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Chinese President's Visit to Nepal and Consolidation of Relations of Two Countries

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Abstract

This paper explores Chinese President Xi Jinping's Nepal visit and its significance in diplomatic relations between the two countries. Drawing information from the secondary sources, this paper provides a brief overview and analysis of the Nepal-China relation, high-level visits between the two countries and Xi Jinping's new diplomacy of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The paper argues that President Xi's visit to Nepal on 13 October 2013 following his visit to India should be taken as part of his new diplomacy rather than the continuation of the tradition of exchanging high-level visits between the two countries. During this visit, Nepal and China signed a 20-point comprehensive agreement. In his statement, President Xi mentioned that China will help Nepal to get transformed from a 'landlocked' to a 'land-linked' country. For that purpose, he put forward the modality of Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network as a way out. Xi has expressed the commitment to opening up further new entry points between China and Nepal for enhancing connectivity between the two countries. President Xi announced financial help of around 56 billion rupees to Nepal between 2020 and 2022. The recent developments, with careful and timely implementation, have the potentiality of opening new geopolitical, regional, and economic opportunities for Nepal.

Keywords: Bilateral relations, belt and road initiative, connectivity, boundary management

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Introduction

Nepal and China have centuries-long historical, social, cultural and religious bilateral relations (Basnet, 2019). China is the rising superpower in the world. The national interest of China is to improve and strengthen bilateral relations with its neighboring countries through economical and multidimensional perspectives. Its foreign policy behavior reflects Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, and the world order (Kumar, 1989). China continued its tactics to secure the goodwill of Nepal (Prasad, 1989).

Nepal and the People's Republic of China have a long and storied relationship. The relations between Nepal and China has traditionally been amicable and cordial. In history, we can find several important mutual visits and events like a visit of Nepali monk Buddhahadra to China during the early 5th Century, the marriage of Nepales Princess Bhrikuti to emperor Songtsen Gampo of China during the first half of the 7th Century, visit of Nepali artist Araniko to China during the second half of the 13th Century. There were visits of Chinese monks and scholars like Monk Fa Xian, Monk Xuan Zang, and others during the ancient period (MOFA, 2019). Besides, the diplomatic relations, the people of Nepal and China have had close economic, social and cultural relations, especially among the people around the border from east to the west (Hamal, 2014, p. 76). However, diplomatic relations between Nepal and the Peoples Republic of China was established in 1955. Nepal is fully committed to the One-China policy (MOFA, 2019). The President of China Xi Jinping visited neighboring countries, India and Nepal, on 13 October 2019. Both, Indian and China are the, largest trade partners, having the largest population and fastest-growing economies. China is one the largest donor country in the world after the 1990s. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, China, as a close friend of Nepal, has supported Nepal in various development activities.

At the invitation of President of Nepal Bidhya Devi Bhandari, the Chinese President made two days' official state visit to Nepal, in October 2019. During President Xi's visit to Nepal, Nepal and China signed 20 points agreement (Joint Agreement 20 Points Signed) (<https://mofa.gov.np/>). He announced to provide an economic add of around fifty-six billion to Nepal in the time frame between 2020 to 2022 and assured continued support for the economic development and prosperity of Nepal (*The Kathmandu Post*, 2019). It has further strengthened the diplomatic relationship between the two countries.

Objective

China and Nepal are two friendly neighboring countries. China is assisting our country in various sectors from the very beginning. High-level state visits have enormous significance in building ties at the diplomatic level. The overall aim of the paper is to explore the significance of the Chinese President's visit to Nepal and critically analyze high-level visits to Nepal by Chinese leaders. The relationship between Nepal and China as a new dimension in the twenty-first century is briefly described and analyzed in this study.

Methodology

The information for this study is collected from secondary sources, including books, journal articles, reports, joint statements, agreements, and analysis them critically. It is a qualitative research based on data collection methods-document analysis, historical studies, and exploratory studies. Qualitative research is a scientific method of observation. This method helps to obtain non-numerical data. This type of research usually "refers to the meanings,

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concepts, natures, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and description of things” and excludes their “counts or measures’ (Turmidzi, Mahfud, Zuhri, Imron & Fahlevi, 2019).

