

**PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS BETWEEN NEPAL AND
CHINA**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of
Tribhuvan University in fulfillment of the requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

POLITICAL SCIENCE

By

Kamal Pandit

PhD. Roll No.:117/2074

Tribhuvan University

Kathmandu, Nepal

June 2025

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it contains no materials previously published. I have not used its materials for the award of any kind and any other degree. Where others' sources of information have been used, they have been acknowledged.

Kamal Pandit

Kamal Pandit

June 2025

LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION

We certify that this dissertation entitled “People-to-people relations between Nepal and China” was prepared by Kamal Pandit under our guidance. We hereby recommend this dissertation for further evaluation by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY in POLITICAL SCIENCE.

Dissertation Committee



.....
Dr. Purna Bahadur Khadka

Supervisor



.....
Dr. Pramod Jaiswal

Co-supervisor

Date: June, 2025

APPROVAL LETTER



TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Office of the Dean

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

APPROVAL LETTER

This dissertation entitled "**People-to-People Relations Between Nepal and China**" was submitted by **Mr. Kamal Pandit** of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan University, in fulfillment of the requirements for the **Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science**. I hereby, certify that the Research Committee of the Faculty has found this dissertation satisfactory in scope and quality. Therefore, it has been accepted for the degree.

Prof. Dubi Nanda Dhakal, Ph.D.

Dean and Chairperson

Research Committee

Date: 2082/05/19

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with great pleasure and sincere gratitude that I express my deep indebtedness to my supervisor Dr. Purna Bahadur Khadka for his scholarly and enlightening guidance. I am also very indebted to my co-supervisor Dr. Pramod Jaiswal for encouragement, creative suggestions and comments for nurturing this research to this level. Their guidance and advice carried me through all the stages of writing my research. Likewise, I would like to express my gratitude to Prof. Dr. Dubi Nanda Dhakal, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, TU and Dr. Khomraj Kharel, Assistant Dean for their meticulous and intensive inputs and suggestions in making this research a complete one. Their insightful remarks further reshaped and reframed this study into different level.

I would like to thank Mr. Hiranya Lal Shrestha, Prof Dr. Khadga K.C., Ms. Lila Nyaichyai, Ms. Kriti Bhujju, Ram Karki, journalist Anil Giri, former chief secretary and ambassador Leela Mani Poudyal, former ambassador Jaya Raj Acharya, former ambassador Rajeshwor Acharya, Prof. Dr. Shambhu Ram Simkhada, Krishna KC, Gopal Khanal, member of the House of representative of Nepal Dr. Shekhar Koirala, former ambassador Sundarnath Bhattarai, Bhagirath Basnet, former ambassador to Bangladesh, Dr. Bhekh Bahadur Thapa, foreign affairs expert, Sushil Lamsal, Ambassador of Nepal to Egypt, elected local representative of Humla, Chakka Bahadur Lama and elected local representative of Sindhupalchowk Madhav Sapkota for their participation. Also, I am deeply grateful to Mr. Abichar Bohara for his unwavering support and encouragement throughout my academic journey, especially during the writing of this dissertation. My profound respect goes to my father Mr. Hari Bhakta Pandit, sisters Pushpa Adhikari and Indira Pandit, brother Krishna Pandit, nephew Bikash Adhikari, all nephews /nieces, and relatives. Finally, I would like to dedicate this research to my late mother Kamala Pandit.

ABSTRACT

This study explored people-to-people relations between Nepal and China by identifying the factors that had shaped their interactions from 1990 to 2024. While bilateral relations were often framed through state-level diplomacy, this research shifted the focus to individuals and communities, emphasizing the role of interpersonal and grassroots exchanges in shaping cross-border understanding. It also examined how foreign policies had addressed these relations and what strategies could strengthen them in the future. Grounded theory was followed to identify the factors that influence people-to-people relations while Social Network Theory guided the analysis, as it emphasized the importance of relationships and connections between individuals and groups.

