

Power of Bonding and Non-Western Emerging Great Powers Engagement: Comparing China and India's Soft Power Strategy in Pakistan

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Power of Bonding and Non-Western Emerging Great Powers Engagement: Comparing China and India's Soft Power Strategy in Pakistan by Md. Nazmul Islam is a scholarly exploration that pioneers new perspectives in International Relations. It offers a unique and fresh insight into how non-Western emerging great powers, specifically China and India, utilize soft power strategies to engage with Pakistan. The significance of this four-chapter book lies in its departure from traditional Western-centric viewpoints, providing a distinct lens to comprehend the geopolitical and cultural strategies of these major Asian powers. This unique perspective on non-Western soft power will intrigue scholars, policymakers, and individuals interested in international relations.

At the outset, the author introduces the concepts of soft power and Pakistan's unique geopolitical context, which China and India influence. Following the introduction, the first chapter provides a comprehensive overview of various theories (Soft Power Theory, Theory of International Politics, Hegemony Theory, Notion of Disciplinary Power Theory, Constructivist Theory) and interpretations of power, critiques the Western-centric view of soft power, and presents a novel theoretical approach such as triangulation method, a qualitative technique for content analysis and the perceptions of experts (p. 176) to understand the soft power strategies of emerging non-Western great powers. The author describes this strategy using the term "Power of Bonding," which refers to a country's capacity to forge strong and enduring relationships based on cultural and historical connections.

The second chapter elucidates China's soft power strategy in Pakistan, providing specific examples of cultural diplomacy, economic initiatives, and political strategies. For instance, it highlights the role of Confucius Institutes in promoting Chinese culture, the Belt and Road Initiative as a major economic initiative, and China's support for Pakistan in the international

arena, such as the World Diplomatic Forum as a political strategy. By fostering cultural exchanges, investing in Pakistan's economic development, and strengthening diplomatic ties, China aims to create a favorable image and a solid bilateral relationship. While this strategy significantly enhances bilateral relations and economic development, it also reports challenges in the power and infrastructure sectors' dependency, cultural domination, financial imbalance, and geopolitical tensions. As China and Pakistan continue to deepen their partnership, it will be crucial to address these challenges to ensure a balanced and mutually beneficial relationship.

The third section examines India's soft power strategy in Pakistan, providing a more detailed analysis of its cultural connections, political engagement, and economic interactions. India leverages its historical and cultural ties with Pakistan, mainly through the shared heritage of the subcontinent. This could be further explored by discussing the influence of Bollywood, which enjoys immense popularity in Pakistan, and various people-to-people initiatives like Aman Ki Asha (Hope for Peace). Politically, India's engagement has been complex due to historical conflicts, but efforts have been made to improve diplomatic relations through dialogue and bilateral agreements. Economically, while direct interactions are limited compared to China, India seeks to enhance trade and investment ties with Pakistan. The chapter underscores India's challenges, such as the Kashmir issue and the tension between the two countries in deploying soft power in Pakistan and highlights the potential of cultural affinity and shared history as powerful tools for engagement.

The last chapter, "Comparing China and India's Soft Power Strategy in the Case of Pakistan," provides a comparative analysis that reveals China's and India's distinct approaches to their soft power strategies. China's strategy is characterized by significant economic investments and political support, which have substantially influenced Pakistan. On the one hand, India's approach leverages cultural and historical connections. Moreover, the Chinese policy is currently more effective due to the lack of conflict between China and Pakistan. However, India's policy has greater potential for impact, as it could foster stronger ties between the people of the two countries. While China and Pakistan may continue to strengthen their state-to-state relations, cultural differences hinder people-to-people connections. In contrast, despite political and ideological issues, India and Pakistan share a common understanding of their grievances, making reconciliation possible with empathetic leadership.

The book's focus is timely, as it helps to illuminate the shifting power dynamics in the region. Underpinned by a rigorous mixed-methods research approach, it incorporates both qualitative and quantitative data, which strengthens the robustness of the findings and enhances the book's credibility. One of its most notable strengths is its focus on non-Western perspectives of soft power, providing a fresh and much-needed alternative to the Western-dominated discourse in international relations theory. Another unique perspective it offers is that it allows for a thorough comparative analysis of China's and India's soft power strategies. The book offers a holistic view of how these two emerging powers engage with Pakistan by meticulously examining the cultural, political, and economic aspects.

While the author has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the field, it is important to acknowledge the book's limitations. The dense theoretical discussions, particularly in the first chapter, may pose a challenge for those not well-versed in International Relations.

Moreover, the first chapter should delve deeper into the analysis rather than focusing heavily on such a school of thought. These discussions would be more appropriately placed in the introductory segment. In addition, the contemporary analysis of “power” should probably also be covered in the Introduction. By addressing these potential concerns, the audience can feel that their interests and needs are being considered.

While providing a detailed case study, the focus on Pakistan also limits the broader applicability of the findings. Readers interested in the wider implications of China’s and India’s soft power strategies beyond Pakistan may find the scope somewhat narrow. The book could also benefit from a more robust engagement with opposing perspectives and criticisms of China’s and India’s strategies. For instance, it could address potential criticisms of China’s economic initiatives being seen as debt traps or India’s cultural initiatives as attempts to influence public opinion. Including more voices from critical scholars or dissenting viewpoints would provide a more balanced discussion. Ultimately, there is a risk of bias in how the strategy and their effectiveness are evaluated. Although the author uses rigorous methods to mitigate this, readers should be aware of the potential for subjective interpretation of the data.

Overall, the book’s comprehensive theoretical framework, empirical data, and comparative analysis provide timely and crucial insights into how China and India engage with Pakistan. Despite some limitations, it introduces the concept of the “power of bonding,” which refers to a country’s ability to build strong and lasting relationships through cultural and historical ties and underscores its importance in soft power dynamics. This book is a must-read for scholars, policymakers, and anyone keen on understanding the evolving landscape of global power relations. Therefore, in addition to this book review, those who do not have time to read the book can easily read similar book reviews (Ay 2024; Fuad 2024) to sharpen their knowledge.

References

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