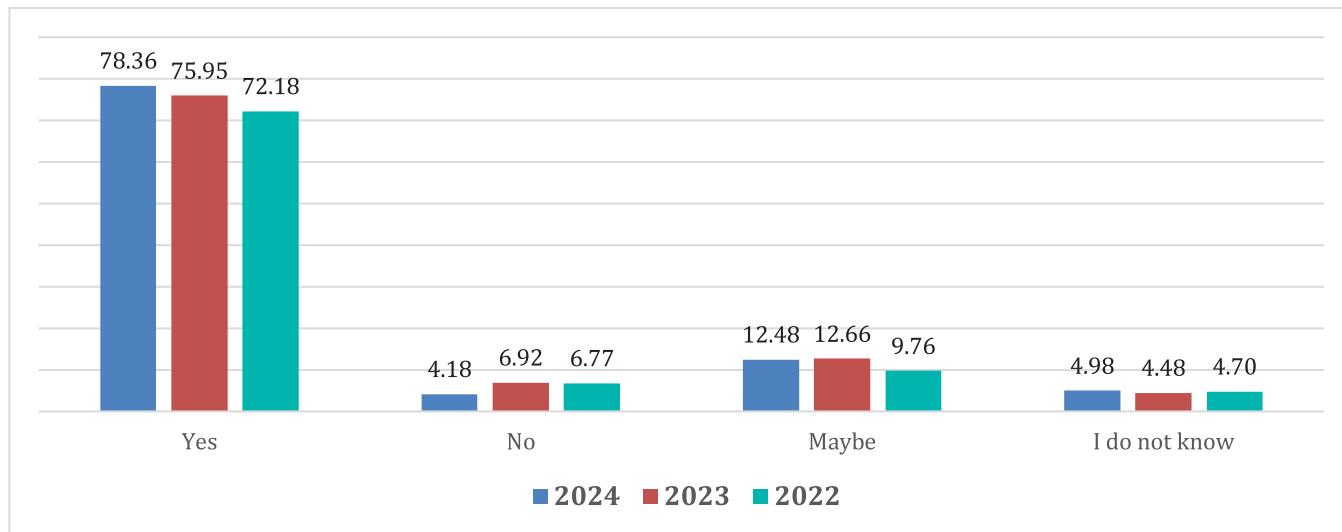
### 5.2.9 Welcoming China's Foreign Direct Investment in Bangladesh

China has remained one of Bangladesh's most significant Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) sources. Over the past decade, China has invested over \$2.6 billion in Bangladesh across various sectors, including communication infrastructure, energy and power, factories, Export Processing Zones (EPZs), and municipal facilities. Chinese investment sharply increased following President Xi Jinping's visit to Bangladesh in October 2016, during which he pledged \$27 billion in investments. Between 2009 and 2019, China invested over \$9.75 billion in infrastructure development in Bangladesh. Notably, with 104 investors operating across eight Export Processing Zones, China emerged as the leading foreign investor in the country.

A largely positive response was observed regarding the Chinese Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) invitation to Bangladesh. Most respondents (79%) supported incoming Chinese FDI, reflecting a 3% increase compared to last year (76%). Compared to the 2022 data, a 6% increase in positive responses was observed. Meanwhile, the percentage of respondents with a negative perception of Chinese FDI also decreased by 5%, reflecting a 2% decrease compared to last year (7%). Compared to the 2022 data, a 2% decrease in negative responses was observed. A portion of respondents (13%) expressed ambivalence toward Chinese FDI, which remained almost identical to last year's figure of 13%. However, compared to 2022 data, ambivalent responses increased by 3%. Additionally, a small minority (4.98%) were unaware

of China's FDI inflows into Bangladesh, marking a 0.5% increase compared to 2023 and a 0.3% increase compared to the 2022 data.

**Figure 5.2i: Perceptions about welcoming Chinese foreign direct investment in Bangladesh.**



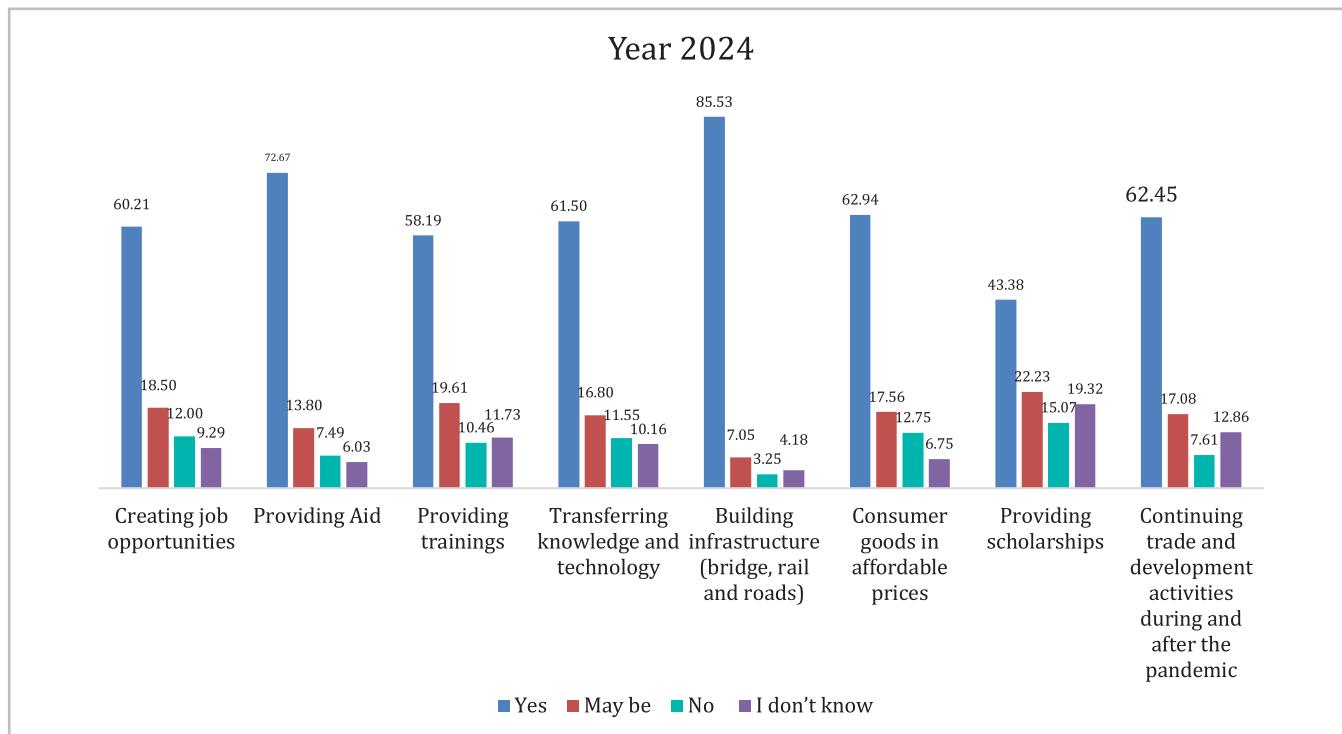
The overwhelmingly positive responses may be attributed to several key factors. Firstly, China's efforts to address Bangladesh's energy demand through investments in diverse renewable and non-renewable energy sources have enabled the country to develop a diversified energy mix. Secondly, the construction of highways, roads, and railways has established a crucial backbone for Bangladesh's transportation network, facilitating smoother movement of people and goods, thereby enhancing trade and commerce. Thirdly, investments in municipal infrastructure, such as water and sewage treatment facilities, have reduced pollution and improved living conditions. Lastly, investments in local Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and various factories have fostered robust economic and social development within communities. These factors seem to have driven the overwhelmingly positive feedback from respondents this year.

### **5.2.10 China's Role in Poverty Alleviation in Bangladesh**

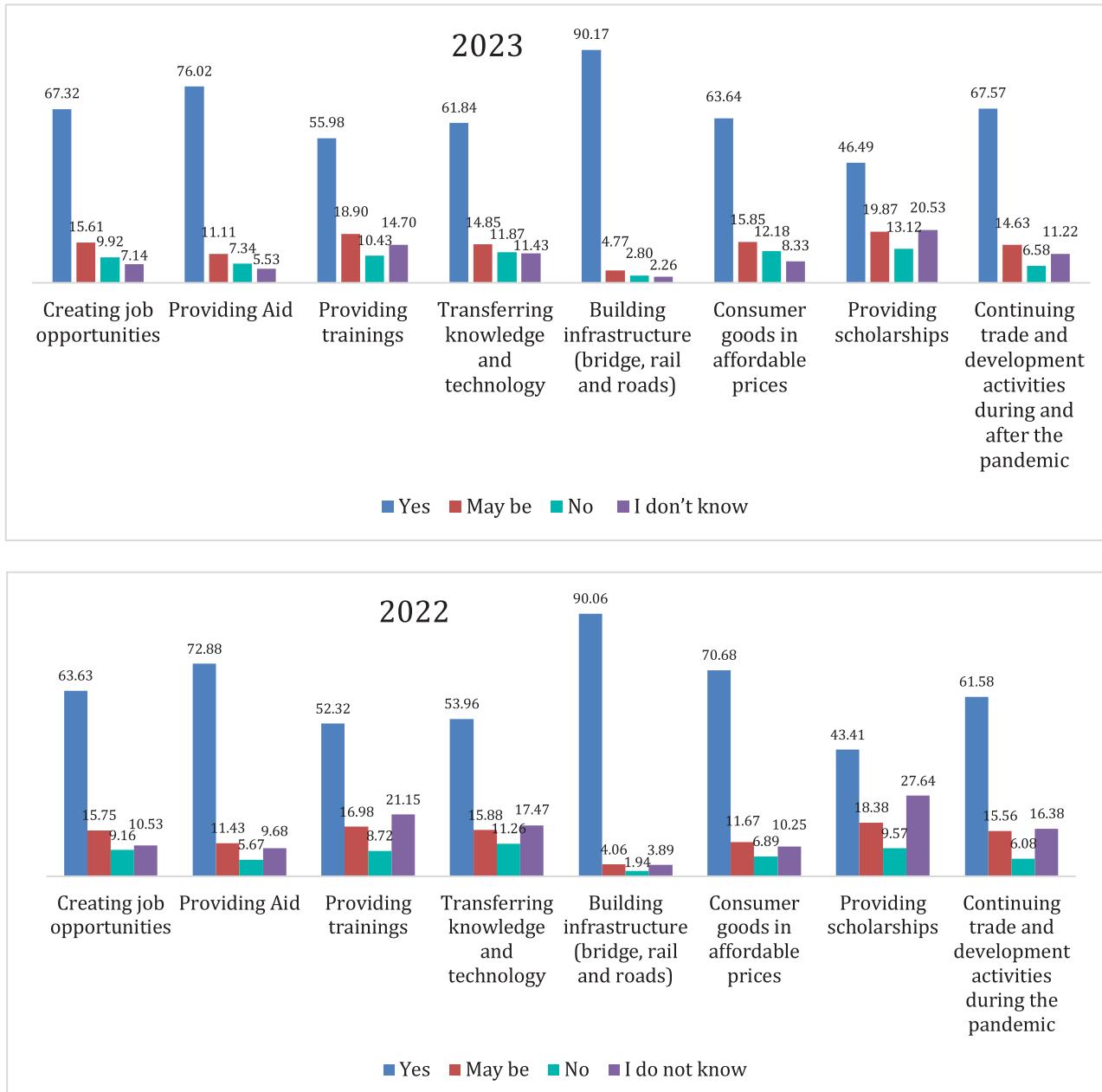
Respondents have positively seen China's role in poverty alleviation in Bangladesh. On positive responses, Bangladeshis perceived building infrastructures as the most critical indicator (86%). This has decreased compared to the previous 2023 data (90%) and 2022 data (90%). The next important indicator was providing aid to eradicate poverty, which garnered 73% positive responses, a slight decrease compared to 2023 data (76%), and remained unchanged compared to 2022 data (73%).

According to the respondents, the third perceived critical indicator in this regard is having consumer goods at affordable costs from China as a way of poverty reduction, which hovered around 63% positive responses, a minuscule decrease compared to the previous 2023 data (64%), and about 8% decrease compared to 2022 data (71%). Other indicators receiving positive responses, i.e. continuing trade and development activities during and after the pandemic (62.5%), transferring knowledge and technology (61.5%), creating job opportunities (61%), providing training (59%), providing scholarships (44%) were also observed for this year as well. Compared to the 2023 data, a slight decrease in positive responses was observed in indicators: creating job opportunities, providing aid, providing scholarships, and continuing trade and development activities during and after the pandemic. Compared to the 2023 data, a slight increase in delivering training and building infrastructure indicators was observed. Some indicators showed ignorable changes in positive trends, i.e., transferring knowledge and technology and supplying consumer goods at affordable costs. The pessimistic, sceptical, and ignorant responses have been insignificant compared to the positive responses for these indicators, which were similar to the findings of the last two years.

