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# A Critical Appraisal of China's Power in South Asia: Strengths and Achievements

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## ABSTRACT

With its rising power, China has been spreading its clout in almost every corner of the world. South Asia, owing to its rising significance, has caused new-found interest of China in this region. Amidst many assumptions, this paper attempts to trace out the rationale behind China's increasing presence in South Asia. Then, it primarily tries to analyze China's base of power in South Asian region and to explore its strengths and weaknesses. This study is designed to identify the factors that have attracted South Asian countries towards China. This study employs a case study method in general and 'focused comparison' in particular. This method is considered highly appropriate as it brings various perspectives which are rooted in a particular context. China's transforming statecraft towards South Asia is the context and focused comparison comes into play while exploring the commonalities and differences associated with Chinese strategies towards South Asian countries. The study concludes that Chinese base of power in the South Asian region comes from the economic, security, and diplomatic support for the South Asian countries and China has capitalized on this opportunity to transform its resources into power.

**Key Words:** Base of Power, Strengths and Weaknesses, Statecraft, South Asia, China etc.

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## Introduction

China's rise as a major power and growing clout in the global politics attracts wider attention from international community of states. It has provided China with more confidence in its dealings with the world. It is reflected in their assertiveness in the form of statecraft in recent times. Chinese statecraft strategies in South Asian region further explain this factor. Only recently China has started to focus South Asia as a region in its foreign policy. However, with the advent of 21<sup>st</sup> century China has sought to fix its footprints in South Asia as a financial supporter for many countries. Moreover, it is observed that China has managed to gain influence and win the confidence as a friend in small countries through providing economic assistance and diplomatic support at different occasions. This transition in China's posture towards South Asian region is accepted with mixed reviews. While most of the countries in South Asia welcome China to the region with

warmth, many political analysts, mostly in the West and India, argue that China is trying to seek hegemony in the Indian sub-continent, challenging India's regional influence.

Meanwhile, South Asia has attracted great attention from the world community because of its increasing role in global politics. As per global political observers, it is becoming one of the grounds for the 21st century's geopolitical contest. Moreover, it has become a breeding ground for terrorism quite recently. Given this scenario, the need of a pragmatic approach for China to handle its ties with South Asian countries is further apparent for securing its strategic and national interests (Ma, 2012).

There is a long list of factors behind how China's statecraft and behavior has attracted wider attention from international society in this century. Firstly, China's phenomenal economic development for three decades has been watched religiously by the world community. Thus, Political and geostrategic analysts, scholars, policymakers and journalists alike have been watching the progress of China's development with mixed thoughts of concerns and doubts. This interest can be witnessed through 'Rise of China' as top news story of 21<sup>st</sup> century initial years (Austin, 2009).

Secondly, China's distinctive political ideology is another major factor that invites concern from world community. China's political ideology is quite different from the one which is promoted and accepted by the United States – the current superpower. So, China's rise is visualized as a threat to the world's stability and peace. This comes from the popular belief that China will be replacing a declining US as the next world hegemony, and if that is to be true, there will likely be a conflict between the two countries. Scholars employ Koehane's 'hegemonic stability theory'<sup>1</sup> to prove this point (Ref). Consequently, China's act of behavior is closely observed, analyzed and debated in order to understand if Beijing – contrary to what it admits – has hegemonic interests.

South Asia is quite diverse in its characteristics. It is significant for its lack of commonality and cooperation as a region and it is also in close proximity to China. According to Malhotra, South Asia as a region does not share a certain commonality of national interests. In spite of their understanding on cooperation above conflict in the conduct of inter-state ties, South Asian countries have not demonstrated collective desire for a lasting mechanism for regional cooperation. The lackluster performance of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), even after existing for three decades emphasizes this factor. The factors which are held responsible for failure to achieve "region-ness" include; (1) failure of South Asian states to achieve "adequate degree of complementarity of interests"

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<sup>1</sup>**Hegemonic Stability Theory** proposes the cyclical transition of world leadership. In other words, it explains that the current leader could be soon replaced by a new power. The theory has been in use to analyze the rise of great powers to the world leadership and to forecast the future of international politics by discussing the power transition between the declining hegemon and its rising successor. In this context, today, those who support the decline argument use this theory to predict the decline of the United States alongside the rise of China.