A qualitative research methodology was employed, utilizing participatory observation, personal interviews, and key informant interviews. General interviews were conducted with randomly selected Nepalese individuals from diverse backgrounds, including drivers, traders, shopkeepers, hoteliers, guides, waiters, students, and teachers—each with varying degrees of interaction with Chinese nationals. A total of 36 personal interviews and observations were conducted across five locations: the Campus of International Languages, Thamel, Pokhara, Sauraha, and three border areas—Tatopani (Sindhupalchowk), Lo Manthang (Mustang), and Rasuwagadhi (Rasuwa). To complement and deepen the findings, 19 key informant interviews were conducted with professors, ambassadors, former ambassadors, political figures, diplomats, and authors with expertise in Nepal-China relations. These interviews were conducted mostly in-person, with a few carried out online or via phone between July 2022 and May 2024.

Thematic coding and relational thinking revealed that the factors shaping people-to-people relations fell into three interconnected networks: cultural, economic, and diplomatic. The cultural network included shared religious traditions such as Buddhism,

festivals, food practices, cross-border marriages, language, public perceptions, communication technologies, and cultural appreciation. The economic network consisted of cross-border trade, tourism, Chinese foreign direct investment, and labor migration. Meanwhile, the diplomatic network was shaped by cross-border mobility, aid and assistance, education and scholarship programs, exchange visits, and crisis management.

Nepal's foreign policy towards China, although addressed people-to-people relations, it is concluded that strengthening people-to-people relations required a holistic approach integrating all three networks. The summary emphasized about strategies like infrastructure and connectivity, promoting cultural diplomacy (especially targeting border communities), expanding student exchange programs, encouraging tourism and academic collaborations, organizing exchange visits and think tank dialogues, and fostering media partnerships for enhancing ties. Rooted in social network theory, these strategies offered concrete pathways to deepen ties between the people of Nepal and China.

Keywords: people-to-people relations, Nepal, China, social network theory, relational thinking, strong ties, weak ties

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION LETTER	i
LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION	ii
APPROVAL LETTER	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	v
LIST OF TABLES	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
ABBREVIATIONS	xiii
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	25
1.3 Objectives of the Study	29
1.4 Significance of the Study	29
1.5 Delimitations	30
1.6 Organization of the Study	32
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW	33
2.1 Theoretical Foundations on People-to-people	34
2.2 Factors Influencing People-to-people Relations	41
2.3 Foreign Policy and People-to-people Relations	67
2.4 Strategies to Strengthen People-to-people Relations	74
2.5 Research Gaps	80
2.5 Conceptual Framework	82
2.6 Operational Definitions	84
CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	87

3.1 Research Design	87
3.2 Participants and Research Locations	88
3.3 Nature and Source of Data	90
3.4 Data Collection	90
3.5 Data Analysis	91
3.6 Ethical Consideration	95
CHAPTER IV: FACTORS INFLUENCING NEPAL CHINA PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS	97
4.1 Cultural Network	97
4.1.1 Buddhism	100
4.1.2 Transnational Marriage	106
4.1.3 Festivals	111
4.1.4 Language	116
4.1.5 Food	124
4.1.6 Cultural Appreciation	126
4.1.7 Communication Technology	131
4.1.8 Public Perception	134
4.2 Economic Network	137
4.2.1 Nepal China Trade	138
4.2.2 Tourism	145
4.2.3 Cross-border Labor Migration	146
4.3 Diplomatic Network	148
4.3.1 Cross-border Mobility	148
4.3.2 Aid and Assistance	154
4.3.3 Education and Scholarships	158