**Figure 5.2j: Perceptions about China's Role in Poverty Alleviation in Bangladesh (2024).**



**Figure: Perceptions about China's Role in Poverty Alleviation in Bangladesh (2023 & 2022).**



## 5.3. BRI, Megaprojects and Debt-Trap

### 5.3.1 Prospects of Bangladesh-China Cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

Respondents were asked if Bangladesh-China cooperation has bright prospects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). They viewed the prospects of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) impacting Bangladesh-China relations positively. The respondents who answered 'yes' (48%) anticipated bright prospects for bilateral relations under the BRI. We could see a positive increase if we compare this year's data, which answered yes, with the 2023 data (44%) and 2022 data (33%).

Some respondents who answered 'maybe' (22%) have mixed feelings about whether there are bright prospects in this regard. This decreased by 1% compared to the 2023 data and increased by 4% compared to the 2022 data (18%). This can also be interpreted as positive changes in the perception of the surveyed people.

An insignificant portion of the respondents who answered 'no' (3%) shared that they do not see bright prospects, exhibiting a 0.5% decrease from the 2023 data and a 0.6% increase from the 2022 data. These shifts reflect a minimal yet positive transformation compared to the positive responses on this particular aspect.

Some respondents who answered, 'I do not know' (27%) shared that they are ignorant about this, which has declined by 2% compared to last year's data (29%) and significantly by 20% compared to 2022 data. The positive shifts in public perception can be attributed to the tangible benefits derived from completed and ongoing megaprojects. These include the Padma Bridge, Railway Link, South Asia's largest sewage treatment plant in Dasherkandi, Karnaphuli Tunnel, Payra 1320 MW Thermal Power Plant (Phase 1), the IV Tier National Data Center, and other forthcoming infrastructure developments.

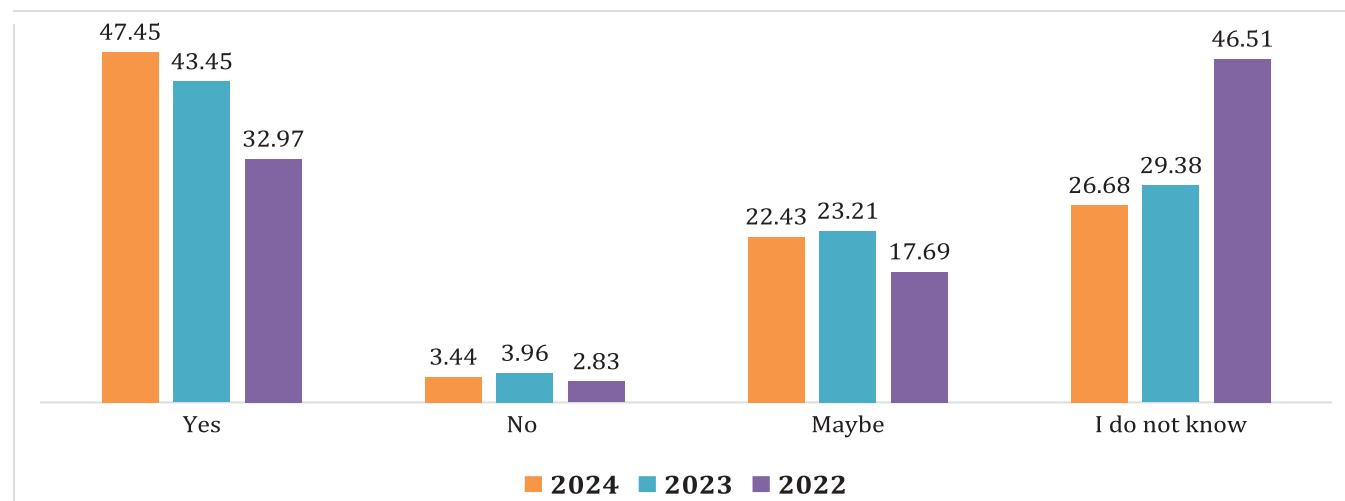
The Padma Bridge has revolutionised people's lives in the southern 21 districts of Bangladesh by significantly reducing the communication barrier between Dhaka and the southwestern region. This landmark project has dramatically cut travel time by two to four hours, eliminating the perilous and unpredictable journeys previously reliant on overcrowded and often unsafe boats, launches, and ferries.

Beyond faster travel, the Padma Bridge catalyses positive change across various sectors. Increased accessibility has spurred tourism growth, created new job opportunities, facilitated industrial expansion, and streamlined the transportation of goods. The Padma Bridge is a major part of the Asian Highway Network, already contributing to the national and regional trade scenario. This vital infrastructure has

improved connectivity and laid the foundation for sustainable economic development in the southern regions of Bangladesh.

This may have fostered a favourable view of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) among the general public, strengthening Bangladesh-China relations. The successful completion of these mega-projects and the visible progress of other continued projects contributed to the positive image of China's BRI among the surveyed population. As people directly benefit from these projects and experience improved quality of life, it instilled trust in the surveyed population regarding the future advantages of participating in China's BRI.

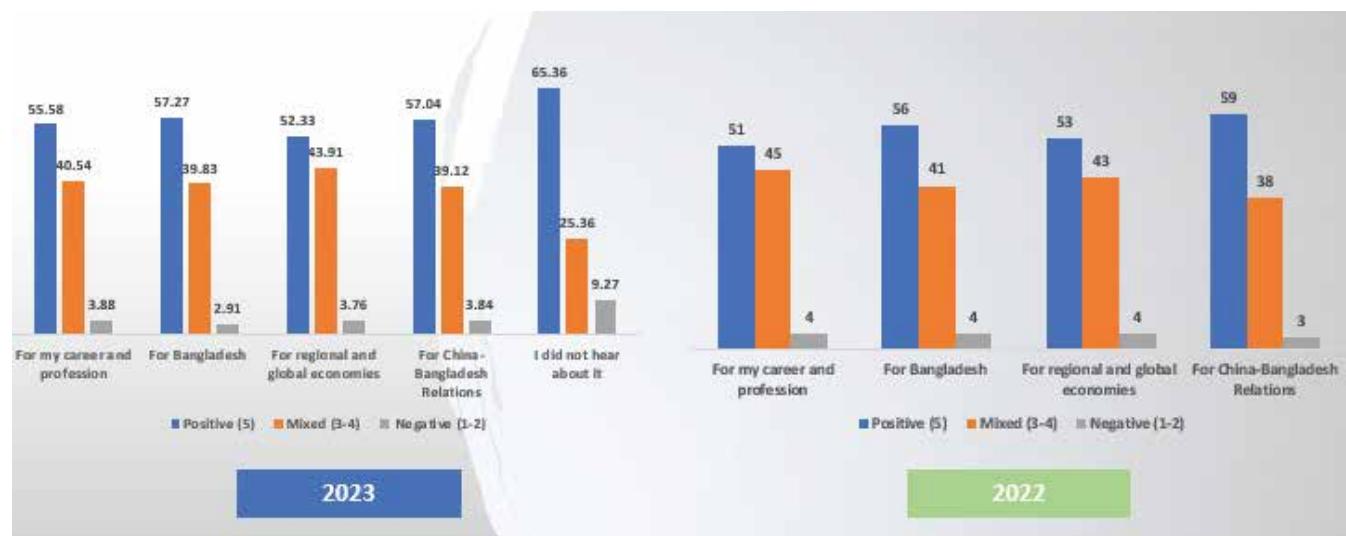
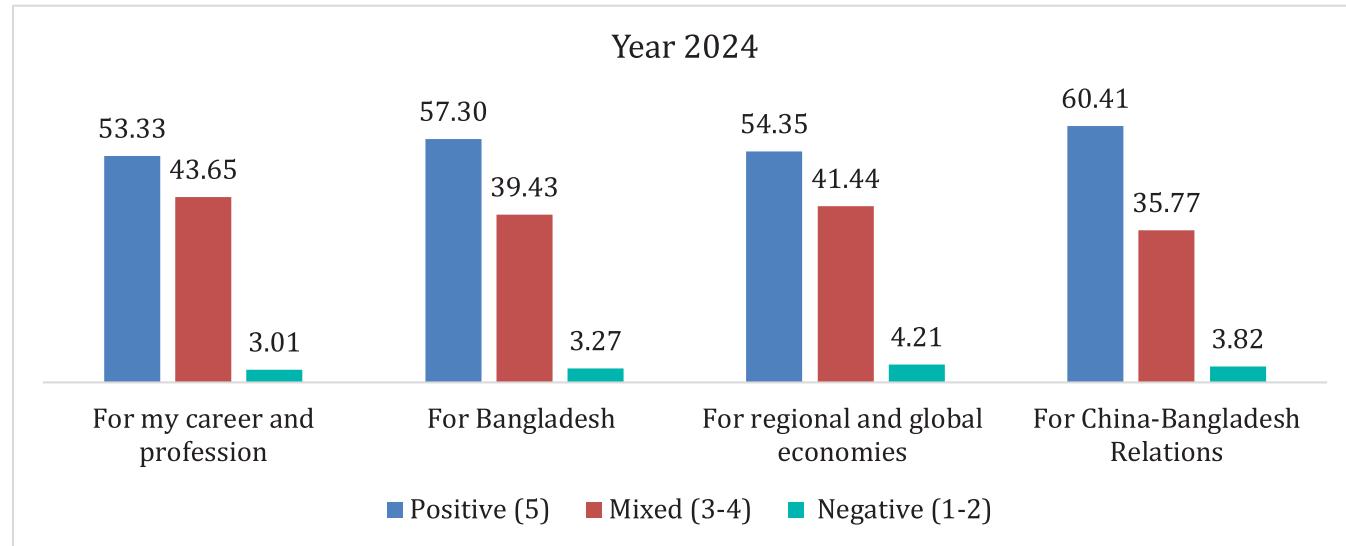
**Figure 5.3a: Prospects of China's Belt and Road Initiative**



Respondents were also asked to share the possible impacts of China's BRI on four specific areas. These indicators were on the likely effects on individual self, Bangladesh, regional and global economies, and the Bangladesh-China bilateral relations. In all these indicators, positive responses were more than 53%. For individual self, the positive responses were 53%, exhibited a slight decrease from the 2023 data (56%), and showed a slight increase from the 2022 data (51%). For Bangladesh, the positive responses were 57%, exhibited no change compared to the 2023 data (57%), and showed a minimal increase from the 2022 data (56%). For regional and global economies, the positive responses were 54%, showed an increase of 2% compared to the 2023 data (52%), and exhibited a slight increase from the 2022 data (53%). For Bangladesh-China relations, the positive responses for this year were 60%, exhibited a slight increase of 3% compared to 2023 data (57%), and showed an ignorable rise from the 2022 data (59%).

These indicators also recorded the respondents' mixed feelings, which remained at 44% or lower, which shows relevance for the last two years' data. A very insignificant portion of the respondents saw the impacts of the BRI in a negative light; in all these indicators, it was lower than 4%, echoing the last two years' records.

### Figure 5.3b: China's Belt and Road Initiative impacts four areas.



### 5.3.2 Potential of China's Economic Assistance to Bangladesh in Creating a 'Debt Trap'

The apprehension of a possible debt trap resulting from Chinese investments in Bangladeshi Mega projects has been discussed over the years. Warnings had been made in media reports regarding the debt trap, and there were many counter-analyses in rebuttal of these notions. Officials from the Bangladeshi and Chinese governments repeatedly assured Bangladesh had no risk of a debt trap. However, a few Bangladeshi observers remained cautious about the loan scenario in 2024, especially after seeking loans from the Chinese government to stabilise the foreign exchange reserve.<sup>113</sup>

The following table shows data from 2024 regarding Bangladeshi perceptions of Chinese economic assistance and potential debt trap concerns. Among the respondents, 38.21% expressed uncertainty by choosing "Maybe," representing the largest segment. 26.33% of respondents believed there is a debt trap risk, while 19.88% disagreed with this concern. The remaining 15.58% admitted not knowing the issue, suggesting a significant portion of the population lacks understanding or information on the economic implications of Chinese assistance. While most of the responses regarding bilateral relations (Q23) and signing FTA (Q24) were positive, the cautious stance about the possibility of a debt trap was interesting.

