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**Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy: India and  
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## **Nation Branding and Public Diplomacy: India and China Compared**

### **Abstract**

In recent years, both India and China have become increasingly cognisant of nation branding and public diplomacy. Both nations are engaged with actively telling the story of their land and to further realise national goals. This study examines the link between the concepts of soft power and nation branding as instruments to enhance a nation's influence on the world stage, exploring nation-branding initiatives of both the countries. A comparative analysis of the elements of Indian and Chinese soft power approaches and their effectiveness on global platforms drives this paper. This paper looks at the strategic objectives, resources, and actions of the states as well as their political, economic, and societal image in the light of nation branding and soft power projection. Despite its authoritarian political system being a major hindrance to public diplomacy and soft power, Chinese initiatives in this regard are relatively more comprehensible. India can potentially do better with the image of a country with a spirited civil society and multi-party democratic value. While both the nations' plans have been effectual so far in positively prompting public perceptions, further efforts at telling the story of the land may come to naught if governments quash dissent indiscriminately and cherry-pick religion (or caste) as basis for discrimination.

### **Keywords**

Nation branding, public diplomacy, soft power, story of the land, India, China.

## Introduction

*“Great nations write their autobiographies in three manuscripts - the book of their deeds, the book of their words, and the book of their arts”<sup>1</sup>*

While Chinese President Xi Jinping stated that, ‘China's *cultural soft power* [Italics mine] and the international influence of Chinese culture have increased significantly’ while delivering a report to the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Indian Prime Minister Modi surprised everyone by revamping Indian diaspora with his visits (either state visit or to attend summits) for a record ninety-five times from June 2014 to November 2020. On the one hand, the United Nations General Assembly announcing 21<sup>st</sup> June as annual ‘International Day of Yoga’ in December 2014, while on the other, the Chinese idea of making ‘a community of shared future for all mankind’ was adopted into a UN Security Council resolution on 17 March 2017, reflecting the international acknowledgment of China's offerings to the global governance. Although it is surmised that both India and China are somewhat laggards in the race of public diplomacy, these two Asian giants employed different approaches by largely influencing most of Asia with their culture, heritage, philosophy, knowledge, and trade as well as their status as ‘non-imperialist,’ ‘non-colonialist’ powers.

Even though India and China are ramping up their efforts to identify various turfs of public diplomacy and nation branding to build positive public perceptions nationally as well as globally, it remains to be seen how efficient and adequate these efforts have been in achieving their aims. Following the creation of a new Division for Public Diplomacy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), People’s Republic of China (PRC) on 19th March 2004 and External Publicity & Public Diplomacy Division (XPD) by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India in 2006, both nations reaccelerated attempts to popularise politics, economic developmental model, human capital, diplomacy, culture, cuisine, language, movies, sports, tourism, international leadership role and so on.

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<sup>1</sup> John Ruskin, the 19<sup>th</sup> century British writer also stated: ‘Not one of these books can be understood unless we read the two others, but of the three the only trustworthy one is the last.’ *St. Mark’s Rest: The History of Venice*, Preface (1885:1).

This paper attempts to find answers to the following questions:

- What are the approaches India and China have employed for nation branding and public now?
- Where do they stand now?
- What are the resources and prospects for India and China in projecting the country's image?

This article has been divided into four parts. The first section examines the thematic literature followed by a brief discussion of the concepts of nation branding and public diplomacy and how they can be congregated under one umbrella. The second section conducts a comparative analysis of the various methods employed by both nations in recent years to enhance and leverage their soft power, which further supplements their skills to story-telling. The third section focuses on and discusses the results of the cross-national survey employed for the study. A comparative analysis of various indices between the two countries and a short conclusion is also offered at the end. The propaganda apparatuses that are assigned to tell the 'story of the land' are however beyond the scope of this article. So are the cumulative investments of both the countries, competition in promoting Buddhism, as well as the contribution of Indian and Chinese diasporas to their countries' efforts to nation branding.

### **Nation Brand and Public Diplomacy**

The concept of *nation brand*<sup>2</sup>, though relevant, is a very different idea than national brand. National brand indicates a commercial product or corporate brand or service, which is branded primarily in the economic aspect of a certain territory by an exclusive proprietor. Nation branding, *a super complex and long-drawn process*, refers to a country's complete image on the

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<sup>2</sup> Anholt claims to be the "founding father" of the term "nation branding". American Marketing Association (1960) defines a *brand* as a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of them, which is intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or a group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors. According to the Cambridge dictionary, *branding* is the activity of connecting a product with a particular name, symbol, etc. or with particular features or ideas, to make people recognise and want to buy it. Aaker, D.A., in the book, *Building Strong Brands* (1996: 68) states, 'brand identity should help establish relationship between the brand and the customer by generating a value proposition involving functional, emotional or self-expressive benefits'.

global stage followed by an enduring ‘commitment to consistent and comprehensive execution of a positioning strategy’ (Quelch and Jocz 2004: 75), covering political, economic as well as cultural extents (Fan 2006: 98). Nation brand, being treated as the self-management project, consists of mainly three concepts, viz., identity, image, and reputation (Whetten and Mackey 2002: 401). A nation’s identity defined by its people, not strategised by branding agency (Fan 2010: 101) and is also an irrational philosophical attachment that binds fellow nationals together, assuming to represent the spirit of national identity (Connor 1978: 389, 390); whereas it is the views of people outside the country which defines a nation’s image (Fan 2010:100). Finally, reputation, as the reciprocal outcome of image, is a specific kind of feedback received from the other or outside world (Whetten and Mackey 2002: 400).

On this matter, Wally Olins (1999) is of the view that nation branding is ‘building or remoulding the national identity.’ Simon Anholt’s (2007, 2010) proposal of ‘competitive identity’ or ‘nation’s competitiveness’ is based on the components of ‘strategy, substance and symbolic actions.’ Rendon (2003) and Szondi (2007: 9) suggest the inclusion of the promotion of economic, commercial, and political interests nationally and globally in defining nation branding; Szondi further distinguishes between ‘destination branding’ and ‘country branding’<sup>3</sup> whereas destination branding precedes country branding, which necessitates even more creative and comprehensive approach (2007: 12). Fan adds a novel focus on how nation branding can be seen from the perspective of ‘nation image management’ (2010: 101). He further argues that ‘one slogan, one campaign, no matter how clever or creative, cannot sell everything to everyone’ (Ibid 102) and suggested nation branding to be measured at various sub pillars.

In 1965, former US foreign services officer and founder of the Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy, Edmund Gullion coined the term ‘*public diplomacy*’. ‘Public diplomacy traditionally means government *communication* aimed at *foreign* audiences to achieve changes in the ‘hearts or minds’ of the people’ (Szondi 2008: 6). Malone (1985) describes public diplomacy as ‘direct *communication* with foreign peoples, (to shape) their thinking and ultimately, that of their governments’ (199). Public diplomacy is ‘the process by which direct relations with people

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<sup>3</sup> Country branding, state branding, and nation branding are used interchangeably by many authors.

in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented' (Sharp, quoted by Melissen 2005: 8); and it focuses on 'building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies' (Nye 2004: 107). Bátorá (2005) defined public diplomacy as the promotion of soft power, whilst Melissen (2005b) argued that public diplomacy is only one of the key instruments of soft power (Cited in Szondi 2008: 8). Public diplomacy is about 'changing minds' (Edward 2007) and 'aims to build and leverage the soft power of societies for the benefit of the state' (Hall 2012: 1092). Szondi explored five possible relationships between nation branding and public diplomacy: Public diplomacy and nation branding are distinct spheres, public diplomacy is part of nation branding, nation branding is part of public diplomacy, distinct but overlapping concepts, nation branding, and public diplomacy are the same concepts (2008:15-29).

Combining the above insights, it is axiomatic that all the indices of both nation branding and public diplomacy can be amalgamated to attractively tell the 'story of the land' --- an idea, which not only consists of culture, cuisine, costume, but also economic model, diplomacy, international responsibility, and science & technology. Joshua Kurlantzick succinctly defines it as 'anything outside of the military and security realm (2007: 6)'.

