

# Redefining Nepal's Foreign Policy on the Basis of Its Soft-Power Assets

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## Abstract

This paper examines the bilateral and multilateral relations of Nepal with soft power superpowers. It discusses the proper identification of soft power resources and instruments on their ground and mobilization of those to the targeted country using formal, public, and economic diplomacy with an aim of uplifting soft power ranks and indices. The homilies and diplomatic activities of Nepal have been examined using the soft power theory and the small state lens. In addition, it also aims to analyze Nepal's complex involvement in international affairs at the levels of governments, think tanks, research institutions, and academia. This paper has been prepared primarily based on desk research, mainly utilizing secondary data sources.

**Keywords:** soft power superpower, foreign policy, diplomacy, small state, Nepal

## Introduction

International relations are determined by the politics of great powers who prominently strive their influence to achieve their national interests. Even after attaining the highest level of development, every nation has to rely to some extent on other nations to serve their interests. In today's world, no nation can remain isolated. So, interdependence in foreign relations is a common phenomenon for all countries. Interdependence in world politics refers to situations characterized by reciprocal effects among countries or actors in different countries (Keohane & Nye, 1977). However, the dependence and interdependence status of foreign relations is determined by power intrinsic within the given state.

Power has many different meanings and manifestations that have evolved. In essence, the manifestations of power include scientific prowess, political sway, economic might, and military might. To exert more political, economic, military, or other types of influence over others, the participants in international relations use their powers in a variety of ways. Actors in global politics and international relations

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use eight distinct and fundamental types of power (soft, hard, smart, relational, structural, compulsory, institutional, and productive) to protect their sovereignty, independence, and security, and pursue national goals (Sotirovic, 2020). Many governments today prioritize soft power as a key foreign policy goal (Singh and Macdonald, 2017).

The appeal of a state's culture, political principles, and foreign policy make up its soft power which is a specific force of attraction (Nye 2008, 2004). In this sense, formulating foreign policy is an essential function of the modern state connected to the soft power of a certain nation. Therefore, to advance its own interests in relation to other countries, each state establishes diplomatic, economic, trade, educational, cultural, and political relations with those countries. These relations also compel each state to maintain relationships with other states, as well as with international organizations and non-governmental actors. Therefore, a state's soft power assets play a crucial role in pursuing its own inter, achieving its foreign policy goals, and upholding its international ties. This also applies to Nepal's international affairs.

### **Nepal's International Relations**

Nepal's foreign policy, with its immediate neighbors, China and India, as well as other distantly positioned powers, is not distinctly independent but rather mutually interconnected. Nepal is geo-strategically located between China and India, two of the most economically and politically strong countries in Asia. Nepal first established diplomatic ties with the UK in 1816 and most recently with Sierra Leone on June 29, 2021 (MOFA, 2021). Nepal currently maintains diplomatic ties with 171 countries. The guiding concepts, policies, and duties of the Nepali regarding about its foreign policy are laid out in the 2015 Nepali Constitution. As stated in the directive principles (Article 51), international relations policies must conduct an independent foreign policy based on the United Nations Charter, non-alignment, *Panchsheel* principles, international law, and norms of world peace, while actively defending Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and national interest.

Nepal has stated nine major foreign policy objectives, which are as follows: (1) to strengthen bilateral relations with all countries, including neighbors, based on sovereign equality, mutual benefit, and respect; (2) to advance national interest by strengthening Nepal's national identity and representation in international and regional fora; and (3) to play an effective role in multilateral fora for world peace (4)to cooperate in establishing a just, inclusive, and fair system of international law; to advance regional cooperation, peace, and collaboration; and (6) to aid in the socioeconomic change of the nation by engaging in economic diplomacy in areas like promoting investment, export, and tourism as well as mobilizing development cooperation. (7) to assist in achieving the goal of a prosperous country and its citizens

(8) to safeguard the interests of Nepali people as well as legitimate foreign business, labor, and employment entities; and (9) to advance soft power by highlighting the nation's exceptional natural beauty, native civilization, lifestyle, diversity, arts, languages, literature, and sports. These goals set forth a broad range of requirements for diplomatic missions and foreign policy actions. The brief comment on foreign policy goals suggests that soft power assets are required to attain them. However, there is still more research to be done on how diplomatic practices and the use of soft power resources can advance goals.

Long-standing bilateral relations between Nepal and the countries with which it has bilateral ties have resulted in the establishment of 30 residential embassies, 3 permanent missions to the United Nations and other international organizations, and 6 consulate generals (MOFA, 2021). These countries are spread across the African, American, Asian, European, and Oceanian continents. Additionally, Nepal maintains diplomatic relations with numerous international, regional, and multilateral organizations, including the United Nations (UN), World Health Organization (WHO), World Trade Organization (WTO), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and others.

Nepal also participates in and signs multilateral agreements. Nepal has ratified 27 international treaties and is a party to 165 other similar multilateral agreements. Such participations in international forums (bilateral, regional, and multilateral) aid Nepal in promoting soft power. Such interactions are components of Nepal's soft power. In light of the shifting situation, Nepal should try to expand its soft power promotion missions to other nations.

Nepal's use of soft power in its foreign policy and international relations has resulted in significant cooperation with foreign entities. However, scholarly studies, as to whether Nepal's soft powers have been effectively used in her relations with other countries to attain foreign policy goals, are lacking.

