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No. 200

China's Soft Power in South Asia

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Singapore

8 June 2010

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ABSTRACT

China's rapid strategic elevation has been accompanied by conscious efforts to project a benign image of the Chinese nation and its culture. This has resulted in "soft power" assuming an increasingly important role in Chinese foreign policy. This paper examines the different aspects of Chinese soft power in South Asia, notably, cultural diplomacy, economic engagement and development assistance, in terms of their applications in individual countries of the region. Chinese initiatives in all these respects in the region have expanded sharply in recent years. This paper, however, argues that China's overarching strategy towards South Asia is a careful mix of soft and hard postures. It further contends that the nature and pattern of deployment of Chinese soft power tools in the region has varied considerably between India and other smaller countries in South Asia. Sino-Indian ties will not only decisively determine future Chinese strategy towards South Asia but will also impact the outlook for Chinese soft power in the region.

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China's Soft Power in South Asia

Introduction

China's emergence as a predominant entity in the global order has been accompanied by the country's conscious efforts to build and maintain a benign image. The 29th (and latest) Summer Olympics held in Beijing in 2008 is a pertinent example of China's efforts to project itself as a "charming" sovereign. The Olympics not only injected the "China element" into the world¹ but it also reflected Beijing's eagerness to pursue a diplomacy that accords high priority to persuasion and appeal. This new strand of thought (*xinsiwei*) has resulted in soft power becoming a critical strategic variable for China.

History points to the strength of a great power being in its "strength for war".² Machiavelli contended that fear was superior to love and therefore royalties should instil fear in people. This notion, however, has undergone fundamental changes. Notwithstanding the significance of hard power in international politics, countries are vigorously cultivating soft power as well. The conscious cultivation of a positive national image as a core objective of foreign policy (first witnessed during the First World War)³ is evident in Beijing's foreign policy posture. Soft power is central to China's strategic vision and underlines its sensitivity to external perceptions. The Chinese political leadership, academia and opinion-makers appreciate the importance of acquiring a benign national image to facilitate China's ascent as a global power⁴ by vanquishing the rather inglorious "dooming of democracy" perception that the country had acquired during the decades following the Second World War.⁵

The contemporary Chinese foreign policy, both at the global as well as the regional level, is distinct in its attempt to portray China as a peace-loving, people-based (*yiren weiben*),

¹ Pang Zhongying, "The Beijing Olympics and China's Soft Power", *Brookings*, 7 May 2009 at http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0904_olympics_pang.aspx. Accessed on 3 January 2010.

² Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: the Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. 3.

³ Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 4.

⁴ Sujian Guo and Shiping Hua, *New Dimensions of Chinese Foreign Policy* (UK: Lexington Books, 2007), p. 112.

⁵ David Sambaugh, "China Engages Asia: Reshaping the Regional Order", *International Security*, Vol. 29, No. 3, Winter 2004/5, p. 65.

cooperative, tolerant, confident and responsible power.⁶ Beijing is confident that soft power diplomacy will not only enhance its global status but it will also ensure peace and stability in the neighbourhood and encourage economic development. However, conscious encouragement of the “soft” component in foreign policy does not imply a concomitant dilution of the “hard” segment. Indeed, China’s foreign policy strategy in South Asia is a pertinent example of its judicious balance between the soft and hard strategies. However, the deployments of soft and hard powers in the region appear to have distinct country-specific applications. The application of soft power appears to be more intense in the relatively smaller countries of South Asia compared to India, which is not only the largest South Asian country but is also the most strategically critical entity at the South Asian systemic level. China’s overall foreign policy strategy for South Asia may well be categorized into “India” and “non-India” categories, with the soft and hard mixes differing between the two.

Though China is appropriately employing hard power in pursuing its contemporary foreign policy, its exercise of soft power in securing a benign image is becoming increasingly conspicuous. Thus its rapid strategic elevation in the global arena has been accompanied by the reinforcement of “peace and development” (*heping yu fazhan*),⁷ producing multiple cooperative relationships with neighbours ostensibly for allaying fears about an all-powerful and assertive China. This “peaceful development” strategy, envisioning creation of a network of friendly neighbours by deploying soft power, was articulated by President Hu Jintao in 2003.⁸

The academic literature on soft power in China’s foreign policy is steadily enlarging. Much of this literature pertains to Chinese soft power deployment in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia. The corresponding literature on China’s efforts in South Asia is much limited. This is surprising given the considerable strategic significance that South Asia has assumed in Chinese perspectives.

⁶ Guo and Hua, No. 4, p. 2.

⁷ Sambaugh, No. 5, p. 71.

⁸ Thomas Lum, Wayne M. Morrison and Bruce Vaughn, “China’s ‘Soft Power’ in Southeast Asia”, *CRS Report for Congress*, 4 January 2008 at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34310.pdf>. Accessed on 5 January 2010.

This paper reviews the main strands of Beijing's soft power efforts in South Asia with the objective of contributing to the scant body of research literature on the subject. The paper particularly focuses on the "non-India" part of South Asia as allusions to Chinese soft power—though not always in a structured manner—is occasionally noticed in the existing literature on China-India strategic relations. Such references, however, are rare for Chinese soft power with respect to the other countries of South Asia. The paper is divided into four parts. Part I provides conceptual illustrations of soft power while Part II reviews its application by China in South Asia. Part III briefly examines the Chinese hard power trajectory in the region. Part IV summarizes and concludes.

I. Soft Power: Conceptual Illustration

The rapid growth in the academic discourse on soft power highlights the increasing importance of the concept in strategic literature. Despite being considered an essentially "Western" concept, the notion of soft power dates back to as early as the seventh century and is attributed to the Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu.⁹ Later, in 1939, British realist E. H. Carr was cognizant of the concept as well when he distinguished international power in three categories: military, economic and the power of opinion.¹⁰ The latter is the manner and ability of countries to condition opinions of other nations. This arguably implies powers of attraction (or even persuasion) responsible for nurturing and conditioning public opinion.

