



RESEARCH PAPER

Role of Propaganda in Chinese Scheme of Statecraft to Dispel the Narrative of China's Threat Perception in South Asia

Dr. Arfan Mahmood

Assistant Professor, Centre for South Asian Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** arfanmahmood.csas@pu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Looking into the history of civilizations, they ceased to exist the moment they stopped being interactive and Chinese civilization is no exception. China has been pursuing a path of peaceful development to regain its lost glory but many countries especially the West has become skeptical of this Chinese claim. Beijing has responded to this narrative of 'China threat' by cultivating its soft power and propaganda and diplomacy have been adopted as effective tools of Chinese statecraft. In this backdrop, this study is aimed at analyzing Chinese statecraft in South Asia in general and propaganda statecraft in particular to alleviate the fears stemming from 'China threat' thesis. This is a qualitative study that employs content analysis technique to analyze Chinese propaganda statecraft in South Asia. This study concludes that propaganda statecraft has produced phenomenal results in transforming its resources into power in most of the South Asian countries except India.

Keywords: China Threat, Diplomacy, Peaceful Development, Propaganda, Soft Power, South Asia, Statecraft

Introduction

Chinese decades' long double digit economic growth which is deemed unparalleled feat in the history of human civilization not only transformed China but also made the world especially its neighbors highly skeptical of China's rise. The start of 21st century witnessed China making quick adjustments in its foreign policy and assumed fairly assertive outlook towards its neighbors in particular. Since then the international community started seeing China as potential potent threat. With the immediate realization of this trend, China came up with a very prompt response by taking initiative to redeem its image. The first and foremost outcome was the re-writing of the terminology from 'China's rise' to 'peaceful rise' and then further to 'peaceful development'. It was, undeniably, a conscious effort to 'Photoshop' its image in the world in general and to its neighbors in particular that China's path to development is peaceful and it is not a threat.

Even though Chinese efforts have produced significant results to alleviate or dispels the fears of the neighboring countries in particular and the West in general, the element of China threat still persists. For countering the narrative of China threat, Chinese leadership adopted soft power approach to alleviate or dispel the fears of its neighbors regarding China's rise. Since the presidency of Hu Jintao, China started intensifying its efforts to promote its image overseas. In China's scheme of soft power, public diplomacy of which culture is an important aspect is heavily emphasized. Diplomacy and propaganda are identified as closely related tools of statecraft. This study is an extensive attempt to analyze the role of propaganda in Chinese statecraft for alleviating the fears of China threat in South Asia.

Considering the case of Southeast Asia, a region highly suspicious of China's rise, is still quite concerned about China's economic development and military modernization. China has been trying to improve its ties with Southeast Asia for the last two decades by the following strategies: to develop strategic partnerships and working with regional

organizations; to develop official military-military exchanges; to enhance China's participation in ASEAN Regional Forum; and to increase its military transparency (Prajuli, 2013). Even after untiring efforts to remove this distrust, it has not been vanished completely yet. This brings the following query to be addressed: How the propaganda can be employed as a tool of statecraft for alleviating or dispelling the fears of the South Asian countries about China threat theory? This study is segregated into four parts. First section deals with the definitional aspects of statecraft and Holsti's categorization of statecraft. Second part of the study explores propaganda in Chinese scheme of statecraft. Third segment of this study deals with the dominant themes in Chinese propaganda towards South Asia. Last portion of this research summarizes it with policy recommendations.

What is Propaganda?

Different scholars have defined propaganda and its various aspects have been covered by them. According to Holsti, it is the "deliberate attempt by some individuals or groups to form, control, or alter the attitudes of other groups by the use of the instruments of communication, with the intention that in any given situation the reaction of those so influenced will be that desired by the propagandist" (Holsti, 1977). This definition differentiates the communication acts which are attempts of propaganda from that of non-propagandist communications. Accordingly, if the communication attempt of the act of promotion is targeted at the deliberate campaign to induce actions through control of the attitudes then, such acts are categorized as propaganda.