4.3.4 Exchange Visits	164
4.3.5 Crisis Management	168
4.4 Discussion	172
CHAPTER V: NEPAL'S FOREIGN POLICY AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE	
RELATIONS	173
5.1 Historical Agreements and People-centric Policies	174
5.2 Post 1990 Agreements and Policies	182
5.3 People-to-people Aspect in Nepal's diplomacy	192
5.4 Discussion	197
CHAPTER VI: STRATEGIES TO STRENGTHEN PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE	
RELATIONS	198
6.1 Infrastructural Connectivity	198
6.2 Cultural Diplomacy	202
6.3 Student Exchange Programs	205
6.4 Tourism Promotion	208
6.5 Exchange Visits	211
6.6 Scholastic Dialogue	212
6.7 Media Visit and Collaboration	214
6.8 Sports Diplomacy	216
6.9 Transliteration of Nepalese Literatures	218
6.10 Discussion	220
CHAPTER VII: SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION	223
7.1 Summary	223
7.2 Findings	224
7.3 Conclusion	228

7.4 Contribution to Knowledge	229
7.5 Recommendation for Further Research	230
APPENDICES	231
REFERENCES	237

List of Tables

Table 2.1: List of Nepal China agreements.....	58
Table 5.1: Strategies for soft power	196

List of Figures

Figure 3.1: Conceptual framework of the study.....	83
Figure 4.1: Percentage of Chinese tourist ion Nepal from 2013-2022.....	154

ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
BRI	Belt and Road Initiatives
CACS	Center for Africa and China Studies
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	Chinese Central TV
ETCP	Economic and Technical Cooperation Program
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GoN	Government of Nepal
GT	Grounded Theory
KII	Key Informant Interview
MCC	Millennium Challenge Cooperation
MoFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
OBOR	One Belt One Road
SNT	Social Network Theory
TAR	Tibet Autonomous Region
TU	Tribhuvan University
UN	United Nations
WB	World Bank

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The relationship between Nepal and China has been shaped by centuries of shared cultural, economic and diplomatic interactions, forming strong connections at both state and grassroots level. Despite this, the dynamics of people-to-people relations, a critical component of bilateral ties, remain underexplored. People-to-people relations here is defined as interpersonal connections between Nepalese and Chinese individuals that are formed through everyday interactions. A number of concepts such as “people to people contact”, “people to people engagement”, “people to people diplomacy”, “people to people dialogue”, “people to people cooperation”, “people to people communications, and so on has been interchangeably used by authors when studying the relation between people of two nations (Liwei, 2021b).

The usage of the term “people-to-people” relations can be traced back to 1956 AD when President Dr. Dwight D. Eisenhower established the U.S. People-to-People Program as part of his campaign to win the Cold War and promote global peace (Fett, 2021). Bhattarai and Khan (2020) described the significant role of human diaspora in connectivity, religion and histories that have shaped the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. They concluded that people-to-people relation between Nepal and China is itself driven by the interest of the two states, unlike the relations between Nepal and India. Gathering his academic experiences on the different forms of relations that existed between Nepal and China, Dhungel (2017) noted that the relationship between these two countries exists in different forms and it different levels: between Kathmandu and Beijing at the official and diplomatic level while at the level of people-to-people residing in bordering areas.

The dynamics of people-to-people relations between these countries have long been a subject of interest. This study exposed the journey to find an answer to the connections, seeking to understand the factors that influence this relation. Pokhrel (2021) indicated that the relationship between Nepal and China holds a special place in the histories of international relations. Earlier, Ransom (1968) stated that nations of the world are conceived to be in contact and association in a complicated framework of (geography, demography, technology, sociology, psychology, ethics, history and philosophical) relationships, which is formed through the process of interactions. The interactions between the people of Nepal and China have a long history and that geographical proximity have played a significant role in influencing these interactions.

