

CHINA'S SOFT POWER AIMS IN SOUTH ASIA: EXPERIENCES OF NEPALESE
STUDENTS IN CHINA'S INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Internationalization of higher education is a major characteristic of China's higher education policy. Accordingly, the Chinese government is fervently encouraging the spread of Chinese language and culture through Confucius Institutes, student exchange programs, recruitment of international students, and international collaborations. South Asia is no exception to China's higher education outreach. Against this background, this qualitative study examined experiences of South Asian students with regard to China's higher education program(s) in relation to the explicit and implicit aims of China's soft power policy. Soft power refers to the power of attraction and co-optation, which is based on a nation's intangible resources such as "culture, ideology and institutions" (Nye, 1990).

A case study approach was employed by using Nepal as the site for an in-depth investigation into academic, socio-cultural and political experiences of Nepalese students in relation to China's higher education policy and programs. Soft power constitutes the theoretical framework. Data sources included interviews with 20 Nepalese students (including alumni) and six experts, You Tube videos, images, news stories, books, journal articles, documents, and reports. Findings indicate that whereas the Chinese political system — specifically governance — and foreign policy as well as certain traits of the Chinese society drew admiration from the Nepalese students, the Chinese education program was found deficient in brand reputation and Chinese cultural

penetration remains challenging, while such issues as racism and color discrimination stood out as social ills in the Chinese society.

The study bridges a critical gap in the existing literature that is largely exclusive of the South Asian region where China is rapidly strengthening its strategic foothold, as well as making a significant contribution to the literature on linkages between soft power and education by employing the educational soft power model. The findings should be useful to education policy analysts, specifically those who are associated with international education, Nepalese and Chinese policy makers, China observers and specialists, prospective foreign students in China, and students and scholars of international relations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
China in South Asia	2
China’s Interest in South Asia	4
Purpose of the Study	9
Conceptualization of Soft Power	10
Prevailing Hardness	10
Persisting Advocacy for Soft Power.....	11
Parallel Approaches of Hardness and Softness.....	12
China and Soft Power	12
Rationale and Motivation.....	13
China's Approach to Soft Power.....	15
Research Questions.....	16
Significance of the Research.....	17
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	19
Soft Power and Higher Education.....	20
Positive Perceptions of the Host Country	22
Influence Over Future Leaders	23

	Public Diplomacy.....	24
	Transmission of Culture.....	24
	China's Higher Education System.....	25
	Education Governance.....	25
	Major Developments in Higher Education.....	27
	Internationalization of Higher Education.....	28
	China's Soft Power and Higher Education.....	31
	Confucius Institutes (CIs).....	31
	China as a Host to International Students.....	33
	How Soft is the Soft Power?.....	34
	Research Gaps.....	38
	Theoretical Framework.....	40
III.	METHODOLOGY.....	43
	Research Questions.....	43
	Research Approach.....	46
	Case Study.....	46
	Interpretive Paradigm.....	47
	Research Context.....	48
	Participants and the Sampling Plan.....	49
	Interview Questions.....	54
	Data Collection Methods.....	56
	Role of the Researcher.....	58
	Data Analysis.....	59

	Trustworthiness.....	60
IV.	CHINA’S SOFT POWER AIMS THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA: NEPAL AS A CASE STUDY	65
	China-Nepal Relations	66
	Development Aid and Infrastructural Support to Nepal	66
	The India Factor	67
	The Tibet Issue.....	68
	China-Nepal Educational Ties	69
	China’s Soft Power Aims in Nepal.....	75
	Expert Opinion.....	75
	Online Sources	78
	Conclusion	91
V.	EDUCATION AS A RESOURCE OF ACADEMIC ATTRACTIVENESS FOR CHINA	93
	Compulsion and Convenience: Decision to Study in China.....	94
	Unfavorable Perception of China's Education Program	96
	Limitations	98
	Learning Challenges	98
	Issues in the University Life	101
	Positive Experiences	101
	Learning Benefits.....	102
	Caring and Helpful Teachers	103
	Multicultural Ambiance	103

	Appreciation for Social Science Programs	104
	Academic Experiences of Other Social Science Students	105
	Conclusion	107
VI.	EDUCATION AS A CONDUIT OF CHINA’S CULTURE AND VALUES	108
	Students' Experiences at the Confucius Institute: Findings through Interviews.....	109
	Forgetting the Language	110
	A Difficult Language	111
	Fascination with the Chinese Language	111
	Familiarity with Chinese Culture.....	112
	Familiarity with China	113
	Students’ Perception of the Motive of CIKU	114
	Online Sources and the Confucius Institute.....	115
	Growing Popularity.....	115
	Experiences of Nepalese Students in China.....	116
	Positive Social Experiences	116
	Dark Spots in Social Experiences	120
	Familiarity with Chinese Culture.....	124
	Opinion on Chinese Political System	126
	Online Sources: Views of Nepalese Students on Chinese Politics, Culture and Society.....	133
	Praise for China’s Economic Development.....	133
	Cultural Mediation.....	134

	Conclusion	134
VII.	EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR CHINA’S FOREIGN POLICY GOALS	136
	Findings from Interviews with Nepalese Students	136
	Positive Perception of the Belt and Road Initiative	136
	China's Contribution to Nepal and the World.....	139
	Impact of Course Content	139
	Interest in Collaboration with China.....	140
	Online Sources	140
	Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).....	141
	Arniko Society	143
	Conclusion	146
VIII.	DISCUSSION	149
	Relationship between China's Soft Power Aims and Nepalese Students'	
	Experiences.....	150
	Increasing the Influence of China’s Higher Education.....	152
	Cultural and Language Dissemination.....	162
	Creating a Constituency of Supporters	168
	Building a Positive Image.....	171
	Conclusion	174
IX.	CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	175
	Major Implications.....	175
	Travesty of International Education.....	175
	Exclusivity of Soft Power: Zero-Sum Gains	178

Difference in Experiences of Other Foreign Students	178
Connection with the Institutional Integration Scales Model.....	179
International Education as a Platform for Foreign Policy	181
Convergence with and Divergence from Nye’s Framework	181
Recommendations.....	183
Limitations and Future Research	184
Conclusion	186
REFERENCES	190
APPENDICES	214
A. Demographic Questionnaire for Students.....	214
B. Interview Questions	215
C. No Objection Certificate (NOC).....	218
D. Consent Forms	219

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Data Sources for Addressing the Research Questions.....	57
2. China Education Exhibitions in Nepal, 2007-2014	81
3. Excerpts from Speeches of Yang Houlan, then Chinese Ambassador to Nepal....	88
4. Relationship between China’s Soft Power Aims and Nepalese Students’ Experiences.....	150

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Map of South Asia	2
2. Original Model and the Modified Model of Educational Soft Power	41
3. Awards to Chinese Scholarship Recipients	86
4. China's BRI Program.....	137

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union triggered two major developments in world politics. First, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, China steadily emerged as a great power — rather a competitor to the U.S. — with its expanding global footprint by dint of massive economic prowess and military might. China is now aggressively pursuing cultural soft power to dazzle and win the global audience with its charm. Second, with the collapse of the bipolar politics, inter-state relations have transcended the barriers of ideological cleavages and covered multiple domains of cooperation and exchanges. Hence, apart from defense and security, the realms of culture, higher education, trade, and investment have elevated the portfolio of inter-state engagements. This is true of China's foray into South Asia as Beijing has moved beyond military and defense cooperation in its growing engagement with the region.

Against the above background, this chapter in its introductory passage explains how China's role in South Asia has unfolded in the post-Cold War era. The remaining sections are as follows: purpose of the study; conceptualization of soft power; research questions and approach; and significance of the research.

China in South Asia

South Asia, with a population of 1.67 billion, is constituted of seven countries — Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Maldives and Sri Lanka¹— the last two of which are littoral states. India is the largest among them by size, population and economy.



Figure 1. Map of South Asia (International Mission Board, 2016)

South Asia is known not only as a site of ancient civilization but also for its linguistic, ethnic and religious diversity. In the world of international business, it is “the epicenter of future middle-class growth” (Wenqian, 2016, September 28, para. 1). In international politics, the region has garnered attention as a “nuclear flashpoint,” with India and Pakistan as the nuclear states, and for the geostrategic location of sitting astride

¹ Though Afghanistan is the eighth member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), it is not a part of South Asia. Some scholars erroneously include Afghanistan in South Asia, which has implications for their research involving the region.

“the strategic sea lanes of communication between the Orient and the Occident through the Indian Ocean” (Muni, 1991, p. 117).

China is bordered by Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan. China's linkages with the South Asian region were noticeable for long primarily in 1) its “all-weather” relationship with Pakistan,² specifically in terms of the supply of military hardware and build-up of Pakistan’s nuclear and missile capabilities (Afridi & Bajoria, 2010; Curtis, 2016) as a hedge in Pakistan’s rivalry with India; and 2) in its unpredictable relationship with India owing to the contentious border dispute. In recent years, however, with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), initially known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), China’s strategic involvement in South Asia has become prominent. Comprised of two components — Silk Road Economic Belt and Maritime Silk Road — the BRI is a grand project of the Chinese government, which covers Asian, European and African continents (“Full text: Action plan,” 2015) and is considered “a more audacious version of the Marshall Plan, America's postwar reconstruction effort” (Perlez & Huang, 2017, May 13). In addition, China has strengthened its ties with “smaller states” through “trade, diplomacy, aid, and investment” (Anderson & Ayres, 2015, para. 1). While hard power connotes China’s military and defense ties with South Asian states, the non-military dimension of China’s involvement and penetration in the South Asian region can be termed as an exercise of soft power.

The term soft power, coined by the American scholar Joseph Nye (1990) in his book *Bound to Lead*, refers to a nation’s “intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions” (p. 32) that shape the “preferences” of others, in contrast to

² Pakistan became China's close ally in the aftermath of the Sino-Indian War in 1962.

hard power such as military prowess. In China's context, as underscored in Chapter II, soft power has a broader coverage. For example, presenting the economic aspect of soft power in the context of China's BRI program, Churchman (2015) explains that China's "geostrategic motivations" are to "win the goodwill of OBOR [BRI] nations by providing billions of dollars in financing for infrastructure projects that will likely benefit their economies" (para. 5).

China's Interest in South Asia

A host of factors attract China's attention to South Asia. First, the geo-economic and geo-strategic significance of South Asia entices China to deepen its strategic presence in the region through military and economic partnerships, including development assistance, with individual countries in the region and to counter India's historically predominant influence through, what a section of scholars term, a policy of "strategic encirclement" (Prakash, 2017). The preeminence of India in South Asia is manifest from its size, population, gross domestic product (GDP), and scientific, military, nuclear and missile capabilities. Furthermore, its image as a regional hegemon is being projected by a vast majority of South Asian states while citing some of the evidences such as India's military role in the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation in December 1971, its carrying out of the first nuclear explosion in May 1974, and the annexation of Sikkim with India in 1975. This apart, Nepal, a landlocked country, is entirely dependent on Indian ports to transport its goods for external trade. Also, India has been involved in infrastructure development projects in South Asian countries such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. As such, China's motivation in South Asia includes, though not limited to, undercutting India's influence (Curtis, 2016) through a

combination of hard power and soft power.

In addition, Curtis (2016) identifies China's major interests in the region as constitutive of the following: 1) promotion of stability in Pakistan with reduction of the influence of Islamist extremists, and securing trade and energy corridors; 2) increase in China's influence with such South Asian states as Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka to secure energy and trade flows from the Middle East and Europe; and 3) enhancement of China's diplomatic and economic clout. Yet another factor is China's concerns about Tibet that constitutes China's "core interest." A brief note on the Tibet issue may be made here. Tibet, which lies at the edge of Nepal, was incorporated into China in 1951. The 1959 Tibetan uprising against the Chinese rule, led by the Tibetan spiritual leader Dalai Lama, met with a crackdown by China. As a result, thousands of Tibetans fled to India and Nepal. Thus, given that South Asia (specifically Nepal) borders Tibet, China needs Nepal's support in reining in Tibetan separatists. As Lekhnath Paudel, a Nepalese strategic affairs analyst, observes, "In Tibet, unrest has significantly increased, so Chinese investment [infrastructure projects] in Nepal should be understood in the context of China's integrity, which is very important for the giant nation" ("China invests in Nepal," 2013, March 11, para. 8).

China's soft power diplomacy in South Asia. In order to protect and advance its national interests in South Asia, China is not relying on hard power that includes provision of military aid to countries such as Pakistan. It is rather deploying soft power to create goodwill and co-opt ruling elites and future leaders through such mechanisms as trade, infrastructure development, development aid, and educational cooperation. Explaining the overarching rationale of China's soft power diplomacy in South Asia,

Jain, B. (2017) writes, “[It] is to convince South Asian states that it [China] does not constitute a threat to their national security or regional peace and stability... [and that] ...it is seriously concerned about their well-being and economic prosperity” (p. 22).

Jain, B. (2017) further writes that China’s soft power strategy in South Asia is constituted of three key planks: cultural diplomacy, economic assistance, and trade and investment (p. 17). China has signed free trade agreements (FTAs) with Pakistan and Maldives, and its foreign direct investment (FDI) in South Asia rose from \$2.8 billion in 2010 to \$12.29 billion in 2015, while its trade with the region is worth over \$111 billion (“China's investments,” 2016). Importantly, under the BRI, mentioned above, a prominent ongoing project in South Asia is the \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)³, which is 3,000 kilometers long and runs from China’s Kashgar to Pakistan’s Gwadar. Besides, China has completed infrastructure projects in other South Asian countries while some projects are underway. For example, in Sri Lanka, which has long been in “India’s orbit” (Schultz, 2017, December 12), China has constructed the Hambantota port and is currently engaged in the Colombo Port City Project; in Bangladesh, China’s contribution lay in developing the Shahjalal Fertilizer Factory, in addition to its ongoing construction of the Padma Bridge. Further, China’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Sri Lanka is in terms of loans and grants worth \$12 billion for energy and infrastructure sectors (Bhatia, 2016).

Matthews, Ping and Ling (2015) observe that unlike the Western countries’ use of conditional aid that is contingent on host countries’ record of human rights and acceptance of neoliberal ideology, the Chinese aid comes “without strings attached.”

³ Gwadar is a deep-sea port on the Arabian Sea.

They write that the Chinese model is “imbued with a less moralizing tone, and is characterized by a respect for self-determination and national sovereignty” (Matthews, Ping & Ling, 2015, p. 2). In turn, the modality of the Chinese aid projects China’s image as that of a non-interventionist country whose growing economic might translates into aid and assistance for countries in need. At the same time, Chinese projects in South Asia have encountered a “pushback” owing to China’s stringent lending conditions, resulting in massive debt for the recipient countries such as Sri Lanka (Schultz, 2017, December 12).

Cultural investment is yet another manifestation of China’s soft power diplomacy in South Asia. China’s Confucius Institutes in the region not only promote the Chinese language but also undertake cultural programs such as the “Chinese Cultural Festival, performances, Chinese textbooks exhibitions, cultural lectures, seminars, and various Chinese games” (“Welcome to Confucius Institute,” 2007). From time to time, China organizes cultural events such as the Chinese Culture Fair that was held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in February 2017, and the Chinese New Year Temple Fair that was organized in Kathmandu, Nepal, in January 2017. From the perspective of soft power, the cultural initiatives are among the measures intended to build attractiveness for China, which is a long-term investment to attract the youth in the region, to curtail India’s cultural influence in the region, and to possibly promote its cultural products in the region, as discussed in Chapter IV. While it may be argued that soft power is too soft to achieve strategic objectives, China has latched onto the notion of “smart power” (Nye, 2009) which combines hard power based on coercion and soft power based on appeal, essential for protecting the national interest.

Involvement in the higher education sector. Yet another domain of China's engagement with South Asia in non-military fields, as described above, is higher education. Though Nye includes education in culture (specifically "high culture"), this thesis treats education as a separate soft power source in view of the growing literature on the role of higher education in soft power.

Choudaha (2015) observes that China has emerged as "a primary engine of growth for international higher education" (para. 2). In fact, from the perspective of internationalization of higher education, China is feverishly expanding its global educational footprint, though with the varying degree and nature of involvement. It is rapidly promoting the Chinese language and culture through Confucius Institutes and is swiftly intensifying student exchange programs, recruitment of international students, and international collaborations in science and technology.

Against the above backdrop, it is crucial not only to explore China's higher education engagement with South Asia, the region that accounts for 22 percent of the global population, but also to investigate how well it has been received by students in the region. Importantly, South Asia is witnessing an increase in the demand for higher education. As reported by Badat (2016), "While an estimated 30 million or more are enrolled in tertiary education systems across the region, the unmet demand is estimated at three to four times this number" (para. 3). It merits a mention that the Chinese government states that an objective of its *Plan for Study in China* (2012) is "to develop China into the country with the largest number of international students in Asia" (Objectives section).

Purpose of the Study

This study explored the experiences of South Asian students with regard to China's higher education program(s) through the conceptual framework of soft power, which is defined as the power of attraction and co-optation and is based on a nation's intangible resources such as "culture, ideology and institutions" (Nye, 1990). The experiences were examined in relation to the explicit and implicit aims of China's soft power policy in South Asia. As a South Asian country, Nepal served as the case study. Nepal, a federal democratic republic, has a population of 29.62 million and lies in the lap of the Himalayas which is known for the world's highest peak, Mount Everest. Nepal stands out as the state in the region where China is striving to sharpen its geopolitical outreach by forging stronger bilateral ties. China not only shares its border with Nepal but is also believed to be exerting diplomatic pressure on it as well as providing logistic support to rein in Tibetan refugees, numbering about 20,000 in Nepal, from carrying out anti-China protests and separatist activities.

Using the soft power framework, I investigated academic, social and cultural experiences of Nepalese students in China and at the Confucius Institute in Kathmandu, Nepal, as well as bringing out their impressions of China in terms of Chinese culture, values, foreign policy, and politics. Interestingly, this study has an interdisciplinary appeal in bringing together the concepts of internationalization of education and soft power to inform the literature on China's higher education approach toward South Asia. Thus, disciplines of education, international relations, and area studies coalesce in this research. In the next section, the concept of soft power is introduced and discussed as an official policy embraced by China.

Conceptualization of Soft Power

As mentioned, Joseph S. Nye invented the term soft power to denote the power of attraction in contrast to coercion in order to get “others to want the outcomes that you want” (Nye, 2004, p. 5). Nye (2004) further writes:

The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority). (p. 11)

Nye’s policy prescription for embracement of soft power came in the wake of the end of the Cold War era when, according to his reasoning, the United States emerged as a sole superpower faced with the possible coalition of international actors. Hence, Nye argued for building and using soft power as a “means to success in world politics.” Interestingly, the concept of soft power is popular in academic circles globally and has caught the fancy of policy makers and practitioners. Currently, the discourse of soft power centers around three major directions: prevailing hardness; advocacy for soft power; and the parallel approaches of hard power and soft power.

Prevailing Hardness

On this spectrum are scholars, policy makers and policy practitioners who have advocated the use of hard power, given the complexity of challenges — emerging from the reign of hard power — to the US foreign policy. This stance has developed from the perceived belligerence of North Korea on its nuclear program issue and the rise of the ISIS in the Middle East. In his work on the limits of soft power, Cohen (2016) presented a case for the indispensable role of hard power in American foreign policy based on the

critical role of the US in international affairs. Cohen argues that given the burgeoning military strength of China, Russia's conquest of Crimea and eastern Ukraine, nuclear threats from North Korea and Iran and the spread of the ISIS, global peace is threatened which calls for an active role of the US.

In this context, the Trump administration's priority to "defense spending over diplomacy and foreign aid" was reflected in its budget proposal that was described as the "hard power budget" (Merica, 2017). Nossel (2017) notes that the president has tended to "view the U.S. role in international affairs almost entirely through a military lens" (para. 3). For instance, military generals were appointed to head the Department of Defense, the National Security Council and the Department of Homeland Security.

Persisting Advocacy for Soft Power

Nossel (2017) cautions about the dangers of the major focus on military power. Claiming to be the proponent⁴ of the smart power concept, which combines hard power and soft power, she writes, "Trump's tunnel-vision foreign policy, centered on the military, will leave other elements of the U.S. foreign policy toolbox idle while incurring significant expense and risk for troops pressured to become the solution to all of America's foreign policy challenges" (Nossel, 2017, para. 5). Echoing Nossel's viewpoint, Herpen (2016) notes that then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton had expressed concern over America's lack of proactive communication of its values through "government-backed media" (p. 6). He quotes Clinton, "We are engaged in an information war and we are losing that war" (p. 6). Interestingly, the recent discourse in soft power includes propaganda and information warfare as well as hegemony, as the

⁴ Nye (2009) writes that he developed the term "smart power" in 2003.

following discussion reveals.

Parallel Approaches of Hardness and Softness

Despite their overt demonstration of hard power in their foreign policies, such as Russia's annexation of Crimea and China's "muscleflexing" in the South China Sea, countries like China and Russia are simultaneously pushing for soft power. For the Russian leadership, soft power is apparently tied to information war, which is distinct from the original meaning intended by Joseph Nye who contended that civil society rather than government plays a crucial role in building a nation's soft power. In contrast, Herpen (2016) talks about the "propaganda machine" of the Putin administration in projecting Russia's soft power and outlines its following elements: allocation of "unprecedented *generous budgets*" for propaganda efforts; "profound *modernization* of the propaganda machinery"; *psychological knowhow* in conducting information warfare; and use of the "relative *openness* of the Western media world for the Russian propaganda offensive" (p. 3).

In China, Peking University established a research center in 2014 to strengthen the country's soft power. Cai Wu, China's culture minister, stated at the inaugural ceremony, "Cultural soft power is beginning to offer strong support for the rise of China. The country must enhance its cultural strength in order to dominate the global contest for soft power" ("New center," 2014). It is apparent that for China, soft power (apart from military and economic spheres) is another domain of "contest" for global stature.

China and Soft Power

The foregoing discussion raises the question as to what soft power means to China and how and why China embraced it, which is discussed in this section.

Rationale and Motivation

The notion of soft power resonated with Chinese scholars and political leadership with Nye's coinage of the term (Nye, 1990). In hindsight, Chinese leaders acutely realized its significance for foreign policy with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which partly demonstrated the power of political ideals and values over the power of the gun. In fact, Wang Huning, a Chinese scholar, published China's "first article on soft power" in 1993, arguing that "if a country has an admirable culture and ideological system, other countries will tend to follow it" (Glaser & Murphy, 2009, p. 12). Huning also noted that a country "does not have to use its hard power which is expensive and less efficient" (Huning, 1993, cited in Glaser & Murphy, 2009, p. 12; Wang, 1993, p. 91).

China's cultural system reform (CSR) was launched at the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2002 to promote the "socialist culture with Chinese characteristics [as] a powerful attraction and inspiration not only to the Chinese people, but to the people throughout the world" (Yunshan, 2002, cited in Glaser and Murphy, 2009, p. 15). At the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group meeting on January 4, 2006, President Hu Jintao stated that China's "international status and influence" needed to be "demonstrated in hard power such as the economy, science and technology, and defense, as well as in soft power such as culture" (Hayden, 2012, p. 177). On another occasion, Jintao said, "The one who takes [a] commanding point on the battlefield of cultural development will gain the upper hand in fierce international competition" (Meng, 2012, p. 20). As Glaser and Murphy (2015) note, for China, soft power represents "achievement of comprehensive national power" (p. 16).

Finally, in October 2007 President Jintao submitted his work report to the 17th

CPC Congress, mentioning “culture as part of the soft power [of China]” in promoting the “vigorous development and prosperity of socialist culture” (“Full text of Hu Jintao’s report,” 2012). The report categorically affirmed that in the current era, “culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength...” (“Full text of Hu Jintao’s report,” 2012). Further, in the context of the current regime under President Xi Jinping, *Xinhua* (2014) reported:

President Xi Jinping has vowed to promote China’s cultural soft power by disseminating modern Chinese values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the world...China should be portrayed as a civilized country featuring rich history, ethnic unity and cultural diversity, and as an oriental power with good government, developed economy, cultural prosperity, national unity and beautiful mountains and rivers. (para. 3)

Kurlantzick (2007) traces China’s global strategy of “charm offensive” globally, launched in the early 2000s, to Chinese leaders’ projection of China’s rise as “peaceful rise” (*heping jueqi*) in response to foreign policymakers’ perception of China as a “threat” to world peace, fueled by China’s “military actions in the 1990s, and its powerhouse economy” (p. 40). Similarly, Wang (2011), director of the University of Southern California Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD), writes in his introduction to China’s search for soft power:

Countries, large and small, are now keenly aware that their image and reputation can be vital strategic resources in world affairs. China is no exception. In fact, perhaps nowhere else has the idea of “soft power” been as widely discussed,

embraced, and appropriated as in China. (p. 1)

China's Approach to Soft Power

Even though the original meaning of soft power as the power of attraction permeates China's pursuit of soft power, China's approach to soft power, including its characteristics and objectives, has been varyingly discussed and examined. Kurlantzick (2007) notes that for Chinese leaders, soft power encompasses all those resources that fall outside the "military and security realm," and as such, it includes "not only popular culture and public diplomacy but also more coercive economic and diplomatic levers like aid and investment and participation in multilateral organizations" (p. 6), in contrast to Nye's sole emphasis on the "attractiveness of a nation's brands, of its values, ideals and norms" (p. 6). This study focuses on higher education, and while it incorporates Nye's connotation of the softness of soft power (in terms of culture as a source), it also includes higher education "aid," including scholarships, in China's soft power approach.

Glaser and Murphy (2009) point to China's focus on soft power in both domestic policy and foreign policy. The former involves China's publicization of "harmonious society discourse" while the latter incorporates setting up Confucius Institutes globally as well as expansion of "Chinese media and other cultural enterprises overseas" (p. 24). However, they add a caveat that "China's soft-power policy remains largely ad hoc and primarily reactive, aiming to counter the China threat theory and improve China's image abroad" (Glaser & Murphy, 2009, p. 10). In contrast, Chen (2016) points to the Report to the Eighteenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (Chapter VI) as an indication of the Chinese government's "coordinated, consistent, coherent and comprehensive soft-power strategies of promoting modern Chinese culture" (p. 10).

Mingjiang (2009) critically examines Nye’s conceptualization of hard-soft power dualism, pointing out that even conventional sources of hard power can be sources of soft power such as humanitarian tasks like disaster relief. Hence, the “resource-based” approach of soft power is questionable. He also points to the “social context” that facilitates or hinders the growth of soft power. Hence, while the American liberal democracy model may be appealing in certain pockets of the globe, the Chinese model of development, that is, “political authoritarianism plus economic liberalism” is appealing to many third-world countries.

The above discussion underscores that in China’s context, soft power is an all-encompassing term of national power resources sans military power. Higher education is another resource as well as a tool of soft power in China’s international relations.

Research Questions

This study sought to address the following research question through the case study approach that focused on Nepal as a South Asian country: What is the relationship between the experience of Nepalese students in China’s higher education programs and the explicit and implicit aims of China’s soft power policy in South Asia? The sub-questions are:

- a. What is the experience of Nepalese students with regard to China’s higher education program(s)?⁵
- b. How are China’s social and political values as well as its culture reflected in the experience of Nepalese students in regard to China's higher education programs?

⁵ This sub-question deals with students’ academic experiences.

- c. What are the perceptions of soft power/ Nepal-China relations experts in terms of the explicit and implicit aims of China's soft power policy in South Asia?

Significance of the Research

First, this study is the first to extensively document academic, social and cultural experiences of Nepalese students in a foreign country, covering both scholarship recipients and self-funded students. Second, with the focus on South Asia, this study bridges a critical gap in the literature on China's internationalization of higher education. This research reveals how the experiences of Nepalese students in China and at the Confucius Institute (CI) are different (while also being similar in some ways) from those of foreign students in other regions of the world. Also evident in the research findings are the typical ways in which China is reaching out to the region by strategically employing higher education to engage the Nepalese youth, including professionals. Third, by analyzing students' experiences against the backdrop of China's marketing of its education programs, this study offers a useful reference for reform in China and possibly elsewhere and also becomes relevant to the discipline of international education.

Fourth, the conceptual framework enriches the literature on soft power as part of statecraft or public diplomacy in inter-state relations, especially in view of soft power's enduring relevance in China's foreign policy. This is especially so when hard power is much apparent in the current international politics, as evident from the defense and foreign policies of the Trump administration, North Korea, and Russia. Fifth, this research straddles several disciplines – education policy studies, international relations (through the intersection of education and soft power and with the role of education in

China-Nepal ties), and China studies. As such, it enriches the inter-disciplinary literature while also serving as a useful source for comparative studies in higher education — for example, comparison with China’s policy approach toward Africa and Europe or comparison with experiences of students from other South Asian countries. Similarly, it provides insights for US policy makers in handling the challenge posed by China’s rise, since the findings provide a close-up view of what young adults from a China-bordering country think about China’s political system and foreign policy.

Importantly, this study captured the voices of Nepalese students by revealing their social, cultural, and academic experiences in China. Thus, it should benefit Nepalese foreign and education Ministries through greater awareness of those experiences as they review their respective policies with implications for Nepalese students in foreign countries, as well as to use that information for coordination with the Chinese government to improve learning experiences and outcomes for Nepalese students. Findings might also be useful in influencing the development of an enabling environment for Nepalese students at home. Finally, this study may spark interest among Nepal’s policy makers and scholars to conduct research into concrete benefits of China’s higher education program for Nepal.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Between 1100 and 1800, China sat astride the globe as an economic and technological giant, with the Tang dynasty (618-907 C.E.) constituting a golden age in Chinese history (Petras, 2012; Wang, 2011). In its modern history beginning with the foundation of the Communist China in 1949, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has come a long way in becoming a major power, or a global power (as some scholars claim), in world politics. Notably, China is the world's second largest economy and has made huge strides in building military strength as well as establishing a global presence in myriad ways, including trade and investment. In fact, the trajectory of Chinese politics has been marked by distinct visions of its leaders in different time periods. Mao Zedong's extreme emphasis on class struggle reflected in his Cultural Revolution and Great Leap Forward which rather insulated China from the rest of the world, though industrialization received a firm footing under his leadership. Deng Xiaoping launched the modernization program and economic reforms for the country's economic advancement in 1978. Since then, China has been on the path to economic liberalization, while the political authority of the Chinese Communist Party has remained intact. The current leadership, led by President Xi Jinping, is known for the slogan of the *China Dream* that calls for national

revitalization. Toward this end, one of the stated tasks of the leadership is to build China into a “cultural superpower.” It is partly a reflection of the pursuit of soft power or the power of attraction.

However, as noted in the previous chapter, aspirations for cultural eminence are not the only rationale behind embracing the soft power policy. China combines the objectives of projection of a “benign image” for generation of goodwill in foreign countries and preservation of the Communist regime by upholding its legitimacy through Chinese values and culture. Furthermore, the Chinese government utilizes a number of tools to build and project the national soft power. Higher education is one of them and constitutes the cornerstone of the focus for this research.

This chapter conducts a review of the literature on China’s projection of soft power through higher education. The first part describes the soft power – higher education linkages in general. The second part explains China’s higher education system, followed by the third part that illuminates the connections between soft power and higher education in China’s context. The fourth part carries a critique of China’s soft power, while the fifth part highlights the research gaps that this study bridged.

Soft Power and Higher Education

Nye (2004) puts education in the high culture domain of soft power, whereas popular entertainment is in the low culture realm. In this way, education is a soft power resource. What makes it so is a higher education institution’s ranking, research output, quality of faculty, level of internationalization, attractiveness to international students and scholars, and collaboration with prestigious foreign institutions. Importantly, higher education is also an instrument of soft power in terms of creation of national goodwill,

image, appeal, and attraction among foreign students (Peterson, 2014; Richmond, 2003; Selltiz, Christ, Havel & Cook, 1963; Wang, 1991; Watson & Lippitt, 1958; Wilson & Bonilla, 1955). Wojciuk, Michalek and Stormowska (2015) offer the model of educational soft power that has three constituents: values, resources, and tools. Accordingly, soft power through higher education is strengthened through communication of the values of the host country to international students, provision of quality education to foreign students, and through the role of higher education in achieving a country's policy goals.