### **Story of the Land: How Do India and China Tell It?**

Nation branding efforts of both India and China include international messaging through broadcasting and strategic communications, projecting a positive image by branding places, hosting visitors, and accelerating digital diplomacy, and promoting cultural exchanges as well as people-to-people contact. Over the years, the two countries have also employed more coherent approaches by directly involving domestic publics and partners, mostly on digital platforms. India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) holds virtual weekly press conferences on Facebook and YouTube, whereas the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC conducts regular press conferences (daily, except on weekends) to reach both domestic and international audiences. While the core mission of India's MEA is to influence foreign public opinion which is sympathetic and supportive of India's foreign policy and interests (Mazumdar 2020: 4), the primary objective of China's public diplomacy is to secure legitimacy for its policies and actions at the domestic and international level (Zhang 2010).

After the end of the Cold War, Chinese public diplomacy had five major goals: '(1) Publicising the Chinese government's statements and assertions more strongly to the outside world, (2) forming a desirable image of the state, (3) issuing rebuttals to distorted overseas reports about China, (4) improving the international environment surrounding China, and (5) exerting influence on the policy decisions of foreign countries' (Zhan 1998, Cited in Wang 2008: 268). Added to these are China's aspirations 'for peaceful development' (263) and 'harmonious society'. The characteristics of China's public diplomacy feature five key points (Yang Jiechi (2011) — (1) China's public diplomacy is guided by the principles of Deng Xiaoping Theory<sup>4</sup>, Three Represents<sup>5</sup>, the Scientific Outlook on Development<sup>6</sup>, and the notion of bringing harmony, lasting peace, and prosperity to the entire world through concerted efforts. (2) The objective of China's public diplomacy is to promote common development and prosperity around the world. (3) China's public diplomacy approach includes both domestic and international perspectives. (4) China emphasises the integration of Chinese culture with elements from other countries in our public diplomacy. (5) China's public diplomacy is moving forward with the times while carrying on the traditions of the past.

India's new approach to public diplomacy is based on three strategic methods. (1) Aimed at engaging new addressees within India, in the West, and in the developing world, (2) foreign policy-making process is made more open and democratic by initiating dialogue with communities outside New Delhi, and (3) efforts at revamping new media or web 2.0 (Hall, Ian 2012: 1090). However, this is partly in response to the Chinese 'charm offensive'<sup>7</sup> (Ibid: 1095), which prompted New Delhi and concerned outsiders to initiate similar efforts.

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<sup>4</sup> Deng Xiaoping Theory or Dengism encapsulates a series of economic and political policy pronouncements by Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping that guided China's 'reforms and opening up' (1978). The Theory is not a rigid form of Marxism-Leninism or Maoism but emphasises that 'economic development is the centre of party work'; it further advocates political and economic pragmatism and 'adopt a low profile and never take the lead' in foreign policy.

<sup>5</sup> Jiang Zemin in February 2000 first propounded 'Three Represents'. The meaning of the thought of the Three Represents are representing the development trend of China's advanced productive forces, representing the orientation of China's advanced culture, and representing the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people.

<sup>6</sup> The Scientific Outlook on Development is a theoretical guidance for the Communist Party of China. This concept aims at the creation of a Socialist Harmonious Society by championing people's interest. As Hu Jintao said, '(it) was created by integrating Marxism with the reality of contemporary China and with the underlying features of our times, and it fully embodies the Marxist worldview on and methodology for development.'

<sup>7</sup> A campaign of charm, flattery, and cajolement designed to achieve the support of others, particularly in a political or diplomatic domain.

One important traditional means of public diplomacy for both the nations has been radio broadcast, which they relied heavily on to advance their international outreach. India established All India Radio (AIR) in the 1930s during British rule to counter Nazi propaganda. International reporting of AIR is currently broadcast in 27 languages.<sup>8</sup> China Radio International (CRI, also *Radio Peking* during inception) was first used by the CPC in 1940; CRI's present-day external services are offered in 65 languages, much higher than India's.

Realising numerous trends that make 'co-optive behaviour and soft power resources relatively more important' (Nye 1990: 167), India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) speeded up its public diplomacy through social media with its first tweet on 8 July 2010 (official handle of India's Public Diplomacy as @IndianDiplomacy with 1.4 million followers by 15 August 2020, whereas Ministry of External Affairs' Twitter account @MEAIndia had 2.1 million followers and some 2,126,714 people liked its Facebook page). China is a latecomer on this social media meadow, and one viewer rightly put it, an indication of a bureaucracy that was tardily 'waking up' to micro-blogging sites, as it joined Weibo in May 2019 (SCMP), and WeChat only in 2018 (MOFA, PRC). China has quite recently begun exploring so-called "Twiplomacy" beyond the country's "Great Firewall" to convey its message, though with pugnaciousness, around the globe. One-third of the Twitter accounts had been created from April to June 2020; a *ProPublica* study traced how these accounts shifted their focus from Hong Kong protesters to the coronavirus outbreak by further urging Chinese netizens to 'dispel online rumors.'

Post-Cold War international system, which is unipolar or uni-multipolar in nature, has acclimated soft power as an artefact. Joseph Nye (2008) believes that culture, political values, and foreign policy of a country play a key role in winning the gratitude of others. Simply put, soft power is the power of attraction. As Indian politician and author Shashi Tharoor rightly put it in a Ted Talk that in this information era, it is not the country of the bigger army that wins but the country that tells a better story that prevails (YouTube). How do India and China tell their stories? In the context of winning hearts and minds, culture is defined as the 'set of practices that

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<sup>8</sup> The external Services Division of All India Radio (AIR) has been covering over 100 countries in 15 foreign and 12 Indian languages. Prasar Bharati is the Public Service Broadcaster of India. It comprises AIR and Doordarshan Television Network, which were previously media units of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB). The external services division of AIR is currently caught in a turf war between the MIB, which runs it and the Ministry of External Affairs, which is expected to fund it. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/i-b-ministry-and-mea-at-odds-over-all-india-radio-external-service/story-k8CDvm9gmYSJ4gDzuYrHiK.html>

create meaning for a society' (Nye 2008: 96). Therefore, a broad agreement is that the performance of high culture is contingent upon attraction and admiration of its literature, art, education, television, cinema, and pop music; political values like justice, transparency, and equality as well as attractive foreign policy, which is the outcome of state's good governance, legitimacy, and moral authority.

The structure for making comparative study of two nations was built on a survey of existing literature on public diplomacy, nation branding, and soft power. In this vein, the work by Jonathan McClory (2012) has been contributory to categorise a country's story-telling skills in five domains: Business/Innovation, Culture, Government, Diplomacy, and Education. Apart from these five domains, a comparative look at tourism, educational and cultural institutions, foreign aid, and the country's contribution to the United Nations Peacekeeping operations have also been explored. Tourism has been included in the study due to the role of destination branding as an effective soft power ploy that leads to greater understanding and increased attractiveness of the destination. Further, tourism authorities build a positive image by glorifying the destination while countering negative ones (Morgan et al. 2011). As Can-Seng Ooi observed, soft power can also be measured by the perception of global audiences towards a particular country's places, policies, and programmes (2016: 1,2). On education, Nye (2008: 94) noted, many ambitiously developing countries attach great importance to the modernisation and internationalisation of their educational systems. Education and cultural institutions showcase countries' engagement to attract brilliant foreign students for 'global competition for minds', which eventually augment nation-branding efforts. The provision of scholastic prospects for foreign students is one of the most crucial contraptions of the soft power of the state (Cowan and Arsenault 2008). About foreign aid Alexander Colin (2018: 9) argues that 'foreign aid fit well within the remit of public diplomacy and soft power as it seeks to improve the attractiveness of the source within the minds of target domestic and international audiences, such is its positive propagation under prevailing ideology'. Though foreign aid can come under the ambit of either soft power or hard power or both, it ultimately 'shift(s) public opinion in a way likely to leave (donors) safer from transnational threats and more able to obtain cooperation from the countries to which they send foreign aid' (Dietrich, Mahmud and Winters 2017:133).

We now briefly look at the above-mentioned soft power elements through some data and graphs

and their implications for nation branding.

**Tourism**

According to United Nations World Tourism Organization data, a total of 1,326 million international tourist arrivals were recorded in destinations around the world by the end of 2017 (UNWTO). The total number of international tourist arrivals in China was 60.7 million, whereas 15.5 million tourist arrivals were recorded in India. In 2017, China’s acquired receipts for travel items were US\$ 32,617 million, and for India, it was US\$ 27,878 million (World Bank).

<b>A total of 1,1326 million tourist arrivals were recorded around the world by 2017</b>			
Country Name	Number of International Tourist Arrivals (In millions)	Receipts for Travel Items (In millions)	International Ranking
China	60.7	32,617	4 <sup>th</sup>
India	15.5	27,878	26 <sup>th</sup>

Figure 1: Primary Data collected from UNWTO and World Bank.

