

## **Environmental Foreign Policy as a Soft Power Instrument: Cases of China and India**

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*Joseph S. Nye defined soft power as the power of attraction to affect the behavior of other states through the use of non-coercive instruments including culture, political values and foreign policy. Over the last two decades, environmental issues have grown in importance on the international agenda and become critical components of states' foreign policy-making. This paper aims to analyze environmental foreign policy as a soft power instrument focusing on two major rising powers: China and India. Traditionally, China and India had been reluctant to make any commitments in the field. However, they have shown greater willingness to act in global environmental governance in the past decade. They started playing more active roles in global climate change negotiations and supported a number of initiatives. Their current rise in global environmental governance has even been praised by the international community as the Paris agreement case demonstrated. This study evaluates China's and India's recent efforts in global environmental governance with a focus on climate change negotiations linking their constructive position to their soft power potential. It is argued that environmental issues are used by these two states as foreign policy strategy to gain more influence in international politics. This study finds out that China's climate-related environmental diplomacy has been more ambitious than that of India and thus has been closer to fulfill its potential as a soft power asset.*

*Key Words: China, India, climate change, environmental foreign policy, soft power*

### **Introduction**

Joseph S. Nye (1990) defined soft power as the power of attraction to affect the behavior of other states through the use of non-coercive instruments including culture, political values and foreign policy. Comparing it with that of hard power, Nye (1990: 166) suggested that soft power offered a “more attractive way of exercising power” because it enabled a state to achieve desired outcomes in world politics through encouraging willingness in other states to agree with its foreign policies and/or to follow it. On the one hand, it is fair to suggest that acquiring soft power increases the likelihood of a state to set international political agenda and to shape the framework of global

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governance debates. On the other hand, a number of states have also built their soft power by improving their international image and contributing to global governance.

In international politics, the soft power of a country is closely related with how it handles its relations with others and to what extent it is viewed by other states as a legitimate and moral authority (Nye and Jisi 2009: 19). In the twenty-first century, networks are becoming highly critical and as Nye (2011: 17) suggests “positioning in social network can be an important power resource”. Portraying a responsible image through undertaking an active role in international negotiations for global commons helps strengthening soft power potential of a state. Nye (2011: 17) also argues that controlling communication between others in complex network arrangements, linking diverse groups together in a cooperative manner increases “a country’s ability to gain power with, rather than over others”. A state can reinforce its power in a better way by acting together with other states rather than acting against them particularly when the global commons are concerned.

Over the last two decades, environmental issues have grown in importance on the international agenda and become critical components of states’ foreign policy-making. In this regard, compliance with international environmental norms has increased soft power potential of countries. For instance, Germany’s environmental foreign policy, particularly its climate policy, has earned the country a very good reputation demonstrating it as a responsible actor and strengthening its soft power potential (Wyligala 2012). Germany’s effective climate diplomacy experience and its linkage to country’s soft power potential are argued to offer a good example for other countries (Li 2016). Addressing environmental issues, particularly the climate change has positively contributed to the strengthening of the soft power capacity of the rising powers as well. Shifting to a constructive environmental foreign policy has allowed rising powers to shape the framework of global climate negotiations. In recent years, leaders of the emerging powers have sought to project their countries as responsible actors in world politics, which do not only promote peace and development, but also actively contribute to global governance. As a result, proactive commitment of rising powers to global governance in a number of fields including environmental protection have played critical role in strengthening their soft power.

This paper aims to analyze environmental foreign policy as a soft power instrument focusing on two major rising powers: China and India. Traditionally, China and India had been reluctant to make any commitments in the field. However, they have shown greater willingness to act in global environmental governance in the past decade. They started playing more active roles in global climate change negotiations and supported a number of climate-friendly initiatives. Their current rise in global environmental governance has even been praised by the international community as the Paris agreement case demonstrated.

Main research questions of this study are: how have China and India contributed to global environmental governance in the past decade? What are the similarities and differences between China’s and India’s domestic and foreign climate-related policies? To what extent climate-friendly foreign policy of a state can be regarded as a soft power asset? This study tries to answer these questions by evaluating China’s and India’s recent efforts in global environmental governance with

a focus on climate negotiations linking their constructive position to soft power potential. It is argued that environmental issues are used by these two states as foreign policy strategy to gain more influence in international politics.

With respect to methodology, a comparative analysis of environmental foreign policy in China and India is deployed. Mostly, documentary materials are utilized and there is a reliance on both primary resources and secondary resources. Primary resources include United Nations (UN) documents on climate change and national documents by Chinese and Indian governments on their climate change programs. Secondary resources include scholarly books, articles and selected press releases on the subject. This research also benefits from the speeches of Chinese and Indian authorities.

It is found out that China has taken promising actions in coping with climate change including high investment in renewable energy, adoption of efficient action plans to cope with air pollution and considerable reduction in its energy and carbon intensity. India has also played an increasingly proactive role in combating climate change and hosted many projects addressing global warming. However, when two countries are compared, China has shown greater willingness to act in climate regimes when compared with India. China has adopted ambitious climate-related policies than that of India's and thus in the case of China environmental foreign policy has been closer to fulfill its potential as a soft power asset.

