



UNIVERSITY OF TARTU
Asia Centre



"Political, economic and cultural role of Asia in Estonia"

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Recent publications

Scientific article

Agnieszka Nitza Makowska (2022). **Can the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor help Beijing Win Pakistanis' hearts and minds? Reviewing higher education as an instrument of Chinese soft power in Pakistan.** *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 28(3), 274-289.

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1. Introduction

The rise of Asia aligns with its growing economic, political and cultural influences worldwide, including in geographically distant Central Eastern and Nordic Europe. Specifically, this report focuses on the multifaceted implications of, to a different degree, growing positions of China, India and Singapore for Estonia. These implications are seen through the prism of widely defined soft power, which seems relevant because these states leave only subtle footprints in Estonia, though with some doubts concerning China's ambitions. What is more, the characteristics of these footprints, or these states' roles, resonate well with what soft power is, including its political, economic and cultural aspects.

The essence of soft power comes from its innate difference from traditional forms of "hard power", which emphasize force, coercion and ultimately, the use of military power in relations amongst states. In contrast, soft power is about a state's attributes that make it attractive to other countries and the subsequent policies that extend from this, which aim to co-opt and persuade other states to "want what you want" (Nye, 1990) without the use or the threat of the use of force. Therefore soft power is a political strategy to influence other international relations actors by using a variety of political, economic and cultural instruments.

The concept of soft power was originally coined by American scholar and practitioner Joseph S. Nye in 1990. He argued that "soft power occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants" (1990, p. 166) without using force, only by the sheer power of attraction. It is derivative of three main sources: "a state's political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority) and its culture (in places where it is attractive to others)," (Nye, 2008, p. 96). Using these three powerful tools the state project a positive image of a country and its values on the global stage and convert soft power into the economic benefits through trade, investment and financial assistance.

Aligning with the growing political resonance of this concept and the global geopolitical change marked by the rise of Asia, "a wide variety of states, including non-Western countries, have defined themselves as soft powers" (Longhurst, Nitza-Makowska, and Skiert-Andrzejuk, 2019, p. 154). Among others, these states include India, which—because of its democratic traditions, Mahatma Gandhi's concept of non-violence and peaceful conflict mediation, and Bollywood—has been labelled a "soft power by default" (Wagner, 2010, p. 333) and China, an authoritarian trendsetter. While experts, academics, governments and societies worldwide are divided as to whether China can be deemed a soft power, the Global Soft Power Rank (2022) recognizes China as the fourth world soft power after the US, UK and Germany, leaving India behind in 29th position.

This report focuses on attributes of China's, India's and Singapore's soft power to demonstrate how they present themselves to an international audience, with the focus on Estonia. China and India are two world's largest states with ambitions to go global and increase their political, economic and cultural role in their neighbourhood and beyond. This report identifies specifically whether and how their strategies reach Estonia. The motivation behind including Singapore is different and linked to the similarities between this Asian state and Estonia. Both are the so-called small states and stand out internationally as "digital tigers".

Therefore this report includes the following topics

- The political role of India, China and Singapore in Estonia to emphasize the general scope of these states' soft power as a political strategy vis-a-vis Estonia and therefore highlight the specifics of their presence in Estonia;
- The economic role of China and India in Estonia with the focus on two types of soft power transmitters i) immigrants originate from India and China and ii) Chinese and Indian companies in Estonia that mark these two Asian states' business presence;
- The cultural role of China and India in Estonia with a detailed focus on the symbols as soft power instruments to emphasize these symbols' role in deepening mutual understandings and potential to strengthen people-to-people connectivity.

2. Political Role: Mapping the Scope of China's, India's and Singapore's Soft Power in Estonia

China and India employ numerous soft power instruments to boost their international stature and influence. These instruments underpin the two states' grand foreign policy strategies, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and India's Modi doctrine. The primary regional focus of these strategies—including the vast BRI, under which the top recipients of project funding are Pakistan, Bangladesh and Indonesia—is India's and China's own neighborhood, namely, South and Southeast Asia. Accordingly, China and India have not designed specific expanded soft power strategies for Central Eastern or Nordic Europe. However, Estonia and the region still experience these states' soft power to a different degree. In case of Singapore, its model of soft power projection has been based on its exceptional global economic competitiveness, especially relative to the country's size (Chong, 2010). In global soft power index, Singapore's highest indicators are in the fields of finance, business, logistics and innovation, with additional strengths in digitalization (The Soft Power 30, 2019).

