

Asian Soft Power in Africa: China *plus* India

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China's rapid and escalating expansion in Africa has generated much interest in policy circles around the world. In a three-part series published in November 2013, the leading German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, reported that since 2000, trade volume between China and Africa had grown 20-fold, reaching \$200 billion in 2012. There were 2,000 Chinese companies operating in the resource-rich continent, it noted, and more than a million Chinese citizens were living in sub-Saharan Africa (Grill, 2013).

As one of the world's fastest growing markets, with abundant natural resources and a host of deep economic and political problems, Africa has been an area of interest for international powers, including from Asian countries (Cheru and Obi, 2010; Mawdsley and McCann, 2011, among others). Given the legacy of colonial occupation, exacerbated by the politics of the Cold War, the continent has well-established and deeply entrenched elite interests with European colonial powers, as well as with the United States, a legacy that Asian nations such as China have to adjust to. In this article, the focus is on another Asian emerging power, India and how its engagement with Africa is growing. Unlike the Chinese involvement, the Indian connection is largely based on private power not state support, drawing on its cultural and diasporic connections with Africa. The article suggests that there are areas where the two Asian giants can collaborate and thus complement their efforts and provide a new model for development, using their soft cultural and hard economic power.

The notion of 'soft power', associated with the work of Harvard political scientist Joseph Nye, is defined, simply, as 'the ability to attract people to our side without coercion'. In his most widely cited book *Soft Power*, Nye suggested three key sources for a country's soft power: '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)' (Nye 2004a: 11).

Though Nye's focus is primarily on the United States, it is a testimony to the power of the US in the international arena that the phrase 'soft power' has acquired global currency and is routinely used in policy and academic literature, as well as in elite journalism. The capacity of nations to make themselves attractive in a globalizing marketplace for ideas has become an important aspect of contemporary international relations, as has been the primacy of communicating a favourable image of a country in an era of a digitally connected and globalized media and communication environment, involving both state and non-state actors and networks. Unlike propaganda, which retains a negative connotation in democratic societies, soft power is perceived to be a more persuasive instrument of foreign policy and one which is conducted by states in conjunction with private actors as well as civil society groups.

Broadcasting Soft Power?

Despite the unprecedented growth of media and communication industries in the global South, particularly in large and economically fast-growing countries like China and India, the global media continue to be dominated by the US, given its formidable political, economic, technological and military power. As elsewhere, American or Americanized media are enthusiastically consumed across Africa, in English or in dubbed or indigenised versions. The US media's imprint on the global communication space, by virtue of the ownership of multiple networks and production facilities - from satellites and cables to on-line networks - gives the US a huge advantage (Thussu, 2015). As Nye has remarked, US culture 'from Hollywood to Harvard - has greater global reach than any other' (Nye, 2004b: 7). In an increasingly digitized globe, the US remains the largest exporter of the world's entertainment and information programmes - from Hollywood entertainment giants to the digital empires of the Internet age.

While the US remains 'number one country' in most of Africa in terms of media content, the former European colonial powers also have their strong imprint. British media presence within the Commonwealth countries in Africa is considerable: the BBC's Hausa service is one of its largest overseas broadcasting outfits, while entertainment programmes, including many such formats as game-and-chat shows owe their origins to television companies based in London. Within the Francophone, the French media continues to be prominent: Radio France International has a following while TV5 Monde reaches 230 million households around the world and available in 13 languages, including Arabic. French foreign broadcasting has been strengthened with the launch in 2006 of France 24, a 24/7 international news channel whose mission is to 'cover international current events from a French perspective and to convey French values throughout the world,' broadcasting in French, English, and Arabic.

Broadcasting retains an important position as an instrument of global influence and ever since international broadcasting became a part of foreign policy agenda during the Cold War, control over the airwaves has been fought over. Until the globalization of television, international broadcasters fulfilled an important information gap, especially in countries where media were under strict state control. With the deregulation and digitisation of communication and the entry of powerful private providers, as well as many state-run media outlets, the broadcasting landscape has been transformed, offering new challenges and opportunities. Russia, for example, has raised its international broadcasting profile by entering the English-language news world in 2005 with the launch of the Russia Today network, which apart from English, also broadcasts round-the-clock in Spanish and Arabic, claiming to have a global reach of more than 550 million people and a tag line - 'question more' - indicating that the Kremlin-controlled channel covers international affairs generally from an anti-US perspective and therefore questions the dominant Western media discourses.