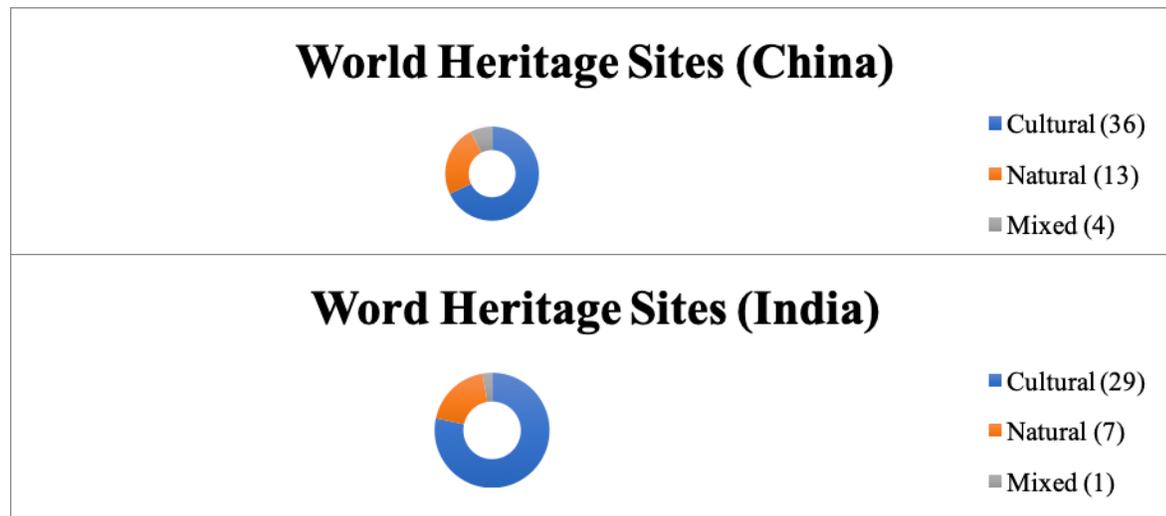


Figure 2: Data collected from UNESCO World Heritage Sites

**Educational and Cultural Institutions**

Although Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) was established soon after Independence (in 1950), it is currently no match for Chinese Confucius Institutes (CI, founded in 2004 and has attracted criticisms) in terms of presence, activities, and accomplishments. With a total number of 36 Indian Cultural centers abroad (mostly in Asia), ICCR is trailing far behind CI, which currently has 539 Confucius Institutes and 1193 Confucius classrooms worldwide by 2018 (Hanban). However, with an estimated annual budget of US\$314 million<sup>9</sup> (approximately US\$582,560 for each Institute), China is behind the individual budget allocated for ICCR (US\$1045421).<sup>10</sup> Therefore, it can be argued that there is a likelihood of the ICCR catching up given proper planning and vision on the Indian side.

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<sup>9</sup> China also receives additional fund for its Confucius classrooms from the host institutes. Though the Chinese government allocates funds for the expenditures of all CIs, the exact amount remains unclear. Also, the above-mentioned amount was taken from 2017 annual report. Please see <https://hongkongfp.com/2019/05/05/chinas-overseas-confucius-institutes-pose-powerful-threat-academic-freedom/>

<sup>10</sup> As per MEA annual report, ICCR has a total budget of INR 2900000 thousand for the year 2020-21. Also, author could not find the updated budget for China's Confucius Institute. The gap between individual funding of CI and ICCR therefore may not be this huge [http://mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/32633\\_DDG\\_2020\\_21.pdf](http://mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/32633_DDG_2020_21.pdf)

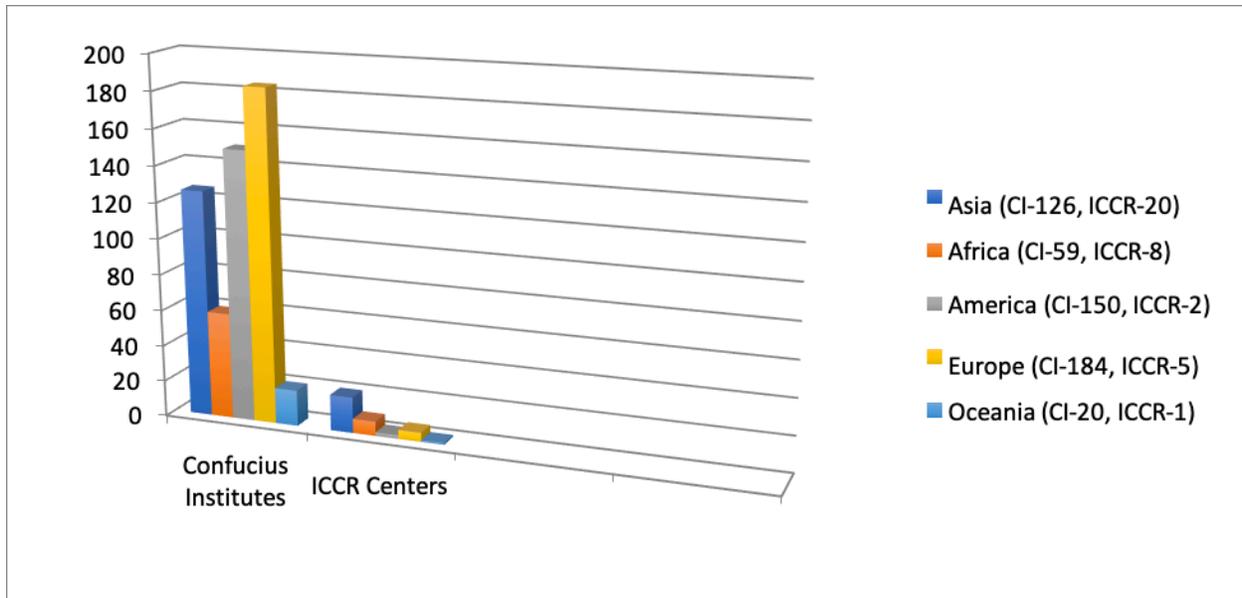


Figure 3: Distributions of Confucius Institutes and ICCR Centers by region. Data collected from Hanban and ICCR, and arranged by the author.

### **Education**

In 2018, a total of 492,185 foreign students from 196 countries/regions were studying in 1004 institutions in China. Among them, 429,144 (87.19%) were self-funded, 63,041 (12.81%) received a Chinese government scholarship (Ministry of Education, PRC). The number of Indian students in China is 23,198, whereas only around two thousand Chinese students are currently enrolled in Indian institutes (MOE, PRC). The number of international students in India is only 46,703 (Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students, UNESCO). Nevertheless, an ambitious scheme, ‘Study in India’, was announced in 2018 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to attract two hundred thousand international students<sup>11</sup> over the next five years ‘by branding India as an attractive education destination’ (MHRD). The “100-day action plan for

<sup>11</sup> Some are cynical about this ambitious project considering poor infrastructure, inadequate number of scholarships and violence in campus.

education”<sup>12</sup> and “five-year vision document,” initiated by the HRD ministry (The Indian Express, June 19, 2019), are also intended to create opportunities for India in this field.<sup>13</sup>

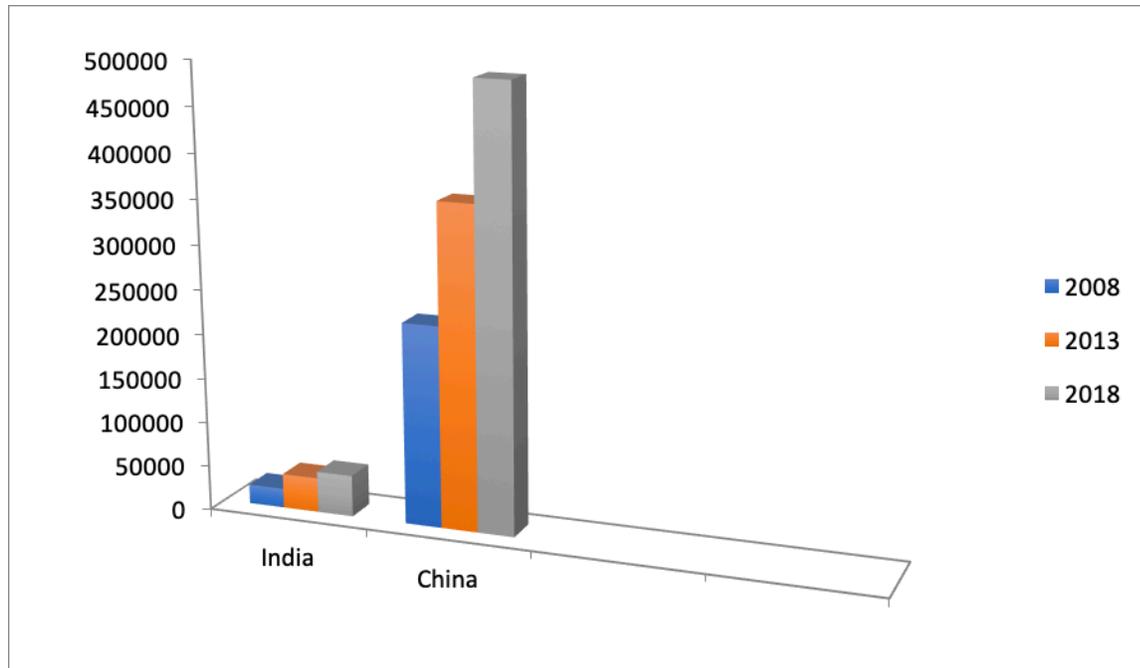


Figure 4: Numbers of International Students in India and China.

