ASIA'S GROWING GLOBAL INFLUENCE: A STUDY OF INDIA'S AFRICA POLICY

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Introduction

The 21st century could become an Asian and African century, which will result in a radical global transformation of the world. Thus, the past decade has witnessed a large Asian presence in Africa, especially, China, India, Japan, and South Korea. Not surprisingly that the rise of Asia in global politics has worried the traditional Western powers. Analyzing contemporary Asian approaches to Africa should be performed through their historical contexts, in particular the history of competition and rivalry between Asian rising powers. It is no secret that this point has not been adequately addressed in previous studies on African-Asian relations (Iwata 2019). This state of rivalry is reflected in the African policies of major Asian countries. For example, the Sino-Indian conflict and the Sino-Japanese conflict, in addition to the Taiwan issue, have definitely affected these countries' interactions with Africa. In contrast to European policies towards Africa after the founding of the European Union, there is no consensus framework for Asian international relations. The experience of struggle against colonialism and engagement in the Non-Aligned Movement represented the most prominent components of the mutual relations between Asia and Africa, especially since the Bandung Conference in 1955 (Adem 2017). When the Cold War ended, Asian countries began to achieve high and rapid rates of economic development. Hence, the Asian countries that previously received development aid have become among the most important international donors. This means that the concept of "donor powers" has undergone a major change that it is not limited to Western industrialized countries (including Japan). Perhaps all of this requires studying and analyzing Asian-African relations.

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This study assesses Indo-African relations by understanding its non--material aspects as reflected in soft power. Specifically, it aims to determine the nature and role of India's soft power in Africa. Based on the current debate on the relationship between soft power and hegemony in the international system in the post-Cold War era, the study seeks to discover and crystallize the role of soft power as an intangible aspect of hegemony. It adopts a few important theoretical approaches created by writers like Nye (2017) and Waltz (2010). Drawing on the case study of India between 2000 and 2019 in the subsequent sections, it examines the concept of soft power in taking stock of variegated power outcomes, and focusing on a non-Western context, in order to advance a theoretical model for soft power. This study seeks to examine the following questions: (1) What are the most prominent intellectual and theoretical approaches that determine the nature of the relation between soft power and hegemony? (2) Is there a link between them? How does India's soft power manifest in Africa? (3) Will Asian soft power lead to a decline in traditional Western hegemonies or will it lead to the formulation of new models of soft hegemony?

This study mainly relies on qualitative approaches to international relations with a specific focus on the concepts of hegemony and soft power. It is difficult to quantify the non-material aspects of hegemony. Therefore, this study relies on the ideas and observations drawn based on prevailing theories (such as neorealism and neoliberalism). A general observation in the literature on the relation between soft power and hegemony is that it started mostly from a Western conceptual framework, especially following Joseph Nye's approach to neoliberalism. Soft power has been analyzed at two levels: the source of power and its tributaries, and the behavior and instruments involved in its implementation.

The literature on soft power presents three key trends. The first focuses on the soft power of Western powers, especially the United States (Nye 2004b, 16-20; Machida 2010, 351). This trend states that the rise of Asia in Africa is mainly due to the preoccupation of the United States with its war on terror and the decline of its soft power in favor of hard power (mainly military) (Tella 2016). The second trend uses quantitative and qualitative comparison, as many studies have tended to compare the soft power of some Asian countries and the United States (McGiffert and Bean 2009). The third trend is of a behavioral nature as it focuses on studying some of the governmental phenomena and behaviors of the major Asian powers, which prompted some scholars to say that Asian soft power is on the rise, especially in its African field (Malaviya 2019; Cloke 2020; Cheru and Obi 2010; Gwatiwa 2012). With regard to the Indian case, we find a great division among researchers

in assessing Indian soft power. There are those who admit that India is a great soft power and that it has enormous potential in this area, while others see that there are many obstacles that prevent India from benefiting from its capabilities in the field of soft power (Thussu 2020; Das 2020). Perhaps this imposes the need for further analysis and study of Indian foreign policy from the perspective of soft power.

The review of this literature will help us understand the nature of the relationship between soft power and hegemony in international relations, which means increasing reliance on the non-material side of force in the international arena. On the other hand, studying the policies of the major Asian powers in Africa will help us understand the alternatives to development and the options available to African decision-makers. Perhaps this may ultimately mean the retreat of the traditional hegemonic powers in Africa in exchange for the formulation of new models of hegemony or the achievement of partnership by Asian powers.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. The first part reviews the major approaches in the study of hegemony and soft power in the literature on international relations. The second discusses the history of Indo--African relations. The last five parts focus on Indian soft power capabilities and policies in Africa before concluding the paper.