### *A Critical Appraisal of China's Power in South Asia: Strengths and Achievements*

and (2) scarce in time and resource to invest in regional solutions due to “perpetual preoccupation with intra-state conflicts – some of which are either the cause or consequences of inter-state disputes and misperceptions” (Keohane, 2005).

India's rising status to emerge as 5<sup>th</sup> great economy of the world is another reason for South Asia to attract global attention. India is regarded as one of the fastest growing economies and the largest populous country (Mehta, 2023). India stands at the center of the region both physically and culturally. It is its geostrategic location in the region which has made South Asia an Indo-centric region or an Indian subcontinent. Other peripheral states in South Asia have been historically and politically influenced by India for centuries. Singh and Mir (2014) contend that: “India is unmatched in South Asia. Its military strength and military expenditures are exponentially increased over the time which is considered serious security concern for neighboring countries” (Singh & Mir, 2014). This fear prompts other countries in the region to seek for strategic support from external powers such as China.

One of the most significant factors that make South Asia worthy of worldwide attention is the Indian Ocean. Most of the countries in South Asia are located bordering the Indian Ocean. To many analysts, Indian Ocean is projected to be the geostrategic battlefield of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both China and India, the rising economic powers in Asia and many other economies are exponentially dependent on the Indian Ocean for trade. Besides holding immense mineral wealth, it is a major maritime trade channel for the worldwide supplies of energy and other raw materials. Due to these reasons, Indian Ocean has also become a center of power struggles making it a vital place to be controlled for numerous stakeholders like the US, India and China (Samaranayake, 2014). Thus, it has also become the new security dilemma between the current hegemony and emerging powers.

The unique geographical feature of Indian Ocean - bounded on almost all sides by the narrow chokepoints of the Straits of Malacca to the east and the Suez Canal, Cape of Good Hope, and Straits of Hormuz to the west imposes challenges to maritime security (Samaranayake, 2014). Thus, the words of Felipe Fernandez-Armesto, which says “whoever is lord of Malacca has his hands on the throat of Venice” and another saying by a historian in the fifteenth century “If the world were an egg, Hormuz would be its yolk” have more relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to security analysts, “If there was ever a case to be made for the relevance of strategic chokepoints, it is here, at the aquatic juncture between the world's largest sources of petroleum and the world's most import- and export-dependent economies” (Samaranayake, 2014). US Energy Information Administration emphasizes that “blocking a chokepoint, even temporarily, can lead to substantial increases in total energy costs and world energy prices” (EIA, 2015). This simple factor explains China's sudden interest in the South Asian region. China's vulnerability over energy resources and sea lanes of communication emphasizes the need to have strong foothold in the South Asian region.

Talking about Chinese core national interests, export economy and energy security among others take a center stage. It is quite hard for China to deliver on its promised economic development for its citizens without maintaining its export trade and imported energy supplies. The failure to do so will jeopardize the political stability of the communist rulers. As Ming Xia, in his article, explains economic development is a “quintessential political process” for the Communist Party. After the Cultural Revolution, the political elites of China accept that “performance-based legitimacy was the only hope for the prolonging its rule” (EIA, 2015). Thus, China’s development of policies and act of behavior will always mirror the domestic economic and political demand.

This paper offers a critical analysis of some significant questions that are being debated in the global political environment which are: Why South Asia, once a region of least importance, has become so important for China from the advent of 21<sup>st</sup> century, what are China’s bases of power in South Asia, how China has manifested its power in South Asia, and what kind of response is acquired from Central Asian countries?