Palmer and Perkins have illustrated propaganda as a new kind of diplomacy in which "the radio, the press, and other methods of making a direct appeal to peoples rather than government through various channels" (Palmer & Perkins, 2007). Additional important feature of propaganda has been explained as "the manipulation of symbols to control controversial attitudes" (Lasswell & Blumenstock, 1939). Thus, propaganda is an extensive branch of study. For the purpose of this research, the common themes employed by Chinese in South Asian countries will be considered. The application of propaganda as statecraft's tool is observed both at government level (Figure 1) and non-government level (Figure 2).

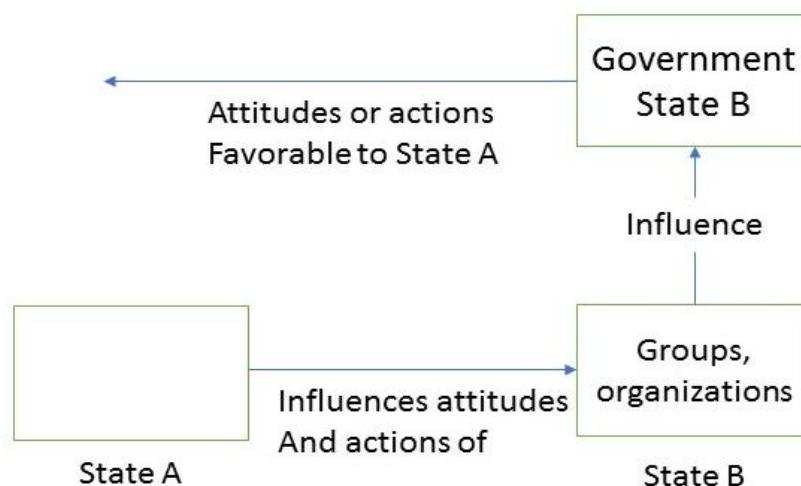


Figure 1: Government Level/ Official Propaganda (Holsti, 1977)

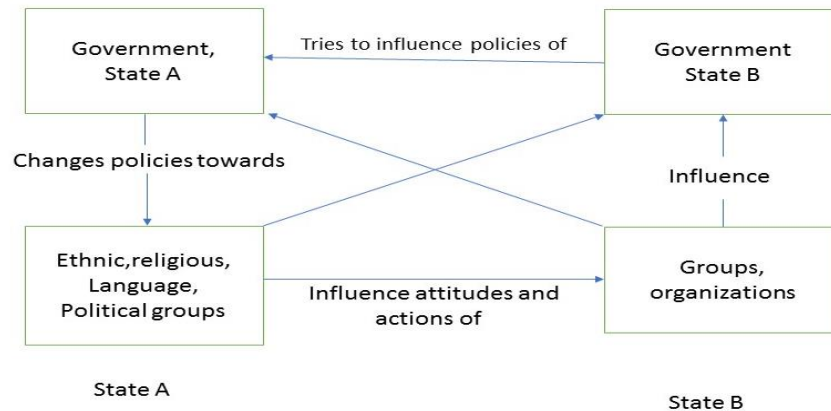


Figure 2: Non-governmental Propaganda (Holsti, 1977)

Now-a-days the practices of propaganda as a mean of statecraft have become very common and significant in importance for countries around the world. Holsti argues that the propaganda attempts of the states are not only targeting the governments but also the entire society as it is put brilliantly by Holsti in the following words: "Governments no longer make promises of rewards or threats of punishments just to the foreign diplomats and foreign office of officials; they make them to entire societies" (Holsti, 1977). Thus, the states make deliberate efforts to influence the societies through multiple strategies.

Multiple commonalities are found as far as the elements of propaganda are concerned i.e. "a communicator with the intention of changing attitudes, opinions, and behavior of others; the symbols – written, spoken, or behavioral – used by the communicator; the media of communication; and the audience or, as it is often called in the terminology of public opinion studies the target" (Holsti, 1977). Hence, propaganda technique involves a process of persuasion, and relies on the selection of facts, partial explanation and predetermined answers. It has been observed by scholars that the art of advertising is not different from propaganda. The propagandist must understand and study its target group, analyze preconceptions, fears, weaknesses and desires. Then decide upon the most promising techniques to be used. They also note that there are numerous techniques used, yet, they can be grouped into four categories: methods of presentation; techniques of gaining attention; devices for gaining responses; and methods of gaining acceptance (Holsti, 1977).