Additionally, Nepal's soft power will benefit from its dedication to human rights and the domestication of international human rights rules. By domesticating human rights accords, Nepal is a country that respects human rights. The fact that numerous human rights treaties have been ratified without any reservations logically justifies Nepal's increased internalization of international human rights legislation (Pathak, 2018, p. 12). Even though Nepal has maintained substantial bilateral and multilateral ties with several nations, analysts and academics contend that Nepal's foreign policy currently places the most focus on upholding mutual trust and confidence with China and India. Thus, it is natural that the majority of studies focus primarily on these two nations, thereby reflecting on Nepal's geopolitical reality, although

it is still unclear whether Nepal's foreign policy is focused on its neighbors. This explains why Nepal has not improved or built good connections with far-off nations with soft power superpower status countries such as Japan, Germany, Australia, Canada, Brazil, South Africa, and the United Arab Emirates. Regarding relations with nations outside of its region, Nepal's foreign policy appears to be underdeveloped.

Nepal has long-standing bilateral and multilateral relationships with several actors and soft power superpowers in the world. The question as to how well Nepal's diplomatic ties with soft power giants have served to protect national interests and advance foreign policy goals is therefore a pressing one.

### **Concept of Soft Power Super Powers**

“Soft power” is an iconic word among political scientists, political leaders, policymakers, scholars, academia, researchers, and other stakeholders in international relations discourses. The concept of “Soft Power” exists discretely in the discourse formally after Harvard University Professor Joseph Nye used the term in his book 'Bound to Lead' published in 1990. Soft power is a specific power of attraction to a state based on the appeal of its culture, political values, and foreign policies (Nye Jr, 2004, p. 11, 2008, p. 96). Further, Nye explains that soft power is a nation's ability to influence the preferences and behaviors of various actors in the international arena through attraction or persuasion rather than coercion. Nye specifies that, ‘The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)’ (Nye, 2004, p.11).

In this connection, Ohnesorge (2020, p. 85-205) has recently made comprehensive discourses about soft power resources (culture, values, policies, and personalities), instruments (public and personal diplomacy), receptions (attractions, apathy, and repulsion), and outcomes (compliance, neutrality, and opposition). Further, he attempted to concise the taxonomy of soft power in a separate chapter entitled ‘A Taxonomy of Soft Power: Introducing a New Conceptual Paradigm’. The taxonomy of soft power in four sub-units with their respective indicators are:

- (1) Indicators of resources are; (a) Culture: Pervasiveness of (high and popular) culture, (b) Values: values represented, consistency of values with political action, commitment to multilateralism, (c) Policies: grand strategy, relation to hard and soft power, the primacy of national interest vs. common good, adherence to international law, credibility and legitimacy, prevalent domestic policies and issues, and (d) Personalities: character and charisma of decision-makers, a team of cabinet members and advisors, and relationships between decision-makers.

- (2) Indicators of soft power instruments are; (a) Public Diplomacy: overall organizational structure, personnel (leading positions and staff), budget, and particular programs and initiatives, (b) Personal Diplomacy: number, duration, and quality of foreign travels, speeches and public remarks, symbolic acts, and influential networks.
- (3) Indicators of soft power reception: public opinion polls, contemporary statements and subsequent reminiscences of decision-makers and elites, media and content analysis. And,
- (4) Indicators of soft power outcomes: compliance record in international organizations, voting patterns in the UN General Assembly, compliance in foreign policy decisions, and number and character of treaties concluded/joined (Ohnesorge, 2020. p. 204).

Thus, soft power measurement, observation, and evaluation is a very comprehensive procedure and urges in-depth discourses. At present, the concept of soft power has undergone a critical analysis by a wide range of academics, foreign policy analysts, think tanks, politicians, diplomats, and researchers.

In light of the increasing relevance of soft power in international politics, the measurement and evaluation of soft power inherited within a particular state is a prime concern among the stakeholders. As such, soft power has undergone an 'evaluative turn' and three major institutions have emerged to develop indices and set indicators to it. These are The Global 30 by Portland, the Global Soft Power Index by Brand Finance, and China National Image Global Survey (GNIGS) by the Academy of Contemporary China and World Study (ACCWS) and Kantar group (Zhang, 2019). The GNIGS and The Soft Power 30 are not comprehensive as GNIGS focuses on China's soft power through had included up to 22 states and 11000 respondents and The Portland's Soft Power 30 only focuses on 30 states, including poll in 25 countries with 12,500 respondents (McClory, 2019) and are largely Western countries. Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index 2021 (Brand Finance, 2021) provides a more comprehensive list of soft power countries and indicators. It highlights the soft power of 105 based on 75,000 respondents and features countries from–Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, North America, Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa and ranked 100 countries. Besides, Portland's Soft Power 30 relies on six indicators, namely, Culture, Education, Engagement, Digital, Enterprise, and Government; Brand Finance's Global Soft Power Index 2021 has eleven broader indicators including:

It is difficult to identify soft power superpowers on the battlefield of soft power, however, top rank states by geographical sectors in Global Soft Power Index 2021, are assumed as soft power superpowers in this research. They are Germany, Japan, Canada, Australia, UAE, Brazil, and South Africa. Table 1 reveals the global

and geographical sector ranks of the states that are at the top of the list of the abovementioned indicators in terms of soft power.