Qatar's Al Jazeera and Iran's English language network, Press TV, are other recent players to emerge, though the latter is accurately perceived as propaganda channel

reflecting the viewpoints of the Iranian government. The most significant example of a new network to appear from non-Western world is of course the Qatari-owned Al-Jazeera, which since its launch in 1996 has grown into a major global broadcaster. Based in Doha, Al Jazeera broadcasts news and current affairs in Arabic, as well as, since 2006, in English, reaching 260 million homes in 130 countries (Figenschou, 2014). Qatar has been able to use this channel to play an important geo-political role in the Middle-Eastern and North African region. Al-Jazeera's coverage of the NATO-led invasion of Libya in 2011 and the campaign against the Syrian regime in 2012-2014, as well as recent support for Hamas in Gaza and Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, shows how it has used its visual power to influence politics in the Arab world. Al Jazeera English claims to privilege the global South in its coverage of international affairs and its emergence as a broadcaster of substance has not only changed journalistic culture in the region but provided a space for a wider conversation in the global communication arena (Figenschou, 2014).

With more than 200 round-the-clock news channels and a strong tradition of English-language journalism, Indian perspectives on global affairs is accessible via such channels as News 18 India and NDTV 24x7. Both are private networks while the Indian state broadcaster *Doordarshan* remains one of the few major state news networks not available in important global markets at a time when global television news in English has expanded to include inputs from countries where English is not widely used, including Japan and Iran. The absence of *Doordarshan* in the global media sphere can be ascribed to bureaucratic apathy and inefficiency, though in an age of what Seib has called 'real-time diplomacy' the need to take communication seriously has never been greater (Seib, 2012). Paradoxically, Indian journalism and news media in general is losing interest in the wider world at a time when Indian industry is increasingly globalizing and international engagement with India is growing from across the globe. For private news networks, the need for global expansion is limited, since, in market terms, news has a relatively small audience and therefore meagre advertising revenue. Belatedly, the Indian government has woken up to promoting its external broadcasting. A high-level committee has recommended that Prasar Bharati, India's Public Sector Broadcaster, should have a

'global outreach' (Prasar Bharati, 2014). Its vision is ambitious: 'Create a world-class broadcasting service benchmarked with the best in the world using next-generation opportunities, technologies, business models and strategies. The platform should be designed for new media first and then extended to conventional TV. Outline an effective content strategy for Prasar Bharati's global platforms (TV and Radio) focused on projecting the national view rather than the narrow official viewpoint' (Prasar Bharati, 2014: 15).

Arguably the most significant development in global broadcasting is the growing visibility on international news scene of Chinese television news in English, part of what has been termed its 'Charm Offensive', promoting the Chinese model of development with an extensive programme of external communication (Kurlantzick, 2007). The Chinese version of an image makeover, consistent with its rise to a global power, is rooted in an official discourse aimed at making the Sino-globalization a palatable experience for international audiences. China wants to present itself as a peaceful nation and to ameliorate the country's image, especially in the West, as a one-party state which suppresses freedom of expression and individual human rights.

Chinese government has invested heavily in its external communication, including broadcasting and on-line presence across the globe (Wang, 2010). In 2011, two years after President Hu Jintao announced a \$7 billion plan for China to 'go out' into the world, Chinese broadcasting has expanded across the globe: by 2014, CCTV News was claiming 200 million viewers outside China and broadcasting in six languages, including Arabic. The biggest presence has been in Africa, where since 2012 CCTV has been operating an Africa-specific channel, based in Nairobi. It has been suggested that CCTV Africa is gaining viewers as, 'instead of airing the usual disaster reports, the station tends to broadcast 'good news' from Africa and portrays China as a 'true friend' (Grill, 2013). Supplementing this is ongoing expansion of Xinhua, among the largest news agencies in the world, with 28 offices in Africa, more than any international news agency, which has recently launched English-language TV, CNC World. However, this huge expansion so far has not been able to

change perceptions or affect journalistic agendas and debates as Chinese television news, in the words of one commentator, 'has yet to be the international authority on China, let alone being a credible alternative to the BBC, CNN, or Al Jazeera on world affairs' (Zhu, 2012, 194).