### ***Peacekeeping Operations***<sup>14</sup>

Engagements in UN Peacekeeping activities help countries bolster their image and further buttress their reputation. One of many objectives for participation in UN peace negotiation is to project the image of a ‘responsible, generous, and peace-loving country’ (Nye 2004) in the global setup. At least one visible scope of peacekeeping is intricately linked with soft power discourse. For example, if we look at Simon Anholt Good Country Index (GCI), where India and China are placed at 44<sup>th</sup> and 61<sup>st</sup> respectively in the overall ranking, while in the ‘International

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<sup>12</sup> It is intended to achieve that by unveiling a national education policy, filling up vacant faculty positions and by increasing the number of Institutions of Eminence (IoE).

<sup>13</sup> As per the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) data, two years of ‘Study in India’ later, number of foreign students sees marginal rise. Most foreign students opt for IIMs and IITs when choosing India, however IITs said that most applications from foreign candidates come through collaborations and not via the ‘Study in India’ programme. <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/study-in-india-governments-efforts-fail-to-attract-foreign-students-6190458/>

<sup>14</sup> This section is an extended version of Md Yasin’s M.Phil. Dissertation, ‘China’s Participation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, 2002-2016’.

Peace & Security’ index, India and China’s rankings are 35<sup>th</sup> and 36<sup>th</sup>. The reason behind such a remarkable ranking in this section is that among five indicators, two belong to UNPKOs. These are – the resources and number of troops deployed overseas by the country and a negative indicator for dues in arrears to the United Nations peacekeeping budget contribution. This goes on to indicate how participation in UN peacekeeping directly benefits a country’s image or reputation.

The approved budget for UN Peacekeeping for the fiscal year 1<sup>st</sup> July 2018 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2019 is US\$6.7 billion. China replaced Japan to contribute 10.25 percent of the peacekeeping budget. India’s total contribution is fixed at 0.1474 percent and is more than only South Africa among BRICS nations.

<b>UN Peacekeeping Troops by Country (By 31 May 2019)</b>				
<b>Country Name</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Ranking</b>
<b>India</b>	<b>6,246</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>6,307</b>	<b>4th</b>
<b>China</b>	<b>2,469</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>2,534</b>	<b>11th</b>

*Figure 5: Data collected from UN Peacekeeping Factsheet*

### ***Foreign Aid***

Although China treats its aid data ‘as a sensitive area, a state secret’ (Bräutigam 2009: 2), researchers from AidData claimed that from 2000 to 2014, ‘China offered \$350 billion worth of aid to 140 countries and territories, sponsoring more than 4000 projects – the largest foreign aid program in the world’ (AIDDATA 2017:2). China’s gross disbursement of foreign aid in 2016 was US\$ 6.6 billion (Kitano, N. 2018).

With more than US\$4.5 trillion received between 1960 and 2015, India has been the world's largest recipient of foreign aid (OECD, 2017a, quoted in AIDDATA. 2017: 13), whereas 'needy donor' India's total aid to countries for 2018 -2019 is fixed at INR 55.45 billion (Union Budget).

## **Results of the Survey**

### ***A note on Methodological Approach and Data Analysis***

As this study attempts to employ both qualitative (interpretative) and quantitative research strategies, questionnaires were preferred over other means. In the quantitative tradition, the questionnaire script was designed in line with "*The Soft Power 30 Report*,"<sup>15</sup> and its sub-indices (Economy, Human Capital, Culture, Diplomacy, and Politics) category was incorporated. Some questions from Gregory G. Holyk's work (2011) have also been borrowed. The numerical data has been collected and collated from different sources and is arranged into five categories, with each category functioning as a sub-index.

The questionnaire was prepared with a total of five sub-indices consisting of three to five questions with an individual score and was circulated and collected via Google forms. A total of 305 respondents (45.6 percent Graduate, 31.5 percent Postgraduate, 19.3 percent Ph.D. students) from thirty countries, in the age group of 18 – 40 years responded to the survey. The primary aim of the questions was to reveal the respondents' perceptions of India and China. A link to all the questions asked to respondents and survey results are attached in the end. Here we will analyse the results of each of the five sub-indices.

- A. Economy:** China emerged stronger than India in this sub-index. The question was: when you are considering buying something, and you see it is made in country 1 (China) and country 2 (India), how does this affect the likelihood you will buy the product? Though the likelihood for buying a product made in China is higher, respondents commented that the quality of Chinese product is a concern at times, and also they do not find many

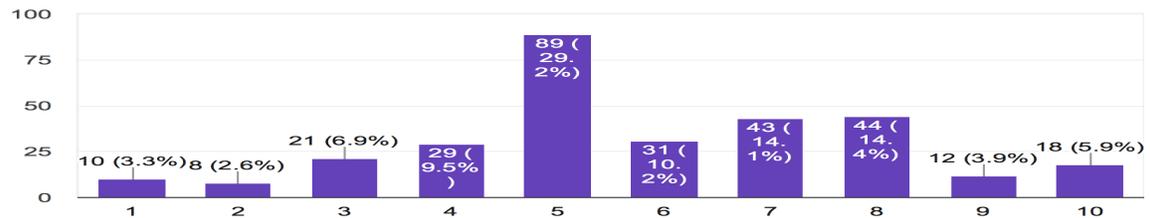
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<sup>15</sup> '*The Soft Power 30*' is a platform designed by Portland's in-house Content & Brand team with help from Facebook and USC Center on Public Diplomacy. The Soft Power 30 index – claims to be engaged with the world's most comprehensive comparative assessment of global soft power. As per its website, the index combines objective data and international polling to build what Professor Nye has described as 'the clearest picture of global soft power to date'.

Indian products in the market – data from *Statista* also validate respondents’ perceptions as in terms of share of global manufacturing output in 2018, China constituted 28.4 percent, whereas India’s share was at a minuscule 3 percent. Also, looking at the index of the World Bank’s ease of doing business (or the scale of business-friendly regulations), India stands at 63<sup>rd</sup> position, which is far behind China’s ranking at 31<sup>st</sup> position (World Bank). On the question of assisting Asian countries in developing their economies, China scored better, where India is slightly better placed on the measures of assistance during humanitarian crises in Asia.