From hegemony to soft power

Hegemony has been a central concept in the literature on international relations for a long time. It can be noted two basic works that are the cornerstone of the theorizing process of the concept, the first of which is what Thucydides wrote about the war of the Peloponnese and the hegemony of Athens in the context of the ancient Greek city-state system, and the second is what Nicola Machiavelli wrote in his book The Prince on the issue of hegemony and control of the state (Nye 2002). Whatever the case, the concept is used in contemporary international relations literature to study and analyze situations, strategies, dynamics, and entities that focus on the traditional components of international politics, namely the individual, the state, and the international system. Nevertheless, the distinguishing feature of the concept of hegemony in the literature of international relations in all its various approaches is that it implies a great deal of influence or control over the structure of the international system and the behavior of its component units. And excludes from this concept the control or influence resulting from

the occupation of the lands of others by force and usurpation, which means that hegemony differs from the concept of colonialism.

Research is divided between two pivotal theories of hegemony. The first is the theory of hegemonic stability, which relies on realistic, liberal, and historical structural approaches in international relations. This theory argues that the stability of the liberal economic system depends on the existence of a single hegemonic power, considering that the distribution of power among states is the main determinant of the character of the international economic system (Antoniades 2018, 595). The hegemonic stability theory is based on two main assumptions. The first states that the system in international politics is created by one dominant power, and the second indicates that maintaining this system and its stability requires the presence of a dominant power capable of extending its leadership through its military and economic hegemony (Waltz 2009; Brooks and Wohlforth 2008). In contrast to the theory of hegemonic stability advocated by many Western writers, the hegemonic instability theory focuses on the risks of dominating the security system in the international system. The processes of international competition and scramble between the dominant powers and the forces opposing them have led to the transformation of many political disputes into violent ones, which is embodied by the African reality in the post-Cold War era. By the end of the Cold War, five main factors contributed to the emergence of the soft power theory: economic globalization, the rise of transnational actors, the spread of technology, the new wave of democratization, and the growth of international organizations which makes cooperation much easier (Gallarotti 2011; Nye 2017; Waltz 2010).

The concept of "soft power" was coined by Joseph Nye in his (1990) book, "Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power". He then published a series of articles and books on the same topic. Nye says:

> [...] sometimes you can get the outcomes you want without tangible threats or payoffs. The indirect way to get what you want has sometimes been called "the second face of power.". A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries admire its values, emulate its example, aspire to its level of prosperity and openness. This soft power—getting others to want the outcomes that you want—co-opts people rather than coerces them (Nye 2004a, 5).

Thus, soft power means wooing people instead of forcing them. Soft power is the ability to shape the preferences of others without resorting to the use of coercion, force, or violence. Many leading countries the world over have

built their influences through international broadcasting, cultural activities and institutes, education, and scholarships as well as through foreign aid and support in disaster-affected areas. An example of this is China's recent international offer of free personal protective equipment (PPE) to help fight the COVID-19 virus. This health crisis opened up a new window of opportunity to promote China's narrative and its international ambitions.

There are two types of sources for soft power: domestic sources, where Nye notes, "How [a nation] behaves at home can enhance its image and perceived legitimacy, and that in turn can help advance its foreign policy objectives" (Nye 2004a, 56-57). The internal sources fall under the framework of the inherent power of culture and political institutions. The second type, international sources, indicates the need for the state to respect international law and international norms and institutions. There is no doubt that both domestic and international sources of soft power clearly reveal the new liberal face of the analysis, where the focus is always on policies and procedures that reflect the orientation towards justice, the common collective concern, and the rules of fair play. In this context, we find the prevalence of the principles of political liberalism in all sources of soft power.

In 2008, the Anholt Ipsos Nation Brands Index was developed to measure each nation's reputation along six dimensions of national competence: Exports, Governance, Culture, People, Tourism, Immigration, and Investment. And in 2015, the Soft Power 30 methodology was created by Jonathan McClory to consider the following factors when ranking a country's soft power strength: enterprise, culture, digital, government, engagement, and education.

However, soft power is an extremely complicated process and not entirely a matter of government policy. It could be made by spontaneous incidents as much as by official projects. Winder claims that:

> soft power had two different meanings. On the official and conscious level, it was a government project designed to cultivate good relations overseas. But it was also something deeper: a nation's overall glow. The government could take the helm and trim the canvass, but was the pilot, not the ship - and certainly not the ocean (Winder 2020, 6).

Based on the study of previous theoretical trends in the literature on international relations, it becomes clear to us that soft power, which is the intangible side of power, is an important factor in consolidating the foundations of hegemony and control at the international level (Winder 2020). The literature has also shown that soft power that is based on persuasion and gai-

ning minds and hearts contributes to legitimizing hegemony, and thus it is a necessary condition for achieving control in light of the chaotic international system. However, internal sources prefer the style of Western democracies, which makes these criteria a subject of controversy in many countries of the global South (Gallarotti 2011). As Nye indicated, many Western values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive and have become part of the attraction of soft power (Nye 2017).