The post-1990 period marked a pivotal era for Nepal-China relations, as both countries embraced globalization and regional connectivity. For Nepal, the restoration of democracy in 1990 led to a more open society, fostering opportunities for cross-border collaboration. Simultaneously, China's rise as a global economic power brought about new avenues for cultural and educational exchanges, tourism, and trade. These developments have enhanced interpersonal interactions, with growing numbers of students, pilgrims, and traders traveling between the two countries, forging bonds that extend beyond official diplomatic channels. However, amidst recent relations, there has been a long history of cultural exchanges, trade and diplomatic decisions that shape the contemporary people-to-people relations as Dhungel (2017) cited:

... the relationship between these two countries exists in different forms and in different levels: between Kathmandu and Beijing at the official as well as diplomatic level; historical and the diplomatic relationship that exists between

Kathmandu and Hong Kong; and diplomatic as well as historical and cultural levels between Kathmandu and Lhasa, finally, at the level of people-to-people residing in bordering areas. (p. 50)

The academic exploration highlighted the various forms of contacts between people of Nepal and China after 1990 especially in the fields of economy, culture, education and trade. However, with his special focus on the relations between people residing in the border areas, Maskey (2017) highlighted that familial and religious contacts have decreased over the time mainly due to strong border policies and control. In his work, Murton (2017) argued that to truly grasp the complexities of China's relationship with Nepal, one must direct their attention to the Himalayan borderlands. While the Himalayan borderlands played a significant role in facilitating cross-border interactions and cultural exchanges, it was essential to strike a balance in our analysis and consider both the macro-level interactions between governments and the micro-level interactions between communities.

The transmission of Buddhist teachings by scholars like Monk Fa Hsian and Monk Xuan Zang in the early 5th century not only enriched the spiritual lives of people across these lands but also strengthened the bonds of friendship and understanding (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). The research explored into the historical journey of Nepal-China relations, to find out that India has been an integral part of Nepal-China relations narrative. The geographical proximity of Nepal to India and China had led to a convergence of cultures and influences. Nepal's unique position as a bridge between the two Asian giants has allowed for a rich exchange of traditions, languages, and customs. The flow of people across these borders has further solidified the interconnectedness of the three nations. Aiming towards Himalayas and the trade along the it, Maskey (2017) stated that:

...facilitating trade commerce and culture between her two neighbors, a kind of entrepot trade, is not a new phenomenon. Second, Nepal herself was a major cause of such trade and commerce because of her immense cultural strength. Indeed, culture and commerce are the bedrock upon which the historical relations between the countries are built. (p. 134)

In the historical context of Nepal-China relations, the interplay between Buddhism, trade, and diplomatic exchanges has been a defining factor in shaping their enduring ties. Dating back centuries, the Himalayan corridors facilitated vibrant connections, fostering a sense of geographical proximity and cultural affinity between the peoples of Nepal and China. However, this research also acknowledged the presence and role of India's diplomatic strategies in Nepal. Despite Nepal's claims of non-alignment, a subtle inclination towards its northern neighbor has become evident, often driven by a politically expedient wariness of Delhi (Murton, 2017). As Nepal embraced its rich history of cultural, economic, and diplomatic connections with both its neighbors, the delicate balance between its two powerful neighbors became a crucial aspect to consider in understanding the nature of Nepal-China people-to-people relations.

In summary, people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, particularly after 1990 can be found and have been studied within three interconnected networks: cultural, economic, and diplomatic. The cultural network highlighted shared traditions and social practices, including the spread of Buddhism, transnational marriages, festivals, food culture, language, communication technologies, and public perceptions. The economic network focused on tangible exchanges such as Nepal-China trade, tourism, foreign direct investment, and cross-border labor interactions, showcasing how economic activities contributed to people-to-people connections.

Similarly, the diplomatic network reflected formal engagements (focusing on the events after 1990) shaped by government policies and agreements, such as cross-border mobility, educational exchanges, aid and assistance, high-level visits, and disaster management cooperation. These three networks serve as key domains for understanding the diverse ways in which people-to-people relations between the two nations are formed, sustained, and studied.

With these relational thinking and backgrounds, mainly, (a) the existence of people-to-people relations, (b) the assumptions of social and political constructs of nation-states, (c) the existence of cultural, economic and diplomatic network, and (d) the interconnectedness within these networks, the subsequent section explored into specific cultural factors of people-to-people interactions. Through a closer examination of these factors, a comprehensive understanding of the cultural network that have influenced the development of people-to-people relations between these neighboring nations has been extended. This cultural exploration put light on the foundation of their interactions, providing valuable insights into their relationship. Likewise, further subsequent sections dealt with the introduction of economic and diplomatic networks that also influenced Nepal-China people-to-people relations.

