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Impact of Chinese soft power strategies in determining the triangular relationship among China, India and Sri Lanka

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The Chinese soft power usage in South Asia has strategic influence over the triangular relationship among China, India and Sri Lanka. India's nostalgia for its dominance over the South Asian region in the past is still evident in its approach towards South Asia, since India could not completely eliminate its hegemonic aspirations over regional affairs. The clash of strategic aspirations between the two major powers influences the overall triangular relationships among three states. The main research problem at the present study is to determine how the Chinese soft power strategies influence Indian and Sri Lankan policies by analyzing their responses towards Chinese presence in the region which shape the triangular relationship. One objective is to determine the Chinese soft power strategies and responses of India and Sri Lanka towards it. Another objective is to determine the impact of Chinese soft power application on the overall triangular relationship among India, China and Sri Lanka. This paper particularly focuses on the trade and investment by two major powers as one of crucial soft power approach. A qualitative approach has been used to analyze data in this context. Primary data collected from semi structured interviews and Secondary data collected through data triangulation method available in both printed and electronic form in various data sources such as historical records, government publications, books, interviews, speeches, and web will be analyzed using theories through a deductive content analysis. Key findings is that China is threat theory explained India considered Chinese Peaceful rise as a threat while smaller states like Sri Lanka played a significant role by providing an attractive platform for major powers to play their great game. As a means of soft power trade and investments have been effectively used by both India and China and Sri Lanka was attracted by Chinese economic assistance which came without political influence over its respective domestic policies. China's strategy of non-interference implied it has the least interest on Sri Lanka's political issues. Chinese strategic presence in Sri Lanka and its attempt at takeover South Asia's under-exploited markets so far dominated by India caused anxiety in India which is reflected on the Indo-Sri Lanka relations.

Key words: *soft power, Peaceful rise theory, China Threat theory, trade and investment*

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