A propagandist usually does not present his materials in a way as to declare both positive and negative dimensions of an issue. Mostly, they will highlight the positives and will not disclose the negatives. Palmer and Perkins, however, compare a propagandist to a trial lawyer who carefully organizes evidence to prove his side of the case (Palmer & Perkins, 2007). They may employ several strategies – notes, protests, official speeches, a declaration by statesmen – to reach the governments, and may use other means such as media, public diplomacy, to gain the attention of the masses.

Propaganda in Chinese Scheme of Statecraft

In the recent years Chinese have given much consideration for propaganda as a tool of statecraft due to various reasons. China, with its rapid development, has invited different kinds of perceptions from the international community. After clinching phenomenal successes and emerging as one of the most powerful economies in the world in a short span of time without following the popular Washington consensus have created a "China threat" theory. Because Chinese are ideologically and politically different from the US, the current hegemon, and because China has developed with its own merits within a period of three decades made the theorists and political observers to predict that China is going to replace

the current world hegemony, the United States, within a short span of time, which might result into affecting the global peace. This perception coupled with China's border and maritime disputes with its neighbors, growing assertive behavior towards small countries in its neighborhood, and tightening domestic policies which resulted in questions of human rights, generate a poor international image of China. Consequently, China is facing hardships in gaining acceptance as a responsible international super power. Thus, Chinese ruling party, the Communist Party of China (CCP) has realized the significance of investing resources to boost the country's image in the international society.

The CCP is of the opinion that its negative image arises out from "distorted view of contemporary China due to its misrepresentation in Western media" (Brady, 2015). Going by Liu Qibao's remarks, the head of the CCP's Central Propaganda Department: "there are always some people who wear colored glasses to see China. They view the country through the lenses of the 'China threat theory', 'resource plundering theory' or 'China collapse theory'" (Brady, 2015). Thus, Chinese leaders are prioritizing persuasion and information management, and have even established institutions to carry out propaganda mechanisms. Thus, current Chinese propaganda techniques are a mix of conventional media and publishing, public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, electronic games and social media.

Chinese propaganda is targeted at two vital groups; overseas Chinese and overseas foreigners. China intends to have a positive constructs among the overseas Chinese that the Chinese diplomats abroad make several attempts to mobilize pro-Chinese elements among them. Beijing is targeting for three goals in its propaganda attempts aimed at overseas Chinese; neutralizing antagonism towards the ruling regime, increasing antipathy towards anti-CCP forces (both within China and in exile), and to encourage overseas Chinese to invest in China (Brady, 2016). As most of the studies disclose, their attempts have been successful that China has been capable of fostering positive public opinion among overseas Chinese and have even succeeded in bringing investments home. Conventional media such as Chinese language newspapers, radio, television channels – especially China Central Television (CCTV) are employed as information dissemination mechanisms aimed at overseas Chinese.

Another target group of Chinese propaganda campaign is non-Chinese foreigners. The key objective of propaganda targeted at non-Chinese foreigners is to raise awareness of China's social, economic and political stability, and its rapid economic growth. Through the promotion of its economic prowess China has attempted to attract other countries, however, this has also created threat perception among other countries. It intends to minimize the fear among neighboring countries that a powerful China or a militarily strong China is a threat. Hence, as Joshua Kurlantzick notes, China wants to "diminish fears of China's future military power, or concerns that China's massive economic growth would divert trade and foreign investment from other nations" (Kurlantzick, 2006). China wants to transform its image from that of a growing threat or an aggressor to one of a benefactor, potential partner, and a responsible power. Chinese propaganda statecraft also aims at winning the trust and confidence of states that possess oil, gas, and other natural resources which are vital for continuous economic growth of the country. Unimpeded supply of energy resources is a vital national interest of China. The need for resources and energy is increasing in parallel with the continuous growth of the economy. Thus, securing access to resources and the energy markets abroad by winning their trust and confidence has become a core objective of its statecraft, and China believes it can succeed by persuading and attracting these countries without using force. Securing support for its "One China policy," by weakening Taiwan's ties with the international community is another major objective of Beijing's propaganda. Derek Mitchell argues in his chapter "China and the Developing World" that in 1994, Beijing declared that it will "use all economic and diplomatic resources to reward countries that are willing to isolate Taiwan", hinting they are also ready to take punitive measures against who will not comply with this position (Mitchell, 2005). Thus, China is not reluctant to make its available resources and employ propaganda strategies to make the others change their loyalty to Beijing and make them accept that Taiwan is a part of China. To promote multi-