2.1 Sharp Edges of China's Soft Power

The main sources of China's soft power include its traditional culture and values, foreign policies, and development model, with its implications for various sectors such as the science, technology and innovation sectors. Manifesting in China's state-centric governance model, the difference in political values between communist China and Western democracies is the reason these states consider China "ill-equipped to "do" soft power well" (Walker, 2018, p. 18). Resonating with this, the limited literature about China's influences in Estonia discounts the softness of Beijing's strategies (Jüris & Teperik, 2022; Liepiņa, Holger & Naglis, 2019; Kapitonenko, 2021; Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 2021; 2022; Dams et al., 2021). These strategies are seen as seeking to "pierce, penetrate, or perforate" (Walker and Ludwig, 2017, p. 12) the political and information environment in Estonia, and this is the main aim not of 'soft' but of "sharp power", although the related literature does not employ this term. Examples of Estonia's wary reception of Beijing's ostensibly "soft" overtures is Tallin's call for Western infrastructure investments to rival the BRI, which is considered a vehicle for China's soft power, and Estonia's exit from the 16+1, a forum designed by Beijing for Central and Eastern European Countries, in August 2022.

Sources	Main instruments	Selected Chinese transmitters
Traditional culture and values	Chinese language	Confucius Institute (CI) in Tallinn
	Public diplomacy and political messaging	China's Embassy in Estonia
Development model with its implications for various sectors	Higher education exchanges and cooperation to learn from China	Chinese universities and companies (e.g., Huawei) offering scholarships to Estonian students, academics and universities
	Technological investments and cooperation	Chinese companies involved in such cooperation (e.g., Huawei, Tencent Estonia)
Traditional Chinese values (community of shared destiny, harmonious coexistence)	Public diplomacy/ political messaging	China's embassy in Estonia, CGTN Russian – Russian language television channel owned by China Central Television available in Estonia
BRI as grand foreign policy strategy	Public diplomacy/ political messaging	China's embassy in Estonia

Table 1. China's soft power in action in Estonia

2.2 The Barely Existing “Soft End” of India's Soft Power in Estonia

India's main soft power sources include its democratic political values, traditional values and beliefs, and popular culture. Despite India's recent democratic decline, marked by its downgrade from “free” to “partly free” status in Freedom House's global freedom ranking of 2021, a synergy in democratic values between India and European liberal democracies, including Estonia, can still be identified. Because of this synergy, coupled with New Delhi's ambitions to ensure its “emergence as a great power that is fully autonomous, influential and respected in the global comity of nations” (Ogden, 2011, p. 3), India has the potential to rise as a soft power in Estonia and Central Eastern and Nordic Europe, especially vis-à-vis authoritarian trendsetters such as China and Russia. This potential is recognized but has also been characterized as “false promise” (Mukherjee, 2014). In Estonia, in particular, the “soft end” of India's soft power might be deemed barely existent. The instruments that constitute this nascent soft end of Indian soft power are distinguished in Table 2 and significantly overlap with how installed in December 2021, India's embassy in Tallinn projects this country in Estonia.

Sources	Main Instruments	Selected Indian and Estonian transmitters
Democratic political values	public diplomacy	India's embassy in Tallinn
Traditional values and beliefs	Yoga, Ayurveda, Hinduism and linked vegetarian diet	Yoga schools, Indian restaurants
Popular culture	Movies, Bollywood	Cinemas, movie industry involved in co-productions and/or promotion of Indian movies in the region

Table 2. "Soft end" of India's soft power in Estonia

2.3 Singapore's Soft Power

An effective instrument of Singapore's soft power is its education system. Singapore's universities rank among the world's top academic institutions (e.g. National University of Singapore at 11th and Nanyang Technological University and 19th position in QS World University Rankings 2023) while its schools rank highest in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Kong, 2017). However, the aspect that would present a challenge for a potential increase in Singapore's attractiveness to the Estonian government and public, and the subsequent closeness between the two states and strengthened people-to-people connectivity is related to the question of how much of Singapore's success in education and beyond is tied to its political model.