Review of Literature

The countries' relationship is founded on sovereign equality. This includes safeguarding the country's sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence and national interests, along with advancing national prestige in the international community. Nepal's foreign policy is guided by the Nepali constitution of 2015, the United Nations Charter, non-alignment, international law, world peace norms and *Panchsheel* principles (Government of Nepal, 2015). In developing diplomatic relations and economic and cultural exchanges with other countries, China steadily subscribes to an independent foreign policy based on principles of mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual nonaggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence (Review & Jones, 1985).

The Government has developed and expanded foreign relations in a manner that protects and promotes national interests based on sovereign equality, mutual respect and advantage, fulfilment of just mutual, regional and international obligations by obeying the Charter of the United Nations, non-alignment and five principles of peaceful co-existence. (Affairs, 2020)

During primordial times, the Kathmandu valley was a lake, according to the Swayambhu Purana. Bodhisattva Maha Manjushree arrived in the Kathmandu valley from Wu Tai-shan, China, and created the gorge at Chobhar and emptied the lake, permitting human habitation in the valley (Shrestha, 2016, p. 48). Nepal and China relations have existed since the 5th century BC (Subedi, 2016). In the fifth century, famous Chinese Traveler Faxian returned to China after the visit to Ramgram, Kapilvastu, and Lumbini (Shrestha, 2016). China's biggest special economic zone expands and opens to the outside world (China Handbook, 1993). As far as China is concerned, our trade with that country started in ancient times (Lohani, 2009). Historically speaking, Nepal and China have had bilateral relations from the ancient period. Besides, China's relations with Nepal were always indirect through Tibet with whom Nepal had an ancient and intimate relationship (Kumar, 1963). China is the world's rising superpower. Owing to its military and economic might, economic China is also on the verge of becoming a superpower (Acharya, 2019, p. 46).

Nepal-China relations are friendly, with mutual trust and respect. Friendly relation continuous since the ancient time. Latter the friendly relations strengthened since the days Araniko with all his artists visited Tibet and Bhirkuti got married to the Prince of Tibet.

Nepal's worldview is in the making and is reinventing itself. It is drawn from historical experiences, geopolitical location, economic completions and increasing exposure to the outside the world. Its worldview dramatically changed in the 21st century (Acharya, 2019). Nepal China has had good bilateral relations since ancient times. Both have social, political, economic, religious, and cultural relations. Nepal likes good neighbors giving support and help during difficult times.

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Result and Discussion

Xi Jinping is a distinguished visionary leader in China, leading the Chinese dream with a balance of power, politics and development, which is an essential foundation of China. After Jiang Zemin's trip in 1996, it is the first time that the Chinese President visited Nepal in 23 years. However, three Presidents of China have paid visits earlier to Nepal. President Li Xianian has visited Nepal in 1982 (*My Republica*, 2019). Likewise, Premier Zhu Rongji paid a visit in 2001 and Wen Jiabao in 2012 (*Spotlight Nepal*, 2018). From the Nepali side, recently, President Bidhya Devi Bhandari visited China in 2018.

High-Level Visit

The diplomatic relations between the countries formally began in 1955 (Dahal, 2018). Since then, frequent exchange visits of high-level leaders and diplomats of both countries are common. In 2019, Nepali President Bidhya Devi Bhandari made a state visit to China and asked Chinese President Xi Jinping to visit Nepal. He accepted the invitation to be here in October 2019 (*My Republica*, 2019). Similarly, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli visited China in 2016 and has an agreement on a trade and transit treaty and both governments' authorities signed it for the landlocked country (<https://mofa.gov.np/>). Now, Nepal gets a transit facility for third countries and of the world. It is an international right for landlocked countries to get connected with third countries, but Nepal still needs to depend heavily on India. International law has provisioned transportation facilities through the third countries, but India has not sincerely followed those norms, violating international rules and regulations, India put import-export blockage to Nepal at different times. China is a suitable partner of Nepal and it has helped and supported Nepal during many difficult times. It has always been a good neighbour to Nepal. China's foreign policy goal is to gain international support for its One-China policy. So the Chinese side wants Nepali land not to be used against China. The following table shows the frequent visits of leaders in different periods.