The following figure presents these perceptions' three-year trend (2022-2024). The "Maybe" responses have remained the highest but show slight variations, from 36.59% in 2022 to 38.21% in 2024. Positive responses ("Yes") show minimal change, from 26.04% to 26.33%. Negative responses declined from 23.43% in 2023 to 19.88% in 2024. Those expressing no knowledge decreased slightly from 17.71% in 2022 to 15.58% in 2024. This suggests relatively stable but cautious public opinion regarding Chinese economic assistance.

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<sup>113</sup> Riaz, A.(2024) 'Why Is Bangladesh Seeking a \$5 Billion Soft Loan From China?', The Diplomat, Cited in-  
<https://thediplomat.com/2024/05/why-is-bangladesh-seeking-a-5-billion-soft-loan-from-china/>

**Figure 5.3c: Do you think China's economic assistance to Bangladesh will create a 'debt trap'?**



## 5.4 Rohingya Crisis

### 5.4.1 Satisfaction with China's Role in Resolving the Rohingya Crisis

The repatriation of Rohingyas to Myanmar remains a critical issue in Bangladesh's foreign policy. The recent arrival of 40,000 persecuted Rohingyas has further intensified the crisis for the new interim government. As a close geopolitical and economic ally to both countries, China is expected to take decisive measures to mediate the situation.

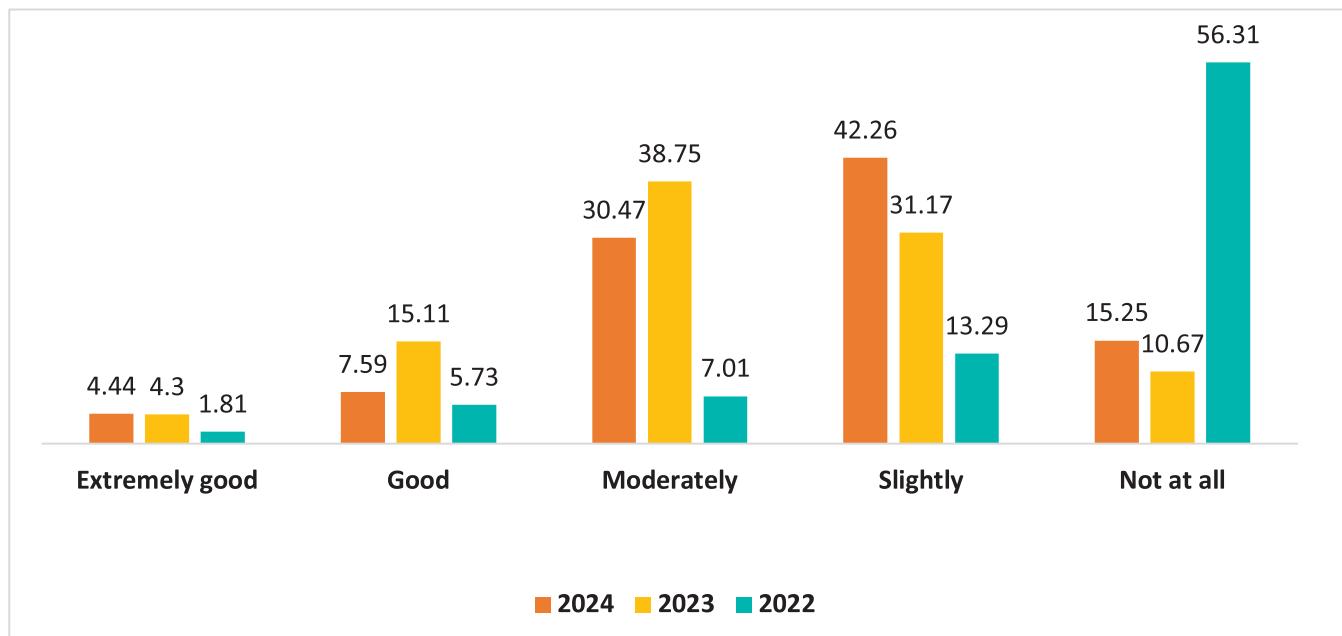
According to 2024 survey data, China's role in resolving the Rohingya crisis is becoming increasingly visible among Bangladeshi people. However, 42.26% of respondents believe that China is doing little to address the issue, up from 31.17% in the previous year. Meanwhile, the percentage of people who view China as moderately active in resolving the crisis has declined from 38.75% in 2023 to 30.47% in 2024.

**Table 5.4: Satisfaction with China's Role in Resolving the Rohingya Crisis**

Indicator	Total	Percentage
Extremely good	218	4.44
Good	373	7.59
Moderately	1497	30.47
Slightly	2076	42.26
Not at all	749	15.25

On a positive note, Bangladeshi perceptions of China's role have shifted significantly in the 2024 survey compared to 2022, when more than half of the respondents believed China had no role in mediating the issue. In 2024, respondents were more appreciative of China's efforts.

**Figure 5.4a: Do you think China's role in resolving the Rohingya crisis is satisfactory?**



#### 5.4.2 The Role of Different Countries in the Repatriation of Rohingya Refugees

From 2022 to 2024, survey data reveal shifting perspectives on which country should play the primary role in Rohingya repatriation. While China remains the leading choice, its perceived responsibility fluctuated from 55.37% in 2022 to 44.26% in 2023 before rising to 57.14% in 2024. Myanmar's perceived responsibility increased from 31.88% in 2022 to 36.19% in 2024.

Notably, the proportion of respondents who believe Bangladesh holds significant responsibility grew from 12.83% to 30.96% in 2024. The USA's role has seen the most dramatic shift, rising from 1.83% in 2022 to 19.12% in 2023 and further to 43.19% in 2024. The data also indicates a growing diversification of responsibility, with more countries being recognised as potential stakeholders in later years.

In the 2022 and 2023 surveys, people's responses regarding China's role and which country should play a significant role in the Rohingya crisis suggest a more considerable scope of intervention for China. There are a few reasons why people might be inclined to agree with that notion. Initially, China has maintained a non-interference policy regarding Rohingya issues, pledging respect for Myanmar's sovereignty, like many other critical global actors.<sup>114</sup> This approach is seen by observers as a liberal act to strengthen and sustain economic ties without tampering with Myanmar's internal affairs.<sup>115</sup> In the first survey, the perception of Bangladeshi people regarding China's role might reflect these courses of action adopted by the latter. Recently, China has mediated a cease-fire between the Tatmadaw and an alliance of ethnic armed groups in the first month of 2024 and maintains relations with both parties.<sup>116</sup> China, the biggest investor in Myanmar, is working on several projects there, much like in Bangladesh. The internal conflicts in Myanmar might decrease China's desired outcome.<sup>117</sup> The high expectation of Bangladeshi respondents regarding China's role in influencing Myanmar to take back its people might be a reflection of the

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<sup>114</sup> Lambert, R (2022), 'Hidden Parallels: The Impact of Beijing's Policies on the Rohingya Crisis' - Cited in <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/hidden-parallels-impact-beijings-policies-rohingya-crisis>

<sup>115</sup> Yuan, Changrui and Lee, Brice Tseen Fu (2023) "Exploring China's Response To The Rohingya Crisis: A Liberal Perspective," Journal of Terrorism Studies: Vol. 5: No. 1, Article 1.  
DOI: 10.7454/jts.v5i1.1056, Cited in

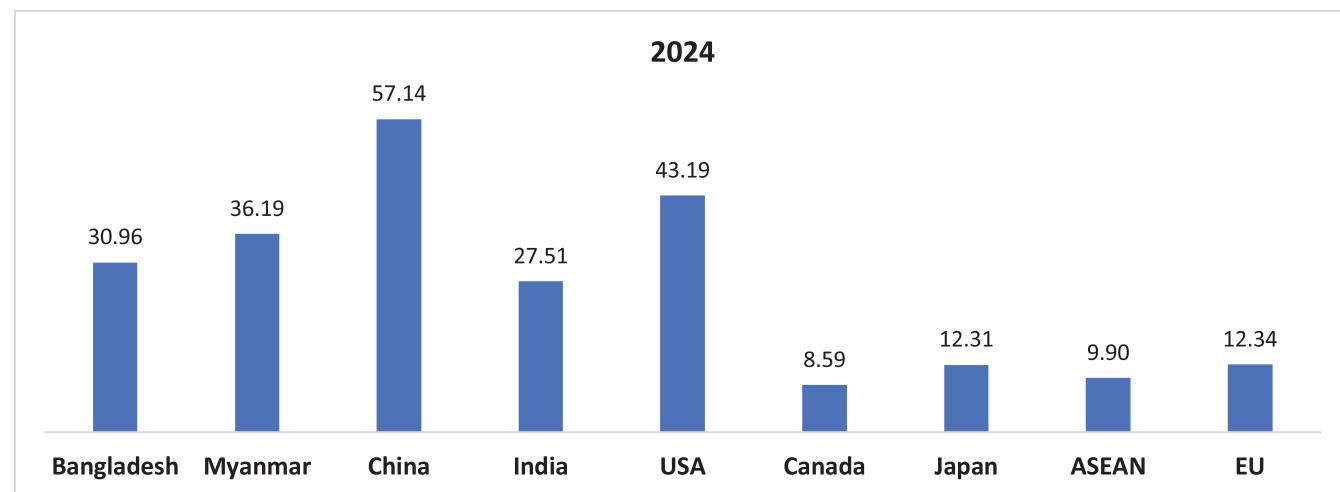
[https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/jts/vol5/iss1/1?utm\\_source=scholarhub.ui.ac.id%2Fjts%2Fvol5%2Fiss1%2F1&utm\\_medium=PDF&utm\\_campaign=PDFCoverPages](https://scholarhub.ui.ac.id/jts/vol5/iss1/1?utm_source=scholarhub.ui.ac.id%2Fjts%2Fvol5%2Fiss1%2F1&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages)

<sup>116</sup> 'Myanmar's military, ethnic armed groups agree to China-mediated truce', 12 January 2024, Cited in <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/1/12/myanmars-military-ethnic-armed-groups-agree-to-china-mediated-truce>

<sup>117</sup> Paing, T.A. (2024), 'China in Myanmar: How the Game-Changing Neighbor Would Continue to Maintain Its Influence', Cited in <https://www.stimson.org/2024/china-in-myanmar-how-the-game-changing-neighbor-would-continue-to-maintain-its-influence/>

perceived control of China over Myanmar. Also, people identified Bangladesh and Myanmar as significant actors to contribute in this matter, and the opinion might be an after-effect of the July upsurge and formation of an Interim Government. The interim government has been addressing the Rohingya repatriation issue in a new vigour. The Chief Advisor, Dr Mohammad Yunus, proposed that the UN should create Safe Zones for displaced Rohingyas in the Rakhine state of Myanmar and suggested a three-point proposal to address the issue on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting.<sup>118 119</sup> On several occasions, the Foreign Advisor of the Interim government identified China, India and the UN as major role-players in this issue.<sup>120 121</sup> While China and Myanmar were seen as major players in this issue in the 2022 survey, the responses from the latest survey can be interpreted as a hope for a multilateral resolution of the Rohingya problem, with China taking the leading role.

