

The Incremental Role of Higher Education in the Soft Power Milieu: Impressions From China and India

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journals.sagepub.com/home/cne**Akhil Bhardwaj and Mohan Kumar****Abstract**

This paper will trace trends in cooperation and contestation in the higher education space, as a possible driver of wider change in the soft power of a nation. While countries in North America and Europe increasingly contend with the idea of knowledge societies, emerging countries such as China and India are found to be building their own capacities and staking claims for leadership in various ways. One of the important aspects of Chinese and Indian attempts towards developing an effective knowledge society for the holistic development of the two countries is to build a network of quality higher education Institutions through path breaking schemes and subsidiaries ultimately benefiting their Universities and Institutions to be globally benchmarked. This includes Chinese initiatives like Project 985, C-9 League and Project 211 (as well as programmes within the umbrella of Belt and Road) and Indian Initiatives like the Institutions of Eminence and Study in India to name a few. The paper also proposes to analyse the changing mind-set of the two Governments especially CPC in China towards the need of projecting its knowledge society at the global platform.

Given this scenario, the paper will outline patterns of change and continuity, hoping to stimulate a more dynamic debate on diverse notions of order articulated through processes of knowledge creation and dissemination.

The recent experience of Higher education and its internationalisation being no longer immune from systemic forces and developments in geopolitics and diplomacy, we will argue that the potential of education to shape and reshape the global order demands closer, *longue duree* investigation.

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Keywords

China, India, higher education, soft power, university

Introduction

The impact of a country's image at a global level has repercussions in a positive and negative build up against its each and every activity at any platform. A country's image building in a constructive manner has direct congruencies to the "Soft Power" of a nation. Soft Power as coined by notable American Political Scientist Joseph Nye Jr. at the starting of the post-cold war era is the ability of a nation to attract others through its foreign policies, culture, political values and eco-system. It is the power to influence the preferences of diverse stake holders in a geopolitical atmosphere. Nye further states that Soft power is rather opposite to hard power and military prowess of a nation which uses persuasion. It is rather a friendly and natural perspective of individuals, states or organisations about a particular country which is gradually developed based upon its own actions. With the occurrence of the 20th century the geopolitical environment at regional and global level was marked by a recognition that in-state or regional problems and challenges having multi-dimensional and significant implications are beyond the individual capacity of States and Regions to attend and provide a solution to. It demands a cooperative and combined effort at the global level with diverse expertise coming in for a pragmatic approach and solution.

Soft power of a nation has often been seen to work towards creating a congenial environment for a country to develop combined efforts to solve in-state, regional and global problems. However, the duration of developing soft power might be longer than expected with a continuous investment of capital, intellect, physical resources and favourable policies. Culture has always been an important pillar of developing the soft power of a nation. Higher Education has been a very important subset of cultural diplomacy towards creating the soft power for a nation and institutions like the British Council, the Fulbright fellowships, Cervantes Institute, Goethe-Institut, DAAD, USIEF, Alliance Française, American Centre, Russian Centre and the Confucius Institute are live examples of leading efforts towards creating collaborations and spreading culture thought higher education and research. It is also one of the key areas of the aforesaid collective efforts in the above para towards building a mutual perspective for diverse problems at regional and global level.

This paper will trace trends in the incremental role of higher education in building a soft power milieu for a nation. It would also focus on cooperation and contestation in the higher education space between universities and institutions of different nations, as possible drivers of wider change in the geopolitical environment with impressions from India and China.

The notion of soft power presupposes the existence of a dominant narrative. Realist international scholars have focused on the distribution of power in the system. Liberal and constructivist frameworks on the other hand, have concerned themselves with the ideas and values that gain or lose prominence when backed by differential degrees of power. Transformation in the Global order is today the subject of multivariate analysis no longer limited to geopolitics and diplomacy, but extending to the influence of softer ideational aspects. Higher education and its internationalisation are no longer immune from systemic forces and their future trajectory will in large part depend on how they respond to globalisation and its discontents. Indeed, as drivers of creation of knowledge and dissemination of ideas, providers of higher learning could find themselves at the very epicentre of a diplomatic system in the throes of transformation. It is for these reasons that the potential of education to shape and reshape the soft power of a nation demands closer, longer investigation.