Table 1

High-level visit from Nepal to China

S.N.	Designation	Name	Date
1	Prime Minister	Tanka Prasad Acharya	1956
2	Prime Minister	BP Koirala	1960
3	King	Mahendra	1961
4	Prime Minister	Kirti Nidhi Bista	1972 and 1978
5	King	Birendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev	1973, 1982, 1987, 1993, 1996 and 2001
6	Prime Minister	Girija Prasad Koirala	1993,1992
7	Prime Minister	Manmohan Adhikari	1995
8	Prime Minister	Sher Bahadur Deuba	1996

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9	King	Gyanendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev	2002 and 2005
10	Prime Minister	Pushpa Kamal Dahal	2008 (Closing ceremony of the Beijing Olympics)
11	Prime Minister	Madhav Kumar Nepal	2009
12	President	Dr Ram Baran Yadav	2010 (Closing ceremony of the Shanghai Expo) 2015
13	Vice President	Paramananda Jha	2013 (First China-South Asia Exposition in Kunming) 2015
14	Prime Minister	Sushil Koirala	2014 (Second China-South Asia Exposition),
15	Prime Minister	KP Sharma Oli	2016 and 2018
16	Vice President	Nanda Bahadur Pun	2016 (Fourth China-South Asia Exposition)
17	President	Bidhya Devi Bhandari	2019 (Second Belt and Road Forum),

Source: (*My Republica*, 2019 & MOFA).

Table 1 shows 10 Prime Ministers, 3 Kings, 2 Presidents and 2 Vice Presidents from Nepal who visited China at different times (*My Republica*, 2019). Nepal is a sovereign nation and a member of UNO. India is Nepali major trading partner and plays a vital role in transportation (Muni, 2016, p. 402). Nepal is attempting to minimize its reliance on India and it is looking for the best alternative. International law allows landlocked countries the rights of transportation from third countries. But India has been difficult in the matter. However, after the agreement with China, Nepal is now more open with the third world.

The visit of Chinese President Xi to Nepal is very important. Both countries have been realizing good relations since the diplomatic tie in 1955. China is now the world's second-largest economy, and it aspires to be the first. Nepal and China have no easy connectivity because of geographical difficulties in the northern borders. In this context, President Xi's visit to Nepal and various agreements and treaties between Nepal and China on the cross Himalayan Railway connectivity, trade and infrastructure has a great significance for Nepal. China and Nepal have already signed a transit and transport agreement. Now, Nepal will be a land link country after Chinese President Xi declared to introduce cross the Himalayan railway to help Nepal to get transformed from a landlocked country to a land-linked country. The following table shows the visit of Chinese leaders to Nepal.

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Table 2

From China to Nepal Visit

SN	Designation	Name	Date
1	Premier	Zhou Enlai	1957 and 1960
2	Vice Premier	Deng Xiaoping	1978
3	Premier	Zhou Ziyang	1981
4	President	Li Xiannian	1984
5	Premier	Li Peng	1989
6	President	Jiang Zemin	1996
7	Premier	Zhu Rongji	2001
8	Premier	Wen Jiabao	2012
9	President	Xi Jinping	2019

Source: (*My Republica*, 2019)

Table 2 shows 3 Presidents, 5 premiers and 1 vice-premier who visited Nepal at different times from China (*My Republica*, 2019). Among them, Xi Jinping's visit is the latest. It is marked as very important and historical because it will help Nepal to get access to new routes for transportation. It is Chinese President Xi's new diplomacy and multidimensional approach to help neighbouring countries in Asia and Europe to get connected through the highly ambitious project BRI. He exhibited power balance diplomacy with his visit to India and Nepal together. First, he visited India and then came to visit Nepal. His national interest was security. Each nation has its national interest in sovereignty and integrity, independence.

Xi Jinping New Diplomacy

18th National Congress of Communist Party of China (CPC) held in November 2012 elected President XI Jinping as the General Secretary of CPC (Jiemian, 2015). After that, Xi led the government as well. Under the leadership of Xi, China experienced new diplomatic examinations while adopting many legacies of the previous times. Since the middle of the 1990s, China has gained both strength and global popularity (Kurlantzick, 2007). China is powerful today, yet it still faces multiple pressures from other countries (Ji, 2008). In the Xi Jinping Era, China's diplomacy has been powerful, lively, represented the diplomatic endeavour of a great rising nation, dynamic, and have been effective in tackling new challenges for satisfactory needs of China's continuing development as an important part of the diplomatic theory and practice with Chinese characteristics (Jiemian, 2015). Under the Chinese new diplomacy for the global political economy, Nepal needs to facilitate the development of its remote northern districts, especially those close to Chinese road heads (Lohani, 2009, p. 11), an alternative development path called geo-development. China leads a prominent role in establishing connections across Eurasia and beyond (Luard, 1992).