India and its soft power in Africa: a historical perspective

Indo-African ties can be traced back to the pre-colonial period, particularly the movements of migration and trade in the eighteenth century (Beri 2003; Banda 2020). India, like China, had historical, cultural, economic, and political relations with the African continent, especially its eastern coast, where there is a large and stable Indian community. Colonial policies led to the fall of India and many parts of Africa under the yoke of British colonialism, which led to the presence of Indian communities in many parts of Africa. During the time of colonialism, many Indians were taken as indentured laborers in the sugar colonies of the Caribbean, Oceania, and Africa. India's independence in 1947 inspired African liberation movements, as India had become a model of decolonization and national liberation. The charismatic leadership of the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, and his role in fighting imperialism, colonialism, and *Apartheid*, were embodied by the spirit of the Bandung Conference in 1955. Nehru's activism and cooperation with other international leaders like Joseph Tito (Yugoslavia), Gamal Abdel Nasser (Egypt), and Kwame Nkrumah (Ghana) were the driving forces in establishing the Non-Aligned Movement and supporting the principle of South-South cooperation as part of India's foreign policy. The circumstances of the Cold War era and India's preoccupation with its internal development efforts prevented the development of Indo-African relations.

To a considerable extent, India and African countries have shared over the years a mutual understanding of many global issues (Trigunayat 2020). They have been on the same side in global negotiations to make the international economic order more equitable to the global South (Sachdeva 2020). India realized after the end of the Cold War, especially with the independence of Namibia and the end of the *Apartheid* regime in South Africa, that the ideological and political component that united it with Africa became irrelevant. Issues of non-alignment and disarmament no longer go beyond the rhetorical and symbolic aspect, which imposed on India the necessity to shift from the

sterility of ideology to the capacity of pragmatism. Indeed, in the wake of India's economic openness policy in 1991, its foreign policy became more realistic and pragmatic, and accordingly, the Indo-African relations in the post-Cold War era were governed by political and economic considerations.

However, the comparative advantage enjoyed by India in its relations with Africa and its distinction from other international powers, especially China, is the presence of a large Indian diaspora in Africa, in addition to sharing the experience of belonging to the British colonial empire. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which has ruled India uninterruptedly since 2014, has recognized the untapped potential of India's large diaspora network and has put in tremendous effort to connect with them. In its foreign policy agenda, it was stated: "The people of Indian origin living abroad are an asset, which the BJP would try to utilize to the fullest extent to foster relations of friendship and cooperation between the countries of their residence and India" (Modi and Taylor 2017, 918). The prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, has shown a great interest in what is termed People of Indian Origin in Africa. According to a survey of 450 business owners in Africa, almost half the respondents of Indian origin had taken on African nationalities (with most of the other half retaining their Indian nationality), compared with only four percent of firm owners who were of Chinese origin (the other 96% had retained their Chinese nationality) (Modi and Taylor 2017, 924). It is not surprising that India relies heavily on these Indian communities to achieve economic and trade cooperation with African countries.

It is true that energy security represents one of the major drivers of India in Africa, and some scholars may refer to the Indo-Chinese competition in Africa. However, the beginning of the new millennium witnessed a major shift in India's African policy as New Delhi focused on bilateral and regional cooperation in Africa. India has established a dialogue with many African economic groupings and obtained observer status in some of them, as is the case for the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). In 2008 India institutionalized its relations with Africa by organizing the India-Africa Summit Forum (Beri 2011).

Some literature has indicated a similarity between Indian and Chinese behavior in Africa, which has led to the neologism "Chandia"[2]. The Indian economic rise requires more markets and investment opportunities.

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2 India has followed the Chinese example and emulated the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) by developing its own Africa-India Forum Summit to change the world's perception of India from being a recipient to being a donor.).

The competition with Chinese companies in Africa is one of the sources of interest for the Indian decision-maker. Perhaps all of this drives the increase in the pace of competition between India and China, as they are among the emerging powers in the international system who wish to gain wealth and influence. According to one of the Indian scholars, India has been busy trying to catch up with China in Africa, as in recent years it is working hard to engage in Africa seriously (Taylor 2012).

Whatever the case, the Indian presence in Africa, although not different from the presence of other major powers in terms of its aspiration to obtain natural resources and trade, represents a model that can be emulated by many African countries. The Indian model based on respecting the values of pluralism, secularism, and democracy while liberalizing the economy provides important lessons for African countries wishing to achieve stability and sustainable development.