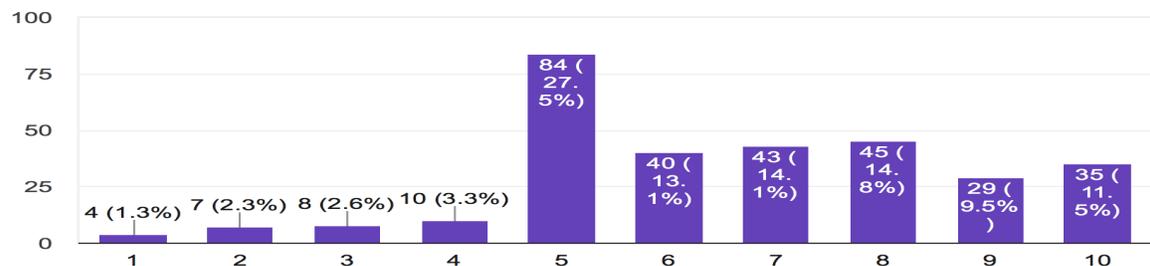
### China

305 responses



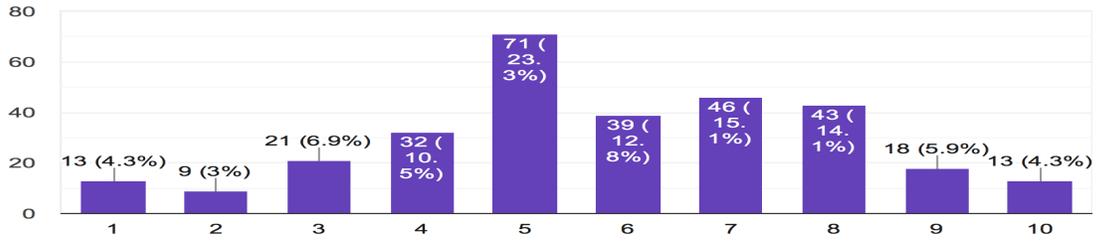
### India

305 responses



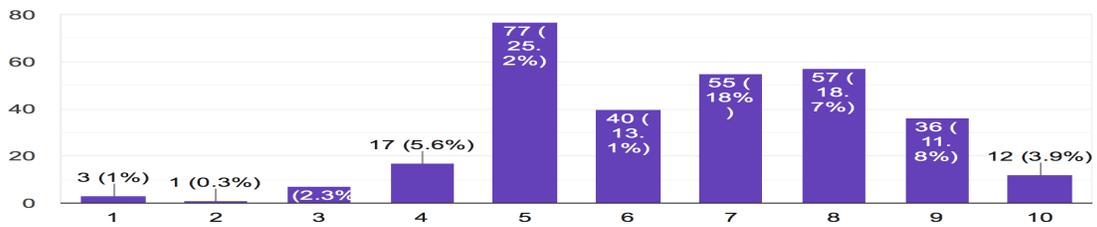
### China

305 responses



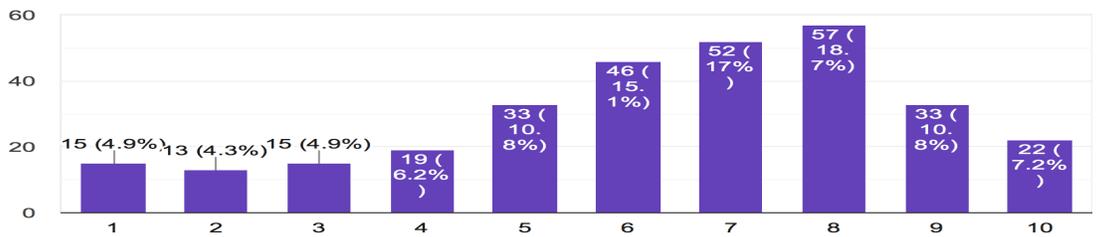
### India

305 responses



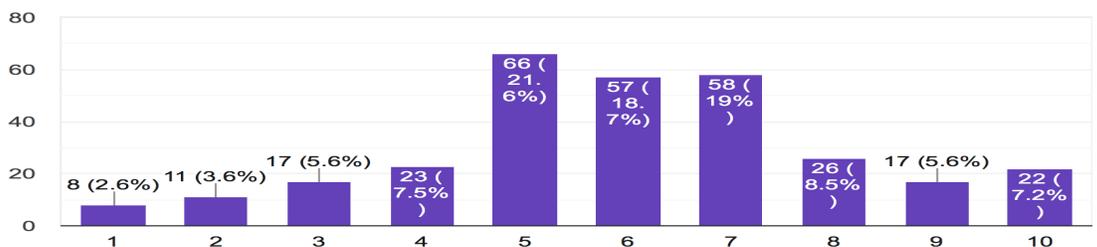
### 3. China helps/ assists other Asian countries develop their economies.

305 responses



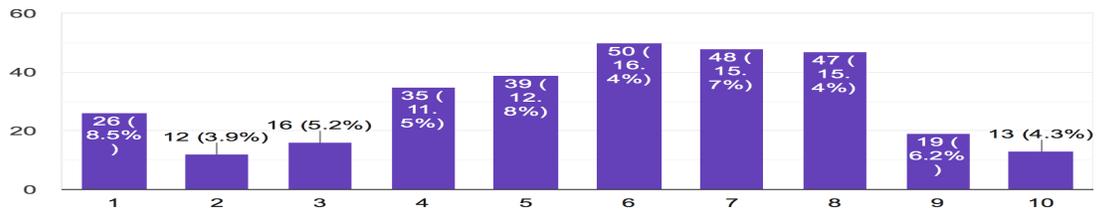
### 4. India helps/ assists other Asian countries develop their economies.

305 responses



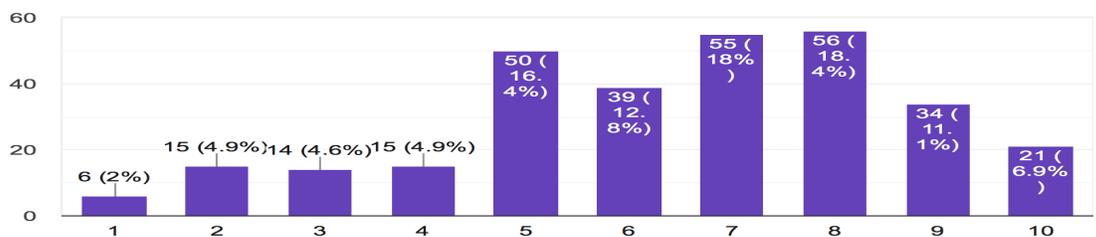
### 5. China provides assistance in the event of humanitarian crises in Asia.

305 responses



### 6. India provides assistance in the event of humanitarian crises in Asia

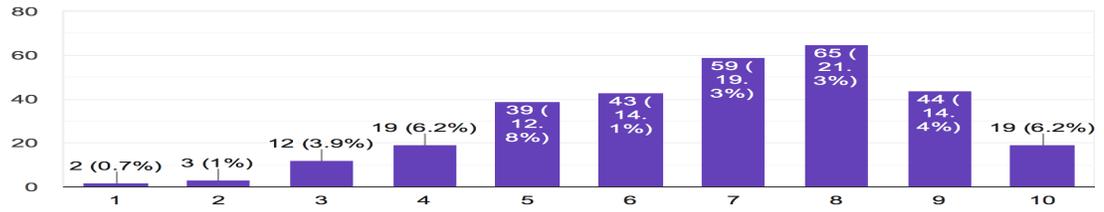
305 responses



**B. Human Capital:** In all three indicators for assessing human capital, namely, (i) highly educated population, (ii) high-quality universities, and (iii) science & technology, while India performed well, it still trails behind China. Additionally, *Statista* shows India's literacy rate is at 74.04 percent, whereas China's literacy rate for 2018 was 96.84 percent. Also, given the proportion of GDP of both the countries, a considerable gap is noticed in allocating funds to the education sector. India's share of the union budget for education in 2019 – 20 remained at 3.4 percent (Government of India Budget Documents); China's government budgetary spending education in 2018 accounted for 4.11 percent of GDP, totaling nearly \$520 billion (State Council, PRC). Furthermore, while no single Indian university made it to the top 300 list in The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2020, China improved its number to eight universities in the top 300. According to the Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) World University Rankings 2021, twelve Chinese universities and institutes are featured in the top 300 list; only four Indian institutes made it to the list.

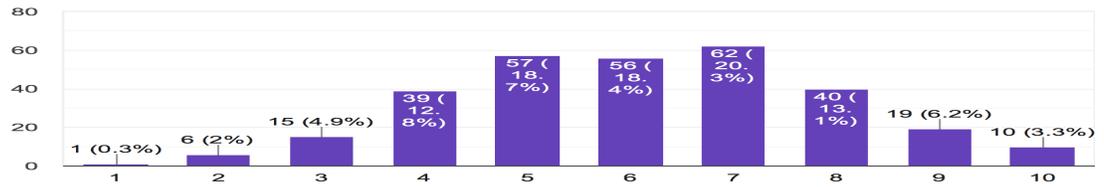
### 7. China has a highly educated population.