**Figure 5.4b: Which country should work more on repatriation of Rohingyas to their homeland?**



<sup>118</sup> 'Chief adviser seeks 'safe zone guaranteed by UN' for displaced people in Rakhine', 15 October 2024, Cited in-  
<https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/79mq1mv1db>

<sup>119</sup> 'Rohingya crisis: Yunus seeks global attention, shares 3 proposals', 25 September 2024, Cited in-  
<https://www.thedailystar.net/rohingya-influx/news/rohingya-crisis-yunus-seeks-global-attention-shares-3-proposals-3711636>

<sup>120</sup> 'Adviser on Rohingya crisis: No light at the end of the tunnel yet', 16 November 2024, Cited in-  
<https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/365328/rohingya-crisis-no-light-at-the-end-of-the>

<sup>121</sup> 'Rohingya crisis: Foreign adviser urges UN Security Council to take decisive action', 27 September 2024, Cited in-  
<https://www.thedailystar.net/rohingya-influx/news/rohingya-crisis-foreign-adviser-urges-un-security-council-take-decisive-action-3713851>



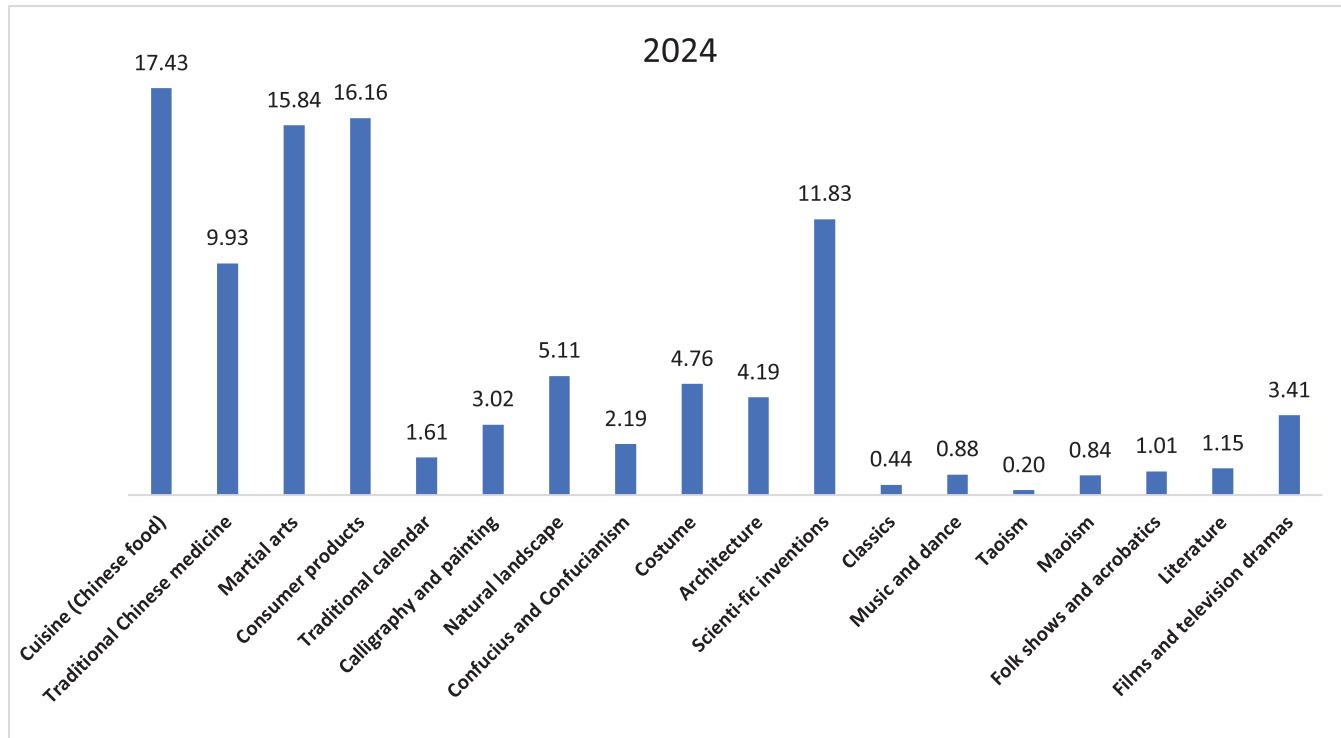
## 5.5. Culture and Media

### 5.5.1 Cultural Representation of China in Bangladesh

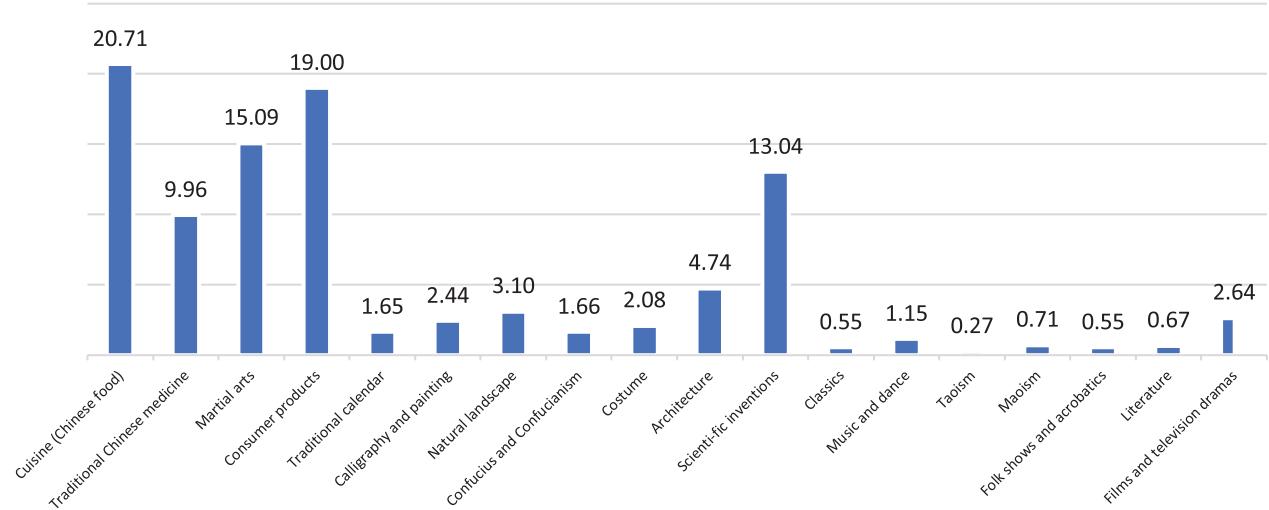
Chinese cuisine is the most recognised cultural element, commanding 17.43% of total ratings. This is closely followed by consumer products at 16.16% and martial arts at 15.84%. Scientific inventions and traditional Chinese medicine round out the top five cultural representations, accounting for 11.83% and 9.93%, respectively. Looking back at the previous year's responses, an identical performance is noticeable for these top five categories. These consistent preferences suggest that Bangladeshi people primarily associate Chinese culture with tangible, practical aspects rather than philosophical or artistic elements. Traditional cultural components such as Taoism, classical literature, and performing arts register minimal recognition, with each garnering less than 1% of total ratings. This pattern indicates that China's cultural influence in Bangladesh is predominantly driven by everyday experiences and practical applications rather than more profound cultural traditions. The situation will hopefully change, as the Chinese Embassy in Bangladesh was very active in 2024, organising 60 cultural events reaching 100000 Bangladeshi people.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>122</sup> 'Ushering in a new chapter of China-Bangladesh comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with renewed friendship and joined hands', The Daily Star, 1 October 2024, Cited in-  
<https://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/75th-anniversary-the-founding-the-peoples-republic-china/news/ushering-new-chapter-china-bangladesh-comprehensive-strategic-cooperative>

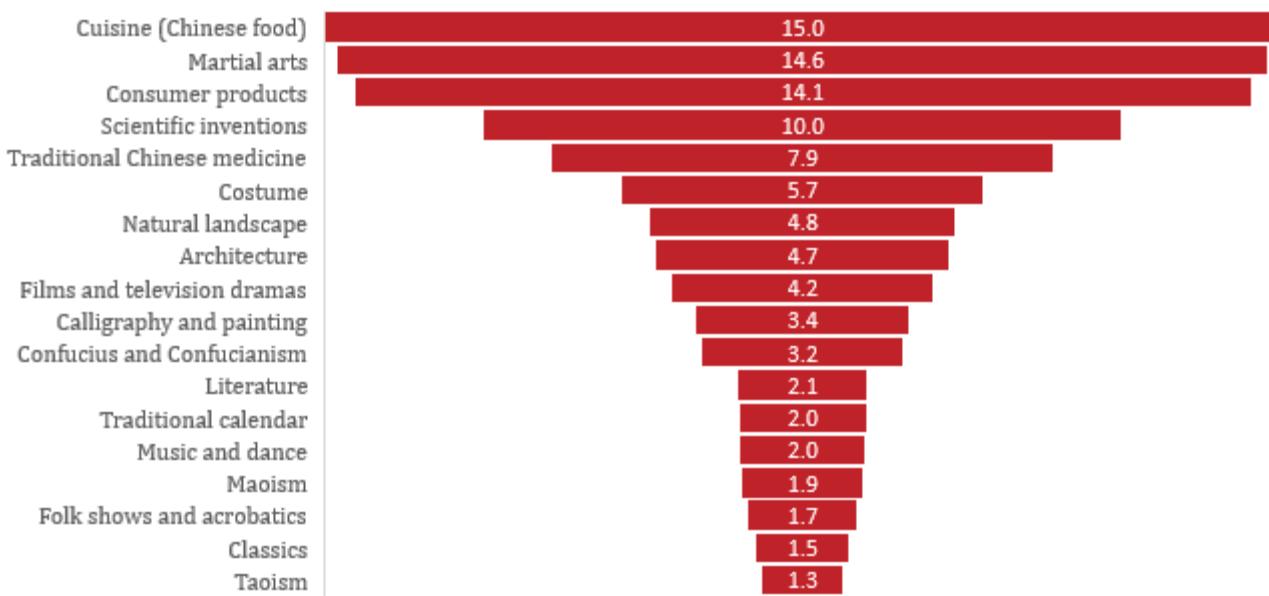
**Figure 5.5a: Which of the following best represents Chinese culture in Bangladesh**



2023



2022

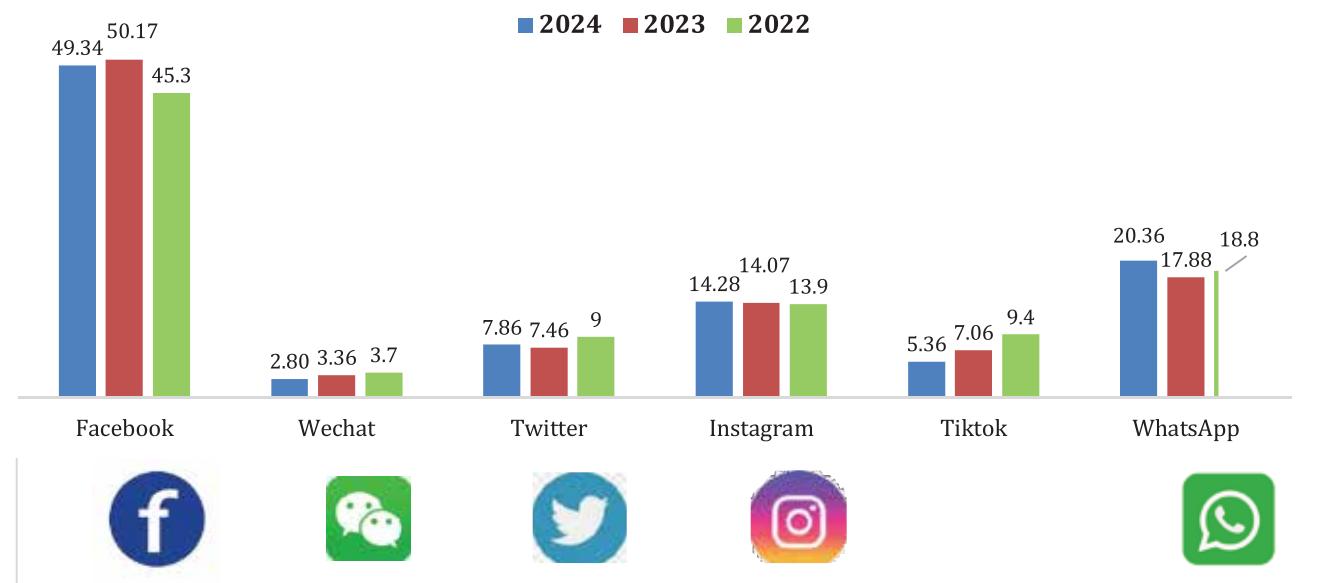


## 5.5.2 Social Media Platform Usage

The social media landscape in Bangladesh shows a pronounced preference for Facebook, which dominates with nearly half of all engagement at 49.34%. WhatsApp is the second most utilised platform, capturing 20.36% of user preference. Instagram has established itself as the third most popular platform, with 14.28% of total ratings. Interestingly, Chinese social media platforms have minimal penetration in Bangladesh, with WeChat securing only 2.80% of user preference.

In year-based comparison, the dominance of Facebook was seen, peaking at 50.17% in 2023 before slightly declining to 49.34% in 2024, indicating stabilising growth. WhatsApp significantly recovered, rising to 20.36% in 2024 after a dip in 2023. Instagram experienced steady growth, reaching 14.28% in 2024, reflecting increased acceptance of visual-based platforms. TikTok declined from 7.06% in 2023 to 5.36% in 2024. Twitter showed modest growth, while WeChat, the Chinese social media platform, has declined, from 3.7% in 2022 to 3.36% in 2023 and dropping to 2.80% in 2024.