The discussion centers on China’s statecraft strategies towards South Asia in general and its bases of power to influence in South Asia in particular. This paper employs the case study method and emphasizes ‘focused comparison’ technique. This method is considered highly appropriate as it brings various perspectives which are rooted in a particular context. China’s transforming statecraft towards South Asia is the context and focused comparison comes into play while exploring the commonalities and differences associated with Chinese strategies towards South Asian countries. Moreover, case study method has been the popular research method employed in analyzing statecraft of a nation state. For example, Baldwin’s Economic Statecraft, which is known to be one of the signature studies on the subject, explains his concept through employing case studies. He has utilized focused comparison in explaining how countries use tools and techniques of economic statecraft to gain influence. Similar methods have been used by scholars like Keith Krause, Evelyn Goh, and Daniel Drezner in analyzing statecraft and gaining influence (Krause, 1991) (Jochen Prantl, 2022) (Drezner, 1999). This study utilizes both primary and secondary data. For primary data, purpose sampling method was employed to identify interviewees. For secondary data, journal articles, newspaper reports, books, data bases, governmental statistical reports etc. have been utilized for relevant data collection.

### **Bases of Power – Factors that Provoke Interests from other Countries**

This section details about the various bases of power China utilizes to increase its influence in South Asian countries. Base of power refers to resources, opportunities, acts, objects and so on which one country can exploit in or to affect the behavior of another (Dahl, 1957). According to Dahl, power base is “inert and passive. It must be exploited in some fashion if the behavior of others is to be

## *A Critical Appraisal of China's Power in South Asia: Strengths and Achievements*

altered” (Dahl, 1957). Chinese base of power in the South Asian region can be ascribed to the economic, security, and diplomatic needs of the South Asian countries.

### **China: An Economic Opportunity**

The responses from most of the South Asian countries through primary and secondary data affirm that China is regarded as a great economic opportunity. Ping notes that “China, once seen as a threat by the states of South Asia, is now viewed correctly as an alternative development opportunity. The unprecedented success of the Chinese development model places it as an obvious alternative to that offered by India—or Indeed by the Western model of development” (Ping, 2013).

The responses acquired from most of the countries in South Asia confirm a positive opinion about China as an economic opportunity. For instance, Dr. Lalifur from Dhaka University states that China has turned into more of an economic fund provider for Bangladesh during the past decade. Similarly, Dr. Saman Kelegama stressed that despite the trade deficit China is a promising market. One of the most commonly viewed opinion on China is that it is the only country today which has the capability to provide funding to finance the projects that are required for the small South Asian countries. In spite of all the reservations, even India sees an economic opportunity in China. As it has already been illustrated before bilateral trade between India and China has grown at a rapid rate. Jabin Jacob from India confirmed that despite the concerns India has on China's growing presence and assertive rise, it could not ignore the economic benefit offered from Beijing (Jacob, 2020).

The explored literature stresses that when other donor countries refused to provide support to various South Asian countries on various accounts of human rights violations, volatile security situations, and terrorism etc. China came to aid these countries without strings attached. As it has been stressed throughout this paper, Sri Lanka's growing dependence on China was a result of the fact that its traditional donors refused to support them after the end of its thirty-year war. Even for Pakistan which was a non-Nato ally in War against Terror, the donors were reluctant to provide infrastructure support due to its volatile security situation. However, China has come to provide support for these countries despite all the odds. Hence, it is quite natural for the countries in South Asia to get attracted to China.

It is also crucial to note that most of the economic ties between China and South Asian countries are a win-win enterprise. Most of the analysts from China are of the view that South Asia is an important labor market for China owing to its young and skilled population. In addition, China is at a cross-road where it wants to diversify its manufacturing hubs. Mentioning about the three models of the future, Gilpin stresses that “as the economies of developed countries become more service oriented, as their terms of trade for raw materials continue to deteriorate,

and as their labor costs continue to rise, manufacturing will migrate to lesser-developed countries” (Gilpin, 1975). China’s situation is not quite different from this. However, it is found to export its manufacturing markets to many countries in South Asia such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka etc.

