

TOURISM DIPLOMACY: INDIA CHINA MALDIVES AND USE OF SOFT POWER

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Abstract

Various dimensions of diplomacy, such as tourism diplomacy, health diplomacy, diaspora diplomacy, public diplomacy, and terminology, are prevalent in current international politics, serving as components of soft power. Globalization, following the end of the Cold War, elevated trade to the forefront of international relations, displacing other disputes between countries and prioritizing economic interests. Essentially, following the conclusion of the Cold War, nearly every nation finds itself in a state of conflict, needing to prioritize economic interests over disputes, while simultaneously balancing security concerns through the application of soft power. The present research paper is an attempt to explore this element. An attempt has been made to conceptually analyse tourism diplomacy, explore its importance as a soft power component, and analyse it in relation to China, India, and the Maldives.

Keywords: China, India, Maldives, Soft power, Tourism diplomacy, outbound tourist.

Introduction

Aristotle, the father of political science, said that man is a political animal destined by nature for state life. Aristotle's assertions have proven to be timeless. The evolution of the modern state system has also demonstrated that man is suited for state life, specifically political life, with power and economics

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at the core of all human activities. Accordingly, in international politics, only two things are at the center of all states' activities: security and trade. If we see world politics since the Second World War, it becomes evident that security and trade have been the axis of international politics. During the Cold War period, international politics primarily focused on security, forming treaties and military alliances accordingly. After the Cold War, we enter the era of globalization, where security takes a backseat and trade becomes the primary concern. Due to globalization's free movement of services and products, the mediaeval boundaries of the nation-state and the concept of sovereignty have become irrelevant. The importance of rating agencies such as Moody's and Fitch, as well as any country's economic rating, has increased. Today's world is a political economy. Politics revolves around interstate economic activity. Money makes the world go round. And now the world appears to be spinning wildly out of control, escaping from its traditional orbit. (Jacob:2012) Like economic activities, the traditional boundaries of international politics have broken. Now, diplomacy is more than just the work of diplomats. Rather, the emergence of numerous non-traditional sources of diplomacy has proven to be more effective than traditional diplomacy in many cases. This context provides a clear understanding of tourism diplomacy. "Tourism is today the second largest item of world trade. It is a source of bitter controversy, yet a topic of intense regional collaboration in both international and sub-national politics. It is a policy area infused with the most optimistic projections and the most vitriolic criticism. This area is also largely overlooked by political science. Political science has neglected important aspects of tourism's political costs and advantages" (Richter: 1983) Quantitative changes lead to qualitative changes. Therefore, as the tourism industry expands and generates significant remittances to its host countries, it draws the interest of major economic powers, underscoring its strategic significance. This is even more important in the context of an expansionist state like China. Scholars have conducted modern studies (Fan, 2010, Tse, 2013, Chen & Duggan, 2016). They explain how China has developed its tourism diplomacy under the guise of investment and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and has successfully exported Chinese tourists, a development that has significant strategic implications. It has disturbed the balance of power in South Asia. As a result, this research paper

aims to understand tourism diplomacy within the framework of China's expansionism, especially considering India's recent relations with the Maldives.

Statement of the problem

In the 21st century, security dimensions have changed. The interconnection between security and economy is evident. Due to globalization, a dictatorial political system such as China gained a place in the World Trade Organization. As a result, China's rapid economic progress manifests both directly and indirectly in strategic and security matters. Thus, security questions are indirectly involved in China's investments and BRI plans. Tourism diplomacy is a tool for this. The rapidly increasing number of Chinese tourists in the Maldives and Sri Lanka is a testimony to the expansion of China's soft power in South Asia. This is disturbing the balance of power in the Indian Ocean region. The conceptual analysis becomes necessary for the study of tourism diplomacy as a soft power component.

Objectives of the study

- To explore the possibilities to conceptualize the term tourism diplomacy.
- To examine the role of tourism diplomacy in soft power.
- To examine Chinese expansionism through tourism diplomacy and its use as a foreign policy tool.
- To identify the importance of tourism diplomacy in South Asia and in India-Maldives relations in particular.

Review of literature

Our review of the literature focuses on examining three primary questions.

1. Understanding tourism diplomacy as a soft power component

2. China is increasing its outbound tourism and using tourism diplomacy as an expansion tool.
3. The India-Maldives relation and tourism diplomacy are countering the Chinese effort of hegemony in the Indian Ocean.