1.1.1 Factors of Cultural Interactions

In the exploration of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, it was necessary to dissect the cultural components that fundamentally shaped the relations. The research identified various cultural components, including Buddhism, kinship, language, festivals, food practices, cultural appreciation, communication technologies, and public perception. Each of these components was examined to expose ways in which they contributed to the development of people-to-people relations (whether strong or weak ties) between individuals from these two

neighboring countries. By systematically analyzing these cultural aspects, the study justified how cultural factors influenced the establishment and evolution of people-to-people relations. Additionally, this study also acknowledged the existence of a broader network encompassing cultural, economic, and diplomatic dimensions. Embracing the social network theory of strong ties and weak ties, it was posited that this interconnectedness must be considered to fully understand future directions of people-to-people relations.

The historical relations between Nepal and China have been a captivating narrative of cross-cultural interactions, exchange, and cooperation. Dating back centuries, the two nations have been connected through numerous trade routes and pilgrimage trails, fostering a network of people-to-people interactions. According to Shrestha (2005), throughout history, Nepal and China have enjoyed a close and enduring neighborly relationship, characterized by their shared border and strengthened by robust political, socio-cultural, and economic bonds. Shrestha's work highlighted the historical interconnection that served as a bedrock for their people-to-people relations. The strong ties that have evolved over the centuries have excelled political changes and contributed to the resilience and stability of their interactions.

Referring to marriage of princess, Bhrikuti (or Vrikuti in some literatures), Pandey (2005) indicated that it facilitated political, economic, cultural, religious ties between the two countries and is placed in history as a landmark event. Pandey further claimed the subsequent opening of Kerung route for *trans*-Himalayan trading and communication, developed Nepal not only as an *entrepot* for trade and commercial activities but also for scholarly route between China and India.

Despite the imposing challenges posed by the formidable Himalayas, Nepal and China have managed to establish enduring connections in diverse forms since

ancient times. As articulated by Late King Birendra, the two nations' people have engaged in mutual interactions spanning various domains, including philosophy, literature, art, religion, culture, trade, and commerce (Lohani, 2005). Physical evidence to this age-old relationship is the iconic White Pagoda built by the esteemed Nepalese artist, Arniko, which stands proudly in Beijing, serving as an immortal witness to the longstanding Nepal-China ties (Lohani, 2005; Bhattarai & Ali Khan, 2020). These interactions, dating back to ancient times, have surpassed geographical barriers, fostering a profound sense of cultural interconnectedness between the peoples of Nepal and China.

These studies provided valuable insights into the early stages of their people-to-people relations, when geographical proximity and cultural affinities played a significant role in shaping their interactions. According to Prasad (2015), the first recorded official relations between Nepal and China dated from the middle of the seventh century, although unofficial contracts between these two countries began in the fifth century. Similarly, Tuladhar (2017) also stated that by the time of seventh century, Nepal had adapted *Buddhism* as the main religion, so when Princess Bhrikuti was married off to the powerful Tibetan king Tsrong Tsong Gyampo, around 624 A.D. she took great treasures of Buddhism and Buddhist, teachers, artists and traders to Tibet, along with her. Examining these pre-formalization interactions offered valuable context and a deeper understanding of the cultural components that have nourished people-to-people relations between Nepal and China over the years. This research explored such cultural interactions especially after 1990 and explained how century old cultures are still influencing the people-to-people relations.

The government of Nepal has published online information about the relations between Nepal and China. According to Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2019) the

historic and bilateral relations between the two countries have evolved since the days of Nepali monk and scholar Buddhahadra (Jue Xian Fa Si, early 5th Century), Princess Bhrikuti (first half of the 7th Century) and Araniko (Anige, Second half of the 13th Century) and early visits of Chinese monks and scholars like Monk Fa Hsian (Jin Dynasty), Monk Xuan Zang (Tang Dynasty). China and Nepal are bounded together by a long history of cultural and social relationships established through Buddhism in the middle of the seventh century A.D. (Singh, 2015). Therefore, it can be claimed that Buddhism was the locus of classical interactions between the civilizations of Nepal and China.