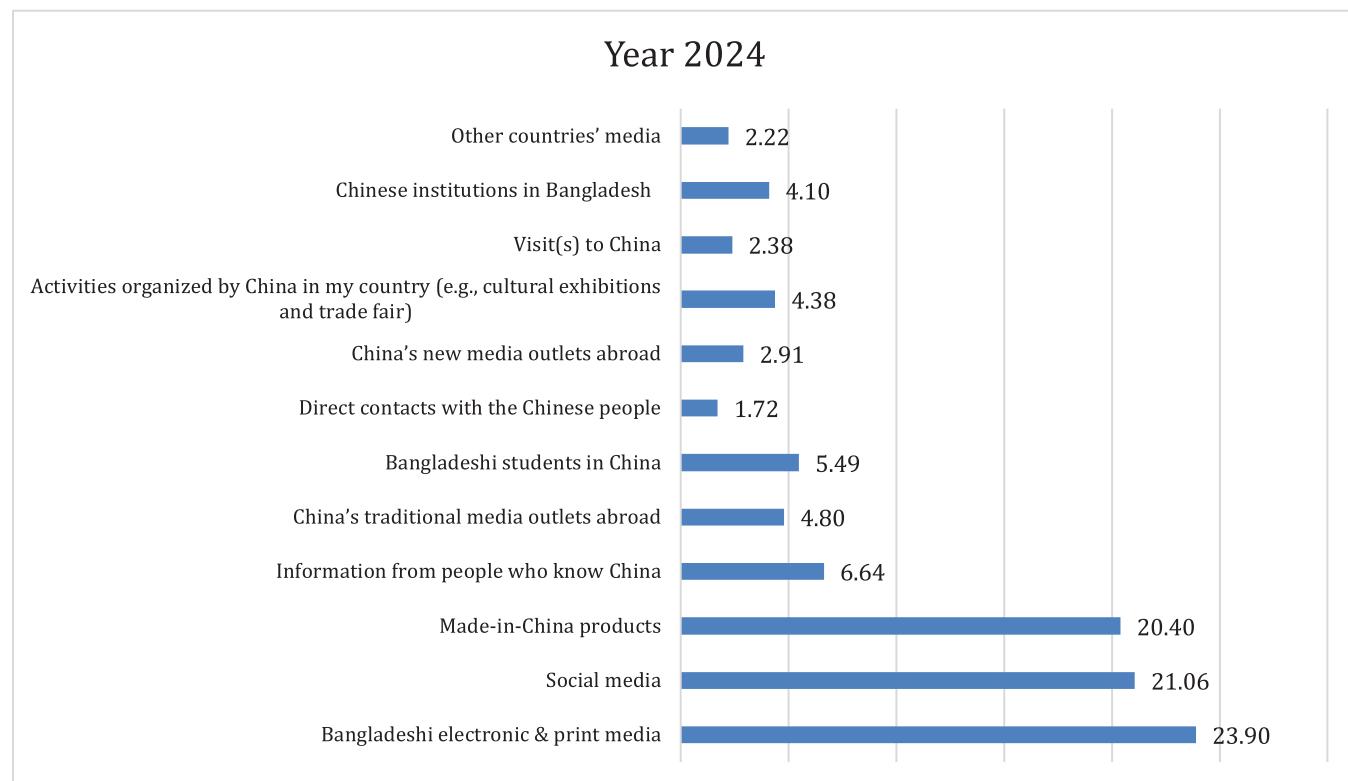
**Figure. 5.5b: Most heavily used social media platforms among the respondents**



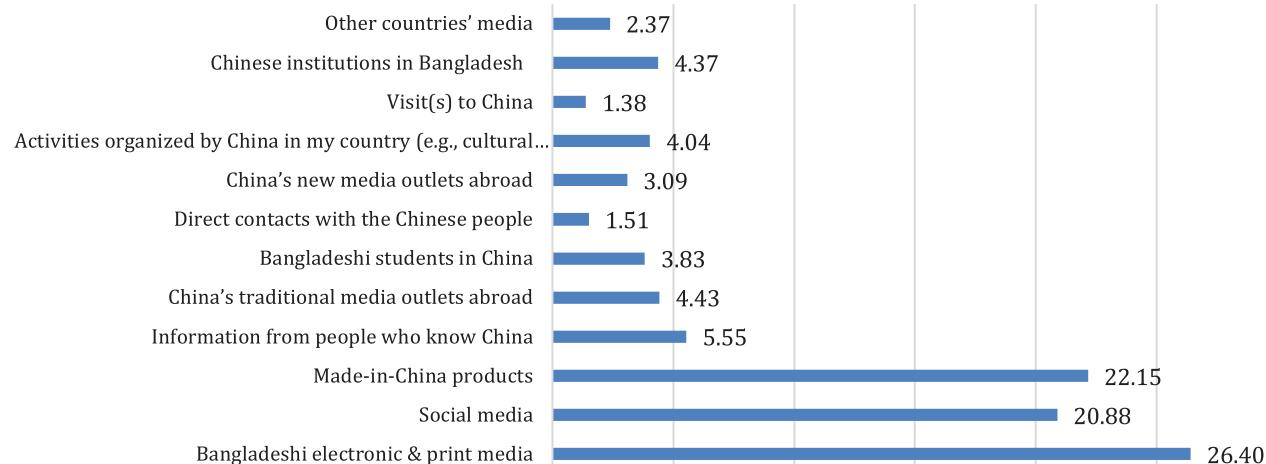
### 5.5.3 Channels for Learning about China

Bangladeshis primarily learn about China through domestic media channels, with local electronic and print media serving as the primary source of information at 23.90%. Social media platforms are closely followed as the second most crucial channel at 21.06%, while experiences with Made-in-China products contribute significantly at 20.40%. Direct interaction channels, such as personal contacts with Chinese people or visits to China, play a surprisingly minor role, accounting for less than 5% combined. This suggests that most Bangladeshis form their impressions of China through mediated experiences rather than direct engagement.

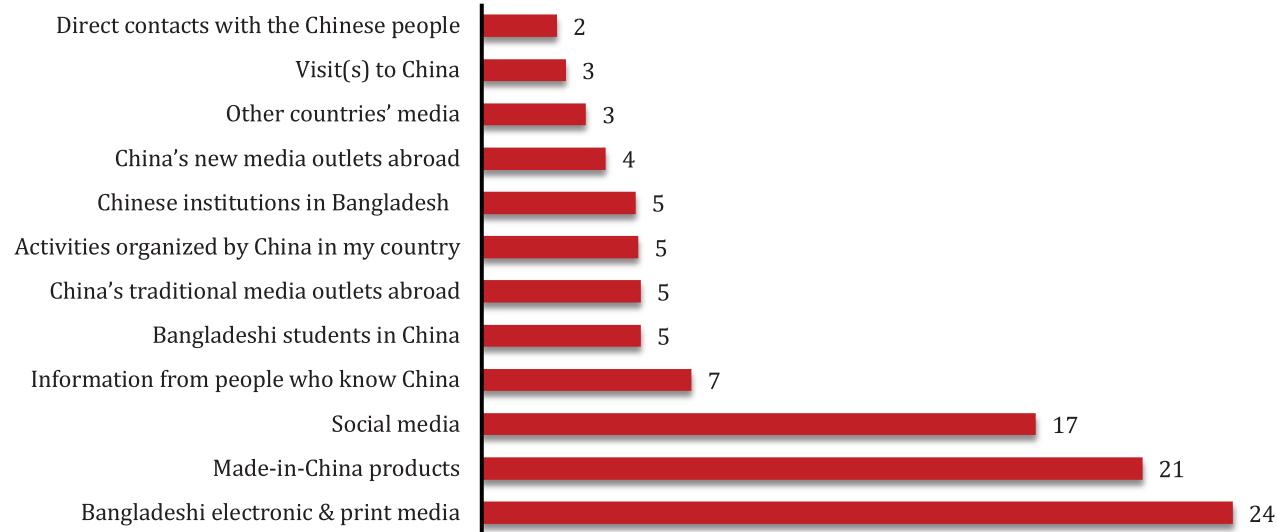
**Figure 5.5c: What are the main channels for you to learn about China**



2023



2022

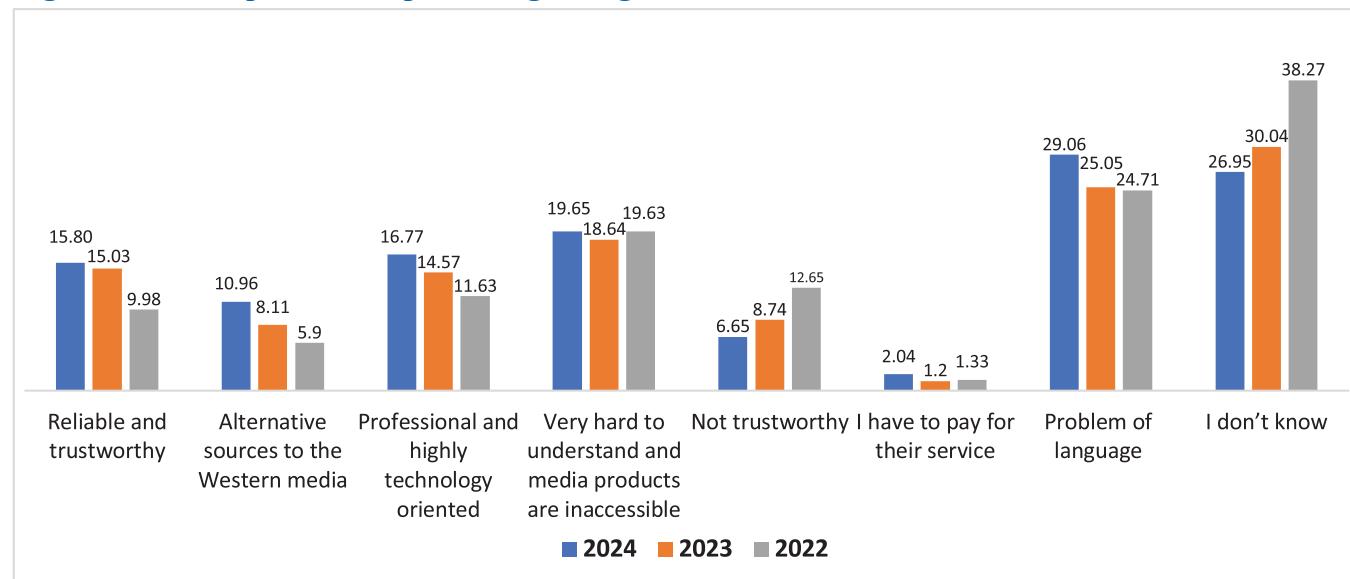


#### 5.5.4 Chinese Media Perception

The survey uncovers significant challenges in how Bangladeshi people engage with Chinese media. Language barriers emerge as the primary obstacle, cited by 29.06% of respondents. Accessibility of media products presents another major challenge, with 19.65% finding Chinese media content difficult to access or understand. While 16.77% appreciate Chinese media's professional and technological sophistication, only 15.80% consider it reliable and trustworthy. A notable portion of respondents, 26.95%, indicate no familiarity with Chinese media, suggesting substantial room for improving media outreach and accessibility.

The data reveals evolving perceptions of Chinese media among Bangladeshis from 2022 to 2024. While cost and trust are minor issues, language barriers remain the primary concern, decreasing from 38.27% in 2022 to 29.06% in 2024. Media inaccessibility persists at around 19%, while reliability perceptions improved from 9.98% to 15.8%. The percentage viewing Chinese media as professional and technology-oriented increased from 11.63% to 16.77%. General uncertainty ("I don't know") decreased from 38.27% to 26.95%, suggesting growing familiarity. Trust issues show mixed trends, with "not trustworthy" responses declining from 12.65% to 6.65%.