Interestingly, the trend of internationalization lies at the intersection of the notion of higher education as a resource and tool of soft power. Specifically, this trend has aided building and projecting soft power — let us understand internationalization of higher education in light of four perspectives: activity, competency, ethos and process (Knight, 1994). The activity perspective incorporates activities bearing an intercultural dimension, including “the presence of international students, curriculum and student/faculty exchange” (Delgado-Marquez, Hurtado-Torres and Bondar 2011, p. 270). The competency perspective covers the “development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values” (p. 270) to compete in the global marketplace. The ethos perspective includes the culture or climate that supports intercultural or international initiatives, and the process perspective emphasizes the “integration of an international or intercultural dimension into teaching, research, and service” (Delgado-Marquez, Hurtado-Torres & Bondar, 2011, p. 270).

Helms, Rumbley, Brajkovic and Mihut (2015) cite Hans de Wit (2002) in outlining the categories of motivations driving internationalization, which include the

following: academic, economic, political, and social/cultural (p. 7). Soft power, along with public diplomacy and national security, figures in the political motivation category. The academic category includes expansion of higher education capacity; improvement in higher education quality; prestige and rankings of national higher education institutions; and creation and advancement of knowledge. Economic rationales include short-term economic gain, workforce development, and long-term national economic development; and social/cultural motivations incorporate resolution of global problems and promotion of global citizenship and mutual understanding.

What does internationalization cover? Given the above perspectives, it covers student mobility (inbound, outbound, and bilateral) through grants, scholarships and financial aid policies; scholar mobility and research collaboration through such policies as funding for visiting scholars; cross-border education through overseas campuses and formation of institutional hubs; internationalization at home through curriculum internationalization; and comprehensive internationalization strategies through global strategies or strategies with a regional focus (Helms, Rumbley, Brajkovic, & Mihut, 2015, p. 50).

The following points highlight the role of higher education in serving as an instrument of soft power. It may be noted that by serving as a host to foreign students, a country may be able to benefit from the favorable opinion formed by the latter and by positively impacting them in its favor.

Positive Perceptions of the Host Country

Atkinson (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of student exchange programs to investigate whether soft power really “matters.” She notes that statesmen have

supported educational exchange programs as a mechanism of gaining influence and shaping “international political behavior” (p. 3) Atkinson is often cited for her following observation: “Research has consistently shown that exchange students return home with a more positive view of the country in which they studied and the people with whom they interacted” (p. 3). Similarly, Wit, Hunter, Howard and Egron-Polak (2015) write in the context of the United Kingdom, “The UK Government claims to support universities in attracting high quality students and the soft power...they wield on behalf of the UK when they return home” (p. 180).

Influence Over Future Leaders

Yang (2007) observes, “Training future generations of intellectuals, technicians, and political elites from other nations is a subtle yet important form of soft power” (p. 25). Similarly, Nye (2004) cites former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in underlining the significance of soft power, “I can think of no more valuable asset to our country [U.S.] than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated here” (p. 44). Nye explains that foreign alumni who hold important positions in their home countries can impact “policy outcomes” that are significant to the US. For instance, he points out that “most of China’s leaders have a son or daughter educated in the States who can portray a realistic view of the US that is often at odds with the caricatures in official Chinese propaganda” (Nye, 2004, p. 13). In this regard, Mai (2015) gives examples of foreign leaders who were educated in the US and exhibited a pro-US attitude, such as Namibian Prime Minister Nahas Angula’s defense of the decision to clinch the multibillion-dollar Millennium Challenge Account Development agreement with the US or Panamanian President Ricardo Martinelli’s catalyst role in achieving a

free trade deal with the US. Mai (2015) concludes:

A welcoming attitude toward international students facilitates U.S. soft power.

The influence that the United States is exerting on other nations around the world attests to the underlying and important value of the education of international students in the United States. (para. 10)⁶

Public Diplomacy

Patti McGill Peterson, presidential advisor for internationalization and global engagement at the American Council on Education, writes that higher education is “an ideal vehicle for soft power” (Peterson, 2014, p. 2). In the context of Malaysia, Wit et al. (2015) write:

The ultimate objective is to develop confidence and trust with partner countries through educational internationalization. This policy clearly illustrates Malaysia’s desire to use its educational strategy as soft power to enhance its influence in contributing to South-South socio-political and economic development. Part of this soft power strategy is best reflected in the implementation of various initiatives between Malaysia and the CLMV Countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam). (p. 245)

Transmission of Culture

Nye (2004) observes that international students facilitate transmission of the

⁶ In contrast, according to a survey (“Do years studying,” 2015) conducted by the Foreign Policy magazine in 2015, the years spent by Chinese students in the United States did not always constitute a gain for the US soft power. The magazine reported that 55 percent of respondents said that their view of China improved after time in the US. Explaining the reason, Haifeng Huang, a professor of political science at University of California, Merced, said that some Chinese students saw that “not everything in foreign lands is as shiny as they had imagined” (para. 9). Further, there are examples of individuals who despite studying in the US turned against it. For instance, Anwar al-Awlaki, a “top propagandist for Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula...was educated at Colorado State and George Washington University” (Rosen, 2014, para. 9).

culture, including values and ideals, of the host country. He writes:

The ideas and values that America exports in the minds of more than half a million foreign students who study every year in American universities and then return to their home countries, or in the minds of the Asian entrepreneurs who return home after succeeding in Silicon Valley, tend to reach elites with power. (Nye, 2004, p. 13)

China's Higher Education System

As noted earlier, higher education is considered as both a soft power resource and a soft power instrument. Mok and Ong (2013) write, “the expansion of transnational higher education in China is...[a] part of its strategy to transform the country from a strong economic power to a country with strong cultural and soft power influences” (p. 134). Similarly, Wang (2013) writes, “education is used as an important tool to expand China’s influence, as it provides suitable channels to introduce the Chinese value and culture to the world” (p. 306). Interestingly, China has the world’s largest higher education system in terms of student enrollment that reached 36.9 million in 2016 from approximately 29 million in 2010. Further, it has over 2,900 colleges and universities, producing eight million graduates annually.

Before reviewing the literature dealing with China’s soft power and higher education, let us briefly describe China’s higher education system as well as its internationalization.

Education Governance

Education governance in China takes place at three levels: national, provincial, and local (Michael and Gu, 2016). As the central government agency, the Ministry of

Education formulates macro education policies at the national level. Guided by state regulations, provincial education departments are responsible for the local policy development and implementation. Over 100 universities of repute fall under the direct jurisdiction of the education ministry and central government authorities, while a few universities are managed jointly by the central and provincial governments. While a majority of higher education institutions have affiliation with provincial or lower local governments, local authorities are primarily responsible for supervision over elementary education (Michael and Gu, 2016).

Higher education is governed by the Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China that was adopted at the fourth session of the Standing Committee of the Ninth National People's Congress on August 29, 1998, and became effective on January 1, 1999. Per the Law (Article 2), higher education means "education conducted on the basis of completion of senior middle-school education" (known as high school in the US). Article 3 states that in "developing socialist higher education, the State adheres to Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory as its guide and follows the basic principles as laid down in the Constitution."

China's higher education sector is divided into two categories: regular and adult. Ninety percent of them fall in the regular sector (2,553 as of 2015) that includes "447 private institutions, 275 independent colleges (quasi-private) and seven Chinese-foreign cooperative initiatives" (Michael & Gu, 2016). The adult program follows the regular program curriculum but it includes distance education and part-time study.

Over time, higher education institutions have received autonomy in such financial and academic matters such as appointment of staff and administrators, and curriculum.

However, as noted by Li and Yang (2014) in their UNESCO report, the government's control can be seen in "ideo-political education and the appointment of university presidents and party secretaries" (p. 4). Similarly, Kapur and Perry (2015) note:

[A]pparent autonomy [among universities] is, however, tempered by the role of the Chinese Communist Party...campus governance structure is embedded within a larger framework of party supervision and direction. The Communist Party's central and provincial propaganda departments set the agenda, conduct the selection and evaluation process, and regulate the funding for major research projects in the humanities and social sciences. (p. 8)

Major Developments in Higher Education

From 1949 through mid-1970s, higher education in China was largely confined to ideological indoctrination and technical training for serving the planned economy (Vaughan & Chunzhou, 1996). In fact, China has had a tradition of preserving social order through "regimentation of knowledge" (Hayhoe, 1993, p. 291) with the focus on "classical studies and narrow specialization" (Vaughan & Chunzhou, 1996, p. 214).

Chinese leader Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) adversely affected higher education as 106 higher educational institutions were shut down and replaced with universities for workers, party cadres, and peasants to spread proletarian consciousness (Agelasto & Adamson, 1998). It also resulted in a huge drop in enrollments from 674,000 students in 1965 to 48,000 in 1970. Hence, in the post-Mao period, Deng Xiaoping launched educational reforms with his acclaimed speech in 1978, terming education as the "crucial basis for a drive towards economic and technological modernization" (Yin & White, 1994, p. 218) which paved the way for massification of

higher education and autonomy for universities, as well as sponsoring of overseas Chinese students for building a human capital base. It may be mentioned that Deng introduced economic reforms and open-door policy in 1978 as a crucial step toward the country's economic development. Hence, educational reforms came to complement the economic liberalization.

Between late 1990s and 2000s, the Chinese leadership found it essential to boost competitiveness of the national economy in the increasingly globalized world, which demanded educational reforms along with best practices, wherever amenable to incorporation. As such, Project 211 (Hawkins, 2007) was launched, which brought about decentralization of higher education, involving provincial governments in education, depoliticization, and private-sector led commercialization, though the supervisory role of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) continued (Gow, 2012). Similarly, Project 985 was launched to establish world-class universities. Overall, economic modernization, technological advancement, creation of skilled labor force, and building of national influence in the domain of education constituted major goals of Chinese higher education reform, with the CCP as the major driving force.

Internationalization of Higher Education

As noted above, during the Deng Xiaoping era, China opened up to the world as part of economic liberalization with impact on its higher education system as well. In fact, currently the importance of internationalization can be gauged from China's National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020) that outlines the following elements: expansion of international exchange and cooperation at all levels of education (both inbound and outbound); introduction of high

quality education resources; emphasis on substantial and quality-orientated educational exchange and cooperation models; and strengthening of international partnerships based on the principle of mutual benefit (“Outline of China’s National Plan,” 2010).

Further, a section of the website of the Chinese Ministry of Education is dedicated to foreign students, institutions and governments, reflecting a prime importance to international cooperation and exchanges and to the “Study in China” program which is supported through multiple channels of scholarships. As informed by the Chinese Ministry of Education, 442,773 international students were studying in China in 2016; they are enrolled in over 829 higher educational institutions in China (“Study in China,” 2017). Moreover, 279 designated Chinese universities offer academic programs in science, engineering, agriculture, medicine, law, economics, management, education, liberal arts, philosophy, history, and fine arts to scholarship recipients. The scholarships offered include: Chinese government scholarships (such as bilateral program, Chinese university program, and Great Wall program), Confucius Institute scholarships, local government scholarships, foreign government scholarships, enterprise scholarships, and university scholarships.

Coelen and Bo (2016) spell out characteristics of internationalization in China’s context. First, the Double World Class Project was launched in 2015 to create “international hubs” for cooperation with overseas universities. Second, international student mobility, both inward and outward, has been enhanced which has contributed to “acceleration of credit transfer, degree recognition and joint programs as well as short-term student exchange programs” (Coelen & Bo, 2016, para. 5). Third, there is an increase in bi-directional staff mobility and international research collaboration. Fourth,

there is an uptick in staff and student exchange, facilitated through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Fifth, more than 2,000 Sino-foreign cooperative education programs or institutions have come into existence, comprised of 200 non-independent institutions, 1,800 non-independent programs, and eight independent universities. Sixth, as part of overseas expansion, as many as 500 Confucius Institutes and 1,000 Confucius classrooms operated in 134 countries at the end of 2015. It may be added that the Confucius Institutes offer the following services: Chinese language teaching; training for Chinese language instructors; delivering of Chinese language teaching resources; administration of the Hànyǔ Shuǐpíng Kǎoshì (HSK) examination (Chinese Proficiency Test); provision of information and consultative services concerning China's education, culture and other areas; and conducting language and cultural exchange activities between China and other countries (Hanban, 2014).

It merits a mention that the Chinese government is packaging its scholarships under its foreign policy program — BRI — by launching the BRI Scholarship Program in 2017 for countries “along the routes” of its BRI project. Clearly, the field of education has been employed in the brand marketing of the foreign policy program. Writing in *China Plus*, Yijing (2017) informs that the scholarships will be awarded at the following three levels:

Ministry- and commission-level cooperation, to reserve talents in important fields, such as energy, transportation, communication, finance and maritime research; provincial-level cooperation, to strength[en] regional scholarship support along the routes; and employment-side cooperation, to encourage Chinese colleges and universities to cooperate with the state-owned enterprises, government sectors of

“Belt and Road” nations and foreign universities to cultivate talents with specific orientations. (“China to launch new government scholarship,” 2017, para. 3)

In sum, by internationalizing its higher education program in several ways, China has reached out to foreign countries to deepen bilateral ties, to attract international students to its educational institutions, and to spread its culture far and wide. As Yang (2007) points out, “Beijing’s innovative and most systematically planned soft power policy involves a two-way strategy: hosting international students and building up the Confucius Institutes worldwide” (p. 25). Also, the Pew Research Center notes that “China’s greatest global asset in the future may be its appeal among young adults around the world” (“Attitudes towards China,” 2013).

China’s Soft Power and Higher Education

This section deals specifically with the literature on China’s soft power in higher education, divided broadly into two categories: Confucius Institutes and international students in China.

Confucius Institutes (CIs)

Most of the literature on the subject is constituted of journal articles that focus on Confucius Institutes (Hartig, 2010; Kragelund, 2010; Kwan, 2014; Wheeler, 2014; Yang, 2010) in individual universities, rather than conducting an in-depth study of several components of soft power diplomacy through higher education. In the context of the African region, for instance, Wheeler (2014) provides an empirical case study of the University of Nairobi Confucius Institute, which reveals a difference in perspectives of African policy makers and Chinese diplomats. While the former expect practical benefits of Mandarin for Kenyan students, the Chinese side is more interested in advancing

China's political and economic interests than promoting "cultural exchange and language instruction." In the case of the University of Zambia (UNZA), Kragelund (2010) concluded that the CI is the "hotbed for training of future Zambian political and economic leaders," serving as a "breeding ground for the development of opinion formers that may be able to communicate Chinese values to the Zambian public" (p. 17). He further finds that rather than being an example of "equal partnership," the CI is simply "donor driven" (p. 18) like other international partnerships that UNZA has forged historically.

Kwan (2014) studied three CIs in Canada through interviews with their administrative staff to understand the host perceptions of CIs. The theoretical framework was formed by constructivism, and the findings revealed that CIs were considered a part of the internationalization of Canadian campuses. The author further states: "it can be observed that the local administrators believe there are benefits to being a host and such bilateral partnership proves to be a kind of symbiotic relationship" (p. 125). However, Kwan adds a caveat that interviewees' responses might have been impacted by their motive to project "a certain image of the Institute" (p. 25).

A case study by Yang (2010) employed semi-structured interviews in investigating China's soft power projection through CIs as a "new distinctive model of international exchange and cooperation" in the context of an Australian university. Hartig's case study (Hartig, 2010) involving Confucius Institutes in Australia employed a "strategic stakeholder engagement" to understand CIs as a cultural diplomacy tool, arguing that it is a collaborative tool relying on the commitment of "local stakeholders."

Hartig (2010) sums up:

The Chinese approach to engage local stakeholders and expertise is strategically very smart: by utilizing the current global demand for and fascination with Chinese language and culture, the Chinese government has found interested and willing international partners to co-finance the teaching of Chinese language and the introduction of Chinese culture (p. 269).

In addition, Confucius Institutes have been the dominant subject of “public diplomacy” as exercised by China in higher education (Flew & Hartig, 2014; Hartig, 2012; Lien, Ghosh & Yamarik, 2014; Paradise, 2009; Zaharna, Hubbert & Hartig, 2014).

China a Host to International Students

Literature in this section mainly covers experiences and perceptions of foreign students in China. Gillespie (2001) studied motivational factors and experiences of African students in China as part of her work on Sino-African educational exchanges. She found that “obtaining a scholarship” was the strongest motivation for her participants and their experiences were largely negative reflecting in racial discrimination. Dong and Chapman (2010) investigated Chinese Government Scholarship Program (CGSP) recipients’ “perceptions of their higher education experience in China and their attitudes toward China as a country” (p. 145). However, their use of surveys limited capturing the depth of experiences, though they used opened-ended questions for respondents’ additional comments.

Gao (2015) examined the effectiveness of China’s higher educational programs for Arab students in enhancing its soft power in that part of the world. The researcher reported that the majority of the survey respondents developed “more positive feelings about China despite the difficulties encountered by many of them academically and

socially” (p. 60), such as communication problems and lack of academic and personal attention to international students. Metzgar (2016) focuses on public diplomacy strategy “implemented at home” through China-based university programs —Schwarzman and Yenching programs — to attract international students. Prior to this study, Cheng (2009) examined China’s efforts at being transformed into a major educational powerhouse on two fronts: elevating Chinese universities to global higher rankings, and promoting soft power overseas through CIs. Cheng pointed out that China was faced with such challenges as the counter-challenge from Western universities, lack of quality, and skepticism over motives of the CIs.

King (2013) undertook a comprehensive study of China’s education aid and training to African countries such as Ethiopia, South Africa and Kenya. He applied three lenses: China’s view of historic connections with the region; China’s approach to South-South cooperation; and China’s soft power perspective. While King interviewed African students to explore their experiences in China, his analysis of the nature of Confucius Institutes in Africa was not informed by student interviews. Yet another investigation into African students’ experiences was conducted by Haugen (2013) in the context of Sino-African relations. Using the soft power concept, she mentioned that her study focused on two conditions of soft power: students’ enjoyment of their experience and attractiveness of China’s political system. However, Haugen’s actual focus was on the academic experience, or the first condition, while the second condition seems to have been overlooked or sparsely addressed.

‘How Soft is the Soft Power’?

Scholars have brought out different dimensions of soft power. Bell (2016)

couches soft power in imperialistic terms, not pejoratively though. Using the original connotation of soft power as attractiveness of culture, she places it in the category of cultural imperialism in the context of Britain, while observing that soft power enables “British imperialism to spread in a new form” (p. 77) through British-based companies. In the case of China, Callahan (2015) argues that its soft power is “negative rather than positive, and is employed as a tool in domestic policy more than in foreign affairs” (p. 216). He gives the example of Chinese President Xi Jinping’s *China Dream* notion which depicts mainly “negative portrayals of foreign countries in order to mobilize China’s domestic audience” (Callahan, 2015, p. 226). As such, this notion has gained “little traction abroad” (p. 226).

Regimented approach. In the case of China, the dualism of internationalization and state control is found operational. On the one hand, through internationalization of higher education China is building and projecting soft power, integral to which is the positive image of and attraction for China and its culture. On the other hand, state control over higher education suggests coercion, which is antithetical to “seduction.” This section explains China’s regimented approach to higher education, which is considered essential for the preservation of the communist regime against the spread of liberal ideas.

The turning point in the Chinese higher education scenario came about with the student-led pro-democracy protests in June 1989 in the precincts of the Tiananmen Square in Beijing, marked by such slogans as “Long Live Democracy.” The Chinese government severely crushed the protests, declaring martial law. Moreover, the incident prompted the government to reform education along politico-ideological lines. Hence, party secretaries to universities came to be entrusted with “expunging all tendencies

towards bourgeois liberalism” (Hayhoe, 1993, p. 297) by controlling and reforming the curricula. It primarily affected the previously popular disciplines of humanities and social sciences that witnessed huge cuts in funding, leading to a decline in enrolments (Gow, 2012; Hayhoe, 1993). Moreover, it led to “the stratification of Chinese academia” (Gow, 2012, p. 204) with the transformation of the intellectuals of the 1980s into experts and scholars for supporting “the emerging technocracy of the 1990s” (Gow, 2012, p. 204).

In addition, a number of state control methods exist. Writing about the control exerted by the Chinese government over Chinese students in foreign universities, Onsmann and Cameron (2014) explain that the spread of democratic values is prevented through Student Affairs Offices in universities. Such offices maintain detailed files on every student, including his or her ideological views. This practice acts as a deterrent on students in voicing anti-Party opinions for fear of not getting employment if the file reports a misdemeanor. Similarly, youth leagues of students are entitled to act as informers to university administration if they find their professors speaking up against the CPC or the Chinese political system. Similarly, Elizabeth Perry explains that Chinese college campuses have mental health facilities just like in the US. However, in China, “the definition of ‘mental illness’ is broadly construed to include ideas and inclinations that the state deems politically dangerous, and the results of mandatory mental health screening for freshmen are forwarded to political cadres for analysis and possible preventative or punitive action” (Perry, 2015, pp. 17-18).

During the current Communist regime led by President Xi Jinping, who assumed office in 2013, ideological controls have been further tightened with a vociferous advocacy of Marxism. Jinping has instructed China’s higher learning institutions to

“shoulder the important tasks of studying, researching and publicizing Marxism, as well as training builders and successors of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics” (Ramzy, 2014). For example, in January 2015, then Chinese Education Minister Yuan Guiren summoned administrators from China’s universities, including Tsinghua University and Peking University, to announce the government mandate that colleges must prevent infiltration of textbooks that spread Western values in classrooms or disparage socialism and CPC leaders. The minister also asked for a greater scrutiny of Western textbooks, stating: “Never let textbooks promoting Western values appear in our classrooms” (Yue & Xinying, 2015).

Control over faculty can also be seen. In November 2014, the *Liaoning Daily* published an article titled “Teacher, Please Don’t Talk about China Like That: An Open Letter to Teachers of Philosophy and Social Science.” The *Liaoning Daily* informed that it had found three major issues with Chinese university classrooms, based on approximately 130,000 words of class notes compiled by its reporters who had visited nearly 100 classes in 20 schools in Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Shenyang and Wuhan in 2014. First, there was a lack of theoretical recognition of CCP ideology on the part of faculty. Second, there was a lack of political recognition, with some teachers praising Western “separation of powers” and questioning policy decisions of the CCP’s Central Committee. Third, identification on an emotional level was lacking, with some teachers making such remarks as “I won’t enter the Party” (Bandurski, 2014). The article apparently had official support since it was published by the newspaper of the Communist Party provincial committee of Liaoning province and was republished on the website of *People’s Daily*, a prominent party newspaper (Ramzy, 2014).

In light of the above discussion, it appears that China's soft power approach in education is selective, geared to promoting its culture, projecting a "benign image" in dealing with the outside world, creating goodwill in foreign countries, and upgrading the quality of its higher educational institutions as a source of national power. However, there remains a question as to whether and how the regimented approach on the domestic front is applicable to foreign students enrolled in Chinese universities. As noted, regimentation is more applicable in social sciences. In this study, there were five students in this discipline; interviews with them shed light on some nuances of academic freedom.

Research Gaps

The literature review reveals that the South Asian region is missing in the studies on China's higher education policy in relation to soft power, barring the sporadic references to China's educational presence through Confucius Institutes and scholarships. Similarly, the existing literature on the China-South Asia relationship does not deal exclusively with China's higher education outreach in South Asia. For instance, Jain, B. (2017) conducted a critical examination of China's use of a multitude of soft power tools such as trade, aid, infrastructure development, cultural exchanges, and education in the South Asian region. His contribution lies in exploring the implications of China's soft power diplomacy for India and South Asia in general. Palit (2010)'s working paper examined various aspects of Chinese soft power in South Asia in dealing with individual countries, while her another work (2017) on soft power, though inclusive of South Asia, extends to regions beyond it. Hence, my research focuses exclusively on South Asian students' experiences with regard to China's higher education programs through a case study approach.

Importantly, the existing literature (Barrie, 2014; Nelson, 2008; Valentin, 2015) on Nepalese students' overseas experiences is sparse. Valentin's (2015) study was in the context of Nepalese students' migration to Denmark from the perspective of class-based mobility practices in Nepal. In her undergraduate thesis, Barrie (2014) undertook to understand the challenges faced by Nepalese students at American universities in light of their lived experiences and diverse perspectives on their "exodus and commitment to return to Nepal" (p. 10). On her part, Nelson (2008) employed the lens of critical hermeneutics to explore the issues of "identity, solicitude, and imagination" as they related to Nepalese university students in the United States and to those who returned to Nepal upon completion of their studies. These studies are related more to identity and migration issues than Nepalese students' academic experiences in foreign countries. In fact, even the Nepalese government's records are glaringly blank on important aspects of information pertaining to Nepalese foreign students. As Aryal (2017) writes:

The [Nepalese] government has no records on how many students return to the country after studies abroad or what they do in foreign countries. Neither MoE [the Ministry of Education] nor the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) has done anything yet to compile details of the Nepalese students abroad and their status in the foreign countries. The Non-Resident Nepalese (NRN) Association also has no such records. (para. 4)

Thus, this study makes a major contribution in revealing Nepalese students' experiences in a foreign country in academic, socio-cultural, and political terms. Also, experiences of students who studied Chinese at the Confucius Institute are documented. The soft power theoretical framework was employed, as explained below.

Theoretical Framework

As noted earlier, education is a sub-component of culture as a soft power source. In this study, education is treated as a resource, as a conduit or vehicle of values and culture promotion, and as a tool for policy goals attainment. The model of “educational soft power” (Wojciuk, Michalek & Stormowska, 2015, p. 16) was employed which features the following three “mechanisms”: values, resources, and tools. I modified the model for my research by adding “culture”⁷ to “values” (Wang, 2013) and by leaving out the “quality of life” and “future-oriented” aspects of higher education (which are the outcome of the study by the authors of the model). To elaborate, the original model presents “quality of life” and future-oriented expectations (as shown in the ellipse in Figure 2) as the major “values” found attractive to international students in Finland and China. In other words, the ellipse in the original model represents the findings of the study by Wojciuk and others (2015). Hence, I kept out the findings portion by retaining the three constituents of the model, which includes the following: values (and culture), the resource, and the tool. With this, the model became broader which is not confined to “quality of life” and “future-orientation” as the values cherished by international students. Importantly, the modified model is comprehensive, incorporative as it is of Nye’s soft power triad: culture, political ideals, and foreign policy. While the first two of them figure in the “values and culture” part, foreign policy occurs in the context of the “tool” of education.

⁷ In the Chinese official discourse, the reference to cultural power has figured frequently. Also, Glaser and Murphy (2015) write that China's top leadership has “recognized the importance of soft power in achieving comprehensive national power, and has accepted the mainstream academic view that the core of soft power is culture” (p. 16).

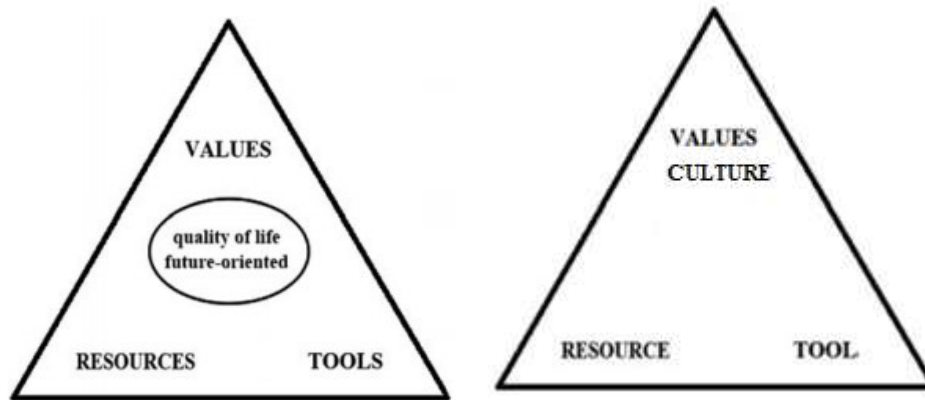


Figure 2. Original Model (left) and the Modified Model (right) of Educational Soft Power

Let us now understand the model. First, the soft power of a country results from education as a resource based on the quality of education or the level of internationalization of a higher education institution or through any other element of academic attraction for students. Enhancing attractiveness of China’s education for international students is part of China’s official document — *Plan for Study in China* (2012). Second, education boosts the soft power by “purveying” the values and culture that appeal to foreign audiences. Wojciuk, Michalek and Stormowska (2015) include “modernization, equality, good life, and competitiveness” as the cherished values which are reflected in varying degrees in Finnish and Chinese educational systems, which constitute case studies in their work. In my research, values and culture have a Chinese context. The website of the Chinese Ministry of Education markets its educational program to international students through the attraction of Chinese culture by underlining the following elements: traditional Chinese cultural values (such as harmony, benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom, honesty, and loyalty); food culture; and arts and literature (such as dance, music, paintings and poetry). Moreover, the website’s

special feature on the cultural experiences of international students states that it aims to “encourage foreign students to experience the profound yet interesting Chinese culture and understand the huge achievements China has made” (“My Chinese new year stories,” 2016).

Third, education serves as a tool of achieving “certain policy goals” (Wojciuk, Michalek, & Stormowska, 2015, p. 17). In the context of China, from the soft power perspective, the goals include the following: strengthening “mutual understanding and friendship between the Chinese people and people from all over the world” (“Notice to international students,” 2011, para. 1); “to generate a large number of graduates [international students] who both understand China and contribute to connecting China to the rest of the world” (“Plan for study in China,” 2012, Objectives section); expansion of international influence, and promotion of “its model of governance” (Yang, 2010, p. 235). It may be added that the phrase “mutual understanding and friendship,” as referred to above, occurs commonly in the parlance of public diplomacy in international relations. Several factors such as convergence of national interests contribute to building such understanding; so, higher education engagement is one of its building blocks.

The subsequent chapters in this dissertation pertain to the methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion. Findings on China’s soft power aims are presented in Chapter IV while findings on students’ experiences and observations are presented in chapters V, VI and VII. Chapter VIII is the discussion on the research question based on research findings, and Chapter IX presents the implications, recommendations and conclusions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken to explore the socio-cultural and academic experiences of Nepalese students in relation to China's higher education programs and to examine them from the perspective of China's soft power policy toward South Asia. The first part of this chapter lists the research questions and explains why qualitative research was employed. The second part describes the research approach, constitutive of the theoretical framework, interpretive paradigm, research context, participants, and interview questions. The third part deals with data collection methods in alignment with the case study approach. The fourth part describes the role of the researcher in this study, while the fifth part deals with data analysis. The final part concludes.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following research question and its sub-questions: What is the relationship between the experience of Nepalese students in China's higher education programs and the explicit and implicit aims of China's soft power policy in South Asia?

- a. What is the experience of Nepalese students with regard to China's higher education program(s)?

- b. How are China's social and political values and culture reflected in the experience of Nepalese students in regard to China's higher education programs?
- c. What are the perceptions of Nepal-China relations experts or soft power experts in terms of the explicit and implicit aims of China's soft power policy in South Asia?

The nature of research questions required qualitative research. As Munhall (2008) writes, "Qualitative researchers are most interested in individual perception to gain access to understanding the meaning of experience for an individual, a culture and or social groups" (p. 606). Her views on the use of qualitative research for exploring perceptions have been echoed in several other texts that connect research questions that seek to answer "hows" and "whats" of a phenomenon or a case with qualitative research methods for in-depth investigation through open-ended questions (Berg, 2014; Farber, 2006, p. 366). Janesick (1994) explains:

[Qualitative researchers] study a social setting to understand the meaning of participants' lives in the participants' own terms. I mention this in contrast to the quantitative paradigm, which is perfectly comfortable with aggregating large numbers of people without communicating with them face to face. (p. 210)

Clearly, my research involved a deeper interaction with the participants, which is not possible in quantitative research, in order to unearth their experiences in a foreign country or in a foreign institution (the Confucius Institute) in their home country. Also, Denzin and Lincoln (2005), while differentiating between qualitative research and quantitative research, point out that the former seeks "answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning" (p. 10). As such, experiences of

Nepalese students are captured in this study by seeking answers to the above-mentioned questions rather than relying solely on the Chinese or Nepalese media for the reporting on the growing number of Nepalese students in China.