In the 21st century, the tourism industry is too big to ignore. (Richter: 1983) Superpowers used tourism diplomacy, which was of great importance even during the Cold War period. According to Sune B. P. and Elitza S. (2024), tourism diplomacy played a significant role during the Cold War period. The 21st century's evolving dimensions of diplomacy have led to the emergence of tourism as a new dimension, prompting attempts to explain its significance. According to Shelley B. and Lisa P. (2019), Tourism diplomacy has also been considered a tool for establishing peace. (Stuart E. L. & Donald E. H. (2009) Therefore, the absence of war has also been defined as peace. (Fabio Carbone: 2017) Tourism diplomacy has been considered a part of public court policy and soft power. Many studies present it as an essential component of soft power (Chen and Duggan 2014). It is believed that China uses tourism diplomacy as a soft power tool to expand its influence (Tse: 2013). The geography of the Maldives makes it a natural place for the tourism industry. (Brahim N. 2024) The Maldives is vital for Indian interests in the Indian Ocean, especially from a security and strategic point of view (Balázs D. 2016). Despite Chinese influence, the Maldives recognizes the importance of India and its tourists. (Chatterji A K 2024).

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative structure. It is exploratory and analytical. The primary objective of the study is to investigate the interconnection between tourism and diplomacy. What is the significance of tourism diplomacy in the context of soft power and public diplomacy? Exploratory research relates to the 'How' and 'What' questions (Malhotra, 2010). Therefore, methodologically, we rely on research papers, books, policy papers, media reports, articles, columns, and reports on tourism, foreign policy initiatives, investment data, and analytical reports.

Discussion

Historical Background tourism diplomacy as a soft power component

The term diplomacy is believed to have originated from the French word diploma, which is derived from diplo, meaning a folded civic document. It is believed that politicians once carried such folded documents, which granted the holder special travel rights. The Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 is considered the beginning of diplomacy in modern international politics. However, diplomacy stems from human nature, as evidenced in the oldest texts, from the Old Testament to the Mahabharata and other epics. Diplomacy has an established tradition in ancient India. "In the Ramayana, Lord Rama sent Hanumana and Angada as his envoys to King Ravana to persuade him to avoid war and destruction... In the Mahabharata, Lord Krishna himself played the role of a mediator of last resort to avoid hostilities between the Pandavas and the Kaurvas. Commenting on different roles of authorities in a state, Manu stated, "Let the king appoint an ambassador." (Sachdev: 2014) Kautilya's Arthashastra is the world's first systematic treatise on diplomacy. It systematically explains the art of statecraft, foreign policy, and diplomacy, making it the first treatise on diplomacy. (Sachdev: 2014) Arthashastra, Kautilya's Mandala theory, and Shadgunya Niti provide important explanations of the art of statecraft. Kautilya's 'Saam Daam Dand Bhed' policy, which he justified for achieving diplomacy goals, has become a proverb in Indian politics today. The eternal tradition of travelling and tourism for knowledge and religion has been clearly established in Indian culture. "Pilgrimage was an important means of travelling in ancient India. Since the Vedic era, pilgrimages have been a common practice. The Rig Veda mentions that on the bank of the pious river Sarasvati, Aryans assembled and composed Vedic hymns, and the Taittiriya Aranyaka described the Kailash Mountain on which Mansarovar is situated. It is supposed to be the abode of Lord Siva; anti-Aryans frequently visited this place (Rig Veda 3:23:4)." (Singh 2008) However, fundamental questions arise about the concept of tourism diplomacy.

What is the interrelationship between diplomacy and tourism?

The tourism industry developed rapidly after the Second World War. In 1970, the World Tourism Organisation approved its constitution, thereby institutionalizing the tourism industry. During the Cold War era, Europe and America held a dominant position in global tourism, accounting for a significant portion of the world's tourists. However, with the end of the Cold War and the advent of globalization, the tourism industry also underwent globalization. Today, regions such as Southeast Asia (138.6 million), North East Asia (170.3 million), West Asia (73 million), South Asia (33.8 million), Africa (69 million), and Latin America (35.6 million) contribute significantly to this industry. As compared to the share of advanced economies, which was 776 million, the share of emerging economies is now 688 million. The tourism industry has grown from 25.3 million in 1950 to 1464 million in 2019. (UNWTB:2023)