Singapore has not shied away from promoting "Singapore Model of Development", particularly in the context of its development aid and cooperation policies. This model is based on "rational elite planning and disciplined compliance of the population under the rubric of a communitarian vision" (Chong, 2010:399). The longevity of a single political party in power and the strong emphasis on a unified community as regulated by the law in a significant manner differs from Estonia's adherence to liberal democratic values of multiparty politics, individualism and dissensus. However, first, this difference has decreased as in the last Democracy Index (2022), Singapore left the group of hybrid regimes, which is a type of political system that combines some features of an authoritarian regime and democracy, to join "flawed democracies", where Estonia belongs, among others. Second, despite the differences in political models and political values, Singapore has been received in Estonia as an attractive partner to cooperate within political and economic domains.

During recent years, there has been a clear uptick within Estonia's efforts in an official level to make its name more recognizable and attractive for its potential Singapore partners. Their key areas of cooperation are digitalization of both government and businesses, investments in start-ups as well as defence cooperation. As put by Estonia's ambassador in Singapore Priit Turk:

Estonia and Singapore are among the most advanced digital societies in the world and we have a lot to learn from each other and to offer to the world. While we are two small states on different continents, we are united by a similar vision and ambition – a belief in an open economy, innovation, e-governance and digital solutions and good contemporary education. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Estonia, 2021)

Singapore is also presented as “a gateway” to other markets in Asia, with a clear interest in attracting potential partners of global markets in the region (The Baltic Times, 2022). The strong interest of Estonia can also be seen as a successful outcome of Singapore as a soft power producer. As Turk’s statements illustrate, Estonia places great emphasis on these same aspects, combined with the shared position of being small states in global economy.

In the more recent context, the connections and differences between both countries in a new light has brought Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. As discussed in the report “Russia’s War in Ukraine: Perspectives in China, India and Singapore” (Luik et al., 2023), Singapore has been unique in the region of South and Southeast Asia by its strong condemnation of Russia. It also has been vocal about the role of small states in this situation, a perspective Estonia certainly shares. This position certainly has a potential to bring both countries closer as demonstrated by visit to Estonia by the Singapore Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen in May, 2022. (Ministry of Defence of Singapore, 2022). Singapore’s side has also been especially interested in cyberdefence experience and capabilities of Estonia (Mulia, 2022). There are still important differences in how both countries would frame the war, especially in regard to the discourse of democracy vs. autocracy, which reflects the crucial differences in understanding political liberalism in Estonia and Singapore. Nevertheless, Singapore’s clearly positive assessment of the U.S., NATO and European partners in the present context increases the potential for growing cooperation and connections between Estonia and Singapore.

