



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## Soft Power in India's Foreign Policy to China and South East Asia

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### Abstract

Soft power and cultural diplomacy have become hot topics of International relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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. 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 spiritual as well as material 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 connections with the countries in the Asian continent, 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'. 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.

Key Words: soft power, cultural diplomacy, Act East Policy, cultural connect, religious connection.

## Introduction

Soft power and cultural diplomacy have become hot topics of International relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

## Concept of Soft Power

In recent years, in this growing interdependent world, besides hard power, the concept of 'soft power' has gained much popularity throughout the world and has also become an important factor determining any country's status and identity in the world. Cambridge Dictionary of English defines 'power' as the 'ability to control people and events',<sup>i</sup> as per the Oxford Dictionary of English 'power' is 'the ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events'. Scholars differ on the definition of Power, but it is still perceived as the core of the human world. 'Hard power' is 'a coercive approach to international political relations, especially one that involves the use of military power'.<sup>ii</sup> But 'soft power' is defined as 'a persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural

influence'.<sup>1iii</sup> The term 'soft power' famously coined by Harvard professor Joseph Nye, can be best understood as 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcome one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment', (Nye, 2009) with the latter being characteristics of hard- economic and military- power. In short, soft power is 'attractive power' (the diplomat, 2013). As in his book *Soft Power*, Nye clarifies the concept, emphasizing that a country's soft power rests upon the attractiveness of its foreign policies. (Nye, 2004) The article tries to explore India's foreign policy and soft power projection imbibed in it.

Though Nye had coined the term 'soft power' in 1990 to explain the foreign policy of the U.S., in recent years, the two old civilizations and current Asian giants India and China have been influenced by this concept to a large extent as both the countries find it as an opportunity to raise their power and influence at regional as well as a global platform. This study tries to explore how the two ancient civilizations with rich cultural heritage, highest population, and huge potential, India, and China have understood Nye's concept. It is visible that India and China, these two rising giants of Asia possess immense potential to lead others by their rapid economic growth and vibrant foreign policy. At present growing multipolar world order, both India and China have emerged as quite influential countries among their neighbors as well as other parts of the world.

In the present competitive global political scenario, the traditional hard power is no more the deciding supreme player. Rather newly emerged concepts of cultural and social interventions like cultural diplomacy or soft power and smart power are earning coins in today's power race.

## The Power of Soft Power

Soft power in international relations is primarily studied and interpreted concerning politico-diplomatic, economic, and commercial as also security-oriented realities that consistently shape them. Traditional international relations have been engrossed in what we call power politics and have undermined the socio-cultural factors in its analysis and interpretation. Such an approach was predominant especially in world wars and also during the Cold war. However, the post-Cold war coupled with globalization has forced us to relook the dynamics of international politics from a much wider prism. With the end of the Cold war, there came a drastic change in the international system and countries foreign policy strategies. There was also a dramatic shift in the theorizing of international relations. We see different approaches being adopted by international relations scholars and their practitioners to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of the international system. The crux of the debate is whether international relations can be understood scientifically using scientific tools and methods. While the positivists believed that it could be, the post positivists on the other hand thought otherwise. However, whether we hold on to positivists' beliefs or the post positivists, we cannot

deny the fact that normative elements like culture ( one of the vital constituents of soft power) play a definitive role in contemporary international relations. There is an expanding literature on the international aspects of identity politics which focuses on transnational ties and conflict, external intervention, and the role of international organizations, and conflict resolution. More direct work on the relationship between culture and international politics is also emerging, often examining the role of culture in international negotiations. Still, little systemic attention has been paid to the role of cultural implications in foreign policymaking.