“In 2019, prior to the pandemic, travel and tourism (including its direct, indirect, and induced impacts) accounted for 10.5% of all jobs (334 million) and 10.4% of global GDP (US\$ 10.3 trillion). Meanwhile, international visitor spending amounted to US\$ 1.91 trillion in 2019.” (WTTC 2023) A significant change in quantity also has an impact. Hence, the growing size of the tourism industry and its \$1.5 trillion economy become a force in themselves. Today, the tourism industry is the world's third-largest industry, employing more than 10% of the global working population. The growing tourism industry in emerging economies and third-world countries automatically invites conflict of interest. Only diplomacy can balance the conflict of interest. Diplomacy exemplifies the ability to secure the most benefits from another state while advancing one's own interests with minimal or no resource expenditure. From this perspective, diplomacy functions as a form of soft power display, demonstrating power without resorting to direct force in the mutual relationships between states, with the expectation of achieving victory in conflicts of interests. “Diplomacy’ no longer refers only to the political relations between sovereign states but may now include the relationships of private individuals, for example, working in the tourism trade. ”Tourism' has

acquired subdivisions such as economic, cultural, heritage, and gastronomic, among others." (Tasam 2023)

Infrastructure plays a crucial role in the growing tourism industry in the third world, Central Asia, West Asia, Africa, South Asia, and Latin America, necessitating substantial investments. For all these things, things like good relations between nations, less tension in them, and separating controversial issues from business issues come to the fore, and diplomacy is definitely involved in all these things. Thus, diplomacy naturally establishes a relationship with the tourism industry.

“The relationship between tourism and diplomacy brings together two enormous areas of inquiry. Diplomacy shows a broad trend toward democratization during the past several centuries, especially with the expansion of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and tourism in recent years. Even domestic tourism, which at first glance does not appear related to diplomacy—usually seen as the relationships between countries—may show linkages in creating bridges between communities within one country.” (Gordon & Baranowski, et al. 2019)

In the 21st century, people-to-people interaction has increased substantially. People travel for a variety of reasons, including migration, business, studies, treatment, and tourism. All these increased economic activities contribute to GDP growth and boost economic dynamism. Almost every level of these activities involves some form of direct or indirect diplomacy. As a result, a variety of terms, such as tourism diplomacy, diaspora diplomacy, game diplomacy, medical tourism, medical diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and cinema and TV drama diplomacy, have gained popularity. All of these are broadly part of public diplomacy, which is an essential part of the state's soft power in international politics.

The definition of public diplomacy can include most overseas humanitarian activities “Scholars have defined public diplomacy as "the way in which both government and private individuals and groups influence directly or indirectly

those public attitudes and opinions that bear directly on another government's foreign policy... A typical statement would describe public diplomacy as direct communication with foreign peoples with the aim of affecting their thinking and, ultimately, that of their governments. (Gilboa: 2008)

Thus, tourism diplomacy is not an independent concept in itself but is a part of public diplomacy, and public diplomacy is a tool of the soft power of states. "Scholars of International Relations (IR) have detected that tourism is one way of manifesting soft power; they do not feel comfortable nor ready to place the promotion of tourism into standard IR discourse... It is challenging to separate the economic and cultural functions of outbound tourism, each of which reinforces the other, although not without limits." (Chen & Duggan: 2016).

Increasing China's Outbound Tourist and Tourism Diplomacy

It would not be an exaggeration to say that one country, China, has taken tourism diplomacy very seriously and used it as a tool for foreign policy. China has developed a lot of soft power tools that expand Chinese influence and effectiveness. Joseph Nye defines "soft power" as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments." It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies" (Nye, 2005). China's rapid economic progress and material development itself are a soft power attraction to third-world countries that want rapid economic development. China also operates tourism activities in poor African countries. Chinese tourists, like other tourists from Asia, visit Europe and the USA, as well as Latin America, Africa, and the Indian Ocean islands, China has significantly increased its outbound travel to Sri Lanka and the Maldives in order to threaten the Indian monopoly, according to data on outbound tourists.