2.4 Conclusion

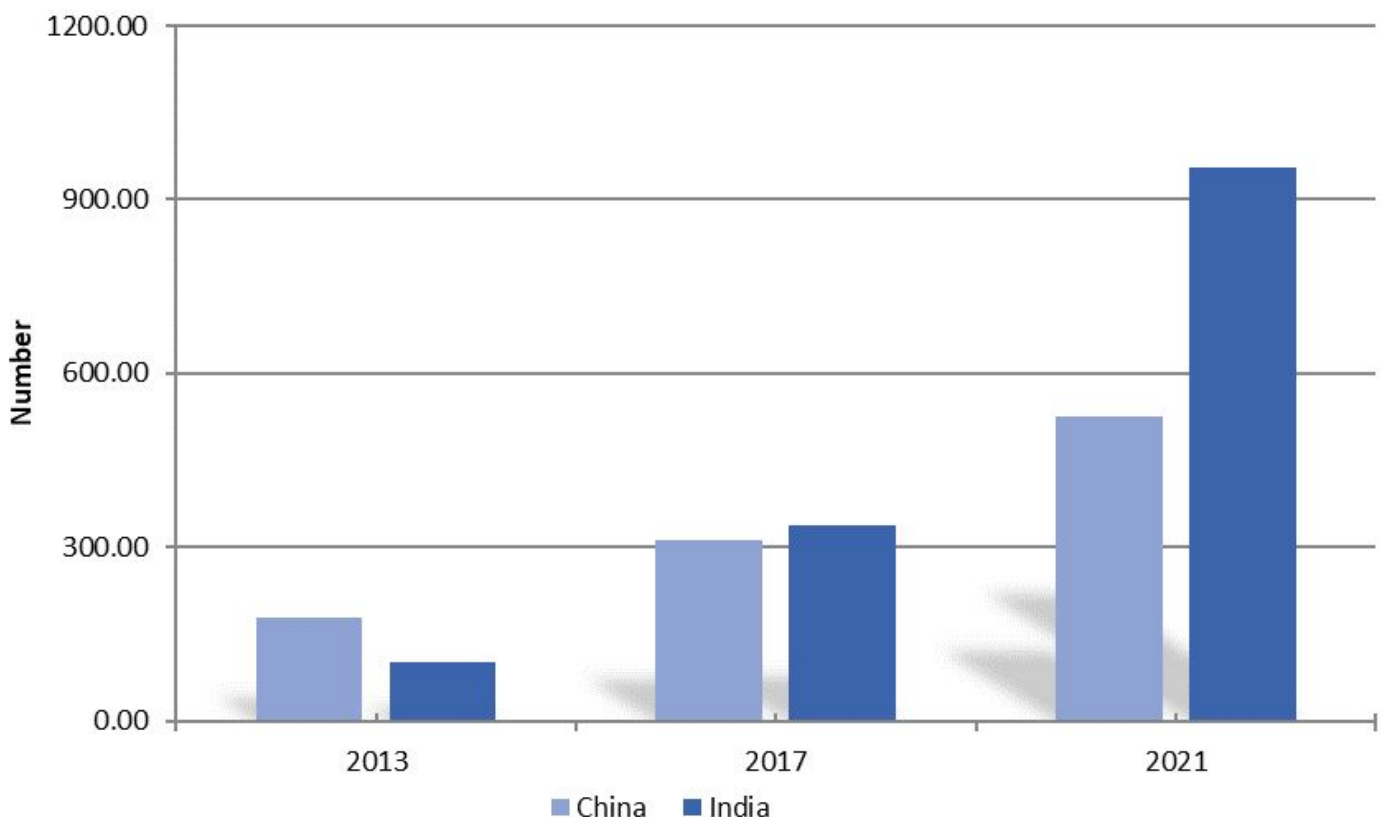
China’s soft power projection emphasizes its traditional culture and values, foreign policies, and development model with its implications across various sectors, including higher education, and technology and innovations. However, China’s state-centric governance model and differences in political values with Western democracies have led to skepticism about the softness of Beijing’s strategies, with Estonia’s wary reception of China’s purportedly “soft” overtures exemplified by its call for Western infrastructure investments and exit from the 16+1 forum. India’s soft power sources, including its democratic political values, traditional values, and popular culture – despite its recent democratic decline – provide this state with the potential to rise as a soft power in Estonia and beyond in Central Eastern and Nordic Europe. However, the “soft end” of India’s soft power in Estonia is strictly limited and barely visible. In the case of Singapore, its presence in Estonia is still modest, but growing, especially in digital solutions, educational cooperation and security technology. While Estonia and Singapore are small states with shared interests and development goals, they differ in political values undermining their political regimes. However, this difference and precisely Singapore’s distance vis-a-vis democratic liberal values have not overshadowed other sources and instruments of its soft power for the Estonian government and public.

3. Economic Role: People, Business and Opportunities

3.1 Immigrants of Chinese and Indian origin

Immigrants can serve as powerful transmitters of a country's soft power, bringing their own cultural traditions and values to their new homes and contributing to the diversity and richness of their host societies (Gupta, 2008; Kumari, 2019). As they integrate into their new communities, immigrants can become ambassadors of their home countries, sharing their knowledge, experiences, and perspectives with others and fostering greater understanding and cultural exchange. By promoting their own cultures and bridging cultural gaps, immigrants can help to build stronger relationships and connections between their home countries and their new homes, making them valuable agents of soft power in today's interconnected world (Voci & Hui, 2017).