polarity and diminish the influence of external powers, especially the US influence in Asia, is another objective of China's propaganda mechanism. It projects to create its own area of influence in Asia.

The global society has been observing with concern this new development. A report released by the International Security Advisory Board of the United States notes that "China is in the midst of a comprehensive strategic deception campaign," using techniques of "Psychological Warfare (propaganda, deception, and coercion), Media Warfare (manipulation of public opinion domestically and internationally), and Legal Warfare (use of 'legal regimes' to handicap the opponent in fields favorable to him)" (ISAB Report, 2008).

Chinese Propaganda in South Asia

As far as the perception of south Asian countries of China is concerned, it's of mixed views. Some countries view China's rise and growing presence with positivity while the others with concern. Going by the survey done by Pew Research Centre in 2014, China is viewed in Asia with favor as a nation and with concern about its territorial ambitions. Of the three South Asian nations participated in the survey, both Pakistan and Bangladesh have favorable perceptions of China. When it was inquired by these countries to rate China whether it is favorable or not, 78% of Pakistanis and 77% of Bangladeshi have viewed China as favorable. In fact, China received highest ratings from these two countries (Figure 3). Thus, Pew Research Centre notes Pakistan and Bangladesh as China's strongest supporters in Asia. Moreover, Pakistan deems China as its greatest ally. Even though only 31% of Indians view China as favorable, they do not deem China as the greatest threat for the country. Yet, 72% of Indians have raised serious concerns about China's territorial disputes. Apart from the Southeast Asian countries like Philippines, Japan, Vietnam and South Korea, India transmits the highest concern of China's assertive behavior with regard to territorial disputes and that it will lead to a military conflict in China's neighborhood. Despite its favorability towards China, even almost half of Pakistanis too are concerned of a possible military conflict which will destabilize regional peace (Figure 4).

How Asians Rate China, India, Pakistan, Japan and the U.S.

Favorable views of ...

Views in:	China	India	Pakistan	Japan	U.S.
	%	%	%	%	%
Bangladesh	77	70	50	71	76
China	-	30	30	8	50
India	31	-	15	43	55
Indonesia	66	62	52	77	59
Japan	7	63	19	-	66
Malaysia	74	46	43	75	51
Pakistan	78	13	-	51	14
Philippines	38	50	33	80	92
South Korea	56	59	30	22	82
Thailand	72	45	27	81	73
Vietnam	16	67	36	77	76
U.S.	35	55	18	70	-

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q15a, b, h-j.

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Which Country Is Greatest Ally/Threat?

Top choice (%)

Views in:	Ally	Threat
Bangladesh	U.S. (43%)	India (27%)
China	Russia (25)	U.S. (36)
India	U.S. (33)	Pakistan (45)
Indonesia	U.S. (28)	U.S. (25)
Japan	U.S. (62)	China (68)
Malaysia	China (27)	U.S. (26)
Pakistan	China (57)	U.S. (38)
Philippines	U.S. (83)	China (58)
South Korea	U.S. (68)	North Korea (36)
Thailand	U.S. (29)	Cambodia (11)
Vietnam	U.S. (30)	China (74)
U.S.	Britain (31)	Russia (23)

Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q96a_1 & Q96b_1.