Nevertheless, the availability of these new channels have complicated the news discourse in Africa. Al-Jazeera has contributed to improved coverage of Africa on the global television scene. Unlike their Western counterparts, Chinese news reports tend to avoid critical journalism and claim to give a more positive coverage to African issues, though who is watching their programmes and with what effect remains an open question. It is pertinent to remind ourselves that in terms of audience, news networks have a relatively small impact on global media flows – most of which is centred on entertainment, which continues to be dominated by the US, though others players are increasingly visible, notably India's Hindi film industry, popularly described as Bollywood.

The Soft Power of Bollywood?

The most visible Indian media presence in Africa are the Hindi films, a prominent manifestation of Indian content in global media space and which has grown today to a \$3.5 billion industry. Watched by audiences in more than 70 countries, Bollywood is the world's largest film factory in terms of production and viewership: every year a billion more people buy tickets for Indian movies than for Hollywood films. Though India has been exporting films to countries around the world since the 1930s, it is only since the 1990s and in the new millennium that Bollywood has become part of the 'global popular'. The recent and rapid liberalization, deregulation and privatization of media and cultural industries in India, coupled with the increasing availability of digital delivery and distribution technologies, have ensured that Indian films are increasingly visible in the global media sphere (Schaefer and Karan, 2013). At the same time, the unprecedented expansion of television – from a single state channel in 1991 to over 800 channels in 2014 - was a massive boost for the movie industry, not only with the emergence of many dedicated film-based pay-channels but the potential for coverage of the film industry itself given the huge

demand of the new channels for content. The ensuing corporatization and the synergies that it created made it possible for Bollywood content to be available on multiple platforms, satellite, cable, on-line and mobile, resulting in a complex, globalized production, distribution and consumption practices including among the 35-million strong South Asian diaspora, scattered on all continents (FICCI-KPMG, 2014).

From a soft power perspective, Bollywood is perhaps more effective among other countries of the global South (Tharoor, 2012). The promotion of family and community-oriented values in contrast to Western individualism, has made Indian films more receptive to audiences in many African countries. Their religiosity and gender representation make Indian films culturally accessible for Muslim audiences, for example in North African countries. Muslim-dominated northern Nigeria has a long-established interest in Hindi cinema. The mushrooming of Hindi-to-Hausa video studios, where Indian films are adapted or copied for the 'Nollywood' market, indicates their value as cultural artefacts which can be reworked to suit local tastes and sensibilities. The 'visual affinities' of dress, gender segregation and the limited sexual or sexualized content in Hindi films are attributes which Nigerian audiences appreciate and view as what has been defined as an alternative modernity to the pervasive influence of Hollywood (Larkin, 2003). Bollywood music too is skilfully appropriated, it has been noted, by the musicians of the *Ushaq'u Indiya* (Society for the Lovers of India) who use 'vocal harmonies' from Hindi film lyrics and rework them into Hausa versions (Uba Adamu, 2010). Bollywood stars remain very popular in many African countries: In 2012, Morocco's King Mohammed VI bestowed the prestigious national honour, *L'Etoile d'Or*, to Indian superstar Shah Rukh Khan, the first Indian to be granted the accolade (Thussu, 2013).

The diasporic dimension – people-to-people communication

One key reason for the popularity of Indian cinema is the existence of large South Asian diaspora in many African countries, their presence going back in some cases to 150 years. During the British colonial period, labour from India was transported to British colonies in Mauritius and South Africa, who were encouraged to settle in new surroundings, while Indian labourers were recruited to build East African Railways.