## **Environmental Foreign Policy**

The term 'environmental foreign policy' or 'environmental diplomacy' has been widely used since the ending of the Cold War. The term mainly refers to "international negotiations which address the problems of environmental degradation and pollution on a global basis" (Broadhurst and Ledgerwood 1998). In addition, the term refers to a country's foreign policy-making with respect to environmental issues along with its standing in international environmental meetings. Until the late 20th century, environment was not very much on the foreign policy agendas of states. Yet, with the growing negative consequences of environmental degradation, nation-states have increasingly admitted that there are a number of very critical environmental problems to transgress their national boundaries and coping with these problems require international cooperation. This admission was then reflected in a series of international meetings and agreements concerning the environment and growing cooperation in scientific research. As Benedick (1986: 172) rightfully points out the intensified sense of interdependence among the states has led to increasing responsibility to protect human health and to preserve the common natural heritage.

Historically, the United States (US) had been one of the leading states in the field of environmental diplomacy, but through time it has become a foot dragger in international environmental negotiations because US leaders have found international environmental treaties as unacceptable. European Union (EU) member states have proved to be responsible actors regarding their

environment-friendly policies and strong commitment to international environmental treaties. The 2016 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) developed by the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy assessed the policies of 180 nations to find out to what extent they met internationally established environmental targets (Smith 2017). According to findings, except for three countries, the 20 most environmentally-friendly countries consist of European countries.

## **Historical Background of Global Climate Change Governance**

Climate change has been pronounced as one of the leading challenges in today's world politics, threatening all humanity. Industrial revolution was an important turning point in this regard, as increasing industrial activities accelerated carbon dioxide emissions, due to intensified use of fossil fuels by developed states. As a result, there has been increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere leading to climate change, which has been mainly reflected in the global warming. Through time, the issue of climate change has been globalized as it cannot be addressed without the collaboration of the international community. Climate change has been the core issue to be debated within global environmental negotiations, as it has increasingly been argued to be closely linked with international trade, development and security. As Dimitrov (2010: 797) rightfully points out "climate change is the defining challenge of our times" because firstly, it is the only global problem posing a serious threat to the security and prosperity of all human societies, and secondly, tackling this problem has socioeconomic consequences such as encouraging a fundamental change in means of energy production and consumption in modern societies.

Offering a framework for global engagement, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), agreed at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, was a major achievement on the issue. The acknowledgement of the uneven contribution of states to climate change in the convention led to formation of an understanding of differentiated commitments by developed and developing states expressed through the phrase 'Common But Differentiated Responsibilities' (CBDR) as indicated in the Article 3 (UNFCCC 1992). Accordingly, with the UNFCCC, developed countries agreed to undertake substantial role in fighting against climate change through fulfilling emissions reduction obligations and providing financial and technological assistance to developing states (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012: 470). In the meantime, developing states were freed from any emission reduction obligations due to their need for further development and their lower per capita emissions, when compared with the developed states. The convention also required member states to meet annually at a Conference of the Parties (COP) to evaluate achievements in policy implementation and to renegotiate agreements (Dimitrov 2010: 799).

The second important UN meeting on the global climate change took place in Kyoto in 1997. Kyoto summit resulted in the Kyoto Protocol known as the first legally binding climate change agreement (Zhang 2017: 2). The divide between developed and developing countries was highlighted by the Kyoto Protocol as developed countries were obliged to control their emissions, whereas developing countries were not. The third significant international climate change conference to be sponsored by the UN was the Copenhagen Summit of 2009 to end up with a

nonbinding political declaration, the Copenhagen Accord. Lastly, Paris Summit of 2015 was a critical meeting addressing global climate change. The outcome of the summit was the Paris Agreement which was accepted as the first global agreement on climate change to include legal obligations for all states. Paris Agreement was also a considerable achievement on the issue establishing an international transparency system, in order to increase transparency both for mitigation actions by developing countries and for assistance provision by developed countries (Zhang 2017: 5).

### **Emerging Powers in Global Climate Change Negotiations**

Developing countries traditionally cooperated in international climate change negotiations, through the coalition of the Group of 77 (G77) plus China. They adopted a common negotiating position on environmental issues arguing that environmental degradation was largely a result of human activities in the developed world, and thus developed states had to play greater roles in tackling with it. They also demanded financial and technological support from the industrialized countries, if there was any expectation for their contribution to problem-solving. For instance, at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the coalition of G77 plus China managed to secure an agreement on the principle of CBDR, successfully attracting attention to differentiated responsibility between the developed world and the developing world.

With their continued economic growth and increased carbon emissions, emerging economies such as China and India had become the main beneficiaries of CBDR. They benefitted from Kyoto Protocol's exemptions for developing countries with respect to legal emission limitations. Despite its benefits, emerging powers' traditional alignment with the G77 group of developing countries came to an end because they had become increasingly different from the G77 bloc with respect to their economic power, population and carbon emissions. Prior to Copenhagen Summit of 2009, these fast-growing developing countries formed a new negotiating group called BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, and China) to express their own unique position in global climate talks (Hallding et al. 2013: 608).

There were three reasons behind the formation of BASIC group to ensure cooperation among them regarding the climate issue. First of all, as Thaker and Leiserowitz (2014: 107) state, these advanced developing countries started facing intensified pressure by the developed states to undertake legally binding emissions limitations to avoid global warming owing to rapid increase in their emissions. Secondly, the BASIC countries had realized that due to environmental degradation, they would face resource scarcities constituting a serious burden for their further development. It meant that they would not have access to enough global resources compared with the earlier times when some other states had the opportunity to become industrialized (Hallding et al. 2013: 608). Lastly, these rising powers of the BASIC group were motivated by the chance to play greater roles in global governance. If they want to become influential actors in world politics, global environmental governance would be a critical field to demonstrate their weight. In this regard, Mohan (2017: 42) underlines the positive correlation between developing countries'

impressive economic growth and increasing expectation by these countries “to take the lead in influencing the outcomes of global governance”.