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Figure 3: Views on China in Asia (Pew Research Center, 2014)

The Pew Research Center's report argues that "Asians' concerns about China reflect the fact that, as Asia's largest economic and military power sitting at the center of the region, Beijing has territorial disputes with many of its neighbors. There is widespread concern among publics in East, Southeast and South Asia that these frictions could lead to military conflict." Thus, Chinese have to put up extra effort to develop a positive image among the South Asian countries as well.

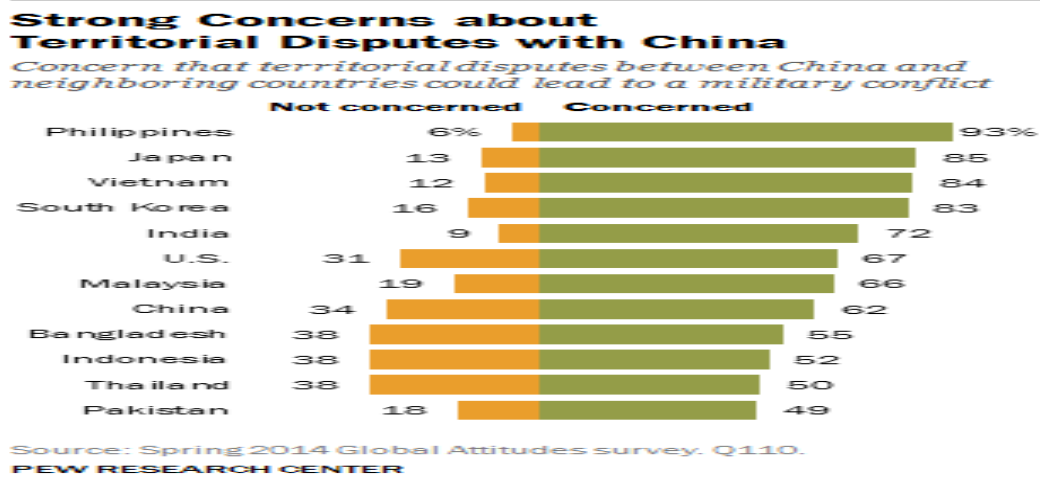


Figure 4: Concerns about China's Territorial Disputes (Pew Research Center, 2014)

Hence, there is similarity in Chinese objectives regarding propaganda statecraft in South Asia and the world. It projects to convince the South Asian countries that its rise to great power status is not a threat. Moreover, China intends to dispel the negative perceptions India has on its increasing presence in the subcontinent. Chinese aim at ensuring that it does not have any hegemonic ambitions in the region, nor does it want to displace India. However, it desires India to accept its growing presence in the South Asian region.

Consequently, Chinese propaganda statecraft in South Asia is based on several popular themes: peaceful rise and anti-hegemonism; non-interference, sovereignty, and territorial integrity; and neighbors, friends and strategic partners.

Dominant Themes in Chinese Propaganda towards South Asia

Peaceful rise and anti-hegemonism

A major objective of Chinese propaganda statecraft is to highlight its desire of its peaceful rise and development. To do this, China has introduced the policy of “peaceful development” and claims its rise as “peaceful rise.” To explain China’s global strategy properly, various scholars and writers’ speeches and writings are used by diplomats and political leaders. An article written by Zheng Bijian, Chair of the China Reform Forum, and a prominent scholar who has drafted key reports for five Chinese national party congresses and who has held senior posts in academic and party organizations in China:

“China will not follow the path of Germany leading up to World War I or those of Germany and Japan leading up to World War II when these countries violently plundered resources and pursued hegemony. Neither will China follow the path of the great powers vying for global domination during the Cold War. Instead, China will transcend ideological differences to strive for peace, development, and cooperation with all countries of the world” (Bijian, 2005).

Moreover, it recapitulates that “China does not seek hegemony or predominance in world affairs. It advocates a new international political and economic order, one that can be achieved through incremental reforms and the democratization of international relations” (Bijian, 2005).