In modern times, soft power gained currency in strategic parlance courtesy of Harvard academic Joseph Nye, Jr., from the late 1980s. The phrase was first used in his book, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Nye subsequently discussed soft power again in 2001, in *The Paradox of American Power*. The clearest conceptual exposition is perhaps available in his later work, *Soft Power: The Means to Success*.

⁹ For details, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soft_power. Accessed on 29 December 2009.

¹⁰ E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), p. 108.

Nye argues, “Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others.” He also adds, “Simply put, in behavioural terms soft power is attractive power.” But he excludes economics from the conceptual domain of soft power. He views national economic might as a coercive resource and clubs it with hard power by suggesting that both economic sanctions and military force are used for threatening recalcitrant states. Nye underpins culture, political values and national foreign policies as the main constituents of soft power. Other analysts, however, have included the power of economic attraction—“sticky” power—within the ambit of soft power, in the sense of it implying influence that is difficult to shed off once attracted to it.¹¹

Joshua Kurlantzick elaborates the concept further and explains that “soft power has changed” over time.¹² In the dynamic sense, soft power “means anything outside of the military and security realm, including not only popular culture and public diplomacy but also more coercive economic and diplomatic levers like aid and investment and participation in multilateral organizations”.¹³ Kurlantzick’s vision of soft power is more exhaustive, particularly in its inclusion of economic components. Both popular and contemporary academic expositions appear to agree on the larger scope of soft power. The Chinese use of soft power is consistent with this wider scope.

The literature on China’s soft power highlights the influence of culture, economics and politics in shaping such power. Beijing’s soft-power instruments range from culture to economic engagement. The political report of the 16th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Congress pointed out that “in today’s world, culture intertwines with economic and politics, demonstrating a more prominent position and role in the competition for comprehensive national power”.¹⁴ Beijing’s eagerness to harness soft power is reflected in several official policies in the copious use of phrases like “friendly and good-neighbourly” (*mu lin youhao*), “benevolence towards and partnerships with neighbours”

¹¹ W. R. Mead, “America’s Sticky Power”, *Foreign Policy*, March/April 2004, p. 48.

¹² Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive* (Yale University, 2007), p. 6.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mingjiang, Li, “Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity and Prospect”, *RSIS Working Paper* No. 165, 1 September 2008, p. 2.

(*yi lin wei shan, yu lin wei ban*) and “enrich, harmonize and reassure the neighbourhood” (*fu lin, mu lin, an lin*) in official documents.¹⁵

The official pronouncements have been accompanied by matching initiatives. Several confidence-building measures (CBMs), resolving existing border disputes, reassuring neighbours about benign intentions, enhanced economic engagement along with fawning of cultural outreach symbolize Beijing’s earnest pursuit of soft power diplomacy in Asia. These initiatives have arguably helped China in acquiring favourable perceptions in the region.¹⁶ Soft power is expected to remain an integral component of Chinese foreign policy aiming to engage its neighbourhood given the high priority it accords to maintaining stable relations with its neighbours. In this respect, South Asia has emerged as a strategically vital region for China.

II. Chinese Soft Power Initiatives in South Asia

The Chinese premier Li Peng had declared: “Along with the South Asian countries, China is ready to write a new chapter of friendly relations and cooperation.”¹⁷ Although Beijing has displayed notable maturity in its interactions with different countries in the region, its policy direction has been rather complex. Much of this is due to its uneasy relations with India—the largest South Asian country. Sino-Indian relations are characterized by occasional political friction and sustained economic engagement. Such dichotomy, however, is absent in China’s relations with other countries in the region.

Closer engagement with South Asia is a natural outcome of China’s “western development” scheme: a plan that the Chinese leadership hopes will correct the widening regional disparities within China.¹⁸ The region comprises eight countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka). Some of the

¹⁵ Mingjiang Li, “Explaining China’s Proactive Engagement in Asia”, in Shiping Tang, Mingjiang Li, Amitav Acharya, *Living with China: Regional States and China through Crises and Turning Points* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

¹⁶ According to a 2007 Pew research poll, only 29 per cent Indonesians and 27 per cent Malaysians had a favourable view of the United States while 83 per cent Malaysians and 65 per cent Indonesians had positive impressions of China. See *CRS Report for Congress*, No. 8, p. 2.

¹⁷ Tang et al., *Living with China: Regional States and China through Crises and Turning Points*, p. 159.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 18.

countries have common geographical borders with China, thereby making themselves important parameters in Beijing's foreign policy. The various soft-power tools that China has been employing for building a benign image in the region and "prospering together" are discussed in this section.

Cultural Diplomacy

China's rich, varied and ancient cultural heritage has emerged as a key instrument of its soft power. It has been actively exporting different aspects of its culture through an elaborate network of cultural enterprises, interactions and exchanges.

As is typical of China, its efforts to promote its culture overseas have been exhaustive and large-scale in their scope. The Sixth Asia Arts Festival held in China in 2004 was attended by almost 1,000 artists from 17 Asian countries and attracted 500,000 spectators.¹⁹ China's attempts to push the making of "convention on protection of cultural and artistic diversity" and issuing the "Shanghai Declaration" during the seventh annual ministerial meeting of the International Network on Cultural Policy²⁰ are distinctly impressive. Its cultural advances aim to neutralize adverse perceptions that visualize it as a military threat. The efforts are producing encouraging results, with the number of foreign students in China increasing from 36,000 to 110,000 over the past decade and inflow of foreign tourists rising to 17 million per year even before the Beijing Olympics.²¹

Confucius Institutes promoting Chinese language and culture in different parts of the world have been key mediums of China's soft power. There are expected to be 500 such institutes by the end of 2010.²² They have been active in South Asia too. Professor Jiang Yinlian, Director of the Confucius Institute in Bangladesh, mentions that "learning

¹⁹ "Culture Minister on China's Foreign Exchange", at http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200412/21/eng20041221_168135.html. Accessed on 15 January 2010.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Joseph Nye, "The Olympics and Soft Power", 24 August 2008 at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-nye/the-olympics-and-chinese_b_120909.html. Accessed on 26 December 2009.