Another category of migrants – Indian traders and professionals – moved to work in South and East Africa under the ‘free passage’ system which gave a free passage in return for a fixed number of years’ labour. Other colonial powers too affected this trans-continental migration: Indian communities from western India, especially Goa, under control of Portuguese empire, arrived in Portuguese colonies of Mozambique between 1890 and 1920 (Khoury and Leite 2008). More recent migration also brought people such as Aquino de Braganca and Oscar Monteiro - both originally from Goa - who played key roles in anti-colonial movement in Mozambique and contributed significantly to the newly formed socialist state of Mozambique.

The most significant Indian diasporic presence remains in South Africa home to more than 1.3 million South Africans of Indian origin and many of whom have made major contributions in fighting colonialism and racism. Mahatma Gandhi, who established the Natal Indian Congress in 1894, first experimented with nonviolent protest in South Africa. His legacy still lives on: Ela Gandhi, granddaughter of the Mahatma, was an ANC parliamentarian for ten years from 1994 to 2004, representing the constituency of Phoenix, the site where Gandhi lived in the vicinity of Durban, today one of the biggest Indian cities outside India. Gandhi was also involved in founding the Transvaal-based British Indian Association, in 1903. During the same year, he started the newspaper *Indian Opinion*, published from Phoenix in four languages, which was to become the prime vehicle for the dissemination of Gandhi’s thoughts.

In the South African National Assembly, scores of Indian-origin MPs participate in decision-making processes. Prominent figures in public life, including Economic Development Minister Ebrahim Patel, build on a long association of Indians in the public life of South Africa, including such individuals as Frennie Ginwala, former speaker of the South African Parliament, and Professor Fatima Meer, close friend and famed biographer of Nelson Mandela. In the professions too, the Indian presence is significant: Navanethem Pillay, the United Nations human rights chief, a South-African of Indian origin, was the first non-White woman to become a judge at

the High Court of South Africa, while Kumi Naidoo, the head of Greenpeace in London since 2009, was a prominent anti-Apartheid activist in South Africa.

The close political ties between South Africa and India – not least via such groupings as IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa, a grouping created in 2003, of the three major multicultural democracies, ‘to contribute to the construction of a new international architecture’) and BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) – are likely to become more important in the coming years and decades (Nordenstreng and Thussu, 2015).

As India’s international profile has grown many members of its diaspora are attempting to reconnect with an emerging economic powerhouse (Tharoor, 2012). In the digitised world, film entertainment in India is no longer just an artistic or creative enterprise but a global brand, contributing to the reimagining of India’s role on the international stage from that of a socialist-oriented voice of ‘the Third World’ to a rapidly modernizing, market-driven democracy. Thomas Hansen notes the phenomenon of ‘roots tourism, whereby thousands of South African Indians each year travel to India in search of the village of their ancestors and for shopping and/or spiritual purification’ (Hansen, 2012: 23). Indian media is vital as a communicating tool among the diaspora and Indian television and telecom businesses are feeding the demand for a link to the home country: Tata Communications (part of Tata group, one of India’s largest corporations) has the most shares in Neotel, South Africa’s largest fixed-line network operator. A number of Indian television channels are available via DStv, the largest pay television network in Africa. In addition, since 2008, a locally produced entertainment channel on DStv network called Saffron TV has been promoting the ‘South African Indian experience,’ at different levels. A Bollywood-driven lifestyle magazine, called *SA India*, is also popular among young ethnic Indians.

These connections have ensured that South Africa has become a regional hub of Indian presence in the continent. Many Bollywood films are filmed in South Africa while South African actress, Ilene Hamann, appeared in a lead role in the 2005 film

Rog; in 2001, the annual IIFA (International Indian Film Academy) awards – the Bollywood version of the Oscars - were held in Sun City in South Africa. India's former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh told Indian Foreign Service probationers, that the 'soft power of India in some ways can be a very important instrument of foreign policy. Cultural relations, India's film industry – Bollywood – I find wherever I go in Middle-East, in Africa – people talk about Indian films. So that is a new way of influencing the world about the growing importance of India. Soft power is equally important in the new world of diplomacy' (quoted in Thusu, 2013).