The importance of culture was also highlighted in the 1990s by Joseph Nye, who contended that culture can be a source of power. He incorporated culture and other factors in his concept popularly known as ‘soft power’, which he advocated in his book *Bound to Lead*. Nye proposes that in today’s global politics, the old thinking of hard power being the only influential means for achieving what one wants is no more effective.<sup>iv</sup> He propounds that beyond traditional instruments of hard power, an actor also possesses other instruments of power in the mode of attraction embedded in their cultural, philosophical, or spiritual charm. And this ideological or cultural attraction is the soft power that promises to realize one's goal without coercion. Thus, whereas hard power rests on 'carrots' and 'sticks' – inducements and threats – soft power convinces others that they should follow because of the allure to other's way of life. Of course, Nye is hardly the first to recognise that power can be expressed without making threats or promising inducements. Great thinkers and political scientists like Foucault, Bourdieu, Gramsci, etc. have also articulated forms of ‘soft’ power. Since the form of soft power is complementary to the traditional hard power and it helps any country’s ideology or policies getting legitimized at international platform through influence. The concept of a 'softer' version of power has been easily accepted by even the scholars of International Relations. Nonetheless, in contemporary mainstream scholarship and foreign-policy circles, it is Nye's account that has captured imaginations. Possibly since Nye considered it like a platform to deploy powerful resources by different actors. ‘In this way, Nye considers soft power in the same manner as many do hard power: as a tangible tool that can be accumulated and projected through concentrated effort’.( Berenskoetter, 2007)

In crux, soft power focuses more on attraction rather than coercion. In recent years, international relations, the concept of soft power has become a very popular. Ever since Joseph Nye coined it in 1990, the term has frequently appeared in government policy studies, academic discussions, and the popular media. According to Nye, soft power is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments". This ability to affect what other countries want tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions. He further argues that the soft power of a country has three major sources: its culture (in those places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when the country lives up to them) , and its foreign policies (when they are perceived as legitimate and ensuring moral authority). Nye mentions that soft power also includes the ability to shape international institutions and agendas, which actually can be seen as part of his reference to legitimate foreign policies. As per this definition, military, economic, and technological strength which are the traditional mechanisms of power are considered as the

sources of hard power. Nye makes a clear-cut distinction between how soft and hard powers are used. Hard power is evident in the practices of threat, coercion, sanction, payment, and inducement, whereas soft power is demonstrated in attraction, persuasion, appeal, and co-option. In Nye's words, 'when you can get others to admire your ideals and to want what you want, you do not have to spend as much on sticks and carrots to move them in your direction.' (Nye, 2004).

## Rising Indian Soft Power

In the last two decades, there happened to have a dramatic change in the resources of India's soft power. Especially in this 21<sup>st</sup> century, it has realized its age-old assets of ancient civilization, rich philosophical, cultural, and spiritual values. And in recent years India has tried to revive this cultural or civilizational connection through Hinduism, Buddhism, Yoga as well as Ayurveda. The latent potential of India's splendid diversity and magnificent cultural richness is truly highlighted by Mark Twain's following lines:

*"This is indeed India! The land of dreams and romance, of fabulous wealth and fabulous poverty, of splendor and rags, of palaces and hovels, of famine and pestilence, of genii and giants and Aladdin lamps, of tigers and elephants, the cobra and the jungle, the country of hundred nations and a hundred tongues, of a thousand religions and two million gods... the one land that all men desire to see, and having seen once, by even a glimpse, would not give that glimpse for the shows of all the rest of the world combined."* (Twain, 1899: 26)  
(Mahapatra, 2016)

Indian soft power instruments include rich and diverse Indian culture, Spirituality and Indian philosophy, Ayurveda and Yoga, Indian diaspora and Indian food, Indian cinema and traditional art forms, Tourism and Cricket, Indian democracy, Peacekeeping operations, Direct investment, and economic assistance, Potentials of Indian ancient knowledge system and modern Indian Universities, etc.

John Cheong Seong Lee (2010) in his article *Unrealised Potential: India's 'soft Power' Ambition in Asia*, makes the argument that, unlike China the soft power potential of the rising India is complementing the regional Asian strategic and normative order. The paper also argues that India's existing 'soft power' is weak and continues to fall short of its potential for two main reasons. First, New Delhi has long neglected 'soft power' as a tool of statecraft. Second, it is doubtful that 'soft power' in any real sense can exist without intimidating 'hard power' resources. India's 'soft power' credentials are undermined by lingering doubts as to whether the country can continue to rise. (Lee, 2010). The book *Communicating India's Soft Power: Buddha to Bollywood*, written by D. Thussu had claimed that in recent years, India has emerged as a major economic and political power. (Thussu, 2013). Nevertheless, the cultural influence of India beyond its territorial boundary has not been satisfactorily examined in academic discourses. In 2017, Patryk Kugiel in his book *India's Soft Power: A New Foreign Policy Strategy* did scan the Indian foreign policy and its changing

positive emphasis towards soft power strategies, instruments and institutions deployed in its external affairs in last two decades (Kugiel, 2017). However the scholars vary in their opinion regarding the real power of India's soft power. Patryk Kugiel asserts that: 'While some consider India as one of the few major soft powers (Tharoor, 2008,2012; Wagner, 2010; Purushothaman, 2010) others point at serious flaws in this outlook (Lee, 2010c; Mukherjee, 2013).'<sup>v</sup>