305 responses



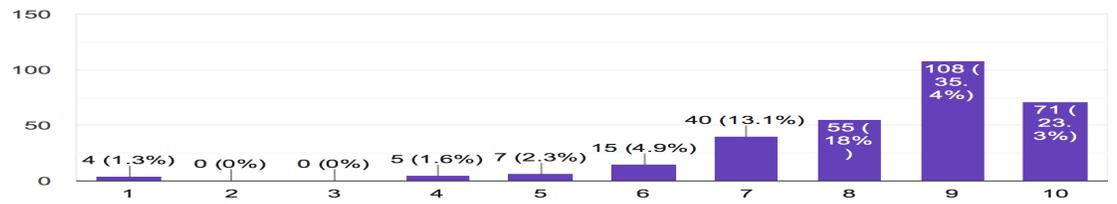
### 8. India has a highly educated population.

305 responses



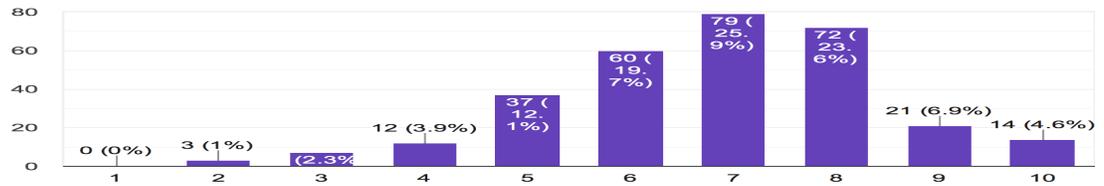
### 9. China possesses advanced science & technology.

305 responses



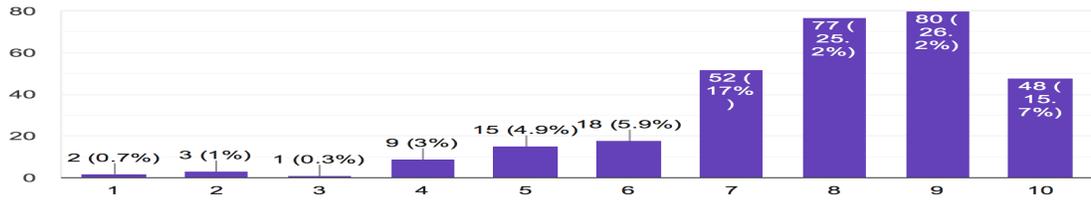
### 10. India possesses advanced science & technology.

305 responses



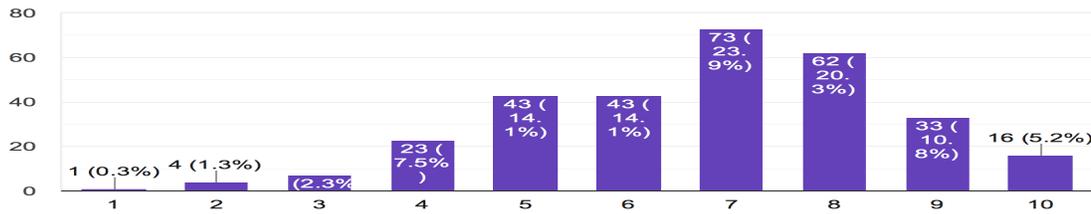
### 11. China has high quality universities.

305 responses



### 12. India has high quality universities

305 responses



**C. Culture:** India manages to significantly fill the gap in the pattern of ratings of the first two sub-indices in the cultural domain. It is speculated that the popularity of the Indian film industry contributed immensely to disseminate the large ethos of Indian culture and made it more appealing globally. The questions asked in this category related to popular culture (music, clothing, and cuisine), rich cultural heritage, and an attractive tourist destination.

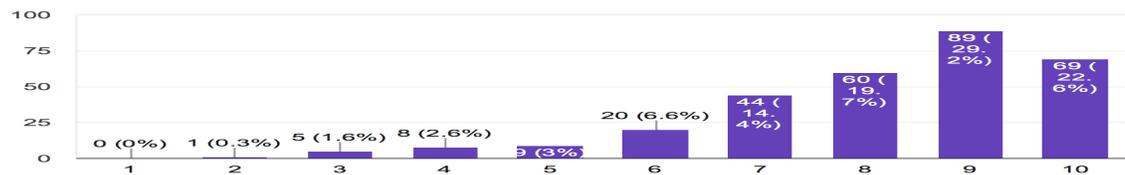
### 13. China has an appealing popular culture (popular culture includes music, movies, clothing and cuisine).

305 responses



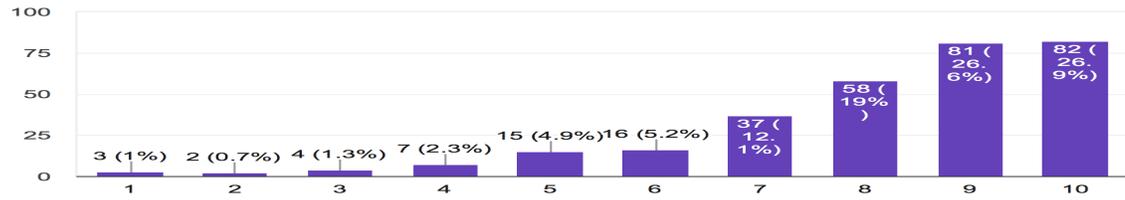
### 14. India has an appealing popular culture (popular culture includes music, movies, clothing and cuisine).

305 responses



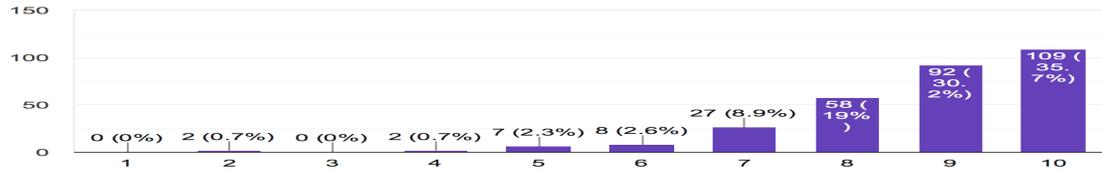
**15. China has rich cultural heritage.**

305 responses



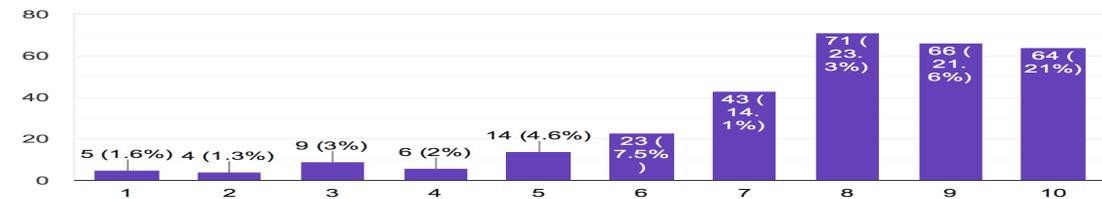
**16. India has rich cultural heritage.**

305 responses



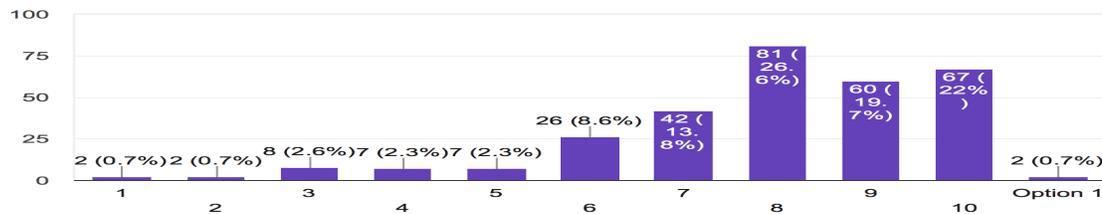
**17. China is an attractive destination for tourism.**

305 responses



**18. India is an attractive destination for tourism.**

304 responses

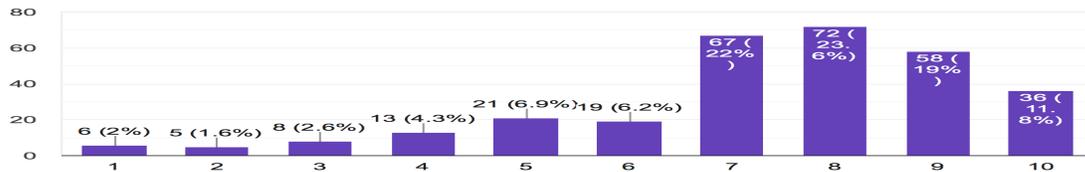


**D. Diplomacy:** In the diplomatic soft power sub-index, China again takes the lead. China scored much higher on the question of international leadership in international institutions like the UN and the WTO. The survey results are also evident by the number of diplomatic missions both the countries have outside their territories. According to Lowy Institute, an Australian think tank, China surpassed the United States in 2019, with the highest number of (276) diplomatic missions globally, while India has 166 missions

abroad (MEA). India's understaffed foreign ministry<sup>16</sup> is also trailing the diplomatic strength of China, which is only next to the US. On the question of how the countries resolve key problems in Asia, India slightly trails behind, but regarding questions about building trust and cooperation among Asian countries and respecting the sovereignty of other Asian countries, India does comparatively better than China.