To emphasize on its peaceful rise, China’s Whitepaper on Peaceful Development is one of the prominent steps taken by the Chinese government. The Whitepaper notes:

“China's peaceful development has broken away from the traditional pattern where a rising power was bound to seek hegemony. In modern history, some rising powers established colonies, fought for spheres of influence, and conducted military expansion against other countries. This reached a climax in the 20th century, when rivalry for hegemony and military confrontation plunged mankind into the abyss of two devastating world wars. With a keen appreciation of its historical and cultural tradition of several thousand years, the nature of economic globalization, changes in international relations and the international security landscape in the 21st century as well as the common interests and values of humanity, China has decided upon peaceful development and mutually beneficial cooperation as a fundamental way to realize its modernization, participate in international affairs and handle international relations” (China's Peaceful Development, 2011); (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Rahim, 2017). This has surely explained China's path to development and highlighted its intention to pursue development and harmony domestically and pursue cooperation and peace internationally.

“China's overall goal of pursuing peaceful development is to promote development and harmony domestically and pursue cooperation and peace internationally. Specifically, this means that China will endeavor to make life better for its people and contribute to human progress through hard work, innovation and reform carried out by the Chinese people and growing long-term friendly relations and promoting equality and mutually-beneficial cooperation with other countries. This has become a national commitment which is manifest in strategies for national development, and progress made in the course of China's development” (China's Peaceful Development, 2011).

These ambitions are often reflected from Chinese diplomats and leaders of CCP whenever they visit South Asian states. President Xi, during his visit to Bangladesh, highlighted the importance of Chinese policy of peaceful co-existence. During his meeting with the PM Sheikh Hassina and President Abdul Hamid, he pointed out that the bilateral relations between China and Bangladesh will be based on five principals of peaceful co-existence. Premier Zhu Rongji visited Pakistan back in 2001, emphasizing Sino-Pak friendly relationship in these words that “good example of peaceful coexistence between countries with different social system” (Rongji, 2001). The same ambition was expressed to Sri Lankan minister of foreign affairs when he paid visit to China back in 2006. In 2002 China's Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Jiang Qin Zheng published his article in local newspaper on China's national daily noted that “The global policy of the People's Republic of China on inter-state relations has always been on five noble principles of the peaceful co-existence” (Zheng, 2002). The perception embedded in Indian society that China is taking the place of India in the region. President XI, during his visit to India in 2014, ensured that China has no intention to do that rather it want continuity in peaceful co-existence and strong bi-lateral relations with all the stakeholders in South Asian region. President Xi further added to this and showed his concern that China wants to engage with India on equal terms rather to get involved in any kind of hegemonic race in the region. President Xi emphasized that “A South Asia that enjoys peace, stability, development and prosperity serves the interests of countries and people in the region and of China as well. China wants to live in harmony with all countries in the region and contribute its share to the development of the region” (Liu, 2016).

Chinese academia is firmly making every attempt to promote China's idea of peaceful co-existence in South Asia. In an article written by a Chinese scholar Wang Weihua on Sri Lanka-China friendly relations noted that “the road of peaceful development is China's national strategy and will not be shaken easily since we believe that there is no way for China to follow the old way which the western powers have taken when they were rising in the last 400 hundred years” (Weihua, 2018).

Non-interference, sovereignty, territorial integrity

Another theme that China uses in its relations with South Asian countries is non-interference, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. Regardless of their size or level of influence in the international community, all South Asian nations demand respect from other states for their territorial integrity and sovereign rights. China's Whitepaper on Peaceful Development put its finger on state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity and national reunification as its core interests. Thus, it publicizes that China seeks to pursue economic development without undermining sovereignty and state security. Moreover, Beijing reveals that countries that adhere to such principles are considered to be strategic partners (Zhongping & Jing, 2014). Many South Asian countries do relate to this thought. Consequently, small South Asian countries who often get pressured due to interference by major powers in domestic affairs find China a reliable partner.

Almost all the South Asian countries have faced external interventions in domestic affairs from time to time. Sri Lanka had to go through different hard times during and after the protracted conflict because the government was not ready to comply with the demands by the other countries to abandon fighting and resume peace negotiations. As a result, Sri Lanka was accused of allegedly violating human rights, and the UN Human Rights Council enacted numerous resolutions to hold the Sri Lankan government and its army responsible.