The first half of 2017 saw 62.03 million outbound trips, up 5% from the same period in 2016 and ranking first globally. One important reason for the growth is that the number of outbound tourism destinations included in the Chinese passport has greatly increased to 153 countries/regions. Among them, 65 countries/regions have provided convenient visa policies to Chinese tourists

by July 11, 2017. Notably, 90% of Chinese citizens have yet to apply for passports for outbound tours. Currently, outbound border crossings have reached 122 million trips in 2016, elevating China to the status of the world's largest outbound tourism market. This expansion continues, with outbound tourism consumption reaching 109.8 billion US dollars. (Karki, N. 2020). According to Joseph Nye, soft power becomes active when a state successfully persuades another state to do what it wants through intangible power resources such as culture, language, cinema, media, and tourism. (Nye, 2005). This perspective also highlights China's Belt and Road Policy and its significant investment. During the period 2005–18, China's global investment and construction amounted to \$1.7 trillion.

In China, outbound tourism embodies soft power, intrinsically connected to politics. People perceive the Chinese government as exerting control and influence over outbound tourism development, aligning it with the country's political agenda. (TSE: 2013) These facts also provide insight into China's tourist diplomacy policy activities, revealing that China is expanding the Approved Destination Status (ADS) to a growing number of countries, aiming to boost its outbound tourism. In 1983, China gave ADS facilities only to Hong Kong and Macau, but by 2014, this number had increased to 117, meaning China gave Approved Destination Status to more than 117 countries. All of these policies have led to a huge increase in the number of outbound tourists. (Tse: 2013)

The Chinese government, not the tourists themselves, makes most of the decisions about destinations for Chinese tourists through ADS. The Chinese government strictly controls the outflow of Chinese tourists through ADS, making it more than just a tourism-related phenomenon but a diplomatic endeavor. In 2008, China's outbound tourism reached \$36.2 billion, which is currently around \$50 billion. Following a COVID epidemic, dollar revenue from Chinese tourists is an important source of income for many poor African and Asian countries. In 2008, China had almost filled Macau with its tourists. (Fan 2010) China is doing the same thing now in Africa, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. People assert that China's investment and ADS policies undoubtedly

reflect its political ambitions and strategic significance. Joseph Nye warns that China's neighbours, and even its trade and investment partners, are fearful of China due to its cultural and tourist activities, use of other components of soft power, and its clear policies of expanding soft power. (Nye, 2005) China's outbound tourist numbers reached 154.63 million in 2019 from 57.39 million in 2010. (Statista 2023) It translates to a threefold growth in just nine years.

India-Maldives Relations and Tourism Diplomacy

Only 210 of the approximately 1200 coral islands in the Indian Ocean to the southwest of India make up the Maldives. The Maldives spans an area of approximately 348 square miles. It is about 70 nautical miles from the Indian border at Minicoy in Lakshadweep and 300 nautical miles from the Indian west coast. The Maldives gained independence in 1965 and became a republic in 1968. India-Maldives relations have been cordial since 1974. Since 1988, India and the Maldives have maintained strong security relations and cooperation. The two countries signed a Comprehensive Action Plan for Defence in 2016. India has been training the Maldives National Defence Force (MNDF). India has carried out nearly 70% of the training activity. In the last 10 years, India has conducted approximately 1500 such training programs for the Maldives. MNDF officers have been receiving training in the training institutes of Indian defence and medical establishments like NDA, OTA, INA, and AFMC.

“MNDF has also been participating in various joint activities with Indian Defence forces, such as joint EEZ patrols, joint exercises, anti-narco ops, SAR, sea-rider programs, HADR exercises, sailing regatta, etc. The Indian Navy has also provided MNDF with air assets for air surveillance, MEDEVAC, SAR, and helicopter-borne vertical insertion capability. Since 2019, the Indian Navy has conducted around 600 MEDVACs, SAR operations, and medical team transfers. A team of medical specialists has been serving Maldivians at MNDF's Senahiya Hospital, Male', in addition to providing medical equipment and sharing expertise with MNDF doctors. At AFMC, Pune, numerous MNDF doctors have received or are undergoing training. India-Maldives Defence Cooperation also covers joint exercises, maritime domain awareness, hardware

gifting, infrastructure development, and so on. Key projects in the defence sector include the Composite Training Centre (CTC) for MNDF, the Coastal Radar System (CRS), the construction of a new Ministry of Defence Headquarters, and the construction of the “Ektha” MNDF harbor. In December 2018, India unveiled a financial aid package worth USD 1.4 billion, comprising USD 50 million for budgetary support to the GoM, a USD 150 million T-bill subscription by SBI, a USD 400 million currency swap agreement, and eight infrastructure projects under the USD 800 million Line of Credit (LoC). India also offered additional 1000 training slots over the next 5 years.” (MEA 2024) In short, India and the Maldives have had cordial economic and strategic security relations. The Maldives has relied heavily on India for most of its needs. India has also tried to carry forward the history of cordial relations with the Maldives under the Neighbour First Policy, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and has continued economic and security assistance to the Maldives.