### **Power of Religion and Spirituality**

Southeast Asian countries share a strong historical, cultural as well as spiritual connection with India, the influence of Indian epics Ramayana and Mahabharata are still deep-rooted in the minds of people. Ramayana is embedded in the culture and society of the region in different forms. From the myths, folklore, traditional art forms to the names of cities, and even today's lifestyles in present society have traces of the strong civilizational connections with India. Though in the process of transferring, the narratives, forms, and dramatization has changed, these countries of South East Asia still practice various manifestation of Rama and Ramayana in today's life, and which reveals the strong connection with Indian culture, religion, and society. Even before the spread of Buddhism to the region, the spread of Hinduism is believed to take place around 20 BCE, with the movement of traders from the ancient Indian coasts, especially from the eastern state of Kalinga (present Orissa) through marine routes. Present Indonesia and Malaysia still show the deeper influence of Hinduism, and the mention of Java and Sumatra is also found in Indian mythologies, confirming the concept of 'Greater India'.<sup>vi</sup> During the same time, Cambodia's Khmer rulers are also believed to adopt Hinduism which later became completely Indianised, embracing Ramayana, Sanskrit names, and started constructions of Hindu temples.<sup>vii</sup>

### **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:

The cultural exchanges between India-China date back to several centuries and there are some evidence that conceptual and linguistic exchanges between the two civilizational states did happen during 1500-1000 B.C. amongst the Shang-Zhou civilization of today's People's Republic of China and the ancient Vedic civilization of present India. In between first to third centuries A.D., a number of Buddhist pilgrims and scholars traveled to China through the historic 'silk route'. Monks

Kashyapa Matanga and Dharmaratna made the White Horse monastery situated at Luoyang as their home. Ancient Indian monk-scholars Kumarajiva, Bodhidharma, Dharmakshema to name some had great contribution towards the spread of Buddhism in Peoples Republic of China. Similarly, several Chinese pilgrims like Fa Xian and Xuan Zang also undertook journeys to the ancient India in pursuit of spiritual knowledge.<sup>viii</sup>

### **Civilizational connect and ancient Indian influence on China:**

‘India conquered and dominated China culturally for two thousand years without ever having to send a single soldier across her border.’ (Agarwal, 2012, p.375) (Agarwal, 2013, p.219) (Tiwari & Kalam, 2012, p.28)

The above statement by the Chinese Philosopher and diplomat Hu Shi (1891-1962) confirms the impact of Indian soft power in the land of the dragon. Great Chinese Indologist and the author of *The Wisdom of China and India*, Lin Yutang had also similar views about the richness of ancient Indian wisdom:

‘The contact with poets, forest saints and the best wits of the land, the glimpse into the first awakening of Ancient India's mind as it searched, at times childishly and naively, at times with a deep intuition, but at all times earnestly and passionately, for the spiritual truths and the meaning of existence - this experience must be highly stimulating to anyone, particularly because the Hindu culture is so different and therefore so much to offer. Not until we see the richness of the Hindu mind and its essential spirituality can we understand India....’ (Agarwal, 2013, p.219) (Tiwari & Kalam, 2012, p.28) (Lin Yutang, 1942, p.3-4)

He further reiterates about ancient Indian knowledge and wisdom influencing the Middle Kingdom deeply: ‘India was China's teacher in religion and imaginative literature, and the world's teacher in trigonometry, quadratic equations, grammar, phonetics, Arabian Nights, animal fables, chess, as well as in philosophy, and that she inspired Boccaccio, Goethe, Herder, Schopenhauer, Emerson, and probably also old Aesop.’ (Lin Yutang, 1942, p.3-4)

### **Present-day Indian influence on China:**

To boost the academic exchanges between India and China, in the year 2003, a Centre for Indian studies got established at Peking University. Further, Chairs of Indian Studies and Hindi also got operational in several Chinese universities like Fudan University, Guangdong University, Jinan University, Shanghai International Studies University, and Shenzhen University. In the year 2006, the groundbreaking Education Exchange Programme (EEP) was signed between India and China, which later turned to be a milestone in the field of educational cooperation between the two neighbours. To mark the age-old historical civilization connect between the two ancient giants Indian and Chinese, both governments have created a few monuments and shrines in each other's countries., like Xuanzang memorial was inaugurated at Nalanda, India in the year

2007. Further, joint stamps also got released in 2008, one stamp portraying the Mahabodhi temple of Bodhgaya and the other representing the White Horse temple of Luoyang. Moreover, in the year 2010, a Buddhist temple was constructed and inaugurated by then Indian President Mrs. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil in Luoyang, Henan Province of China.