The study of experiences was informed by an inquiry into students' motivation to study in China or at the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University (CIKU) in Nepal, their academic experiences associated with CIKU and with universities in China, and their understanding of China's socio-political values and culture. Such investigation involves semi-structured interview questions and follow-up questions. For instance, Gao (2015) undertook a study to examine the effectiveness of China's soft power in the Arab world by supplementing the use of a survey with interviews. The interviews allowed for the exploration of Arab students' overall impressions of China, their experiences in Chinese universities and the "future development" of Arab students in China. Gao (2015) explained why the survey was not sufficient: first, almost half her respondents skipped the open-ended questions that were optional, and "a vast majority" of those who responded simply "jotted down a few words" (p. 44) without elaboration; second, questions that prompted for ratings of China did not capture details of Arab students' impressions of China, which underscores a limitation of a quantitative approach. Also, King (2013), a former professor of international and comparative education at the University of Edinburgh, U.K., conducted qualitative research on African students' experiences in China as well as China's training for African professionals.

Hence, through qualitative data sources, I was able to explore and reveal how Chinese socio-political values, culture, and its higher educational institutions/programs are viewed by South Asian students or Nepalese students specifically. Investigation into

recipients' experience was important to determine the strength of China's soft power, defined as the power of attraction. Also, this study required a deeper involvement of the researcher in terms of asking probing questions and interpreting the data through her informed awareness and conceptual knowledge of the subject, in particular the concept of soft power and strategic involvement of China in South Asia.

Specifically, with Nepal as a site with which China shares the border and has a geopolitical interest in spreading its political influence in the South Asian region, the case study approach was employed that involves "the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system" (Creswell, 2007, p. 73). As Creswell (2007) notes, education and political science are common subjects for case study research. Be that as it may, this study bears disciplinary affinity with political science, international education and international relations.

Research Approach

Case Study

Stake (1994) puts case studies into three categories: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. While the purpose of an intrinsic study is to understand "a particular case," an instrumental study provides "insight into an issue or problem" or "refines" a theory. A collective case study employs multiple cases to understand a phenomenon. This study is a "single instrumental case study" in which "the researcher focuses on an issue or concern, and then selects one bounded case to illustrate this issue" (Creswell, 2007, p. 74). The issue in the given context was illumination of China's soft power strategy in the South Asian region, specifically Nepal, through the mechanism of higher education.

Creswell (2007) further writes that a case study approach works well when the

researcher has “clearly identifiable cases with boundaries and seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the cases” (p. 74). In this study, I identified Nepal as a case for investigation: being a South Asian country with a border with China, Nepal comes across as a suitable case. The section on sampling explains my choice of Nepal in detail.

Interpretive Paradigm

Social constructivism paradigm informed my research. As Creswell (2013) explains, the meaning of the situation, phenomenon or event is constructed in relation to subjective experiences. The study involved interpretation of the experience of Nepalese students in China’s higher education programs. It considered the relationship between their experiences and the aims of China’s soft power policy in South Asia. For example, the website of the Chinese Ministry of Education prominently markets its education system to foreign students, institutions and governments, reflecting the Chinese government’s prime focus on international cooperation and exchanges. Creswell (2013) writes:

[constructivist researchers] recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they “position” themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences. Thus the researchers make an interpretation of what they find, an interpretation shaped by their own experiences and background. (p. 25)

The constructivist paradigm reflects in my interpretation of data through my analytical lens constituted of my academic background in international relations and my South Asian background. The paradigm engaged student experiences and document study as well as data from interviews with experts. Further, the meaning making or

understanding of the subject was shaped by the theoretical concept of soft power, reflecting multiple realities.

Research Context

At the outset, it is important to explain why Nepal served as a case study. Nepal holds geostrategic significance for a global power like China that is seeking to enhance its influence in the South Asia region through both hard power and soft power. Nepal is “sandwiched” between India and China. For centuries, Nepal has had cultural affinity with India and the post-independent India has wielded political and strategic clout in Nepal, especially with the signing of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. However, on account of political developments in Nepal and China’s expanding portfolio of military and economic power, China has lately intensified its penetration in Nepal in order to curb India’s influence and deepen its own influence politically, economically and culturally. Further, Nepal shares a border with Tibet, spanning over 1,400 kilometers, which China considers as its autonomous region. Thus, Nepal’s cooperation is considered essential for China to rein in Tibetans from conducting separatist activities. The subsequent chapters will turn spotlight on Nepal’s importance for China.

In addition, the remaining South Asian countries are not ideal cases for the following reasons. First, China already carries a predominantly positive image in Pakistan which is considered as its “all-weather friend.” So, China is reaching out to new frontiers. Also, China has been a supplier of military hardware to Pakistan; as such, its influence in Pakistan is tied up to the strength of China’s hard power. Second, in the case of India, engagement with China on the front of education is not substantive, other than the existence of two Confucius Institutes. In fact, due to the trust deficit between the two

countries owing to border skirmishes, China's defense assistance to Pakistan, and other bilateral issues, China's soft power appeal has not made inroads into the Indian psyche (Gopal & Mancheri, 2013). Third, the South Asian countries of Maldives and Bhutan do not have any Confucius Institute. In fact, China does not have diplomatic relations with Bhutan. Fourth, China does not share a border with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, whereas Nepal serves as a conduit for shelter of Tibetan refugees. Given the political salience of the Tibetan issue, Nepal ranks high in China's strategic calculus (Adhikari, 2011).

Participants and the Sampling Plan

Participants in my study fall into the following categories: five Nepalese alumni who had learned the Chinese language at the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University (CIKU) in Nepal; 15 Nepalese students who were studying in or had studied in China; and six Nepalese experts. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour. Two of the experts were interviewed for between 45 minutes to an hour for ascertaining China's soft power aims; short telephone conversations with three experts involved China-Nepal relations, while email exchanges took place with a Nepalese academician on the role of China in Nepal's education. Pseudonyms – Leejo and Jaba – have been used for the experts interviewed on soft power keeping in view the IRB requirement for protecting the identity of the participants. Leejo is a China expert and a US director of the Confucius Institute in a major East Coast city. The real names of the remaining experts have been mentioned in this research as information was them was meant to supplement or clarify certain aspects of the findings. They are: Lok Raj Baral, Executive Chairman of the Nepal Center for Contemporary Studies; Madhukar S.J.B. Rana, an economics professor at the South Asian Institute of Management in Kathmandu

and former finance minister; Sujeev Shakya, a Nepal-based trade and investment consultant and the author of *Unleashing Nepal*; and Hira B. Thapa, a former Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal.

Students currently studying in China were in the 20-30 age group (most of them in their 20s), while the alumni were in their 20s. Two current Ph.D. students of political science and international relations are recipients of scholarships from Nepalese and Chinese governments respectively. Three other participants from social science disciplines were recipients of Chinese government scholarships for short duration master's courses, ranging from a semester to a year. One former MBBS student in China was a recipient of the Nepalese government scholarship. Thus, out of 15 students – both current students and alumni – nine were self-funded.

A total of 13 universities from diverse regions of China found representation in this study, including northern, eastern, northeastern, southwestern, southeastern, and central parts of China. I approached members of the Facebook groups of Nepalese medical students in China by using the following criteria: their frequency of participation on Facebook, based on their profile pages, suggested how likely they were to read my message; representation of different universities; and recruitment of both males and females. Given the overwhelming number of males in the groups, most of the participants in my study were males; four out of the 20 student participants (including alumni from the Confucius Institute) were females. It may be added that their recruitment could not take place through the Facebook group page administrators. As such, I reached out to individual members, which rather ensured their confidentiality. LinkedIn, a networking site of professionals, was used for a couple of recruitments. For instance, a combination

of a Nepalese last name and a reference to “China” in the search option delivered names of possible participants. In addition, a small proportion of participants came through snowball sampling as several participants in this study and Nepalese experts recommended current students or alumni, contributing to the pool of prospective respondents.

For recruitment of experts, I employed snowball sampling by requesting the scholars known to me to recommend those who would be willing to participate in helping me create a list of prospective participants. I reached out to select scholars, based on their expertise on China-Nepal relations or soft power through email to request their participation. The pool of scholars was widened as I conducted author-based searches of articles/books in the Cleveland State University Michael Schwartz online database and other online libraries, in addition to Internet searches.

Recruitment challenges. I intended to recruit alumni through the Nepal-based Arniko Society, which consists of Nepalese alumni who had studied in China. Initially, I approached the Society via email with an attached flyer but there was no response. When I made a phone call, I received the message that the subscriber did not accept incoming calls. Then, I attempted to reach out to the Society’s Executive Committee (EC) members through personal contacts but to no avail. One of the EC’s members did ask one of my contacts that I email him the questions and he would send me his answers, but he never got back to me despite reminders.

Under the IRB process, I was required to seek institutional approval for contacting the students and teachers at the Confucius Institute for recruitment in my study. Unlike Confucius Institute (CI) websites in other countries, the Institute’s website

in Nepal does not provide any contact information of any of the staff members, including the director(s). So, I hunted up two email addresses of the director representing the Nepalese side director through online search. I sent him emails to both addresses with an attached flyer detailing the purpose of the research. I did not get any response.

Then, I contacted a couple of Nepalese scholars for help with connecting me to the director. One of them informed me about the director who represents the Chinese side at CIKU and shared the director's contact information. Thereupon, I sent the email to the Chinese director, but there was no response from him either. Sending a reminder also did not work. Other than that, I had some questions for him as well as I sought to provide contextual information in my chapter on CIKU. My contact who was in touch with him apprised him of my research and sought his cooperation. So, when I eventually called the director in October 2017, he told me to email him the questions because he could not hear me. I did that immediately. The questions were general such as the curriculum and course material, the number of students and their levels, the number of teachers and volunteers, and challenges and opportunities before the Institute, while one question specifically pertained to the role of CIKU in contributing to China's soft power. A couple of minutes later, I called him just to inform that the questions had been emailed, but my phone call was ended from his side. I thought that if he did not wish to share his views on soft power, he would at least answer the basic questions that were important to provide the contextual information in my introduction to the Confucius Institute in Nepal, which as a director he was ideally able and capable to furnish. Had I received institutional cooperation, I would have taken a field trip to Nepal to interview the students at the Institute.

As such, I was left to find out prospective participants on social media. I ended up interviewing the alumni whose experiences and stories provided significant information that was not to be found in the existing literature or on the Web. But no teacher at the Confucius Institute could be interviewed as the contact information was nowhere to be found. There was one former teacher whom I approached via social media but I am not sure if my message reached him. Had the Confucius Institute website provided email addresses of the teachers, I could have at least reached out to them.

I felt like I was investigating a serious criminal issue because an air of fear, caution and secrecy seemed to surround both the Institute and certain sections of the Nepalese society. A remarkable behavior pattern on the part of an eminent Nepalese journalist and professionals, such as doctors who had studied in China, was that instead of expressing their inability to participate, they rather showed their willingness to “help” and asked me to email them the questions. But they never responded to my questions afterwards. Despite several reminders, they did not even reply to my email. I felt like they were more interested in knowing the questions rather than answering them. As my study reveals in subsequent chapters, close linkages have formed between the Confucius Institute, the Chinese Embassy, and the Arniko Society. Does that provide a clue to the silence? It is an open question. Is it the influence of China? Is it the fear of antagonizing China? Or is it the liking for China? Interestingly, a former student at the Confucius Institute, whom I reached through Facebook, told me that there was no use interviewing the students at the Confucius Institute because they were going to talk about “positive aspects only.” He added that if I was aiming to get their views on whether China or donor

agencies were spying on Nepal, I might not get answers to such questions, especially from the engineering students who, he humorously added, “lacked critical thinking.”

However, inasmuch as the focus of this study is on students’ experiences, this study is rich with relevant data from students. Further, the extensive online search traced information pertaining to the Confucius Institute and the Arniko Society in relation to China’s soft power aims and actions in practice. My analysis of the online data brings out the dynamics and nuances of China’s higher education engagement in Nepal.

Interview Questions

The interview questions centered on the academic, social, cultural and political experiences of Nepalese students while studying in China and at the Confucius Institute. The questions were designed for different categories of participants: current Nepalese students in China; alumni; members of the Arniko Society; students at the Confucius Institute in Kathmandu, Nepal; teachers at the Confucius Institute; the Nepalese Ministry of Education; and experts (see Appendix B). Questions for the students in China and at the Confucius Institute, including the Arniko Society and alumni, were mostly the same with necessary modifications to reflect the difference in their academic status. Questions for the teachers and the Ministry were formed to understand Nepalese students’ experiences from their perspective, though interviews with them could not take place. Questions for experts centered around their views on the factors behind China’s involvement in Nepal’s higher education sector as well as China’s soft power objectives in South Asia and Nepal in particular.

The process of forming interview questions began with consulting existing sources such as Gao (2015), but at a later stage they were discarded because more

relevant questions, aligning with the research question and the soft power model, needed to be framed. Also, the number of questions was reduced for the sake of managing the interview process; the initial count of questions for students was 27, which scaled down to 10.

The questions were developed keeping in view the education soft power model with its three constituents: education as a mechanism to expose students to Chinese values/culture, education as a resource for China's effort to attract Nepalese students, and education as a tool for China in attaining specific goals such as broadening its influence globally and, for this study, in Nepal in particular.

The values/culture part reflected in questions on students' cultural and social experiences. When students could not understand what I meant by "social values," I gave them examples of Indian values and American values, and thereby probed what they thought of Chinese social values or how the people in China behaved with them. Given that the Confucius Institute deals with language and culture, it was included in the values/culture category. Because the students who had learned Chinese at the Confucius Institute in Nepal and had not been to China, follow-up questions mostly centered around their language learning and cultural experiences.

The resource part of the soft power model covered the academic experiences of Nepalese students, both current and alumni, in China. Under this model, education is considered a resource in nation-branding or attractiveness of a country based on its educational offerings. The tool part of the model refers to the use of higher education to achieve "certain policy goals." This study deals with the foreign policy goals vis-à-vis Nepal. In this regard, experts on soft power and Nepal-China relations were interviewed,

in addition to analyzing documents such as news articles. In addition, Nepalese students were asked about their understanding of China-Nepal relations.

Data Collection Methods

Methodological rigor followed from adherence to the requirements of the case study approach. Accordingly, data collection involved “multiple sources of information” (interviews, audiovisual material, books and articles, documents, and reports) to answer the research question about experiences of Nepalese students at the Confucius Institute in Nepal as well those who were studying in or had studied in China as well as to explore the aims of China’s soft power policy.

Interviews took place over WhatsApp (a Voice over IP service), regular phone, Skype, and via emails. Four respondents, including current students and alumni, answered by email. Student experiences were studied in terms of participants’ views about the educational program, their motivation in joining the program, and their academic, social, cultural, and political experiences. The social aspect of experience was explored in the case of Nepalese students in China in order to understand their experiences with Chinese society. In addition, an interview with the Nepalese Minister of Education (or the education ministry staff) was planned in order to explore the benefits of China’s higher education program for Nepal and to triangulate the investigation of experiences of Nepalese students. But I could not reach out to the Ministry. As such, content from the Web such as the education minister’s statements was incorporated and analyzed in this thesis. The table below illustrates how various data sources help to answer the research question and sub-questions in this study:

Table 1

Data Sources for Addressing the Research Questions

Data Sources	Information	Research Question
Website of the Chinese Embassy in Nepal: Education section	Activities of Chinese ambassador in terms of speeches, participation in exhibitions, seminars pertaining to China's educational cooperation with Nepal.	Aims of China's soft power policy
The Chinese Ministry of Education website	Policy framework on international cooperation & exchanges. Policy focus on internationalization of higher education. For example, the National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020).	Policy framework for understanding the soft power approach in the higher education domain
Online articles/stories	China-Nepal educational cooperation/views of students studying in China	Aims of China's soft power policy/ experiences of Nepalese students
You Tube videos	Interviews with Chinese language learners at the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University	Experiences of Nepalese students
Interviews with members of the Arniko Society/alumni and current Nepalese students in China	Academic, social, cultural and political experiences	Experiences of Nepalese students
Interviews with students at the Confucius Institute in Kathmandu, Nepal	Academic, social, cultural and political experiences	Experiences of Nepalese students
Expert interviews	China's soft power pursuit through higher education, with a special reference to Nepal.	Aims of China's soft power policy

Role of the Researcher

My role was to collect the data through various sources to answer the research questions and analyze it through the soft power framework. In this regard, my academic background in international relations enabled me to connect the data with the concept of power. Since I am from India, a South Asian country, my interest in the region further drove my investigation into the subject. Also, India has a population of 3 to 4 million Nepalese people. Further, the name of Tenzing Norgay, one of the first mountaineers to climb the Mount Everest which is in Nepal, has been associated with my memory of Nepal. As such, it was interesting for me to know as to what motivated Nepalese students to study in China, while traditionally India has been their destination. Hence, I became interested in exploring Nepalese students' mobility outside South Asia in choosing China as a destination for higher education.

Thus, my subjectivity crept in interpreting findings in terms of adding a note for Indian policy makers to retain India's attractiveness for Nepalese youth. Besides, my understanding of China, through the lens of the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the persisting border skirmishes between the two countries, is informed by China's pursuit of hard power. Hence, this background enabled me to discern contradiction with its soft power strategy as I analyzed the data. Nevertheless, I was aware that my role lay in presenting the views of the participants in terms of what they perceived and experienced. As such, my findings clearly indicate what the participants reported (Chapters V-VII), separate from my interpretations in Chapter VIII.

Data Analysis

With guidance from Saldana's coding manual (2009), the data underwent multiple cycles of coding to investigate into the experience of the recipients of Chinese education as well as to identify the aims of the Chinese government in its soft power policy through higher education in South Asia. Toward this end, the educational soft power model (Wojciuk, Michaleka & Stormowska, 2015), as described earlier, was employed. As such, the model constituents of "values"/culture, "resources" and "tools" served as umbrella themes representing the three chapters — V, VI and VII. In respect of selection of the type of coding, Saldana (2009) writes, "Affective coding methods investigate subjective qualities of human experience (e.g., emotions, values, conflicts, judgments) by directly acknowledging and naming those experiences" (p. 86).

Descriptive codes were used which summarize the statements of the interviewees. Affective coding supplemented the codes where applicable. For example, the descriptive code of "racial discrimination" was accompanied by the emotion code of "disapproval," and "mental discomfort," which resulted from the participant's experience of discriminatory treatment that he "didn't like" and that made him feel "uncomfortable." Coding was preceded by extraction of statements based on research questions. Once codes were assigned to the selected responses, they were condensed into categories such as "unpleasant social behavior."

The archived data was codified to inform analysis pertaining to China's soft power aims and students' perceptions of China's foreign policy. Other than that, this source was employed for substantiation, context support, and evidence where relevant.

Coding acquired added importance in this qualitative study owing to the methodological challenges and complexities associated with measuring soft power. Tao (2015) mentions the most important of them:

First [as acknowledged by Nye himself] how do we know how much soft power a country has and how do we compare soft power across countries? Public opinion polls are the most frequently used instruments these days, but they tell us little about the degree of attraction, the essence of soft power. Second, how do we know that one country's foreign policy behavior is a result of another country's soft power? In other words, how can we isolate the independent effects of soft power from those of hard power (such as economic inducements or military coercion)? (para. 7)

Hence, the use of coding enabled me to capture the perceptions and experiences of Nepalese students in relation to China's higher education offering, social values, culture, politics, and foreign policy.

Trustworthiness

This study meets the four criteria of trustworthiness, as spelt out by Guba (1981): credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability.

Credibility. Credibility was achieved by using properly designed research methods as well as through triangulation, peer scrutiny, the researcher's personal credibility, and thick descriptions. Triangulation occurred in terms of diversity of data sources. In this regard, Shenton (2004) writes, "Here individual viewpoints and experiences can be verified against others and, ultimately, a rich picture of the attitudes, needs or behavior of those under scrutiny may be constructed based on the contributions

of a range of people” (p. 66). Shenton further cites Van Manen’s view that he “urges the exploitation of opportunities ‘to check out bits of information across informants.’” While there were constraints on diversifying the source of informants, as mentioned in the data challenges section, the extensive search of information through the Internet — as exemplified by incorporation of online sources — as well as diversity, reflecting in the composition of Chinese universities and regions, recruitment of both current students and alumni, and involvement of both males and female students, facilitated triangulation.

During the course of this study, feedback on some drafts was obtained from China experts — Joseph Lee, a China expert and professor of history at Pace University, and Zhiqun Zhu, a professor of political science at Bucknell University. It was in relation to determining the strength of my analysis of China’s cultural penetration as well as its interest in higher education engagement with Nepal in light of soft power. Shenton (2004) explains, “The fresh perspective that such individuals may be able to bring may allow them to challenge assumptions made by the investigator, whose closeness to the project frequently inhibits his or her ability to view it with real detachment” (p. 67). In addition, the researcher’s “background, qualifications and experience” (Shenton, 2004) is considered important in qualitative research because of his or her vital role in data collection (Patton, 1990). Further, thick description in presentation of the findings conveys the context of the experiences, imparting credibility to findings.

Transferability. Detailed information about specifics of research context is provided, such as categories of participants, methods and challenges of data collection, and modality of interviews (such as phone calls) in order to enable the reader to

determine the extent of transferability. Overall, transferability was achieved through the rich description of the writing up of the study, which I offer in chapters V-VII.

Dependability. Dependability demands that “the way in which a study is conducted should be consistent across time, researchers, and analysis techniques” (Gasson, 2004, p. 94). It was achieved through an audit trail that detailed the “chronology” of emergence of research design, emerging codes and analytic memos.

Confirmability. In order to protect the findings from being shaped by the researcher’s biases, source triangulation and reflexivity were employed. The steps of the research process are outlined below:

Identification of the research topic. The research topic was identified when I was enrolled in EDU 895 doctoral research courses, beginning in fall 2015, in the Ph.D. program. I grabbed the opportunity to explore the topic further for PSC 512, an elective political science course, when I chose to write my final paper on Nepal as a case study in China’s soft power projection through higher education in South Asia. The peer reviews of my draft as well as class discussion on paper proposals bolstered my interest in pursuing research on that topic as well as impressing on me the necessity to conduct interviews with Nepalese students and to get into the depth of the subject. In October 2015, I chaired a panel on Projecting Chinese Culture through Education at the 57th annual conference of the American Association for Chinese Studies in Texas. I presented a paper on dualism in China’s higher education system, marked by internationalization and regimentation. During the question-answer session, I had the opportunity to interact with attendees such as June Teufel Dreyer, a professor of political science at the University of Miami, Florida, who shared her thoughts on China’s soft power. Hence, the

background to conducting research for my Ph.D. degree was informed by my active engagement with the subject in conjunction with interaction with scholars and peers.

Importantly, the topic of this thesis complements my academic background with a master's in political science and international relations as well as previous publications on China. Additionally, the growing importance of internationalization in universities' strategic planning as well as my own experience as an international student in the United States sensitized me to work on this timely project. My interest in it was further piqued by my father's book on China's soft power in South Asia (Jain, B., 2017) as I considered exploring the higher education aspect of China-South Asia relations.

Preparation and approval of the research proposal. Once I became sure of my research interest in the area of soft power through higher education, I prepared an 82-page research proposal for approval by a four-member dissertation committee drawn from education and political science departments. Its key highlights were: the introduction to the subject, a thorough review of the literature, the theoretical framework, and the methodology. The gap in the coverage of South Asia in the existing literature on China's internationalization of higher education was underlined as one of the aspects of the significance of the proposed research. Once approved, the committee and I approached the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for its approval for data collection. The application form outlined the measures to seek informed consent of interviewees as well as providing the participant consent forms and informational flyers. After receiving the IRB approval, I began interviewing the participants.

Preparation of the interview protocol. Interview questions were carefully selected, refined and finalized, marked by relevance for the research question, through a

process of several exchanges with the committee. The demographic questionnaire was prepared to provide background information about the student participants.

Maintenance of analytic memos and notes. During data collection through both interviews and archived documents, I maintained notes on emerging codes, queries, questions for further investigation, and follow-up questions for interviewees. Also, I created MS Word files titled “to be added” or “important matter,” containing content on analysis, for inclusion in the draft. Besides, I maintained notes on my interpretation of the emerging data. With this, I could keep the interviewees’ responses and data from online sources separate from my reflections which I used in the discussion chapter.

Data reduction. In data analysis, the memos proved helpful in creating categories and themes, while in the occasional meetings with the committee I got feedback on the coding. The data analysis was facilitated by coding matrices columned into "descriptive codes," "categories" and "exemplars." Also, my experience in coding in the Ph.D. courses on qualitative research was useful.

Peer reviews. During data analysis, feedback on some portions of the draft from experts on China was incorporated where relevant.

Review of the checklist. I reviewed my notes to ensure that research findings and my interpretations had been integrated into the final document.

CHAPTER IV

CHINA'S SOFT POWER AIMS THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA: NEPAL AS A CASE STUDY

China-Nepal diplomatic ties were established on August 1, 1955. A turning point in their relationship came with the treaty in 1956 which replaced the Treaty of Thapathali and under which Nepal accepted Tibet as an integral part of China. Both countries share the 1,414-kilometer-long border. In most of the South Asian history, however, Nepal has been politically and strategically closest to India through their 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship, establishing a “special relationship” (the 1,700 kilometers open border without a visa requirement, and unrestricted movement of people on both sides), as well as owing to socio-cultural affinity and recruitment of Nepalese Gorkha soldiers in the Indian Army. At times, Nepal-India ties were strained over the issue of China during the regime of then Nepalese King Birendra in 1970s.

With the installation of the Maoist-led government by Pushpa Kamal Dahal in the August of 2008, China-Nepal relations experienced a positive change. The Nepalese government, bearing ideological proximity to China, emphasized keeping equidistant relations between Beijing and New Delhi, which meant that Kathmandu did not subscribe

to its past policy of a unilateral tilt toward India. Further, in 2009, a “comprehensive partnership” of cooperation was established between China and Nepal.

This chapter underlines the key aspects of China-Nepal relations, including the educational ties, and identifies the aims of China’s soft power drive in relation to Nepal.

China-Nepal Relations

Lately, China-Nepal bilateral relationship witnessed such developments as China’s opening of the Jilung border crossing point for transport of petroleum and other essential items in the face of Madhesi protests⁸ in Nepal, and an uptick in China’s official aid to Nepal from \$24 million in 2014 to \$128 million between 2015 and 2016 (Shah, 2016). From the Nepalese perspective, it is through China that the landlocked Nepal can scuttle “India’s monopoly over Nepal’s transit trade” (Ramachandran, 2016) as well as the prominence of India in trade with Nepal. Interestingly, India’s share in Nepal’s imports and exports is 60 per cent and 63 per cent respectively, while “the rest of the trade, valued at over \$3 billion, is also routed through India” (Bose, 2017, July 16). Also, following the massive earthquake in Nepal in April 2015, China sent a total of 1,088 personnel as part of disaster relief assistance.

Development Aid and Infrastructural Support to Nepal

China’s financial aid and infrastructural support to Nepal have stepped up recently. As noted in Chapter II, China is using a number of tools to build its soft power in South Asia. In Nepal, China’s economic role is no less prominent. In the Nepal

⁸Due to the Madhesi movement's blocking of trucks, carrying food items from India, it is considered as an unofficial economic blockade by India.

Investment Summit 2017 in Kathmandu, Chinese firms committed to investing \$8.3 billion in Nepal, “far higher than the Indian commitment of \$ 317 million” (Giri, 2017, para. 1).

As noted on the Nepalese Ministry of Foreign Affairs website:

The Chinese assistance to Nepal falls into three categories: Grants (aid gratis), interest free loans and concessional loans... Some of the major on-going projects under Chinese assistance include: Upper Trishuli Hydropower Project- Power station and Transmission Line Projects (Concessional loan); food/ material assistance (Grant) in 15 bordering districts of northern Nepal; Kathmandu Ring Road Improvement Project with Flyover Bridges -(Grant); Tatopani Frontier Inspection Station Project (Construction of ICDs at Zhangmu-Kodari)- (Grant); and Pokhara International Regional Airport (Loan). (“Nepal-China Relations,” n.d., Economic Cooperation section)

During Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli’s visit to China in March 2016, China agreed to upgrade road links between Nepal and Tibet, extend the Chinese railway from Kathmandu through Lumbini and made a commitment of financial support for building international airport in Pokhara, as well as agreeing to “a long-term commercial oil deal” (Baral, 2016). Also, China has emerged as the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Nepal.

The India Factor

Whereas India considers Nepal its natural sphere of influence, China is keen to scuttle India’s entrenched influence (Dabhade & Pant, 2004). As appeared in the *DNA*, based on an Indian intelligence report, 22 China Study Centers (CSC) have come up in

Nepal, with 11 of them on the Indo-Nepal border, “propagating subjects of Chinese culture, traditions, teachings and economy to the population in Nepal” (“Four dozen China study centers,” 2014, December 28). Writing about China’s “soft power offensive in Nepal,” Zheng comments that many sections in Nepal “seem unconcerned” about the implications for Nepal’s sovereignty even as China’s influence in Nepal deepens because they are focused “instead on China’s massive economic development and the spillover benefits it could have for their country” (Zheng, 2018, January 8, para. 17).

The Tibet Issue

As mentioned earlier, Nepal’s proximity to Tibet has catapulted Nepal to prime significance for China. In this regard, Nepal and China have committed themselves to boosting security cooperation. According to Hira B. Thapa, interviewed for this study, “China wants its close neighbors like Nepal not to allow the use of Nepalese territory by any anti-China element.”⁹ As reported in *Xinhua*:

Hailing the traditional friendship between the two countries and the smooth cooperation between the ministries, Guo Shengkun [Chinese State Councilor and Minister of Public Security] said he hopes the two sides will increase personnel interactions, improve mechanisms of cooperation, and boost practical cooperation on Tibet-related affairs, fight against illegal border crossing and drug trafficking to safeguard security and stability of the two countries as well as the region at large to provide a favorable environment for common development. (“Police chief holds,” 2014, October 17, para. 2).

Clearly, China wants to ensure that Nepal curbs protests and activities of Tibetan

⁹ The participant's name appears with his consent.

activists, and the Nepalese government has responded accordingly. For instance, the Nepalese police detain Tibetans who try to cross the Nepalese border into India (Wong, 2016).

Writing about China's interest in Nepal owing to the Tibet issue, Campbell (2012) writes:

China's engagement with Nepal is strongly shaped by the 'One China' policy.

This refers to China's own sovereignty and territorial claims, which are primarily concerned with denying official recognition to Taiwan and to claiming Tibet – officially the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) – as an integral part of China.

Beijing considers Tibet part of its territory, and the region is also a key source of mineral and water resources for China's development. Tibet is one of China's so-called 'core interests', which essentially means that it is not open to negotiation and China will use all means necessary to protect it. (p. 10)

This section provided the context of China-Nepal relations in light of both countries' mutual interest in coming close to each other. It did not go deeper into other areas such as China's interest in Mustang and Lumbini.

China-Nepal Educational Ties

China's approach to higher education in dealing with Nepal fits in its education policy framework for developing countries in general, its plan for internationalization for higher education, as well as for fostering bilateral ties with Nepal to achieve some specific aims, as described subsequently in this chapter.

Section titled "exchanges and cooperation" of China's Medium and Long-term National Plan, 2011-2020 for higher education states:

International aid to education shall be boosted, so as to cultivate and train professionals for other developing countries. A framework shall be established to make Chinese college graduates' overseas volunteer service available in more fields and through more channels...Chinese government scholarships shall be increased, with financial assistance offered mainly to students from other developing countries. ("Outline of China's National Plan," 2010, p. 35).

Accordingly, in a joint statement released in March 2016 during Nepalese Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli's visit to China, China offered approximately 400 training opportunities in human resource development and an increase in government scholarships for Nepalese as well as inviting the latter to pursue higher education in China through other channels as well. Hence, the provision of scholarships and training is the key to educational relationship with developing countries. In case with the American and Oceania region, in contrast, what underlies China's strategy is "partnership" that includes institutional exchanges, involvement of multinational companies (such as for donation of funds and equipment for Chinese universities) and government cooperative projects.