Table 1

S.N.	Name of the State	Geographical Sector	Global Rank	Geographical Sector Rank	Remarks
1.	Germany	Europe	1 <sup>st</sup>	1	
2.	Japan	Asia	2 <sup>nd</sup>	1	
3.	Canada	North America	4 <sup>th</sup>	1	
4.	Australia	Oceania	10 <sup>th</sup>	1	
5.	UAE	Middle East and North Africa	17 <sup>th</sup>	1	
6.	Brazil	Latin America and Caribbean	35 <sup>th</sup>	1	
7.	South Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	37 <sup>th</sup>	1	

Fortunately, Nepal has continued to maintain diplomatic and bilateral ties with all of these superpowers through soft power. What attraction and influence does Nepal have on these soft power superpowers to continue bilateral, diplomatic, and international ties? Now is the right time for Nepal to consider how to position itself in a brand-new environment and what soft power tools it might use to succeed as a player on the global stage. It is asserted, however, that Nepal has been undermining its previously earned soft power credentials by eroding self-identity as a result of acculturation and marginalizing personal values.

The attraction of soft power superpowers towards Nepal may be ensured by the soft powers, and Nepal can defend sovereignty, promote independence beyond interdependence, reveal national priorities, and defend national interests. Therefore, identifying Nepali soft power at this time is a hot topic. The question of why different players are eager to participate in bilateral relations with Nepal and how soft power resources should be utilized to advance goals of shared interest must also be addressed.

In this context, one of the main goals of this article is to find a response to the question, "What are Nepal's soft powers that draw soft power superpowers to her in international affairs?" Why have Nepal and variously situated soft power superpowers been working together to sustain cordial Diplomatic relations? How can Nepal use soft power elements in international relations to defend its interests, promote mutual gain, and strengthen friendly ties with all soft power superpowers? In this context, the researcher examines Nepal's soft power and its role in international relations with soft power superpowers by emphasizing key areas of interaction between Nepal and both sides of these superpowers.

### **Nepal and Soft Power Superpowers**

Formal diplomacy is considered to be the primary peacemaking tool of a state's

foreign policy (Mapendere, 2005). Formal diplomacy is government-to-government diplomacy – also called Track-I Diplomacy – that goes through formal, traditional channels of communication to communicate with foreign governments (written documents, meetings, summits, diplomatic visits, etc.). This type of diplomacy is conducted by diplomats of one nation with diplomats and other officials of another nation or international organization. Formal Diplomacy can use political power to influence the direction of negotiations and outcomes (Sanders, 1991). This power might include using the threat of military force if a party decides to go against international treaties. It can access material and financial resources that give high leverage and flexibility in negotiations (Bercovitch and Houston, 2000), and employ in-depth knowledge about the parties' interests because of the use of various intelligence sources (Stein and Lewis, 1996). In this regard, the study of the formal diplomacy of Nepal to soft power superpowers is another dimension of discourse to implement the foreign policies of Nepal. Diplomatic engagement, diplomatic missions, bilateral exchange, bilateral agreements, political visits, summits, and diplomatic visits between Nepal and soft power superpowers and their impacts on the achievement of foreign policy objectives carries great significance.

Skills in diplomatic relations for a small country like Nepal is the most important mean of achieving its foreign policy goals, objectives, and strategies (Malla, 2018). Nepal has to adopt appropriate diplomatic techniques and successful regulations with soft power superpowers of the world adopting proper give-and-take policy and promoting economic diplomacy and making it people and country friendly. The appointment of appropriate and qualified persons with adequate knowledge of international relations, diplomacy, politics, economics, and history, as diplomats, enhances the status of Nepal and promotes national interests in international affairs. In this regard, the diplomatic engagement and formal diplomacy of Nepal to the world community is an opportunity to enhance her development and safeguard national interest through foreign policy objectives attainment. The formal diplomacy of a soft power superpower indicates that the wider diplomatic engagement and formal diplomacy volume of particular countries have wider soft power potentialities and soft power mobilization. So, Nepal's diplomatic relations with soft power superpowers also have a strong link with soft power utilization of her

Nepal has been engaging with soft power superpowers with the establishment of diplomatic relations with Japan-September 1, 1956, Germany-April 4, 1958, Australia-February 15, 1960, Canada-January 18, 1965, Brazil-February 7, 1976, UAE- January 22, 1977, and South Africa-July 28, 1994 (MOFA, 2021). Furthermore, as an active member of the UN, she has been continuously contributing to and benefiting from it in all its major achievements, activities and programs (Acharya, 2019) ranging from peace and security, development, human rights,

international law and humanitarian issues. As scholar Yadu Nath Khanal writes to describe the role of Nepal in the UN: “Nepal has always sought to be vigilant about international problems and has never thought of escaping from them, she has not, on the other hand, poked her nose in any and every matter and has, as a matter of policy refrained from meddling in other’s people affairs. Nepal has never sought the limelight but has always worked silently to establish her legitimate position in the world (2000, p.36)”.

Before 1950, the international relations of Nepal with her counterpart were mainly initiated by them, not by Nepal. In this regard, Werner Levi (1957) mentions, “In most cases, the relations which have grown between Nepal and foreign countries since 1950 was due to the initiative of these countries, not Nepal.” If this statement of Levi is a fact, then what are the hidden interests of those who initiated bilateral relations with Nepal at that time? The answer to this question hints towards the soft power inherited within Nepal. Furthermore, how often Nepal and soft power superpowers have promoted the achievement of their foreign policy objectives? The following are the contents of the discourses.