It is believed by scholars that Yoga is another great Indian influence on Chinese society since ancient times. Like Buddhism, Yoga has also become an integral part of modern Chinese society. India's initiative to designate June 21 as International Yoga Day by United Nations resolution was supported by China too. 'During the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to China in May 2015, a Yoga-Taichi performance in the world heritage site of Temple of Heaven was witnessed by the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang and the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.'<sup>ix</sup> This visit of P.M. Modi turned out to be momentous for India's soft power in China as an agreement of establishing a Yoga college at Kunming, Yunnan had also got signed during this visit. An event of successful Yoga@Great was organized at the Great Wall, Beijing in June 2017, and every year International Yoga Day is observed in China with great enthusiasm. In recent years, besides Beijing, the Yoga Day celebration has spread its popularity to other major Chinese cities too. (The Embassy of India, Beijing)

As per the Pioneer article of 18th April 2018 'Indian soft power impacts China', in the backdrop of sharing common Asian values, Indian cinema is deeply touching the Chinese citizens' hearts and minds. Indian stories are playing their constructive role in the region sharing similar ancient philosophies and common present aspirations and issues. The author Rinku Ghosh opines that: 'sameness of a cultural construct has made Bollywood the arrowhead of a "soft diplomacy" beyond Buddhism, yoga, and food'.(Ghosh, 2018) The popularity of Indian Bollywood movies in China during the 1960s and 1970s was restored once again in recent years. An agreement of co-production of movies was signed between India and China with its first movie on great monk Xuan Zang's life in 2016. In recent years Indian Bollywood movies have turned as a strong bridge to fill the huge gap between the people of two neighbouring countries. 'Movies like Dangal, Secret Superstar, Bajrangi Bhaijan, Hindi Medium, Toilet – Ek Prem Katha have become super hit with the Chinese audience'<sup>x</sup>

Academic and cultural exchanges between non-governmental organisations, educational institutions, and think tanks also play an important role in the direction of propagating cultural influence from one country to another. At present, more than 10 universities in China are offering Hindi and other Indian language courses. The increasing number of Indian studies centres is making more and more Chinese youth interested in India.



## **Role of Indian Embassies in propagating soft power:**

The Indian Embassy to China in Beijing mentions several initiatives undertaken by them to propagate the Indian culture in China:

To promote Indian art and culture, the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre of Embassy of India, Beijing runs Music, Dance, and Yoga classes and regularly organizes a variety of cultural activities. Culture Centre takes the lead role in promoting Yoga. Over the years, a great number of Chinese Yoga lovers have participated in our Yoga events to mark the International Day of Yoga.

During the visit of External Affairs Minister Smt Sushma Swaraj to China in April 2018, a major Hindi Conference was organized in Beijing. The Conference was well attended by teachers and students from different Universities in China where Hindi language is taught. Culture Centre also organizes Hindi Pakhwada events every year to promote the study of Hindi language. Various activities like Essay writing, Poetry recitation, Speech competition are held to engage the Chinese youth in knowing the Hindi language. Presently, the ICCR is administering the following Chairs in China: a) Hindi Chair at Shanghai International Studies University, b) Hindi Teacher at Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, c) Hindi Chair at Shenzhen University, d) ICCR Chair of Indian Studies at Chinese University of Hong Kong. (Bilateral Brief on India-China Cultural Relations, 2020)

## **Policies of present government**

The use of Soft power and underlining cultural linkages forms the key components of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's overactive foreign policy in recent years. As a counter to Huntington's theory of clash of civilizations, the Modi government is giving full stress on the civilizational connections and trying to become a responsible leader in the race for global leadership and revive its age-old position of regional power. The present Indian government is trying its best to fully utilize all its soft power potentials through cultural diplomacies as well as by promoting people to people exchanges with the countries of Southeast Asia. Strong Indian diaspora present in this region lays a strong connection, which is well tapped by the present government to incentivized in its national interests. Drive for internationalization of Indian higher education and attracting more and more numbers of foreign students is a major step towards spreading Indian influence in the region and beyond. The exchange between art troupes and performers among the countries of the region contributed greatly to bridging the souls of people of these countries with Indians. With the gradually

rising Indian stature at the International platform, the countries of Southeast Asia have also started emphasizing their Indian links and are showing interest in reviving their historical and cultural connections.