According to the latest available data from Statistics Estonia, there were 964 Chinese citizens living in Estonia in 2022, making up 8.7% of the total foreign-born population in the country. Immigrants from India have also become a significant part of the immigrant population in Estonia in recent years. According to the latest available data from Statistics Estonia, there were 2,039 Indian citizens living in Estonia in 2022, making up 9.3% of the total foreign-born population in the country. These China and India origin communities serve as powerful magnets for new immigrants to arrive by providing a supportive network and a sense of belonging to those who share their cultural background. As the result, in recent years the flows of new immigrants originate from China and India is stably increasing (Diagram 1).



Source: Global Knowledge Partnership on Migration and Development (available: https://www.knomad.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/bilateral_migration_matrix_2021_latest.xlsx)



However, for powerful promotion of the soft power of their home countries, immigrants have to take solid socioeconomic status that impact their ability to transmit soft power, as those who are well-educated and economically successful are often better positioned to promote and showcase their culture to others. Immigrants who are able to establish themselves as leaders and entrepreneurs in their new communities may have greater influence and visibility, making them more effective agents of soft power. The majority of Chinese and Indian immigrants in Estonia are highly educated, with a large number holding advanced degrees in engineering, computer science, and other technical fields. This has resulted in many Chinese and Indian immigrants being employed in high-skilled jobs in the technology industry, which has contributed to the growth of Estonia's economy. In particular, for 2022 year Chinese immigrants are employed in ICT sector (22.3%), followed by retail trade industry (9.7%) and education (9.8%). According to Statistics Estonia, in 2022, 28.9% of Chinese citizens in Estonia were employed, having on average 1100 euro monthly salary. The employment rate of Chinese immigrants in Estonia is higher than the overall employment rate for immigrants in the country.

In terms of employment, Indian immigrants in Estonia are also highly skilled and well-educated. Many of them work in the tech sector, particularly in software development and IT services. According to Statistics Estonia, in 2022, 58.3% of Indian citizens in Estonia were employed, with the majority working in the accommodation and food service sector (29.7%), followed by ICT industry (22.3%) and manufacturing (13.2%).

Despite their high levels of education and professional skills, Chinese and Indian immigrants in Estonia face certain challenges related to their socioeconomic position. One of the main challenges is the language barrier. Another challenge that Chinese and Indian immigrants in Estonia face is discrimination. Although Estonia is a relatively tolerant society, there have been reports of discrimination against immigrants, particularly those from non-European countries. This can make it difficult for immigrants to integrate into Estonian society and to feel like they belong.

Despite these challenges, Chinese and Indian immigrants in Estonia have made significant contributions to the country's economy and society. They have brought with them new ideas, skills, and perspectives, and have helped to build a more diverse and vibrant society. In turn, Estonia has provided these immigrants with opportunities for professional growth and personal development.

3.2 Chinese and Indian Business Presence in Estonia

China and India, two economic powerhouses in Asia, have been steadily increasing their business presence in Estonia. Indian and Chinese companies have been increasingly establishing their presence in Estonia in recent years, contributing to the country's economy and business landscape. The growing business activities of Chinese and Indian companies in Estonia are not only driven by economic interests, but also serve as sources of soft power for these countries, allowing them to exert influence and enhance their global image.

According to Statistics of Estonia, there were 33 Indian-owned companies registered in Estonia in 2020, making up 1.3% of the total number of foreign-owned companies in the country. These Indian companies employed a total of 547 people, with a turnover of €16.8 million in 2020. The majority of Indian-owned companies in Estonia operate in the software and IT services sector, contributing to Estonia's digital transformation. One of the major examples are the following: i) TCS Estonia that is a leading global IT services and consulting company headquartered in India, with a presence in Estonia. TCS Estonia provides a wide range of IT solutions and services to Estonian businesses and government agencies, including application development and maintenance, digital transformation, data analytics, and cybersecurity. TCS has been actively involved in various e-governance projects in Estonia, leveraging its expertise in digital technologies; ii) Infosys Estonia that offers IT consulting, digital transformation, and software development services offered to finance, healthcare and telecommunications sectors; iii) HCL Technologies that is provider for application development, infrastructure management, and cybersecurity. Through such collaborations, India is able to showcase its IT prowess, innovation, and expertise in digital technologies, enhancing its soft power in Estonia and the broader European market.