**Figure. 5.5d: Respondents' opinion regarding Chinese media**



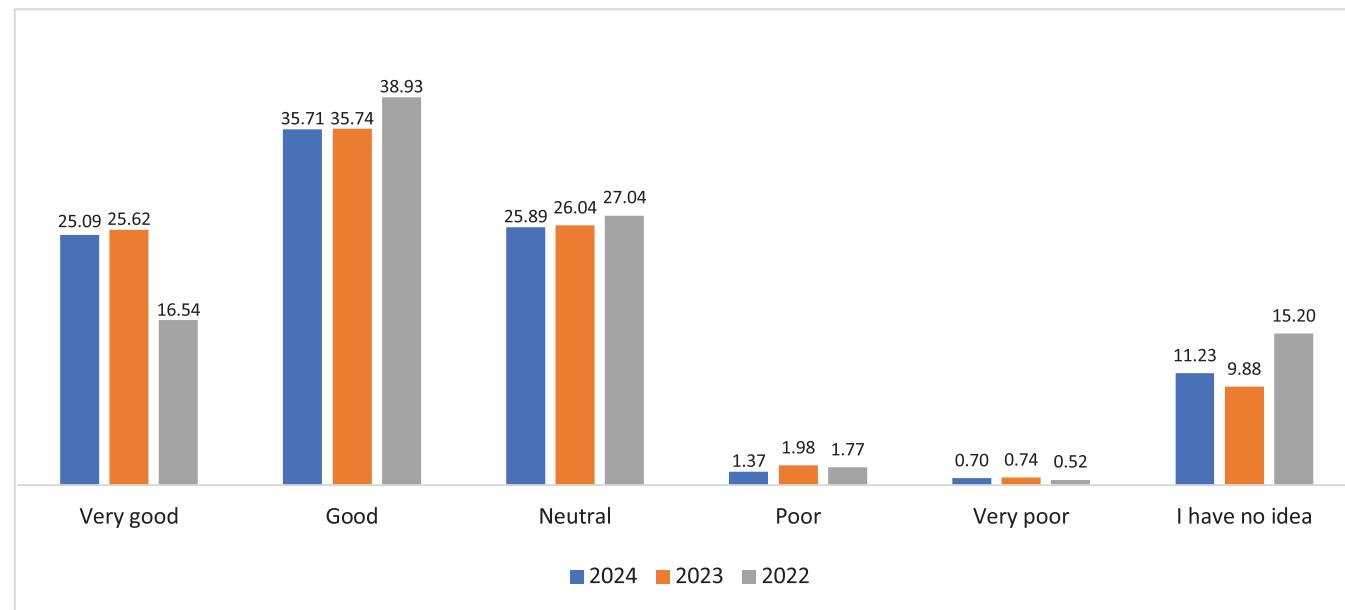
## 5.6. Education and Tourism

### 5.6.1 Chinese Higher Education Perception

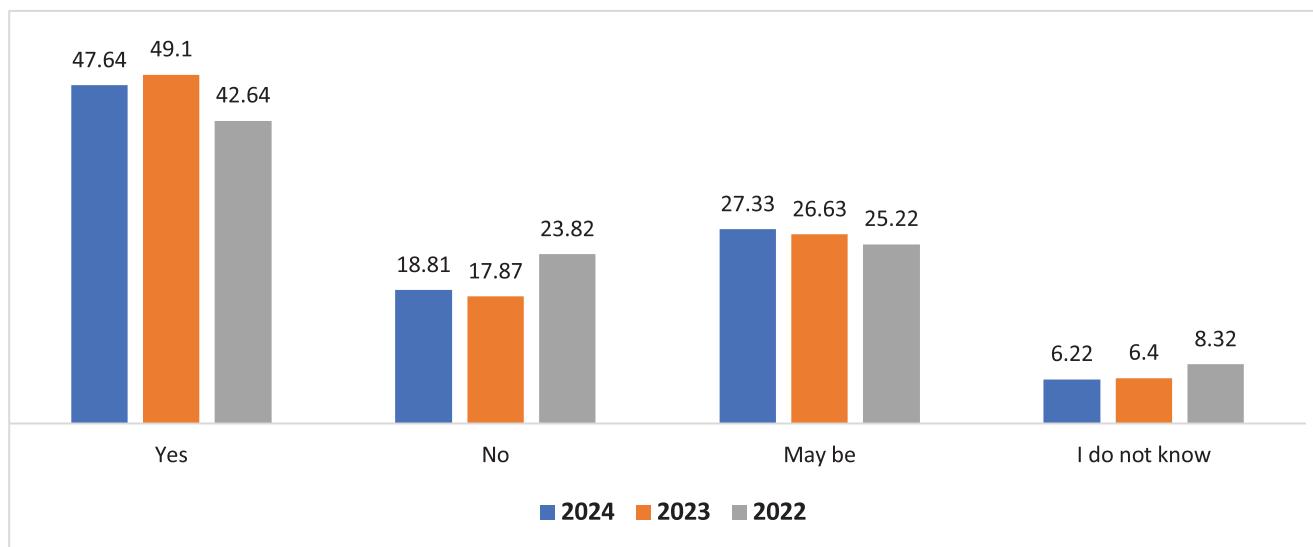
Attitude toward Chinese higher education is predominantly positive, with over 60% of respondents rating it as "Very good" or "Good." This favourable perception translates into strong interest in educational opportunities, with 47.64% expressing willingness to pursue higher education in China or send family members there for studies (Figure 5.6b).

The data from 2022-2024 shows consistently positive impressions of Chinese higher education among Bangladeshi respondents. The "Good" category leads with around 35-39% across all years, while "Very good" ratings increased notably from 16.54% in 2022 to about 25% in 2023-2024. Neutral responses remained stable at approximately 26%, while negative perceptions stayed minimal at less than 2%. The percentage of respondents with "no idea" decreased from 15.20% to 11.23%, indicating growing awareness. Overall, combining "Very good" and "Good" responses shows a strong positive perception maintained at around 60% throughout the period.

**Figure 5.6a: What is your impression about the Chinese higher education system?**



**Figure 5.6b: Will you be interested to get your higher education in China or send your children/family members to China for higher studies?**



Most respondents expressed positive opinions regarding higher education in China for their children or family members, while another 27.33% remain open to the possibility, and only 18.81% definitively rule out Chinese education. These numbers suggest significant potential for educational cooperation between the two countries. 10,807 Bangladeshi students studied in China in the 2022-23 academic year.<sup>123</sup>

The three-year data (2022-2024) on Bangladeshi interest in Chinese higher education reveals notable trends. Positive responses increased substantially from 42.64% in 2022 to 49.1% in 2023, slightly decreasing to 47.64% in 2024. Negative responses declined from 23.82% to 18.81% during this period. The "Maybe" category showed a gradual increase from 25.22% to 27.33%, while uncertainty ("I do not know") decreased from 8.32% to 6.22%. Overall, the data indicates a growing acceptance of Chinese higher education among Bangladeshis, with nearly half the respondents showing definite interest by 2024.

<sup>123</sup> 'Ushering in a new chapter of China-Bangladesh comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership with renewed friendship and joined hands', The Daily Star, 1 October 2024, Cited in <https://www.thedailystar.net/supplements/75th-anniversary-the-founding-the-peoples-republic-china/news/ushering-new-chapter-china-bangladesh-comprehensive-strategic-cooperative>

One primary reason for the increased positive view towards China as a higher study destination could be the affordability, scholarship availability and ample job opportunities.<sup>124 125</sup> Aside from the financial incentives, more intangible motivations also made China a desirable higher study destination, such as better enrolment system in higher studies, quality of education, bilateral relations between China and other countries, geo-location, strong interest in Chinese culture and language, etc.<sup>126</sup> While the push factors for the Bangladeshi students could be mainly financial, the pull factors created by China are very strategic. The Chinese government has experienced an upward shift of international students after launching BRI in 2013, a desired outcome for increasing soft power. For this, they have granted many scholarships to international students through government and non-government collaboration.<sup>127 128</sup> In 2024, China emphasised building a robust and attractive higher education system to become a “leading education power”, and the Ministry of Education of China attempted to go forward with an extensive plan, reportedly by strengthening the student/high-level exchange program, university collaborations, etc. with a special attention innovative and scientific areas.<sup>129</sup> Vocational education also gained importance among Chinese policymakers as an influential contributor to economic stability, innovation, and livelihood sustainability.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> ‘China offering higher education, job chances’, 28 November, 2023, cited in-  
<https://today.thefinancialexpress.com.bd/first-page/china-offering-higher-education-job-chances-1701106336>

<sup>125</sup> Ministry of Education, The People’s Republic of China, ‘Brief report on Chinese overseas students and international students in China 2017’ Cited in- [http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/201901/t20190115\\_367019.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/documents/reports/201901/t20190115_367019.html)

<sup>126</sup> Ke Hu, Junfeng Diao, Xiaojing Li (2022), ‘International students’ university choice to study abroad in higher education and influencing factors analysis’, *Frontiers in Psychology*, Cited in- <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.1036569>

<sup>127</sup> “Is China Both a Source and Hub for International Students?” *China Power*. September 26, 2017. Updated September 4, 2020. Accessed January 12, 2025. <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-international-students/>

<sup>128</sup> Wen, W. and Hu, D. (2023) ‘International student education in China and its connections with local and Global Society’, *Research Handbook on the Student Experience in Higher Education*, pp. 392–403. Cited in- doi:10.4337/9781802204193.00037

<sup>129</sup> ‘China sets out roadmap to become ‘leading education power’, 08 October 2024, Cited in-  
<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20241008105010175>

<sup>130</sup> Ministry of Education, The People’s Republic of China, ‘Huai Jinpeng delivers keynote at global conference on vocational education’, 22 November 2024, Cited in- [http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press\\_releases/202411/t20241123\\_1164315.html](http://en.moe.gov.cn/news/press_releases/202411/t20241123_1164315.html)

## 5.6.2 Chinese Cities of Interest

Tourism is the primary driver of interest in Chinese cities among Bangladeshi respondents. Beijing ranks as the most preferred destination, attracting the highest number of respondents across all categories, particularly in tourism (2,175 responses) and business (1,391 responses). Hong Kong follows closely, with significant interest in tourism (1,696 responses) and business (662). Shanghai also maintains a consistent appeal, with a strong interest in tourism (1,308 responses) and industry (540 responses).

Lhasa is a tourism-centric destination, attracting 1,592 respondents in this category but showing comparatively lower interest in business (234 responses) and study (157 responses). Other cities such as Guangzhou (793 responses for tourism), Macao (958 responses for tourism), and Kunming (666 responses for tourism) demonstrate moderate interest, with lower appeal for business, education, and medical treatment.

Notably, medical treatment is a secondary reason for travel, with no city receiving more than 340 responses in this category. Similarly, educational interest remains relatively limited, with Beijing (803 responses) and Shanghai (313 responses) being the most preferred destinations for study.

Overall, the data suggests that Bangladeshis perceive China primarily as a tourist destination rather than a business or educational hub. However, Beijing, Hong Kong, and Shanghai maintain a substantial and diversified appeal across multiple categories. The growing interest in business and education in these key cities indicates potential opportunities for deeper engagement beyond tourism.

Despite the high interest in visiting China for tourism, the country is 6th in the overall destination list of Bangladeshi people.<sup>131</sup> In addition to sightseeing and relaxation, people visit countries like India, Thailand, and several Eastern countries for medical treatment, religious pilgrimage, shopping, business tours, etc.<sup>132</sup> Several factors influence Bangladeshi people's choice of domestic and international tourism. A recent study on potential Bangladeshi tourists found that various factors, including destination familiarity, image, safety measures, social media presence, and reference group influence, notably

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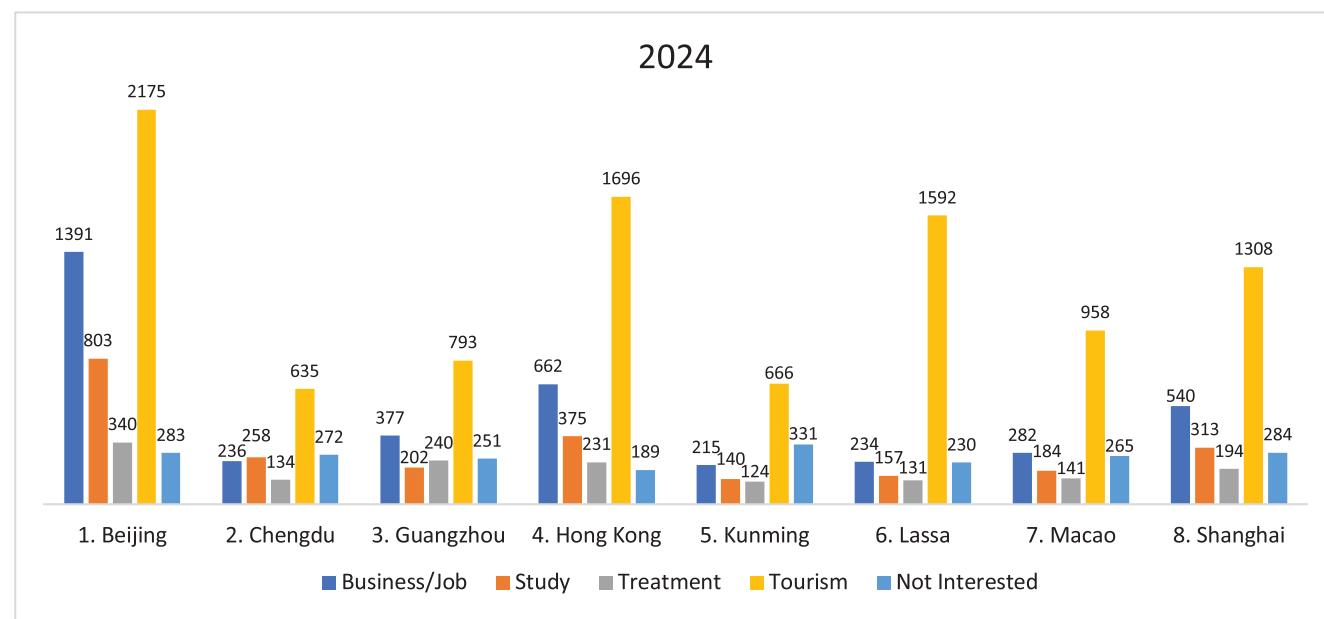
<sup>131</sup> Top ten outbound destinations from Bangladesh, 11 June 2024, Cited in-  
<https://www.hotelmanagement-network.com/data-insights/outbound-destinations-bangladesh/?cf-view>

<sup>132</sup> Top Destinations: Most visited countries by Bangladeshis, Cited in-  
<https://www.itsholidaysltd.com/top-destinations-most-visited-countries-by-bangladeshis>

impacted destination selection.<sup>133</sup> The young population seeks to balance affordability and nature-safety-relaxation in their tour packages.<sup>134</sup>

China has been working on attracting Bangladeshi tourists and businesses to host in its country.<sup>135</sup> Aside from the survey findings, the additional pull factors for China are the on-arrival visa facility for businesspersons and humanitarian grounds. It may be noted that the opportunities for medical care for Bangladeshis in Kunming are significant.<sup>136 137</sup> In the search for diverse options, Kunming can be a promising destination for Bangladeshi healthcare seekers in terms of distance and quality of care.