Following the declaration of India's 'Act East Policy' by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the 12th ASEAN-India Summit and 9th East Asia Summit in Myanmar in November 2014, the countries of ASEAN, as well as the whole region of South East Asia, has become a priority for Indian foreign policy. In Nov. 2017, Prime Minister Modi had attended the 15th ASEAN-India Summit and the 12th East Asia Summit and gave momentum to India's engagement with the ASEAN and wider Indo-Pacific region. In this summit, PM Modi reiterated that: 'India places ASEAN at the core of our 'Act East Policy'. Our ties with ASEAN are old and we want to further strengthen cooperation.'<sup>xi</sup>

The next year's ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit, held in India in January 2018, turned out to be a remarkable breakthrough in India and ASEAN long-term cooperation. This year's summit's theme was 'Shared Values, Common Destiny'. As this year was completed 25 years of ASEAN's dialogue partnership with India, the commemorative summit marked a diplomatic victory for both sides and further aspired for greater cooperation in coming years.<sup>xii</sup>

### **Cultural diplomacy towards South East Asia**

The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) is the manifestation of Independent India's recognition of the importance of cultural diplomacy in its foreign policy. Since its establishment in 1950, it has served the role of a bridge of connectivity between Indian people with outside nations. Through successfully showcasing and promoting Indian civilizational and cultural richness and the legacy it has tried to connect the people across the globe with India.<sup>xiii</sup> As it aims to contribute in the direction of boosting up India's external cultural and political ties by formulating and implementing policies for improving India's cultural relations with the outside world. Further, it has set its goal to nurture and support other countries cultural relations and promotes deeper understanding with India; to increase people to people exchange and improve relations of India with other countries.<sup>xiv</sup> By establishing cultural centers in several regions of more than 35 countries, ICCR has spread its presence. Through the instruments of signing numerous bilateral cultural agreements and implementing cultural exchange programs with various countries, the Ministries of External Affairs and Culture of the Indian government is trying to propagate India's soft power along with these countries.<sup>xv</sup> The following statement of the former President of the ICCR, Dr. Karan Singh highlights the significance of culture as a powerful means of soft power propagation: 'Culture has no boundaries and using it as a way to interact with the masses has been the most effective way to win hearts in the era of globalization'.(Sahai, 2013)<sup>xvi</sup> In the last two decades, the soft power of India through its ancient cultural heritage has started being revived and utilized by the Indian government. In C. Raja Mohan's words: 'Amidst

India's globalization and the intensification of its global footprint since the 1990s, there has been growing popular interest in India's culture — from yoga to cuisine and from Bollywood to contemporary art'. (Mohan, 2015)

Gradually, through cultural agreements, India got engaged with more or less all the South East Asian countries. In 1978 it signed a formal cultural agreement with Malaysia, in 1969 with the Philippines, in 1976 with Vietnam, in 1994 with Laos and in 2001 with Myanmar; in 2010 with the U.K, etc.<sup>xvii</sup> further, these bilateral agreements with various countries opened channels for India to formally engage with these countries through different modes of cultural diplomacies like cultural exchange programs, cultural activities, and performances. Indian embassies and consulates in these South East Asian countries also regularly organize cultural performances of Indian artists. Cultural troupes are also getting facilitated by the Indian government to perform in various countries. Cultural troupes are being sent to different countries. Keeping the popularity of Indian cinema in mind, Indian film festivals are organized from time to time. There is also a provision of visiting various countries by the cultural troops with government support and funding.

