

# Comparative Soft Power Strategies of India and China

Dr. Indulekha BS

**Abstract:** *China's soft power strategy from the vantage point of vigorous employment of soft power by a rising power in the modern times. The perspective is contextually extended to a comparative study of similar strategies by India. The conceptual framework employed is the exhaustive construct of soft power outlined above, including economic engagement, given the strong resonance of the notion with China's external engagement policies that include cultural diplomacy, economic aid, education and use of the media. Different chapters in the book discuss the quantitative and qualitative aspects of employment of these tools in various parts of the world. China's non-military engagement of the world must proceed on the realization that Chinese diplomacy is not merely reactive to the West but is also driven by its struggle for resolving domestic and external challenges for consolidating national stability and economic progress. Imperatives of maintaining high economic growth for providing economic stability to a huge population, accessing critical natural resources, maintaining a stable external environment particularly in the neighbourhood and promoting balanced relations with major and rising powers are key drivers of Chinese diplomacy. The history and its outcomes have led to the development of 'post-imperial ideology' with implications for China's diplomatic strategies. China's participation in various regional and multilateral forums like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) reflect its willingness to change and work with diverse partners and associations. This is notwithstanding China's historical disinclination towards regional alliances and partnerships.*

**Keynotes:** Indo-China relations, foreign policy, soft power, Comparative Soft Power Strategies of India and China

## 1. Introduction

In the case of GDP growth and per capita income, India and China equally helped Nepal. According to the survey most of the respondents commented that in the case of economic development India and China were very helpful to Nepal. Nepal published a new political map which included three Indian territories: Limpiyadhura, Kalapani, and Lipulekh. China's interest in security and diplomacy is wider in Nepal. China's deep pockets make it problematic for India to control the expansion of China's influence on India's neighbourhood. India, on the other hand, has focused on service industries such as IT services and business process outsourcing which have contributed significantly to its economic growth. China and India comprise above 2/3 of the world population and have proven to be decisive powers in global economy. Since 1980, both China and India have made significant progress in economic strand, 'the GDP more than doubled in India and increased remarkable seven-fold in China. Albeit, there is ideological and economic contest between these two countries, the annual Sino-Indian trade 'exceeds US\$60 billion with potential for increasing indicate that Nepal can benefit maintaining good neighbourly relationship with these nations as 'transit states. As a matter of fact, Nepal needs to act for her benefits, maintaining good relationship with both the nations. It is observed that the relation between India and Nepal have been traditionally close since ancient times as result of geographical location and common religious, linguistic and the cultural identities that overlap the two countries.

### Indo-China relations

India and China, located in the southern and eastern parts of Asia, respectively, are major developing nations with significant influence in South Asian and global politics. Initially, they had a cordial relationship and brotherly bond, but border conflicts and tensions have led to the fragmentation of ties. Both nations are part of several multilateral groupings like BRICS, G20, etc., and need to

utilize these forums for mutual trust and cooperation building on the Panchsheel Principles agreed between them in 1954. India and China, home to 2.8 billion people, have deep economic ties, with China as India's top trading partner. India China Relations History date back to the 2nd century B.C. The relationship between India and China has improved through several exchanges and visits by political and spiritual leaders. The details are discussed below:

**Impact of Buddhism:** The contact at the level of people through commerce got a fillip with the advent of Buddhism into China from India in the first century A.D.

**Role of Travellers:** Chinese travellers like Fa Xian and Xuan Zang and Indian travellers like Bodhidharma, helped in information and cultural exchange between both nations.

**Period of Independence Struggle:** The period of British Rule saw increased camaraderie between both nations which saw events like Kang Youwei's stay in India (1890s), Rabindranath Tagore's visit to China (1924), sending of the Aid China Medical Mission, which included Dr. Dwarkanath Kotnis, by the Indian National Congress (1938), etc.

**Ties after Independence:** The period of the 1950s saw the Hindi-Chini Bhai Bhai phase, which led to the strengthening of ties.

### India China Border Disputes

India China Relations have witnessed several border disputes. The Sino-Indian border dispute revolves around the sovereignty of key territories like Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, complicated by historical colonial influences. The dispute stems from unclear historical boundary demarcations made during British colonial rule and the McMahon Line agreement, which China repudiates. The several border disputes between India and China are discussed below:

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**Boundary Line dispute:** India acknowledges the McMahon Line as the 'Actual Line of Control (LAC)' between India and China, while China does not recognize it.