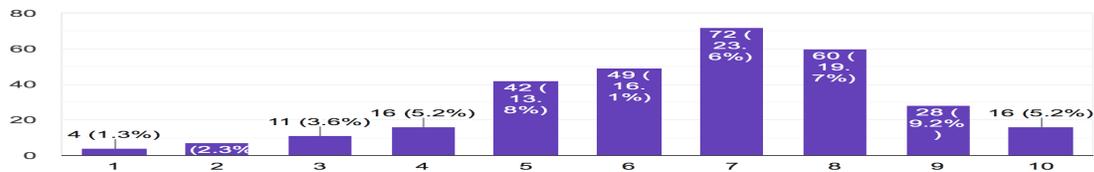
**19. China provides international leadership in international institutions like the UN and the World Trade Organization.**

305 responses



**20. India provides international leadership in international institutions like the UN and the World Trade Organization.**

305 responses



**21. China uses diplomacy to resolve key problems in Asia.**

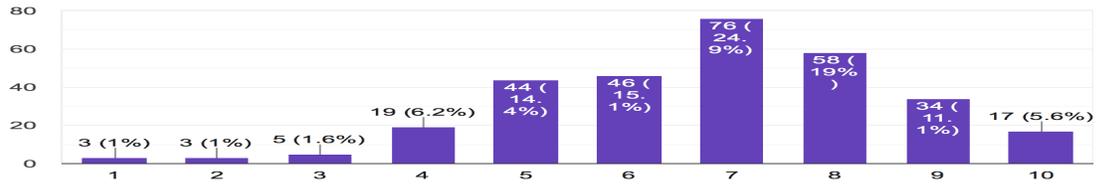
305 responses



<sup>16</sup> As per Ministry of External Affairs, the present cadre strength of the service stands at approximately 850 officers manning around 193 Indian missions and posts abroad and the various posts in the Ministry at home. <https://www.mea.gov.in/indian-foreign-service.htm> Accessed on 30 November 2020.

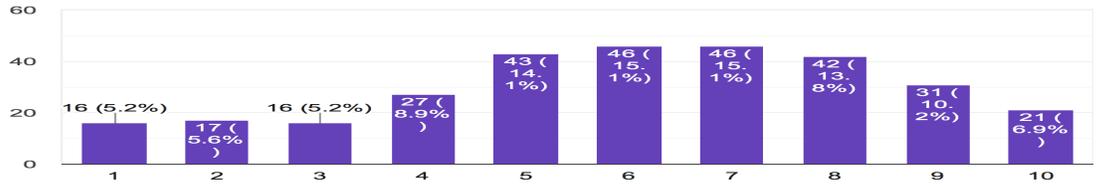
**22. India uses diplomacy to resolve key problems in Asia.**

305 responses



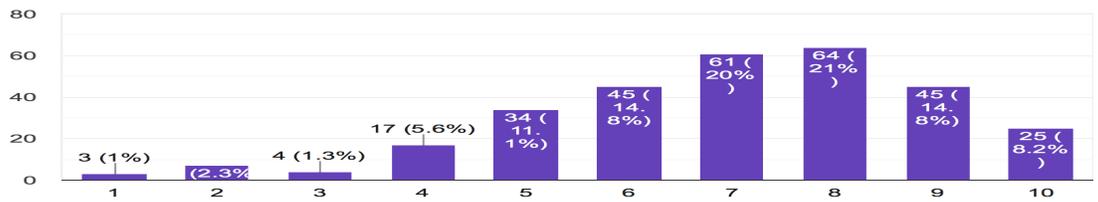
**23. China builds trust and cooperation among Asian countries.**

305 responses



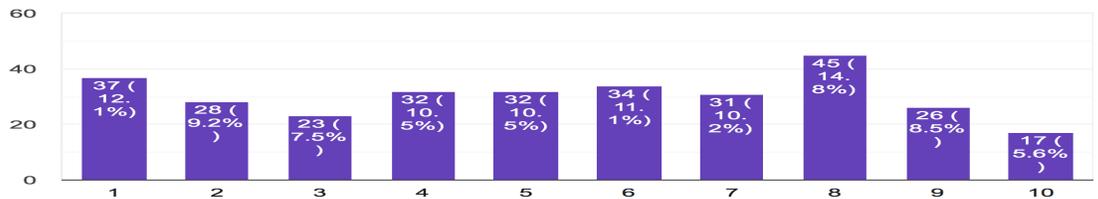
**24. India builds trust and cooperation among Asian countries.**

305 responses



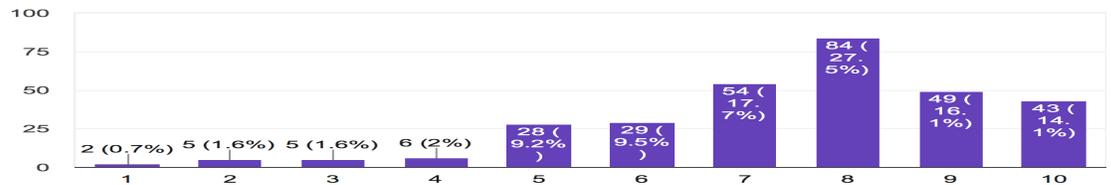
**25. China respects the sovereignty of other Asian countries.**

305 responses



**26. India respects the sovereignty of other Asian countries.**

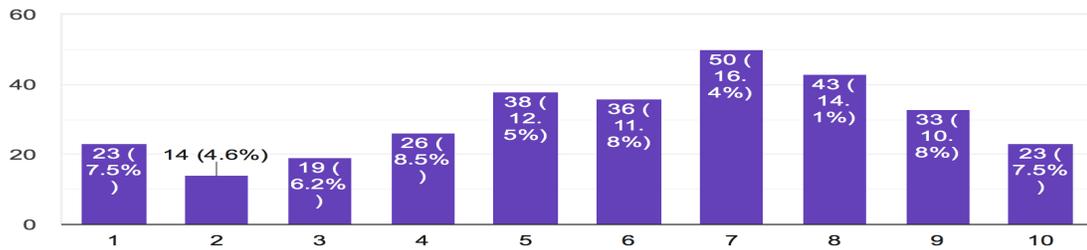
305 responses



**E. Politics:** With regard to measures of a country's political system that serves the needs of its people, interestingly, China scored higher than India. However, on another measure of the sub-index regarding respect for human rights and the rule of law, China trailed behind India.

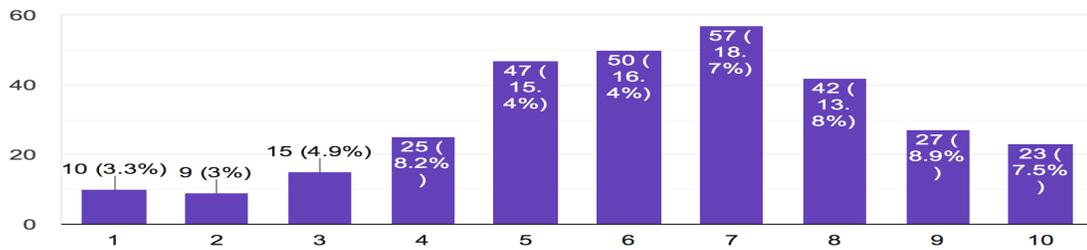
**27. China has a political system that serves the needs of its people.**

305 responses



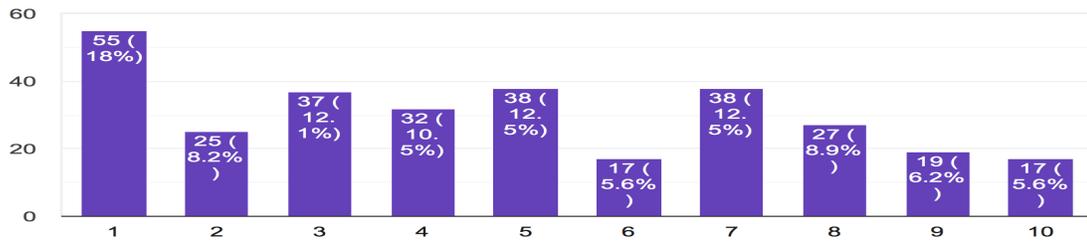
**28. India has a political system that serves the needs of its people.**

305 responses



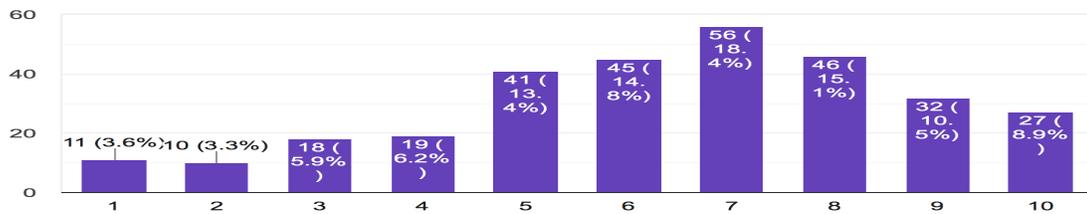
## 29. China respects human rights and the rule of law.