The central point of the Indian government's policy on cultural diplomacy is to improve India's cultural, economic, and trade relations with other nations diplomatically. The key themes consist of:

1. Annual 'Pravasi Diwas' is trying to connect present India to its massive Indian Diaspora present outside and get their expertise and skills at a common platform. Since the year 2003, Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas is organised in January every year.<sup>xviii</sup>
2. 'Brand India' image as a measure to put forward a better picture of India to attract the international community. Brand India has turned into a phrase referring to the campaign India is using to attract global investors and trade partners.<sup>xix</sup>
3. 'Know India Programme' (KIP) is a program introduced by the Indian government on January 8, 2014, for the young Overseas Indian population (aged between 18-26 years) at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (PBD). KIP offers a unique platform for young students and professionals of Indian Origin to know their origin and culture closely by visiting India, sharing their opinions, expectations, and experiences, and further develop stronger ties with present India.<sup>xx</sup>
4. Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA), established in 1943 organizes events, including the organization of Academic Conferences.<sup>xxi</sup> Through regular intellectual activities and cooperation, it is trying to connect with the international think tanks and build as well as promote a better picture of India abroad.
5. Indian government policies stress spiritualism rather than religion. In today's mechanized and stressed lifestyle, the people around the globe are getting attracted towards Indian spiritualism, yoga, and vegetarian food, etc. for attaining mental peace.<sup>xxii</sup>
6. The Indian cinema industry and other art forms have been always a mesmerizing global audience and thus spreading Indian influence worldwide.

**Indian edge over Chia in the South-Asian regionn:**

According to Ney's concept of soft power, besides culture and foreign policy, political values is also one major resource for any country's soft power. The fundamental values on which the Indian state is based like democracy, pluralism, secularism, and federalism are the essentials for any country's soft power. Certainly, the democratic political system gives India an edge over authoritarian China over spreading their soft power influence (Lee, 2010, Kugiel, 2017). Joseph Nye had also admitted that: 'democratic India has passed the test which China has not yet taken'(Kugiel, 2010).<sup>xxiii</sup>

**Limitations of India's soft power:**

'India exhibits limited success in projecting its soft power capability. Former Union Minister of State for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor, who is also a staunch propagator of India's soft power, has contended that today it is not the size of the army or of the economy that matters but instead it is the country that tells the "better story" qualifies as a global player. But the question remains if India has been able to tell a better story.'(Bhattacharya, 2013)<sup>xxiv</sup>

In recent years, there have been questions raised on the Indian democratic system which was considered an asset. There is no doubt that India has an edge over China because of its liberal democratic polity and policy of accommodation of diversity, but this liberal democratic polity and excessive freedom of expression is increasingly coming under threat due to its domestic policies. Besides the broadcasting of all domestic chaos to the international media is downgrading the Indian image on the international platform and throwing its hard-earned global influence into the drain. Therefore, in critical assessment of the act east policy, it raises questions about its effectiveness. Does its foreign policy has a real impact on the diplomacy of India in the region?

Despite India's claims as a regional superpower, the recent study of the Global Soft Power Index shows that India is still far behind to capitalize on its soft power potentials. Notwithstanding its economic rise and possessing an image of a peaceful growing state, it still faces several challenges to fully utilize its potentials. The issues hampering its global ranking as a soft power include regional terrorism, domestic instability, difficult neighbours, China's growing influence and rivalry in the region, etc.

## 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.<sup>xxv</sup> 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.

### Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/power>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/hardpower>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/softpower>

<sup>iv</sup> Felix Berenskoetter and M. J. William, eds., *Power in World Politics* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2007).

<sup>v</sup> Kugiel, P. (2017). *India's soft power: A new foreign policy strategy*. Taylor & Francis., P-65

<sup>vi</sup> <http://indianization-of-southeast-asia.tumblr.com/TheGreaterIndia> (accessed on 21<sup>st</sup> Oct. 2019)

<sup>vii</sup> <https://indianhistory.quora.com/Greater-India-Tracing-the-Sanskrit-Influence-in-Southeast-Asia> (accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2019)

<sup>viii</sup> Cultural Relations, Govt. of India, Beijing, China, Retrieved from: <https://eoibeijing.gov.in/cultural-relation.php>, on 22<sup>nd</sup> Jan. 2021

<sup>ix</sup> Bilateral Brief on India-China Cultural Relations, <https://eoibeijing.gov.in/cultural-relation.php> (accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> Dec. 2020)

<sup>x</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>xi</sup> <http://mea.gov.in/asean2017/> (accessed on 19<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2019)

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<sup>xiii</sup> *Ibid*

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