Culture as defined one of the important and critical part of attraction to people and societies across borders, is a set of social practices being practiced by a country and creating a meaningful impact on others to adopt the same. A culture when related to soft power can be defined as high culture such as literature, art, and education, which appeals to elites; and popular culture, which focuses on mass entertainment. (Nye, 2005). The concept of Culture within Soft Power covers the “exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding” (Michael J. Waller, 2009). The wide spectrum of Culture showcasing includes Arts, Education, History, Science, Customs, Religion, Philanthropy, Sports, Language, Professional Vocation, Tourism etc. Education has always been a primary focus of States across the world as it is a true representative of a country’s culture and pedagogy. It embraces a deep sense of a nation’s approach in today’s time of globalisation and the global value chain.

Developed countries like USA is also one of the strong proponent of Education, especially higher education as a Soft Power instrument with many observers agree that American higher education produces significant soft power for the United States. Secretary of State Colin Powell, for example, said in 2001: “I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated here.” (Nye, 2005). Further, Altbach, P. G., and Peterson, P. M. (2014) in his work has argued that Higher education has always served as an international force influencing intellectual and scientific development and spreading ideas worldwide. Its large scope of influence comprises of people and Institutions across borders. Higher Education has played a significant role in establishing America’s hierarchical stand in today’s world though its ascendant role in higher education with attracting brightest of students across the globe. On the other hand, it is also argued that soft power relationships and approaches are often ridden on self-interest of states which creates inequality in associations amongst nations. This is a rising issue highlighting a significant difference between East – West and North – South relationships in the world. There is a need to understand the motivation behind the aid in higher education given by developed nations through different channels like scholarships and grants to the developing countries. (Peterson, 2014).

Only a developed education system that meets the requirements of innovative high-tech economy, and is integrated into the international educational and scientific space, can become one of the major competitive advantages of the modern state in the “global competition for minds” and attract the most talented foreign students (Amirbek Ydyrys 2014). The provision of educational opportunities for foreign students is one of the most important instruments of soft power of the state (Cowan and Arsenault, 2008, s.10). These foreign students are most likely to carry back the culture and transitional knowledge from the host country to their home country thus leveraging a soft power effect to the people around them when they become successful (Nye, 2005, p. 12).

While countries in North America and Europe increasingly contend with the idea of knowledge societies having well established system of higher education and research, emerging countries such as China and India are found to be building their own capacities and staking claims for leadership in various ways. One of the important aspects of Chinese and Indian attempts towards developing an effective knowledge society for the holistic development of the two countries is to build a network of quality higher education Institutions through path breaking schemes and subsidiaries ultimately benefiting their Universities and Institutions to be globally benchmarked. This includes Chinese initiatives like Project 985, C-9 League and Project 211 and Indian Initiatives like the Institutions of Eminence and Institutions of National Importance to name a few. The paper also proposes to analyse the changing mind-set of the two Governments especially CPC in China towards the need of projecting its knowledge society at the global platform.

The overall impact of policies and initiatives by nations in the field of Higher education has enduring effects towards cooperation and contestations within and between the Higher education

sectors. Given this scenario, the paper will outline patterns of change and continuity, hoping to stimulate a more dynamic debate on diverse notions of order articulated through processes of knowledge creation and dissemination for all stakeholders. The paper attempts an assessment of education systems in China and India over the recent past to identify patterns of continuity with an approach similar to that of western institutions and departures from this broader story. In what ways have the two systems replicated experiences elsewhere and in what other areas do we see evidence of a unique trajectory?

Moving ahead, the paper highlights and talks about collaborations and mutual cooperation in the space of higher education for competitive advantage. It mentions selective collaborative programmes and cooperation patterns amongst states and its agencies also including Universities and Institutions. The paper further narrates the idea being practiced of ways in which Higher Education could be an Instrument for soft power and a possible source of generating impactful environment for states with a say in the global affairs. It also retrieves the possibility of a soft power projection through education systems towards enhancing global influence.