Similarly to Indian companies, Chinese businesses have been actively investing in Estonia in recent years, particularly in the technology and infrastructure sectors. Chinese companies have been involved in various projects such as the development of e-governance solutions, 5G technology, and the construction of the Tallinn-Helsinki tunnel. These investments not only promote economic cooperation between China and Estonia, but also showcase China's advanced technology capabilities and expertise in areas such as digital governance and infrastructure development, thus enhancing China's soft power in Estonia and the broader European Union. According to the Statistics of Estonia, there were 129 Chinese-owned companies registered in Estonia in 2020, making up 5.2% of the total number of foreign-owned companies in the country. These Chinese companies employed a total of 1,232 people, with a turnover of €74.4 million in 2020. The following companies exert soft power influence: i) Huawei that is the leading global provider of telecommunications equipment and infrastructure development, including 4G and 5G technologies. It has also collaborated with Estonian universities and research institutes to promote technological innovation and knowledge sharing, contributing to Estonia's digital advancement and showcasing China's technological capabilities in the field of telecommunications; ii) Tencent Estonia that focuses on areas such as artificial intelligence, data analytics, and cloud computing and actively collaborating with Estonian universities.

3.3 Conclusion

Chinese and Indian immigrants have become significant parts of the immigrant population in Estonia, with Chinese citizens making up 10.5% and Indian citizens making up 8.9% of the total foreign-born population in the country in 2020. These communities serve as magnets for new immigrants due to their supportive networks and sense of cultural belonging, resulting in a steady increase in immigration from China and India to Estonia in recent years. Many Chinese and Indian immigrants in Estonia are highly educated, holding advanced degrees in technical fields, and are employed in high-skilled jobs, particularly in the technology industry that is the magnet industry for Chinese and Indian companies as well. Despite the importance of these companies, the overall number of Indian and Chinese-owned companies in Estonia is relatively small compared to companies from other countries. However, these companies are growing business activities of Chinese and Indian companies in Estonia serve as sources of soft power for these countries, allowing them to enhance their global image, showcase their technological capabilities, and promote cultural exchange. As China and India continue to expand their economic presence in Estonia, their soft power influence is likely to grow, contributing to the evolving dynamics of global diplomacy and international relations.

4. Cultural Role: India's and China's Symbols in Estonia

Symbols are unique sign structures that describe the polysemy and sacredness of a cultural phenomenon. In addition to cultural constants, meanings of symbols are also curated and re-adjusted through perception, reflection, consolidation, interpretation, and transmission of values and ideals. The concept of symbol permeates most contemporary societies and public policies. In addition, all symbols do not belong to a synchronous layer of culture; they always penetrate this layer vertically, coming from the past and moving into the future (Lotman, 1992, p. 192), creating a shared space of cultural memory and transferring meanings from one layer to another that plays a vital role in discussing cultural front. Analyzing the functionality of symbols contributes to a deeper understanding of the culture. Dialogue of cultures is critical because it contributes to the building of national identity that surpasses the matter of shared language and territory, towards shared traditions and values. When confronted with elements of another culture that are alien to it, cultural and historical memory tends towards conservatism, thereby influencing interethnic interaction at its very core. For different cultures to coexist peacefully and harmonize symphonically, it is essential to have knowledge and understanding of basic cultural symbols.

4.1 The Symbols of India in Estonia

The Baltics and the Indian subcontinent share most common heritage that remain unexplored academically in terms of geographical distances and cultural aliveness. But there are many elemental interaction happening in the grassroots level, while with interaction between people and contacts. For example, several generations of Lithuanians have been raised with the idea that their language has its roots in Sanskrit. Many folk belief related to deities such as Tara, Vanemuine etc., of the Baltic takes its root and relativity in the Hinduism or the Buddhism that were pioneered in India. The Centre of Indian Studies and Culture at the University of Latvia, or the recently inaugurated center of Baltic Culture and Studies at the Dev Sanskriti University, in Haridwar, India are example of how these ties are being revitalized.