### **China: A Balancer/Security Provider**

China as a balancer or security provider is another base of its power for the countries in South Asia. Considering the case of China’s military diplomacy towards South Asia, it is affirmed that almost all the countries in the region acquire arms from China for their security and notably among them are Pakistan and Bangladesh.

Pakistan regards China to be its most dependable security partner (Curtis, 2009). China has not only transferred but also provided a license to produce specific weapons which includes tanks, aircrafts, missiles, armored carriers to China. It is also contested worldwide that China assisted Pakistan to develop nuclear weapons. It is also contended that China has remained consistent to help Pakistan not only in the initiation of nuclear program but also provided continued assistance to strengthen it.

China is the largest supplier of arms to Bangladesh. Dr. Lailufar from Dhaka University noted that because of this very reason, Bangladesh sees no threat from China instead believes it to be a strong supporter in maintaining its security. China’s support to Sri Lanka in its war against LTTE helped strengthen its perception of China as a security provider. As it was noted earlier, China was among the few countries that provided required weapons and armors to fight the last battle. Sri Lanka resorted to arms import from China and Pakistan when India could not meet the growing requirements (Curtis, 2009). To many scholars, however, Sri Lanka’s appreciation of China as a security provider goes back to many years before the decisive war time.

Nepal is another country that has sought military support from China when the similar was denied by India. Kathmandu was also recently seen wooing China for its military support that after a five-month blockade in 2015 allegedly supported by India which deeply destructed functioning of the economy. Joint military exercises between China and Nepal back in 2017 can be seen as an example of strengthening security ties between them.

There are several reasons that why most of the countries in South Asia feel more comfortable to approach China for defense and security needs than any other country such as India or the US. One significant reason is that China has never sought military intervention in the small South Asian countries unlike India. India has got involved militarily in the internal affairs of South Asian countries, or else it is alleged to be supporting opposition groups within these countries. However, China has never been charged with such interventions. On the contrary, it has politically assured its respect for the sovereignty and independence of the small

## *A Critical Appraisal of China's Power in South Asia: Strengths and Achievements*

South Asian countries. In addition, China, as a policy, does not actively get involved in military conflicts between regional countries. As it was seen, despite its strong relationship, China has not once fought beside Pakistan in its wars with India. This has often been criticized as China not being a reliable provider of defense needs (Muni, 2017). The growing defense ties between South Asia and China demonstrate that these countries accept the role Beijing is playing in providing security.

### **China: An Unwavering Friend**

Diplomatic support from China as an unwavering friend is another significant base of power that attracts South Asian countries towards China. There are good numbers of occasions when diplomatic support was badly needed by South Asian countries and it was China that provided the small South Asian states with support unlike India. As a result, China is seen as an unwavering reliable friend. Thus, this aspect stands as a strong base for China to gain influence in the South Asian region. S.D. Muni notes that “China has come forward to politically assure the South Asian countries that it stands by their sovereignty and independence. This has been done through the use of both multilateral institutions as well as bilateral engagement” (Muni, 2017).

China has a good record of defending its partners at multilateral forums such as the United Nations. Such an example can be witnessed back in 1982 when China used its first veto at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) against accession of Bangladesh to UN to show solidarity with Pakistan. Ever since, China is seen supporting Pakistan in its international diplomatic battles. When recently Pakistan raised its case against India giving accession to Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG), China was seen supporting the decision. Even though it was shown as China opposing Indian membership on principle, it was clear that Beijing was supporting Pakistan's cause (Aizaz, 2016).

Similarly, Sri Lanka is another country that has been supported by China at multilateral platforms. For instance, China has supported Sri Lanka in its diplomatic battles at the UNSC after the US decided to sponsor a resolution with the support of India and the West questioning humanitarian crisis during the last phase of war. On that occasion, Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa has praised and acknowledged Beijing's support several times. During one of his visits to China he appreciated the understanding and support of China when the West was putting pressure on Sri Lanka after the resolution of civil war back in 2009 (Xinhua Report on President Rajapaksa's Interview, 2011).