²² "500 Confucius Institutes Worldwide by 2010", at <http://sars.china.com.cn/english/education/200268.htm>. Accessed on 28 December 2009.

language is the best way of building strong relationship and minimizing gap with people of different countries as it works like a bridge”.²³

China’s efforts to engage the smaller countries of the South Asian region are evident from the establishment of a Confucius Institute in Nepal in June 2007.²⁴ The Institute aims to strengthen bilateral relations in the realm of education, culture and tourism. A China Study Center has also come up in Jhapa (east Nepal) to help local entrepreneurs to do business with China.²⁵

The Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka is another example of education (primarily through the promotion of the Mandarin language) being employed as a tool for building better ties. This particular institute has succeeded in enlisting Chinese culture on the credit award system of the university.²⁶ A Confucius Institute has also been established in Afghanistan with the Chinese ambassador to Afghanistan Yang Houlan hailing the initiative: “It will not only satisfy the growing need of Afghan young people in learning Chinese, but also make contribution to Sino-Afghan social and culture exchanges, and further help to enhance economic cooperation between the two friendly neighbours.”²⁷ In a bid to further deepen cultural and educational links in South Asia, China Radio International (CRI), China’s state-owned overseas broadcaster, is launching on-air Confucius Institutes in the Maldives, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal.²⁸

While Confucius Institutes are mushrooming in the rest of South Asia, their growth and spread of the Chinese language has run into difficulties in India.²⁹ The two pilot centres

²³ “Confucius Institute Builds Bridge between Bangladesh and China”, *Xinhua*, 16 December 2009. See <http://www.chinese.cn>. Accessed on 2 January 2009.

²⁴ “Nepal welcomes first Confucius Institute”, *Xinhua News Agency*, 14 June 2007, at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/education/213859.htm>. Accessed on 1 March 2010.

²⁵ “New Chapter of China Study Center Established”, at <http://np.china-embassy.org/eng/ChinaNepal/t621153.htm>. Accessed on 28 December 2009.

²⁶ “The Confucius Institute at the University of Kelaniya Throws a Party Entitled ‘Welcoming New Students and Celebrating the New Year’”, *Hanban*, 24 December 2009. See <http://english.hanban.edu.cn/content.php?id=5273>. Accessed on 18 January 2010.

²⁷ “Afghanistan to set up Confucius Institute”, *CHINA.ORG.CN.*, 10 January 2008. See <http://www.china.org.cn/english/international/238804.htm>. Accessed on 19 January 2010.

²⁸ Confucius Institute at CRI, 10 December 2009. See <http://english.cri.cn/7046/2009/12/10/167s534682.htm>. Accessed on 18 January 2010.

²⁹ “India oversensitive to anything related to China”, *People’s Daily Online*, 10 October 2009 at <http://www.peopleforum.cn/viewthread.php?tid=3220>. Accessed on 1 March 2010.

in the Vellore Institute of Technology in Tamil Nadu and Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) have made little progress. Preparations, however, are underway for building on-air Confucius classrooms in India to promote Chinese culture and language.³⁰

Beijing has been offering generous scholarships to South Asian students for studying Chinese language as well as pursuing other studies and research in China. The China Scholarship Council (CSC) has a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. The collaboration plans to identify about 1,000 college teachers or scientific researchers to pursue doctoral degree studies in Chinese institutions of higher learning.³¹ While China awards approximately 23 scholarships to Sri Lanka annually,³² the Maldives has also been getting a fair share of these scholarships since 2001. Through these initiatives, China has been able to promote itself as a centre for higher learning in medicine, science and technology. This aspect of China's soft power is visible with respect to India as well, given the agreements reached by both countries "to consolidate and strengthen mutual cooperation in the field of education".³³

Chinese cultural expressions have captured the fancy of the entire world with its literature, art, films, fashion, martial arts and cuisine, successfully increasing China's popularity outside its borders. China has not spared any effort in showcasing its culture and has undertaken numerous cultural exchanges every year. Chinese writers, actors, filmmakers and artists are combining traditional arts with modern ideas to create new expressions for China's cultural diplomacy. Chinese novelist Gao Xingjian became the first litterateur from China to win the Nobel Prize in literature in 2000. The ability of Chinese movies to transcend cultural barriers was evident when "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" became the highest-grossing non-English-language film. Actress Gong

³⁰ Confucius Institute at CRI, 10 December 2009, No. 28.

³¹ "China Scholarship Council (CSC) signed MOU between the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan", 30 May 2005. See <http://en.csc.edu.cn/News/da715f360f75496082ade5429f91f262.shtml>. Accessed on 19 January 2010.

³² "Education in China", available at <http://www.embbiz.net/com/slemb/2016e.html>. Accessed on 19 January 2010.

³³ "Documents signed between India and China during Prime Minister Vajpayee's to China", 23 June 2003, at http://www.indianembassy.org.cn/press/pm_docu.htm. Accessed on 1 March 2010.

Li and painters such as Fang Lijun and Zhang Xiaogang have received worldwide critical acclaim.

While all these potent channels for the export of Chinese culture (including Chinese cuisine) have succeeded in casting strong Chinese footprints in South Asia, their influence has also been reinforced by the presence of the Chinese diaspora in the region. The Chinese who have settled in different parts of South Asia are participating actively in spreading Chinese culture and consolidating a benign image for China. The strong emphasis on peace, stability and regional harmony in China's foreign policy, which has been endorsed by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) as well,³⁴ has produced a plethora of state-sponsored initiatives, including involving the diaspora, to showcase a "new" China to the rest of the world, including South Asia.

Several agreements for facilitating cultural exchanges and Track II diplomacy initiatives are being taken up with individual South Asian countries. An agreement of cooperation was entered into by Bangladesh and China in November 1979, following which an implementation programme is being signed every three years to strengthen bilateral exchanges and cooperation in culture and sports.³⁵ The Bangladesh, China Executive Program for Cultural Exchanges aims to encourage mutual visits by performing art groups, cultural delegations and artists,³⁶ with both countries planning to further strengthen such exchanges in culture, press and publication, education and sports. China's Track II diplomacy with Nepal has resulted in extensive interfaces between scholars and think tanks from both sides.³⁷ China has been encouraging not only official interactions but also private visits by its political leaders, journalists and academics to Nepal as part of its public diplomacy.