Adopting a common negotiating position in the global climate debates through the BASIC group, emerging powers including China, India, South Africa and Brazil have continued to make references to the principle of CBDR, differentiating themselves from the industrialized states. However, there has also been a visible shift in their willingness to tackle with climate change, particularly when compared with the other members of the developing world. Just before the Copenhagen Summit, all BASIC countries announced “concrete, quantitative, mid-term targets” which they aimed to implement in their countries to curb their respective carbon emissions (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012: 471). For instance, China announced to reduce its carbon intensity by 40-45 percent below 2005 levels by 2020, whereas India announced to reduce its carbon intensity by 20–25 percent against 2005 levels by 2020 (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012: 471).

In addition to their voluntary mitigation assurances, through the Copenhagen Accord BASIC countries agreed to present more precise and transparent reporting of their emissions limitation acts through “more frequent and detailed national communications and a new process of international consultations and analysis” (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012: 471). Constructive and flexible negotiating position of the BASIC countries continued during the Paris Summit of 2015. BASIC countries agreed to undertake important commitments in combating against climate change and thus they highly contributed to a global compromise to be reached for the Paris Agreement.

In the next two sections, the focus will be on China’s and India’s negotiating positions in global climate politics from the Rio Summit of 1992 to the Paris Summit of 2015 with a special attention paid to the leading motivations that have driven their policies and the shifts in their policies along the years.

### **China’s environmental foreign policy**

This section seeks to analyze China’s environmental foreign policy with a focus on its climate-related domestic and foreign policies. China has experienced an impressive economic growth over the last two decades becoming the world’s second largest economy (Sun 2016: 43). On the one hand, accommodating the world’s largest population China consumes substantial energy highly contributing to environmental pollution, whereas on the other it is one of the major countries to be subject to severe impact of climate change. In international politics, China is considered as one of the leading rising powers to have a growing impact on global governance. Environment is one field of global governance, where Chinese weight has been increasingly felt.

Historically, as a developing country to align with the G-77 group at global environmental negotiations, China had fully embraced the CBDR norm and had been unwilling to make any commitment in the field. Chinese leaders, by and large, prioritized economic development and national sovereignty (Sun 2016: 44-45) at the expense of environmental degradation. However,

through time there was a considerable shift in China's environmental foreign policy in line with the changes in the domestic and international contexts. Zhang (2017: 1) describes China's stance in global climate change negotiations as "evolved from playing a peripheral role to gradually moving to the center".

From outside, China has increasingly faced strong pressure to undertake action in combating climate change and to become a solution of the problem, in which it played an undeniable role with its large energy consumption along with carbon emissions. Assessment Reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) working under the auspices of the UN has played an instrumental role in causing a policy change in Chinese government. Released by February 2007, the Fourth Assessment Report on the climate change by the IPCC made references to various levels of environmental degradation in China suggesting that the country along with most of Africa will display the largest vulnerabilities by 2050 (p.827). After the release of the report, international community's pressure on China has been on rise, viewing China not only as one of the most-exposed countries to climate change, but also one of the leading countries contributing to it. In the meantime, as mentioned by Qi and Wu (2013: 305); "Chinese embassies and consulates worldwide received, for the first time, numerous calls and questions regarding Chinese actions on climate change".

Several factors have been significant on the transformation of China's domestic and international climate-related policies. On the domestic front, rapid industrial production has led to massive urbanization. As Qi and Wu point out (2013: 305), motivated by higher wages each year, millions of people moved to cities to work as workers in industrial plants. This boost in urbanization in return has contributed to high pollution in the cities. By January 2013, air pollution in major Chinese cities reached unprecedented levels as "for several weeks the air was worse than in an airport smoking lounge" (The Economist 2013). A number of concerning environmental developments had already preceded the climax in pollution. They included severe snowstorm in southern China by January 2008, terrible drought in Yunnan province by 2007, sudden rainstorms causing destructive flooding in Guizhou by 2009 (Qi and Wu 2013: 304). National Assessment Reports on Climate Change also estimated that China would be one of the most severely affected countries by climate change. All these critical developments resulted in an explosion of public concern in the country with respect to environmental degradation and its negative consequences.

International pressure and growing popular interest on environment-related challenges had created a legitimacy crisis for Chinese authorities and in return led Chinese government to pay more attention to climate change. Accordingly, Chinese leaders adopted a number of measures, particularly with the aim of coping with air pollution. Chinese government released its first global warming initiative through its National Climate Change Program in June 2007, which introduced measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and a flexible approach to climate change (China's National Climate Change Program 2007). By 2012, the Chinese Communist Party added "the establishment of an ecological civilization" as a target to the constitution, making references to "resources conservation and environmental protection" (Sun 2016: 47). In the meantime, Environmental Protection Law (EPL) was amended between 2011 and 2014 (Zhang et al. 2016:

334). The new law toughened the penalties for environmental crimes and set higher environmental protection standards for enterprises (Zhang et al. 2016: 334). Starting with mid-June 2013, the government also undertook a series of reforms such as launching the first carbon market of the country and increasing the accountability of local authorities with respect to regional air-quality problems (The Economist 2013). In addition, action plans to prevent and control pollution in air, water and soil were released by the State Council in 2013, 2015 and 2016 respectively (Sun 2016: 47).