The guarantees China provides through diplomatic support to South Asian countries against pressure from the other powers including India makes it to be viewed as a reliable partner. This sort of aid and gesture of friendship helps enhancing relationship, building trust and confidence. Resultantly, China is

welcomed with no concerns by almost all the countries in South Asia except India. This provides leverage for China to enhance its clout on the South Asian countries.

### **Strength and Extent – Has China been Successful to Attract South Asian Countries?**

In the analysis of power, Dahl recommends to look into the reach and intensity (strength) of one country's influence over the others. Strength is also equated with weight. It is the probability of one actor to affect the behavior of another in its favor. Dahl is of the view that, despite having sufficient resources, skills and capabilities there can be cases where one actor's power is not reliable on another. So, he stresses that the probability of success makes a significant factor in power understanding.

According to Baldwin, there are two aspects behind the success of exercising power. Firstly, the actor should be capable of achieving the submission or the compliance of the target country. Secondly, the actor should be capable of achieving the result that it desires (Xinhua Report on President Rajapaksa's Interview, 2011). While noting that resources can make affluence, the probability of the target's compliance and the speed with which the target complies has great impact in the success of an influence attempt. For understanding this dimension, it is imperative to analyze power in terms of three meanings; power as a control over outcomes, power as control over behavior of the other, and power as control over resources. This aspect of power as control over outcome is entailed in Weber's assumption that "asserting one's will even against resistance implies getting the outcome one wants" (Kaviani, 2017). The second aspect of Power as a control over behavior is associated with Dahl's understanding of power. He defines power as "A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do" (Dahl, 1957). The third aspect of understanding of power as control over resources is related to "resources that can be used to affect outcomes or influence behavior" (Kaviani, 2017).

To check whether China's attempt to exert power in South Asia has succeeded should be understood through understanding if Beijing has played a role in changing behavior of the South Asian countries in recent events and outcomes, whether China has control over the resources of these countries and if they have managed to influence these countries in some other way.

### **Control/Grip over Events and Outcomes**

Chinese influence can be clearly witnessed in numerous events and outcomes in the countries of South Asia during the past decades. There is a strong possibility to make an assumption that China has played a role – perhaps indirect – in influencing the outcomes of particular events.

Bangladesh is regarded as a country having friendly ties with both China and India. It tries not to annoy either India or China as both of them provide different



### *A Critical Appraisal of China's Power in South Asia: Strengths and Achievements*

opportunities for the development Bangladesh. Dhaka takes India as its major security provider. Despite considering India to be its security partner, Bangladesh has been purchasing its arms and weapons from China as well. No doubt, this has made India uneasy. For example, when Bangladesh purchased submarines from China in November 2016, strong concern was shown by Indian security analysts and strategists. They took this action of Bangladesh as an act of provocation. An article reported that "Given Bangladesh's economic situation and the fact that it is surrounded on three sides by India, the acquisition of submarines is not only illogical but actually an act of provocation as far as India is concerned. Submarines are offensive weapons of sea denial and their only use would be to pose a threat in being for India and to complicate the latter's maritime security paradigm" (Rghuvanshi, 2016). India, as a policy response, renewed its defense ties through a defense pact with Bangladesh back in 2016 under Defense Minister Manohar Parikkar's visit to Bangladesh. The proposed agreement included high-level cooperation, sales, and supply of military hardware between them and coordinated operations against mutual conceived threats (Bhaumik, 2017). India also proposed to provide Bangladesh with a credit of US\$ 500 million to purchase military hardware from India.

Responding to this offer from India, Dhaka refused the idea of a comprehensive agreement and proposed a less formal MOU, and also refused the line of credit to purchase arms pointing that "India's own reliance on military imports suggests it has few quality products of its own to offer" (Bhaumik, 2017). There is a strong speculation that Bangladesh's decision to refuse these offers comes as a result of its growing ties with China.