Tourism and Maldives

The Maldives' main industry was fishing earlier, but today tourism is the main source of economic activity in the Maldives. Its GDP share in the Maldives rose from 13% in 1980 to 30% in 2022. Thus, tourism accounts for about 30% of the Maldives' GDP and generates 60% of the country's foreign exchange. In 2009, the Maldives welcomed 655852 tourists, but by 2019, the number had increased to 1.7 million. (US State Department 2024)

“Tourist arrivals plummeted by 67.4% and the economy contracted by 32.9%, the deepest recession on record. Historically, fishing and agriculture were the main economic activities in the Maldives. In 1980, both contributed 35% of GDP together, whereas tourism contributed 13%. These industries have decreased their GDP share in recent years, while the government's focus on tourism has led to the industry directly accounting for more than 20% of the country's GDP, with a projected indirect contribution of 79% in 2022.” (Elisabette et . al., 2023)

In the Maldives, China is leveraging soft power

In fact, China is using both force and soft power against India in the Indian Ocean region. Under the String of Pearls policy, China is constructing military bases from the Asia Pacific region to the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, and Red Sea. It is also challenging Indian interests by employing soft power strategies such as the Belt and Road Policy, investing in Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and other Asia Pacific countries in the Indian Ocean region, and rapidly entangling these countries in debt. Apart from this, it also creates enough space in internal politics by using local politics, corruption, and so on. Abdullah Yameen, a pro-China politician, was president from 2013 to 2018. Chinese influence is also believed to have played a role in the formation of the political party and the election of the current President, Mohammad Moizu. Maldives' debt-to-GDP ratio rose from 58.5 percent in 2018 to an estimated 61.8 percent in 2019, according to the World Bank (WB); it rose further to 138 percent in 2020. Notably, China alone contributes 20% of the Maldives' total foreign debt. The Maldives formally joined China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2014, under which China provided a \$1.4 billion loan and launched a number of large infrastructure investments in the Maldives. The most significant of these is the \$200 million China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, which connects Hulhulé and Hulhumalé to the capital Malé. (Basarkar 2024) After becoming president, Moizu chose China for his first foreign visit in January 2024, where the Maldives signed 20 agreements with China, the majority of which were defence and financial agreements. According to the Maldives' Department of Tourism's website, Chinese tourists currently make up the majority of visitors to the Maldives, with India occupying the sixth position. As of August 27, 2024, 5689 Chinese tourists (14.6%) and 80365 Indian tourists (6%) visited the Maldives. China has begun employing effective tourism diplomacy in the Maldives, with the primary goal of excluding India and integrating the Maldives into its sphere of influence. This is because 80% of China's oil originates from the Indian Ocean region. By enhancing its influence in the Maldives, China aims to fortify its position in the Ocean against both India and America. In the elections against India, President Moizu emerged victorious, and his party secured a substantial majority in the parliamentary elections in

April 2024. According to the Maldives' constitution, the people directly elect both the President and the MP, which means that a loss in the parliamentary elections would hinder the President's ability to implement his economic and strategic policies. However, Moizu's party's success in the parliamentary elections has elevated him to the status of a near dictator, a position that China shares. Moizu is talking about Indian soldiers' withdrawal from the Maldives because of China's influence.

Indian Response

Moizu's boldness quickly became evident, as campaigns such as #Boycott Maldives began trending on Indian social media, causing the number of Indian tourists in the Maldives to drop from the top spot to the sixth. Prime Minister Narendra Modi also visited Lakshadweep. His video of walking on the beach of Lakshadweep became an iconic inspiration for Indian tourists. As a result, the number of Indian tourists visiting the Maldives fell drastically, and Indian tourists turned towards Lakshadweep. The Maldives soon understood this situation, and Moizu visited India to emphasise strengthening Maldives-India relations. In the current financial year, India has spent 93 million dollars on various Maldives projects. Even the Maldives president has softened his stance on Indian soldiers returning from the country. In fact, tourism is the backbone of the Maldives' entire economy, and the Maldives believes that it has cultural and historical relations with India, so Chinese tourists cannot be a substitute for Indian tourists. The Maldives is also a natural destination for Indian tourists, and large hotel groups like Tata have invested in the Maldives' tourism industry. Therefore, a negative impact on India-Maldives relations is unlikely, given the significant role of tourism diplomacy in this relationship. India's rapidly growing economy and the increasing purchasing capacity of Indians are increasing the number of Indian tourist's year after year, and the Maldives would certainly not want to lose its share in it.