This paper reflects that the above approach are more strenuous efforts by countries like India and China to gain that soft power benefit in recognising international education at their corner. The methodology is rather uniform by creating world class Universities and Institutions to be positioned globally for connecting their aspirations to reality in the geopolitical environment. The rising competition between emerging nations for being a quality exporter of higher educational services thus pursuing their respective national interests has now been into realisation with other important sectors. We find that various other considerations for reform of higher education have been overshadowed by the choice of states recognising higher education as microcosm of soft power with a sense of contestation and cooperation.

The last part of the paper reflects on the unattended space in higher education towards a holistic approach for its development, especially in societies with scale like China and India. It argues that the overwhelming focus has been on building few world class Universities leaving behind a holistic development of the complete higher education system with challenges like access to higher education and failure to address the problems such as low Gross Enrolment Ratios in the two countries.

With the current challenge and need of the serious education reforms in the countries of scale like India and perhaps also China at some extent, the idea of prioritising handpicked institutions with additional funding and special treatments have raised questions on this particular approach. With a critical problem of access to higher education, countries like India may be avoiding to address the elephant in the room with over concentrated efforts to position its Universities and Institutions as world class destinations for higher education.

Developing education hubs with in a country signifies and reflects the role of wide spectrum of actors and stakeholders strategically involved in international higher education and research. It is a planned and concentrated set of efforts by a state to attract and train a large masses beyond borders to have an influential and attractive approach for the host country eventually projecting its soft power for national interests. These efforts are driven by a country's motivation to enhance its influence and linkages within the region and beyond. It helps a nation to be recognised as a reputed destination for pursuing higher education and gaining knowledge. These concerted efforts in higher education presents its importance as a critical factor in developing bilateral and multilateral relations while maximising cross cultural and international engagement though soft power (Knight, J., and De Wit, H. (2018)).

Building a Milieu for Creating World Class Universities: Chinese and Indian Approach

Higher Education across the globe, especially in the developing world is undergoing a paradigm shift with states focusing more towards establishing a reputed framework benchmarked with the best in the world for their own strategic interest. Building world class Universities and Institutions of global repute with a pedigree of attracting the best students, scholars and staff members in the world has been the focal point of emerging societies like China and India. What constitutes a world class university or institution? Models abound enabling us to answer this question; however, the forces of globalisation have also steered institutions across the world in a direction of conformity and competition, with the Humboldtian model emerging as the dominant frame of reference

There has been a shift of attention which started almost a decade ago in China and India for placing its selective Universities and Institutions amongst the world's best and ultimately participating in a global competition for attracting talent.

The Chinese Approach

Higher education in China has witnessed impressive growth under diverse government initiatives in the last two decades. This has been possible with concentrated efforts by the Chinese government for, at first creating the reach of Higher education to masses and then focusing on quality to be at par with the global benchmark.

(Li, H. 2010) *"Growth after the Cultural Revolution with the beginning of the economic reforms of 1978, Chinese higher education began expanding rapidly. From 1978 to 2006, the number of institutions of higher education more than tripled, and total enrolment exploded, increasing by a factor of 20. The acceleration in enrolments began around 1999, coinciding with government policies for expanding higher education. From 1999 to 2006, new enrolments grew at the astonishing average rate of 23% a year. As a result, the number of graduates also increased accordingly. The expansion also increased the probability of getting into college for those taking the national college entrance examinations."*

Today, China has a higher education system comprising of 2000 universities and colleges, with more than six million students. The system offers Bachelors, Masters and Doctoral degrees also open to foreign students. The Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China (MOE) is the government authority for all matters pertaining to education and language states that higher education in China has played a significant part in economic growth, scientific progress and social development in the country *"by bringing up large scale of advanced talents and experts for the construction of socialist modernization."* (MoE PRC). *"China is also a major destination for international students, and is the most sought-after destination in Asia by students from across the globe. In fact, China is moving fast to overtake the United Kingdom as the second most popular country for international students by 2020"*. (China's [Higher Education September 17, 2015](#)).