In line with the progressive environmental reforms and initiatives adopted at home, China started following an ambitious and proactive environmental foreign policy in international platforms. It has attached great importance to coping with climate change viewing this issue as a national strategy to strengthen its prestige in international politics. Promoting green and low-carbon development was stated as an “important component of the ecological civilization process” in the China’s Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) (2015: 2-3) presented to the UN. In order to reduce carbon emissions, thousands of inefficient power and industrial facilities had been shut down leading to a visible decrease in energy consumption per unit of GDP by 20% between 2010 and 2015 which as a result became a bit better than the global average by 2013 (Economist 2013, Sun 2016: 45). China has also adopted impressive renewable energy policies in combating climate change. The country has highly invested in renewable energy and put forward the most progressive plans to build new nuclear power stations (The Economist 2013).

Chinese leaders’ constructive stance regarding environmental issues in the decade has also played a critical role in China’s positive transformation in its domestic and foreign environmental policies. As Stalley (2013:1) puts forward, Chinese leaders, who once argued against emission limitations, eventually have agreed that climate change is a legitimate challenge to cope with through inter-governmental cooperation. The determined climate-related foreign policy of China was clearly expressed by former President Hu Jintao in his address to the UN Conference on Climate Change dated back to September 22, 2009. He stated (New York Times 2009): “Out of a sense of responsibility to its own people and people across the world, China has taken and will continue to take determined and practical steps to tackle this challenge. China has adopted... mandatory national targets for reducing energy intensity and discharge of major pollutants and increasing forest coverage”. This understanding was also reflected by former Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao at the Copenhagen Summit by December 2009 as China voluntarily agreed to cut carbon emissions setting an example within the international community (China Daily 2009). The premier said: “China would strive to overcome the challenges it faced in realizing its announced emissions reduction target while providing the international community with timely and full information and enhancing international cooperation and exchange” (China Daily 2009). Current President, Xi Jinping attaches special importance to struggling against climate change as well since he came to power by 2012. Under his presidency, China has undertaken a proactive role in international climate change negotiations. At the start of Communist Party congress that took place in October 2007, Xi Jinping underlined China’s leadership role in addressing climate change through these words: “China had taken a driving seat in international cooperation to respond to climate change” (The Guardian 2017).

Another important factor to cause a change in China's domestic and foreign environmental policy is the increasing impact of Chinese civil society organizations on environmental issues.

Social life in China had undergone a remarkable change and social life in today's China has become quite different from that of Mao's period, where citizens had no right to organize. China's three decades-long economic change has been reflected in its society as the state has gradually retreated from society. People are no more silent in voicing their concerns regarding environmental issues. As it is pointed out, Chinese civil society has contributed to climate change mitigation through "government engagement, professional and financial capacity enhancement, and the shaping of public opinion and awareness" (Liu, Wang and Wu 2017: 5). Among these civil society organizations, climate NGOs, academic organizations and student organizations have stood out with respect to climate governance. Chinese environmental NGOs have been influential on the public opinion through promoting an awareness regarding energy saving practices and low-carbon development (Liu, Wang and Wu 2017: 8). For instance, Friends of Nature which was established by March 1994 has been influential in raising environmental awareness within Chinese society (Hilton 2013). Environmental NGOs have also operated in close alliance with the media and relevant officials and agencies in the government, such as the State Environmental Protection Agency (Lu, 2005). In the meantime, academic organizations have been influential in attracting the attention of political authorities to environmental degradation through their research and reports, while student environmental organizations have contributed to strengthening environmental consciousness of students (Liu, Wang and Wu 2017: 4). Despite the positive role played by Chinese civil society on the issue, environmental NGOs need to further develop their technical capacity to address environmental issues in a more effective way.

The INDC which was submitted by China to the UNFCCC in June 2015 clearly presented achievements of China in climate change mitigation (UN Climate Change Newsroom 2015). Accordingly, China's progress in coping with climate change by 2014 was reported as;

- Carbon dioxide emissions per unit of GDP is 33.8% lower than the 2005 level;
- The share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption is 11.2%;
- The forested area and forest stock volume are increased respectively by 21.6 million hectares and 2.188 billion cubic meters compared to the 2005 levels;
- The installed capacity of hydro power is 300 gigawatts (2.57 times of that for 2005);
- The installed capacity of on-grid wind power is 95.81 gigawatts (90 times of that for 2005);
- The installed capacity of solar power is 28.05 gigawatts (400 times of that for 2005); and
- The installed capacity of nuclear power is 19.88 gigawatts (2.9 times of that for 2005) (China's INDC 2015: 3-4).

China played a critical role in the negotiations for the Paris Agreement of 2015. In order to encourage a global compromise to be reached for the Paris agreement China signed a series of

bilateral statements with India, Brazil and the EU (Zhang 2017: 2). Chinese authorities agreed to undertake severe responsibilities for fulfilling their country's national environmental commitments and made considerable concessions to enable reaching a legally binding agreement in Paris (Zhang 2017: 7-8).