Assets of India's soft power

India possesses enormous capabilities of soft power according to Joseph Nye's neoliberal analysis. Since the early 2000s, India has been consolidating its soft power sources both at home and abroad. Tharoor states:

> "[...] when India's cricket team triumphs or its tennis players claim Grand Slams, when a Bhangra beat is infused into a western pop record or an Indian choreographer invents a fusion of Kathak and ballet, when Indian women sweep the Miss World and Miss Universe contests or when Monsoon Wedding wows the critics and Lagaan claims an Oscar nomination, when Indian writers win the Booker or Pulitzer prizes, India's soft power is enhanced" (Tharoor 2008, 40).

Over the past decade, a large number of writers (such as Tharoor (2012) and Blarel (2012) have begun to focus on studying India's soft power and its potential for use in its IR. The sources of Indian soft power are numerous, including sports, music, arts, and literature. In addition to this list, there is India's anti-colonial history, its defense of the values of national liberation, and its strong civil society that believes in the values of secularism and pluralism. As well as its nuclear capabilities, economic advancement, its advantage in the field of information and communication technology, and so forth. India may seek to achieve multiple goals by using its soft power, including compensating for the lack of hard power, easing international con-

cern about the rise of India, improving India's image, honoring the legacy of the founding fathers, attracting foreign investment, and defining India's position on various issues (Mazumdar 2018).

The indirect nature of India's soft power is surely more difficult to ascertain. However, India has gained global attention based on its soft power qualities. We can refer to a number of indicators that can be measured and push Indian values and culture to become more open and attractive: (1) Obtaining the Nobel Prize in Literature (won by the great Indian poet Tagore in 1913). (2) Indian films won international awards. India's support for the "Bollywood" film industry has gained great fame which led to its global outreach. Both Amitabh Bachchan and Shah Rukh Khan won important international awards. (3) The presence of prominent sports stars at the global level. And here it is worth noting the legendary cricketer Sachin Ramesh Tendulkar. (4) The presence of a large and influential Indian diaspora. According to some statistics, the number of Indian Diaspora is estimated at thirty million people (Wagner 2019).

Africa accounts for about 9.11% of the total Indian diaspora in the world. The largest groups are in South Africa (1.5 million), Mauritius (855,000), Réunion (220,000), Kenya (100,000), Tanzania (100,000), and Uganda (90,000) (Wagner 2019, 13). The diaspora in the island states of the Indian Ocean represents a substantial proportion of the total population. In Mauritius, the proportion of the population of Indian descent is over 60%, in Réunion 31% and in Seychelles about 6% (Wagner 2019, 13). The Modi government is trying to establish closer ties with countries that have large Indian communities by reviving historical sea routes in the Indian Ocean and by promoting cultural initiatives. India is also trying to use the financial and cultural capital of its diaspora in Africa by granting overseas Indian citizenship. It does this to reinforce their ties with their "motherland" (Venkatachalam and Modi 2019). India continues to rely on Mahatma Gandhi's legacy to develop Indo-African relations.

As for space exploration, the Indian Space Research Organization is one of the six largest government space agencies in the world, as it has succeeded in launching a trip to the moon and another to Mars. It is noted that India has used the India-Africa Forum summit that was held in India for the first time in 2008 to lay down a general framework for cooperation between the two sides, as expressed in the Delhi Declaration document issued by the first summit. Areas of cooperation include human resources, science, and technology, industrial growth, especially in small and medium enterprises,

minerals, the health sector, information and communication technology, security, and judicial reform (Modi 2017).

It is clear that India is trying to portray its international interactions in Africa as a major power fulfilling its responsibilities, and this may come through its active and effective contribution to the international peacekeeping forces operating in Africa. Statistics indicate that India has contributed about 8,000 people to African peacekeeping operations[3]. Despite some criticisms directed at its policy in Africa, India is trying to use its cultural arms to win the hearts and minds of Africans, among these arms is The Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR), which was established in 1950 by Maulana Abul Kalam Azad in order to manage India's foreign cultural policies, including cultural exchange issues. ICCR has five branches in Africa as follows: Egypt, Mauritius, Tanzania, and South Africa (with two centers, one in Durban and the other in Johannesburg). The objectives of the ICCR are: "[...] to actively participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and programs pertaining to India's external cultural relations; to foster and strengthen cultural relations and mutual understanding between India and other countries; to promote cultural exchanges with other countries and people, and to develop relations with nations" (ICCR 2020).