It has been more than a decade that Chinese government announced and decided to work radically towards revamping its higher education system with a strong aspiration to establish quality centric universities at its core. the major drivers for this strategic goal was few of the key projects initiated by the Chinese government primarily as "211 Project," in 1995 the "985 Project," and some related projects like the "863 Project" and the "973 Project." Project 211 focused on the National Key Universities and colleges with the intent of raising the research standards of high-level universities and cultivating strategies for socio-economic development. It included the distribution of 2 billion US\$ approx. systematically in the first phase to these Universities to achieve a standard of scientific, technical, and human resources with advanced degree programs). Project 211 schools take on the responsibility of training four-fifths of doctoral

students, two-thirds of graduate students, half of students from abroad and one-third of undergraduates. They offer 85% of the state's key subjects, hold 96% of the state's key laboratories, and consume 70% of scientific research funding. People's Daily Online, (March 2008) *The total finding under this project is estimated around 10 billion yuan*. It is also countered that post 2014, project 211 was widely replaced by a new project named as Plan 111 for introducing talents of discipline to universities and establishing innovation centres.

The then CPC General secretary and Chinese President Jiang Zemin announced the Project 985 at the 100th anniversary of Peking University on May 4, 1998, to promote the development and reputation of the Chinese higher education system by founding world-class universities in the 21st century. The founding members of the project were elite 9 universities of China which later own formed the C9 league kind of headed by Peking University. A total of 39 Universities were funded under the project and in 2011 it was announced that no further addition will be made to the project. Another related project, the 863 programme included strategic funding to Institutions to remove Chinese dependency on foreign technology and to create an environment of advance technological solutions to in-house requirements. Whereas, the 973 programme was launched as a support mechanism for basic research to acquire technological and strategic advantage in diverse scientific fields, especially the development of the rare earth minerals industry.

Riding on the success of its initial strategic initiatives to boost up its higher education sector at a domestic level, China has recently initiated the Project World-Class 2.0 under the leadership of President Xi Jinping. Analysing the past two tenures of the earlier leadership in China, there has been a new strategy every time not completely stopping the previous ones. First, the 985 Project under President Jiang Zemin and then 2011 Project by President Hu Jintao. Therefore, it was not a totally new-fangled approach adopted by President Xi Jinping by launching Project World-Class 2.0. This might also be China's strategy to keep up with the pace at different fronts at a global level in higher education. China's dream of having world class universities and institutions was wider in terms of achievable goals in the earlier projects and this has been rightly identified by the current government thus focusing on key disciplines and selective universities to support. Every Chinese leadership in the past few decades have been focusing on the recent trends and farsightedness to be in the contestation of the world class in higher education and thus coming up with a new strategy every time.

(China Daily, 2016). *"The Double First Class University Plan or Double Top University Plan or World Class 2.0 announced in 2015 and implemented in 2017 focuses on a holistic and inclusive development of leading Chinese universities and their selective departments into world class universities and disciplines by the end of 2050. The first phase is comprised of 42 first class universities (36 Class A schools and 6 Class B schools) and 465 first class disciplines (spread among 140 schools including the first class universities). However, the discontinuity or the replacement of earlier Projects mainly, 211, 985 and C9 league by the World Class 2.0 project was not completely clear."*

In terms of the results produced by these initiatives we find that while in 2011, there were only six Chinese universities in Times Higher Education's World University Rankings, whereas in 2015–2016 there were 37, more than either Canada or Australia and growing. For instance, by establishing the collaborative funding opportunities with the partner countries has gained China has positioned itself strategically a strategic advantage in the current scenario. One such engagement is the UK-China BRI Countries Partnership Fund which is collaborative initiative between the British Council and Ministry of Education, Govt. of China to proactively support multi-lateral higher education links between the UK, China, and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) Countries, including ASEAN countries. The earlier efforts were considered and acknowledged worldwide as key strategic policy formulation to strengthen China's competitiveness with the best in the world on a strong platform with sustainable development. It will not be wrong to say that

China has moved much ahead from an education system established on legalist and Confucian ideals to a pragmatic structure for its own socialist ideology of addressing the higher education for masses and creating world class universities and institutions at par amongst the best.

Arguably, amongst the most strategic initiatives ever taken by the Chinese Government to positions itself globally is the “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI). The exclusive Chinese programme envelops the main objectives of establishing and improving the bilateral, regional and “1+N” form of international relations riding on infrastructural extension for economic trade and relations. Education is one of the significant parts of the “Belt and Road Initiative.” The primary purpose of including education as a part of the BRI is to nurture international relations through academic collaboration, collaborative research and students and faculty exchanges.