China's relations with Pakistan have been cordial for several decades, with a cultural agreement signed in 1965 paving the way for cultural exchanges for several years now.

³⁴ Tang et al., p. 39, No. 17.

³⁵ "China and Bangladesh", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 25 August 2003. See <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjlb/zzjg/yzs/gjlb/2681/t15842.htm>. Accessed on 28 December 2009.

³⁶ "Bangladesh, China sign Executive program for Cultural Exchanges", 15 December 2008. See http://en.youth.cn/yculture/cnews/200812/t20081215_836688.htm. Accessed on 20 January 2010.

³⁷ Nihar Nayak, "Nepal: New 'Strategic Partner' of China?" Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses at http://www.idsa.in/idsastrategiccomments/NepalNewStrategicPartnerofChina_NNayak_300309. Accessed on 28 December 2009.

Subsequently, nine such plans have been signed by the two countries.³⁸ The latest initiative is an exchange programme for 2010–2011 signed in August 2009 on the sidelines of the Asian Cultural Minister's Roundtable at Ordos, Inner Mongolia.³⁹ China and Pakistan are also currently proposing to revive the Silk Route to promote commerce and connect people, regions and cultures in South Asia.⁴⁰

Cultural exchanges between China and Sri Lanka were facilitated through an institutional agreement signed in August 1979,⁴¹ following which a supplementary agreement of 2008 encourages regular movements of artistes between the two countries. Sports have also been China's way of engaging the Maldives. Both countries also signed an MOU in 2008 to build mutual understanding and friendship among their sporting communities.⁴² An Agreement of Cultural Cooperation (signed in 1965) also exists between China and Afghanistan, which was formalized along with the Boundary Protocol, Agreement of Economic and Technological Cooperation.⁴³

Apart from these formal agreements between China and the various South Asian countries, there are regular visits, and student and cultural exchange programmes between China and these countries. However, while formal Chinese cultural ties in the form of formal agreements exist with Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and

³⁸ "China and Pakistan", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 23 October 2010. See <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/yys/gjlb/2757/t16110.htm>. Accessed on 20 January 2010.

³⁹ "Pakistan and China sign Cultural Exchange Programme", Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Culture. See http://202.83.164.26/wps/portal/Mocul!/ut/p/c0/04_SB8K8xLLM9MSSzPy8xBz9CP0os_hQN68AZ3dnIwML82BTayNXTz9jE0NfQwNfA_2CbEdFAA2MC_Y!/?PC_7_UFJPCGC20OUQE02ET9FMPJ30O2_WCM_CONTEXT=/wps/wcm/connect/MoculCL/ministry/highlights/iap-09-china. Accessed on 20 January 2010.

⁴⁰ Ambassador Masood Khan's opening statement on "Reviving the Great Silk Routes: Role of China and Pakistan as Ambassadors of Peace", Tsinghua University, Beijing, 14 May 2009. See http://www.pakembassy.cn/statement_5.html. Accessed on 29 December 2009.

⁴¹ "Cultural Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka". See http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_exchange/2003-12/31/content_45322.htm. Accessed on 22 January 2010.

⁴² "Maldives and China sign Memorandum of Understanding on Sports Cooperation", 26 May 2008 at http://www.maldivesinfo.gov.mv/home/files/bulletinx_det.php?id_news=998. Accessed on 1 March 2010.

⁴³ "People's Republic of China-Afghanistan Relations". See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People's_Republic_of_China_%E2%80%93_Afghanistan_relations. Accessed on 22 January 2010.

Afghanistan, cultural links with Bhutan and the Maldives seem relatively less in comparison.

Economic Engagement

The use of economic tools as foreign policy instruments has two dimensions. While economic sanctions restricting trade and other economic exchanges reflect the deployment of “hard” power, the “softer” option of providing development assistance through grants and loans enables donor countries to develop benefactor images in the recipients. Efforts to facilitate bilateral or regional trade and cross-border investments also serve similar purposes.

China’s economic engagement with South Asia has been steadily increasing. How do the South Asian countries perceive the benefits from such engagement? China’s economic “appeal” appears to have increased sharply after the global financial crisis of 2008. Its ability to maintain economic growth at higher rates than the rest of the world has sent out positive signals about China’s ability to sustain economic activity, notwithstanding setbacks in its export prospects.⁴⁴ China’s economic success has also encouraged the pronouncement of new growth paradigms such as the “Beijing Consensus”.⁴⁵ There is little doubt that China will vigorously pursue greater economic engagement with its Asian neighbours in the days to come by exploiting the positive perceptions regarding its growth and development.

While China’s economic ties with Southeast and Northeast Asia are extensively researched, its ties with South Asia are less explored in comparison. Many argue that it is

⁴⁴ Referring specifically to China, World Bank economists Shahid Yusuf and Kauru Nabeshima commented that “no other country has averaged a growth rate more than nine per cent over a 25-year period”. See Dustin, R. Turin, “China offers Alternative Development Model in ‘Beijing Consensus’”, 2 January 2010. See <http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/108/china-offers-alternative-development-model-in-beijing-consensus#>. Accessed on 26 January 2010.

⁴⁵ American economist and journalist Joshua Cooper Ramo has developed a development model in a paper published by the British Foreign Policy Center. This new model recognizes that each country faces a unique set of challenges and therefore requires unique solutions. The China model is founded on three broad ideas: the importance of innovation, a rejection of per capita GDP, and a fundamental belief in self-determination. For details see <http://www.studentpulse.com/articles/108/china-offers-alternative-development-model-in-beijing-consensus#>. Accessed on 26 January 2010.

the economics that has conditioned China's image as a benign entity⁴⁶ and its engagements, with the Southeast and Northeast parts of Asia are pertinent examples. China's emphasis on creating a stable regional environment, as argued earlier, is partly for increasing its economic growth. Maintaining the rapid rate of advance by the Chinese economy requires access to new overseas markets for tapping new consumer segments as well as accessing energy and raw materials. Connecting with South Asia through economics fulfils these objectives as part of China's western development strategy.⁴⁷ Several parts of the relatively less developed Western China are in close proximity to South Asia. Xinjiang borders Afghanistan and Pakistan, while Tibet has contiguous borders with Nepal, Bhutan and the northeastern part of India. The compelling objective of developing its west has motivated China to cultivate stronger economic links with neighbouring South Asia.