Scholarships. In August 2017, the Chinese government granted "university-level scholarships to over 100 Nepali students" for the 2017-2018 academic year ("China awards," 2017, para. 1) in such disciplines as civil engineering, medicine, business, telecommunications, and international relations. *XinhuaNet* further states that as of 2016, 5,160 Nepali students had studied in Chinese universities through scholarships "supported" by the Chinese government. As stated on the website of Sichuan University, the purpose of the BRI Scholarship is "to allow more international students to learn while living in China and experiencing its culture, bridging the gap between China and other

countries” (“Sichuan University,” 2016). The full scholarship covers tuition, accommodation and insurance, apart from providing a monthly stipend of RMB 3,000 and RMB 3,500 respectively, for graduate and Ph.D. students, while undergrad students are entitled to RMB 20,000 per annum.

Establishment of the Confucius Institute. The Confucius Institute was established at Kathmandu University (CIKU) in 2007 through a partnership between the Hebei University of Economics and Business and Kathmandu University. The Confucius Institute offers the following services: Chinese language teaching; training for Chinese language instructors; delivering of Chinese language teaching resources; administration of the HSK Examination (Chinese Proficiency Test); provision of information and consultative services concerning China’s education, culture and other areas; and conducting language and cultural exchange activities between China and other countries (Hanban, 2014).

With four Confucius classrooms and 2129 registered participants, it offers different levels of curriculum in Chinese such as undergraduate compulsory and elective courses, postgraduate elective courses, local teacher Chinese language training, elementary school courses, and Chinese language classes serving business persons, tourists, and media reporters. In addition, the Confucius Institute undertakes cultural programs such as the “Chinese Cultural Festival, performances, Chinese textbooks exhibitions, cultural lectures, seminars, and various Chinese games” (“Welcome to Confucius Institute,” 2007).

Upon the completion of ten years since its establishment in Kathmandu, Yang Shichao, Political Counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Nepal, said that the contribution

of the Institute was to enable the Nepalese people to learn Chinese and get to know about Chinese culture closely, by responding to the lack of professional organizations and by providing teachers and textbooks. Hanban News, operated by the Confucius Institute Headquarters, made further observations on the achievements of the Confucius Institute:

The Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University has established 4 Confucius Classrooms and 14 teaching sites, cultivating more than 20 thousand students in all...it has made remarkable progress in establishing favorable cooperative relations with other universities, enlarging teaching venues, regulating the management systems, enhancing the teaching levels and influence, and other aspects. (“Confucius Institute at Kathmandu university,” 2017, para. 6)

Nepalese actors and collaborators. China has received cooperation from multiple actors in Nepal in China’s drive to enroll Nepalese students in Chinese institutions, though in varying degrees and forms. The following section identifies those six actors.

Nepalese Ministry of Education. A ministry of the government of Nepal, it is responsible for formulating the country’s education policy and is an important actor in government-to-government ties in the educational field. The Ministry grants No Objection Certificates (NOCs) to Nepalese citizens before they can study abroad. The Ministry’s official stance in China’s context is that educational ties with China will boost people-to-people contacts.

Nepal Medical Council. The Nepal Medical Council (NMC) is Nepal’s legislative institution whose approval is mandatory for Nepalese students to study medicine abroad. Otherwise, the students graduating from abroad are not allowed to

appear for the NMC licensing examination. The NMC's role in the enrollment of Nepalese students in China appears to be forming lately.¹⁰ Registrar Dilip Sharma welcomed the delegation of the University of South China (USC) in May 2017. Covering this news, Ning (2017) writes that Sharma said that the NMC would recommend "more and more excellent Nepal[ese] students to study in China" (para. 3) and apprised them of the requirements of higher medical education as acknowledged by the NMC.

Nepalese universities. Apart from Kathmandu University that hosts the Confucius Institute, Nepal's Tribhuvan University has witnessed a spurt in interaction with Chinese universities and the Chinese Embassy. Extension of China's research arm to Tribhuvan University reflects in the creation of the Chinese Academy of Science (CAS)'s Kathmandu Center of Research and Education (KCRE). As mentioned on the KCRE's website:

As South Asian countries are important stakeholders in China's implementation of the [Belt and Road Initiative], the establishment of Chinese Academy of Science's Kathmandu Center of Research and Education (KCRE) in Nepal is within the framework of the CAS 'Go-Out-to-Develop' strategy, and an important step forward to strengthen the scientific and education cooperation between China and South Asian countries. ("About KCRE," 2016, para. 3)

Nepal-China Cultural and Educational Council. The Nepal-China Cultural and Educational Council (NCCEC) is involved in organizing education exhibitions for Chinese universities. Upon its recommendation, Liu Shengxue, vice-president of the University of South China, paid official visits to both the Nepalese Ministry of Education

¹⁰Though just a few instances do not confirm continuation of its support in the future.

and the Nepal Medical Council in May 2017. The delegation briefed the Nepalese ministry on USC's [proposed] initiatives to "build collaborative programs with Nepal educational institutions, establish Confucius Academy in Nepal and broaden students['] recruitment channels" (Ning, 2017). On behalf of the Nepalese Ministry of Education, the Joint Secretary of Education expressed his "willingness to support USC's international education exchange and cooperation moves in Nepal" (Ning, 2017).

Educational consultancies. In March 2017, Free Educational Consultancies Organization of Nepal (FECON) organized the China Education Fair in Kathmandu to familiarize Nepalese students with China's progress in the education sector and to assist them with applying to Chinese universities. Yubaraj Katuwal, FECON's president, told *Xinhua*, China's official press agency, "Our major objective is to bring Chinese universities which are highly ranked and are offering scholarships and different types of schemes for international students." Noting the significance of the event, *Xinhua* notes:

Through the exhibition, the organizers have brought together Chinese education institutions and Nepali students from the diverse academic backgrounds. The exhibition is being held at a time when Chinese government has set a target of having half million foreign students by 2020. ("China education fair," 2017, para. 8)

Arniko Society. This is an alumni association of professionals who had studied in China. It is one of the organizers of the China Education Exhibition in Nepal, and its presidents have promoted Chinese universities during such events. For instance, Sarbottam Shrestha, president of the Arniko Society, stated on one such occasion, "Chinese universities have professional teachers, well facilities and high quality

education. Nepali students can learn a lot in China and utilize the knowledge in their own nation” (“China awards,” 2017, last para.).

China's Soft Power Aims in Nepal

Chapter II highlighted that China is interested in building soft power in South Asia by going beyond military and economic forms of engagement. As stated earlier, the sources of soft power – the power of appeal and attraction in contrast to coercion – are culture and values, ideology and institutions, and foreign policy (Nye, 1990). A question arises: what does China aim to achieve through its soft power in Nepal which serves as the case study? It is important because the research question entails exploring the relationship between China's soft power aims and experiences of Nepalese students with regard to China's education programs. Against this backdrop, this chapter aims to identify China's soft power aims by drawing on the following sources: my interviews with two experts, and online sources: the website of the Chinese Embassy in Nepal; news stories; articles; and speeches of Chinese President Xi Jinping. One of the experts is a China expert and US director of a Confucius Institute in the United States, and the other is a South Asia expert based in India.

Expert Opinion

Although I interviewed six experts in all, the views of two experts specifically on China's soft power aims are being presented in this section. The background information on experts has been provided in the methodology chapter. At the outset, Leejo, an expert on soft power, briefed me on China's embracement of the soft power concept:

Those in charge of Chinese international education and cultural affairs appropriated the Western construct of soft power....in teaching Chinese language

as a foreign language for foreigners. In a way....so I think there was a deliberate effort to use this Western idea of soft power to repackage what China has been doing to promote its cultural resources.

Leejo pointed out the cultural, economic and political considerations behind China's establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide. He said that Confucius Institutes in general were set up as a "cultural passport to promote the idea of Chinese soft power and also maybe to cultivate a new generation of Chinese language learners." Additionally, Leejo indicated China's intention to compete with the "First World" and to dominate the "Second World" and "Third World." When asked to elaborate on this aspect, he said that China had observed "the spread of America's cultural influence since the second World War" and that even in its modernization project launched in 1970s, China has "always looked up to the West especially the United States [in the] world order," while the success of the Japanese cultural industry also appealed to the Chinese leadership. Against this background, Leejo said:

So what China is trying to do is by promoting the study of Chinese language and culture, China is actually trying to invest in the language, [in] education of the younger people in many parts of the world. I guess the idea is by cultivating the interest in Chinese language and culture....[so they may] subscribe to cultural products or maybe the Chinese popular cultural industry in the next ten to twenty years.

When asked specifically about Nepal, Leejo said:

It could be part of its regional diplomacy to coopt Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal where the Confucius Institute is active and also to support

Chinese competition with India. That's my reading of China's approach — how they run Confucius Institute and also how they offer scholarships, and how they support local universities, local colleges and even the local high school system in competition with much powerful regional state — India.

Leejo further cited an example of Africa where political and economic elites who studied in China had developed a positive image and had likely become a major bridge between the Chinese and African governments. Building on this point, he said, “So I guess the Confucius Institute and the China Scholarship Council would be working to bring the support of the future elite in the developing world. And I see the similar patterns in some of the South Asian countries.”

Hence, according to Leejo, China's soft power aims in South Asian countries like Nepal are to garner support of future leaders, to disseminate its culture, and prepare a generation of Chinese language learners. Additionally, the use of soft power is intended to curtail India's cultural and political influence. The aspect of competing with India is corroborated in a case study by Campbell (2012) who writes, “Beijing is well-aware of the deep-rooted Indian cultural influence in Nepal and it is widely perceived to be deploying soft power in an attempt to counter-balance and dilute India’s influence” (Campbell, 2012, p. 9).

According to Jaab, another expert interviewed for this study, China’s soft power aims consist in creating a network of supporters including the youth and thereby wean the current generation away from the influence of India. Jaab contended:

it is easy to brainwash professionals from a non-political background. As such, it is seeking to influence future doctors and engineers by providing scholarships and

by inviting professionals to China. It is possible that by creating incentives for them [youth] and through hospitality, China is cultivating them.

Jaab observed that in China's strategic calculations, its economic aid to Nepal would lessen the latter's dependence on India.

Online Sources

On the front of several soft power aims, highlighted above, expert views find resonance in several online sources including the speeches of President Xi Jinping, the website of the Chinese Embassy in Nepal, the website of the Chinese Ministry of Education, and news articles. Those aspects are explained subsequently in this chapter. Online searches have unearthed another aim: making China a “major player” in global higher education, an aim that is a part of strengthening the global appeal of higher education as a source of nation branding or a constituent of national power. As Schulmann and Ye (2017) write in *World Education News and Reviews*, “More recently, China has embarked on an effort that could have an equally radical effect on global higher education: transforming itself from a non-entity as an international higher education destination into a major player.” In fact, China is seeking to recruit 500,000 international students by 2020. Similarly, China is striving to enhance the attractiveness of its educational institutions in Nepal and enhance recruitment of Nepalese students and thereby build and strengthen its soft power resource through higher education. This aspect is described below.

Increasing the influence of China’s higher education program. China is seeking to become a hub of international education. In order to enhance the influence of the Chinese higher education system by making it attractive to foreign students or

Nepalese students, China encourages enrollment of Nepalese students in its higher educational institutions by organizing events such as exhibitions, seminars and lectures.

According to China's *Plan for Study in China* (2012), the country is aiming to enhance the attractiveness of Chinese education for international students with the guiding principle of developing "the brand name of education in China internationally." Nepal is part of this overall project. In building a brand name, the plan talks of a "comprehensive, cohesive and sustainable development of Study in China" program that takes into consideration the "scale, structure, quality and effectiveness" of education in China. The objectives of the plan are the following:

to develop China into the country with the largest number of international students in Asia; to establish a comprehensive system, compatible with the overall scale and development of education in China; to produce a number of highly-qualified teachers; to build up a group of higher education institutions with distinguishing features and a number of high-standard disciplines for Study in China; and to generate a large number of graduates who both understand China and contribute to connecting China to the rest of the world. (Objectives section, 2012)

Toward this end, course construction and teacher development have been highlighted as reform and development areas. The Plan (2012) states, "We will try to build brand names of our courses, optimize course structure and develop a course system more attractive to international students" (Course Construction section). In regard to teacher development, the Plan (2012) seeks to make "a number of outstanding teachers with academic excellence, rich experiences and caring for students the main force for

Study in China” (Teachers Development section). In achieving the aim, the following major tasks have been identified: increasing enrollment to 500,000 international students by 2020; a gradual increase in Chinese government scholarships; and a more balanced composition of foreign students in terms of origin and academic levels and types. In sum, China seeks to make its education attractive to international students by building a brand name through education reform and development.

Promotional activities. In Nepal, China’s plan to recruit international students is more visible in provision of scholarships and in organizing education exhibitions. In 2003, the China Scholarship Council (CSC) which functions under the Chinese Ministry of Education held the China Education Exhibition in Nepal for the first time. It took place in the Birendra International Convention Center in Kathmandu, drawing approximately 2500 attendees, most of whom were high school and university students (“China Edu. Exhibition,” 2003). The event was aimed at “introducing Chinese higher education system” with the involvement of China’s 30 higher education institutions, comprised of “comprehensive ones, scientific and technological ones, normal ones and medical ones, such as the famous Tsinghua University and Beijing University” (“China Edu. Exhibition,” 2003, para. 1). The official website of the CSC interprets the success of the event in the following words: “[the event] broadened the influence of Chinese higher education in Nepal, and the universities achieved proactive results in enrollment and cooperation” (“China Edu. Exhibition,” 2003, last para.). This description provides a clue that building and increasing China's influence in Nepal in the field of higher education is one of the aims of China's soft power pursuit.

Table 2 gives an account of the remaining exhibitions (though not all) in

Kathmandu for promoting Chinese universities in Nepal. They were sourced from Web searches, including the CSC website, and as such, the list is confined to the information available.

Table 2

China Education Exhibitions in Nepal, 2007-2014

China Education Exhibition	Participating Universities	Organizers
Year: 2007 (5 th exhibition)	21 institutions Included Beijing University, Fudan University, Zhongshan University, East China Normal University, National Central University, Nanjing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics	The China Scholarship Council, the Chinese Embassy in Nepal and the Nepal Arniko Society
Year: 2009 (6 th exhibition)	No information	Same as above
Year: 2010 (7 th exhibition)	36 Chinese institutions, including engineering, medicine, language, culture and commerce, science and technology, and normal universities.	Same as above
Year: 2013 (8 th exhibition)	No information	The China Scholarship Council, the Chinese Embassy in Nepal, and the Nepal-China Cultural and Educational Council
Year: 2014 (exhibition number not known)	13 universities including Zhejiang University of Technology, International School of Capital Medical University, Guangxi University, Nanchang University of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Ocean University of China, Changzhou Textile Garment	Same as above

China Education Exhibition	Participating Universities	Organizers
	Institute, China Pharmaceutical University	

Interestingly, the CSC has secured the support of Nepalese alumni from the Arniko Society in holding these events. Speaking at the sixth such exhibition, H.C. Shah, then president of the Society, said, “the focus of this exhibition is to inform Nepalese youths that China is one of the best option[s] of higher education which is of international standard” (“China education exhibition, 2009, para. 4).

Given that Nepal has joined China's foreign policy program, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Nepal might witness an increase in the number of scholarships for its students under the BRI Scholarship Program. In 2017 also, China raised the number of Nepalese recipients of Chinese government scholarships.

Dissemination of Chinese culture. According to the Council of Confucius Institute Headquarters, the aim of the Confucius Institute is to “promote Chinese language and culture in foreign countries” (“Confucius Institute Headquarters,” n.d., para.1). Furthermore, in 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping gave a clarion call for making China a cultural soft power, which entails spreading Chinese language and culture.

Given the presence of the Confucius Institute in Nepal, Nepal is a part of the cultural project. Evaluating the progress made by the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University (CIKU) since its establishment, the website of the Hanban (CI headquarters) reported that CIKU has established four Confucius Classrooms and “14 teaching sites, cultivating more than 20 thousand students in all,” making “remarkable progress in establishing favorable cooperative relations with other universities, enlarging teaching

venues, regulating the management systems, enhancing the teaching levels and influence, and other aspects” (“Confucius institute at Kathmandu University,” 2017, para. 6).

Chinese teachers as “culture evangelists.” The website of the Chinese Embassy in Nepal carries news and speeches about activities of the Chinese ambassador in Nepal, which highlights the significance of culture in China's educational linkages with Nepal. For instance, then Chinese ambassador to Nepal, Yang Houlan, at its fifth anniversary ceremony in 2012 made frequent references to the role of the Confucius Institute in transmission of Chinese culture and values. Houlan stated that the Institute was “the most important base on Chinese language teaching and Chinese culture transmission” (“H.E. ambassador Mr. Yang,” 2012, para. 2). Alluding to teachers' role in China's cultural diplomacy, he said, “Besides [being] Chinese language tutors, I hope, the teachers can also be the Chinese culture evangelists” (“H.E. ambassador Mr. Yang,” 2012, para. 5).

Culture exhibitions. Yang Shichao, Political Counselor of the Chinese Embassy in Nepal, underlined the importance of the Confucius Institute by saying that earlier it was difficult for Nepalese students to learn Chinese because of the lack of professional institutes, teachers and textbooks, but since the establishment of the Confucius Institute, the locals were not only able to learn Chinese but also “come in close contact with Chinese culture” (Hanban News, 2017, para. 4). Further, in August 2017, the first Chinese Publication and Chinese Culture Exhibition was “sponsored by the CRI [China Radio International] Confucius Classroom Nepal and co-organized by Xinzhi Books Chinese Bookstore in Kat[h]mandu” (“The First Chinese Publication,” 2017, para. 2). The exhibition comprised the publication exhibition section, the culture experience section, and the video section that featured 100 short videos about Chinese culture. As

reported, “nearly 500 people, including...employees from Chinese-funded enterprises in Nepal and teachers and students from over 20 colleges and universities such as Tribhuvan University” (Chenyi, 2017, para. 4). attended the exhibition. According to Xiang Pingyong, director of Xinzhi Books Chinese Bookstore in Kathmandu, the bookstore was opened with a view to spreading Chinese culture globally. He said that Nepalese students visited the bookstore to “experience Chinese culture on their own,” adding “We will hold more such kind of activities in various schools” (Chenyi, 2017, para. 7).

Clearly, promotion of Chinese language and culture is an important component of the Chinese leadership’s ambition to make China a “cultural soft power.” Interestingly, the Confucius Institute comes under the Chinese Ministry of Education, not the Ministry of Culture, which points to association between education and culture in this specific case.

Fostering bilateral ties and gaining support of the Nepalese youth and alumni. Existing literature points to China's policy of providing scholarships as part of soft power diplomacy to generate goodwill and strengthen friendly ties with foreign countries (Dong & Chapman, 2010). Nepal is no exception. The Chinese government's stance in giving these scholarships is that it will enable the recipients to contribute to their nation's welfare. In the words of the Chinese ambassador in her speech at the award ceremony in August 2017, “This year, the Chinese government has increased the number of scholarships to Nepali students. After completing their studies, the Nepali students can be experts on their respective fields and can contribute to the development of their nation” (“China awards university-level,” 2017, August 27, para. 5). A respondent in this study, a Ph.D. candidate in international relations, considered provision of scholarships to

Nepal as an instrument of China's soft power, aimed at building influence in the region. He further said that it was part of China's policy of taking responsibility for assisting developing countries. His view mirrored China's official policy of stepping up international aid under the Medium and Long-term National Plan (2011-2020) for higher education.

Apart from building goodwill, one of the objectives of China's official *Plan for Study in China* (2012) is "to generate a large number of graduates who both understand China and contribute to connecting China to the rest of the world" (Objectives section). As such, China considers it important to expose Nepalese students, including self-funded ones, to China and its culture and economic development. China expert David Shambaugh's observation fits in Nepal's context as Shambaugh (2004) opines that China is aiming to "train future generations of intellectuals, technicians, and political elites in its universities and technical colleges" (p. 77).

Interestingly, at the fourth gathering of Nepalese alumni in Kathmandu in November 2017, Chinese Ambassador Yu Hong noted that after finishing their studies in China, the Nepalese students were promoting the China-Nepal relations ("Nepal grateful to China," 2017, November 22). Gaining support of the Nepalese youth in advancing its national interest pertains to what China perceives as related to its national security (for example, by reining in Tibetan separatists), stronger China-Nepal ties, cultural promotion, creation of a market of cultural products such as traditional Chinese medicine, and penetration of political influence as an edge over India. The following findings shed light on this analysis.

Cultivating the alumni. The importance given by China to the Arniko Society, an

alumni association, reflects in several ways. First, then Chinese ambassador to Nepal Yang Houlan did not neglect to meet with Sarbottam Shrestha when Shrestha was elected as president of the Society. As reported on the website of the Chinese Embassy in Nepal:

They [Houlan and Shrestha] exchanged views on enhancing people-to-people exchanges between China and Nepal and on the future plans of the Society. Dr. Sarbottam Shrestha introduced the Society's future plan of carrying out free clinic in Nepal, organizing Nepalese Culture Festival in China, translating and introducing Chinese books, films and TV programs to Nepal people. He and the Society would strive to contribute to the friendly cooperative relations between Nepal and China. (“H.E. ambassador Mr. Yang,” 2012, paras. 1-2)

The extent of importance given by the Chinese ambassador to a president of an alumni association can be shown from the photograph below at an awarding ceremony of the Chinese government scholarship where the president is seated in the front row, next to the ambassador. Such gestures are apparently intended to build up goodwill for China.



Figure 3. Awards to Chinese scholarship recipients (2017, August 28)

Interestingly, Sarbottam Shrestha said in his interview to China Global Television

Network (CGTN) in November 2017: “...we want [to] push TCM [traditional Chinese medicine] to Nepali society as a whole” (“Studying in China,” 2017, para. 7). In fact, one month before his interview, the Chinese Ministry of Culture had organized an event in Nepal to promote Chinese traditional medicine, introducing it to Nepalese health professionals and students (“Chinese culture talk,” 2017).

Frequent interaction with Nepalese youth. The Chinese Embassy’s website chronicles the events of the Chinese ambassador’s interaction with the Nepalese youth. Then Ambassador Yang Houlan interacted with Nepalese students on several occasions by paying personal visits to schools and by alluding to the ancient ties between the two countries in his speeches on different occasions such as the closing ceremony of the China Winter Camp in January 2013, signaling a strategy of influencing the future leaders in Nepal. Interestingly, the Chinese leadership is seeking to engage even high school Nepalese students who might want to pursue higher education in China or develop a pro-Chinese bent of mind. In the words of a senior Nepali journalist, “Traditionally the Nepalese elite used to go to India for higher education. But soon a day will come when the future leadership of Nepal will be educated in Beijing and Shanghai rather than in Indian universities in Allahabad, Varanasi and Patna” (Joshi, 2013, para. 10).

Table 3 lists instances of events organized by the Confucius Institute in Nepal, such as the Spring Festival, attended by then Chinese Ambassador Yang Houlan. The excerpts from Houlan's speeches affirm the Chinese government's policy of strengthening bilateral ties with Nepal through an appeal to the young generation as well as by conveying the message of the “peaceful rise” of China.

Table 3

Excerpts from Speeches of Yang Houlan, then Chinese Ambassador to Nepal

Event	Excerpts	Notes
Spring Festival Celebration Organized by CI, January 27, 2013	“...we always stick to target of peaceful development, and launch all-round diplomacy to strengthen exchange and cooperation all over the world, to make a new contribution for building harmonious world.”	Reference to “peaceful development” and “harmonious world” is a clear-cut instance of China’s vigorous efforts to spread the message of its peaceful rise- important for its positive image- which is a well-known motivation of its soft power diplomacy.
Ceremony of the First Nepal China Winter Camp, January 22, 2013	“I sincerely wish China-Nepal younger generation would further enhance mutual understanding by communication and jointly create a better future for our two countries’ mutually beneficial cooperation.”	There is a reference to the young generation as a link between China and Nepal.
Interaction Program of “Experiencing China” at Siddhartha Vanasthali Institute, July 16, 2012	“Young students are not only the future of the nation, but also carry the heavy responsibility of continuing China-Nepal friendship. ”	The emphasis is on students as a link between China and Nepal.

Both countries have signed an agreement for China-Nepal Youth Exchange and Cooperation. Further, at the interaction program with young Nepalese political leaders, upon invitation by the Nepal-China Friendship Youth Association, Houlan stated:

I believe the youth associations such as Nepal-China Friendship Youth Association and our young political leaders here today will bear in mind the history of our friendship, and keep exploring new ways to enrich, vitalize and refresh the friendly cooperation between China and Nepal, and in this way promote the development of our friendship in new times. (“Ambassador Yang

Houlan's address,” 2011, para. 7).

The ambassador shared his observation on involving Nepalese youth in the Chinese Embassy’s activities:

More and more young people in Nepal are interested in involving themselves in activities organized by Chinese Embassy, including China Festival, Happy Spring Festival, Chinese Film Festival, Chinese Book Exhibition, Chinese Photo Exhibition, China Education Exhibition, and Chinese Language and Culture Competition, which create very positive social atmosphere featuring China-Nepal friendship. (“Ambassador Yang Houlan's address,” 2011, para. 6)

In another instance evident in the data, the frequent interaction between China and Nepalese youth is quite clear. In a diplomatic move in March 2017 the Confucius Institute organized a tour of over 50 Nepalese students to “China-aided development facilities” in Kathmandu in order to make them aware of China's assistance to Nepal and, thereby, create goodwill for China. The places included: Civil Service Hospital, the Birendra International Convention Center (BICC), the national stadium, the National Ayurvedic Research and Training Institute, and the Sports Complex. In this regard, the role of the teachers at the Institute comes across as diplomatic in serving as channels of building goodwill for China. *Xinhua*, China's official press agency, quotes a Chinese teacher at the Confucius Institute, Zhang Shubin, “So many students do not know anything about how China is supporting Nepal in many sectors so we organized the program...China has been helping Nepal for its development projects for the economic development in the country” (“Nepali students enjoy,” 2017, para. 6). The press agency further states that students liked visiting those places and becoming aware of China's

assistance. This is evident in a Nepalese student's statement, "I am feeling good to visit places of Chinese development cooperation to get familiar with it and to know about the Chinese assistance" ("Nepali students enjoy," 2017, line 11).

Yang Houlan stated at the fifth anniversary of the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University (CIKU) that CIKU was making a "remarkable contribution to the cross-culture communication" between China and Nepal by acting as a "bridge of language, culture and friendship." He further said that Nepalese students learning Chinese language were like the "seeds of the friendship" between the two countries, "rooting and spreading" ("H.E. Ambassador Mr. Yang Houlan's address," 2012). Houlan's speech clearly reflects the foreign policy objective of not only promoting Chinese culture but also forging closer cultural ties with Nepal by familiarizing Nepalese students with Chinese language and culture. It also echoes the opinion of Leejo, an expert participant in this study, that China is seeking to nurture a generation of Chinese language learners. In this scenario, China's soft power consists in building appeal and attraction for the Chinese language.

Also, the Confucius Institute in Nepal is apparently acting as an arm of China's foreign affairs office even though it is affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education.

Promotion of business interests. It may be noted that existing sources do not suggest talent acquisition as China's aim involving Nepal as of now, while China is seeking foreign talent to propel innovation as part of structural changes in the economy ("China seeks foreign talent," 2016). However, building networks with professionals to advance its business and legal interests in developing countries as well as building and strengthen friendly ties is apparently driving some of the courses in Chinese universities.

For instance, the Youth of Excellence Scheme of China (Yes China) is a Chinese government scholarship for master's programs targeting applicants from developing countries, including Nepal (which in the World Bank parlance is a least developed country). In fact, one of the participants in this study, with a legal firm in Nepal, was a recipient of the Yes China scholarship. As for the qualifications spelled out in the requirements, they are: "working in a government agency, company or research institute...or excellent in scientific researches[sic]; possessing a strong development potential in his/her career, and willing to promote the mutual cooperation and exchanges between China and his/her home country" ("Youth of Excellence Scheme of China," 2017, Qualifications section). As for China's business interest in Nepal, Campbell writes (2012), "Nepal is a market for Chinese goods in its own right, but more importantly it could also be a gateway to the markets of South Asia. A senior Chinese official spoke of 'developing Nepal as a transit hub between China and the larger sub-continent'" (p. 13).

Conclusion

Thus, in building soft power — the power of attraction — through education, China aims to penetrate Nepal by generating goodwill by offering scholarships while also acting as a counterweight to India by challenging its clout in cultural, educational¹¹, and political arenas¹² by cultivating the Nepalese youth who would be future elites or could be of help in advancing China's national interests in Nepal. While these are specific aims, the general aims, which extend to China's aims globally, are to attract Nepalese students to study in China with a view to accelerate China's emergence as a hub of international education and also to expose the students to Chinese culture, economic development, as

¹¹ India is currently ahead in hosting Nepalese students.

¹²If Nepalese alumni from China would be the future political leaders.

well as impacting them positively in forming a pro-China opinion (for instance, through courses, as discussed subsequently in this thesis).

The aims described above fit in the constituents of the educational soft power model: education as a resource for China in attracting Nepalese students; education as a purveyor of Chinese culture and values; and education as a foreign policy tool. The subsequent chapters deal with student experiences in each of these categories.

CHAPTER V

EDUCATION AS A RESOURCE OF ACADEMIC ATTRACTIVENESS FOR CHINA

This chapter analyzes how China has positioned itself as an attractive education destination for Nepalese students. In this regard, their choice of China as a destination for study and their academic experiences will be taken into consideration. The composition of the sample of interviewees is as follows: nine were medical students in Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programs; one was a master's student in aeronautical engineering; and the remaining five were in social science programs in international relations, political science, and international law. Three of them were females — two medical students and one student of international relations. Among the social science students, three were master's students and two Ph.D. candidates.

Interviews with those 15 Nepalese students, including both those currently studying in China and alumni, reveal their experiences in terms of learning, pedagogy, and other aspects of academic life in China. Where relevant, findings through interviews have been supplemented by news articles and other existing sources. Broadly, the results have been presented through the following categories based on coding: compulsion and convenience; unfavorable perception of Chinese education; limitations of academic experiences, and positive academic experiences.

Compulsion and Convenience: Decision to Study in China

The study reveals that Nepalese medical students chose to study in China largely out of considerations based on convenience and compulsion, rather than because of the quality of its education or reputation of its educational institutions. The category of “convenience and compulsion” was formed out of the following descriptive codes from the final cycle analysis: affordability, scholarships, and easy admission. These in turn were extracted from the initial coding based on the following common explanations to study in China: low cost; ease of paying tuition in installments; Chinese scholarships; non-acceptance of students by Nepalese medical colleges owing to the students' failure in qualifying examination; and lack of enough seats in medical colleges in Nepal. For instance, in the words of Bimal, an MBBS student in central China, said, “The basic problem is the money problem. In Nepal we can't afford. We have to pay forty lakhs [4 million in Nepalese rupees] in one time but in China we can pay installments like 5 lakhs [0.5 million] per year....6 lakhs [0.6 million] per year.... it's a big difference for medium-level families.” It looks like China is to middle-class students in Nepal (or elsewhere) what Walmart is to middle-class Americans. As Mishra (2012) writes, “Compared to the US, UK and other European countries, the cost of medical education in countries like China and Russia is much lower and varies from US\$3,400 to US\$6,000 per year” (para. 9).