Trade exchange between India and Africa

Trade exchange between India and Africa during the period from 2001 to 2014 witnessed remarkable growth. The volume of bilateral trade between the two parties rose from USD 7.2 billion in 2001 to USD 78 billion in 2014 (Gulati and Das 2020, 4). This increase in trade was partly facilitated by adopting policies like the 'Focus Africa' program by the Indian government in 2002. However, the volume of trade decreased to USD 62 billion in 2018. Experts attribute this decline in trade volume in the post-2014 period basically to factors such as a fall in commodity prices and the slowing down of the global economy (Gulati and Das 2020, 5). India is currently Africa's third-largest trading partner (Godara et al. 2019, 93). According to available

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3   India has participated in most of the UN peacekeeping missions on the continent, beginning with the Congo (1960-64). Subsequently India participated in missions to: Namibia (1989-90); Angola (1989-1995); Mozambique (1992-94); Somalia (1991-94); Rwanda (1993-96); Sierra Leone (1999-2001); and Ethiopia- Eritrea (2006-08). Currently Indian peacekeepers are deployed in UN peacekeeping missions in: Liberia (since April 2007), Côte d'Ivoire (since April 2004), the Democratic Republic of Congo (since January 2005) and South Sudan (since April 2005).

statistics, African exports to India increased by 32.2 percent annually, while Indian exports to Africa increased by 23 percent annually. Perhaps an interesting observation is that the annual growth rate of African exports to India reached (41.8%) during the period from 2005-2011, which is higher than that achieved by African trade with China (28%) (WTO 2013). In 2018, this percentage reached 13.76%. It was decided in the meeting of trade ministers in the African Union with the Indian Minister of Trade and Industry, in Johannesburg, South Africa on October 1, 2013, to establish four continental institutions agreed upon at the first India Africa Summit: India-Africa Institute of Foreign Trade (IAIFT), India-Africa Diamond Institute (IADI), India-Africa Institute of Education Planning and Administration, and India-Africa Institute of Information Technology (Arnaud and Guennoun 2019, 8).

In recent years, India's dependence on oil resources has increased and remains a priority for Indian investments abroad. The increasing pressure of India's demography requires more energy imports. Energy holds a large share in trade flows between India and Africa. In 2017, oil and gas accounted for 60% of African exports to India. Over the past 20 years, Indian investments in the continent have seen robust growth, allowing the country to become a strategic partner for African development. Given India's awareness of the challenges related to investments in Africa, the country coordinated efforts between the government, banking institutions, and the private sector (Arnaud and Guennoun 2019, 8).

According to the Ministry of External Affairs of India (2022), India's bilateral trade with Africa has grown significantly, reaching US$ 89.5 billion in 2021-22 compared to USD 56 billion in the previous year. With a cumulative investment of US$ 73.9 billion from 1996-2021, India is one of the top five investors in Africa. India has opened its market to African countries through the Duty-Free Tariff Preference (DFTP) Scheme, which grants duty-free access to 98.2% of India's total tariff lines. Currently, 33 Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in Africa are entitled to receive benefits under this scheme. India sees Africa as a promising market for its businesses, particularly in the manufacturing industry, including textiles, pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and light machinery (Gopaldas 2022). Additionally, Africa presents opportunities in the resource and energy sectors, which have been areas of concern for India in the past. The African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement (AfCFTA) that came into effect in 2021 is expected to provide a platform for Indian companies to further expand and enhance their business footprint in Africa.

Indian public diplomacy in Africa

The development of a positive narrative, projection of soft power, guest hosting, digital diplomacy, image and branding, broadcasting, home front, coordination, and strategic communications are among the most essential elements of India's approach in trying to advance the public diplomacy agenda. This mission is carried out by the following agencies: the department of Overseas Indians Affairs (OIA), External Publicity and Public Diplomacy (XPD), and the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) (Mazumdar 2020, 25).

Tharoor presented a detailed picture of the general features of Indian thinking with regard to soft power and public diplomacy, which, he noted, differs remarkably from Chinese practice, which differs in some ways remarkably from Chinese practice (Tharoor 2012). However, leaders in India, like Chinese leaders, are conscious of the growing importance of soft power in global politics. During the past decade, India has invested in public diplomacy initiatives. The Indian Council of Cultural Relations plays an active role in promoting cultural diplomacy through its sponsored festivals inside and outside India. In this context, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs has made extensive use of social media since the establishment of the Public Diplomacy Department (PDD) in 2006; this is in order to clarify and explain Indian foreign policy[4]. Other public diplomacy formulas have also been strengthened, such as the publication of India Perspectives magazine, which is available in seventeen languages and distributed in 162 countries around the world (Natarajan 2014). India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) is using digital public diplomacy very effectively. Thussu states that MEA:

> was one of the early adopters of social media platforms to connect with diasporic communities. Though MEA's twitter account @ IndianDiplomacy was set up in 2010, since Modi took over in 2014, the Ministry has been using social media more effectively, promoting a positive cultural narrative for 'Brand India'. The MEA India Facebook page, created in 2012, is also widely followed in diplomatic and diasporic circles. It also maintains two YouTube channels and has accounts on various platforms including Instagram, Soundcloud, Flickr, LinkedIn as well as a Google+ channel. India's Foreign Missions have twitter accounts and Facebook pages. Such digital diplomacy has been spurred on by Modi's own considerable social media presence (Thussu 2020, 118).