The considerable improvement in China's image as a responsible international actor in combating climate change is closely related with China's impressive investments in the field. These investments attracted worldwide attention, especially when mentioned in global media by various commentators. For instance, Melik (2011) points out that China has become the largest investor in renewable energy projects through spending "tens of billions of dollars every year on so-called clean-tech projects". Likewise, report by Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (2017: 1) clearly underlines that China is now the world leader in renewable energy and associated low-emissions-energy sectors with a noticeable rise in investment in the sector. According to Jaffe (2018: 86), China's increasing dependence on foreign energy has led Chinese leaders to accelerate investment in renewable energy and low-carbon technologies, which in return has significantly contributed to global fight against climate change. Among renewable energy sectors, China is showed as the driving power for solar energy with \$86.5 billion invested in the sector in 2017 (Frangoul 2018).

In the twenty six years since the signing of UNFCCC at the Rio Summit, there has been a remarkable change in China's position and policies in global climate change negotiations. On the domestic front, China has adopted impressive initiatives to reduce carbon emissions, whereas on the external front Chinese representatives started to play a constructive role in various international platforms and summits. For instance, as Stalley (2013:1) points out China did not only give up its opposition to legally binding commitments, but also Chinese authorities accepted voluntary targets for developing countries presenting China's emissions limitation targets. China has become increasingly active in its efforts to protect the environment with its policies increasingly appreciated by the international community. Thus, it would be fair to suggest that China's progressive environmental policy has strengthened its prestige in world politics, in return contributing to its soft power potential. However, despite this progress, China has to improve its environmental policies through getting over a number of shortcomings in this field.

First of all, civil society involvement in environmental protection is accepted as very important in coping with climate change, but Chinese environmental NGOs face some challenges including restricted political space, insufficient professional capacity and shortage of funding (Liu, Wang and Wu 2017: 5). Thus, while Chinese environmental NGOs have become active and played positive role over China's environmental governance, they have remained short of fulfilling their potential in the field. Weaknesses still remain, as on the one hand, the complete retreat of state from society has not occurred yet, whereas on the other environmental NGOs have to develop their technical capacity further. Secondly, the top-down nature of China's environmental policies leaves a small room for private actors' formal participation in the political process (Sun 2016:48). Thirdly, public awareness about environmental protection needs to be raised. Lastly, like other advanced

developed states, Chinese leadership faces a dilemma between environmental protection and economic development.

China's compliance with international environmental obligations has positively contributed to its image of a responsible and law-abiding power on the global stage. McBeath and Wang (2008: 11) suggest that environmental diplomacy is typically a soft power exercise and here China demonstrates a considerable success with its "grand strategy of a 'peaceful rise' in world politics". Likewise, Chen (2009) argues that through the adoption of international environmental agreements like Kyoto Protocol, China has revealed its soft power, as this act led China to gain respect from both developed and developing states. Lastly, Rauchfleisch (2017) expects that with the eroding soft power of the US in environmental issues and China's growing willingness to commit itself to international environmental norms, China is likely to increase its soft power potential.

According to Soft Power 30 survey conducted by Portland Communications (2017: 43), China is described as a "upward-mover" with a score of 30 in 2015, climbing to 28 by 2016 and then climbing to 25 by 2017. Rise of China in the survey is attributed to its willingness to shoulder global responsibility in the field of environmental sustainability at a time when "the Trump administration could turn its back on the world" (Portland Communications 2017: 49). Another data to show China's growing popularity in world politics is obtained by Pew Research Center. Polling in 36 nations for three years including 2014, 2015 and 2016, global popularity of the US versus China was measured. It was found out that China was overtaking the US in favorability (Vice 2017).

### **India's environmental foreign policy**

This section analyzes India's environmental foreign policy with a focus on its climate-related domestic and foreign policies. Like China, India has had an impressive economic development in the last two decades. Traditionally considered as a developing state in world politics, India has been renamed as an emerging state or a rising power, due to this rapid economic development. On the one hand, it is one of the leading polluters with its over-crowded population and intensifying industrial activity, whereas on the other it is among the most vulnerable states to climate change as a considerable amount of its population depend on agricultural activity.

India's shifting environmental foreign policy is closely related with changes in its foreign policy understanding over the years. Throughout the Cold War years, India prioritized two basic principles: national sovereignty and non-alignment. In the post Cold-War era, India has had more room for maneuver in its foreign policy (Ganguly and Pardesi 2009: 16), but initially there wasn't any change in its commitment to above-mentioned basic principles. In its early years of climate policy, Indian position tended to reject any internationally supervised climate mitigation (Mohan 2017: 47) pointing out "the historic responsibility of the North" and "per capita rights to global environmental resources" (Vihma 2011: 78). During the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, India was part of the G77 plus China coalition playing a key role in the negotiations through developing a common position for the South and acting as the representative of the coalition (Joshi 2013: 134).

Mainly, India supported the principle of CBDR arguing that mitigation commitments had to take place “on the basis of per capita emissions, historical responsibility, and economic capacity” (Michaelowa and Michaelowa 2012: 576). Accordingly, industrialized north would be subject to binding mitigation commitments, whereas emissions limitation had to be voluntary for the developing south and to depend on funding and technology transfer by the north.