**Sino-Indian War:** The 1962 Sino-Indian War stemmed from the border dispute in Akshai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh.

**Nathu La Clashes:** The Nathu La clashes occurred in 1967 when the People's Liberation Army (PLA) attacked Indian posts in Sikkim, resulting in a decisive tactical advantage for India, which successfully drove back Chinese forces and destroyed PLA fortifications.

**Doklam issue:** The 2017 China-India border standoff, also known as the Doklam standoff, was a 73-day military conflict between India and China over the construction of a road by Chinese troops in the disputed Doklam region.

*The standoff began on June 16, 2017, with Chinese troops extending a road, prompting India to launch Operation Juniper on June 18, supporting Bhutan.*

*The standoff lasted over two months, and on August 28, 2017, both nations withdrew their troops.*

**Galwan Clashes:** Chinese troops invaded Indian territory in the Galwan River valley in 2020, causing objections to Indian road construction. It became the first fatal confrontation between the two sides since 1975.

**Yangtse Clash (2022):** The Yangtse clash occurred in Arunachal Pradesh, involving Indian and Chinese troops. Around 300 Chinese troops advanced on Indian outposts near Chumi Gyatse Falls, resulting in an hour-long hand-to-hand combat and serious injuries on both sides.... Read more at: <https://vajiramandravi.com/upsc-exam/india-china-relations/>

### Foreign policy

According to the majority of political experts, the global political architecture is changing as power gradually shifts from the West to the East. China and India, the two most populous countries, are losing their hesitation to express their worldwide profiles and are on their path to becoming economic powerhouses. The relationship between China and India, the two regional powerhouses, will be crucial to the direction of this Asian century. Despite favorable changes in the recent few years, the trajectory of the India-China relationship is still very convoluted and challenging to understand.

The political elite in India frequently claims that Indian foreign policy has a clear continuity. Here are some important aspects of India's Foreign Policy toward China:

- There is obvious consistency in India's official position about its China policy. All political parties in India agree that bilateral relations with China should be strengthened and that dialogue should be used to resolve disputes between the two countries.
- There are three main schools of thought in India regarding how to approach China, and they have been labeled as pragmatists, hyperrealists, and appeasers.

- The pragmatists see China as a competitor and a long-term threat, but they contend that this competition can be managed by establishing economic ties with China and establishing a great power to counterbalance it.
- Indian foreign policy continues to be embroiled in confusion as a result of several obstacles that have prevented the establishment of a long-term China strategy in India. In the case of India's China policy, one is not even sure if the Indian political and foreign policy establishment comprehends the fundamental dynamics that form and configure world politics, leaving aside the question of the competence of the Indian elites to think strategically on national security.

### Comparative Soft Power Strategies of India and China

**Culture Diplomacy:** India engages the global community by highlighting its diverse cultural heritage, which includes festivals, art, and spiritual practices. Cultural festivals overseas and events like the International Day of Yoga are important tools for this communication (K. S. K., 2020). In the meantime, China's Confucius Institutes promote a more centralized cultural narrative by promoting language and history with a clear political undertone

**Media and Narrative Influence:** India's democratic media environment permits a variety of viewpoints, many of which are consistent with democratic ideals and free expression. In contrast, China's media channels, such as CGTN, are state-run and focused on providing a cohesive, strategic message that reflects Communist Party ideals (Li, 2021). China's strategy maintains narrative discipline, but worries about censorship may restrict its worldwide attractiveness.

### Economic Diplomacy China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI),

which aims to promote economic links and dependencies throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe, is possibly its most visible soft power strategy (B. R., 2019). In contrast, India promotes development-oriented cooperation with Southeast Asian countries through its "Act East" policy (Mohan, 2018). While China's strategy is frequently characterized as aggressive and hegemonic, India emphasizes mutual development and inclusivity.

### Technological and Educational Outreach

China's numerous scholarships target students from Africa, Asia, and Latin America, while India's GIAN and Study in India programs aim to establish the country as an academic center (Kumar, 2021; Li, 2021). Both nations provide scholarships and educational programs to entice foreign students. These programs create people-to-people connections that promote long-term soft power. • Diaspora as Cultural Representatives - India has a large global diaspora that is crucial to spreading its values and culture overseas. Indian communities, particularly those in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Southeast Asia, frequently serve as unofficial ambassadors of Indian culture (Panda, 2020). In contrast, China's diaspora diplomacy is more state-coordinated and frequently focused on sustaining political connections and influence rather than natural cultural exchange (Zhao, 2019).