The Indian Approach

Higher Education system in **India** is the third largest in the world following USA and China. As of 2018, based on the Ministry of Human Resource Development data, India has 800 + universities, comprised of 44 central universities, 540 state universities, 122 deemed universities, 90 private universities, 5 institutions established and functioning under the State Act, and 75 Institutes of National Importance which include AIIMS, IITs, IIST and NITs among others. Across the country, tertiary enrolment rates have increased at a compound annual growth rate of 3.5% in the 5 years preceding 2016. Current enrolment stands at 34.58 million, over 15% more than the 29.2 million enrolled in 2011.

Indian higher education system is currently accelerating at a pace and in all possibility stand to overtake U.S. in the next 5 years and China in the next 15 years, to become the largest system of higher education in the world. There has been a substantive growth in the Indian higher education system since the end of the colonial rule. However, there is a massive shortage of access to higher education in the country leaving the quality factor aside. A cumbersome higher education set up with complex regulations encompassing numerous irregularities and anomalies has now been put in a slow gradual changing improvement process with a bright future ahead given a string commitment from government for the betterment of the system with sustained efforts. It is evident that India is set to become the world’s youngest nation with an approximate 140 million aspirants for higher education.

The policy-making priority has gradually shifted from heavily relying on regulation for quality control to recognising the need of greater autonomy for selected Institutions through initiatives like “Institutions of Eminence.” Institutions of Eminence (IOE) scheme has been launched in order to implement the commitment of the Government to empower the Higher Educational Institutions and to help them become world class teaching and research institutions, as announced by the Hon’ble Finance Minister in his budget speech of 2016. UGC, ten public and ten private institutions are to be identified to emerge as world-class Teaching and Research Institutions. This will enhance affordable access to high quality education for ordinary Indians. The selected Institutions are expected to attract higher levels of funding and be empowered to establish autonomous governance structures.

Under the scheme, Public Institutions of Eminence are eligible for a grant of ₹1000 crores from the government and no funds will be given to Private Institutions of Eminence. The IoEs will enjoy complete academic and administrative freedom. The primary objective of the Ministry of Education in India is to provide support and prepare the IoEs to become world-class institutions and the ultimate aim of the scheme is to make them secure top global rankings. There are also other critical factors for an IOE including 1:10 students-faculty ratio, minimum cap on faculty quality and numbers, research quality and infrastructure, networking plan, governance plan, financial and administrative plan to name a few.

Higher education as a sector is not been untouched with an undercurrent to be a sector of global preference and global positioning. It has now secondary effects beyond education and India is not lagging far behind than other countries. The contesting nature of higher education in today's world with positioning its Universities and Institutions amongst the best in the world have been in the forefront of national policies recently. The draft New Education Policy of 2019, is similarly noteworthy for its underlying thrust on reform. From expanding recognition to credits earned via the online and distance learning mode, to clearing the path for entry of leading foreign institutions to operate in India, a host of departures from earlier previous practice suggest an embrace of the global. The government of India has also redoubled its efforts to receive international students for study in Indian institutions through the Study in India policy. In excess of one thousand five hundred programmes are now on offer to international students via the official Study in India portal. An important provision under study in India is that of financial aid to students from listed countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America and children of Indian Diaspora.

In another recent move, India has set-up a massive scholarship project for ASEAN countries, providing 1000 Doctoral fellowship in India for research students from ASEAN nations. The internationally renowned Institutions in technical education, the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) are inviting scholars from ASEAN countries to apply for PhD fellowships to strengthen the deep and historical relations between India and ASEAN. The institution thrives for its quality education and strict selection criteria. When selected, research scholars will be able to complete PhD with funding from the Government of India. The funding includes a monthly stipend and an annual research grant for up to 5 years of their PhD program. This particular move is seen under India's "Act East" policy and regional cooperation to balance the Chinese influence in the region. However, there are other advantages of developing strong ties through academics and research with ASEAN nations.