Long before diplomatic relations were established between Japan and Nepal, the people of these two countries established connections and companionship when the Zen Buddhist scholar Ekai Kawaguchi arrived in Nepal on January 26, 1899, and stayed for two and a half years to collect Buddhist manuscripts and to study the sacred place Lumbini where Lord Buddha was born (Thapa, 2018). According to MOFA (2021), the relationship of Nepal with Japan became formal with the establishment of diplomatic relations on September 1, 1956. The relations between the two countries are marked by friendliness, goodwill, and cooperation. Nepal established its embassy in Tokyo in 1965 and Japan established its embassy in Kathmandu in 1967. Japan has maintained bilateral and multilateral relations with the countries and organizations located in diverse geographical sectors of the world. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (MOFAJ, 2021), the country has established 196 embassies overseas, 85 consulate generals, 11 permanent missions, and 18 multilateral missions all over the world.

According to the diplomatic blue book (2020), Japan pursues diplomacy with a focus on (1) further strengthening the Japan-U.S. Alliance, the cornerstone of Japan’s foreign policy; (2) tackling outstanding issues of concern regarding North Korea; (3) diplomacy with neighboring countries, such as China, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and Russia; (4) addressing the increasingly tense situation in the Middle East; (5) economic diplomacy in which Japan will lead efforts to establish new common rules; and (6) addressing global issues. Correspondingly, Cono (2019) mentions that Japan will continue to support Nepal in four key areas: (1) Recovery from the earthquake and disaster-resilient nation-building; (2) Social and economic



infrastructure development; (3) Poverty reduction and improvement of quality of life; (4) Enhancement of governance and development of a basic framework of democracy. Thus, the soft power superpower of Asia; Japan engaged in huge diplomatic relationships to safeguard her national interests and address its priorities and set priorities with the bilateral relation to Nepal. In this regard where would be the place and diplomatic activity of Nepal? It would be an interesting matter for the formal diplomatic actors of Nepal to search for the common interests of Nepal-Japan relations. This also shows the worth of diplomatic engagement of small power like Nepal to fulfill its national interest accordingly.

Similarly, diplomatic relations between Nepal and the European soft power superpower Federal Republic of Germany were established on April 4, 1958. Since then, the relations between Nepal and Germany have been growing on the foothold of friendship, mutual understanding and cooperation (MOFA, 2021). Both countries have established residential embassies in each other's capital cities. Nepal established its embassy on July 5, 1965, and the Republic of Germany has had its embassy in Kathmandu since 1963. Besides, Germany has huge bilateral relations with various countries and international organizations. It has 153 embassies overseas, 54 consulates general, 12 permanent missions, 1 other mission, 7 consulates, and 350 unpaid consuls all over the world. According to Federal Foreign Office (FFO) (2021), Germany and Nepal have maintained diplomatic relations since 1958. Germany is involved in public and private development policy cooperation. Its support focuses primarily on improving the healthcare system, promoting renewable energies and energy efficiency, and promoting sustainable economic development. Germany has supported Nepal's efforts to build democratic structures since the start of the peace and democratization process in 2016. Another important element of Germany's engagement in Nepal is its support for the peace process (the impact of the civil war from 1996 to 2006 can still be felt today). Bilateral foreign policy consultations were held between Germany and Nepal for the first time in 2019 (FFO, 2021).

In connection with Asian and European soft power superpowers, Nepal also has a friendly diplomatic and bilateral relationship with Oceanian soft power superpower Australia. Diplomatic relations between Nepal and Australia were established on February 15, 1960. Both countries celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations in 2010. Australia opened its residential Embassy in Kathmandu at the level of Chargé d'Affaires in 1984 which was upgraded to the ambassadorial level in 1986. Nepal established its residential embassy in Canberra in March 2007 which was formally inaugurated in September 2007 (MOFA, 2021). The diplomatic relations between Australia and Nepal crossed 60 years in 2020. The relationship between Australia and Nepal is built on a long-standing history of development partnership and close

people-to-people links. The Australian Nepali population is growing with over 90,000 Nepalis now residing in Australia. It continues to be a destination of choice for Nepali students, with over 51,000 Nepali international students studying there as of 2020 (DFAT, 2021). The exchanges of visits at various levels have helped significantly in consolidating the relations between Nepal and Australia (MOFA, 2021). Australia has been engaging in formal bilateral and diplomatic relations with various countries and organizations. There are 79 foreign embassies, and 259 consulates placed in Australian territory along with 233 bilateral relations with countries, regions, and economies (DFAT, 2021). Furthermore, it has 54 embassies and 105 consulates spread all over the world. These are strong pieces of evidence of the foreign diplomatic engagement of soft power superpower Australia in comparison to the diplomatic engagement of small power Nepal.

As mentioned above, Nepal also has long bilateral relations with another soft power superpower: Canada. Nepal and Canada established diplomatic relations on January 18, 1965. The longstanding Nepal-Canada relations ever since the establishment of diplomatic relations are based on sovereign equality, mutual respect, and goodwill towards each other (MOFA, 2021). Canada's bilateral relations are managed by the High Commission of Canada in India, in New Delhi. Canada also has an honorary consul based in Kathmandu. According to the Government of Canada (GOC) (2021), Nepal established an embassy in Ottawa and has honorary consuls in Calgary and Victoria, as well as an honorary consul general in Toronto which shows long bilateral relations between Canada and Nepal. Khanal (2000, p. 196) observes that both Nepal and Canada share the intense belief that they must develop their full national identities in the shadow of their big neighbors but in a spirit of creative understanding with them. In this context, the Canadian experience of living in friendship and cooperation with the US and Nepal's own experience of doing the same with India and China can, in certain circumstances, prove helpful to each other.