Trade and Investment

In the South Asian region, China's economic engagement has been most intense with India. This is expected, given India's economic prominence in the region. While history has complicated the Sino-Indian relationship with political impediments continuing to affect the overall quality of bilateral ties, economic engagement, particularly in recent years, has been remarkably robust. This reflects the pragmatism characterizing the relationship, which has not suffered serious setbacks despite provocations. Institutional efforts to promote bilateral friendship are evident through initiatives such as declaration of China-India years of friendship (2006) and tourism (2007) respectively. The overall flavour of the relationship is being termed as "strategic" and "global",⁴⁸ with high-level visits and exchanges becoming more frequent. A particularly notable initiative that has the potential of developing into a momentous CBM is the Joint Study Group on Trade

⁴⁶ Thomas Lum, Wayne M. Morrison and Bruce Vaughn, "China's 'Soft Power' in Southeast Asia", *CRS Report for Congress*, 4 January 2008 at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RL34310.pdf>. Accessed on 6 May 2009.

⁴⁷ Li Mingjiang, "China's Proactive Engagement in Asia: Economics, Politics and Interactions", *RSIS Working Paper* No. 134, 30 July 2007, pp. 2–3.

⁴⁸ Li Xing, "Partnership 'Is of Global Significance'", *China Daily* (Beijing), 22 November 2006, p. 1.

and Economic Cooperation set up in March 2004.⁴⁹ The report of the group submitted in 2005 provided various suggestions for trade facilitation and can be the building block for a preferential trade agreement between the two countries.

Sino-Indian economic ties have been strengthened by the booming bilateral trade. China has emerged as India's largest merchandise trade partner while India has grown into one of China's top ten trade partners.⁵⁰ The bilateral trade in 2008–2009 was US\$40.6 billion, with Indian imports being the main driver of the robust trade with China, accounting for more than 10 per cent of India's total imports.⁵¹ The enhanced exchange of goods has been accompanied by an increase in cross-border capital flows as well.⁵² Leading Indian firms, particularly IT companies such as Infosys, Satyam, APTECH, NIIT and Reliance Industries, are working out of China while Chinese companies such as Huawei Technologies, ZTE, TCL and Haier are functioning from India.

China and Pakistan not only share strong political relations but have also good economic ties as well. Sino-Pak trade reached US\$7 billion in 2008 despite the economic deceleration following the global financial crisis. The free trade agreement (FTA) signed by the two countries in November 2006 has provided greater access for Pakistani products into the Chinese market.⁵³ The FTA also precludes investments, including investment promotion and protection, expropriation, compensation for damages and losses, and dispute settlement within its purview. Islamabad is looking forward to larger Chinese investments, particularly in its energy sector for increasing supply of electricity.⁵⁴ Moving beyond the FTA, a free trade zone (FTZ) between China and

⁴⁹ Swaran Singh, "India and China: Confidence Building through Crises", in Tang et al., *Living with China*, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Amitendu Palit & Shoukie Nawani, "India-China Trade: Explaining the Imbalance", *ISAS Working Paper* No. 95, 26 October 2009. See <http://www.isasnu.org/events/workingpapers/94.pdf>. Accessed on 26 January 2010.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Embassy of India, Beijing. See <http://www.indianembassy.org.cn/DynamicContent.aspx?MenuId=3&SubMenuId=0>. Accessed on 1 February 2010.

⁵³ "Free Trade Agreement". See <http://www.commerce.gov.pk/PCFTA.asp>. Accessed on 1 February 2010.

⁵⁴ "Pakistan Seeks Chinese Energy Investment", UPI.com, 13 October 2009. See http://www.upi.com/Science_News/Resource-Wars/2009/10/13/Pakistan-seeks-Chinese-energy-investment/UPI-27681255472624/. Accessed on 28 December 2009.

Pakistan will provide a bigger boost to trade in goods and services as well as investments.⁵⁵

Chinese corporate presence in Pakistan is steadily increasing, with China Mobile planning to invest US\$500 million in Pakistan to build local networks and telecom infrastructure for its Zong brand. This is in addition to China Mobile's extant investment of US\$1.7 billion in Pakistan, which has reportedly created 41,700 job opportunities.⁵⁶ There are at present about 10,000 resident Chinese personnel engaged in various businesses in Pakistan, with economic engagement between the two countries beginning to span a diverse range of sectors, including telecommunication, engineering, port development, power generation, construction and mining.⁵⁷

China's economic ties with Bangladesh, though on a promising trajectory, are yet to assume the scale of its ties with Pakistan. Bangladesh is China's third largest trade partner in the region with bilateral trade estimated at US\$3.2 billion in 2006. Under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Free Trade Agreement (AFTA), China removed tariff barriers on eighty-four key commodity exports from Bangladesh. Efforts are on to slash tariffs on jute and textile exports—Bangladesh's major foreign exchange earners—as well.⁵⁸

China-Sri Lanka bilateral trade has also been picking up, with such trade amounting to US\$1.7 billion in 2008. Beijing is considered an involved collaborator in the country's development, given that Chinese companies run “at very high efficiency and at the lowest costs”.⁵⁹ Organizations such as the Sri Lanka Business Council have been active in pushing trade facilitation between the two countries. China's key involvement in Sri

⁵⁵ See “China, Pakistan Service Trade Agreement to take effect Next Month”, *People's Daily China*, 10 September 2009. See <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90884/6754303.html>. Accessed on 1 February 2010.

⁵⁶ “Pakistan Welcomes More Chinese Telecom Investment”, 18 February 2009. See <http://www.chinatechnews.com/2009/02/18/8855-pakistan-welcomes-more-chinese-telecom-investment/print/>. Accessed on 28 December 2009.