India’s uncompromising position continued during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations as Indian authorities refused any emissions reduction commitments, emphasizing their country’s right to socio-economic development. But, this uncompromising standing started shifting after 2007. While India neither slowed down its economic development nor gave up putting pressure on industrialized states for climate-related action, Indian leaders developed a comprehensive climate change program at home and adopted a proactive foreign policy in supporting international efforts to cope with climate change (Rastogi 2011: 127). There were a number of factors behind this transformation. First of all, India began to experience a rapid economic growth like some other rising powers contributing to global environmental degradation to a larger extent. As a result, international pressure on the Indian government to reduce its country’s carbon emissions has grown. Secondly, there has been rising awareness within the Indian society with respect to climate change and India’s vulnerability to global warming. Pointing out this vulnerability, grassroots organizations including People’s Science Movement and India Climate Justice movement have placed pressure on the Indian government to take action in combating climate change (Thaker and Leiserowitz 2014: 113). As Michaelowa and Michaelowa (2012: 577-578) suggest, two progressive groups have emerged within Indian society sponsoring India’s active engagement in climate mitigations: progressive realists, who have called for “proactive policies at the national level” and progressive internationalists, who have called for proactive policies at the international level. Thirdly, international climate policy instruments have proved to have financial benefits for India as the instrument of Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) of the Kyoto Protocol has demonstrated (Michaelowa and Michaelowa 2012: 578). Lastly, as an emerging power in world politics, India has sought to prove that it was a responsible and enlightened member of the international community through its contribution to the solution of an important global challenge like climate change (Government of India 2008).

All these factors have played their roles in increasing impact of climate change to shape India’s domestic and international environmental policies. On the internal front, Indian government has adopted impressive programs on emissions reduction, energy efficiency and renewable energy (Vihma 2011: 87). Accordingly, carbon emissions per unit GDP in India were reduced by 12% between 2005 and 2010 (Government of India 2015). Climate change has also become a publicly debated issue thanks to rising awareness within the Indian society and media about environmental degradation. Increased deliberation placed more pressure on the Indian government to act, which led to the establishment of Prime Minister’s Council on Climate Change in 2007 to manage the issue on the highest political level (Vihma 2011: 82). Under the leadership of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister’s Council on Climate Change released a very important policy framework, the National Action Plan on Climate Change (NAPCC) in 2008. According to Rastogi (2011:130), the release of NAPCC was a turning point in India’s engagement on the climate change,

because for the first time it established an ambitious package of measures to combat climate change in the domestic context. The NAPCC embraced the following principles:

- Protecting the poor and vulnerable sections of society through an inclusive and sustainable development strategy, sensitive to climate change.
- Achieving national growth objectives through a qualitative change in direction that enhances ecological sustainability, leading to further mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.
- Devising efficient and cost-effective strategies for end use Demand Side Management.
- Deploying appropriate technologies for both adaptation and mitigation of greenhouse gases emissions extensively as well as at an accelerated pace.
- Engineering new and innovative forms of market, regulatory and voluntary mechanisms to promote sustainable development.
- Effecting implementation of programs through unique linkages, including with civil society and local government institutions and through public-private partnership.
- Welcoming international cooperation for research, development, sharing and transfer of technologies enabled by additional funding and a global IPR regime that facilitates technology transfer to developing countries under UNFCCC (Government of India 2008).

On the external front, India started to play a positive and constructive role in global climate negotiations. Once a leading skeptic about the CDM, India has highly engaged in CDM project funding mechanisms, becoming the second largest country to host projects under this mechanism (Mohan 2017: 48). Just prior to the global climate change conference in Copenhagen by 2009, Indian authorities announced that India would voluntarily reduce intensity of its carbon emissions per unit GDP between 20–25 percent by 2020 below 2005 levels (Thaker and Leiserowitz 2014: 108, Rastogi 2011: 131). This announcement was a clear indication of the shift in India’s climate negotiation position. During the Copenhagen Summit, India acted with other advanced developing states under the BASIC alliance demonstrating a different approach compared with that of other developing countries. During the summit, Indian negotiators agreed to undertake greater percentage of Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) regardless of financial and technological support from industrialized nations (The Times of India 2009). India played a very active role in Copenhagen in representing the negotiating position of BASIC on the climate change issue. Michaelowa and Michaelowa (2012: 587) mention that India’s dynamic and decisive standing in the Copenhagen Summit was praised by the international media and by the Secretary General of the UNFCCC again and again. India also acted as a mediator between China and the US during Copenhagen negotiations (Rastogi 2011: 133).

India’s constructive engagement continued in the following global climate negotiations in Cancun by 2010. During the Cancun Conference, for the first time, Indian negotiators sponsored the issue of transparency in climate mitigation (Mohan 2017: 44). The same year, Indian parliament passed the National Green Tribunal Act which developed national laws with respect to “liability and compensation for the victims of pollution and other forms of environmental damage” (Gill 2010: 466-467). In the meantime, India’s ambitious forestation plan bore fruit as the forest and tree cover in the country was reported to “increase from 14% in 1950-51 to 24.01% in 2011-12” (Government

of India 2015). Kashwan (2015: 101) suggests that this nearly 30 percent increase in forest under state sponsorship was a notable achievement given the rise of population and rapid growth industrialization in the country.

By October 2015, India submitted its climate action plan, Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) to the UNFCCC. Through its INDC, India pledged to increase its renewable energy capacity “from 35 GW to 175 GW by 2022”, launched “Smart Cities Mission to develop new generation cities” by building a clean and sustainable environment and formulated “Green Highways Policy to develop 140,000 km long ‘tree-line’ along both sides of national highways” (India’s INDC 2015). The Paris Agreement of April 2016 was another example to demonstrate Indian authorities’ positive diplomatic standing in global climate change talks. India had undertaken a leadership role in the negotiations proving itself as a responsible actor in global environmental governance. It was one of the pioneer countries to ratify the Paris Agreement and this was praised by other countries (Mohan 2017: 40).