Canada, a soft power superpower, has wider bilateral and multilateral relations with countries and organizations in comparison to small power Nepal. Canada has bilateral relations with 207 countries and organizations, 112 embassies, and 179 consulates all over the world. Similarly, 110 foreign embassies and 291 consulates are present in the territory of Canada (GOC, 2021).

Besides, North American country Canada Nepal has established bilateral and multilateral relations with Latin American and Caribbean giant Brazil. The formal diplomatic relations between Nepal and Brazil were established on February 7, 1976. Nepal established its residential embassy in Brasilia on January 21, 2010. Similarly, Brazil opened its residential embassy in Nepal on September 30, 2011 (MOFA, 2021). Nepal and Brazil have always enjoyed friendly relations. As mentioned on the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Brazil (MOFAB,

2021), agreements between Nepal and Brazil are in force in the areas of partial visa waivers. The Foreign Ministries of both countries established a mechanism for political consultations in 2011, to hold regular meetings on bilateral, regional, and multilateral issues. Even though, the bilateral relations between Nepal-Brazil have already passed 55 years the diplomatic relations have been activated 10 years after the opening of embassies in each other's countries. Brazil also has a wider coverage of geographical sectors in terms of bilateral relations and diplomatic engagement in comparison to Nepal. Brazil has established 112 embassies and 21 consulates all over the world and within Brazilian territory, there are 90 foreign embassies and 226 consulates. Furthermore, Brazil has maintained 198 bilateral relations with countries and organizations (MOFAB, 2021). Nepal is one of the 25 countries in Asia having bilateral relations with Brazil.

Similarly, Nepal has strong and friendly bilateral relations with a soft power superpower-UAE in the geographical sector of the Middle East and North Africa. As mentioned on the official website of the Embassy of Nepal-UAE (EON-UAE, 2021), Nepal and the UAE established their diplomatic relations on January 22, 1977. Nepal established its residential embassy in Abu Dhabi at the Charge d' Affairs level on April 11, 2004, and upgraded it to the Ambassadorial level on December 21, 2007. Similarly, the UAE established its residential mission at the Ambassadorial level in Kathmandu on May 10, 2016. Further, the same website elaborates on Nepal-UAE relations as "at the bilateral level, the two countries have been enjoying friendly and cordial relation based on mutual understanding and cooperation." Similarly, at the multilateral level, Nepal and the UAE, both as the member of the United Nations and Non-Alignment Movement, share common views on significant global issues ranging from renewable energy, and climate change to world peace and the fight against terrorism (EON-UAE, 2021). Diplomatic ties between these two countries are a means to carry out foreign policy objectives of their interests. The geographical size and population of UAE are smaller than Nepal, UAE has emerged as a new soft power superpower within the Asian continent. According to the official website of the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (UAE-MOFAIC), the UAE has 99 embassies all over the world (UAE-MOFAIC, 2019).

Last, but not least, Nepal has a formal diplomatic relationship with the African soft power superpower-South Africa. According to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRC), South Africa, the bilateral relations between South Africa and Nepal have been good since the two countries established full diplomatic relations on July 28, 1994 (DIRC, 2021). The resident Nepalese Embassy in Pretoria was opened on February 10, 2010. South Africa is represented in Nepal by an Honorary Consul and the South African High Commission in New Delhi,

India, is accredited to Nepal. As MOFA (2021) observes “the relations between the two countries have remained warm, cordial and excellent, marked by equality, mutual trust, deeper understanding, strong bonds of friendship and solidarity and growing interaction.” This relation is one among the 189 bilateral relations of South Africa in the world. South Africa has engaged in huge bilateral and multilateral relations including 104 embassies abroad, 16 consulates general, 97 honorary consulates, 2 other liaison offices, 68 non-resident accreditation, and 12 international organizations. Besides, it has 123 embassies, 53 consulates, 79 honorary consulates, 1 other consulate, 18 non-residential missions, and 35 international organizations within its territory (DIRC, 2021). This elaborates on the huge formal diplomatic engagement and is an indication of a soft power superpower.

Nepal ranks 95 in the global soft power index. Accordingly, it has to put in more effort to, build its reputation, enhance influence, and upgrade business and trade, governance, and international relations. Further, Nepal is yet to demonstrate sufficiently its culture and heritage in front of global citizens. This means that Nepali media and communication entities will have to play a more effective role in improving the image of the country beyond their territory. Similarly, science and technology, education, innovation, people, and values of Nepal are vital sectors to uplift its status. In addition, Nepal has not been able to respond to effectively address the spread of Covid 19. Thus, Nepal has challenges to uplift its status in the soft power ranking. Table 2 below explains the status of Nepal in terms of soft power in comparison to soft power superpowers (Brand Finance, 2021).

Table 2: Comparative status of Nepal and soft power superpower derived from Brand Finance Global Soft Power Index-2021.