The chance to visit China and learn the language was found to be an additional advantage. Some students pointed out that their decision to study in China was also informed by the fact that their relatives or siblings had studied in China. Also, the frailties of the education system in Nepal were underlined, viz., expensiveness of medical

education and corruption in the admission process, which caused frustration among some of the interviewees. As Aryal (2017) writes in *My Republica*, “A private medical college charges from Rs [Rupees] 4 million to 7.2 million per student for MBBS and BDS courses, as against the Rs 3.5 million to 3.8 million fee structure set by NMC [Nepal Medical Council]” (para. 11). In addition, Sapkota (2015) provides excerpts of secretly recorded audios of an official who was involved in taking bribes for facilitating admission. He writes:

The registration of medical colleges is a convoluted process in Nepal, but it can be made much simpler by bribing a thoroughly corrupt system. Our investigation has revealed a chilling truth: almost everything is for sale in Nepal’s medical education. Nearly everyone is on the take: government ministries, the Nepal Medical Council (NMC), even the anti-corruption watchdog, the CIAA, and Supreme Court. Anyone can be a doctor if you pay someone enough. Bribery is standard operating procedure in acquiring college licenses, student seats, manipulating monitoring teams, influencing the judiciary. The medical mafia will even guarantee that students with cash will pass not just their entrance exams but their final exams too. (Sapkota, 2015, paras.1-2)

Students in the social science programs went to China as recipients of scholarships (two doctorate students on Nepalese government and Chinese government scholarships respectively) as well as under student exchange programs (less than a year for master's students), which explains why they studied in China, in addition to the fact that their subject matter pertained to China such as China's foreign policy. In international relations as a discipline, China has occupied a prominent place by virtue of

its emergence as a major global player, which also impacted social science students' decision to study in China. For instance, the Ph.D. candidates' dissertations focused on China. Similarly, in the words of Nisha, a master's student, "I was selected under the scholarship program of [an institute at a university in Southwest China.] I chose to study in China because [sic] being a student of international relations and China being one of the emerging powers plus our neighboring country, I opted to study there." Samir, another student who had studied at the same institute, under a student exchange program for a semester, said:

Knowing about China's foreign policy was very important for me because China is a powerhouse and the second largest economy of the world. I really wanted to see what the country is. The perception of China is mostly developed through the Western constructs. So, I wanted to know how it really is.

Unfavorable Perception of China's Education Program

It was revealed during interview that studying in China was not considered prestigious in Nepal. The final cycle of coding yielded such phrases as "unattractive" and "non-prestigious" to describe Nepalese perception of China's education program, preceded by the following initial descriptive codes from students' responses: "just okay," "not much value of people who studied in China," and that Nepalese students studying in China are not considered "serious [about studies]." In addition, a student shared that Nepalese families think that those opting to go to China rather indulge in fun. As such, she called upon a prospective student to prove that "Chinese doctors are not bad" by which she meant that Nepalese students receiving education in China needed to study hard and prove their caliber and competence. It looks like the perception is framed by the

relatively poor performance of China-returned students in Nepal Medical Council (NMC) exams (Kharel, 2013).¹³ Further, most interviewees converged on the need for self-effort in achieving academic and professional success.

Another student added that people in general are not aware of what it means to study in China and are not that aware of China's current state of development. Being aware of this social perception, Karuna from a university in Southwest China expressed disgruntlement over indifference of people in Nepal who did not appreciate how Nepalese students struggled in a foreign land.

In sum, interviews with Nepalese students underscore that studying in China is not fascinating to Nepalese people at large. Interestingly, several Nepalese students asked me to find for them the best programs, offering scholarships in medicine and political science, in the US. In fact, based on the No Objection Certificates (NOCs) issued by the Ministry of Education, China ranks sixth in the list of destinations for Nepalese students. It is preceded by Australia, Japan, the United States, India, and Poland (Nepal Education in Figure, 2016) (see Appendix C). The reasons why other countries rank higher are the following (Most preferred destinations, 2016, June 10): Australia topped the list on account of climate, lifestyle, and top-ranking universities; Japan has a reputation for technical skills with advancements in science and technology; the United States enjoys popularity globally; and India has traditionally been Nepalese students' destination.

¹³ In an interview to *Xinhua* in 2013, Damodar Gajurel, then chairperson of the Nepal Medical Council, stated, "It is an eye-opener that more than 60 percent of medical graduates from China have been unsuccessful in obtaining license of medical practitioner, the records of six licensing examinations of past two years show" (Kharel,2013). Among the 954 examinees with MBBS from China who appeared for the NMC examination in 2011-2012, 381 passed. Gajurel attributed it to the lack of enforcement of "pre-qualifying system for students seeking medical degree abroad" which enabled the "incompetent students" to pursue education abroad.

Limitations

The next section reveals the learning challenges and university-related issues faced by Nepalese students in China.

Learning Challenges

According to the Chinese education ministry's Circular on Education for Foreign Medical Students:

The overall goal of the undergraduate medical education program in English for international students in China is to train the undergraduate students to develop solid medical knowledge, standardized clinical skills, and an appropriate professional attitude, and to lay the foundation for their further study in medical research, health administration, etc. ("Circular," 2007, Article 4).

Nepalese medical students reported that their expectations of learning gains were not fully met, as reflecting from the following codes: language barrier; less practical experience; patient reluctance; diagnosis issue; and unsatisfactory pedagogy.

Language barrier. The language barrier between Nepalese medical interns and patients limited practical experience for Nepalese interns who yearned for great clinical exposure. For instance, Bimal, quoted earlier, said, "In China even there are local variations in the language of the city, so we have to seek the professor's help time and again [in communicating with the patient]." Som, another intern, said, "Chinese language is the most difficult language in the world," pointing to the biggest challenge he had faced in China. As such, several of them advised prospective Nepalese students to study in Nepal if they could financially afford education in the home country. Underscoring the importance of clinical exposure, he said, "it is said that the best book to study medicine

was not published by any author, rather it's your patient who is the best book for you.” Similarly, Raj, a medical student in central China, said, “the biggest barrier is the language — even more difficult than the medical study!”

Patients' reluctance. Barring some exceptions, medical interns reported patients' preference for Chinese doctors. As a result, they got less practical experience. For instance, Rukmini, an MBBS student in East China, attributed patients' reservations to the skin color of Nepalese students. She said, “because our skin color is different, patients don't prefer us to come near them over any other Chinese, so we get less exposed to practical scenarios.”

Difficulties with teaching. While the Nepalese students did not report any problem with teachers' level of knowledge, qualification, and behavior, their negative experiences fall into the following categories.

Dissatisfaction with the teaching style. Though the students reported that in China, the teachers' use of PowerPoint made keeping notes easier, they said that teaching in Nepal and India was better because teachers from those countries tend to explain the course material rather than simply handing in PPT slides to study. For instance, Karuna, in Southwest China, said, “There are a very few teachers who explain the course content. A majority of them put the content on slides and assign readings, that's it.” Dish, another medical student from the same university, said, “[The] Indian teacher taught well. His style was good. Chinese teachers teach through slides, but Nepalese teachers explain.” It appears that the respondents were desiring more teacher-centric classroom inasmuch as they wanted to benefit from teacher expertise. A few students said that teaching was not different from that in Nepal because they used the same textbook. It may be added that

unlike the university in North China which had a presence of international faculty, such as from India and Nepal, and the university in central China where many medical instructors were reported to be from Pakistan, the university on the east coast had instructors almost from China.¹⁴ Thus, student participants had a different degree of exposure to the international faculty.

Limited proficiency in English. Barring a few exceptions, Chinese instructors were not found proficient in speaking English. It may be added that foreign students, including Nepalese students, are taught separately because their medium of instruction is English, while local students are taught in Chinese. Interviewees pointed out that Chinese teachers were relatively “weak” in explaining in English. A master’s student in aeronautical engineering said:

I expected much more from China. Teachers....most disappointing thing was teachers’ English was not so good. Problems I wanted to ask but I couldn’t understand and then only thing I was disappointed with was with the teachers. I know they had most of knowledge but thing was like they could not speak proper English. So, they were like nervous sometimes.

This situation is corroborated in an online article by Schulmann and Ye (2017):

While Chinese universities have made great strides in offering more programs in English, for many students, the linguistic barrier remains an often-insurmountable obstacle to prospective degree-seeking students. English remains the *lingua franca* of academia, rendering language a significant challenge in terms of China’s goal of increasing international student enrollment. (“A natural ceiling”

¹⁴ This point is not aimed to underscore regional variations in faculty composition. In order to protect student participants’ confidentiality, regions act as substitutes for universities’ names.

section, para. 5)

Issues in the University Life

Nepalese students pointed to the difficulties arising out of extreme rules and regulations¹⁵ in universities such as the one in North China and the university policy of accommodation. First, electricity cuts at 11:30 p.m. makes it harder to study at night. An interviewee added it was meant for students' "welfare" by maintaining silence at night (making it easier for roommates who need enough sleep), though those who wish to stay up and study found this rule challenging. Second, the use of fingerprinting at the time of leaving and entering the university premises was found to be annoying. Third, the prohibition on off-campus accommodation (with some universities being an exception on account of the small size of hostels) did not let them choose a place of residence.¹⁶ Fourth, the prohibition on work, including on-campus work, deprives them of the opportunity to cover their living expenses.

Thus, at large Nepalese medical students did not make any remark on the merits or distinctiveness of China's education system. At most, China is an outlet when the dream of becoming a doctor is at stake because of the high tuition cost in Nepal or the failure to get admission or scholarship in Nepal.

Positive Experiences

Despite the limitations described above, Nepalese medical students reported positive experiences in terms of some learning benefits and the attitude of teachers. In addition, Bimal, a medical intern in central China, was impressed by hospital facilities,

¹⁵ In presenting this information, I am not pronouncing my judgment on the rightness of these rules. I am documenting the impressions of the Nepalese students as they narrated their experiences.

¹⁶ However, the official page of the Chinese Ministry of Education mentions the provision of residence off-campus upon written permission and registration.

saying that medical devices and infrastructure were “mind-blowing” which was not found in Nepal. Another converging point was that interviewees believed it was self-study that was important and that academic success and the success in career depended on the student, even though they expected to receive better instruction from teachers.

Learning Benefits

The following factors contributed to the learning gains of the Nepalese medical students while studying in China.

Ease of diagnosis. Patience on the part of patients and instructors’ emphasis on diagnosis were singled out as merits in students’ learning process. Interestingly, speaking about the ease of diagnosis, Bimal said, “In my country if someone goes to the patient and asks and checks, the patient gets angry — ‘do you want to learn in a single day?’ But here three patients have ten interns- each of them checks them. But the patient does not react.”

Patients’ receptivity. Experiences of two students at a university in Southwest China were positive in terms of patient receptivity though it was more so when the Nepalese students were accompanied by Chinese doctors or professors. Som, one of them, said, “Majority of patients are glad that foreign doctors treated them. So, it has been a good experience in hospitals too.”

Acquisition of clinical skills and confidence. Despite the language barrier, the interviewees with the help of instructors, Chinese doctors and self-effort, were able to perform clinical procedures such as ECG, cleansing, dressing, Lumbar Puncture, and Bone Marrow Aspiration by working in several departments such as the cardiology department. What they learnt in theory was put to practice in internship. In the words of

Karuna, an intern, “Initially, I was so afraid of injections. But now I’m so confident.”

Caring and Helpful Teachers

It is apt to mention that teacher development has been identified as an element of higher education improvement in China’s *Plan for Study in China* (2012). It states:

As a part of the personnel development of higher education institutions, teachers’ capacity trainings including teaching in foreign languages shall be further emphasized and a performance-based assessment system shall be improved, thus making a number of outstanding teachers with academic excellence, rich experiences and caring for students the main force for Study in China. (Teachers Development section)

So far as qualification and caring attitude is concerned, participants’ experience was positive. Karuna said that her teachers were caring, helpful and willing to resolve “any problem” including the financial one. In addition, several stories featuring Nepalese students in China can be found online. According to one source, a Nepalese medical student remarked, “My time spent at Sichuan University is an unforgettable experience for me: lifelong teachers, friends and lasting memories” (Sah, 2016, para. 1).

Multicultural Ambiance

The participants got an international experience with the presence of students from different countries such as Poland, India and other South Asian countries, though with Chinese students they had a little interaction because as foreign students, they had separate classes that were taught in English. In the words of Tej, an alumnus from a university in Northeast China and currently employed in a Nepalese hospital, “Indian students were so brilliant. I used to get motivation from Indian students. I used to study

with them and share my knowledge with them.” In addition, a couple of participants reported interacting and hanging out with Indian students.

Appreciation for Social Science Programs

Compared to the medical students, respondents’ experience with the social science programs was more positive. Rachit, a Ph.D. candidate in international relations in North China, gave a thorough description of his academic experience, which is detailed below. He was on scholarship from the Nepalese government.

Academic freedom. When asked what he learned about China that he did not know before, the interviewee said that he had a “misperception” that there would not be “so much academic freedom in China in speaking and writing.” But after living in China for more than five years, he found that his perception was wrong. He based this impression on his interactions on political development and China’s foreign policy when his Chinese friends would “talk frankly” and on the fact that critical opinion had been voiced in Chinese academic circles.

Sensitive issues as an exception. When asked whether there were certain subjects like Tibet and Taiwan that could not be discussed in class, Rachit said “every country has sort of sensitiveness in their core values. I think it’s natural.... I am enjoying academic freedom in China.” This response points to the respondent’s defense/justification of the limitations in China. Similarly, Samir, another social sciences student said, “Maybe sometimes they don’t want to talk about some really sensitive issues like Tibet or Taiwan sometimes but most of the time they are open.”

When asked about the challenge faced, Rachit said that China has a “one-way of thinking” which is different from the thinking process of Nepalese people who tend to

think “from different angles.” He added a caveat that it did not mean that the Chinese way was wrong or right but that their way of conducting academic research was different. He explained that most of his Chinese professors and friends “put the national interest first” when “looking upon an issue” and that “nationalism is very much powerful in Chinese academia.” Thus, on the one hand the respondent talked of academic freedom in China, regardless of the limitations based on the core interest as defined by the government, on the other hand, his reference to the entrenchment of the one-way of thinking in research seems to suggest that the boundaries of research in China are determined by the ethos of nationalism.

University of Repute. Rachit further informed that his was one of the topmost universities in China in the social science discipline. He said that such universities as Peking University and Xinhua had “good reputation” around the world and had well-qualified faculty to assist Ph.D. students. It was a reflection of pride on his admission to a reputed university when he said that it was difficult even for Chinese students to get admission and that one needed to secure more than “90% marks” to be accepted.

Quality of research and learning. Ph.D. students in China are required to publish at least two articles in journals indexed by the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI). While one of the articles can be published in a journal indexed by the Chinese Social Science Citation index, at least one must be published in a SSCI journal. Summing up, Rachit said, “Overall, the academic research in China has been wonderful.”

Academic Experiences of Other Social Science Students

Samir and Nisha, students of international relations in Nepal, studied at an institute in Southwest China for a semester under the joint post-graduate program (sort of

a student exchange program). They shared positive experiences. Samir made the following statement about interactive pedagogy as well as examination system in China in comparison with the system in Nepal:

They [instructors in China] didn't want one-dimensional class where they just speak and lead; they wanted students to interact. So, I like that kind of teaching where teachers and students interact. If you have talent or potential, you can show it more in China than in Nepal because teachers want it to come out like they give you the platform to express yourself to show your potential. The difference I found in the examination system is that in China you have papers in 12 days, in two weeks, whereas in Nepal we have to wait for a long time.

Similarly, Nisha shared in her written response:

My academic experience was very sound because it gave an opportunity to explore more on the aspects of China. Since it was a joint program so, classes were focused primarily on International Relations topics such as Security, State-to-State relations (Bilateral Relations), Geopolitics of China, International Political Economy, etc. (Nisha, personal communication, November 10, 2017)

Referring to her future plans, Nisha stated:

My future plan is to pursue a Ph.D. degree and get into academic sector in relation to IR. My experience in China can be pretty helpful for my further studies and it has helped me to understand the Asian values in terms of IR since our academics primarily focuses on Western values.

The above quotes underscore that the respondent found her course relevant and beneficial as well as enlightening in terms of building her knowledge of Asian values in

contrast to, what she perceives as, non-Chinese academicians' focus on Western values. Similarly, the criticism of the Western media reflects in the following written response by Shiva, a Ph.D. candidate in North China, when asked to tell about his academic experience:

Chinese educational institutions are now very advanced and modern. What some sections of the Western media disseminate inaccurate information about China are baseless and far from truth. I learned knowledge, skill, pragmatic vision, use of modern technologies etc. from China. (Shiva, personal communication, September 15, 2017)

Conclusion

Participants had a mix of academic experiences. Broadly, the lingering desire of the Nepalese medical students was to have a stronger clinical exposure which could be facilitated easily had they interned in Nepal owing to language competence in the native tongue and the resulting interaction with patients. Social science students reported positive experiences in terms of quality of research and learning, especially when China was the focus of their subject matter. Academic freedom with exception in discussion on “sensitive issues” was also reported. Also, while the cost factor was a major driving force behind medical students' decision to study in China, social science students studied in China as Ph.D. scholarship recipients as well as under student exchange programs and because of the importance of China in international relations which was their subject area.

CHAPTER VI

EDUCATION AS A CONDUIT OF CHINA'S CULTURE AND VALUES

China has set out to transmit and popularize its culture through its educational institutions and through the Confucius Institutes that it has opened in various parts of the world. Insofar as exposure to Chinese values and culture is concerned, the Confucius Institute is the direct and purposeful channel of culture dissemination. Other than that, education serves as the medium by hosting international students who get to know about a foreign country's culture and values through social interactions and cultural experiences. Also, their personal values are formed in this process, bearing the imprint of the host country's culture and environment. In turn, the host country's soft power is both built and projected, depending on the quality of the experiences and the nature of the narratives about international students' encounters, impressions and perceptions.

This chapter produces findings on Nepalese students' social, cultural, and political experiences. The findings are based on interviews, followed by literature from online sources. Let us first take experiences of the students who studied at the Confucius Institute. Subsequently, experiences of Nepalese students in China will be described.

Students' Experiences at the Confucius Institute: Findings through Interviews

Let us first understand as to what motivated the participants to learn Chinese at the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University (CIKU). They shared that it was good to learn a new language for free and for the potential benefits in view of studying in China or in interacting with people in China, a neighboring country. In the words of an interviewee, "It was [a] good feeling to get some non-credit courses and understand basic terms of foreign language." He also said, "I have [a] positive feeling towards this program. It is [a] good opportunity for students to get a chance to learn language of their interest, all free of cost." Two of the interviewees — Bikas and Shasha— are engineers at China's Huawei Technologies in Nepal. Aabha, another interviewee, did her B. Tech from Kathmandu University (KU) in Nepal and is currently pursuing an advanced degree in India. Describing her intent to learn Chinese at the Confucius Institute, she said:

It was for free and an opportunity to learn a new language and the Institute was inside the campus [of KU]. It was quite like a fun time with my friends and it was a way to meet different faculty other than my own. It was a good opportunity to meet and interact with other people.

Respondents commonly referred to learning Chinese as "a good opportunity" or "a chance" to learn a new or different language. As far as learning is concerned, the emphasis at the Institute is on sounds for the beginners who are taught to pronounce "pinyins" which takes at least a month to memorize. It is followed by lessons in "simple Chinese words (only pinyin) and their meanings," accompanied by the use of translator devices for translating English into Chinese. The students were taught through PowerPoint slides and were provided with copies of the basic Chinese language book.

The participants' experiences at the Institute are categorized below.

Forgetting the Language

Regardless of the perceived benefits of learning Chinese at the Institute, the interviewees reported that they had forgotten what they learned over time and that Chinese was an extremely difficult language, while they also lacked the opportunity to practice. For instance, Kamal said that the only word he remembered was *nihao* (hello). Shasa said that she had learned the Chinese language for a few months at the Institute. She added, "But studying there wasn't much of a help because we only had one-hour class each day. And this wasn't enough, and after class hours we had no interaction with other Chinese speakers in order to practice."

When asked if her expectations had been met, Aabha replied:

My expectation was maybe I would be able to learn a lot more than what I did.

But then I guess Chinese language is one of the difficult languages. So, I didn't

learn much but I thought after two semesters I would be able to converse in

Chinese, which I did up to some level but I was expecting more on that like

converse on other things rather than just talk about my family or my country. I

wish course content was large enough but maybe it has improved by now — I

don't know. Even by the end of the second semester, we were not able to write in

Chinese. It was difficult for us. The teacher didn't put pressure on us. After a

while he realized that we were all engineering students....I think he was trying to

be a little lenient with the course although he could have included a lot of things

so that students could have learned a lot.

A Difficult Language

Compared to other languages, the Chinese language was found to be more difficult. Explaining the reason, Shasa said, “Nepal[i] or English language does not have tones. However, Chinese language has four tones and it’s really challenging to pronounce a same thing in four different tones.”

Kamal suggested that the Institute apply “different techniques so that people can easily learn the language.” He also said that the program should be designed in such a way that people would be interested in joining the program on their own rather than being driven by the urge of the Chinese authorities to learn their language. In his words:

They should have this program in such a way that people would be so interested in their language by themselves. People would come to them and say “okay, I want to learn your language. Can you please teach me?” So, people should come to them, rather than they telling people to come and learn their language.

Fascination with the Chinese Language

Describing her experience, Shasa explained how she eventually became fascinated with the language.

It was really very frustrating in the beginning but later I was fascinated by it. Rather than speaking it was like singing a song. Also the words....each Chinese word is actually composed of simple words. For example, the word computer is called “diannao” in Chinese. Here dian means electricity and nao means brain, so basically Chinese have named computer as electric brain.

The above description reflects the learner’s appreciation and understanding of the “composition” of the language and the feeling of singing associated with it. She further

said, “We also had to act out the simple conversations written in the book so that we could understand how to use the words in a sentence. All in all the classes used to be fun.”

Familiarity with Chinese Culture

Realistically speaking, China is an “alien” culture to Nepalese who share cultural affinity rather with Indians. As Sujeev Shakya,¹⁷ a trade and investment consultant in Nepal, told me on the phone, “China is not culturally integrated into Nepal.” He also observed that the CI had not made any significant impact in Nepal, and that the very fact that Nepalese watch Bollywood or enjoy Indian food points to the lack of cultural influence or appeal of China as yet. What he said cannot be disputed, but a concrete gain that China has derived is the growing familiarity of Nepalese with Chinese culture. It is another issue that China might have invested a lot whereas the gains might not be commensurate. For instance, interviewees learned about language diversity in China, where people speak different languages in cities. Also, Shasa, quoted earlier, said:

Well before I studied there, I really didn’t know anything about China except it being a neighbor country and Chinese manufactured things [that] were of poor quality. By studying there I realized how rich Chinese culture was. We used to have programs where teachers introduced us the different festivals of China, the cuisines, the music, taiji and so on.

She further said:

Especially talking about the festivals, I found out that there were so many similarities between my culture and theirs. For example, in Nepal we celebrate a

¹⁷ The expert's name appears with his consent.

festival called gaijatra. This festival commemorates the death of people during the year. And even Chinese people celebrate a similar festival.

Familiarity with China

Bikas, a participant who was enrolled at the Confucius Institute for two years as a student of engineering at Kathmandu University, said that he was not a regular student of language, but took it as an extra credit course with the classes held on two days in a week. He said that they were sometimes shown documentaries about advancement and growth of China, its culture, and geographical status. The documentary on culture made him and other students aware of “cultural variances of China.” Thus, while they had the impression that “all Chinese” followed Buddhism or Confucianism, they learned that most of the Chinese were Christian and some were Muslims too. Bikas also shared that he was not familiar with the revolution launched by Mao Tse Tung until, at the Institute, he watched a documentary on Mao’s life and Mao’s revolutionizing of China. Talking about its impact on him, he said, “I had read a book by Dalai Lama, and to be honest I was quite negative about China, but after taking class, I came to know that it is not that bad. We need revolution, if it’s not going through, must follow another way.” When asked to elaborate, he said, “In today’s world of science and technologies, revolution on these two things is necessary and compulsory. If Dalai Lama is not going to do anything and someone has to take over.... after takeover of [sic] China, there are industries and hydropower in Tibet.”

Interviews with the other participants brought out other aspects of their knowledge of China after joining the Institute, as mentioned earlier.

Students' Perception of the Motive of CIKU

When asked what he thought was China's rationale in setting up a CI in Nepal, Kamal said it could be a business purpose. This participant viewed China as targeting "nearby" countries to sell its products, expanding its business, so that "it will be very easy" to buy and sell Chinese products. When asked whether he liked Chinese products, he pondered over it saying, "what should I say?" He said that some of the goods should be introduced so that Nepalese could afford low-priced goods. When asked whether he himself was satisfied with Chinese goods, he said "personally I'm not satisfied with Chinese goods. They are not providing good quality in Nepal. I don't know why. I don't know what type of quality or goods they export to other countries. But in Nepal, the quality is not good." He added that he personally did not "like" Chinese products that did not have longevity or durability. His view mirrored the view of Shasa who became aware of China's rich culture; otherwise, she had known China as just a neighboring country and one that manufactured "poor quality things."

Sharing her opinion, Aabha said that the Chinese teacher intended to show his country as "a peaceful country, a warm and tourist welcoming country, trying to show what beautiful things they have. His motive was to show that."

Other than familiarizing Nepalese students with the language and culture, on the cultural front the Confucius Institute has not made deeper inroads into cultural preference toward China among Nepalese people. China is perceived as a country that makes goods of poor quality, though studying at CIKU introduced the students to positive aspects of China. But more than that, its foreign policy objectives of cultivating appreciation among Nepalese people toward Chinese culture seems to be the major gain, as explained in the

subsequent chapter, which highlights such activities of the Confucius Institute as taking Nepalese students to China-assisted facilities in Nepal.

Online Sources and the Confucius Institute

The composition of learners at the Institute is varied, including university students and general public. Speaking about the economic value of learning Chinese, a tourist guide at the Institute, interviewed by the BBC, stated, “Over a billion people live in China, and even if just 1% of them visit Nepal every year, we will get a lot of employment” (Joshi, 2013, para. 2). Similarly in a You Tube video, August 1, 2012, a Nepalese tourist guide talks of the benefit of the ease of interaction with Chinese tourists. Further, Leela Mani Paudyal, the Nepalese ambassador to China, writes, “China is the largest source of outbound tourists with the highest per capita expenditures. China is the second largest source country in terms of tourist arrivals since 2014. China has declared 2017 as Nepal Tourism Promotion Year in China” (Paudyal, 2017, para. 4). As such, Nepalese people find it important to understand the Chinese language in order to reap the benefits of tourism from China. Similarly, Chinese investors looking for investment in China “may need professional interpreters to overcome language barriers”; the Nepalese ambassador to China says that this issue could be resolved as Nepal has sent “many students to China to learn Chinese, including 200 in Beijing” (“Nepal offering preferential,” 2017, para. 2).

Growing Popularity

Lately, Nepalese officials in different ministries have been learning Chinese (“Nepal education ministry,” 2017). Xinhua cites Hari Prasad Bashyal, joint secretary at the Ministry of Education, as noting, “Nepal has a lot to learn from China in the sectors

like technology, education system, culture, trade and tourism. Learning about these areas is possible only through language, so we felt it's necessary to train our officials first for knowledge and technology transfer" ("Nepal education ministry," 2017, para. 4). Xinhua, China's news agency, cites Devi Prasad Upadhyay, a section officer at the Nepalese Ministry of Education, as endorsing this view: "Chinese language has played a significant role in my life. Besides my regular job, I work as an interpreter and tour guide in my part time. Through the language, I have received a new recognition" (Nepal education ministry," 2017, para. 14). He learned Chinese for two years in China under government scholarship. Further, over 3,000 Nepalese students are learning the language in China ("Nepal education ministry," 2017).

Experiences of Nepalese Students in China

This section highlights social, cultural and political experiences of Nepalese students while studying in China. Here, we move from the experience of the participants who studied at CIKU to those who were international students in China. Let us first take up socio-cultural experiences, both positive and negative. The headings represent the categories formed out of codes.

Positive Social Experiences

Positive experiences encompass safety and security, personal development, pleasant social behavior, and admiration for Chinese traits.

Safety and security. When asked about the social life or what they liked in China, Nepalese students predominantly mentioned safety and security, especially road safety. Most of them reported the ease of going out at night. In the words of Dish, a male medical student in Southwest China, "One can go out at night. In Nepal, people don't go

out at night.” Uday, an aeronautics engineering major at a university on the east coast of China, said that what was important to his experience was “transportation and security.” In his words: “I can find metros, local buses, local taxis. And then.... security is very good; transportation and security I like. That’s different from Nepal....if you are working on a road at night, you will not feel fear...if you are a lady working at night [you will feel safe].”

Personal development. When asked about benefits of studying in China, students reported that they had personally benefited in terms of becoming independent, self-reliant and confident, which is quite a common characteristic of experiences of international students globally. In the words of Karuna, a female MBBS student, “The biggest benefit is that I learned to be independent. There we have a family on which we are dependent. But here it’s not like that. We have to rely on ourselves and we have to think on our own, good or bad. Confidence in myself has gone up. ” Rukmini, another female MBBS student said, “I learned to be patient. I can adapt to tough situations. I can speak basic Chinese and most importantly I learned to live alone and independent.” A male student majoring in aeronautics engineering said, “It has given me a lot of confidence. I don’t think I will [could] be able to speak that frankly with you four or five years ago.”

Pleasant social behavior. In analysis of respondents’ experiences of social behavior in China, the first cycle coding gave the descriptive codes of “respect,” “friendliness,” “helpful,” and “social greetings,” and emotion codes of feeling welcome and respected. They were further coded into the description of behavior as warm, friendly, respectful and helpful, which comes under the overall category of “pleasant social behavior.” In the words of Karuna:

These people give respect. If you reply to their greetings, hello, politely and with a smile, they respect you in return. They welcome us. These people.... unlike us whose outward behavior is different from our inner thoughts...these people speak their heart out...give us blessings. Elderly people do not know us but when we smile at them and speak well, they ask us why we have come here. They don't think like "we should not give them advice because they are from a different country." They rather give us advice, "you have come from that far...study well." Just as our elders give us advice.

Samir, an alumnus from a university in Southwest China, underlined how his perception of China through "Western" media underwent a change through positive experience of freedom and respect from local people. He explained:

Whatever we know about China is [a] Western construction because the better way to learn about a country is to go there and see for yourself. What I saw and what I have read — there was a contradiction. China is different from what you read in the textbooks. You get the images through articles, news articles that China is more restrained toward foreigners. In fact, I found plenty of freedom there. Tourists were treated very well. I got lots of love and respect from local people there. To my surprise, they really love Nepal. They had traveled to Nepal. They wanted to know about Nepalese culture.

Samir also said, "When you go to a country which is the second largest economy, it's one of the super powers of the world. And you have certain image of the people but they are very down-to-earth and they are very respectful."

Participants happened to contrast their own society with the Chinese society. In the words of a Karuna, “These people.... [are] unlike us whose outward behavior is different from our inner thoughts...these people speak their heart out.” The same participant also compared how people in her country were suspicious of foreigners and rather cautioned their children to stay away, while people in China warm and friendly. Som, another medical student, appreciated the civic sense in China unlike in his country, people kept public places clean. He said, “[the] government has some policies and people over here are also so honest that they won’t spoil anything outside. People in my country would throw things outside, on the road. People here think about their country.”

It may be noted that students who mostly talked of unpleasant experiences had been in China for five to six years whereas those who reported pleasant experiences had been there for either a year or less than a year such as a semester-long stay under a student exchange program.

Admiration for Chinese personal traits. Nepalese students were impressed with Chinese people’s zest for life, work-ethic (including dignity of labor), diligence, lifestyle, and attitude toward work. These codes are based on the following statements:

Studying in China has taught me lots of things, like back in our country old people think they need to rest and wait for their turn to die but here I have seen Chinese people even in their old age are active. They go dancing, singing, doing exercises, eat healthy food. From China I learned no job is inferior as even the rich people are found doing their work themselves and they don’t like keeping servants. (Rukmini, a student at a medical university in East China)

Tej, an alumnus from a medical university, shared, “70-80 percent of Chinese do

not believe in God. Some believe in laughing Buddha; in Xinjiang province, people believe in God. But most Chinese do not believe in God. They believe in hard work.” Similarly, Nisha, an alumna from a university in Southwest China (quoted in Chapter V), wrote in her written response, “Chinese life is a very disciplined life. Hard work is given an utmost priority and everyone is encouraged to work to their utmost level.”