## 2. Challenges and Limitations

Both India and China, despite their increasing focus on soft power, encounter serious obstacles. India's soft power message might be overshadowed by internal political division, communal unrest, and regional rivalries. Authoritarian rule, repression of dissent, and an aggressive foreign policy might drive away possible allies in China (Zhao, 2019). Additionally, the digital age has made things more complicated. Social media serves as a venue for public diplomacy, but it also makes governments vulnerable to swift reputational harm. Soft power gains can be rapidly eroded by misinformation, censorship, and inconsistent narratives.

### Soft power

In an era where influence transcends military and economic might, soft power has emerged as a critical tool in international relations. Coined by Joseph Nye, soft power is the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce. This research article offers a comparative analysis of India and China's soft power strategies, evaluating their effectiveness, strengths, challenges, and global perceptions. While both nations are rising powers with ancient civilizations and rich cultural heritages, they differ significantly in their methods and reception globally. This paper argues that India's democratic model and cultural pluralism offer organic appeal, while China's state sponsored initiatives provide strategic but contested influence. Soft power and cultural diplomacy have become hot topics of International relations in the 21st century. Hence, India too cannot escape from this global shift. Being an ancient civilization with a rich cultural heritage, India is a potential soft power hub that is attracting the whole world with its exotic charm of spirituality and magnificent cultural diversity. Though the concept of soft power is not a new phenomenon for India. For ages it has been influencing the world and its neighborhood with its rich culture; however, since the last two decades after its economic rise, India has once again started spreading its lost charm. In recent years, the government has also started exploring India's ancient connection with the countries in Asia, especially through maritime trade exchanges with South East Asian countries where the impact of Buddhism and Hinduism is deep-rooted in the society and lifestyle of people. At the same time, in its neighborhood, one more ancient civilization the Peoples Republic of China is also rising with leaps and bounds to spellbind the whole world with its magnificent economic development. Through Buddhism, India had its deep footings on Chinese philosophy and lifestyle since its dynastic history, but at the same time in China, there was also the presence of Indian Sanskrit texts and Vedic philosophy translated into Chinese since ancient times. The article aims to highlight the ancient cultural connection of India with the countries in East and Southeast Asia through maritime trade links, and the strategic steps India has taken to utilize its glorious deep-rooted connection through its 'Look East and Act East Policies'. Further, it will also try to explore the potential areas of strategic cooperation that can be incorporated in India's foreign policy to revive its age-old leading position in the region. The countries of Southeast Asia share a strong historical, cultural as well as spiritual connection with India. In the backdrop of rising Chinese influence in the region, the paper tries to evaluate the Modi government's 'Act East Policy' and the role of soft

power to enhance Indian influence in the region. The paper assesses the effectiveness of India's soft power approach in the region and provides recommendations on possible improvements to make India a major smart power in the future.

### Impact of India's Soft Power on China:

India and China the two civilizational cores of Asia have had strong historical ties and exchanges since ancient times. Many scholars have explained the mutual exchanges as a circulatory movement where besides spices, sugar making technique, coal, iron ore and some other raw materials China imported more intangible materials like spiritual knowledge from India, on the other hand India imported silk, tea and other finished goods and tangible items. As explained in the Bilateral Brief on India-China Cultural Relations on the official website of the Embassy of India, Beijing, China has highlighted the historical connections:

## 3. Conclusion

India could not list itself in the 'Soft Power Index 30' (2013), but there is a special mention of India under rising soft powers. It indicates the latent potential India possesses which needs to get properly harnessed and utilised. Through its Look East Policy and Act East Policy, the Indian government has been actively using its cultural soft power and strived for improving its relationship with the South East Asian countries and China. In today's globalized world, culture, ideology and other resources of soft power easily get transmitted, and popular cultures across the world are easily getting transferred across geographical boundaries.xxv Hence, gently Indian culture is also spreading its influence in the region. The present government is trying to reignite the 'India story' through reviving its civilizational and cultural connect with countries in the region and the whole world. By using various soft power and diplomatic tools and promoting people-to-people diplomacy, cultural diplomacy to regain its age-old charm among the people of Asia sharing Oriental culture and values. Moreover, the ancient spiritual connection of the countries of the region with India again gives leverage to bind with these states and lead them. In the backdrop of China's growing economic influence in the region, the need of the hour is to tap its potentiality sensibly and fully utilize its soft power in a diplomatic as well as strategic manner.

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