305 responses



## 30. India respects human rights and the rule of law.

305 responses



## Domestic Challenges to Nation Branding

The first constraint of China's nation branding efforts is the state-centered, hierarchical, one-Party character of its political ideology linked to communism (CRS Report 2012). 'A strong government and weak social model' additionally limits China's civil society's communication with international society (Wang 2012: 466). Though China selectively allows NGOs on environmental and developmental matters, it has tightened its grip on subjects related to its politics or ideology. Another institutional constraint is its government-affiliated interest groups that seek to 'gain leverage and legitimacy abroad with foreign publics while pursuing departmental interests in the name of public diplomacy' (Yiwei Wang, 2012: 466). Furthermore, the recently introduced national security law for Hong Kong, arrests and detention of critics (including academics, media magnates), suppression of dissent, and the controlled nature of Chinese media have contributed to undermining the country's image. Moreover, the news of Uyghur Muslim suppression, reeducation camp, and detention of Young Marxist group and China's alleged belligerent behaviour in South China Sea could generate diplomatic costs and weaken China's storytelling ability.

Given India's multi-party democratic structure and vibrant civil society, public diplomacy though plays a key role in positive perception. However, it fails to do for certain issues of concern – social inequality, caste-based discrimination, women's safety and dignity, political vendetta, weakening of public institutions. Moreover, India's ranking by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) on World Press Freedom Index dropped to 142 in 2020; the reason cited by RSF was 'police brutality,' 'hate campaigns on social media,' and 'reprisals instigated by criminal groups or corrupt local officials' (The Hindu). The recent amendment of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (2019) and 'discriminatory'<sup>17</sup> Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) 2019, which excludes only Muslims from neighbouring countries, further hamstring New Delhi's efforts to portray a positive picture. If unchecked, the virus of majoritarianism propagated by extremist Hindutva forces can weaken part of India's story of the land.

Moreover, China's initial mishandling of the COVID-19 pandemic has dented its image and underscored flaws in Beijing's political structure. Also, the virus has brought a huge 'reputational loss' for China. Indian government's actions (freezing of bank accounts and subsequent halt of work) against Amnesty India, a human rights watchdog, meanwhile indicate its own discomfort about critical views and outspoken groups in recent years.

Both India and China need to streamline their strengths to immaculately identify and prioritise what Kathy R.Fitzpatrick (2012) called 'strategic public(s)' in order to bolster their international messaging. Therefore, Indian PM Modi's tacit endorsement for President Trump at "Howdy, Modi" event in Houston with "Abki Baar, Trump Sarkar (This time, Trump time)" (Times of India, The Wire) displeases part of New Delhi's strategic publics. Similarly, while China managed 'commendation' from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and persuaded it not to raise the arbitrary detention of millions of Uyghurs, it still irks strategic publics and partners in OIC countries and beyond (OIC Resolution 2019).

## **Conclusion**

Nation branding efforts of both India and China include international messaging through broadcasting and strategic communications, projecting a positive image by branding places,

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<sup>17</sup> The UN human rights office said that new citizenship law in India 'fundamentally discriminatory'. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/12/1053511> accessed on 28 August 2020.

hosting visitors, and accelerating digital diplomacy, and promoting cultural exchanges as well as people-to-people contact. Over the years, the two countries have also employed more coherent approaches by directly involving domestic publics and partners, mostly on digital platforms.

Both India and China, in the past two decades, have re-energised their efforts at telling a good story through the recreation of traditional methods, such as cultural and intellectual/research links, promotion of ‘non-alignment’ and postcolonial democratic values, reinvigorating diaspora and ancient wisdom of Yoga to traditional Chinese medicine, designing new catchphrases for nation branding (‘Beijing Welcomes You’ or ‘Incredible India’) and conferences on Buddhism from both sides. They have also embraced new approaches, such as movies made in Mumbai to mobiles made in the Middle Kingdom, advertising the Chinese economic model in African summits and redefining ‘sports and expo diplomacy’ to ‘spiritual or religious fair exhibition,’ sketching ‘Beijing Consensus’ to India’s ‘inclusion of democracy promotion in foreign policy,’ classifying ‘country of QR codes’ to ‘Silicon Valley of the East’ and so on.

While PM Modi on 27 September 2020 said in his ‘Mann Ki Baat’ that India had a settled tradition of story-telling (The Hindu), Le Yucheng, Chinese vice foreign minister, during his keynote on 5 December 2020 at Renmin University reiterated that China must tell its story well... with the inexhaustible story materials, Chinese people (especially scholars and experts) need to present a real vivid, multi-dimensional China to the world (Guancha). Indeed, story materials of both nations are phenomenal, and the present engagement is perceptible. But, have they yielded the intended outcome? Grappled with issues including deep-rooted corruption, clashes between communities and religions, unemployment, polluted cities, red-tapism, and many other related issues, India needs to rely more on one of the most important modern heritages – democracy, and for which, it needs to strengthen its federal system, encourage more non-governmental organisations (NGOs) while guaranteeing their smooth functioning and also preserve its long-cherished secular values. In order for India to raise its international profile, it must pay serious attention to the size, diversity and character of its foreign services and move beyond its shoestring budget.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has certainly dented China’s image, and its botched approach has underscored flaws in the Chinese political system. Also, two post-pandemic mobilisation efforts to address major economic challenges – increasing consumption and reducing unemployment have failed to produce the desired results. While these factors, therefore, suggest a ‘push-and-

pull' dynamic, China's international messaging must be understood in relation to its domestic interests that form the CPC's primary focus (Jacob, J. 2020). Moreover, the Chinese government's crackdown on dissent, the dearth of vibrant civil society as well as an absence of NGOs engaged in political activities, and censorship in the post-digital age, for instance, Chinese novelist Fang Fang's posts on Weibo/WeChat (which would later become a book, *Wuhan Diary*) and other related issues continue to haunt China's international image. Also, the recent surge in 'Wolf Warrior' diplomacy<sup>18</sup> and hawkish stance supported by China's most outspoken officials only increase the number of sino-sceptics. Beijing therefore needs to acknowledge that sharp power cannot substitute for soft power to win over the hearts (and minds) of the peoples.

Despite the fact that 'an authoritarian system has a hard time generating soft power because soft power is generated by civil society, not by governments' (Nye and Goldsmith 2011: 49), China is exposing itself as a broad-minded booming economy; India's image of a country with a spirited civil society and democratic values can be employed for a better story for the future. Both the nations' classic efforts of nation branding sought to dispute unconstructive pigeonholes while reaffirming constructive ones, and their schemes have apparently been effectual in positively prompting public perceptions.

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<sup>18</sup> Wolf Warrior diplomacy (or 战狼外交 zhanlang waijiao) describes offensives by Chinese diplomats in the 21st century to defend China's national interests, often in confrontational ways. The term was coined from a *Rambo*-style Chinese action film, *Wolf Warrior 2*. A new Global Times poll has shown that over 70 percent respondents believe that Wolf Warrior diplomacy is the diplomatic attitude that China should take, with 78 percent respondents believing that China's global image has improved in recent years. <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1211003.shtml> Accessed on 25 December 2020.

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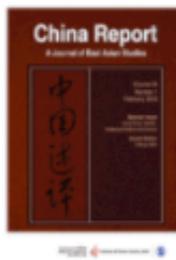


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