⁵⁷ Ambassador Masood Khan's opening statement, No. 40.

⁵⁸ “China Grants over USD 10 mn Aid to Bangladesh”, *The Economic Times*, 23 July 2007. See http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/International_Business/China_grants_over_USD_10_mn_aid_to_Bangladesh/articleshow/2226465.cms. Accessed on 1 February 2010.

⁵⁹ “‘Made by China’ stamp on S Asia”, *Today* (Singapore), 17 February 2010, p. 17.

Lanka's economy (as discussed later), however, has been in form of providing development assistance for building infrastructure and enabling reconstruction

Beijing's economic involvement with the rest of the countries in the region is relatively limited. China-Maldives bilateral trade is at around US\$18 million, with Chinese exports occupying 90 per cent of the trade.⁶⁰ A preferential zero tariff agreement between the two countries from 1 February 2009 has facilitated trade.⁶¹ China's trade and investments with Nepal are also on the rise while its economic ties with Bhutan are much less,⁶² as India continues to remain a major factor affecting bilateral ties.

Development Assistance and Infrastructure Growth

Development assistance is integral to China's economic engagement of South Asia. Pakistan has been a major recipient of such assistance in energy, infrastructure and mining for projects taken up under the Pakistan-China Joint Five Year Economic and Trade Cooperation Plan.⁶³ Beijing's development assistance to Pakistan has increased by 50 per cent, from 100 million yuan (about US\$14 million) to 150 million yuan (about US\$21 million).⁶⁴ China's assistance to Nepal has also increased to Rs 1.5 billion—from the earlier Rs 1 billion—per year, with the resources focusing on the development of hydropower, roads and tourism.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Embassy of Maldives in China. See <http://www.maldivesembassy.cn/Maldives&china.asp>. Accessed on 2 February 2010.

⁶¹ Ministry of Economic Development, Republic of Maldives. See <http://74.125.153.132/search?q=cache:XOafv-iWfUQJ:www.trade.gov.mv/%3Fid%3D22+China%27s+bilateral+agreements+with+Maldives&cd=6&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=sg>. Accessed on 8 February 2010.

⁶² "China and Bhutan", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 23 October 2003. See <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg/yzs/gjlb/2686/t15851.htm>. Accessed on 4 February 2010.

⁶³ "PM Gilani Concludes Successful Visit to China", Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 17 October 2009. See <http://pk.chineseembassy.org/eng/zb/gx/t620978.htm>. Accessed on 2 February 2010.

⁶⁴ "China Rains Aid Ahead of Nepal PM's Visit", *Thaindian News*, 19 April 2009. See http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/business/china-rains-aid-ahead-of-nepal-pms-visit_100181708.html. Accessed on 4 February 2010.

⁶⁵ "China to increase its assistance to Nepal by 50 pc", *nepalnews.com*, 28 October 2009. See <http://www.nepalnews.com/main/index.php/news-archive/3-business-a-economy/2109-china-to-increase-its-assistance-to-nepal-.html>. Accessed on 4 February 2010.

China has been eager to demonstrate its support and empathy for the South Asian people, particularly at times of severe hardship inflicted by natural disasters. It donated US\$1 million for relief and reconstruction after cyclone Sidr hit Bangladesh in 2007⁶⁶ and had also offered aid for reconstruction in the Maldives after the catastrophic tsunami in 2004. The Maldives continues to be supported by China in improving its capacity to deal with natural disasters.⁶⁷ In a similar vein, during the tsunami, apart from providing medical assistance, China also provided urgent food supplies to Sri Lanka.⁶⁸

Like several other parts of the developing world, South Asia is deficient in infrastructure facilities. Intra-regional trade and commerce has failed to flourish on account of poor connectivity within the region, particularly road networks. Deficiencies in terms of good road networks, developed sea ports, advanced telecommunications and adequate electricity are noticeable in almost all parts of the region. Individual country governments have been facing difficulties in addressing these infrastructure deficits due to the paucity of resources and they have been relying significantly on private and external investments, and development assistance for improving infrastructure. China has responded positively in this regard and is becoming a major player in infrastructure development in South Asia.

Almost all countries in the region have witnessed Chinese involvement in ongoing infrastructure projects. Beijing has expressed its willingness to finance five projects involving more than US\$1 billion following Bangladesh's request for US\$5.1 billion in assistance to implementing 28 projects in the telecommunication, infrastructure, energy and health sectors.⁶⁹ China is also supporting infrastructure development in the

⁶⁶ "Bangladesh-People's Republic of China Relations. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh_%E2%80%93_People's_Republic_of_China_relations. Accessed on 2 February 2010.

⁶⁷ "Hu Jintao Holds Talks with Maldivian President". See <http://dm.china-embassy.org/eng/zyxw/t272980.htm>. Accessed on 4 February 2010.

⁶⁸ "WFP lauds Landmark Chinese Aid Shipment for Sri Lankan Tsunami Victims", World Food Programme. See <http://one.wfp.org/english/?n=326&formCategory=Press%20Release&elemId=id2516&key=1335>. 4 February 2010.

⁶⁹ Rejaul Karim Byron, "China offers \$1 b for 5 Projects in Bangladesh", *The Daily Star*, 27 August 2009. See <http://www.asianewsnet.net/news.php?id=7488&sec=2>. Accessed on 28 December 2009.