**Figure 5.6c: Which Chinese cities are you interested to visit and why?**



<sup>133</sup> Mahabuba K Mim, Md. M Hasan, Afzal Hossain, & Md Yusuf H Khan, An Examination of Factors Affecting Tourists' Destination Choice: Empirical Evidence From Bangladesh, Socioeconomic Challenges, 29 October 2022.

<sup>134</sup> Jahan S, 'Reasons for Tourism Destination: A Conceptual Study on Young Generation in Bangladesh', Global Journal of Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Leadership (GJEIL), July 2020.

<sup>135</sup> 'China invites more tourists from Bangladesh', 19 May 2024, Cited in-

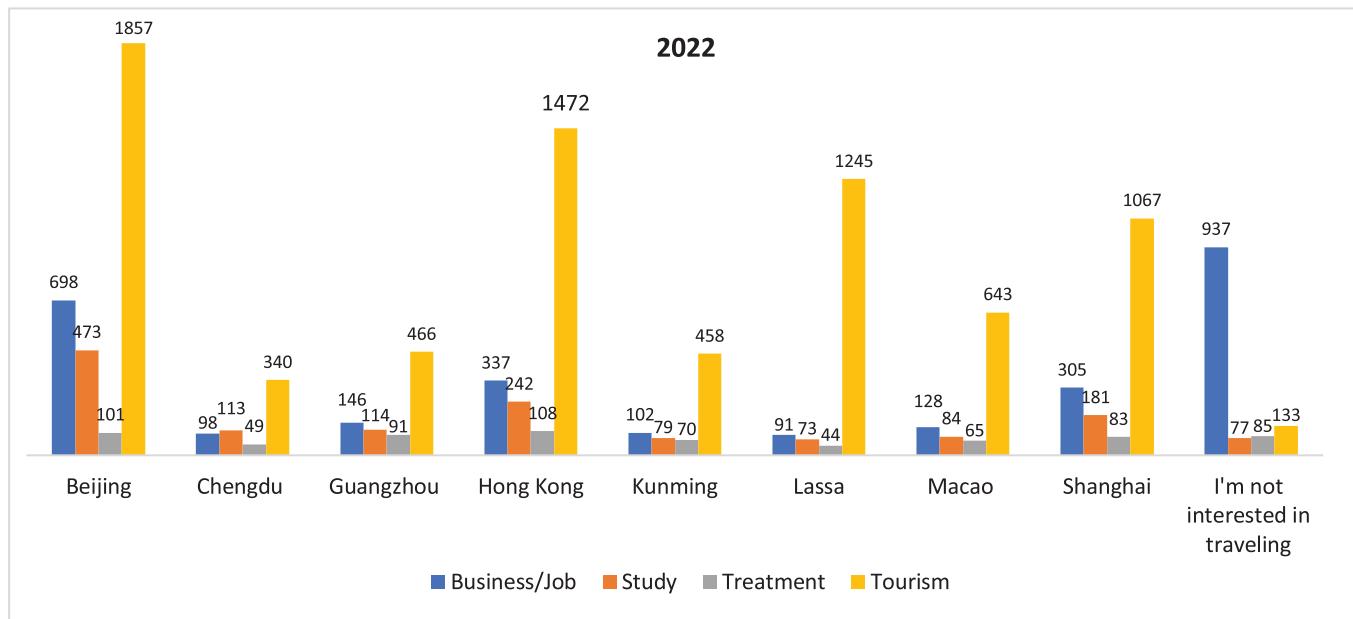
<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/china-invites-more-tourists-bangladesh-855051>

<sup>136</sup> 'China offering visa on arrival for Bangladeshi travellers', 23 November 2018, Cited in-

<https://www.thedailystar.net/country/china-offering-visa-on-arrival-bangladeshi-chinese-embassy-in-dhaka-1663666>

<sup>137</sup> 'China eyes Bangladeshi travellers for expanding medical tourism', 5 January 2025, Cited in-

<https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/china-eyes-bangladeshi-travellers-expanding-medical-tourism-1034841>



## Recommendations

This section presents the observations and recommendations made by the surveyed respondents and the literature review made by the study team. The summary touches upon the various areas where Bangladesh-China bilateral relations may be improved. The following themes outline the recommendations from the surveyed people and the literature review.

### 6.1 Promoting People-to-people Exchanges and Cooperation between China and Bangladesh

Several areas may be explored to increase the number of Bangladeshi travellers in China and facilitate the people-to-people exchange between the two countries.

On-arrival Visa for Bangladeshi tourists and healthcare seekers: As mentioned above, China offers on-arrival visas to business persons and applicants seeking humanitarian grounds. The facility may be extended to tourists and healthcare seekers, too. The waiver of visa requirements for several countries increased the tourist rush in China in 2023; this policy may also apply to Bangladeshi tourists.<sup>138</sup>

Affordability is an essential factor in deciding on a choice for any purpose. Budget-friendly tourism packages for the young population and affordable healthcare facilities for Bangladeshi people may increase the desire to travel for these purposes. A study on the revisit purpose of medical tourists in China reveals a significant influence of the pricing of facilities on the revisit intentions of the patients.<sup>139</sup>

Focus on female travellers: The female respondents' segregated responses in the survey reveal that the percentage of women who wanted to visit the Chinese provinces for tourism was substantially higher than those who wanted to visit for other reasons. The findings indicate a growing interest among Bangladeshi women in travelling. Chinese tourism policies can explore this area and formulate a targeted approach incorporating safety issues.

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<sup>138</sup> Yu,S. & Hall,C. (2024) 'China strives to lure foreign tourists, but it's a hard sell for some', Cited in-  
<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-strives-lure-foreign-tourists-its-hard-sell-some-2024-07-17/>

<sup>139</sup> Fengmin Z, Baijun W, Jiangtao B, Li L, Patwary AK. Investigating revisit intention of medical tourists in China through nutritional knowledge, perceived medical quality, and trust in the physiologist: A recommendation on health tourism policy measures. *Front Public Health*, 26 August 2022.

Awareness raising and Branding: To achieve sustainable people-to-people exchanges between Bangladesh and China, awareness-raising programs, conferences and dialogues are significant. The survey findings regarding the respondents' interest in different cities largely reflect a generalised view of the cities, essentially missing their unique features. The branding of each city, combining the new information and existing knowledge of the respondents, and dissemination of attractive content through popular social and electronic media could increase awareness among Bangladeshi people.

Decentralisation of the activities: The programs and activities aimed at increasing Bangladeshis' awareness and knowledge of China are Dhaka or Capital-centric. Visa centres in the other Divisions of the country can be opened to improve people's access.

## **6.2 Trade, Investment and Economic Cooperation**

Bangladesh and China maintain a robust economic partnership, but respondents have identified specific challenges within this collaboration that must be addressed for sustainable and mutually beneficial economic cooperation. The respondents proposed several measures to strengthen Bangladesh-China economic relations, which include measures to be taken by both countries to reduce the trade deficit, ensure a more balanced trade relationship, and increase investments by China in Bangladeshi industries to create more employment opportunities for the local workforce. Additionally, they emphasised the importance of offering high-quality products at competitive prices for Bangladeshi consumers. Respondents also called for greater access to Bangladeshi products in Chinese markets through initiatives such as duty-free and quota-free facilities or the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP).

They further recommended that China extend financial and technical support to bolster Bangladeshi industries and provide low-interest loans and concessions for various development projects. Addressing these recommendations could significantly strengthen the economic partnership between Bangladesh and China, fostering sustainable growth and mutual benefits. Survey respondents also expressed concerns about the potential development of a patron-client dynamic within this mutually beneficial relationship, emphasising the need for equitable and balanced cooperation. Respondents expressed concerns about the potential for a "debt trap" resulting from Chinese infrastructure projects. They stressed the importance of careful evaluation to avoid economic pitfalls, noting that sustainable structural and economic development is possible if such risks are mitigated.

### **6.3 Rohingya Repatriation and the Muslim World**

Survey respondents suggested that China could have taken a more active role in facilitating the repatriation of Rohingya refugees, as they believe China holds significant influence over Myanmar in this matter. Many expressed that China has not been decisive in resolving the crisis. They recommended that China exert pressure on Myanmar and mobilise the international community to ensure the safe and dignified repatriation of the Rohingya people.

Respondents highlighted concerns over China's treatment of Uighur Muslims, calling for greater tolerance and an end to oppression. China's perceived partiality on issues like the Rohingya crisis has harmed its image in Muslim-majority countries like Bangladesh. Additionally, it was suggested that China play a more active role in resolving global conflicts, such as the Israel-Palestine crisis, to promote peace and enhance its international standing.

### **6.4 Diplomacy, Geopolitics, and Strategic Spheres**

Respondents emphasised the need to strengthen diplomatic ties between Bangladesh and China, highlighting China's vital role in regional cooperation and economic development. They noted that the current situation in Bangladesh presents an opportunity for China to build a stronger, more collaborative partnership. Prioritising bilateral relations, monitoring mutual diplomatic interests, and fostering peaceful, non-exploitative engagement was seen as essential. Strengthened political, economic, and diplomatic ties are expected to benefit both countries and enhance regional stability.

The surveyed population suggested that Bangladesh's strong relations with China have geopolitical ramifications for regional and international politics. Respondents indicated that Bangladesh should strategically manage its relationship with China to ensure a balanced partnership. The respondents felt that strengthening ties with China could support economic and structural development. Building a robust alliance with China may help address longstanding regional geopolitical challenges and foster mutual growth.

### **6.5 Military and Security Cooperation**

China could play a more active role in helping Bangladesh enhance its air defence capabilities and acquire advanced fighter jets, naval ships, military hardware, and weapons, similar to its previous support in providing submarines. Beyond providing military hardware and conducting joint training programs and exercises, China can also help Bangladesh build its maritime security. Strengthening these areas would significantly bolster Bangladesh's defence system and strategic preparedness. Additionally, respondents

have suggested that deeper collaboration between China and Bangladesh on military and security issues could further strengthen bilateral relations and ensure mutual benefits in regional and global security dynamics.

## **6.6 Educational Cooperation**

The number of Chinese scholarships for Bangladeshi students could be significantly increased, with the target of sending more students annually than its current level. Efforts should also focus on expanding academic exchange programs, streamlining visa processing, and enhancing opportunities for higher studies to strengthen educational collaboration between the two countries. People also suggested university-level research collaboration between Bangladeshi and Chinese academic institutions to facilitate knowledge and technology transfer.

China Studies Centers may be established in different public and private universities in Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh may also endeavour to establish Bangladesh Chairs in major universities in China to introduce and popularise Bangladeshi studies.

Exchange visits between academia at the faculty and student levels are another area with tremendous potential for building future cooperative societies.