The Indian and Chinese approaches vary in some respects. In terms of starting points, in the Indian context, institutional autonomy from regulatory overreach has been a key concern. The vision and potential for internationalisation also varies widely across public and private institutions. The operative mechanisms within the Chinese system, on the other hand, have permitted the fostering of a better-defined set of goals and simultaneous buy-in from a broad spectrum of institutions.

As regards benchmarking, the Chinese have more overtly embraced existing norms, shown a preference for setting quantitative targets and directing efforts at achieving them. The debate in India, on the other hand, is still centred on aligning operation of domestic institutions with fundamental goals such as achieving research excellence. The quest is for finding a structural mix that is globally competitive, while still respecting local diversity and responding to domestic needs. The target audiences also differ in each case. The Chinese have opted to first cement their global reputation and then consolidate at the regional level through initiatives such as Belt and Road and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Indian policy has positioned the country as an appropriate study destination for students from emerging countries. One may surmise that this preference is a reflection of India's long standing self-image as the promoter of interests of the developing world.

An interesting hypothesis for further research emerges from these observations: Attainment of global recognition by the higher education systems of China and India will intensify the competition for narrative dominance in the global order. The components of alternative narratives would include both, alternative visions of global order as well as different understandings of knowing and learning itself.

Higher Education and Global Positioning: The Chinese Way

While the forgoing discussion examines the impact of broader global trends and developments on the higher education sector, it is also important to identify the ways in which the sector has been a driver of change. The evolution of higher education internationalisation has mirrored major global developments and geostrategic change. It is imperative to again cite China's position as a leading example in this direction. There has been a three-way approach being adopted towards establishing its global positioning in higher education by China ultimately leading to position itself in the global order though covertly:

1. Promoting its students to study abroad under diverse modes:
(Li, H. 2010). *"Since 1978, the number of Chinese students going abroad has increased continually except for the period of 1988 to 1991, due to the Tiananmen Square demonstration. Figure 8.1 shows the total number of Chinese students and scholars studying abroad. The number increased from 860 in 1978 to 134,000 in 2006. In this period, there were more than 900,000 Chinese students and scholars who studied abroad. Based on the Institute of International Education (2007a), China has been the overall largest supplier of international students to countries around the world over the past decade. Since 1992, especially after 1998, the growth in the total number of Chinese students going abroad to study has accelerated. The total number of students going abroad increased from 2900 in 1991 to 6540 in 1992, an increase of 126%. The second fastest increase occurred in 2001, growing that year by 115%."*
2. Inviting international students to study in China under diverse Scholarships:
According to the study, published in the Journal of Studies in International Education in 2018, the number of international students in China has grown more than tenfold since 1995, from 36,855 to 442,773. More than half (57.9%) of international students in China come from other countries in Asia. The Ministry of Education in China stated through China daily in March 2019 that the number of Chinese students studying abroad reached 662,100 in 2018, up 8.83% from a year earlier. Most of the students funded their studies by themselves, accounting for 90% of the total and only 65,800 were sponsored by public funding. The number of overseas students returning home after graduation totalled 519,400 in 2018, up 8% from the previous year. A total of 5.86 million Chinese studied abroad from 1978 to the end of 2018. More than 4.32 million completed their studies, and more than 3.65 million chose to return to China after completing their studies. China will challenge the UK's position as second in the world for international study by 2020, according to a latest report led by Student.com, accommodation provider for international students. The report said a record breaking 397,635 international students went to China in 2015 and China has been the third most popular destination for overseas students ahead of Canada, Germany and France. The report added that although there has been a slowdown in numbers since 2014, the number of foreign students in China has been growing on average 10% year-on-year since 2006. The report forecasts that at current growth rates China will overtake the UK to be the second most popular destination for international students, behind the USA at number one.