It would be fair to suggest that Indian leaders have played critical roles in positive shifts in India’s policies in both domestic context and in global climate change negotiations. Among those leaders two of them stood out. First one is the Jairam Ramesh, Indian Minister for Environment and Climate Change then, who had been in office between May 2009 and July 2011 under former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s government. Ramesh broke down the continuity in Indian position in international climate change policy since the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. As the minister in charge of climate negotiations, Ramesh demonstrated a more constructive stance both prior to and during the Copenhagen Summit (The Times of India 2009). For instance, during the Copenhagen Summit Ramesh said: “The message that I am trying to convey is that we have not caused the problem of global warming but we want to be part of the solution at Copenhagen. We want to be a deal-maker, not the deal-breaker” (The Hindu 2009). Minister Ramesh played a critical role in India’s voluntary commitments for climate mitigation without stipulating for any legally binding emission cuts for developed countries and support of developed countries support for India’s efforts (Thaker and Leiserowitz 2014: 108).

Other than Ramesh, current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi who has been in office since May 2014 has had a strong commitment in combating against climate change. Modi has placed a special emphasis on India’s leading role in coping with global problems and in that respect one of his priorities in foreign policy has been strengthening India’s role in global climate change negotiations (Hall 2016: 280-281). As the first Indian Prime Minister to address Davos annual summit's plenary session this year, Modi began his speech attracting global attention to climate change. He said: “We're today exploiting nature for our greed... We need to ask ourselves what can we do together to improve the situation, everyone talks about reducing carbon emissions but few back their words with resources to help developing countries” (India Today 2018). His speech was a clear demonstration of the importance the Indian leader has attached to the issue of climate change and India’s willingness to taking a lead on major international issues such as environmental protection.

Overall, there has been a remarkable transformation in India's climate change mitigation policies at home and abroad, since the international consensus on UNFCCC in 1992. Preserving its highly skeptic position on the issue until 2005, India started to take impressive steps in addressing climate change domestically and globally. Increasing international pressure on India following its rapid economic growth, rising awareness of the Indian leaders and public on the vulnerability of their country to global warming and India's desire to play a strategically important role in global governance have all played their roles in this transformation. India particularly adopted a highly active and constructive negotiating position in Copenhagen and Paris Summits.

While impressive progress was achieved in the domestic and international context with respect to combating climate change, India faces a number of challenges on the issue. One of the challenges is about the implementation of ambitious climate-related promises by the Indian government, which were put forward by a various documents such as NAPCC and INDC. Dubash (2013: 191) argues that accomplishment of the pledged targets seems to be difficult for a developing country as India with a substantial poverty problem and limited capacity. Another challenge is related with the dilemma between economic growth and responsibility in combating climate change. Indian authorities, on the one hand aim to safeguard their country's economic development, whereas on the other, they attempt to cope with climate change. Lastly, combating against climate change has been perceived as an elite concern by poorer segments of the society (Dubash 2013: 199).

### **Comparing China's and India's environmental foreign policies**

After having analyzed China's and India's environmental foreign policies focusing on their climate-related policies at home and abroad over the last two and a half decades, their positions and experiences are compared in this section. To start with similarities between China and India, first of all both countries have experienced impressive economic development in the last two decades, becoming emerging economies or rising powers in world politics. Secondly, both countries have contributed to climate change through their over-crowded populations and intensified industrial activity. Thirdly, both states are reported (the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC, 2007) to be among the most vulnerable states to climate change. Fourthly, traditionally they adopted an uncompromising attitude in global negotiations resisting any binding commitments in combating climate change. They belonged to the same negotiating bloc consisted of developing countries in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. Their common position was based the principle of CBDR. Both advocated the view that developed northern states would be committed to binding mitigation measures while developing southern states' commitment would be voluntary and had to be depending on northern funding. China and India prioritized their economic development and adopted an uncompromising negotiation position throughout the 1990s. Both were against any carbon emissions reduction commitments pointing out their right to socio-economic development.

In the 2000s, in line with changing domestic and international contexts, China and India have recalibrated their climate-related domestic and foreign policies. As the two countries have

proceeded with rapid economic growth becoming larger emitters of carbon, they have faced increasing pressure by the international community to undertake commitments against climate change. In addition to international pressure, rising internal pressure occurred in both countries on ruling authorities to undertake action against climate change. Chinese public and Indian public have become aware of their countries' vulnerability to environmental degradation and its negative consequences. Even though both are vulnerable states to climate change, negative outcomes of global warming have been more severe in China than India as the political legitimacy crisis created by 2013 severe air pollution in major Chinese cities demonstrated. Therefore, public pressure has been higher in the case of China when compared with India. As it is pointed out by Stokes, Giang and Selin (2016: 20-21), whereas satisfaction with air quality is below the global average in China, satisfaction with air quality in India is higher than global average and thus "air pollution has been a lower public and regulatory priority in India". Civil society organizations have also played their roles in increasing public awareness on the issue in both states.