Conclusion

Tourism diplomacy is an important economic and political activity in the contemporary world, but it is also part of public diplomacy and soft power as a concept of international politics. Joseph Nye first used the term "soft power" in international politics, but the elements he identified have been a part of international politics and mutual bilateral and multilateral relations of states for a very long time. Events like the establishment of language and cultural missions, the India Festival in the Soviet Union, and the Soviet Festival in India took place during the Cold War period. America and Europe established their institutions in third-world countries to propagate liberal democracy and a free market economy, and they also funded universities and the academic world to disseminate related research. The western world holds the belief that only a free market economy can satisfy its economic, strategic, and security interests. As a result, the spread of a free market economy not only contributes to economic development, but it also serves security interests. In recent years, a lot of non-traditional elements have been used as soft power. China and Turkey are two such countries that have used it very successfully. Turkey has established a separate department for it, known as the TASAM Turkish Asian Centre for Strategic Studies. Languages such as Arabic, Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali have translated and broadcast the serial *Diliris Artargul*, which is based on Artarul Ghazi, the father of Osman, the founder of Turkey's Ottoman Empire. In *Dirilis: Ertugrul*, a minor 13th-century character in Turkish history has taken center stage, becoming a cult figure for millions of Muslims around the world. (Essa: 2020) "Ertuğrul is the Muslim world's Black Panther" (KKhan 2020). Significantly, the production of this serial in Turkey with state money and its diplomatic promotion directly link President Tayyip Erdogan's ambition to displace Saudi Arabia in the Islamic world's leadership. President Tayyip Erdogan bases his domestic politics on empty slogans that call for a return to the golden days of the Ottoman Empire. "The TV drama "Ertugrul" reveals how neo-Ottoman fantasies are finding an enthusiastic audience in a country that struggles with Saudi and Western influence." (Bhutto 2020) Turkey has used history, culture, and media as a form of soft power, and this has had far-reaching benefits for its tourism industry, which has seen a rapid

increase in tourist arrivals. "The number of foreigners visiting Turkey rose by 2.6% year-on-year to 7.3 million in July 2024, marking the highest number of monthly tourist arrivals to date. Arrivals increased from Iran (+25% to 312 thousand). Considering the January-July period, tourist arrivals increased by 8.3% year-on-year to 28.9 million." (Trading Economics, 23 August 2024)

The use of media software is not novel. In the 80s, Libyan dictator Mohammed Gaddafi had also made a successful attempt at this and made a film on his hero Omar Mukhtar called *Lion's Desert*.¹ "The film, funded by Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi and directed by Moustapha Akkad, told the story of Omar Mukhtar, the legendary Libyan and Senussi revolutionary who fought against Italian colonialism during the early 20th century. The film bore the name *Lion of the Desert*. In 1981, the film entered theatres worldwide (ibid.).

China's integration of tourism diplomacy with its investment and loan diplomacy, as well as its application to the island countries of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, raises alarm. In South Asia, China's soft power diplomacy is very active in Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. The political leadership established in these countries does not have a favorable attitude towards India. Despite India's protest, the presence of a Chinese spy ship at Hambantota port, as well as a Chinese spy ship in the Maldives, pose a challenge to Indian interests. India is concerned about China's deepening bilateral relationships with Bangladesh.

The continental route includes Myanmar and Nepal, while the maritime route includes the Maldives and Sri Lanka. However, given that the Indian Ocean is a primary area of interest for the Indian Navy, the MSR, in and of itself, is a major concern for India. New Delhi was not only beginning to voice its concerns about Beijing's expansion in India's neighborhood, both in the maritime and continental domains, but also clarified its stance on the BRI." (M., Barua: 2018) Despite India's effective response and active soft power diplomacy, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and other South Asian countries, with the exception of Pakistan, have demonstrated a positive shift in their perspectives.

However, Indian policymakers must recognise the importance of tourism diplomacy as a soft power tool and allocate more resources and institutional resources in this area.

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