Considering the case of Pakistan and China, they enjoy the strongest relations in South Asian region. Thus, Chinese clout in events and outcomes in Pakistan is also clearly visible. While both countries display more friendly ties free from interference, an article in *The Diplomat* revealed that it was not always the same. Calling the friendship between the two countries 'precarious', the author Alessandro Ripa noted that Chinese pressure played a role in military operation in Pakistan's North Waziristan, "where several ETIM militants are allegedly based" (Rippa, 2014).

Taking the case of Sri Lanka in consideration, there are numerous examples as to how China has exercised its influence in Sri Lanka's events, indirectly. Ever since Sri Lanka and China's relationship grew after the war, Colombo seemed to be being sensitive to China's concern. This can be witnessed through Sri Lanka's refusal to give visa to His Holiness Dalai Lama and its boycott at Nobel Peace Prize even in 2010 during which China's most celebrated democracy activists, Liu Xiaobo won Nobel Peace Prize. Sri Lanka is one of the major Buddhist countries of the world. Dalai Lama is deemed as the most respected Buddhist leader who is alive. Several requests have been placed by him to worship Temple of the Tooth Relic, the most sacred place for the Buddhists around the world. Sri Lanka, in fear of antagonizing China, has refused these visa requests.

In spite of strong reservations and promises to scrap deals with China which were signed by the Rajapaksa government, and despite claims made of Chinese projects to be corrupt deals which gave ransom to Rajapaksa family, the new Sri Lankan government seemed not only to be continuing these projects but also negotiating for new ones with China. The change of policy is often observed to be a result of China's influence to which Sri Lanka is forced to conceive. *Financial Times* reported that the reason for the Sirisena government to make a U-turn on its initial stance on Chinese projects was Beijing piling diplomatic pressure on the island using huge debt as leverage (James Kynge, 2017).

### **Control/Grip over Resources**

With the growing reach and influence of China in South Asian region, Beijing seems to strengthen its grip over resources which are built and sponsored by China. Only those resources are trying to be kept under its control which are strategically important for China. These resources, which were initially built for infrastructure development of the recipient countries, seemed to be given control for Chinese operation. This scenario is quite visible in Pakistan and Sri Lanka, the two countries where majority of the mega infrastructure development projects were held.

Considering the case study of Pakistan in terms of mega development infrastructure projects by China, the most discussed investment project is the Gawadar port. The warm-water deep-sea port in the Baluchistan region of Pakistan gained global attention after the Chinese involvement in investment and construction was identified as one of China's string of pearls. After initial construction in 2007, the port was contracted to Port of Singapore Authority on a 40-year deal. In 2011, it was announced that the Pakistan signed agreements to contract China to take control of the port once the deal with Singapore expires (China to take control of Gwadar Port, 2011). It was discovered back in 2015 that Chinese Overseas Ports Holding Company Ltd (COPHCL) assumed charge of the port. This deal was signed for a 40-year lease for 2000 acres of land in Gwadar, and CPEC activities including transportation and other infrastructure will be implemented in this area (Panda, 2015).

Sri Lanka is another such example where mega projects' control was taken by China after their establishment by China. For instance, it was reported in 2013 that the ownership of Chinese built coal power plant which was known as Lakvijaya/Norochcholai Coal power plant will be transferred to CMCR Company (the Chinese construction company) "in lieu of the massive US\$ 1350 million loan obtained" (Norochcholai Coal Plant To Be Transferred To Chinese Company, 2013). Once this project was completed, it broke down many times questioning the sustainability and effectiveness of the project. It was also reported that failure in proper technological transfer during the project from Chinese firms to Sri Lankan authorities is the major cause for malfunctioning of the power plant. Sri Lanka,

### ***A Critical Appraisal of China's Power in South Asia: Strengths and Achievements***

back in 2015, responded by signing a MOU with Chinese for the proper functioning of this coal project (Sri Lanka-China to sign two MOUs for Norochcholai Coal Power Project, 2017). In addition, 80 percent shares of the Hambantota port were reported to be sold to Chinese firm as equity swap. China is also offered an exclusive trade zone in Hambantota. Thus, it seems that China will have easy access to transport products from the trade zone to its markets. All these cases reflect China's intent to take control of the resources in South Asian region.