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4 This division aims to inform and influence foreign public opinion and attitudes in order to advance its foreign policy goals.)..

Perhaps what is striking in the Pax Indica debate is that India's pattern of public diplomacy is based on presenting a model of pluralist democracy, in contrast to the unilateral model of control and control of information adopted by China. In 2018, the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved the opening of new Indian missions in 18 African countries a four-year period between 2018 to 2021[5]. This move will increase the number of resident Indian missions in Africa from 29 to 47 (Roche 2018). According to India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), "India has made twenty-nine visits to African countries at the level of President, Vice President, and Prime Minister since 2014. And in terms of ministerial-level visits, all 54 African countries have been covered by the Indian government. From the African side, over thirty-two heads of African countries have visited India from 2016 to 2019" (Gulati and Das 2020, 4).

India has made a significant shift in its narrative on India-Africa relations. During the second Africa India Forum Summit, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stated that:

> The objective of our partnership is to cooperate with all the countries of Africa, within the limits of our capacities and capabilities, in their efforts towards achieving economic vibrancy, peace, stability, and self-reliance. Towards this end, it is our intention to become a close partner in Africa's resurgence (Singh 2008, n.p.).

However, the third India-Africa Summit in 2015 witnessed a narrative shift in India's Africa policy. PM Modi in his address to the summit has shown that Africa can contribute to India's development. As an example, PM Modi stressed that "African energy helps run the engine of the Indian economy, its resources are powering our industries; and, African prosperity offers a growing market for Indian products" (India Times 2015). It is to accomplish such a goal of Prime Minister Modi that India's public diplomacy has recently been used more systemically through the PDD.

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the postponement of the fourth India Africa Forum Summit (IAFS-IV). However, this has not hindered diplomatic relations between India and Africa. Instead, the first Indo-Africa Virtual Summit was organized by the IMC Chamber of Commerce and Industry in

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5 According to the Ministry of External Affairs of India (2022, February 11), there are currently forty-three operational Indian Missions in Africa, which include Embassies, High Commissions, Permanent Missions, Permanent Delegations, Assistant High Commissions, Consulates, and Representative Offices. Out of the eighteen targeted missions since 2018, only fourteen have been opened so far.

November 2020, with the aim of enhancing bilateral ties and increasing trade and investment between India and African nations. On March 23rd and 24th, 2021, the IMC Chamber of Commerce and the Africa Business News Group (ABN Group) joined forces again for the 2021 Indo-Africa Virtual Summit. This summit explored sectors such as Power & Renewable Energy, Knowledge, Skill & Education, Automobiles (2-wheelers & EV), Agriculture and Food Processing, Resources: Mining, Oil & Gas, and Health Infrastructure (Indo Africa Summit 2021).

Indian diplomacy is developing its own approach to South-South cooperation as a hallmark of Indian public diplomacy that benefits from the legacy of its democratic institutions and its experience in achieving economic growth. Usually, an emphasis is placed on a shared colonial history and seeking to build relationships through development partnerships. There is a set of initiatives on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the auspices of the Economic and Technical Cooperation Program. The presence of these initiatives under the auspices of the Ministry of External Affairs undoubtedly indicates the way in which India links technical assistance programs with public diplomacy. The focus of these initiatives is on training and capacity building, benefiting a wide variety of professionals, including those working in information technology, rural development, and election monitoring, as well as diplomats and parliamentarians.

India has made public diplomacy a key part of its efforts to represent India as a 'brand state' and to contribute to India's positive image outside its borders (Natarajan 2014). In sum, India is trying to gain the hearts and minds of Africans by emphasizing partnerships and transferring knowledge and skills while always reminding the experience of a common colonial history. India also seeks to highlight this image directed at the African people by training local workers to work on development projects and manage them instead of Indians, in contrast to the general Chinese practice of using Chinese labor.

Development assistance

The Indian Economic and Technical Cooperation (ITEC) Program of the Ministry of External Affairs has been the official arm of the Indian government in pursuing technical cooperation with the outside world since 1964 (ITEC 2020). Since then, India spends about $12 million annually on program activities. The cumulative size of this spending amounted to 2.8 billion US dollars, of which about one billion dollars was allocated to Africa.