Yet, China adhered to its policy of non-intervention and supported the Sri Lankan government's decision. During a visit to Sri Lanka in 2005, Premier Wen Jiabao made a statement saying "China expressed confidence in the Government's ongoing efforts to reach a peacefully negotiated settlement of all issues involved" (Wheeler, 2012). In another joint communiqué in 2007 found China claiming that it "welcomes the positive steps taken by the Government of Sri Lanka to reach a peaceful resolution of ethnic issues through negotiations" (China-Sri Lanka Joint Communique, 2007).

Chinese President Xi was quoted reiterating Beijing's support to protect Pakistan's sovereignty, independence and "firmly support Pakistan's choice of development path" and back Pakistan in its effort to maintain national stability, promoting economic and social development during his visit to Islamabad in 2015. Whilst this is a recurring theme highlighted at every meeting and every event, China is practically proved that it will not interfere in domestic issues. For instance, China is often questioned whether its stance has changed with regard to Kashmir issue now that it is funding the CPEC project which is partly running through the disputed territory. Chinese Foreign Ministry was quoted issuing an official statement emphasizing that it has not changed its stance and will not meddle in the Kashmir row between India and Pakistan, because Beijing considers it to be a bilateral dispute between the two countries. The note reads:

"China's position on the issue of Kashmir is clear and consistent. It is an issue left over from history between India and Pakistan and shall be properly addressed by India and Pakistan through consultation and negotiation... The building of the CPEC does not affect China's position on this issue. We sincerely hope that India and Pakistan will properly handle differences by increasing communication and dialogue, and jointly uphold regional peace and stability" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2017).

China not only adheres to a policy of non-intervention on its own but also rejects meddling from other nations. It respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of others. In an interview, a Chinese academic emphasized that China strongly disagrees with Indian influence on Nepali politics, which resulted in a humanitarian crisis in late 2015. Foreign Minister Wang Yi, giving an exclusive interview to mark the 60th anniversary of relations between the two countries noted that the reasons behind smooth and stable relations between the two countries are Beijing's respect for Nepal's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and its development road chosen independently.

Neighbors, strategic partners, friends

Big brotherhood and the concept of neighbors are two ideas that are frequently used in international relations while dealing with neighboring nations. India is frequently seen as the region's big brother in South Asia.

Accordingly, India dominates, manipulates and even rules the domestic and international affairs of the countries in the subcontinent. This is often viewed with disagreement and opposition by the smaller South Asian countries. Despite sharing borders with five South Asian countries, and despite its geographical size and economic might, China does not try to interfere or dominate South Asian countries. As such, China introduces itself as a neighbor, and a reliable friend. Premier Zhu, during his visit to Pakistan, noted that China and Pakistan are close neighbors. He was quoted saying "China and Pakistan are close neighbors linked by mountains and rivers. In the 50 years since the establishment of the diplomatic relations, successive leaders of our two countries have devoted a great deal of time and energy to fostering and developing our bilateral friendly ties" (Zhu, 2001). China's narrative with regard to Nepal is also highlighting the very same concept that it reads China and Nepal are "neighbors but closer than relatives" (Ghimire, 2016). Chinese Ambassador to Sri Lanka, writing an article to a local newspaper marking 60th anniversary of China-Sri Lanka relations noted that "China and Sri Lanka are close neighbors enjoying traditional friendship" (Xianliang, 2017). In reality, compared with other South Asian countries, Sri Lanka, being an island, is situated far away from China. During Premier Wen Jiabao's visit to Bangladesh in 2005, and during his meeting with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, he referred Bangladesh and China to be important friendly neighbors interestingly, though China does not share a border with Bangladesh. Despite that, calling the other its neighbor signals of the respect and importance China is giving to the small states.

China also frequently uses the term "friends" to consult South Asian countries so as to reveal the relationship. As such, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are known as "all weather friends" and "time-tested friends" who means that the relationship has no longer modified despite converting instances. Premier Zhu has given an interesting quote from old Chinese saying to describe China-Pakistan relations. (Yaseen, Jathol, & Muzaffar, 2016); (Begum, Ashraf, & Muzaffar, 2019).