The impact of material culture transforms the world. These materials culture in the form of religiosity, cultural exchange, or market force requirement has been part of the exchange between India and the Baltic even before the independence of the latter. In the cultural sector, Estonia and India, in particular, have more significant relations. The first Estonian to visit India was E. Eckhold, who arrived at the end of the 17th century. In 1797, the renowned seafarer A.J.von Krusenstern visited Madras and Calcutta. The first missionaries from Estonia went to India in the 19th Century: A.Nerling (1861-1872) and J. Hesse (1869-1873). There were several others who followed later. Aside from evangelistic missionary work in India they described caste systems, religions, yoga teachings, and classical Indian literature. Andres Saal contributed significantly to the field of Indian epic literature by publishing longer essays about the Mahabharata, drama, and folk wisdom. In Estonia or in Baltics in general, these exchanges initially occurred due to Soviet Union's relationship with the Indian subcontinent. The consumption of tea, sweets and, confectionaries, textiles led to intense economic discussion. Apart from that the exchange of military equipment was strengthening the relations. Along that, the popularity of the cultural impact in form of Bollywood movies and religious practices were the early exchanges.

Finally, since regaining their independence, the three Baltic states have also been at the forefront of developing innovative digital governance, which opens up possibilities for cooperation with India. Estonia, for example, has played a leading role in developing European and global standards on data privacy and to strengthen cyber-security. As New Delhi takes the initiative to regulate these new domains domestically and internationally, it benefits from a closer dialogue to assess and share experiences with Baltic policymakers.

Today, the majority of Indians in Estonia are in the education sectors such as IT, Computer Science study and STEM studies. Apart from the digital dialogue, the more rather softer cultural influences that were impossible to avoid are taking roots in multiple variants deepening the Baltic-India connection stronger. The exchange of cultural values between these countries in terms of spiritual and religious field is immense and growing in popularity. In this case, many spiritual groups, and religious communities, practicing various traditions of Indian origin are known in Tallinn and in other cities/towns. Apart from most known ISKCON (Hare Krishna), they are Sahaj Marga, Sri Chinmoy, groups of transcendental meditation (Maharishi Mahesh Yogi), adepts of Satya Sai Baba, as well as loosely organized groups around Shakti centre, Shiva centre, etc. Many Buddhist institute such as Drikung kagyu center, Valuste Center, Umbusi Buddhist center, etc. Some of those groups are part of the global network, and have good international contacts. With the growth of the cultural interaction, there is a swift acknowledgement towards the symbols and signs assigned to different religions. These institutions are all upheld with the popular symbols, whether in terms of iconography, images, idols, flags, stones etc. Thus, the symbols identifies with not only the religious group but with the culture of the nation. Many times, in Baltics, these cultural impacts gains popularity due to the social cohesion and a sense of relativity people feel with the practices. The popular practices such as yoga, meditation, visualization etc has gained immense visibility due to its positive benefits towards body and mind.

Even though, the relation between India and Baltic is still at its nascent stages. There are multiple factors that needs attention. For example, how these interaction between nations are curating a cultural memory that helps develop a sense of identity, stability and cohesion or even conflict at times. By re-evaluating the past in accordance with the requirements of the present, society overcomes the problem of historical change: "cultural memory creates the illusion of constancy in time and the presence of the past in the present" (Hendel, 2010, p. 31).



Both Estonia and India has been impacted by colonial and turned an imperial product. Both, utilizes culture as a tool to identify and reflect. In terms of cultural memory, there is a constant process of returning to antiquity where traditional symbols from the ancient canons are enshrined, rethinking the basic value in the present and their actualization in introducing it to the modern audience. The best example for this could be the use of the Sanskritized Hindu symbol of Swastika, misused by the Nazi, Germany and re-impacted in Latvia as the traditional knitting symbols visible in doily and curtains. Many Buddhist symbols such as prayer flags, rosary beads, Buddha icon and idols, are found in the traditional Estonian households or representing restrautant around Estonia, that might not be invasive yet symbolises a belief and a national identity. The use of singing bowl, incense has become a part of the fraction of Estonian who follows and devotes their life to the ancient magic and belief transported from the other-nation India.

4.2 The Symbols of China in Estonia

Chinese symbols have become increasingly visible in Estonia in recent years, as the two countries deepen their economic and cultural ties. From the Chinese dragon emblem adorning the Chinese Embassy in Tallinn to the Chinese language signs and advertisements popping up in shopping centers and tourist hotspots, Chinese symbols have become an integral part of the Estonian landscape.