Among the policy elite in India too, the diaspora is increasingly viewed as an important dimension of a country's soft power resources. Traditionally, the attitude of successive Indian governments toward the diaspora was of distance and disengagement, even when Indians abroad were threatened: for example, in 1972 when thousands of Ugandan Indians were expelled by the military dictator Idi Amin. This attitude changed with the coming to power of the pro-business Bharatiya Janata Party government in 1998 which announced the creation of a *Pravasi Bharatiya Diwas* (Day of the Non-Resident Indian) celebrations, and the phrase 'Vishva Bharati' (Global Indian) was coined. Since then the day is celebrated annually on 9 January, symbolically chosen to mark the return of Gandhi to India from South Africa in 1914 to lead the Indian nationalist movement. The creation of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004, with its mission 'to promote, nurture and sustain a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship between India and its diaspora' was another milestone in this diasporic diplomacy (Government of India 2012).

Like the Indian government, Indian corporations, too, have belatedly recognized the value of the large and well-established Indian diaspora as a useful tool for promoting India's economic and trade interests in Africa. They realise that people-to-people communication - such Indian words as *hundi* (cheque), *chai* (tea), *chapati* (bread), *sambusa* (samosa) are today part of the Swahili language - can be much more effective than government propaganda initiatives. For many African elites, India is seen as an emerging non-Western economy and in some cases a bulwark against the growing Chinese investment in the resource-rich continent.

A 'Chindian' Soft Power?

The growing globalization of media content from China and India – in terms of international television news emanating from China and deepening globalization of Bollywood - offers new opportunities for soft power discourse, given the scale and scope of changes in these two countries. The increasing importance of China and India in global communication and media debates and the rise of 'Chindia' pose a challenge, as the power equation shifts. The peaceful 'rise' of China as the world's fastest growing economy has profound implications for global media, taking place in parallel with the transformation of international communication in all its variants - political, intercultural, organizational, developmental and corporate (Wang, 2010). 'No longer is China an emerging great power', observes a commentator, 'it is a 'risen' one' (Layne, 2012: 212). Since 2006, China has been the largest holder of foreign-currency reserves, estimated in 2013 to be \$3.3 trillion. On the basis of purchasing power parity (PPP), China's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) surpassed that of the United States in 2014, making it the world's largest economy, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2014). When the country opened up to global businesses in the late 1980s, its presence in the international corporate world was negligible, but by 2013, China had 95 companies in the *Fortune Global 500*, just behind the US (128), while three of the top ten global corporations were Chinese (*Fortune*, 2014). China is a key member of BRICS, whose annual summits since 2009 are being increasingly noticed outside the five countries, which together account for 20 per cent of the world's GDP. At their sixth summit in Brazil in 2014, the group announced the setting up of a BRICS Bank to fund developmental projects, to potentially rival the Western dominated Bretton Woods institutions, such as the World Bank and the IMF (Nordenstreng and Thussu, 2015). China, which is the driving force behind this idea, has been able to transform its citizens from a largely agricultural self-sufficient society to the world's largest consumer market. Much of this has been achieved without major social or economic upheavals. China's success story has many admirers, especially in Africa, and already there is talk of replacing the 'Washington consensus' with what has been termed the 'Beijing consensus' (Halper, 2010). Though India's economic growth is no match to China's, but on the

basis of Purchasing Power Parity, it was the world's third largest economy in 2014 (IMF, 2014). Bilateral trade between India and Africa has escalated from \$961 million in 1991 to \$70 billion in 2013. India has also emerged as an important investor in Africa with cumulative investment of nearly \$50 billion (Government of India, 2014: viii)

Some Indian commentators have argued that Africa should be a major focus area for India in both economic and political terms: 'India cannot match China in terms of investible resources and aid for Africa but its own equities are not inconsiderable: human resources, health and medicine, soft power, institution building, low cost technology-driven solutions' (Khilnani, *et al.*, 2012: 35).

Most notable is the Indian government's \$125 million Pan-Africa E-Network (PAN) project with its hub in Senegal, improving Africa's tele-medicine and tele-education services by linking educational centres and hospitals in Africa with universities and specialty hospitals in India (Government of India, 2014: 55). India has an increasing global corporate presence in health and pharmaceuticals, in volume terms, the Indian pharmaceutical industry has grown to be one of the biggest in the world by producing and selling generic medicines much more cheaply than the global giants in Europe and the US, by exploiting a 'flexibility' clause in the WTO agreement on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights that allows generic manufacturers to produce a patented drug. As the 'pharmacy of the developing world' the cheap generic drugs produced in India could feed into the multilateral bureaucracies – both governmental and NGOs – active in health and humanitarian assistance to African countries.