Dark Spots in Social Experiences

This section illuminates the negative or unpleasant experiences of Nepalese students in China, which fall under the overarching categories of social ills, underpinned by the second cycle codes of racism, color discrimination, and xenophobia. These codes were formed out of the first cycle codes of discrimination, prejudices, mistreatment, and misbehavior. Another category is that of negative cultural shock, formed by second cycle codes of social apathy and money-mindedness which in turn were based on first cycle codes of social indifference and lack of considerateness.

The second cycle codes, underlying categories of social ills and cultural shocks, have been explained below to describe participants’ social experiences.

Racism and color discrimination. Some students reported “racism” outside of the university setting, experiencing discrimination and unfriendly social attitude. First, they observed that whites or people from Western countries were treated more favorably than others in jobs and social interactions. Uday, an aeronautics major at a university on the east coast, gave the following description of the challenge of living in China:

Somewhat racism. If you are white, if you have white skin, students from Eurasia or Ukraine- white skin people- they would easily get the job of teaching English. I won’t get it so easily. Because they are white.... they prefer white people. While

applying for some part-time jobs. Most job is like teaching English. It's 33 dollars per hour. And then when I apply for those kinds of jobs.... okay.... I applied. They were happy. I was selected. But then they finally they told me to tell the parents that I'm from Canada, I'm not from Nepal. And this was not acceptable to me. They prefer people from Western countries.

Importantly, as noted in Chapter V, for those students studying medicine, some patients' reluctance to receive treatment from Nepalese interns was attributed by participants to patients' preference for Chinese doctors who had a fairer skin. This attitude limited practical experience for Nepalese students. Similarly, in the words of Tej:

They [Chinese people] are treating according to color.... generally they are treating according to color.... I don't like that. Sometimes my mood was not good. For us with Mongolian, Aryan face, dark-brown eyes, black hair.... "Yeah, yeah, South Asian dudes"....they are treating in a different way. I really don't like [it] from Chinese people.

Xenophobia and probing. Some respondents narrated experiences of mistreatment and probing by Chinese people. Karuna, quoted earlier, narrated an incident in which a local female shopkeeper abused as well as pushed her and her friends out of the shop. They were looked upon with suspicion. It was due to the intervention of her faculty that the situation was handled when they warned the lady with police action if she did that again. Relating this incident to her other experiences in China, the respondent had a mixed observation:

Some people behave differently. Ladies of her kind look down upon us. But many are also happy to meet us. They mingle with us to the extent that they invite

us over at occasions: “spend time us; go out with us.” But there are some who do not want to talk to us. They behave as if we will eat them up, as if we are aliens from somewhere, this is how they react. Others respect us and speak very nicely to us and love to befriend us — both boys and girls.

Tej, quoted earlier, had stayed in China for five and a half years. He said that local Chinese people were “direct” with foreigners, asking such questions as “where are you from?”, “are you married or not?”, “do you have a girl friend?”, “where are you studying?” He emphasized that most of the time they would ask where he was from and on what purpose he was in China, which made him “uncomfortable in the beginning.” Such encounters were mostly in public at shopping centers, during travel, and during interaction with taxi drivers. Uday observed that the geographical location mattered when it came to people’s behavior. He observed, “I think in cities like Beijing they behave like normally. They don’t care. I mean.... when I am going to some other places, people would stare at me.”

Negative cultural shock. Participants experienced a negative cultural shock in the form of prevailing social apathy and money-mindedness in China.

Expectation belied. Tej said that he thought that Chinese people’s cultural thinking would be modern because it is “a fast-developing country” but he said it was same as it would have been 20-40 years ago. Also, he found that unlike Nepalese people, Chinese shopkeepers were “so money-minded” in selling products. For example, he said that even though he was a regular customer, the vegetable vendor would not spare a single penny if he fell short of even one RMB. His view reflects his being used to the

culture that prevails in Nepal (and also in India) where shopkeepers let the regular and familiar customers pay later.

Social apathy. Most participants alluded to extreme busyness on the part of Chinese people to the extent that several of the participants point to their lack of “empathy for fellow humans in need” owing to busy life and immersion in technology. In the words of a medical student, “people’s unwillingness to act as a good Samaritan is something that bothered me a lot.” Social indifference was pinpointed by participants who said that people in China were too busy to be caring and empathetic toward fellow Chinese. The final code of “social apathy” emerges from initial codes of “extreme busyness,” “lack of care and concern,” and “immersion in technology” found in the descriptions of social life in China, as narrated by the Nepalese students.

Uday shared:

...maybe Chinese people are more into technology. They are in sports, in metros, while walking, I think they have reduced social...they don’t care about other people. They are enjoying the music, and if someone needs help, they wouldn’t do it, they wouldn’t care. They are just busy. Technology has some negative impact in China.

Similarly, Raj, from a university in central China, said, “People here in China are so busy on their own. Even someone met with an accident I have seen, no one stepped forward to help. There are some exceptions and maybe this doesn’t apply to all cases.” When asked about the social life and behavior of the Chinese society, Dhir, an MBBS student in North China, said, “Their behavior is good. The only problem is that people are not concerned about each other; if something happens to someone, no one cares.

Everyone is busy, [has] nothing to do with others.” When asked what made him say so, he said, “They do duty on time. They give much importance to time....sort of disciplined. It is good. But no one cares about the other.” When asked how it works in his country, he said, “it’s not like that in my country but here no one cares; what if someone dies, needs help!”

Familiarity with Chinese Culture

Nepalese students who were studying in China or had studied there had cultural experiences through universities’ events and functions, organized tours (such as those of Sichuan University’s to places of historical significance), personal travel, and through social exposure to festivals. Findings reveal universities’ seminal role in providing cultural experiences to Nepalese students by organizing events featuring Chinese festivals. In her written response, Nisha, quoted earlier, mentioned her Chinese university’s role in promoting China’s soft power in the cultural domain:

in order to understand the social and cultural aspects of China, every weekend we were taken for visits with historical significance followed by understanding more on the infrastructural development. The primary focus to show us the social and cultural life was to make us understand Chinese lifestyle and to some extent those visits posited soft power dimensions as well. (Nisha, personal communication, November 10, 2017)

Nisha also wrote, “Frankly speaking, I did not have much idea about the culture of China before due to our cultural affinity towards the southern neighbor [India]. Hence, these visits gave me a chance to know about the values and cultures that they adapted [adopted].”

Chinese festivals and fun. Students' feelings associated with festivals in China can be described as that of enjoyment and fun, and their knowledge extended to the names and frequency of Chinese festivals. In the words of Karuna:

I do enjoy. Friends invite us over for the Moon Festival, the Fire Festival. But we don't get much involved because they celebrate them at homes. Sometimes, we go to the lake when they celebrate the festivals there. Though we don't understand these things, we enjoy. But Christmas parties are celebrated with much pomp and show. Our university also organizes parties for us; cultural programs are organized. Our own festivals are not that frequent. [But] the Moon Festival comes three times a year.

Several students shared that they hugely missed their own festivals such as Diwali and Dussehra. Som shared that he missed Nepalese festivals but found satisfaction in the fact that Chinese festivals provided occasions of merriment: "Festivals which we used to celebrate in our country we can't see here. Luckily I got to celebrate most of Chinese festivals here."

Lack of taste for Chinese food. Except for two medical students, no other respondent spoke favorably of Chinese food because of their native taste for spicy food. Raj (central China), quoted earlier, said: "Actually, we don't get our type of food that we get in Nepal or India. Food here is boiled, which Pakistanis also don't like. We are used to eating spicy food." But Karuna from Southwest China was positive about Chinese food when she said, "Food here is good. I enjoyed it. I will miss its food when I go back. There're lots of dishes that I take much delight in even though it is Chinese — I like it a lot." An interesting revelation was by Dish, another student from Southwest China, who

said that he and his friends told the staff at local Chinese restaurants to make Indian food for them while sharing Indian recipes. It surprised me. When I asked him whether the local restaurants really complied with their request, he said yes and laughed.

Copying the Western culture. In their observation of Chinese culture, respondents alluded to the impact of the West in festivals, music, dresses and lifestyle. In the words of Uday, an aeronautical engineering major, “the thing is that I have seen Chinese people copying Western culture. They say they are non-religious but they celebrate Christmas. The Western culture has a huge impact on China.” Similarly, Som commented, “Generation over here and the way they live, I think they copy the Western style. There’s an upcoming generation, they will prefer to.... they like to listen to music which is from the US and they will prefer to wear the clothes the US people wear.”

It is important to mention that information on students’ experience with Chinese cultural values can be analyzed in relation to their experience and understanding of social values, as discussed earlier. For instance, Chinese cultural values of benevolence and harmony, as publicized by the Chinese government, can be examined in practice in connection with students’ narration of social behavior and traits as they observed and experienced.

Opinion on Chinese Political System

Nepalese students’ views of China’s political system, ideology and values are grouped into the following types: favorable views without qualification; favorable views with qualification; unfavorable views; appreciation for China’s development model; and understanding of China’s political ideology.

Favorable view without qualification. My interviews with Nepalese students

revealed that they appreciated China's political system because it did not come in the way of China's economic development. It rather accelerated its economic advancement. Their experience of democracy as it operated in Nepal, considered a least-developed country (LDC), made them aware of its pitfalls such as delays in project implementation and lack of economic progress. They pointed to social order, discipline, and rules and regulations, and physical security, which they found lacking in their own country. For instance, Dhya, a medical student in Southeast China, said, "It [system] should be like this everywhere."

Respondents under this category did not have any negative view or characterization of China's political system. They were impressed with the governance, which stemmed from the flaws of the system as they witnessed in Nepal, described below.

Political instability and politicization of the Nepalese society. This code emerged from the following statement by Dhir, a student in the fourth year of the MBBS program in North China, "Everyone is doing politics in Nepal. Teachers are also doing politics which affects our studies because they do not concentrate on teaching. Political instability is a serious issue in Nepal.¹⁸ It [politics the domain of the few] should be like [that] in China." The student seemed to suggest that because in China, politics was the business of the few, the rest could focus on their work, rather than creating indiscipline which was the bane of Nepalese politics. He found that politics had seeped into Nepalese society at large, including the academic world, at the cost of work ethics and national development. Interests of the students were at stake as they were faced with teacher absence as well as lack of teacher commitment.

¹⁸ It may be added that in August 2016, the leadership change in Nepal was the 25th in 26 years ("The cost," 2016, August 11).

Project delays in Nepal versus quick pace in China. Owing to numerous political parties that tended to oppose and obstruct, coupled with the politics of negotiation and persuasion marking the democratic system in Nepal, the students felt that the development projects were susceptible to delays. On the other hand, the faster implementation of projects in China, as manifest from the frequency of construction of infrastructure projects such as bridges and buildings, created a favorable impression on the interviewees. Bimal, an MBBS student in central China, opined:

The country should be democratic only after it has reached a level of development. If a country is developing, I think it should be ruled by only one party because if it is democratic, it has to convince all the political parties of local areas, convince the local people, convince everyone, wait for 30 days, and some more days. What happens in China is the government decides, makes some positive things for development- that's good for the whole country.

Karuna, another MBBS student, said, "When we came here, within five months here, our place has developed a lot that surprises us.... we realize that development in our country is stuck in discussions."

Lack of order and discipline in Nepal. Students spoke of rules, regulations, safety and security in China. Dhya, quoted earlier, said:

It should be like this everywhere. Here also people have freedom. But if do something wrong or break the law, then there is punishment. In fact, I think every country should have such system. They have given their people good living standard and economic development, why will they create nuisance? What people want is facilities.

These interviewees were in favor of emulation of the Chinese system in terms of one party rule in a developing country and preference to economic development (assuming a trade-off between development and democracy). Clearly, those views were informed not by the notion of a supposedly intrinsic limitation of democracy but by how the polity operated in their own country, marked by political instability and stifled economic development.

Favorable view with qualification. Rukmini, an MBBS intern in East China, said, “China lacks democracy which plays a major role in its unstoppable development as it is ruled by good hands.” Karuna, another MBBS intern, said:

From this perspective [freedom], ours is better. I heard from two instructors in China that they.... though they didn't tell openly.... but they told that they don't like the political condition here.... they have to do what they are told to; they can't do what want to do. They said that they [the government] make us dance to their tune. But in our country [Nepal], it's not like that. We can do something for our rights, but these people can't. They have to carry out the will of the government. But for development, it [China's system] is good because they are developing it a lot. When we came here, within five months here, our place has developed a lot that surprises us. We think that development in our country is stuck in discussions. But here progress is fast. So for development it is good...[but] they don't like it that much.

Unfavorable view. Som, quoted earlier, endorsed Nepal's democratic system by first sharing different perspectives on China's political system and then giving his own opinion:

Everything has both sides. Sometime[s] it is good but sometime[s] it is bad. I found lots of my Chinese mates [who] used to tell me “I don’t like the government of China. They will do what they want.” But some people think communist [system] is good — it is good for the development of the country. So, most of the time they will tell like “I don’t like communist [sic] but some of them [said] “I like the government system here”, but for me, I don’t think communist [system] is the good way to rule the country. Our country is the best people have [a] right to do what is good for them (emphasis added).

Appreciation for China’s development model. Concomitantly with critiquing the Western media and the Western model of development, students in the social sciences program talked of the virtues or expressed appreciation of the Chinese system. While medical students also admired the level of development as they saw in China, social science students employed theoretical constructs in their responses, drawing from their knowledge of Chinese leadership’s oft-used concepts such as “harmonious society” and “mutual cooperation.” In the written words of Shiva, a Ph.D. candidate in North China:

China’s harmonious civilization attracted me. From my school level, I have been [sic] great interest in China issues. Anglo-American model totally failed for inclusive development of [the] world and created more conflict than problems. But China always focuses on mutual cooperation and win-win situation. (Shiva, personal communication, September 15, 2017)

Similarly, Nisha, quoted earlier in this chapter, remarked:

The media are controlled to some extent, but the citizens are provided with all the facilities that the state has to provide. The poverty level has declined significantly

which has eventually increased the standard of living. Second, the organized development of cities has been very mesmerizing. I think if China maintains this current status in both state as well as system level, within a span of 10 years, it will become one of the superpowers in the international system. (Nisha, personal communication, November 10, 2017)

The respondent also exhibited her knowledge of “socialism with Chinese characteristics,” saying that this phrase was quoted by her professors in lectures.

Elaborating on this notion, she stated:

In political terms, Chinese Communist ideology has been one of the major aspects for its infrastructure development. And this development process began right after the cultural revolution and the economic reform that was introduced by Deng Xiaoping. Hierarchy has always been given an utmost priority which exists from government level to private level. With this note, the overall system is very much disciplined which has been experienced in our classrooms as well. Rule and order prevails and is strictly followed by the citizens. (Nisha, personal communication, November 10, 2017)

Clearly, the reference to development, rule, order and discipline stand out as the features of China’s governance, which were observed by the respondent and which point to her favorable impression of China along these lines. Referring to Asian values which Nisha said she had learned about at Sichuan University, she added, “those countries that have adopted Western values have a very slow progressive rate...but in [on] the other hand, those countries that have adopted their [own] values have been very much successful”.

Understanding of China's political ideology. Students in the social sciences program got exposure to and understanding of China's political ideology with much clarity compared to medical students. Given that social science as a discipline offers the possibility of incorporation of Chinese political system or ideology into courses, faculty in Chinese universities can play an important role in disseminating China's ideology as well as Chinese worldview. It reflects from the following description by Nisha:

Earlier my idea for Chinese communism was based on the far left of the political spectrum. But later after my four months' stay, China as a communist country has its own characteristics. Since IR [international relations] as discipline emerged from the west and is taught on the basis of Western values prioritizing majorly on liberal values and therefore, the oriental or Chinese values are never prioritized and taught (in Nepal's case). As I spoke to few of our professors there, they said that they believe in the government as the government system is well focused in the welfare of state and that has been proven as well with the poverty alleviation. They feel that they are more democratic than other democratic countries. They also focused on how these political characteristics will eventually make China one of the superpowers in the world. Thus, these perceptions from the professors are also reflected on [sic] the ongoing work of Chinese government and to add further to it, the surplus economy has already set as an example worldwide. (Nisha, personal communication, November 10, 2017)

As Rachit, a Ph.D. candidate noted, "nationalism is very much powerful in Chinese academia." If this statement serves as any clue to the content of class lectures, it is apparent that the faculty espoused a favorable view of China or back up China's case.

For instance, Bibek studied international trade law under the Yes China program for a year at a Chinese university. He shared that his professors pointed out that so far the global order had been West-centric where China had to accept the rules rather than create them and that China was going to be a major force in formulating the rules of international system such as trade governance.

Online Sources: Views of Nepalese Students on Chinese Politics, Culture and Society

Besides interviews, Website documents shed light on Nepalese students' perspectives on Chinese politics and Nepalese alumni's involvement in promotion of Chinese culture.

Praise for China's Economic Development

A Nepalese Ph.D. candidate in international politics at Shandong University writes in *The China Daily*, a Chinese government-run newspaper:

My generation has grown up listening to the stories of China's success. I would wonder how a country could uplift 700 million people out of poverty in a span of 30 years. Thanks to the Communist Party of China and the path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, it has made a remarkable contribution to the humanity's right to development. (Upadhyaya, 2017, para. 2)

Interestingly, the student has made reference not only to the Communist Party of China (CPC) but also to "socialism with Chinese characteristics" — the official ideology of the CPC.

Cultural Mediation

Online data reveals the Arniko Society's role in fostering Nepal-China relations in cultural and humanitarian projects. For example, the Society took an initiative to air in

Nepal China's popular TV series *Xi You Ji* (Journey to the West), dubbed in Nepali, in 2016. Its president Sarbottam Shrestha explained, "To showcase history, culture and current affairs of China, we have chosen *Xi You Ji* to be aired in Nepal. This drama was very popular in France, Italy, Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and China. It is entertaining for children to old" ("*Xi You Ji*", 2016, para. 2). In September 2017, Chinese Ambassador Yu Hong attended the launching ceremony of *Eastward Flows the Mighty Yangtze River: Prose Collection of Wuhan Authors* (Nepali edition). The Arniko Society had a representation at this ceremony where the Nepali edition of the book was launched.

Conclusion

In terms of attraction, China's political system was appreciated for governance (safety and security), efficiency, and economic development. Political legitimacy stands out. In brief, it was found favorable on account of its capacity to deliver results. Some students, however, felt that Nepal's political system was better because of the freedom of resistance vis-à-vis obligation of Chinese citizens to carry out the will of their government.

In terms of social values, Nepalese students appreciated work ethic, discipline, and motivation on the part of Chinese people though social apathy as well as racism stood out as the negative aspects of social life in China. In terms of cultural impact, at most, Nepalese students at the Confucius Institute and in China gained awareness of Chinese culture, including festivals. While for those who studied in China, learning the Chinese language was essential because of the program requirement as well as in order to interact with the Chinese people, those at the Confucius Institute considered learning Chinese an opportunity to learn a new language for free. The language issue was found to

be a major barrier by almost all current students and alumni, and those who had learned it at the Confucius Institute had forgotten how to speak it. These facts point to the limits of China's cultural penetration in Nepal.

CHAPTER VII

EDUCATION AS A TOOL FOR CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY GOALS

As mentioned in Chapter IV, one of the soft power aims of China is to create a constituency of supporters for advancing its national interest in Nepal, whether related to reining in Tibetan separatists or curtailing India's influence or promoting business interests. From the perspective of the soft power model adopted in this study, China's success in achieving this aim can be gauged through Nepalese students' concurrence with its foreign policy, one of the sources of soft power in the soft power framework provided by Joseph Nye. Accordingly, their statements on China-Nepal relations, China's foreign policy initiatives, China's presence in the region, and other issues have been analyzed in this chapter.

Findings from Interviews with Nepalese Students

This section presents findings in four categories: positive perception of the Belt and Road Initiative; China's contribution to Nepal and the world; impact of course content; and students' interest in collaboration with China.

Positive Perception of the Belt and Road Initiative

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), previously known as One Belt, One Road (OBOR), is China's ambitious infrastructure project in Asia, Africa and Europe. Carney

and Martel (2017) describe it as a “super-highway for Chinese economic dominance”; they write, “[It] is China’s plan to dominate world trade by building and controlling a network of roads, pipelines, railways, ports, and power plants to deliver raw materials to China and finished goods to the rest of the world” (para.5). In May 2017, Nepal signed a Memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China, agreeing to join the BRI.



Figure 4. China’s BRI Program (Jia, 2015)

Nepalese students in social sciences programs not only referred to the BRI when asked about their knowledge of China or understanding of its foreign policy, but they were also receptive to and appreciative of it, as manifest from the section below.

Connection between BRI and soft power. Students of international relations were not only familiar with the concept of soft power but also explained how the BRI, soft power, and education were inter-connected, which further speaks of their favorable impressions of China’s foreign policy. Nisha, a former student at a university in Southwest China, shared the following opinion on Nepal- China educational ties:

From the perspective of soft power, China has been successful by adapting such [educational] ties because it provides an opportunity for students to explore more

about China mainly on its developmental side followed by cultural, political and social life. China has also been able to create awareness on its grand project of OBOR [,] which is eventually going to be one of the most influential projects worldwide. (Nisha, personal communication, November 10, 2017)

The above quote is significant in the following ways. First, it reflects a Nepalese student's perception of the success of China on the front of soft power in the domain of educational linkages with Nepal. Second, it mirrors a connection between higher education and the foreign policy program of the BRI (formerly known as OBOR) insofar as foreign students enrolled in such joint programs gain understanding of BRI or other programs. Third, the belief in BRI's future success as "one of the most influential projects worldwide" is a clear-cut concurrence with the initiative itself.

Similarly, Rachit, a Ph.D. candidate in North China, drew a connection between the BRI and scholarships to foreign students, while pointing out that China was "giving scholarships as a tool of soft power" and that it signified its "responsibility" toward developing countries. He said that especially after the BRI came to be implemented, the number of scholarships to developing countries like Nepal went up because "OBOR [BRI] became one of the prominent elements of foreign policy" and added that countries receiving these scholarships were benefiting from the schemes which could result in China's influence in his country also. He further said that "every big power" uses this tool, while citing the example of India that provides 3,000 scholarships to Nepal annually. His viewpoint clearly suggests that provision of scholarships as a soft-power building exercise is tied to the foreign policy initiative of the BRI. Also, the respondent's mention of scholarships provided by India further suggests that China is endeavoring to

curtail India's influence in the educational field — one of the soft power aims underlined in Chapter IV.

Nepalese students' receptivity to the BRI is underlined in the subsequent section on online sources. Interviewees, especially medical students, were either not sure what to say about China's foreign policy or when prompted for Nepal-China relations, they either referred to China's developmental aid to Nepal or simply said that the relations between the two countries were good. Thus, there was no negative characterization of China-Nepal relations or China's foreign policy.

China's Contribution to Nepal and the World

The above category was formed out of the codes of "contribution to countries' development," "financial support," and "global stability, peace and development." In the words of a medical student, "I have heard that China exports products and contributes to countries' development. They support other countries financially. This is what I hear and read in news that China has supported that much, has given aid...but not in detail" (Karuna). In the words of Shiva, a Ph.D. candidate, "China has a lot of things to deliver to the world and contribute for global stability, peace and development." Shiva's words echo the official stance of the Chinese government. For instance, *Xinhua* reports that Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi said that "China will continue to be an anchor of international stability, an engine of global growth, a champion of peace and development and a contributor to global governance" ("China to continue contributing," 2017, para. 1).

Impact of Course Content

A former student at the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University (CIKU) informed that his perception of China was changed after watching a documentary on

“Maoist revolution” and videos on China’s development and growth. The agenda of influencing the foreign youth reflects in the nature of videos shown to students at the CIKU: ideologically influencing the youth in a democratic country. Bibek, who studied at a university in East China, said that after communists came to power in China, gender equality had come to prevail as women constituted most of the workforce in China. He further said that his Chinese instructors would speak highly of the rich civilization of China, and opined that the political system of China had an imprint on the course material and on what was taught in class. The participant seemed to suggest that instructors were expected to put forth China’s case to advance national interest. For instance, in the international economic law class, the instructor explained how China is preferring to be a party to an institution at the time of its formation rather than accepting the existing rules of the game such as that of the World Trade Organization. He also shared that since there were all foreign students in the class, the instructors felt free to engage in discussions without bothering about possible spying by students.

Interest in Collaboration with China

Some Nepalese students in social science disciplines mentioned working with China (or for China) as part of their possible future plans in terms of providing legal assistance in litigation to Chinese companies in Nepal, working with Chinese organizations in Nepal, or associating with China’s BRI project by offering consulting services to Nepal or interested parties.

Online Sources

Apart from interviews, online sources carry articles contributed by Nepalese students, including Ph.D. candidates, which reflect their positive views of China’s foreign

policy, specifically the BRI.

Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)

The *China Daily* is apparently encouraging and is receptive to foreign student-written articles favorable to China's image, including its foreign policy. It is especially carrying write-ups on the BRI. For instance, it carried a summary of the joint research paper of a Ph.D. and a master's student on "The Politics of Soft Power: Belt and Road Initiative as Charm Influence in South Asia." Both are Nepalese students studying in China. The article also alluded to India's foreign policy, saying, "Experts said that India's hegemonic and British-era foreign policy towards the neighbors is forcing them [the South Asian region] to look at China for cooperation" (Sharma & Khatri, 2017, para. 6). Interestingly, the Chinese leadership has called upon India to join the BRI Initiative, and this piece echoes this stance as the authors write:

Due to the massive support of the global community to the initiative, it is said by many Indian scholars that India will not have any other choice than to support B&R [BRI]. They added that India made a mistake by not sending a representative to the Beijing B&R Summit (Sharma & Khatri, 2017, para. 5).¹⁹

Though it is debatable as how much the Nepalese government is committed to China's BRI project (Ghimire, 2017), it looks like some Nepalese researchers studying in China are pushing hard, creating favorable outcomes for the Chinese government which, in turn, through state media is carrying pro-China or Nepal-China write-ups by Nepalese students. For example, the following excerpt from an article by a Nepalese Ph.D.

¹⁹ The summary did not provide any source to back up the claim, viz., "said by many Indian scholars."

candidate, featured on CCTV, China's state news broadcaster, calls upon the Nepalese government to cooperate with China in implementing the bilateral agreements.

Nepal should focus on implementing agreements. China, which is the second largest economy of the world and the biggest exporter, has capital, technologies, knowledge and experiences. Nepal-China relations can move in harmonious ways. Nepal stands committed to the One China Policy. China supports Nepal's development. Now Nepal needs to do much more from its side. (Sharma, 2017, paras. 15-16)

Another Ph.D. candidate from Nepal in his article in *The China Daily*, China's state-run newspaper, writes about the benefits of BRI for Nepal, while also in contrast criticizing India for its intervention in Nepalese politics. Also, he calls upon India to "join hands with China" in the region by joining the BRI. Interestingly, his thesis focuses on China's multilateral diplomacy, including its BRI initiative in South Asia. Given that the article appeared in the Chinese government-run newspaper and subscribes to the Chinese perspective, it appears to be a mouthpiece of the Chinese government. The author writes:

OBOR [BRI] is based on win-win cooperation. It is a Chinese dream of building a[sic] interconnected world where the countries along the route are included in a global value chain. It is imperative for Nepal to create job opportunity so that the human resource do not have to go to the gulf countries to work in the poor working conditions and low pay. Seeing the proximity and affinity, a Chinese train could have first reached Kathmandu, which is merely 100 kilometers from the border of China before plying more than 12,000 kilometers all the way to London. These observations take us to a simple conclusion that it is already too

late for Nepal to start collaborating with China in building infrastructure projects under the One Belt, One Road initiative (Upadhyaya, 2017, paras. 6-7).

In fact, the author in yet another article in the *China Daily* minces no words when he writes, “As a strong admirer of OBOR, I take this opportunity to wish the ongoing ‘Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation’ a grand success” (Upadhyaya, 2017, June 12, last para.) Going further, he puts forth a critical view of the West:

At the time when the West is fanning the clash of civilization, protectionism and isolationism, the Communist Party of China with Chairman Xi [Chinese President] as the core has put forward the Chinese dream of building a community of common destiny for mankind. (Upadhyaya, 2017, June 12, last para.)

The views expressed above appeared in the Chinese state media and clearly align with the official stance of the CPC. It is another issue as to how the Nepalese students’ pro-China views translate into concrete gains for China in muting any future criticism of or skepticism over China’s intentions in Nepal or how influential these students are going to be in the Nepalese mainstream.

Arniko Society

Online sources illuminate increasing engagement of Nepalese alumni with Chinese organizations. Arniko Society, an alumni association, has emerged as an important player in building closer ties between Nepal and China through such ways as holding China education fairs, organizing or attending Chinese cultural events, tying up with Chinese NGOs in development works for Nepal, and positively responding to the Chinese government’s initiatives on the Tibet issue.

In fact, the Arniko Society website lists its following functions:

- Developing closer contacts and cooperation among the members to provide opportunities for exchange of information on academic, scientific, technical and other concerned subjects among the members.
- Introducing China and the Chinese language to the Nepalese youth and general public.
- Developing cultural, educational, social, economic, trade, scientific and technological co-operation and exchanges between the two countries.
- Promoting exchange of visits between academicians, professionals, students and businessmen of both countries to enhance people to people contacts.
- Arranging seminars, conferences, exhibitions, and talk programs on issues of common interest.
- Organizing public programs like film festival, photo exhibition book fair, to give the Nepalese people opportunity to know more about China and the different aspects of life of Chinese people and disseminate information about Nepal to the Chinese people.
- Making arrangements for the visit of Chinese Friendship Organizations, Buddhist organizations and academicians to Nepal.
- Playing the role of a contact point between similar organizations of Nepal and China (“Who we are,” n.d., para. 2)

The Society has been involved in organizing free health camps and conducting free cataract surgeries for Nepalese people with the help of Chinese NGOs (Jin, 2014) such as CNIE and the China Foundation for Peace and Development, giving relief to “low-income households” and providing services in “Nepal’s rugged and remote regions,

where modern eye care is often unheard of” (Pengfei, 2014, para. 10). Similarly, in June 2016, Arniko Society organized lectures of Chinese medical experts to share their knowledge with nearly hundred Nepalese pertaining to diseases and diagnosis of obstetrics/gynecology, cancer, among other diseases. In an interview to *Xinhua*, a Nepalese radiologist said, “The lecture session and presentation by the Chinese medical experts are very fruitful for us. In fact, such interactions should be held regularly to expand our knowledge” (“Visiting Chinese medical experts,” 2016, para. 4).

Arniko Society and the Tibet issue. While on the one hand, the Arniko Society as a non-governmental institution is interacting with Chinese medical professionals and Chinese NGOs, which is contributing to Chinese soft power on a nongovernmental level, the role of the Chinese Embassy is also not passive when it comes to establishing rapport with the Society. In fact, there is a strategic element to the Arniko Society--Chinese government relationship. First, the Society was involved in selecting tour guides for visitors to Tibet. As posted on the website of *China Tibet Online*:

Nearly 60 Nepalese tour guides received training on knowledge of China’s Tibet in a program organized by the China Tibetology Research Center on June 8. The tour guides were all selected by the Nepalese Arniko Society (emphasis added).

Four Chinese scholars made detailed introduction about history and current situation of Tibet, Tibet’s social and economic development, reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism, and traditional Tibetan thangka painting, hoping that the students would gain a comprehensive and correct understanding of China’s Tibet. An Qiyi, deputy secretary-general of the center, said that tour guides would always have a great influence on tourists, and Nepalese tour guides could play a

major and positive role in sharing their knowledge about China's Tibet.

("Nepalese tour guides," 2017, paras. 1-3).