## **6.7 Research & Development (R&D)**

Bangladesh can benefit immensely from China's research and development sector. In the fast-changing world of technology, China is a leading power. Bangladesh has a large pool of untapped human resources who can benefit from China's technological know-how. China can open up R&D centres in Bangladesh. Graduates from these centres can help Bangladesh ease its unemployment problem by providing them with job opportunities; this also holds the potential for slowing down the brain drain as many youths leave the country searching for employment opportunities. The centres can also help Bangladesh to venture into the Made in Bangladesh domain.

## **6.8 Technological Cooperation and Technology Transfer**

Respondents emphasised the need for China to enhance its investment in Bangladesh's technological and IT sectors, including creating an IT hub for the country's freelancer community and advancing agricultural technology. Collaboration in skill development, science, and defence technology sharing was also suggested. Strengthening technological cooperation and increasing China's support in advancing

Bangladesh's technology sector were highlighted as key priorities to foster closer ties between the two nations.

### **6.9 People-to-People Connections and Public Diplomacy**

Respondents suggested strengthening people-to-people connections and public diplomacy between Bangladesh and China is essential. Both countries should enhance cultural exchanges, promote tourism, and facilitate easier travel by offering on-arrival visas for Bangladeshi tourists. The respondents opined that cultural sharing and dialogue, including discussions and exchange programs on different issues, could deepen mutual understanding. Such initiatives, alongside economic collaboration, can foster stronger bilateral ties and better understanding of each other.

### **6.10 Cultural Cooperation**

The survey reveals that Bangladeshis perceive China as a great civilisation with a rich history. This demonstrates the Bangladeshi population's interest in China. To deepen the understanding of the rich cultures and historical and civilisational ties between the two countries, it is imperative to increase the exchange of cultural programs between the two countries. The Chinese Embassy can endeavour to build Chinese cultural centres in the major cities of Bangladesh. Bangladeshi cultural troupes can also visit important destinations in China to popularise Bangladeshi culture.

Joint Fairs and festivals, like the Dhaka Industrial Fair, Dhaka Lit Festival, and Film and Drama Festivals, can also be held between countries.

Exchange between media houses and journalists is also essential to people-to-people connectivity, as they play a critical role in opinion-making.

### **6.11 Cooperation between Women Organizations**

The survey report suggests that women, more than men, are in the neutral category in their opinion of China. The 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action are well known among women activists around the world, including Bangladesh; however, the survey findings on the female respondents suggest the need for substantial cooperation and exchanges between women's organisations and women's-related ministries and officials between the two countries.

## **6.12 Cooperation in the Health Sector**

China's assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic is well-acknowledged in Bangladesh. Health entrepreneurs and physicians in Bangladesh recognise and value China's technological and research advancements in the health sector. China's support in Bangladesh's health sector can go a long way in building connectivity between the two countries.

The survey suggests the popularity of Chinese traditional medicines in Bangladesh. Chinese herbal tea is a popular drink in Bangladesh. There is enough scope for cooperation between the two countries in the traditional medicine sector.

## Brief Summary of the Survey Findings

The report's findings suggest that around 90 percent of respondents have a favourable stance on China. This finding has been used to compare the three surveys conducted in 2022, 2023 and 2024, which were aimed at understanding the perceptions of the Bangladeshi people about China in general and their perceptions of the different aspects of the Bangladesh-China relationship. The indicators for which data has been shared have shown a consistent trend and improvement in several areas, including Bangladesh-China economic relations, people's perception of the Chinese government, society and economic situation. Moreover, most respondents lauded China's emerging role in solving the Rohingya crisis and mitigating the protracted conflict situation in the Middle East. The survey focused on gauging public perceptions of three major issues. These are (a) general areas of cooperation between Bangladesh and China, (b) perception of China and Chinese development aid, and (c) specific sectors of cooperation between Bangladesh and China. The data from the 2022, 2023 and 2024 surveys evidence the changing perception of Bangladeshis people towards China. In all three timelines, it was found that the most decisive opinion was that of "rising dominant global power" which had about 4788 percent and decreased to 4572 percent during 2023 and again slightly increased to 4581 percent during 2024 (See figures. 4.1d). The perception of the country as "a major Asian country" with a rich history and full of charm is also on the steady increase from 3082 percent in 2022 to 3150 percent in 2023 and 3645 percent in 2024. Although views on the country being a 'major contributor to global peace, development, and governance' are still relatively low, they seem to trend upward as they were at 15.12% in 2022 and are estimated to be 19.78% in 2024.

Perceptions of the country as an "anti-West global power" are consistent, around 21%, while the view of it as an "aggressive regional power" remains minimal and slightly declines. The data reflects a growing acknowledgement of the country's cultural heritage and global influence, with dominant power perceptions remaining the key theme. The survey results from the last three years also demonstrate that Bangladesh and China share a multifaceted relationship spanning diplomacy, defence, economy, connectivity, education, and politics. Diplomatic ties have been marked by mutual respect, with China being a key development partner for Bangladesh. For example, the data from three surveys (see. Figure 4.1a) explain a steady improvement in the general impression of China from 2022 to 2024, with the "Very Good (9-10)" category increasing from 14.4% in 2022 to 20.9% in 2024, and "Good (7-8)" ratings remaining stable, peaking at 45.7% in both 2022 and 2024. Neutral perceptions ("5-6") decreased from 34.2% in 2022 and 2023 to 30.4% in 2024, suggesting a shift toward more defined opinions.

Dissatisfaction levels dropped significantly, with "Poor (3-4)" decreasing from 4.0% in 2022 to 1.8% in 2024, and "Very Poor (1-2)" falling from 1.7% to 1.1% over the same period.

Overall, the data represent increasing satisfaction and decreasing dissatisfaction, indicating that developments in Bangladesh have changed public opinion positively. In addition, 66.03% of the survey participants emphasised economic cooperation, demonstrating a great deal of attention towards finance and trade activities (see Figure 4.1b). Next is diplomacy, with 47.23% denoting reasonable interaction for building international relations. A lower emphasis of 25.75% on security indicates a much less focus on defence and security issues. Cultural, educational, or community programmes have the least visibility, receiving only 21.96% of attention. There might be a reason for such lower attention towards the social aspect as, at present, Bangladeshi people place greater emphasis on economic growth and strategic international engagements. Media plays a significant role here, as most of the discussions on social media platforms, talk shows, and reports on online and print media revolve around economics and politics. Economic development, infrastructural investments, trade partnerships, and other mega projects directly affect GDP growth, employment, and international competitiveness. However, diplomatic and security policies are critical considering the geostrategic circumstances and Bangladesh's role in regional politics. The findings also suggest a real need and scope exists for more significant cultural, educational, and social interactions between the people of China and Bangladesh.

## Conclusion: The Way Forward

*If You Want to Go Fast, Go Alone. If You Want to Go Far, Go Together.*<sup>140</sup>

The above-mentioned African proverb aptly captures the aspirations of Bangladesh following the July Revolution. The newly transformed Bangladesh aims to embark on a long journey toward enhancing the socio-economic well-being of its citizens and establishing itself as a stable, democratic nation. To achieve these ambitious goals, Bangladesh recognises the importance of building strong alliances with countries that uphold the values of justice, the rule of law, and development. In this enduring journey, the people of Bangladesh view China as a trusted and valuable partner. This has been reflected in the 2024 survey findings. This report concludes that a large majority of the respondents view China positively. The information has contributed to comparing three surveys conducted in 2022, 2023 and 2024 to understand people's perceptions about China and Bangladesh-China relations. The findings have demonstrated a consistent trend and an improvement in several indicators mentioned above. Respondents in the 2024 survey believe China is a highly advanced nation with a strong economy, cutting-edge science and technology, and robust political ethics. Most respondents see China as a good place for business; it has beautiful cities, good administration, and fresh food. However, in 2024, particularly after the July revolution and the fall of 15 years of the Awami League regime, the survey findings stressed many issues, such as deepening and widening economic and trade cooperation to reduce the trade deficit. Also, the respondents have welcomed the idea of Chinese investment in Bangladesh's industrial sectors. Technology and knowledge transfer are some areas that need more attention from the Bangladesh-China policymakers. The concern for maintaining the territorial integrity and security of Bangladesh has been highlighted in the 2024 survey. Respondents have expressed concern that Bangladesh-China should deepen their security cooperation to enhance Bangladesh's potential deterrent force in the region. The issue of transboundary water sharing is also a concern for the Bangladeshi people, who wanted support from China to access the transboundary rivers based on equity and justice.

China's role in regional diplomacy, particularly concerning the Rohingya crisis, is recognised, but expectations for a more proactive stance persist. Many respondents believe China can play a significant role in brokering peace efforts in other global conflicts, including those in the Middle East. Strengthening

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<sup>140</sup> African proverb. See Victoria Odoi-Atsem (2018), Volume 1 of Inspirational Quote Journal Series, Amazon Digital Services LLC - KDP Print US.

diplomatic engagement could further enhance trust and goodwill, reinforcing China's role as a constructive mediator in international affairs. Furthermore, people-to-people connectivity, encompassing cultural exchanges, educational collaboration, and tourism, is crucial to bilateral relations. Many Bangladeshis are interested in studying in China, highlighting the need to expand scholarships, ease visa processes, and enhance academic collaboration. Establishing China Studies Centers in Bangladeshi institutions could provide platforms for deeper academic and cultural understanding. Enhancing access to Chinese-language learning and cultural immersion programs would support stronger educational ties and mutual understanding.

To further strengthen economic cooperation, both countries can work toward a more balanced trade relationship, attract greater Chinese investment in Bangladesh's industrial and technology sectors, and foster public-private partnerships for sustainable infrastructure development. Many respondents view China's economic initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative, as promising for Bangladesh's growth, focusing on ensuring long-term financial sustainability. Expanding joint military exercises and defence technology collaboration can deepen strategic ties while maintaining transparency and fostering trust. Public sentiment also reflects strong support for Bangladesh's greater integration into international economic forums, indicating a broader interest in multilateral economic engagement that complements Bangladesh-China relations. Both countries can further solidify a mutually beneficial and forward-looking partnership by continuing to build on these strengths.

Diplomatic engagement may be reinforced through China's active role in Rohingya repatriation. Additionally, education and cultural exchange should be prioritised by increasing Chinese government scholarships, facilitating joint university programs, and establishing Bangladesh-focused research centres in Chinese institutions to encourage mutual academic engagement. Expanding collaboration in science and technology, where China is viewed favourably, can further enhance bilateral ties. Public perception of China's technological advancements remains overwhelmingly positive, making it a promising area for deeper collaboration, particularly in IT, artificial intelligence, and green energy sectors.

To further enhance people-to-people connectivity, simplifying visa procedures, strengthening bilateral tourism promotion, and fostering collaboration between women's organisations in both countries could strengthen engagement. Expanding media collaboration and academic exchanges would also improve public awareness and address knowledge gaps regarding China's role in Bangladesh's development. Despite positive perceptions of China's economic and technological progress, concerns about media accessibility, information transparency, and stereotypical portrayal of China in global discourse persist.

Addressing these issues through enhanced cross-cultural media initiatives could strengthen understanding and trust.

Bangladesh and China's partnership has evolved into a comprehensive and multi-faceted relationship shaped by economic collaboration, strategic engagement, and cultural exchange. As both countries navigate an increasingly complex global landscape, prioritising sustainable, transparent, and mutually beneficial cooperation will be crucial for ensuring the long-term success of this partnership. Strengthening bilateral dialogue, expanding economic opportunities, and addressing public concerns will lay the foundation for deeper and more resilient ties in the years ahead.

The report argues that the political transformations resulting from the revolution may have led to changes in leadership and policy directions in Bangladesh, China, or both. Leadership shifts often bring new priorities, ideologies, and foreign policy approaches. These changes could redefine how Bangladesh and China engage with each other, affecting bilateral cooperation across various sectors. New leaders might pursue different diplomatic strategies, emphasising different aspects of the relationship, such as trade, security, or cultural ties. Understanding these new dynamics is crucial for both academic analysis and policy formulation. Further, the global and regional implications of the July Revolution cannot be ignored. Bangladesh-China relations are integral to the stability of South Asia and have a significant impact on global geopolitics. The revolution might influence regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and global platforms like the United Nations. Understanding how these changes impact regional and international order is critical for policymakers and scholars.

In conclusion, the survey is very significant as it gauged public perception after the July revolution, representing a critical juncture that necessitates new research into Bangladesh-China relations. The event's multifaceted impact on political, economic, strategic, and social dimensions requires a comprehensive analysis to understand its long-term implications and inform future policies promoting mutual benefits and regional stability. As the global order continues to evolve, such research is essential to navigating the complexities of this bilateral relationship.





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