Gawadar and Hambantota ports can be taken an example to reveal that China's gradual take-over of resources in South Asian countries using debt as leverage. Considering the amount of debt and growing dependency on China for financial and trade assistance, South Asian countries are left without an option rather than conceiving to Chinese influence in the region.

### **Control/Grip over Actors**

While the aforementioned scenarios reflect the strength and extent of Chinese power in the region, its full fledged control on the actors (South Asian countries in this case) is well illustrated from how these countries are campaigning for Chinese bid to get a full member status of South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

SAARC is the regional organization like ASEAN or EU in the South Asian region. However, compared with other regional multilateral forums, it is less functioning. China does not consider itself to be a South Asian country. However, in the recent years, it is seen as pushing to get full-fledged membership of SAARC. China is already an envoy for SAARC and holds observer status. Three member states of SAARC, namely, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Maldives pitching for expanding membership of the forum to other players including China during the 18<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit (Chansoria, 2017) provide evidence that China have been using its statecraft strategy in these countries in order to gain accession to the regional organization. Even though China had to temporarily settle for "dialogue partner" status, half of the member states of SAARC joining the clamor for Beijing's entry to SAARC shows that its investment of resources for the past decade in the region is bringing satisfactory results. The point highlighted by the member states in support of China's entry to SAARC was that "the Chinese shadow in South Asia is becoming too unambiguous and large to ignore, more so through its all-pervasive presence as a SAARC observer" (Chansoria, 2017). The point of consideration is that if China gets the full member status of SAARC it will also get the right to use veto in SAARC affairs "which will prove detrimental from an Indian standpoint, since China will obstruct any/all projects that could be strategically beneficial to India and reinforce India's regional standing (Chansoria, 2017). Moreover, a country which did not identified itself as a part of the South Asian region getting the membership of the South Asian Regional Cooperation will prove how keen the member states of SAARC are to make China even more

involved in the South Asian affairs. All this reflect that most of the countries are keen to get China a full member status of SAARC.

## **Conclusion**

Summarizing the discussion, this study concludes that South Asia, once a region of least significance, has assumed crucial place in China's scheme of statecraft since the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century. Earlier China emphasized bilateral relations with South Asian countries but it has started dealing it as a region with the advent of 21<sup>st</sup> century. After maintaining double digit growth of economy for three decades, China started to invest its resources at its disposal in foreign countries to further its influence beyond its borders. South Asia enjoys vital position in the international politics because of its immense human resource, mineral wealth, and strategic position etc. Major powers have always been trying to project their influence in this region and China, owing to its rising power status, is doing the same. China's statecraft towards South Asia has become a topic of concern for analysts from all around the world.

China's bases of power in South Asia are derived from the vital needs of countries in South Asia. Most of the small South Asian countries look towards China for their economic and security issues. Therefore, China's role as an economic opportunity, security provider, and an unwavering friend to the South Asian countries provides China with a leverage to further its influence in South Asia. All of these resources have earned China a positive response from most of the South Asian countries except India which takes China as a threat to its clout in the region. Whether China succeed to attract small South Asian countries or not has been tested through its control over events and outcomes, control over resources, and control over actors. The findings suggest that China has been successful to attract small South Asian countries to transform its resources into power. A strong positive trend has been observed in the public of South Asian countries to favor China over other major powers such as India, the US, and Russia etc. This favorable opinion of China can easily be witnessed through pitching for full-fledge membership of SAARC for China by almost all the South Asian countries except India. Why India is reluctant to award full membership status of SAARC to China is an important query that invites future research into this subject.

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## ***A Critical Appraisal of China's Power in South Asia: Strengths and Achievements***

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