"Friendship between chess playmates cannot outlast the day; friendship between wine and diners cannot outlast the month; friendship based on power and influence cannot outlast the year. Only the friendship by virtue of morality and justice can last a lifetime.' This means that only a friendship based on strength of morality and justice is reliable and can last long... for half a century, our two peoples have always supported each other and gone through thick and thin together despite the constant change of events. The Chinese people will not forget the selfless help the Pakistani government and people gave us in the early days of the People's Republic and their valuable support to us at times of our difficulties. The Chinese government and people on their part have also provided selfless help and support to Pakistan" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2011).

Chinese President Xi referred to Sri Lanka as "all-weather friend" for the first time in 2014 during his meeting with then Speaker of the Parliament Chamal Rajapaksa. President Xi was quoted saying "China regards Sri Lanka as an all-weather friend and partner". It was a term China has exclusively used to narrate its relationship with Pakistan. Thus, this statement gained international attention. Even though the relations strained after the change of government in Sri Lanka, the term is still in use when describing the relationship, proving that despite how the situation changes, China and Sri Lanka will remain to have strong ties. Despite issues the two countries have, China does not forget to use the term "friendship" in describing its relationship with India as well. For instance, during one of his meetings with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014, Premier Li did not forget to mention how interested China is to "keep the good-neighborly friendship and mutually-beneficial cooperation as the main theme of the bilateral relationship" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2014).

China has lifted its ties with Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India into a strategic partnership. China and Pakistan relations were elevated to a strategic partnership in 2005. In fact, Pakistan is considered as Beijing's strategic ally in South Asia. It was among the first Asian countries with which China built a strategic partnership. It elevated its relations into a partnership of comprehensive cooperation in 1999. In 2005, it was upgraded to "all-weather strategic partnership". In 2005, China declared its relations with Sri Lanka to be a comprehensive partnership. In May 2013, during the visit of President Rajapaksa to Beijing, the two countries informed of evolving the relationship into a strategic partnership. It was in 2016, during President Xi's visit to Dhaka that Bangladesh and China's ties were lifted for a strategic partnership. In April 2017 China and India issued a joint statement which explained that China and India have agreed to establish a "strategic and cooperative partnership for peace and prosperity" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC, 2014).

Strategic partnerships reveal a courting that's greater critical than the bilateral members of the family, yet it isn't always an alliance. According to scholars, a strategic partnership is a statecraft technique China is an increasing number of exploiting. For China, strategic partnership refers to a long-term and stable relationship (Zhongping & Jing, 2014). Being the only major power that follows a non-alliance policy, strategic partnership seems China's response to having a relationship which is above ordinary bilateral relations. China's attempt to build strategic partnerships with South Asian countries reveals the rising importance of the region in South Asian foreign policy. It also elucidates how China has changed its statecraft to this region during the last few years.

Conclusion

Summing up the discussion, China has effectively made use of its resources, both financial and non-financial for realizing its national interests in the South Asian region by utilizing statecraft techniques. When it comes to explain Chinese position in South Asia region regarding utilization of several statecraft techniques, there is no argument to the fact that these strategies helped China transforming its resources into power and influence in South Asia. It is hard to deny that Chinese possession of resources has not only improved but their capabilities and skills have also improved to transform them into influence attempts. The mechanisms of its statecraft, ranging from economic to military, from diplomatic and propaganda explore that Chinese position in South Asia has altered from what it was decades ago. The application of its propaganda statecraft has been quite effective in south Asia and produced phenomenal results to turn resources into influence and power. In addition, Chinese employment of particular techniques such as strategic partnership, conference diplomacy, assertive trade relations and increasing diplomatic meetings emphasize that China is more confident of its power in the South Asian region and it is definitely influencing the behavior and perception of the small South Asian countries. The themes of propaganda statecraft focused by China in South Asia has proved quite effective to earn positive response from South Asian countries for China that has ultimately enhanced Chinese power and influence in the South Asian region.

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