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China is promoting its new diplomacy with the Silk Road and Road and Belt Initiative (RBI) which links with 50 countries in Asia and Europe and it is 12800 km long. Nepal's dream of economic stability and prosperity will be fulfilled through BRI. Likewise, infrastructural connectivity, tourism, cultural, hydroelectricity with 22 projects have been done. Nepal signed a trade and transept agreement in March 2016 and it opened access to the Chinese market and world market through the different seaports. Similarly, Nepal can achieve sustainable development goals through agricultural development. These are great opportunities in Nepal.

The major challenge for Nepal is to maintain security and political stability to achieve the gains of BRI smoothly. The geopolitical position of Nepal where it has an open border with China and India's sensitive part 'Tibet', creates significant security concerns for both its neighbours.

It is the way of connectivity with the world. It is an extensive project of China to connect to Asia and Europe. It is a huge multidimensional project. It will support their economic development and overall development in the areas of its coverage. China is becoming a super power through economic development. It is also a kind of new diplomacy of China. Total diplomacy has been a new technique of diplomacy that has been adopted to cope with the changing dynamics in international structure (K.C. & Panday, 2018, p. 95).

China has maintained friendly relations with its neighbours and other countries of the world. Nepal has played active and dynamic roles in international and regional politics through forums like United Nations Organization, the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (Dahal, 2009, p. 44). President Xi Jinping was on a visit to India and Nepal in October 2019. He wants his business to spread equally all over the world. RBI is a very ambitious project of the People's Republic of China. Nepal foreign policy has its roots in geopolitical reality, especially its location between India and China, which has always created the need to balance relations with them (Acharya, 2019, p. 257).

20 Points Agreement

During President Xi's visit to Nepal, a 20 points agreement and a treaty were signed between the Government of Nepal and the People's Republic of China. Major agreements and treaties are: Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the possible study of China-Nepal cross Border Railway, agreement on Boundary Management System, the exchange and co-operation on governance capacity building, mutual legal help in criminal matters. Similarly, MoU was signed on establishing cooperation for the protection of Mount Sagarmatha/Zhumulangma. MoU was signed for the establishment of the sister-city relationship between Kathmandu-Metropolitan city and Nanjing city, Butwal Sub-metropolitan city, and Xi'an city. Likewise, an agreement was done for cooperating on carrying research on traditional medicine, the establishment of cooperation in disaster risk reduction and emergency response, extending cooperation between the Attorney General of the two countries. An agreement was concluded for the establishment of the Confucius Institute at Tribhuvan University. An agreement was done for the promotion of exports of citrus fruits from Nepal to the People's Republic of China was also concluded. Similarly, MoU on Tunnels Construction Co-operation, water supply improvement, MoU on the establishment of the joint working group on trade, establishment of investment cooperation working group, exchange of letters for border security equipment and office equipment, delivery and acceptance certificate for China Aid earthquake monitoring network project

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(MOFA, 2019). These 20-point agreements highlight the fact that China wants to extend its bilateral ties with Nepal by opening the door for intense Sino-Nepal physical connectivity, addressing border issues, and assisting in areas like governance, national planning, health, education, trade, and investment.

Significance of the Visit on Nepal's Cross Border Trade and Transportation

The high-level visits between Nepal and China are great achievements to Nepal. Nepal, being a landlocked country, must strike a balance between India and China. But in the past years, India imposed a monopoly in the trade with Nepal as Nepal had done transit and transport agreements with India only. When Nepal's constitution was promulgated in 2015, India purposefully erected an unannounced blockade on the border from 23 September 2015, to 16 March 2016. According to the transit and transport agreement recognizing that Nepal as a land-locked country needs freedom of transit, including permanent access to and from the sea, to promote its international trade, and recognize the need to facilitate the traffic-in-transit through their territories (Nayak, 2018). However, with the high-level visits between Nepal and China, Nepal signed a trade and transit treaty with China too in 2016, breaking the monopoly of India. After the signing of the treaty, Xi Jinping in his visit to Nepal in 2019, announced Nepal is no more a landlocked country but now it is a landlocked country with connectivity to China from Himalayan cross border railway transportation. This visit of the Chinese president is a milestone in the history of Nepal, as Nepal has gone from being landlocked to a land-linked country as a result of it. It is diplomatically, strategically, economically and socially a big advantage for Nepal. According to Article 1 of the transit treaty, no discrimination can be made based on the flag of vessels, the places of origin, departure, entry, exit destination (Nayak, 2018).