The Indian development aid provided to Africa includes a set of interrelated activities such as assistance provided to projects, capacity-building, institutions, and scholarships (Saran 2012, 4). The projects account for the lion's share (40%) of the economic and technical cooperation budget, as the focus is on small and medium industrial projects that may include the processing of agricultural products, carpentry, the plastics industry, and small engineering units. The Indian Cooperation Program usually provides assistance and advice in the stages of project identification, feasibility and implementation, and training of local cadres to eventually take over the management functions.

In the area of capacity building, the ITEC program helps African partners through (1) the offer of technical training in the very large network of vocational and human resource development institutions across India; (2) the Indian experts' trips to African countries to train local cadres, impart specialized skills and know-how in different fields; and (3) the facilitation of study visits to India by senior political leaders and decision-makers from African countries. To illustrate the strategic importance of ITEC, Prime Minister Modi confirmed in 2017 that: "Thirteen current or former Presidents, Prime Ministers and Vice Presidents in Africa have attended educational or training institutions in India. Six current or former chiefs of armed forces in Africa trained in India's military institutions" (Dhoot 2017, 8).

The Indian government attaches immense importance to building institutions to benefit from its development experience. And if training foreign employees and holding workshops at the expert level brings some advantages, then the long-term solution lies in building appropriate institutions in the countries receiving assistance. Therefore, at the second India-Africa Forum Summit held in 2011, the Indian government committed $5 billion for lines of credit, $700 million for new institutions and training programs, and $300 million for the Ethiopia-Djibouti railway line (Bhatia 2011).

To enhance development cooperation, India also relies on loans and subsidies provided to developing countries by the state-owned Export-Import Bank. In recent years, India has continuously expanded its financial commitment to include South-South Cooperation, and in 2014/15 recorded a total of 194 credit lines to sixty-three countries, valued at US$11.7 billion (Wagner 2019, 18). The bulk of the financial support went to African countries. Between 2006 and 2015, African countries accounted for about 58 percent of all loans and credits (Wagner 2019, 18). These funds were used mainly to strengthen economic ties with India and to support Indian companies' activities in Africa. For example, facilitating the export of Indian goods to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). India is

also interested in supporting infrastructure projects in Africa. For example, Indian companies laid a pipeline from Khartoum to Port Sudan in 2009 and supported the establishment of pan-African institutions with many projects.

In the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), which has been launched in 2017, India partners with Japan to connect Asia and Africa and develop Africa's capabilities. It is based on four major pillars: (1) Development and Cooperation Projects, (2) Quality Infrastructure and Institutional Connectivity, (3) Enhancing Capacities and Skills, and (4) People-to-People partnership. The AAGC prioritizes development projects in health and pharmaceuticals, agriculture and its processing, disaster management, and skill enhancement. Regarding connectivity, it emphasizes quality infrastructure, which is aligned with Japan's infrastructure export policy, which it has promoted since 2015 (RIS 2017).

Furthermore, India has cooperated militarily with a number of African countries for many years. Since the 1960s, it has been training officers from English-speaking African countries in Indian institutions. Under the ITEC program, the Indian Army has also sent trainers to the armed forces in a number of African countries, such as Botswana, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Zambia. India helped these countries improve their infrastructure. For example, the Indian Army has been involved in establishing defense academies in Ethiopia and Nigeria (Wagner 2019, 22).

The Modi government has once again given greater priority to security cooperation with Africa. In light of the threat posed by terrorist groups, India has chosen closer cooperation in combating terrorism with many African countries. India has also planned to establish a military base in Seychelles in response to increased Chinese activity in the Indian Ocean. However, the plan failed in 2018 after the Seychelles Parliament protested it (Wagner 2019, 23).

In another context, India and 50 African countries adopted the 'Lucknow Declaration' in February 2020. Both sides committed themselves to fighting against terrorism by not allowing their land to be used by any such outfit. The Indian government offered to scale up military supplies to African nations, including offshore patrol vehicles (OPVs), fast interceptor boats, unmanned aerial vehicles, military aircraft, and other arms and ammunition (India Times 2020).

The declaration also stated that all member countries "encourage enhanced cooperation between India and Africa on the evolving concept of Indo-Pacific and welcome the AU (African Union) vision for peace and security in Africa that coincides with India's vision of SAGAR (Security and