With a strategic approach, Universities and Institutions in China are attracting students from all across the globe in substantial quantities through fully and semi-funded scholarships and exchange programmes for students. There are approximately 243 Chinese scholarships for aspiring students to undertake their study or a part of it in China. These also include research internships and dissertation at masters and PhD level. These scholarships are administered by China at

provincial and federal level. One of the leading example of Chinese contestation in higher education through cooperation is Schwarzman Scholarships funded by the American businessman and philanthropist, Stephen Allen Schwarzman which was incorporated in June 2016 in collaboration with Tsinghua University in Beijing. These scholarships provide an opportunity for a one-year masters study in China at Tsinghua University with disciplines like Public Policy, International Relations, Economics and Business. The idea behind the scholarships is to prepare future leaders which understand the role of China in the current geo-political environment. This would help in establishing sustainable platforms of possible collaborations fostering combined efforts for global social and economic development. The primary beneficiaries of these scholarships have been Americans students comprising of approximately half of the population of Schwarzman scholars. All of this repeatedly reflects China's stand in a much broader context presenting a fine equilibrium for the global order with respect to their national interests.

3. Maintaining a fine balance between the two to maximise leverage as a preferred player in Higher Education:

The per capita income in china is at an increasing rate hinting towards growing expense for higher education in a natural phenomenon. This may also result in students from China opting for studying abroad in popular destinations like USA and UK or for that matters Australia as per their personal choices. However, Chinese government are putting up their best foot to create a fine balance between the two in encouraging its students to study abroad while retaining the best of the minds to pursue their higher education with elite Chinese Universities and Institutions. On other hand, china is aggressively supporting numerous in-house scholarships to invite a pool of higher education aspirants and research scholars under diverse scholarships that it offers through various initiatives.

“China is using international university partnerships to cement its regional and global position, making higher education a jumping-off point not just for research collaboration but also for city to city and industrial partnerships. While the Asian giant is keen to bridge the quality gap between its universities and top universities overseas, it also needs to collaborate with top Western universities to boost innovation as it moves from being a manufacturing economy up the value chain. “With the further deepening of [higher education] reform and opening up, the internationalisation of education in China is accelerating,” Zhong Weihe, President of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, March 2016.

Another, comparative example of Chinese importance given to the principle of attraction within the Soft Power realm through higher education and research is their Thousand Talents Plan or Thousand Talents Program (TTP) or Overseas High-Level Talent Recruitment Programs established in 2008 by the central government of China to recognize and recruit leading international experts in scientific research, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

The program rolled out from the “Talent Superpower Strategy” of the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2007. The programme was further magnified in 2010 and became a high standard award within the China's National Talent Development Plan to further strengthen innovation and international competitiveness within China. The 1000 Talent Plan professorship became one of the highest academic award by the State Council, similar to the top-level award given by the Ministry of Education. The program includes two mechanisms: resources for permanent recruitment into Chinese academia, and resources for short-term appointments that typically target international experts who have full-time employment at a leading international university or research laboratory.

There have also been substantial arguments by both the United States and Canada about the Chinese intentions to use this opportunity to gain access to new technology for economic and military advantage. The programme gained subsequent praise and admiration within the Chinese circles for recruiting top international talent to China. However, it also faced substantial dis-paragement for not focusing on indigenous talent and to address the brain drain in higher education and research.

Critical Perspectives: Access, Equity, Quality and Context

The resolute focus on selective universities and institutions with ploughing physical and monetary resources with an ambition to bring them at par with the best of the western universities is interestingly becoming one of the priorities for higher education policy-making in China and India. The chronic issues like state of the art infrastructure for higher education institutions in countries like India with a vital problem of access to education cannot be brushed under the carpet for the sake of projecting unrealistic might with a handful of Institutions at the global platform. Reconciling exclusivity with on-going demands for increased access is a tight-rope the Indian system must walk.

Data suggests that the Indian higher education system is still playing catch-up in the domestic realm itself. *According to UGC, the total number of sanctioned teaching posts in various Central Universities are 16,699 for professors, 4731 for associate professors, and 9585 for assistant professors. Out of the total sanctioned teaching posts, 5925 (35%) professor posts, 2183 (46%) associate professor posts and 2459 (26%) assistant professor posts are vacant.*

The **National Education Policy 2020** proposed by the Ministry of Education, Government of India of India gives a new hope with an aim to address the many growing developmental imperatives of India as a country. The proposed revision and revitalisation of the entire education structure right from kindergarten to higher education has brought hopes to many minds for a better education system in India. There has been a long unfulfilled need of this development in the basic educational structure in India which might create more association with the aspirational goals of India as a regional centre of quality education.