Rank 2021	Nation	Region	Index score	Familiarity	Reputation	Influence	Business & Trade	Governance	IR	Culture and Heritage	Media & Communication	Education & Science	People & values	Covid 19 Responses	Remarks
1	Germany	Europe	62.2	7.8	7.5	6.0	6.8	5.8	6.7	5.2	4.9	6.6	4.2	5.7	
2	Japan	Asia	60.6	7.5	7.3	5.6	7.0	5.3	5.7	5.2	4.1	7.5	4.5	5.8	
4	Canada	N. America	57.2	7.4	7.5	5.1	6.2	5.8	5.7	4.7	4.6	5.0	5.2	5.6	
10	Australia	Oceania	52.2	7.0	7.2	4.5	5.4	4.8	4.8	4.4	4.2	3.8	4.7	5.3	
17	UAE	Middle East & N. Africa	48.4	5.5	6.4	4.8	5.4	4.0	4.5	3.7	3.3	3.8	3.6	4.9	
35	Brazil	Latin America & Caribbean	38.1	6.9	6.1	4.2	3.8	2.0	3.0	5.1	2.8	2.3	4.0	1.4	
37	South Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	37.2	5.8	5.7	3.8	3.4	2.4	3.0	3.4	2.5	2.3	3.1	2.9	
95	Nepal	Asia	28.0	3.8	5.4	2.7	1.6	1.7	1.5	2.1	1.5	1.6	2.0	2.8	

This table shows that Nepal has a good reputation and familiarity in the international community through international relations and media and communication efforts are inefficient in comparison to soft power superpowers. Similarly, Nepal suffers from poor business, trade, and trade deficits lack competitive education delivery, and also less effective government and diplomatic practices. Despite problems in business, trade, governance, education, science, and innovation sectors, Nepal has a slightly good influencing capacity, attractive culture and heritage, and response to Covid-19 in the evaluation of soft power potentials and credentials. In this context, the role of diplomats, missions, and diplomatic activities are vital to Nepal.

### **Public Diplomacy, Nepal, and Soft Power Superpowers**

Public diplomacy is a newly emerged political instrument in foreign relations and engagement beyond traditional and formal diplomacy. According to Editors (2017), public diplomacy includes all official efforts to convince targeted sectors of foreign opinion to support or tolerate a government's strategic objectives. The public diplomacy methods include statements by decision-makers, purposeful campaigns conducted by government organizations dedicated to the public, and efforts to persuade international media to portray official policies favorably to foreign audiences. It is a political instrument with analytical boundaries and distinguishing characteristics. It is used by states, associations of states and non-state actors to understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships; and influence opinions and actions to advance interests and values (Gregory, 2008) in foreign relations.

According to the USC Center on Public Diplomacy (2018), public diplomacy can be considered as “the public, interactive dimension of diplomacy which is not only global in nature, but also involves a multitude of actors and networks” and it is “a key mechanism through which nations foster mutual trust and productive relationships and has become crucial to building a secure global environment”. In this context, Krajnc (2005) shows that present-day public diplomacy is understood as an integral, network concept that is fundamentally operating mostly in cross-section with other dimensions of foreign policy and international processes (economic, cultural, communication-media, scientific, educational, etc.). In the word of Wei (2020), the common practice of diplomatic efforts is to associate the effects of public diplomacy with soft power, whereby the evaluation of a country's public diplomacy is based on whether a country's soft power towards other countries has improved. Similarly, Shrestha (2021) argues that public diplomacy is, in reality, no other than legitimate propaganda based on truth, credibility, and honesty. It is also a strategic tool to use soft power for diplomatic activities.

In this connection, various scholars and academics have given their ideas and opinion about public diplomacy, public diplomacy methods, instruments, mechanisms, and dimensions. Regarding mechanisms, Rothman (2011) described two mechanisms through which the power of attraction influences other actors. These two mechanisms include the use of rhetoric or discourse and the diffusion of norms. Similarly, there are three dimensions of public diplomacy; they are news management, strategic communication, and relationship building (Leonard, 2002, pp. 8-21; Nye, 2008, p. 101). The first and most immediate dimension is daily communications, which involves explaining the context of domestic and foreign policy decisions. The second dimension is strategic communication, which develops a set of simple themes much as a political or advertising campaign does and the third dimension of public diplomacy is the development of lasting relationships with key individuals over many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels. Among these three dimensions, the third one is primarily concerned with small powers like Nepal. In this regard, Shrestha elaborates:

In the case of Nepal, which does not have any hard power worth the name, public diplomacy carries a significant value in promoting its national interest and building up an abiding image of a well-behaving and responsible member of the international community. Its tactful and strategic use could help enhance bilateral relations and also facilitate a creative role in regional and multilateral forums. Inherently, the deft handling of public diplomacy demands some explicit skills and quality from envoys. A convincing communication skill equipped with good public relations ability would exponentially serve the desired purpose in a foreign ambiance and foreign culture.

Thus, public diplomacy and soft power have a multifaceted connection in international affairs. Public diplomacy exists beyond the size, diplomatic engagement, development, or underdevelopment status of a country. In this connection, Rasmussen (2005) concludes that public diplomacy is no longer solely the pursuit of Western countries and great powers, as the practice of public diplomacy has become prolific expanding to countries despite limitations in the number of years a state has been involved in the UN, the number of missions a state has abroad, or even the democratic nature of a state. So, the public diplomacy of a small power like Nepal has a wide spectrum in international affairs.

Additionally, public diplomacy plays a very important role, as at the very base level interactions amongst the citizens of one country with another generate a reach that sometimes may not even be possible through formal and state channels (Karki & Dhungana, 2020, p. 171). Concerning public diplomacy in Nepal, Indian former diplomat Kumar (2017) suggested four innovative initiatives at the Nepal-

Bharat Library in Kathmandu to expand the horizons of public diplomacy viz. Conversations, Poemandu, Cinemandu, and Voices. These four programs were aimed at promoting Nepalese art, literature, music, and film; they also encouraged and engaged the younger generation of Nepalese to share their ideas, experiences, and stories. Besides, the initiatives should not have limited to the domestic territory.