One of the most iconic Chinese symbols in Estonia is the dragon, which is often associated with power, strength, and good fortune in Chinese culture (China Daily, 2020). The Chinese Embassy in Tallinn prominently features a large dragon emblem on its façade. The dragon is also a popular design element in Estonian architecture, appearing on decorative elements of buildings and bridges throughout the country.

Chinese characters have also become a common sight in Estonia, particularly in tourist areas where Chinese visitors are increasingly prevalent. From Chinese-language menus in restaurants to shop signs and advertisements, Estonian businesses are recognizing the importance of catering to Chinese tourists and are using Chinese symbols to attract their attention (The Baltic Times, 2018).

In addition to the dragon and Chinese characters, other Chinese symbols have made their way into Estonian culture as well. For example, the Chinese zodiac animals, which are associated with different personality traits and fortunes based on the year of one's birth, have become popular design elements on jewelry and other souvenirs sold in Estonian tourist shops. The Chinese practice of feng shui, which is based on the idea that the arrangement of one's environment can impact their health, wealth, and happiness, has also gained a foothold in Estonia, with some Estonians adopting feng shui principles in their homes and workplaces.

While the proliferation of Chinese symbols in Estonia is undoubtedly linked to China's growing economic and cultural influence around the world, it also reflects the increasingly multicultural nature of modern societies. As more people travel and communicate across borders, cultural exchange and the blending of different traditions become more commonplace. In Estonia, the incorporation of Chinese symbols into the cultural landscape serves as a reminder of the interconnectedness of the world and the importance of embracing diversity.

4.3 Conclusion

The exchange of cultural values between countries in terms of spirituality and religion is growing in popularity, particularly in Tallinn and other cities in Estonia. Various spiritual and religious groups of Indian origin, such as ISKCON, Sahaj Marga, Sri Chinmoy, and groups practicing transcendental meditation, are known in Estonia. Buddhist institutes like Drikung Kagyu Center, Valuste Center, and Umbusi Buddhist Center are also present. These groups often use popular symbols, such as icons, images, idols, flags, and stones, in their practices. Chinese symbols, such as zodiac animals and feng shui, have also become popular in Estonian culture, reflecting China's global influence and the multicultural nature of modern societies shaped by cultural exchange and blending of traditions.

5. Main Theses

- Although China and India are rival powers competing for regional and global influence, for now, their soft power efforts in Estonia appear not to be on a collision course. This is mainly because their foreign policy strategies have different regional focus than Central Eastern and Nordic Europe. While China's presence is much stronger in the region, this state has little potential to win Estonian hearts and minds because of its authoritarian characteristics and sharp power practices. This allows India, which is still associated with democratic traditions, to launch effective soft power strategies vis-à-vis Estonia and the region.
- Singapore's distance vis-a-vis liberal values, though incomparably smaller than in China's case, has not significantly affected its soft power projection. The similarities between Estonia and Singapore as small states and digital tigers may bring their governments together and contribute to the people-to-people connectivity between their citizens. Moreover, this bond can be enforced by Singapore's act to join the block of Western states against Russia's aggression on Ukraine as opposed to neutral China and India.
- Immigration flows of newcomers from India and China to Estonia are on the rise. Many Chinese immigrants are attracted by educational opportunities, while Indian immigrants are primarily motivated by family reunification. The increasing trend of new immigration flows could be attributed to the strong ties among the well-established diasporas of Chinese and Indian immigrants, who hold relatively high and stable economic and social positions in Estonia.
- Although the number of Chinese and Indian-owned companies in Estonia is relatively small, these enterprises are profitable and operate in strategically significant sectors such as IT, technological infrastructure development, and telecommunications. Notably, companies such as Huawei, Tencent Estonia, and HCL Technologies are actively engaged in collaborations with esteemed scientific research centers and universities in the country, showcasing their commitment to innovation and knowledge exchange.
- The exchange of cultural values as essential part of China's and India's soft-power in Estonia is on the rise, with various spiritual and religious groups of Indian and Chinese origin gaining popularity. These groups often incorporate popular symbols into their practices, such as icons, images, idols, flags, and stones. Additionally, Chinese symbols, such as zodiac animals and feng shui, have also made their way into Estonian culture, reflecting China's global influence and the increasing multicultural nature of modern societies shaped by cross-cultural exchange and the blending of traditions.



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