Second, while Nepalese government has reiterated its commitment to "one-China policy" (viz., Tibet is a part of China), China is capitalizing on the growing ties with Nepal by seeking its enhanced involvement on the Tibet issue and thereby neutralizing or diminishing the activism of Tibetan separatists. At the inaugural ceremony of the China Tibetan Cultural Forum in Kathmandu, Ambassador Hong said, "I am sure people of Nepal will get to know factual information about Tibet through this event and people of Tibet will get to know about the historic aspects of cultural linkages between Nepal and China" ("OBOR," 2017, last para.). Importantly, the Arniko Society had a representation at the ceremony, alongside the Chinese Embassy and top Nepalese political elites. In fact, as back as the year 2007, a Multi-colored Tibet Photo Exhibition was co-organized by China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture and the Arniko Society. Given that Tibet is a strategically issue for China for its 'One China Policy', the presence of Nepalese civil society such as the alumni association gives a political advantage to Chinese leadership.

Conclusion

It was found that students in social sciences were more knowledgeable about China's foreign policy and gave rich descriptions of the BRI and other foreign policy issues, while medical students and those who had studied at the Confucius Institute mostly alluded to their perception of China-Nepal relations as "good" or spoke of China's developmental aid, including assistance to Nepal in the aftermath of the earthquake in 2015. Overall, both interviews and online sources reveal a positive perception about

China's foreign policy, informed by what the Nepalese students see as a potential benefit to Nepal from BRI, their awareness of China's development aid to Nepal, their apparent belief in China's policy of non-intervention, and disapproval of India's monopoly over trade supplies.

Soft power is assessed through positive images, positive descriptions, and positive narratives or stories of or "favorable views" of foreign publics about a country.

Comparing the gains to China on the front of education as a resource or as a purveyor of values/culture, education as a foreign policy tool has appeared more effective. It is apparent from the following considerations or outcomes. First, China's positive influence over the foreign students (Nepalese students in the given case) reflects from their positive comments on Nepal-China relations, and on China's BRI Initiative.

Second, China's governance and political system found a constituency of admirers in Nepalese students. Even those who preferred the Nepalese political system admired China's governance and infrastructure development. Students in the social sciences discipline were aware of "socialism with Chinese characteristics"—decades-old official description of China's development paradigm. Interestingly, in October 2017, the Research Center for Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era was inaugurated at the Sichuan Academy of Social Sciences.

Third, students of social sciences looked forward to working with China or China-based projects. Fourth, China stands to gain from a pro-China attitude versus attitude toward India. Fifth, the Arniko Society is, to an extent, engaged in activities favorable to China, including on the Tibet issue. Overall, it appears that a coterie of intellectuals is forming to act as an intermediary between Nepal and China, bringing both countries

closer.

It merits a mention that those participants who chose to respond by email were almost positive about China in comparison to those who spoke on the phone or other devices, and were perhaps more careful in sharing their views.

CHAPTER VIII

DISCUSSION

This chapter determines and discusses the relationship between China's soft power aims and Nepalese students' experiences in academic, social, cultural and political terms. As found in Chapter IV, those aims are connected with China's cultural, economic, and foreign policy interests. The education soft power model employed in this study assigns prime significance to the role of higher education in helping China attain those aims. As such, students' descriptions of their experiences and views constitute a lens to gauge the extent of success China has gained so far. One may, however, be cautioned that national aims are not an output that can be easily, instantly, or precisely attained regardless of the strength of inputs, or even measured. It is not an application of science. Nevertheless, this research sheds light on the areas of success, failure, challenges, and opportunities, as gleaned through analysis of various data sources. It may be added that while medical students praised China's accomplishments on the front of economic development and also narrated their social experiences, responses of the non-medical and non-engineering students were primarily focused on the academic and political content in describing their experiences in China.

Relationship Between China’s Soft Power Aims and Nepalese Students' Experiences

At the outset, it may be noted that this study addresses the following research question: What is the relationship between the experience of Nepalese students in China's higher education programs and the explicit and implicit aims of China's soft power policy in South Asia? Accordingly, this section discusses the experience of Nepalese students in connection with China's higher education program(s) against the backdrop of China’s aims behind building soft power in Nepal. In this regard, it keeps in view the following sub-question: how are China’s social and political values as well as its culture reflected in the experience of Nepalese students in regard to China’s higher education programs? The following table presents this discussion.

Table 4

Relationship between China’s Soft Power Aims and Nepalese Students’ Experiences

China’s Soft Power Aims	Nepalese Students’ Experiences
Increasing the influence of Chinese higher education program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • China has not yet established a “brand name” for its education among Nepalese students. • China ranks sixth in destination, attracting Nepalese students on account of affordability and scholarships. • Studying in China is not considered prestigious in Nepal. • China has a limited success in implementing the <i>Plan for Study in China</i> and the <i>Circular on Interim Provisions for Quality Control Standards on Undergraduate Medical Education in English for International Students in China</i> in respect of Nepalese students. • Social sciences might be accounting for a better experience for Nepalese students, though research in this domain is likely to

China's Soft Power Aims	Nepalese Students' Experiences
Cultural Dissemination	<p>be impacted by Chinese academia's "one-way of thinking," i.e., holding China's national interest supreme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nepalese students became aware of and enjoyed Chinese festivals • Cultural sites were appreciated • Barring a couple exceptions, Chinese food did not find favor with Nepalese students • Chinese movies and music did not figure in Nepalese students' cultural consumption • Work-ethic, warmth and friendliness of Chinese people were reported • Negative experiences involving racism, and social apathy toward fellow-beings were reported.
Language Dissemination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chinese was found to be an extremely difficult language • Students at the Confucius Institute (CI) forgot how to speak Chinese over time, losing the learning gain • Students at the CI pointed to limitations such as lack of opportunities to practice, and learning challenges • Those who studied and stayed in China had a better ability to speak Chinese.
Fostering Bilateral Ties & Cultivating Nepalese youth, including alumni, for support as future elites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants expressed a desire or willingness to work with the Chinese organizations in the future. • Arniko Society is engaged in tasks that are important for China's national interest such as promotion of Chinese education program, Chinese culture, and on pro-China stance on the Tibet issue. • Experience of unpleasant social behavior might obstruct goodwill creation
Counter to India's influence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to the BRI project • Appreciation of China's non-intervention

China's Soft Power Aims	Nepalese Students' Experiences
Positive image of China ^a	<p>policy and humanitarian assistance</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Described as a beautiful country, disciplined, with good governance in terms of order, safety and security.

Note. ^aAspects of positive images and negative images can be gleaned from the preceding rows in this table.

Guided by the above table, the following section offers a detailed discussion on the findings of this study. China's soft power aims have been categorized into the themes, and the corresponding text discusses the aims' relationship with the students' experiences and observations. From the perspective of the educational soft power model, increasing the influence of higher education comes under education as a resource; dissemination of culture and language in education as a purveyor of values and culture; and cultivation of youth for protection of its national interest and countering India's influence in education as a tool to achieve foreign policy objectives. The aim of carrying a positive image straddles the three constituents of the model. In addition, Joseph Nye's framework of culture, political ideals, and foreign policy is integrated with this model (Nye, 2004).

Increasing the Influence of China's Higher Education

China is seeking to increase the influence of its higher education globally by attracting international students to study in China and by creating a "brand name" for Chinese education. Extending this aim to Nepal, China has stepped up scholarships for Nepalese students, while scores of Chinese universities have participated in education fairs in Nepal. But an analysis of the brand reputation of China's educational institutions and the quality of Nepalese students' academic experiences reveals challenges to China's

soft power drive, as explained below. The subsequent sub-sections highlight the current focus of China on enrollments, the potential for enrollment of Nepalese students in social sciences, and futuristic scenarios.

Lack of brand reputation. China's Tsinghua University and Peking University rank among the world's top 20 universities in the *Times Higher Education* (THE) World Reputation Rankings 2017. In 2017, they surpassed the University of Pennsylvania and Cornell University to occupy 14th and 17th places respectively. From this perspective, China has carved a niche in top global university brands. Interestingly, the THE ranking is compiled through the opinion-survey of leading academics in identifying universities on the basis of excellence in research and teaching. However, based on interviews with Nepalese students and scholars, it cannot be said that Chinese education carries a brand reputation in Nepal. No student participant, other than one Ph.D. candidate in social science, referred to the university's ranking as a factor of appreciation for Chinese education, while a master's student who was "happy" to have studied at a "big" Chinese university for his undergrad program chose China for the scholarship he received. As Luxbacher (2013) writes in the *Guardian* about the influence of world university rankings:

The indicators and criteria used are not all encompassing and often measured via proxies. There is a greater overall emphasis on research than teaching, despite the context of rising tuition fees, when prospective students are looking for the complete package. (para 11)

Though China attracted the medical interviewees owing to its cost structure,

scholarships, and easiness of getting admission to medical colleges,²⁰ the interviewees did not mention the elements of attractiveness that are included in China's official *Plan for Study in China*. The plan's focus is to make Chinese education programs attractive and to make China known for "higher education institutions with distinguishing features"; "high-standard disciplines"; "attractive courses" (providing international comparative advantage); and "outstanding teachers." Rather, the perception of Nepalese society at large is that it is not prestigious to study in China. In contrast, as the creators of the educational soft power model write, Finland achieved nation-branding most significantly through its internationally acclaimed education system (Wojciuk, Michalek & Stormowska, 2015). In 2017, Xinhua, China's press agency, carried a news story on a Chinese education fair in Nepal in which it cited a couple of prospective students who appreciated both scholarships and growing reputation of Chinese universities ("China education fair," 2017, December 10). But as this study has demonstrated, the current students do not look upon China as a reputed destination for higher education. In the short-term, recruitment because of the low cost is boosting enrollment, but the long-term plan to develop a brand on the basis of quality of institutions, courses, and teachers is a challenge.

Gaps in student expectations. As explained in Chapter V, students experienced certain learning challenges, especially in concept clarification and in their medical internships. Broadly, China's achievements against the backdrop of China's *Plan for*

²⁰ Admission requirements for an MBBS program in China are considered non-stringent. At the time of writing this note, candidates do not need to pass any pre-qualifying medical examination in Nepal in order to apply to a Chinese university nor submit any test score, such as a Graduate Record Exam (GRE) equivalent, other than high school grades.

Study for China as well as the *Circular on Education for Foreign Medical Students* were found to be limited except for students' positive experience with clinical procedures and assistance from "qualified" and "caring" teachers. However, acquisition of "solid" medical knowledge, an objective of the Circular, was challenging owing to the language barrier as well as the limited proficiency of some teachers in English, in addition to other learning challenges.

It may be acknowledged that carving a niche of influence based on attracting students to China through cost advantage can be considered a mark of success in the education market, just as pricing in the business world is considered a selling proposition and a differentiation strategy. But it is important, at the same time, that customer satisfaction and product quality are not compromised. Given this analogy, while holding attraction for Nepalese students is a sign of soft power or a mark of the success of international education strategy, the gaps in student expectations between China's promotion of its programs and the experience of students in obstacles to full gains in knowledge, such as lack of adequate clinical exposure as highlighted in Chapter V, detract from the attractiveness of Chinese education and pose a challenge to building a brand name for it.

But when it comes to easing the language barrier, Chinese universities seem to have limited leeway because while they may appoint more proficient instructors, they cannot possibly identify, shortlist and present to Nepalese interns the patients who can communicate in English. In China around 10 million people in the population of 1.3 billion can speak English. In the mainland China, cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, Jiangsu have more English speakers than other cities. Even if prospective

students decide to target these areas for study, it is not certain that their patients would be English speakers. There appears to be a built-in handicap that demands creative solutions to provide better clinical experience to Nepalese interns or other foreign students. A question arises: how would patient's prejudices based on skin color be addressed? Even if Chinese doctors or instructors could accompany all Nepalese interns, it would be a quick-fix solution rather than amelioration of social prejudices.

Focus on enrollment versus other ingredients of attraction. For the Chinese authorities, the reasons why Nepalese students choose to study in China do not apparently matter anymore than their current prime concern for increasing international enrollment, including that of Nepalese students, to meet the official target of having 500,000 foreign students by 2020 to become a hub of international education. As such, offering scholarships is an important mechanism to attract students from Nepal ("China awards university-level scholarships," 2017). As Ding (2016), who examined experiences of international students in Shanghai, observes, "China...has chosen to focus on strategies that can quickly increase international enrollment in the short term, such as increasing the supply of government scholarships" (p. 335). Besides, the students who self-funded their education certainly contributed to Chinese coffers. As Haugen (2013) notes in the context of China's "neoliberal educational structuring," "China—like several Western countries— aspires to become a primary destination for self-funding foreign students, who pay much higher fees than the domestic students" (p. 7).

Furthermore, another objective of the *Plan for Study in China* is "to generate a large number of graduates who both understand China and contribute to connecting China to the rest of the world." It is pertinent to cite Singh (2010) in Nepal's context:

A large number of Nepalese students, mainly those who have failed to get into engineering and medical colleges in Nepal or India, throng to China to study at facilities especially created for them. Nepal, with population of 2.8 crores [28 million] has 14 medical colleges. The Chinese have a very nonchalant attitude where teaching these students is concerned, for their primary aim is to brainwash the young minds of the Nepalese to the Chinese communist way of thinking, primed to turn Maoists on return to their homeland. (p. 107)

Be that as it may, China is currently aspiring to strengthen the base of Nepalese students studying in China by using scholarships and low cost to fuel their recruitment. While it requires further investigation as to how brainwashing is taking place, it is apt to mention that a former student at Shanghai University said in an interview in this study that after communists came to power in China, gender equality came to prevail, reflecting in women's higher representation in the workforce. Also, Chapter VII illuminates especially positive views of China, based on both interviews and online sources. In any case, the lack of brand reputation might be limiting the number of international enrollment in China.

China's potential for attraction in the social sciences disciplines. Nepalese students go to China mainly for medicine and engineering disciplines. In the telephone conversation (September 22, 2017), Lok Raj Baral,²¹ executive chairman of Nepal Contemporary Studies, stated that China's higher education system does not hold attraction for Nepalese students. He added that given the liberal orientation of Nepalese students in contrast to those in the communist regime, study of the social sciences in

²¹ The expert's name appears with his consent.

China would not attract students from Nepal while medicine and engineering have been the dominant disciplines of Nepalese students' study in China. Similarly, Madhukar S.J.B. Rana²² stated:

[The] Role of higher education is rising as more and more students opt for China, particularly in Medicine and Engineering. When China develops world class universities with international faculty, as they have now planned to do, it is likely that enrolment will increase in arts, humanities, social sciences and, particularly, banking and management. (Madhukar SJB Rana, personal communication, September 25, 2017)

Similarly, when I was looking for participants in this study, a huge pool of medical students on social media was available. As a result, the data on medical students' experience is more extensive. Fewer students in the social sciences disciplines were interviewed. Also, three out of the five interviewees in social sciences had studied in China under special programs for a semester or a year (such as the Yes China program) while they were enrolled in degree programs in Nepal. Hence, only the remaining two, the doctoral students, were enrolled in the degree program in China itself. However, a couple of points suggest future developments in increasing attraction to China's higher education in the area of social sciences. First, given that China is a major force in international politics, interest in China studies may step up in the future. For instance, my respondents in social sciences were focused on China (such as the Ph.D. topic on China or the course on China's foreign policy initiative on the BRI). Second, China is popularizing its foreign policy programs, such as the much famous BRI which extends to

²² The expert's name appears with his consent.

the South Asian region, by introducing “OBOR Scholarships.” These factors produce a potential for growth in enrollments in social sciences.

But how is social science important for China? First, it offers a fertile ground to espouse pro-China views or make a case for China in course material and pedagogy, which may impact the foreign students, especially from non-developed countries, in forming a favorable opinion of China. Second, in its “knowledge war with the West,” China stands to gain by slowly but steadily injecting what it terms “China’s theoretical innovations” in securing audiences for Chinese theoretical constructs. For instance, participants in my study were familiar with such concepts as “socialism with Chinese characteristics” — the concept that was incorporated into the constitution of the Chinese Communist Party as “the Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era” in October 2017. Below is an excerpt from an article that further clarifies the context behind this line of reasoning:

The Chinese leadership is seeking global recognition for its indigenous theories, social science evaluations, and Chinese philosophy. It has flung a challenge to political liberalism, a reigning Western ideology, and has seemingly entered the intellectual warfare or the contest over recognition of “theoretical innovations”—the phenomenon that goes beyond the ideological clashes of the Cold War era. In other words, just as theories or concepts developed by American scholars have dominated the methodological landscape in plethora of social sciences literature, especially after the end of the Cold War and the accompanying triumph of neoliberalism, the Chinese leadership has embarked on the ambitious agenda of hoisting the flag of Chinese intellectual might. (Jain, 2017, p.14)

Futuristic scenarios. This section sheds light on China's attractiveness based on the reputation of its institutions.

Reputation as an attraction? Of late, Chinese universities have been marketing themselves on the basis of world ranking of higher institutions. In the first China Education Fair held in March 2017 in Nepal, Judy Shen, Program Manager at University of Science and Technology of China told Xinhua, China's official press agency, "Our university is one of the top universities among Chinese universities and world widely [sic] stands at Top 200... We offer various scholarship programs so we thought we can attract more Nepali students to study" ("China education fair," 2017, para. 8). Clearly, scholarships and ranking are the selling propositions in universities' promotional activities in Nepal. But China's ranking has not helped it in substantively impacting Nepalese students' perception of Chinese higher education program. It is true that most of my participants have been in China for the past four to five years, while China's universities figured in the top 20 brands in the Times Higher Education ranking in 2017. But even as far back as 2011, Chinese universities ranked among the top 45, with Tsinghua University occupying the 35th place. But no interviewee referred to China's ranking as a decisive or as a factor at all in their decision to study in China. China was actually a low-cost destination for them.

Given that China's education fairs started recently, the ranking factor might reflect in students' choice to study in China in the future, though it is difficult to say whether China would surpass the Western countries in their first choice to study abroad. Students who could afford to study in other countries would probably still skip China. Why? First, China is still a developing country. Some Nepalese student participants in

this study aspired to undertake further study or work in the United States. Further, as a student in my study said, people in Nepal at large are not much aware of China's advances in science, technology and economy. Second, although China's reputed universities such as Tsinghua and Peking University are rivaling top Western universities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics research, they are "not as strong" (Lane, 2017) in the life sciences, medicine, and the social sciences (Bothwell, 2017). Third, if immigration is what prospective students are aiming at, China may not be among top choices because of perceptions such as it is a communist regime with a lack of freedom, the difficulty of getting Nepalese food, and the language issue. As participants in my study said, they had held such images before coming to China. Unless China is able to address these perceptions and images, it will continue to lag behind other countries in attracting self-funded students from Nepal.

Another question arises. If Nepal's education system is reformed along the lines of affordability and an increase in the number of medical colleges, would it impact prospective students' choice of China? In other words, how sustainable is China's charm that largely thrives on the ills of Nepal's domestic education system? What if other countries come to offer the same advantage? How competitive would China be then?

Prevailing competition with other countries. Given that my participants expressed a desire to pursue further education in the United States, it suggests that China is more of a sojourn, in response to exigencies of the situation, rather than a dream destination. In this regard, its soft power is evidently fragile in comparison with the overwhelming attraction the US holds. The source of this attraction is not simply the worldwide reputation of American universities (or to say, the US is an established brand)

but also the implicit goal of settling in the US. For instance, several Nepalese students who are pursuing an MBBS from China plan to take the US Medical Licensing Examination (MLE) in order to practice in the US, while a Nepalese Ph.D. candidate in China plans to pursue a Ph.D. degree from the US after completing his program in China. China's visa policy, though relaxed recently, is not favorable to foreign students even though China is of late seeking foreign talent in select areas such as technology that may drive innovation in China. But in any case, the reputation of China as a whole is not as strong as that of the United States when it comes to the first choice in studying and staying. Thus, though China has established world-class universities with global repute, competition from the US soft power emerges from the reputation of the country, which means that the challenge for China is to take on an established brand.

Cultural and Language Dissemination

This is yet another soft power aim. Nepal is part of an overall project of China in its drive to become a cultural soft power. As observed in an article in the *Economist*, "China hopes foreigners will take up some of its traditional customs...The Communist Party wants China's cultural presence to reach everywhere..." ("China spending billions," 2017, para. 8). This mission demands the spread of Chinese cultural influence in terms of attraction for and consumption of Chinese cultural products such as movies. The following major themes have emerged based on findings in Chapter VI.

Cultural awareness versus cultural embracement/consumption. Nepalese students in China gained more cultural exposure in comparison to those studying at the Confucius Institute. They became familiar with Chinese festivals and traditions and had fun during celebrations. Except for a couple of students who liked Chinese food, none

had a liking for Chinese food, and no one reported viewing Chinese movies. The area where Chinese culture attracted several Nepalese students was the beauty of the country, specifically as they saw during travel, reflecting in cultural sites. For instance, a former student said, “Their museums are very impressive...the things that were preserved there, and all those cultural sites, historical sites were very well-preserved. I went to Chengdu...When you walk there, it feels like it’s 5,000 years old” (Samir). His observation underscores the cultural value the Chinese place on preserving artifacts. This value is mirrored in the statement of the mayor of Kathmandu Metropolitan City in Nepal regarding what Nepal might learn from China: “Nepal is rich in culture, language and festivals which should be preserved for future generations. Chinese experience on preservation and development of cultural heritages can be very useful for us.” On their part, students at the Confucius Institute got to know positive things about China such as its civilization and culture, while previously they had largely perceived China as a maker of substandard goods.

Overall, there is more awareness of than attraction for Chinese culture. In fact, culture does not figure high in student impressions and experiences. China is a ‘newcomer’ on the cultural scene, whereas for centuries Nepal has shared cultural affinity with India. Nepalese people are used to Indian food, entertainment, music, dresses, and are fans of Indian entertainment figures. For instance, Bhandari (2017) notes in *Sixth Tone*, an online publication on China:

China is taking its chances and investing heavily to make its mark on the entertainment landscape in countries such as Nepal...China’s soft power offensive is still dwarfed in many countries by competition from India and South Korea.

Bollywood [India's film industry] enjoys enormous popularity in South Asian and Middle Eastern countries due to linguistic and cultural similarities, while South Korean pop music has been successful in captivating teens across Asia with its catchy tunes and flashy style. (para. 7)

Bhandari (2017) also writes that Tsering Rhitar Sherpa, a Kathmandu-based filmmaker, is leading China's Ode to Joy TV series project in Nepal but finds it challenging because "most Nepalis look to India and its often-patriarchal soap operas" (para. 4). This was found true in the case of the interviewees also. For instance, Nisha, a respondent in my study, wrote, "I did not have much idea about Chinese culture due to our cultural affinity [with India]. These visits [organized by the Chinese institution to Chinese historical places] gave me a chance to know about [their] values and culture." As evident from students' experiences, cultural awareness is increasing, though cultural embracement is challenging. It may be added that China has achieved phenomenal success in the consumer market in Nepal. As Shakya (2015) notes:

Particularly among the Nepali elite, China has a positive image not because of aid but because it has replaced India as the source of sought-after goods. Its consumer products are penetrating every level of the market from refrigerators to cellphones, and almost 100% of cellphones sold in Nepal are Chinese-made.

Among social media users, China's WeChat system²³ is the most popular means of communication among Nepalis. (para. 3)

China is apparently keen on replicating this success on the cultural front. As far as

²³ This thesis does not delve into the specificities of Nepalese people's use of WeChat, such as the impact on Nepal's security (because of possible Chinese surveillance) or the user privacy. But the popularity of WeChat among Nepalese cannot be denied. Participants in this study were also users of WeChat, though interviewed them via other tools.

language dissemination is concerned, online sources revealed a growing popularity of the Chinese language among Nepalese students and professionals. Those who learned Chinese at the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University (CIKU) reported forgetting how to speak it, apparently because they did not get to speak it once they finished the course. In comparison, those who had studied and stayed in China had a better ability to speak Chinese because of the requirement to learn Chinese in the first year of the program and through practice gained out of speaking Chinese with Chinese people in public places such as shops. Thus, although CIKU has emerged as an important avenue for Chinese language learners, its effectiveness in benefiting the learners is not much in evidence. Though online sources feature stories of Nepalese sellers and tourists benefiting from learning Chinese, gains for regular students in acquiring Chinese-speaking skills were not reported in the interviews because of the limitations of the program and lack of opportunities to practice.

Furthermore, the Chinese government's projection of the CI as one meeting the global demand for learning Chinese did not match with the participants' perception of the CI as serving China's interests such as promotion of its goods, projection of the China's image, and cultural appeal. In other words, the participants did not have any particular appreciation for the CI other than having fun at the Institute. As a former student shared, his impression was that China was reaching out to Nepalese people to promote its language rather than the other way around. Thus, on the cultural front, China's soft power has not made substantial gains in appeal to Nepalese students. However, a soft power benefit in terms of projecting a positive image of China or introducing China to Nepalese students has been an achievement of the Confucius Institute, as highlighted in Chapter

VI. This aspect echoes the viewpoint of Gil (2009) who writes: "...but the actual influence and benefits China gains from this project [the Confucius Institute] are currently limited to shaping preferences in language learning and attitudes towards China" (pp. 59-60). As such, my findings in Nepal's context contradict the opinion of Falk Hartig who has researched Confucius Institutes. He says:

I think only people who have a rather positive image of China would go to a Confucius Institute. So no one who really has issues with China would go to a Confucius Institute and afterwards would say: "Oh, the Confucius Institute really changed my perception of China." (Funnell, 2015, para. 34)

Chinese values in practice. As far as Chinese values are concerned, participants reported mixed experiences. While they were impressed with work-ethic and motivation on the part of Chinese and found Chinese people warm and friendly, they reported unpleasant experiences of racial prejudices and color discrimination and found social indifference to others' concerns amid busyness of life given to work, technology, and money-making. The lack of empathy is corroborated by online stories of "deepening moral crisis" (Zhang, 2011) in China such as lack of care and response for a TV journalist in pain on the flight and even after the landing of the plane (MTJ828, 2015); and the public's neglect of the plight of the two-year old girl who was run-over twice.

Discrimination by skin color among Chinese patients was noted by some Nepalese students in Chinese medical programs. Even though some participants apparently internalized discrimination saying, "it happens everywhere," the fact that such practices interfered with their internship experience and part-time jobs points to the social characteristic that is at odds with the Chinese leadership's vision of a harmonious

Chinese society.

Imprint of the West: Western soft power? Evident in participants' perceptions and observations was the impact of the West on China in terms of culture, education, and lifestyle. In fact, students' use of the words "copying the West" suggests that the Chinese leadership is faced with the challenge of presenting Chinese culture in a purer form to outsiders as it sets its eyes on spreading its cultural appeal outside the home frontiers. Is there a wide mismatch between President Xi Jinping's vision and reality? In its cultural scramble with the West, the foreign perception among Nepalese students that Chinese society is "copying" the West exposes the limitations of President Xi Jinping's zealous attempts to sustain China's "cultural lifeline" by restoring Confucianism. On September 24, 2014, in his address to the International Confucian Association in Beijing in commemoration of the 2,565th anniversary of the birth of Confucius, President Jinping stated:

The ideology and culture of today's China is also the continuation and sublimation of traditional Chinese ideology and culture. To understand present-day China, to know the present-day Chinese, one must delve into the cultural bloodline of China, and accurately appreciate the cultural soil that nourishes the Chinese people. (Jinping, 2014, para. 24)

Also, this study revealed several students' experience of preference to Western people in jobs and fairer treatment in Chinese society. While on the one hand, the Chinese leadership, fired by hyper-nationalism, is attempting to take on the West in the global power hierarchy, on the other hand, the mindset and attitude of the Chinese society appears self-defeatist—rather, the captive of the calcified inferiority complex vis-à-vis

the West. Furthermore, the observation of a participant in this study that it is the Confucius Institute that is urging foreign countries like Nepal to learn Chinese (not the other way around) echoes the key message in an article in *The Economist*, “China spends billions to make the world love it.” According to David Shambaugh, it spends around \$10 billion a year on the soft power project to sell its “brand”—a state-sponsored “image building program”— “one that has the ability to attract people from other countries in the way that America does with its culture, products and values” (“China is spending billions,” 2017, para. 2).

Creating a Constituency of Supporters

Joseph Nye, the originator of the concept of soft power, considers attractiveness or agreement with a country’s foreign policy a source of its soft power, assessed through a foreign audience’s endorsement to the country’s foreign policy, their positive images, reservoir of goodwill, and their receptivity to its presence or strategic initiatives in one’s own country, whether related to trade, business, or geopolitics. In this regard, foreign youth are considered a crucial source of support because they are future leaders whether in politics, business, or any other field, and also important actors in bilateral relationship. This study reveals that China has a growing constituency of admirers in Nepalese students, including professionals who studied in China. The participants included those currently working in Chinese companies in Nepal as well as those who looked forward to working with Chinese companies or organizations.

In addition, analysis of data from online sources revealed that the Arniko Society is involved in boosting Nepal’s cultural linkages with China, co-organizing China education exhibitions (and thus promoting Chinese higher education programs), as well

as serving China's strategic interests in Nepal such as on the Tibet issue. Interestingly, the involvement of the Arniko Society in the Tibet issue, in whatever degree, exhibits China's soft power influence over the Society, which in turn strengthens China's hard power over Tibetans. Thus, it is a reinforcement of hardness through softness. Already, the Nepalese government has taken such measures against Tibetan refugees as detainment of those who attempt to cross over to India. In this regard, it is pertinent to quote the Nepalese journalist Sradda Thapa who finds a conflict between Nepal's democratic identity and the treatment meted out to Tibetans. She remarks, "We are a sovereign state and it puzzles my generation — who were taught to value democracy — to witness our government deny the same to Tibetans in Nepal" (Bork, 2011, Nepal's Community section, para. 7).

The following observation of China expert David Shambaugh also fits in this emerging scenario in Nepal, though Shambaugh's views are in the context of China's education diplomacy in East Asia.

Calculating the influence of this academic training on future generations of Asian elites will be difficult to measure with any precision, but their experiences while in China will certainly sensitize them to Chinese viewpoints and interests. In addition, they will possess knowledge of the Chinese language, as well as Chinese society, culture, history, and politics. Those who enter officialdom may be more accommodating of Chinese interests and demands. They will also share personal connections with former classmates and will move up through professional hierarchies simultaneously. (Shambaugh, 2004/2005, p. 78)

However, what is also important for unleashing the potential of goodwill is the

role of society in general — how it treats foreign students. While the Chinese government wants positive narratives about China to flourish, which is crucial for building soft power, the negative impressions about the Chinese society could undermine the goodwill that China might be earning among Nepalese students through scholarships or by building infrastructure in their country. Hence, soft power turns out to be the fine sand that slips through easily; it could be lost with inattention to one aspect of attraction regardless of the strength in another.

There is also a word of caution for the Nepalese youth. If they are not aware of the complexity of political and economic issues surrounding China's investment, with implications for Nepal's interest, it would be naive on their part to support China's initiatives without appraisal on rational grounds. For instance, China is pushing for its traditional medicine (TCM) in Nepal through the Arniko Society, consisting of doctors and other professionals who studied in China. If TCM finds inroads into Nepalese market, it will benefit China monetarily and culturally especially in competition with the Western medicine. However, given the controversy surrounding the efficacy of TCM, Nepalese doctors and medical authorities would need to be cautious in endorsing it. Similarly, the "strict conditions" attached with Chinese investments is not new to South Asia. In fact, the stringency was cited as a factor in why South Asian countries such as Nepal were compelled to scrap deals such as the one on the hydropower project. A social sciences student in this study spoke of the responsibility of Nepal to derive gains from ties with China. In his words, "we have to make sure that we are getting benefits out of this relationship." Interestingly, Nepalese students interviewed in this study endorsed China's BRI, believing it to be in Nepal's interest by providing routes for supply of

Nepalese goods and by ending India's monopoly. But they are not experts who have got details on how the BRI actually helps Nepal.

As noted by Bhaskar Koirala, an expert on Nepal-China relations:

OBOR [BRI] is important for Nepal but this is not everything for us. We have never talked about getting our basics on the trade with China right. We have huge trade deficit with China as well. We are primarily an agriculture-based economy. But we never talk about exporting our agro-goods to China. At the moment, Nepali agricultural products are not allowed into Chinese market. We need to negotiate with China to get preferential access for our agricultural goods.

(Koirala, 2017, last para.)

Hence, the onus is on the Nepalese youth to protect their country's interest through a deeper understanding of complex issues with competence to negotiate with China.