Citizens engaged in foreign employment, students studying abroad, and the diaspora are means of public diplomacy. Australia, Japan, China, United States are destinations for Nepali students for their further study. In this regard, Jain (2018) finds that the “Chinese political system—specifically governance—and foreign policy, as well as certain traits of the Chinese society, drew admiration from the Nepalese students, though, the Chinese education program was found deficient in brand reputation and Chinese cultural penetration remains challenging.” Similarly, whether the education system attracting Nepali students was appropriate to cope with the challenges of the 21st century for Nepali interests? These all are connected to the discourse of public diplomacy in Nepal. Indeed, public diplomacy is a means of attraction toward the soft power credentials of a country. So, every individual, epistemic community, diaspora, scholar, sportsman, actor, poet, political leader, bureaucracy, industrialist, and citizen from top to grass root has a role in public diplomacy.

The modern world is awash with communication tools, virtual social networks, and information technology. Through mass media, the entire world is converging and becoming accessible in one space. As a result, public diplomacy assumes increased significance in maintaining the favorable public view and attitude overseas via media, information technology, and social networks. For instance, how many followers a prime minister, foreign minister, public intellectual, professor, or social worker has on social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, WeChat, or websites counts in public diplomacy (Timilsana, 2020).

Public diplomacy stakeholders should always be mindful of how information is disseminated through social networks. Up until March 2020, 35.75 percent of Nepal's population will have their own Facebook accounts (Internet World Stats, 2020). This network aids in boosting information about Nepal's culture, historical landmarks, political ideologies, scenic wonders, travel destinations, business opportunities, human resources, students looking to study abroad, and other topics in a global context.

Countries make a variety of measures to increase their soft power through public diplomacy. For instance, since 1995, public diplomacy has been acknowledged as a "third pillar" of Canadian foreign policy on a worldwide scale, focused on portraying Canada as a democratic nation with a federal structure that is balanced and rich in

culture (Chitty, Ji, Rawnsley and Hayden, 2016. p. 236). Countries that invest in strengthening global cultural and educational linkages can promote mutual respect and positive relationships between states, international trust and understanding, and global peace, security, and prosperity (British Council, 2018).

By using their resources for public diplomacy, the British Council, BBC media networks, and Confucius Institutes of China, for example, are building soft power. Similar to this, tourism, business community contact, student exchanges, NGOs, migration, and the diasporic community all play a part in boosting soft power through public diplomacy. When dealing with various soft power superpowers, Nepal has varied procedures and priorities. For instance, Japan is a popular tourist destination for Japanese citizens traveling to Nepal, and Nepali citizens traveling to Japan for higher education and work opportunities. Japanese tourists are drawn to Lumbini, the Himalayas, ancient customs and relics, temples, and the kind demeanor of Nepalis, among other places.

In the year 2018, 29,768 Japanese tourists visited Nepal (MOFA, 2021). According to Cono (2019), “people-to-people exchange between two countries has been increasing exponentially in recent years. In 2017, over 27,000 Japanese nationals visited Nepal, while the number of Nepali visitors to Japan has reached over 39,000.” Furthermore, the Nepali community is the 7th largest foreign community in Japan. Every year thousands of Nepali students go to Japan to pursue higher studies and Japanese languages. Japan is the second most preferred destination for abroad study for Nepali students (MOFA, 2021). All this evidence shows that there is a distinct role of public diplomacy in the bilateral relations between Nepal and Japan.

The public diplomacy of Nepal to soft power superpowers always demands to focus on priorities of either part of bilateral relations. According to MOFA (2021), development cooperation, scientific and academic cooperation, investment in technology transfer, and tourism are priorities of Germany whereas economic and technical cooperation, tourism, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), diasporic community, and academic exchange are priorities with Australia. Similarly, diaspora (Nepali Canadian), tourism, development cooperation, and trade are priority areas of public diplomacy between Nepal and Canada. Likewise, trade and investment, and tourism FDI are ingredients of Nepal-Brazil relations and public diplomacy as well. Further, Nepal has a common interest with South Africa concerning Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), experience sharing and learning about peacebuilding and political settlement, truth and reconciliation experience sharing, trade and tourism. So, public diplomacy and exchanges should focus on those areas. In addition, Nepal and UAE have great concern about foreign employment of Nepalese in UAE, business exchanges, security and promotion of investment of Nepali businessmen



in UAE, tourism, FDI using public diplomacy, and bilateral relations. Thus, tourism is the most prioritized component in the foreign relation of Nepal with soft power superpowers.

Table 3 explains tourist arrivals (arrival of nationalities) from soft power superpowers to Nepal from 2015-2019 (Nepal Tourism Statistics, 2020).

S.N.	Nationality	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Remarks
1.	Australia	14,816	25,507	33,371	38,429	38,972	
2.	Canada	6,495	12,491	15,105	17,317	17,102	
3.	Germany	12,216	23,812	29,918	36,879	36,641	
4.	Japan	14,465	22,979	27,326	29,817	30,534	
5.	Brazil	-	-	-	-	-	Data not given
6.	South Africa	-	-	-	-	-	Data not given
7.	UAE	-	-	-	-	-	Data not given
8.	All Nationals	538,970	753,002	940,218	1,173,072	1,197,191	

These statistics present the public relations and worth of the public diplomacy of Nepal with the above-mentioned soft power superpowers since, tourism can work as a catalyst to increase the value of all three resources (culture, political values, and foreign policies) of a country that Nye has identified (Neupane, 2018). Nepal and soft power superpowers should focus on tourism to achieve foreign policy objectives using the utilization of soft powers through public diplomacy targeting a global audience.