Maldives⁷⁰ and reconstruction efforts in Sri Lanka. Chinese investment is substantial in Sri Lanka's infrastructure, including the much-discussed sea port in Hambantota being built by China Harbour Engineering.⁷¹ The strategic location of the port on the southern tip of Sri Lanka is expected to increase China's access to commercial oil routes in the region. China is also financing the coal-fired Norochcholai power with a loan of US\$891 million to be serviced over 20 years at the nominal cost of 2.0 per cent.⁷² Chinese companies are investing in Sri Lanka's special economic zones, with Huawei Technologies involved in Sri Lanka's telecom expansion in a major way.⁷³

Further westward in the region, Pakistan's railway development is progressing with active Chinese support following an agreement signed in 2007 between Pakistan Railways and Dong Fang Electric Supply Corporation to link Havellian and Khunjerab.⁷⁴ Better rail connectivity within Pakistan works to China's strategic advantage by providing it faster access to the energy-rich Central Asia and Persian Gulf states.⁷⁵ Similar strategic considerations coupled with the determination to cultivate a benign image in the region have encouraged China to pursue infrastructure building in Afghanistan as well. China-Afghanistan economic ties have begun blossoming, with China lending substantive support to Afghanistan's reconstruction. The US\$3.5 billion investment in the Aynak copper field and affiliated projects of a 400-MW power plant and rail connection from Tajikistan to Afghanistan to Pakistan's Gwadar Port are major initiatives in Afghanistan's reconstruction.⁷⁶ China has provided almost US\$180 million in economic aid to Afghanistan and written off all matured debts that the latter owed

⁷⁰ K. V. Prasad, "Nasheed Sworn in Maldives President", *The Hindu*, 12 November 2008. See <http://www.thehindu.com/2008/11/12/stories/2008111256831700.htm>. Accessed on 22 January 2010.

⁷¹ "China Funds Sri Lanka Hambantota Port Development Project", *MarineBuzz.com*, 2 November 2007. See <http://www.marinebuzz.com/2007/11/02/china-funds-sri-lanka-hambantota-port-development-project>. Accessed on 2 February 2010.

⁷² "Sri Lanka gives China first Exclusive Investment Zone", Reuters India, 1 July 2009. See <http://in.reuters.com/article/southAsiaNews/idINIndia-40731520090701?pageNumber=2&virtualBrandChannel=0>. Accessed on 2 February 2010.

⁷³ "Huawei Signs US\$40 million Deal with Sri Lankan Firm", *Xinhua News Agency*, 10 April 2005. See <http://www.china.org.cn/english/scitech/125372.htm>. Accessed on 2 February 2010.

⁷⁴ Syed Fazl-e-Haider, "China-Pakistan rail link on horizon", *Asia Times*, 24 February 2007. See http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/IB24Df02.html. Accessed 22 January 2010.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ambassador Masood Khan's opening statement, No. 40.

China.⁷⁷ Chinese companies like ZTE and Huawei have ventured into Afghanistan's telecom sector in collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Communications.⁷⁸ Chinese presence is also noted in the Parwan province irrigation project, which restored water supply to Parwan and also assisted in resurrecting hospitals in Kabul and Kandahar.⁷⁹

China's involvement in infrastructure development in the Himalayan kingdom of Nepal includes a civil service hospital, a polytechnic institute in Banepa, and the improvement and expansion of the Nepal Television Metro Channel Station.⁸⁰ Apart from building roads and highways, China is also engaged in building a rail link connecting the Tibetan capital of Lhasa to Khasa on the Sino-Nepal border to facilitate Nepal's economic engagement with China.⁸¹ Nepal intends to seek further Chinese assistance in its hydropower development.⁸²

III. China's Hard Power Trajectory in South Asia

Both soft and hard powers are potent instruments employed by nations to achieve strategic gains. Nye argues that the soft and hard powers are not mutually exclusive and are inter-related "because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one's purpose by affecting the behaviour of others".⁸³ The Chinese example vindicates Nye's postulate, with Beijing employing both soft and "not-so-soft" initiatives in South Asia, particularly through defence and security cooperation efforts.

⁷⁷ "Remarks of Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Song Tao at the Special Conference on Afghanistan convened under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 27 March 2009. See <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t555299.htm>. Accessed on 8 February 2010.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Nicklas Norling, "The Emerging China-Afghanistan Relationship", Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 14 May 2008. See <http://www.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/4858>. Accessed on 4 February 2010.

⁸⁰ Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kathmandu. See <http://www.mofa.gov.np/bilateral/nepal-china.php>. Accessed on 4 February 2010.

⁸¹ Sudha Ramachandran, "Nepal to get China Rail link", *Asia Times*, 15 May 2008. See http://www.atimes.com/atimes/South_Asia/JE15Df01.html. Accessed on 22 January 2010.

⁸² Anil Giri, "Nepal to Seek Investment in Hydro, Infrastructure", *The Kathmandu Post*, 23 December 2009. See <http://www.kantipuronline.com/2009/12/23/top-stories/Nepal-to-look-invest-in-hydro-infrastructure/304952/>. Accessed on 28 December 2009.

⁸³ Nye, p. 7.

China's emphasis on building cultural links, people-to-people contacts and economic engagement with South Asia has been accompanied by its inclination to ink bilateral pacts on friendship, security and defence. The recent Sino-Nepal friendship draft treaty re-emphasizes China's policy of "non-interference" and "non-aggression", as well as its respect for Nepal's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Nepal is expected to recognize the "One China" policy and not allow its territory to be used for "anti-China" activities. Despite being christened a friendship treaty, the pact contains multiple components of a wholesome strategic agreement that reiterates Nepal's sovereignty in conjunction with China's national interests.

Since 1998, China and Bhutan have a bilateral agreement for maintaining peace on their common border. In the agreement, China affirms its respect for Bhutan's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and both sides aim to build ties based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence.⁸⁴ China's strategic bonds with Pakistan also have noticeable elements of the not-so-soft variety. Military collaboration between the two countries has intensified, along with an increase in bilateral economic engagement and China's disbursement of greater development assistance to Pakistan. Both countries are collaborating closely to upgrade military and weaponry systems. In this respect, the engagement between Beijing and Islamabad is of an intense quality not seen between China and other countries of the region.

Security and defence cooperation are visible between Beijing and Bangladesh as well. Apart from the Defence Cooperation Agreement of 2002, which includes military training and defence production, China has assisted Dhaka in establishing a missile launch pad near the Chittagong port.⁸⁵ Bangladesh is also reportedly a major buyer of China-made weapons.⁸⁶ Sri Lanka also has defence ties with China, as is evident from its US\$37.6 million classified arms deal with Chinese defence manufacturer Poly

⁸⁴ Mohan Balaji, "In Bhutan, China and India Collide", *Asia Times*, 12 January 2008. See <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/JA12Ad02.html>. Accessed on 5 February 2010.