Growth for all in the Region)" (Kaushik 2020, n.p.). To achieve this goal, the two parties also called for deeper cooperation in the defense industry through investments and joint ventures, among other things.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, India has used health diplomacy as a tool of soft power to establish itself as a reliable and compassionate partner to African nations (Mol et al. 2022). India's health diplomacy towards Africa has resulted in significant outcomes, such as the establishment of telemedicine centers and improved access to healthcare facilities. For instance, under the Pan Africa e-Network (PAeN), Indian medical institutions were connected with medical institutions in 53 African countries to improve the healthcare system. Additionally, India has provided financial assistance to African countries affected by major public health concerns, such as HIV/AIDS, Malaria, and Ebola. In 2016, India provided one tonne of medicines as a grant in aid over three years to help achieve the health targets outlined in Namibia's "Harambee Prosperity Plan". Private Indian hospitals, such as Apollo Hospitals, have also been providing consulting services and training medical doctors from 24 African countries. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, India's health diplomacy has been evident through its provision of medical aid and support to African countries, including the supply of medicines and vaccines under the Vaccine Maitri or Vaccine Friendship Initiative (Sharun and Dhama 2021). As of January 2021, India has provided the Indian-made Covaxin and Covishield vaccines to several African countries, such as South Africa, Ghana, and Angola, further strengthening the ties of solidarity, friendship, and cooperation between India and African nations.

Conclusion

It is clear that India, which is the largest democracy in the world, is setting itself apart in capacity building and training for Africans. Given the variable of history and shared experience, India is more of an inspiration than a donor. Accordingly, India has resorted in its engagements with Africa to the use of its soft power tools. It relied on its cultural heritage and the influence of the Indian diaspora in Africa, in addition to its knowledge and technical expertise needed to help African countries.

In general, the increasing influence of Asian powers in Africa faces many challenges, especially with regard to the possibility of it replacing Western hegemony. It is noted that India is trying to preserve the nature of the international system that raises the values of pluralism, secularism, and

democracy, which stands in the way of the possibility of a strategic alliance between India and China in the face of the United States. It is clear that the population of India exceeds a billion and a fourth billion people, many of whom suffer from extreme poverty, and thus the issue of distribution and social justice is placed on the list of its development priorities. Also, the pragmatism in the foreign policies of Asian countries, which is reflected in their adoption of a selective character towards global issues, has hindered the crystallization of a unified ideological stance towards the outside world. For example, we find that India is developing economic and political relations with the United States, and at the same time, it maintains close relations with rebellious countries in the international system according to American standards.

According to the concept of hegemony in the international system, Asian powers represent economic hegemony, but they need to convert their increasing economic power into military capabilities to achieve this hegemony, but in this case, this trend could negatively affect soft power.

In any case, the process of development cooperation effectively practiced by Asian powers with African countries differs greatly from that of traditional donors. And that in several aspects. First: the Asian presence in Africa, especially in exercising its soft power, depends on the principle of historical opportunity and the belief that the twenty-first century is the century of Africa and Asia. Perhaps a review of the political discourse in India shows that it fully expresses this content. The African policy of India, on the other hand, depends on historical ties, especially the presence of effective Indian communities in Africa. Second, the pattern of Asian aid to Africa expresses a kind of sympathy based on shared identity and experience. India shares with Africa in terms of its colonial past and in terms of belonging to the countries of the South. Therefore, Asian-African cooperation usually adopts the slogan of solidarity between the countries of the South as its slogan. Third: Asian-African relations are based on mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs. Therefore, the Asian model of cooperation represents an alternative pattern to the Western Washington consensus model, which emphasizes the concepts of political conditionality. Therefore, Asian countries do not set political preconditions for democratization and human rights, which explains their cooperation with recalcitrant or Westernized countries because of their record in human rights. Fourth: cooperation and development between the two sides depend on the concepts of partnership in order to achieve mutual benefit or common profit. In line with this thinking, the flow of development cooperation from major Asian countries to Africa is closely linked to trade interests and investment. It is no secret that these competing countries are

trying to access African natural resources to help them achieve their energy security. Therefore, the process of defining the concept of development aid to these countries appears to be difficult to achieve due to its overlap with considerations of supporting trade and investment. Fifthly: the rising Asian powers, including India, possess knowledge and experience in the fields of developing poor societies, which gives them a comparative advantage over Western knowledge that expresses superiority. Asian countries offer a model for cooperation that relies on developing capabilities in the recipient country. It appears that India relies on the principle of assistance on demand or need by African countries, which implies a more equitable approach to the relationship between donor and recipient countries. However, the major problem lies in the lack of human competencies in some African countries to be able to determine the type and nature of development aid provided by Asian countries.

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ABSTRACT

The growing influence of Asian powers in Africa has been subject to extensive debate in the literature on international relations. Hence, this study aims to evaluate Indo--African relations to understand the role of soft power. Are we gradually witnessing a potential geostrategic shift in favor of emerging Asia? This study attempts to discover the role of soft power in Asian-African relations by applying some of the prevailing theoretical approaches in the field of international relations by focusing on India's Africa policy. The study concludes that India, which aspires to be a global hegemon by the end of the 21st century, seeks to provide a third way in Africa different from the rising Chinese and the traditional American influences. India relies on its shared cultural and civilizational heritage and the influence of its diaspora in its relations with African countries, in addition to its knowledge of their developmental needs.