### **Prospect for Engaging Soft Power Superpowers through Niche Diplomacy**

This tactic, known as "niche diplomacy," entails picking a "niche" that either has unique significance for the state in question or to which it may be able to contribute significantly (Maitre, 2018. p. 8). Major powers typically have an audience and a huge number of ideas and images associated with them by the foreign public, so they can concentrate on promoting and explaining their policies during their diplomatic actions as well as engaging in rebranding (Batora, 2005).

The focus of specialized diplomacy is on a specific area of national interest. For instance, according to a Canadian academic, to find a niche, Canada must go more and more to the underutilized and underappreciated non-governmental and charity sectors instead of using its resources more efficiently (Potter, 1997). Examples of niches include international civil aviation in Canada, maritime law for Singapore, Malta, Nepal, and other landlocked nations, etc.

For small nations like Nepal to be heard or seen on the world stage, they must be more imaginative, creative, and constructive in their diplomatic efforts. According to Lakatos (2017), effective tiny states most often use so-called "niche diplomacy,"

in which they concentrate their efforts on certain issues, to address issues with influence and exposure. Therefore, Nepal should have an area of global peace since it is the country where Buddha was born. The "Zone of Peace proposal" may be considered a byproduct of Nepal's specialized diplomacy.

Lord Buddha was born in Lumbini, Nepal, in 623 B.C., according to UNESCO, and an inscription on a pillar was built by Emperor Asoka in 249 B.C. During the Licchavi era, which lasted until 880 A.D., Nepal was already a major Buddhist hub (Pokhrel, 2017). It is estimated that 535 million people worldwide practice Buddhism as a religion at this time, which equates to between 8% and 10% of the world's population. In 179 nations, the population of Buddhists has increased. About 13 million people live in Cambodia alone, which makes up 96.9% of the total population. Thailand, Myanmar, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Laos, and Mongolia are some other nations with a sizable Buddhist population (World Population Review, 2020). As a result, "Buddhism" is a major draw for Nepal as a source of soft power.

Buddhism is undoubtedly a philosophy of peace, a tool for resolving conflicts on a worldwide scale amicably, and a soft power asset for Nepal, where it originated. Because Lumbini, Nepal, the birthplace of the world's fascination, will always be a popular spiritual and tourist destination for people all over the world. Buddhism only has a small audience in Nepal. Additionally, Nepal has had success resolving domestic armed conflicts through diplomatic political discussion. Nepal has established political norms and ideals that are distinct from its close neighbors and has also shown both domestic and foreign actors that it is capable of handling internal issues. Adhikari (2017) explores the resolution of armed conflict and the peace process, therefore adding to the strategy of changing armed conflict into a state of international peace in which Nepal had a distinct role.

In terms of sociopolitical dynamics, Nepal's peace process was deemed unusual, and it was finished following the adoption of a new constitution in 2015. Additionally, Nepal's efforts to end the armed conflict have established itself as a singular paradigm for peace and conflict. As a result, Nepal has gained attractive political principles through the merger of capitalism and socialism, allowing it to see the advantages of both democracy and socialism. Nepal's foreign policy, diplomatic practice, and newly adopted policy appear as specialized diplomacy components in the new political setting.

## **Discussions**

The discussion of soft power in international relations in modern IR studies for a peaceful rise through values, culture, and policies of small states like Nepal is expanding. Joseph Nye initially used the term "soft power" in 1990, and it is

most frequently addressed in the context of international relations and diplomacy, especially after Nye's publication in 2004. Foreign policy, diplomacy, and foreign affairs of a country in the 21st century are only directed by hard power but also guided by efforts of attraction rather than coercion. As such, Nepal should learn from the soft power superpower's diplomatic and foreign policy strategies to overcome the domestic challenge and safeguard national interests.

In the course of seven decades of bilateral and multilateral engagement of Nepal with soft power superpowers; Australia, Brazil, Canada, Germany, Japan, South Africa, and UAE, Nepal has attempted to mobilize its soft power resources, instruments, reception, and outcomes at her own pace. Nonetheless, the consequences and results of diplomatic ties with soft power superpowers remain constant in achieving foreign policy objectives. Further, Nepal is in the initial stage to identify its soft power potentialities in terms of structural scholarship. It is mandatory to wield the soft power resources and instruments of Nepal through systematic research followed by ideal and applicable policy, plan, and program. The effects and outcomes of diplomatic relations with soft power superpowers continue to be consistent in attaining foreign policy goals.

Nepal is also just beginning to recognize its soft power potential in terms of structural research studies. Utilizing Nepal's soft power assets and instruments requires thorough research, followed by the creation of the best possible policies, plans, and programs. Most crucially, it will be in Nepal's best interests to speed up robust contacts with soft power superpowers since they typically have a little political stake in Nepal, in contrast to regional and other global powerhouses. Conclusively, advocating for a special peace process used to end internal armed conflict and promoting tourism by fusing Buddhist and natural beauties, mobilizing Nepal's diaspora community spread throughout superpowers, and lobbying to benefit from economic cooperation, and can all help Nepal's soft power grow.

Finally, it would be preferable if Nepal designated niche diplomacy as its top priority area. In conclusion, Nepal's best course of action is to identify its soft power assets and instruments and use them in formal diplomacy, public diplomacy, niche diplomacy, and economic diplomacy to influence the targeted soft power superpowers' foreign policy decisions in ways that are consistent with Nepal's foreign policy expectations.

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