Building a Positive Image

Building a positive image underpins an overarching motivation to build soft power. Mixed images of China based on academic, cultural and social experiences have been presented in the preceding section. It further emerges from this study that China's political system (governance more specifically) and its foreign policy initiative – the BRI – have found favor with Nepalese students. It may be recalled that political system and foreign policy are sources of soft power in Joseph Nye's framework.

Interestingly, as experts say, China has focused more on the cultural part of soft power, knowing that its political system is not found favorable to the West. However, of late Chinese President Xi Jinping has been more vocal in advancing the Chinese model of

development. In fact, China's governance drew accolades from Nepalese students with several of them favoring such system in their own country (for example, in terms of less politicization of the Nepalese society), and the rest of them – while not wanting to emulate the Chinese system – did praise the Chinese system for delivering the goods. It turns out that if the political elites in their country could deliver, Nepalese students would not have spoken favorably of China's system. But it is not certain that the replication of China's political model would guarantee good governance elsewhere. Instead, political reform in terms of institutional capacity and political will could be less risky and more desirable. In any case, what is worth-noting is that China has found a constituency for its political system among some Nepalese youth who seem to have lost faith in their own political leaders. As such, Nepalese students' perception of Chinese political system is that it injects political and social discipline and fosters economic progress.

Major gains to China in the realm of foreign policy are three-fold, which are explained as below.

China versus the West. Nepalese students' unfavorable views of the West reflected in their criticism of the Western media, the Western (Anglo-American) model of development, the curriculum focus on Western values such as courses in Nepal that incorporate exclusively Western theories, and the dominant Western theoretical construct in international relations. These views were expressed by the students in the social sciences program. Concomitantly, they exhibited familiarity and appreciation for concepts employed by the Chinese leaders such as “harmonious civilization,” and “socialism with Chinese characteristics.” Such an attitude is perhaps a vindication of the

Chinese government's efforts to curb the influence of the West in China — for instance, Western values and Western curriculum.

Negative effect on India's influence. Mostly online sources revealed Nepalese students' admiration for China's "policy of non-intervention," which had a concealed reference to comparison with India. Interestingly, these views were published in *The China Daily*, which is China's official newspaper. But in any case, China's soft power in Nepal is being built around the context of India. It is being welcomed as a counterweight to India's monopoly of the routes to supply goods, making Nepalese youth look to China for friendship and Nepal's development. Ironically, a participant in this study specifically mentioned the blockade of 2015 and admired China for its humanitarian help.

Importantly, he did not mention the Indian government's aid and the Indian people's support. Comparing the attitude of Indian public and Chinese people in solidarity with Nepal, Tsering Shakya notes:

The earthquake in Nepal did not arouse a wave of public sympathy in China, unlike the mass support and concern conveyed in India...The earthquake was hardly discussed on the vibrant social media in China, and there was no rush among the public to collect donations to send to Nepal. ("Is China building up," 2015, para. 4)

Finally, the respondents (social science students)²⁴ in this study were supportive of the BRI, which runs counter to India's non-acceptance of the project. Interestingly, their perceptions of China's foreign policy were framed by the context of Nepal, rather than being informed or influenced by China's aggressive postures elsewhere such as

²⁴ It does not mean that medical students were not supportive. But social science students specifically referred to BRI in telling about their knowledge of China.

muscle-flexing in the South China Sea and rejection of the international tribunal's ruling in the South China Sea case (Phillips, Holmes and Bowcott, 2016, July 12). Nevertheless, Nepalese students alluded favorably to Indian teachers, Indian peers and Indian cuisine in their responses in this study.

Conclusion

To sum up, this study addressed the following research question: what is the relationship between Nepalese students' experiences and China's soft power aims? The sub-questions centered on the students' academic experiences and experiences with social, cultural and political values of China as well as China's soft power aims in Nepal. Gains to China in soft power consist in (a) wielding a positive image among Nepalese students largely because of, what the students found, China's good governance (or the deliverance capacity of its political system) beauty of the country, infrastructural development, and certain traits of the Chinese people such as diligence; (b) familiarizing Nepalese students with Chinese culture such as festivals; and (c) finding a base of supporters in Nepalese youth for China's strategic interests in Nepal. However, China's soft power or attraction is lacking in three areas: the image of its education system; its cultural penetration; and the image of its society. Apart from getting a couple of positive remarks, China's education system did not win admiration of the Nepalese students nor does it have a brand reputation in Nepal. Also, China's cultural appeal to Nepalese students was not found to be strong, while the experiences of racism and xenophobia formed negative images of the Chinese society among Nepalese students. As such, China faces some serious deficiencies as it strives to build soft power in Nepal.

CHAPTER IX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing chapters, this chapter outlines the major implications of this study for international education, the soft power concept, and the existing literature. Afterwards, it offers recommendations, discusses the limitations of the study, and presents the conclusion.

Major Implications

The key implications of this study are grouped into the following: travesty of international education; exclusivity of soft power; international education as a platform of foreign policy; difference in experiences of other foreign students; and convergence with and divergence from Nye's framework.

Travesty of International Education

Realistically speaking, China's soft power gains in attracting Nepalese students and exposing them to China are partly pedestalled on the ills of and loopholes in Nepal's education system. Thus, in the scenario of international education, while one country is internationalizing its institutions to become a global hub, the other has caused disillusionment among its own youth because of unaffordable medical education, lack of provision of installments, and corruption in admission process. While some online

sources (Kharel, 2013), as mentioned before, highlight cases of “incompetence” and lack of seriousness on the part of students who could not get admission in Nepal, it does not absolve the domestic system of its flaws.

Interestingly, Nepalese policy makers are relying on foreign countries to build the country’s human capital base and are keen to foster friendly ties with them but do not seem interested in stemming the domestic rot. For instance, at the opening ceremony of the China Education Exhibition in Kathmandu in May 2013, Nepalese Minister of Education Madhav Paudel, the chief guest, stated, “China is developing very fast and we have very good friendly relations with China. By these educational opportunities and exchanges, Nepali and Chinese people will have good friendly relations in people to people level” (“Nepali students throng,” n.d., para. 4). In this process, they seem to be ignoring the “compulsions” driving Nepalese students to study abroad. For example, an MBBS student said in a sunken voice that he could not get admission in Nepal despite good percentage because he came from a middle-class family without adequate financial power to get into the system. He intended to complete his degree in China so that he could go back and take care of his mother and sister. Karuna said that if there were more colleges or medical seats in Nepal, she would have preferred studying in her own country. She also said that people in Nepal do not appreciate what difficulties Nepalese students go through in studying in a foreign country and rather downplay the academic achievements in studying in China. In her words:

We have friends here but how much will they help? In Nepal, we have family support. Who can help us here? They can’t. So we have to do everything on our own. We have to bear responsibility. It’s difficult. We wish we studied in Nepal-

we would have got better experience. Here we are getting but we are not that satisfied.

Though the above respondent pointed to help from friends and also from teachers (Chapter V), she pointed to challenges of living in a foreign country without family, such as sickness. Another student's response reflected determination when she urged fellow Nepalese students to prove that they were not inferior to doctors trained elsewhere, that is, outside China, and called upon them to take studies seriously rather than frittering away time on fun. As such, it is high time Nepalese policy makers and education authorities address the limitations of higher education institutions in Nepal. This is especially important because the medical students shared that they do not get enough clinical exposure in China owing to such barriers as the language and that they rather preferred the Nepalese teachers' active role in clarifying the concepts that they had experienced in Nepal before coming to China. Reforms may also include permitting Nepalese graduates to do internships in Nepal because the interns highly value the local experience. In other words, while China may be celebrating its soft power gains and while Nepalese leaders may be cheering over finding human capital formation avenues, the Nepalese higher education sector has been relegated to the persisting practices that could benefit from reform.

Exclusivity of Soft Power: Zero-Sum Gains

China's soft power benefits can be juxtaposed against disadvantages to both Nepal and India. Let us take Nepal first. Nepalese students were found comparing governance in their own country to that in China, with disdain for the political system in Nepal. It causes a sentiment of deficit toward admiration for one's own country and a

gain in approbation for another. The ideological benefit to China on the front of one party rule is issuing from the lack of sound governance in Nepal. The first-hand evidence of development impressed on the study participants the necessity of political reform in Nepal, though not necessarily in terms of adopting the Chinese system. Similarly, this study underscores significance for Indian policy makers and practitioners who need to be circumspect in relaying messages to the Nepalese youth. Unlike Chinese authorities, the Indian bureaucracy or the Indian Embassy in Nepal is not assiduous or even attentive in cultivating the current generation or the Nepalese students who studied in India, which testifies to loopholes in Indian public diplomacy.

Difference in Experiences of Other Foreign Students

This study addresses a serious deficiency by reflecting the nearly unique voice and perspective of Nepalese students in the existing literature on China's international education, which is heavily focused on other regions, notably Africa. Some instances may be noted here. The findings in terms of student satisfaction and China's soft power benefits underscore some variation. For example, Haugen (2013) writes in the context of experience of African students in China, "teaching methods based on rote learning and discouragement of critical engagement with the teacher during class caused frustration" (p. 13). On the contrary, in this research the respondents from social science backgrounds pointed out that classes were interactive, while medical students had a problem with the lack of English proficiency. Also, Haugen concludes, "the main effect of the current influx of African students to China is not to enhance the illustrious Chinese soft power. Rather, it is yet another manifestation of China's growing old-fashioned economic power based on the export of manufactured goods" (p. 17). In contrast, this study brings out the

soft power factor as an effect of Nepalese students' exposure to China.

Second, participants in this study had a mix of negative and positive experiences with Chinese society, rather than mostly negative experiences that are documented in the case of student respondents in Gillespie's (2001) study. Importantly, Nepalese students did not report encountering institutional discrimination or prejudices while Gillespie revealed African students' bitter experiences on campus as well. Similarly, though both in Gillespie's (2001) research and in this study, financial considerations prominently weighed in students' decision to study in China, the Gillespie's participants spoke about receiving scholarships as "an enabling factor," while participants in this study — most of whom were self-funded — mentioned affordability and alternative destination (for example, because of non-admission in the home country) as primary reasons.

Furthermore, unlike participants in Gillespie (2001) who wished to study abroad in any case (though China was mostly not the first choice), medical interviewees in this study had compulsion to study abroad or in China for the reasons outlined in Chapter V.

While the above areas of comparison are some examples, readers will get to discern more points of comparison with the existing literature, including students' impressions of and experiences with the Confucius Institute.

Connection with the Institutional Integration Scales Model

Though this study, which is qualitative, did not use Institutional Integration Scales (IIS) to examine students' university experience, the responses of the participants in some measure fall into the components of this model. The IIS was used by Dong and Chapman (2010) in their investigation of perceptions of Chinese government scholarship recipients in Shanghai and Beijing in relation to the experience in China. Dong and Chapman

(2010) modified the IIS which was originally developed by Pascarella and Terenzini (1980) to examine college experience of students in the United States. Its subscales are the following: peer group interactions; interactions with faculty; faculty concern for student development and teaching; academic and intellectual development; and institutional and goal commitment. The first three components measure social integration and the last two measure academic integration of the students. While social integration relates to “the informal education of students” (Lyons, 2007, p. 10), academic integration pertains to “both grade performance and his [/her] intellectual development during the college years” (Tinto, 1975, p. 104).

Let us see how the model reflects in my research findings. In terms of peer interaction, respondents reported less interaction with Chinese peers because of separate classes and separate accommodation, though sharing the class with students from other countries provided a multicultural ambiance. However, help from Chinese peers in translating technical terms was reported by an aeronautical engineering major. Though interaction with the Chinese faculty did not figure starkly in students’ responses, other than classroom discussions, faculty’s intervention in dealing with an unpleasant social situation was mentioned by a medical student. Faculty concern for students’ development reflected in student participants’ narration of the Chinese faculty’s attention to students’ diagnosis skills. In terms of goal commitment, medical students appeared to own personal responsibility for success as they talked of the importance of “self-study,” while also expressing dissatisfaction with the teaching style and the level of English proficiency of Chinese instructors.

International Education as a Platform for Foreign Policy

The findings on soft power aims, discussed in Chapter IV and subsequent chapters, underscore the elements of public diplomacy and state control in international education. First, public diplomacy manifests in its course offerings such as BRI courses that familiarize foreign students with China's flagship foreign policy project and in the activities of the Confucius Institute in Nepal in earning goodwill for China and spreading bright stories of China, including positive aspects of the Maoist revolution (in cases where the documentaries on Chinese history are shown to Nepalese students) and Chinese economy. Second, instructors in Chinese universities function under specific constraint when it comes to discussing "sensitive" issues; also, the instructors reportedly put forth China's case in such courses as international trade law and international relations. In fact, in the current regime led by President Xi Jinping, Chinese intellectuals have been instructed not to discuss the following seven issues: "universal values, freedom of the press, civil society, civil rights, past mistakes by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), crony capitalism, and judicial independence" (Li & McElveen, 2013, para. 2). Thus, the instructor's identity appears to be fused with the national identity in protecting China's national interest.²⁵ As Rachit, a Ph.D. participant in this study opined, Chinese academics have one way of thinking, which impinges on their research. This propensity was identified as a particular challenge to conducting research in social sciences in China.

Convergence with and Divergence from Nye's Framework

This study incorporated Nye's soft power framework— culture, political ideals

²⁵ However, one can find through media outlets the instances of Chinese academics such as Zhang Xuezhong and Xia Yeliang who have been defiant and have championed free speech and the rule of law.

and foreign policy— into the educational soft power model. Furthermore, Nye says that soft power consists in the “ability to shape the preferences of others” (Nye, 2004, p. 5). Using both interviews and archival literature, this study has revealed the crucial role of education in this regard. In brief, whether through the Confucius Institute or through exposure of Nepalese students to China, preferences of Nepalese students have been shaped in terms of their desire to learn Chinese, appreciation of the political system of China with a strengthening belief in the political reform in Nepal for development and political stability, and endorsement to China’s BRI project. However, some points of divergence from Nye’s views emerge in this study.

First, as mentioned in Chapter II, China’s notion of soft power encompasses economic inducement as a soft power tool (Kurlantzick, 2006), while Nye keeps inducement within the purview of hard power. From the Chinese perspective, foreign attraction toward the Chinese education program based on low cost and scholarships and the resulting increase in enrollments would constitute a gain in China’s soft power. In fact, the Chinese government raised the stipend of government scholarships for foreign students in 2015. Undergraduates, master’s students, and Ph.D. students will be entitled to 66,200 yuan (\$10,660), 79,200 yuan and 99,800 respectively on an annual basis (Rao, 2015).

Second, Nye includes political ideals as a source of soft power. Writing about attractiveness of American ideals, he notes, “Seduction is always more effective than coercion, and many values like democracy and human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive” (Nye, 2004, p. x). However, in this study, the outcome of governance, rather than China’s political ideals per se, held attraction for

Nepalese students. It is true that some participants in my study upheld belief in their own political system on the ground of civic freedom, but they converged on the understanding that China's single-party rule had quickened the development process. They were appreciative of the prevailing law and order in China, while lamenting the lack of political stability in Nepal with repercussions for development. As such, pragmatism rather than the nature of the political ideal per se permeated Nepalese students' perception of Chinese polity.

Third, comparing the US and China, Nye points out that much of America's soft power comes through its civil society such as universities and Hollywood, while Chinese soft power comes through state efforts or the government investment in soft power projects. As such, Nye considers it China's "soft power deficit." This study reveals that Chinese universities (which signifies the role of the civil society) contribute to China's soft power by offering low-cost options to foreign students. It must, however, be conceded that the academic freedom is limited by the Chinese government's guidelines such as restrictions on discussing certain topics. This partly lends credence to Nye's argument about the fragile role of civil society in China's soft power build-up. But interestingly, the soft power effect of the foreign civil society seems to be in the offing as China piggybacks on such sections of the Nepalese society such as the alumni association and the Nepal China Cultural and Educational Council to buttress its soft power outreach.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and implications of this study, key recommendations for a varied audience can be put forth. First, reforms in medical education in Nepal may include: lower costs; a provision to pay the tuition fee in installments; approval to

complete and internship in Nepal for Nepalese medical graduates from foreign countries; curbs on corruption in admission process; and increase in the number of medical seats in colleges. Second, Chinese universities can provide an enriching learning experience to international students through improvement in the English proficiency of the teachers. Third, it is critical for continuous improvement that they seek international students' feedback on their learning experiences and academic satisfaction. Fourth, reform in governance in Nepal would help address discontent among Nepalese youth who yearn for economic development and political stability. It is understandable there will need to be a collective effort of the Nepalese society as a whole to achieve this change as political leaders are just part and parcel of the society. Fifth, the Chinese leadership should realize that in attracting and winning the international students, as part of building build soft power, the mechanism of higher education is not enough. The mindset of the larger society, reflecting in openness to foreigners and non-discriminatory treatment, is essential for enhancing the nation's appeal.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations to this research include participant recruitment and representation. I attempted to triangulate the findings from the interviews with the Nepalese students who studied in China through interviews with participants who might bring additional perspectives, such as Confucius Institute teachers, the Nepalese Ministry of Education, and the Arniko Society. Also, I aimed to recruit students who are currently learning Chinese at the Confucius Institute in Kathmandu. But for the reasons mentioned in Chapter III, this could not be possible. Second, the interviews took place from off-site locations through communication devices. The positive aspect was that the use of

technology such as social media facilitated my identification of and access to participants from as many as six different regions of China. However, the current students at the Confucius Institute in Kathmandu could not be reached via social media (for example, the Facebook membership of the Institute's members is relatively low). As such, only the alumni were interviewed. Third, there were more males than females interviewed for this study. I had to rely largely on social media to contact prospective participants, and the social media outlets had a predominant membership of males (which could be possible because more Nepalese males than Nepalese females are studying in China).

Future research may include more non-medical students and more female participants. Also, by taking a field-trip to Nepal, a researcher may get to recruit current learners of the Chinese language at the Confucius Institute and thereby assess their learning outcomes and experiences in the current scenario at the Institute. If the researcher is also able to interview the Chinese language instructors at the Institute, it will triangulate the findings from interviews with the learners. However, it is not certain that the interviewees will open up to the researcher in a face-to-face interview, unlike the interviewees who shared certain eye-opening experiences with me over the phone or WhatsApp. The reverse could also be true – in which case, it will certainly be enriching for this research topic should a future researcher get the time to establish trust with the prospective interviewees and fathom their academic experiences at the Institute as well as their knowledge of China's socio-cultural and political values. Further, when conducting soft power research in countries whose political systems discourage candid appraisals of their programs, future researchers may need to establish rapport with prospective participants through personal meetings to assuage the participants' possible concerns in

sharing their experiences or information.

Furthermore, the role of online course offerings from China could be an additional area of investigation in exploring students' experiences. Also, it may focus on the institutional integration dimension in examining South Asian students' experiences through a quantitative perspective, as discussed in the section on implications.

Conclusion

In the context of China's internationalization of higher education (IHE), this study has at least three areas of significance. First, the findings provide a comprehensive analysis of the soft power underpinnings of internationalization of China's higher education vis-à-vis Nepal as well as an assessment of success in building soft power in relation to students' experiences. The domains of international relations (through the soft power concept) and higher education have intersected in this study to inform the literature on IHE. Second, by providing a picture of international students' experiences in the host country, this study should be a useful reference for reform in China and elsewhere. Third, the focus on South Asia bridges a critical gap in the IHE literature that has been confined to other regions, especially in relation to China.

Overall, China's soft power gains reflect in positive narratives in Nepalese students' description of China as a country marked by good governance — reflected in order, safety and security — and sound economic development, and also in appreciation for its BRI project as well as in the emergence of a constituency of supporters for advancing China's strategic interests in Nepal. As Chinese President Xi Jinping said in 2014, "We should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's message to the world" (Xi, 2014, para. 10). Also, an increased

number of Nepalese students are being exposed to China, which satisfies another objective of China's *Plan for Study in China*.

At the same time, there are serious challenges on other fronts. China has a long way to go in creating a brand name in Nepal, in spite of holding an impressive place in the global ranking of higher education institutions. The current focus of China is to boost enrollments as a mark of influence of its higher education program. But in the absence of reputation based on quality, it will continue to be surpassed by other countries in attracting self-funded students. Also, it will be a hard nut to crack if prospective students are swayed by their perception of the country as a whole rather than the ranking of institutions.

The fact that there is a greater awareness of Chinese culture and an increasing popularity of the Chinese language indicates a good beginning for China in Nepal, even though cultural penetration would be challenging. In terms of social experiences in China, the Nepalese students' observation of social apathy and experience of racism can be categorized as social disharmony and a social mindset unwelcoming of human diversity. It flings a challenge to the Chinese leadership's desire to see a spurt in positive accounts of China; its efforts to build the country's soft power is obstructed by prejudices entrenched in the Chinese society. Hence, it appears that China's soft power success hinges on the support of its civil society as well. By this reasoning, the soft power of countries — notably the United States (or the US society) — which are acclaimed for openness to foreigners, poses a challenge to China's soft power. Furthermore, the image of the US as a more advanced, affluent and open country holds attraction for Nepalese students who are interested in working in the US, if given an opportunity. However, the

silver lining for China is that with its generous offering of scholarships to foreign students, it is steadily getting an opportunity to project China's positive image in political governance and economic progress, especially among students from developing countries.

Despite the emerging base of China's supporters in Nepal, China's desired outcomes through friendship with Nepal are not guaranteed if Nepalese policy makers do not find cooperation with China a win-win outcome and also because of the complexities in decision-making and implementation in a democratic country like Nepal. It is not enough to win over individuals. In the words of Zhao Gancheng, head of South Asian studies at the Shanghai Institutes for International Studies, "China needs to protect itself more to guarantee that it is signing the deal with the whole country, not the person governing it at that moment" (Lo, 2017, para. 25). This observation was in the context of Nepal's withdrawal from the \$2.5 billion deal with China on building a dam on the Budhi Gandaki river (The Economic Times, 2017). It is argued that China's stringent financial terms as well as the "political divide" within Nepal (pro-India faction versus pro-China faction) led to Nepal's withdrawal.

As such, it is a moot question whether the Nepalese youth as future political elites are swayed by positive images of China or are cautious in protecting their country's national interest through better negotiation with China. As Nye (2006) admits, "Whether power resources [including the soft power ones] produce a favorable outcome depends upon the context" (para. 1). As such, several further questions arise. Would China cultivate a coterie of Nepalese alumni and professionals by providing financial incentives — the use of "hard soft power" — to circumvent possible domestic opposition to its

strategic initiatives in Nepal such as infrastructure projects? Currently, Nepalese alumni are mostly in the non-political field such as medicine and engineering. Would the Nepalese political elite in the future share an academic background of having studied in China? And does it matter? How concretely will China benefit from its attempt at a strategic utilization of higher education in the context of Nepal?

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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire for Students

Please answer the following questions. Those studying at the Confucius Institute can skip questions 8 through 12.

1. What is your age?
2. Please indicate your gender.
3. Which of the following applies to you?
 - a. Alumni
 - b. Currently studying in China
 - c. Studying at the Confucius Institute
4. What is the level of your proficiency in the Chinese language?
5. What was your academic qualification before joining this program?
6. In which country did you get your previous academic credentials?
7. What's your profession?
8. What's the name of your current university?
9. Are you pursuing/did you pursue a degree program or non-degree program in China?
10. What degree program are you pursuing/did you pursue and at what level in China?
11. How long have you been in China?
12. In which language are you receiving/did you receive instruction in China?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

For Current Students/Alumni

1. Could you talk about your experience as an international student in China?
 - a. In social, cultural and political terms
 - b. In terms of academic experience
 - c. In terms of comparison of academic experience in China to that in Nepal
2. What have you liked/did like being in China? What is it that you have not liked/didn't like or found challenging?
3. What did you learn about China and Chinese life from your experience?
 - a. What do you know about Chinese social values?
 - b. Is your feeling toward the experience a positive/negative/mixed one?
4. If you were to describe what it means to study in China, what would you say?
5. What tools and resources did you gain from your experience?
6. Was there anything that happened that you did not expect to happen?
 - a. What are/were your main reasons for studying in China?
 - b. What benefits are you expecting/did you expect from studying here?
7. Were there things you expected to happen that did not?
 - a. What are/were your main reasons for studying in China?
 - b. What benefits are you expecting/did you expect from studying here?
 - c. What are the challenges to realizing your expectations? (For current students)/To what extent have your expectations been met? (For alumni)
8. What are your plans for the future?

9. What advice would you give to a student from Nepal considering studying in China?

10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

For Students at the Confucius Institute

1. Could you talk about your experience as an international student in China?
 - a. In social, cultural and political terms
 - b. In terms of academic experience
 - c. In terms of comparison of academic experience in China to that in Nepal
2. What have you liked/did like being in China? What is it that you have not liked/didn't like or found challenging?
3. What did you learn about China and Chinese life from your experience?
 - a. What do you know about Chinese social values?
 - b. Is your feeling toward the experience a positive/negative/mixed one?
4. If you were to describe what it means to study at the Confucius Institute, what would you say?
5. What tools and resources did you gain from your experience?
6. Was there anything that happened that you did not expect to happen?
 - a. What are/were your main reasons for studying at the Confucius Institute?
 - b. What benefits are you expecting/did you expect from studying here?
7. Were there things you expected to happen that did not?
 - a. What are/were your main reasons for studying at the Confucius Institute?
 - b. What benefits are you expecting/did you expect from studying here?
 - c. What are the challenges to realizing your expectations? (For current

students)/To what extent have your expectations been met? (For alumni)

8. What are your plans for the future?
9. What advice would you give to a student from Nepal considering studying at the Confucius Institute?
10. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

For Experts

1. How did you come to be interested in Nepal-China foreign relations?
2. What do you know about Nepal-China higher education relationships?
3. What do you know about China's Confucius institutes, particularly the institute in Nepal?
4. What do you think are the driving factors behind China's involvement in the Nepalese higher education sector?
5. What are the mutual benefits and drawbacks of China's involvement in educating Nepalese students?
6. What do you think about the future of China-Nepal relationship in higher education?
7. What do you think are the objectives of China's soft power strategy in South Asia?
8. What is the role of higher education in serving China's soft power goals in South Asia?
9. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

Appendix C

No Objection Certificate

No Objection Certificate (NOC) (From
 2073/01/01 to 2073/09/30) by Countries (Source: NOC Section, MoE, 2016)

SN	Country	No. of Students	SN	Country	No. of Students
1	Australia	15549	25	Philippines	103
2	Japan	6880	26	Indonesia	101
3	USA	5509	27	Switzerland	97
4	India	2043	28	Portugal	97
5	Poland	1376	29	Bahrain	81
6	China	1287	30	Ireland	57
7	South Korea	553	31	Italy	54
8	Denmark	550	32	Georgia	54
9	Germany	493	33	Lithuania	46
10	Canada	476	34	UAE	44
11	Bangladesh	447	35	Spain	32
12	France	441	36	Hungary	27
13	New Zealand	432	37	Pakistan	24
14	Malaysia	361	38	Singapore	18
15	UK	283	39	Turkey	17
16	Finland	225	40	Sweden	15
17	Netherland	209	41	Mauritius	13
18	Malta	207	42	Estonia	12
19	Thailand	204	43	Belgium	9
20	Czech Republic	194	44	Russia	8
21	Cyprus	167	45	Austria	6
22	Slovenia	160	46	Mexico	5
23	Latvia	155	47	South Africa	5
24	Norway	140	48	Bulgaria	4

Appendix D

Consent Forms

Consent Form for Students Currently Studying in China/Alumni

My name is Romi Jain. I am a Ph.D. student with specialization in policy studies in the Urban Education Program at Cleveland State University.

I am conducting a research study on experiences of Nepalese students with regard to China's higher education programs. Dr. Anne Galletta is the principal investigator and Dr. Joanne Goodell is a co-investigator. Both are members of the College of Education and Human Services faculty at Cleveland State University.

If you agree to participate, I will ask you questions about your academic, social, cultural and political experiences during study in China. It will be one interview session with a possible follow-up session. Each will last about 45 minutes.

With your consent, I will record the interview by audio-tape/software. Your privacy will be maintained through one-one-one session(s), and you may end the interview at any time or choose not to answer a question.

Your answers will be kept confidential. The interview audio-tapes will be transcribed and given a code. Your name will not appear on transcription. Only members of the research team will have access to transcripts and tapes.

The information received in this interview, including interview excerpts, will be included in a publication(s) such as a book or an article or a report.

Your name will not be attached with the excerpts or transcripts or report(s).

Possible risks include discomfort from a 45-minute interview or emotional discomfort during experience sharing. In that case, you may stop the interview at any

time without penalty. Another possible risk is an unintended breach of confidentiality. To lessen this risk, audiotapes and the consent form will be kept in a locked cabinet in Dr. Galletta's office. The interview transcript will be maintained in Dr. Galletta's office and in password-protected computers of the research team for a minimum of three years.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Hence, you do not have to participate if you do not want to.

If you have any questions about this study, you may contact me at +1 (216) 370-3129 or by email at <r.jain17@vikes.csuohio.edu> or Dr. Anne Galletta at +1 (216) 802-3044 or Dr. Joanne Goodell at +1 (216) 687-5426.

This form has two copies. After signing them, please keep one copy for your records and return the other one.

Thank you in advance for your support and cooperation!

Please indicate your agreement to participate by signing below.

I am 18 years or older. I have read and understood this consent form. I agree to participate in the interview.

Yes No

I agree to have the interview audio-taped.

Yes No

I understand if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at +1 (216) 687-3630.

Name of Participant (please print) _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

**Consent Form for Alumni/Students Currently Studying at the Confucius Institute at
Kathmandu University, Nepal**

My name is Romi Jain. I am a Ph.D. student with specialization in policy studies in the Urban Education Program at Cleveland State University.

I am conducting a research study on experiences of Nepalese students with regard to China's higher education programs. Dr. Anne Galletta is the principal investigator and Dr. Joanne Goodell is a co-investigator. Both are members of the College of Education and Human Services faculty at Cleveland State University.

If you agree to participate, I will ask you questions about your academic, social, cultural and political experiences at the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University. It will be one interview session with a possible follow-up session. Each will last about 45 minutes.

With your consent, I will record the interview by audio-tape/software. Your privacy will be maintained through one-one-one session(s). You may end the interview at any time or choose not to answer a question.

Your answers will be kept confidential. The interview audio-tapes will be transcribed and given a code. Your name will not appear on transcription. Only members of the research team will have access to transcripts and tapes.

The information received in this interview, including interview excerpts, will be included in a publication(s) such as a book or an article or a report.

Your name will not be attached with the excerpts or transcripts or report(s).

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Yes No

I agree to have the interview audio-taped.

Yes No

I understand if I have any questions about my rights as a research subject, I can contact the Cleveland State University Institutional Review Board at +1 (216) 687-3630.

Name of Participant (please print) _____

Signature _____ Date: _____

Consent Form for Experts

My name is Romi Jain. I am a Ph.D. student with specialization in policy studies in the Urban Education Program at Cleveland State University.

I am conducting a research study on experiences of Nepalese students with regard to China's higher education programs. Dr. Anne Galletta is the principal investigator and Dr. Joanne Goodell is a co-investigator. Both are members of the College of Education and Human Services faculty at Cleveland State University.

If you agree to participate, I will ask you questions about experiences of Nepalese students in China and at the Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University. I will also ask you about the role of China's soft power strategy vis-a-vis Nepal. It will be one interview session with a possible follow-up session. Each will last about 45 minutes.

With your consent, I will record the interview by audio-tape/software. Your privacy will be maintained through one-one-one session(s), and you may end the interview at any time or choose not to answer a question.

Your answers will be kept confidential. The interview audio-tapes will be transcribed and given a code. Your name will not appear on transcription. Only members of the research team will have access to transcripts and tapes.

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Your name will not be attached with the excerpts or transcripts or report(s).

Possible risks include discomfort from a 45-minute interview or emotional discomfort during experience sharing. In that case, you may stop the interview at any time without penalty. Another possible risk is an unintended breach of confidentiality. To

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Name of Participant (please print) _____

Signature _____ Date: _____