Such initiatives are useful instruments for promoting a country's soft power: while these are government projects, they are aimed at helping Indian businesses to strengthen their operations in Africa. As Nye has observed, 'governments are often mistrusted. Thus it often behoves governments to keep in the background and to work with private actors' (Nye, 2004a: 113).

As in many other fields, the emergence of China and India, coinciding with the crisis in the neo-liberal model of US-led Western capitalism, will challenge traditional thinking and paradigms for international media and communication. The combined economic and cultural impact of China and India, aided by their extensive global diasporas, may create a different form of globalization, one with an Asian accent and flavour.

Apart from the contentious border dispute, both countries also vie for resources to meet their rapidly escalating energy needs (Cheru and Obi, 2010). And yet there are growing commercial links developing between the two: Trade between China and India - negligible in 1992 - had reached more than \$70 billion by 2013, making India's eastern neighbour one of its largest trading partners. Such economic flows and a Chindian globalization, rarely get noticed in the international media and, ironically, even in the media in China and India (Thussu, 2013). The trend they represent is significant as noted by the UNDP *Human Development Report* titled *The Rise of the South*: 'Economic exchanges are expanding faster 'horizontally' - on a South-South basis - than on the traditional North-South axis. People are sharing ideas and experiences through new communications channels and seeking greater accountability from governments and international institutions alike. The South as a whole is driving global economic growth and societal change for the first time in centuries' (UNDP, 2013: 123).

One area where a Chindian contribution will be particularly valuable is development communication. Despite robust economic growth - almost double-digit for nearly a decade in case of China - both countries continue to be home to large number of poor and disadvantaged people and indeed in many instances the inequality has increased under neo-liberalism. India was the first country to use television for education through its 1970s SITE (Satellite Instructional Television Experiment) programme. It is well-equipped to deploy new digital media technologies to promote sustainable development. China's aid for African nations especially in such areas as telecommunications may contribute to formulating a Chinese version of development discourse. Traditionally, the development debates

have been devised in the West and conform to a Western sensibility of what constitutes development. Would a Chindian development perspective be less affected by the colonial mindset?

As the world becomes increasingly mobile, networked and digitised, will Chindian media flows erode US hegemony? In his 2011 book *The Future of Power*, Nye explored the nature and shift in global power structures – from state to non-state actors. In an age when, as he suggests, ‘public diplomacy is done more *by publics*,’ governments have to use ‘smart power’, making use of formal and informal networks and drawing on ‘cyber power’, an arena where the US has huge advantage, though the Chinese and India visibility in cyberspace is growing steadily. At the end of 2014, according to industry estimates, nearly half of China’s 1.3 billion people were on-line and only a fifth of India’s 1.2 billion population were using the Internet. And yet, the world’s largest number of Internet users were Chinese, while India was already second only to the US in terms of visitors globally to four key sites: Google; YouTube, Facebook and Wikipedia. Industry estimates suggest that the number of Internet users in India is expected to cross 500 million by 2016, increasingly driven by wireless connections. In China the growth is forecast to be even higher. It is interesting to speculate what kind of content will be circulating on the World Wide Web and in which language when 90 per cent of Chinese and equally high percentage of Indians get on-line. It is particularly striking in the context of India’s ‘demographic dividend’: more than 70 per cent of Indians are below the age of 35. As their prosperity grows, a sizeable segment of young Indians are increasingly going on-line, producing, distributing and consuming digital media, especially using their skills in the English language, the vehicle for global communication.

Will a Chindian media emerge as an alternative to US presence in Africa or a supplement to it? In the short-term the multi-faceted US domination of the world’s media is likely to continue. However, in the long run growing media flows from large countries with old histories and new global aspirations will redress the balance and perhaps change Africa’s engagement with the world at large.

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