As a result of a combination of internal and external pressures there has been transformation in China's and India's domestic and international policies on climate-related issues. Over the past two decades, both countries have adopted a number of impressive domestic measures to cope with climate change including laws and policies to reduce carbon emissions and to encourage renewable energy and forestation. China released its National Climate Change Program in 2007, whereas India released its NAPCC in 2008 both of which set targets to address climate change. Combating climate change has not been limited to states' initiatives in these two countries. NGOs and private sector entrepreneurs have also played critical roles in promoting renewable energy development in India and China's becoming an investment destination for green energy technologies (Hurrell and Sengupta 2012: 477). These programs were followed by a number of other climate-friendly measures and policies in both states. When overall domestic climate policies undertaken by these two countries are compared, it is fair to suggest that China has enacted more ambitious policies in comparison with India including the establishment of a carbon market (Stokes, Giang and Selin 2016: 13). India on the other hand, has enacted relatively less ambitious climate-related policies including its forestation initiative and introduction of the National Green Tribunal Act.

The main reason behind China's relative success in comparison with India is related with differences in economic capacity to cope with the challenge. Stokes, Giang and Selin (2016: 22) suggest that China's greater economic development can be "linked to a higher willingness to regulate air pollution". China's economic development has surpassed that of India's as it has become the second largest economy in the world after the US. India is regarded as a poor country by global standards with a third of the population below the poverty line, as the GDP per capita in India in 2016 was roughly 1,700 USD per annum compared to 8,100 USD in China (World Bank 2016). Differences in material wealth are also reflected in differences in these two countries' capacities to address climate change. India's capacity to address climate change is lower when compared with China parallel to its material wealth. Accordingly, China's greater material wealth may be linked to adoption of more ambitious climate-related initiatives and measures. Yet, this comparison does not intend to deny India's progress in addressing climate change.

In line with the climate-friendly measures adopted at home and the progressive outcomes achieved in return, Chinese and Indian negotiators have adopted highly constructive negotiating positions in the Copenhagen Summit and in other following major global climate negotiations. With the Copenhagen Summit of 2009, the two countries began to cooperate under a new alliance: BASIC. Yet, whereas China and India have worked together within the framework of BASIC playing leading roles in international negotiations their policy priorities and strategies in combating climate change have diverged from each other. For instance whereas China has mainly focused on historical responsibility of the industrialized states for carbon emissions in the international negotiations, India with much lower rate of carbon emissions than that of China, has emphasized historical responsibility along with per capita emissions. In terms of leadership, both Chinese leaders including former President Hu Jintao and current President Xi Jinping and Indian leaders including former Minister for Environment and Climate Change Jairam Ramesh and current Prime Minister Narendra Modi have played critical roles in addressing climate change and strengthening their countries' credibility in global climate change negotiations.

Overall, China's and India's willingness to play constructive roles in global climate change negotiations have demonstrated the rise of both countries as significant global actors to shape global governance (Humphrey and Messner 2006: 108). The two countries have proved that they are ready to take greater global responsibilities in leading international issues such as climate change. In the meantime, it is fair to suggest that both actors have also viewed combating climate change as a means to bolster their prestige in international politics. While existing progresses seem encouraging, both states continue to face a number of challenges such as the dilemma between their quest for economic development and environmental commitments.

## **Conclusion**

This study analyzed China's and India's climate-related environmental foreign policies evaluating their domestic climate-related policies as well. China and India are called as advanced developing countries, emerging economies or rising powers with growing power to shape global governance. Over the last two decades, environmental governance has grown in importance on the international agenda with alarming scientific reports on negative outcomes of environmental degradation on humanity. Among environmental concerns, climate change closely linked with global warming has been the leading issue to attract attention, triggering a series of global negotiations and agreements on the issue. Traditionally, starting with the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, China and India had adopted reactionary and largely defensive position in global climate change negotiations. Yet, their uncompromising negotiating position has transformed into a more flexible and constructive position in the 2000s. The Copenhagen Summit of 2009 can be regarded as a turning point for negotiating positions of both countries in this sense. Since the Copenhagen Summit of 2009, India and China have been highly relevant players in global climate change negotiations.

Parallel to their rapid economic growth and increasing portion of global emissions, governments of these two populous states have faced internal and external pressures which have been influential

in their shifting approach to the challenge of climate change. China's contribution to environmental pollution was greater when compared with that of India. Yet, capacity of China to cope with climate change has been higher than that of India due to both greater economic capacity and more pressure by the Chinese public. To a greater or lesser extent, both countries have played active roles in global climate change negotiations. This activeness has been motivated by two key factors. On the one hand, both countries have undertaken ambitious initiatives and measures at domestic level to have positive outcomes. Secondly, both countries have sought to become global agenda setters, and climate change has constituted an increasingly significant place in international politics. Search for greater power in global governance have led China and India to contribute to solving global challenges like climate change.

Shifts in China's and India's foreign policies in favor of greater responsibility in the management of global commons have clearly contributed to soft power capacities of these two states. Recent efforts of Chinese and Indian governments to address climate change, especially at a time when the Trump administration decided to pull out the US from the Paris Agreement, have increased the likelihood of these states achieving their desired outcomes in world politics through encouraging willingness in other states to agree with their foreign policies. Proactive standing of particularly China in climate-related environmental governance has contributed to its soft power potential in international politics. China's climate-related environmental diplomacy has been more ambitious than that of India and thus it can be regarded as a greater soft power asset. One thing is clear: if a country seeks to construct or to strengthen its soft power, one of the best ways to do is through convincing the international community that it is a responsible political actor both willing to and able to cope with global challenges. For now, China and India seem to increase their weight in the international system through their constructive diplomacy on climate change, thus contributing to the strengthening of their soft power.

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