⁸⁵ "Bangladesh-People's Republic of China Relations". See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bangladesh_%E2%80%93_People's_Republic_of_China_relations. Accessed on 5 February 2010.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

Technologies.⁸⁷ The deal aims to supply ammunition and ordnance to the Sri Lankan army and navy, as well as varied small arms for its defence forces.

The China-Afghanistan Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations came into force in August 2008.⁸⁸ The pact reaffirms China's commitment to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and to support Afghanistan's reconstruction and journey to peace. The agreement is an attempt to expand bilateral relations by promoting greater engagement between the two governments, parliaments, political parties, military forces and people, maintaining high-level exchanges and deepening cooperation on economy, trade, agriculture, education and public health.⁸⁹ China's defence ties with the Maldives, however, are practically non-existent.⁹⁰

With respect to India, China has been trying to work out “good working relations”—despite outstanding contentious issues—to primarily facilitate buoyant economic ties. China and India do not have a framework for military or defence collaborations except for occasional joint military exercises. Bilateral defence ties, similar to those that China has with Pakistan or Bangladesh, are unlikely to materialize between China and India in near future, given that India is another major power in the region with outstanding issues to settle with China. Both countries are core strategic imperatives for each other as well as for the extra-regional powers. Nonetheless, China and India have been largely pragmatic about their geographical proximity and the adverse (for example, political ties) as well as favourable outcomes (for example, economics) that neighbourliness has produced. Both countries signed in 2008 a joint document outlining a shared vision for the twenty-first century that entails collaborating for greater regional cooperation and

⁸⁷ “China in Sri Lanka”, *Intel Brief*, 7 May 2008. See <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Communities-and-Partners/Partners/Detail/?lng=en&id=88330>. Accessed on 5 February.

⁸⁸ “Treaty of China-Afghanistan Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations takes Effect”, The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, 15 August 2008. See http://www.npc.gov.cn/englishnpc/news/Supervision/2008-08/15/content_1442867.htm. Accessed on 8 February 2010.

⁸⁹ Peoples' Republic of China-Afghanistan Relations, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/People's_Republic_of_China_%E2%80%93_Afghanistan_relations. Accessed on 8 February 2010.

⁹⁰ “Maldives-China Relations”, Embassy of Maldives in China, <http://www.maldivesembassy.cn/Maldives&china.asp>. Accessed on 8 February 2010.

integration between Asian nations.⁹¹ They are working together within the G20 grouping as well as proposing reforms to the international financial architecture and seeking to promote the building of a stable international economic and financial order. The two countries have also been collaborating on climate change.⁹²

IV. By Way of Conclusion

A clear shift favouring the greater use of soft power has been discernable in the direction of Chinese foreign policy since the mid-1990s. The generous application of soft-power instruments has enabled China to project a positive image critical to its efforts to build a modern, democratic and “harmonious society”.⁹³ South Asia has not been an exception from this approach, though the soft-power initiatives have varied across the region.

For China, however, the greater application of soft power has not implied discontinuation of the relatively harder power elements. Cultural and economic interfaces have tempered the “aggressive” flavour associated with the rise of China as a great power. But China has simultaneously maintained military and defence collaborations with several countries of South Asia. While it is hard to say whether such a strategy has been influenced by an inclination to marginalize India’s strategic clout in the region, there is little doubt that both the scale and scope of China’s efforts to engage South Asia have been much greater than comparative initiatives by India.

China’s strategic engagement has varied across the region, with such engagement being more intense with certain countries. The China-Pakistan partnership, for example, has flourished to acquire multiple dimensions, ranging from cultural diplomacy and economic engagement to security cooperation. Beijing’s relationship with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal also appear to be on trajectories broadly similar to those with Pakistan. China’s bilateral engagements with all these countries in recent years have

⁹¹ “India, China ink Friendship Treaty”, theTrumpet.com, 16 January 2008. See <http://www.thetrumpet.com/?q=4697.2963.0.0>. Accessed on 5 February 2010.

⁹² Zhang Yan, “Bonding at Copenhagen Cemented India-China Relations”, Outlook India.com, 18 January 2010. See <http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?263645>. Accessed on 8 March 2010.

⁹³ Chen Qimao, “New Approaches in China’s Foreign Policy: The Post-Cold War Era”, *Asian Survey*, Vol. 33, No. 3, March 1993.

intensified not only due to the liberal deployment of soft power but also to the selective application of hard power.

The China-Afghanistan relationship in this context needs to be viewed differently. Whether through development assistance or infrastructure building, China has been making serious efforts to connect with Afghanistan. Though the efforts are primarily directed at resurrecting a war-ravaged Afghanistan and are therefore essentially of the soft variety, Afghanistan's strategic relevance is expected to encourage China to deepen defence ties as well. In contrast, China's relations with the Maldives and Bhutan appear to be entirely soft and limited in scope.

China's South Asia policy is part of a carefully crafted long-term strategy that visualizes it playing a leadership role in both the regional and global spheres. In this respect, while its approach towards the non-India part of South Asia reveals an intertwining of both soft and hard powers, its interfaces with India cannot be treated qualitatively similar to these approaches. India is not only the largest South Asian country and a powerful strategic entity in the region, but it is also an economic powerhouse with centuries of civilizational links to China. China is expected to continue to rely on hard power, while employing soft power at the same time, in its efforts to play a positive and constructive role in South Asia. Both these aspects of Chinese foreign policy are expected to manifest in larger proportions with respect to Pakistan—an “all-weather friend” of China. China is expected to maintain a similar “hard and soft” mix in its foreign policy towards the rest of the countries in the region. However, the mix is likely to be significantly determined by China's evolving ties with India. Sino-Indian ties need to be looked at in a manner distinct from the rest of Sino-South Asian ties. Indeed, the future course of Chinese soft power in South Asia will depend significantly on the changes taking place in China's strategic priorities for the region following changes in its own equations with India.

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