There always has been a competitive edge in gaining a worldwide reputation for a nation's Universities and Institutions achieved through retaining best of the talents at faculty and students level with adequate resources available, good governance with productive environment, government support with favourable policies at State and National level and with an integrated vision of carrying out top level research and publication activities. However, in emerging societies like India and China, the above notion is a much reliant on a support mechanism provided by the National Governments, unlike the western case where the idea of private philanthropic initiatives had propelled the growth of Universities and Institutions. These nations thus gradually made a comprehension regarding the values generated by its higher education institutions and their importance in supporting its voice in the global order. Riding on this, the focused initiatives by these respective governments as discussed in this paper above may be considered as responsive or to an extent mercurial measures in today's world.

The policy framework of a nation in congruent to the productivity of its Universities and Institutions in terms of quality teaching and research outcomes defines and forms the cornerstone of the foundational structure of its knowledge society or economy recognised at a global platform. The higher education system of a nation is not confined to its scholarly output, sustenance and economic growth. It rather encapsulates the societal and cultural values, educational milieu, political structure and ideology, regional heterogeneity and outlook towards the global issues of a country. It also shapes the position of a nation to have a say in a geo-political environment at diverse fronts on a range of subjects.

COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world in a manner of fast pace with Universities and Institutions adopting novel practices of the delivery of higher education moving out of the conventional ways of higher education and its related learning. Worldwide the governing bodies, educational institutions, public and private organizations, all are affected and radically changed their way of functioning within weeks and unfortunately, might be for longer run too. (Saha et al., 2021, February). Online education has been a no brainer for most of the Universities and Institutions in both India and China. Conventional Universities in India and China has also been forced to adopt these non-normative forms of higher education delivery addressing students' requirements across their own regions.

The education sector is witnessing massive changes and adopting revolutionary ideas shifting entire pedagogical approach to keep the momentum going. This shift in education from traditional classroom learning to computer-based learning might be one of the largest educational experiments to date. Universities and Institutions across China and India are helping and putting the best for forward for their students during the distressing moments in COVID19 times. All classes and lectures at all levels are now being conducted in hybrid and online mode along with physical and conventional mode with social distancing and other COVID19 protocols as per the State's regulations. Student-faculty interactions have also been graded to the virtual world. Access to technology and faculty determination is contributing to the success for this redefined paradigm shift, ensuring the cover up for academic calendar without the undesired break. Institutes are employing webinars as knowledge sharing sessions, video calls for one-to-one interactions, also made their admission process online in totality. Online applications are being accepted from aspirants desirous of applying for fresh batches followed by virtual/online interviews. Chinese universities has also been proactive in curbing coronavirus. Their swift and effective response deserves to be recognized by the international community so that everyone can learn from the experience. The use of online education in Chinese universities has been significantly expanded, fast becoming the main mode of instruction implemented on a massive scale. Even those universities that did not have much previous e-learning experience have started teaching online. The Universities and Institutions across China and India has rapidly adjusted to the pandemic and now has infrastructure at place to cater to the demand of the students at all levels.

Higher education policies and good governance also addresses the critical issue of endorsing bilateral relations and regional harmony with an extension of mutual cooperation between Universities and Institutions of the respective nations. The collaborations been undertaken across the globe towards mutual academic and research engagements leaves a wide impact on the support mechanism of creating a mutual beneficial platform between the participating nations. A higher education system and its nuances are the true representatives of a country's culture and pedagogy. It embraces a deep sense of a nation's approach in today's time of globalisation and the global value chain. Its universities and Institutions are not only a major source of the key resources (human capital) towards its economic and social development, but also positions a nation globally. Having said that it would not be an overstatement to state that the World class anxiety has overshadowed the objective of unified growth and development for the higher education system that is sensitive to local manifestations of global developments. The competitive edge of a nation in the global knowledge economy has been a *prima facie* priority in the recent times. The internationalisation agenda of institutions of higher learning has gained from this development but also suffered when the populist backlash against globalisation has manifested itself in policy measures. Whether China and India will deploy an enhanced status of their education systems to reinforce continuity, cooperation or contestation is of great relevance to our shared global destiny.

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