China Rising on Superpower

With President Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal on 12-13 October 2019, the Nepal-China relationship has grown even stronger. It is one of the high-level visits from the side of China. China is a rising superpower in the world, a dream is to become a developed country of the world and advance as a scientific social country in the world. During his visit, Xi Jinping first expressed that the Constitution of Nepal made through the CA is the dream of the people of Nepal. Second, he highlighted China-Nepal cross border connectivity through the Railway. It's a great opportunity to materialize new Nepal. Nepal can connect with the third countries of the world through this project. Nepal is a landlocked country, and it was a tough situation when it faced an Indian blockade for almost 4 months in 2015. KP Sharma Oli, the Prime Minister of Nepal during his visit to China signed an agreement on a Transit Treaty. This agreement between Nepal and China is not only a major diplomatic win for Nepal, it has political and economic significance for Nepal. In the past, India has repeatedly violated Nepal's transit rights. China's agreement to let its territory available for Nepal to connect with the rest of the world. It will eliminate India's influence in Nepal and change the power politics of the South Asia region.

"Nepal and China take the Belt and Road Initiative as an important opportunity to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation in all fields, jointly pursue common prosperity, and devote themselves to maintaining peace, stability, and development in the region," according to a joint statement issued by Nepal and the People's Republic of China in 2019. President Bidhya Devi Bhandari has expressed Nepal's unflinching support to BRI.

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The Joint Statement further says, "Nepali side reiterated its firm commitment to One-China policy acknowledging that Taiwan is an unchallengeable part of the Chinese territory and Tibet affairs are China's internal affairs" (<https://mofa.gov.np>, 2019). On 13 October 2019, the Government of Nepal and the People's Republic of China signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to conduct detailed project research for the building of the Cross-Border Railway. Along with it, the Government of the People's Republic of China has stated its willingness to assist in the development of the Kathmandu-Pokhara-Lumbini Railway Project as well. These agreements are very important for further fostering good neighborly relations between the government of Nepal and the Peoples Republic of China (<https://mofa.gov.np>, 2019). But unfortunately, the Nepal government has not done a follow-up for the implementation of these agreements and on the other side, China's diplomacy cares a lot about it before extending further cooperation with Nepal.

Conclusion

Nepal China relations are strong as of high-level visit and effective long term, deep-rooted with both nations. Similarly, President Xi announced Nepal is not a landlocked country, it is land-linked across Himalayan Railway connectivity. This visit is considered cordial, friendly and bilateral. Nepal and China have strong bilateral diplomatic relations. The relation between the two countries has existed since ancient times and it is developing to newer higher levels now. High-level visits between two countries have aided in the strengthening of ties between them. In the 23 years since Jiang Zemin's visit to Nepal in 1996, Chinese President Xi Jinping undertook a historic two-day visit to Nepal. The visit is a milestone in many ways. China is emerging as a global superpower and the visit of Chinese heads to Nepal is meaningful. This visit should not be viewed as a continuance of good neighbouring policy between Nepal and China alone; it has provided Nepal with geopolitical, regional, and economic opportunities. The recent visit by President Xi concluded with a 20 points agreement between Nepal and China. The most important agreement points and treaty on the agreement are China-Nepal cross Border Railway, Boundary Management System, the exchange and cooperation of governance capacity building.

This visit has historical importance because Xi announced the support from China to help Nepal getting transformed from a landlocked county to a land-linked country. With this, Nepal no longer has to depend on India only on international trade and transport. This visit is going to be remembered, definitely, for a long time, as it has transformed Nepal from a land-locked nation to a land-linked nation across Himalayan Railway connectivity with Nepal. It is politically, strategically, economically and diplomatically significant for Nepal. This historic visit has raised the Sino-Nepal ties to a new height in the 21st century.

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