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INDIA-CHINA DYNAMICS THROUGH THE REALM OF INFORMATION OPERATIONS

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China's information operations, has largely been centred on **soft power** and **sharp power**. The interplay of these two components plays a crucial role in China's global influence strategy. Employment of **Soft power** by China is aimed to attract and influence others through non-coercive means. It involves cultural diplomacy, education, media, and the dissemination of ideas. China has been actively investing in soft power initiatives, such as promoting its language (Mandarin), Confucius Institutes worldwide, and cultural exchanges. These efforts aim to enhance its global image and build positive relationships. Piercing and manipulation of information for management of target population has been pivotal to her strategy of dominating the info warfare domain.

As far as Sharp power is concerned, it is a more covert and manipulative form of influence. Unlike soft power, it operates subtly and often seeks to conceal its origins. Recently the application of sharp power has taken the centre stage of China's information operations. The danger of digital age and weaponisation of information by China is being carried through three forms of warfare namely, Psychological warfare, legal warfare and media warfare. These are indicative of her assertiveness of her need to consolidate discourse power and maintain her right to speak in every forum. China's sharp power tactics involves methods that are "covert, coercive, or corrupting". These methods aim to sway foreign governments, institutions, and public opinion.

China's Sharp Power Toolkit Economics. China wields a vast array of back-door, sharp power media and information strategies. These efforts are designed to influence foreign audiences without even their full awareness. China's rhetoric backed by ideas and institutions are all targeted to influence the foreign governments. Projects like Silk route, BRI are part of its grand strategy to dominate the Information Age.

Control of Chinese-Language Media Abroad. China has taken de facto control of much of the Chinese-language media abroad. It often conceals its hand by inking content-sharing deals that don't clearly indicate the source of articles.

Silencing Critical Media Outlets. Beijing targets Chinese-language media outlets (both domestic and foreign) that provide independent coverage critical of China. By silencing these outlets, it aims to control the narratives.

Exporting China's Media Model. China helps other states set up domestic media outlets modelled on its highly controlled media system. This allows Beijing to shape information flows and narratives globally. The control of China over the hardware and software globally has ringed the alarm bells over the western countries and also raised concern for India.

Chinese Influence Operations in Border Regions especially in Tibet. The strategy of influence operations in the border areas is part of their smart strategy.

Chinese actions in the Tibet targeted poverty alleviation programmes, promotion of tourism in border areas particularly along LAC, repopulation of the border areas along LAC by settlement of Han Chinese in Buddhist dominated region which are all part of weaponisation of info warfare by the Chinese. Unlike the more transparent soft power efforts, China's backdoor, sharper strategies are often designed to conceal their hand to get people in foreign countries to consume Chinese media and imbibe Chinese ideas, without understanding what they are taking. Beijing's sharp efforts that directly relate to media outlets include as to how China is trying to smuggle information into foreign viewers' screens, tablets, phones, and other places by taking de-facto control of much of the Chinese-language media abroad and sometimes by inking content-sharing deals that do not show where the articles hail from; how China is trying to silence many leading Chinese-language media outlets, and outlets in other languages, that provide critical, independent coverage of the country; and how Beijing is helping other states set up their own domestic media outlets modelled on China's highly controlled media. Big tech western countries are constantly involved in countering the Russia- China collusive involvement in the Ukrainian war.

Challenges for India

Mind game matters for India. Post the Galwan incident, Chinese have carefully embedded small incidents in large numbers which need to be monitored and countered by India. Felicitation of their war injured and dead's, media briefing on Galwan is all targeted to achieve info domination and shaping of the world opinion.

India must recognize and counter China's sharp power activities. This requires educating political and civic actors to resist covert influence. Whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches are essential to address this challenge. Sharing information and cooperation among democracies are crucial to defending freedom globally.

Constant Vigilance must be the norm. Indian social media users have been constantly targeted though whatsapp, YouTube and face book, Instagram and other formats. Meta has initiated large number of steps to counter social media influence of Chinese agencies and institutions.

The Indian response should be based on understanding and exposing China's covert operations, enabling effective responses tailored to our country's circumstances. We must understand the importance of vitality of maintaining a balance and vigilant relationship with global powerhouse to counter the Chinese influence operations. China's rapid accumulation and projection of power on the world stage confronts the world's democracies and open societies with serious challenges. Beyond the breath taking modernization and enlargement of the People's Liberation Army, and it's increasingly aggressive and expansionist deployment in the Indo-Pacific region, there is a more subtle—but by no means benign—expansion of China's "sharp power."