Speaking of the culture Upadhyaya (2012) stated that although Tibet has been central to the Sino-Nepalese relationship, Nepal's formal contacts began with China's thirst for Buddhist texts, artifacts and codes from the wider Gangetic heartland. It is widely accepted and argued that the historical event, Bhrikuti's marriage, being instrumental in spreading Buddhism in Tibet and later to mainland China. Recently, Baniya (2023) recently, highlighted the concepts of Hindu and Buddhist civilizations that have shaped the values in the making of foreign policy in Nepal and conduct of relations between states.

Speaking of marriages, it was found that cross-border marriage and kinship was not just common among border residents of Nepal and China but also among the residents in Kathmandu. Kafle (2017) reported the marriage of Puja Tuladhar of Lalitpur and Guyun Fei of Hebei Province in China, in her article in Xinhua news agency. Similarly, one of the participants of this research also indicated of have sister-in-law who is a Chinese national. Personal experiences of one of the Newari Lhasa traders, Pragya Ratna Tuladhar when he first visited Lhasa in 1956 was explored and reported that, "having left their wives behind in Kathmandu, traders would often enter

into relationships with Tibetan women” (Mulmi, 2021, p. 26). One of the participants from Timure, Rasuwa indicated about the happy marital life her friend who recently got married to Chinese boy.

However, one of the experts indicated an issue in cross-border marriage due to closing of cross-border mobility after covid-19 pandemic. The Gumba (Stupa) on the Nepalese side and the ones across the border are not in communication due to restrictions in mobility, thus hindering the cross-border marriage and rituals. The historical and present exploration of cross-border marriage (further elaborated in review section) indicated a sense of strong ties among the people of Nepal and China. Hence, the cultural component, cross-border marriage had positive impact on the Nepalese, influencing their relations with Chinese. Therefore, with such strong ties of Buddhism and marriage, prayers and celebrations were found to be often common among border residents of Nepal-China respectively.

Newar traders conducted business in Tibet, put on Tibetan clothes, spoke the language, worshipped at the same temples and celebrated the same festivals as the locals, and even entered into relationships with Tibetan women, but they rarely integrated into Tibetan society (Bhattarai, 2010; Mulmi, 2021; Pandey, 2005; H. L. Shrestha, 2017b; Upadhya, 2012). The border residents at Lo Manthang, Mustang and Tatopani, Sindhupalchowk spoke of common festivals that are celebrated together with the Chinese. The festivals usually happened on Chinese territory. The opening of border at the Lo Manthang every year for about a month had become a culture among the residents of Lo Manthang. Analysis from the interviews of the border residents indicated diversity in the festivals and celebrations of even within the small community of residents. However, due to restrictions after covid-19 pandemic, such festivals are losing its occurrence. It is argued here that such cultural events are deep

rooted among the border residents and have immense influence to further enhance people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

Another important cultural factor identified was language in shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Interviews with participants like Narendra Tamang, a tourist guide, illustrated how language proficiency, particularly in Chinese, enhanced social ties and mutual respect. Other participants also repeated this sentiment, noting that Chinese language proficiency opened up employment opportunities and facilitated cultural exchange. In border areas, shared languages like Tibetan further strengthened connections among residents, demonstrating the role of language in forming speech communities and fostering cross-border interactions. Overall, this study highlighted the multidimensional impact of language on social networks, economic opportunities, and cultural understanding.

Interactions among Nepalese and Chinese seem to have significantly influenced by food and culinary arts as well. The introduction of “momo” (dumplings) in Nepal, a popular snack among Kathmandu dwellers attached its origin in Tibet. These dumplings known as momos and jiaozi have interesting similarities and be it a Nepali student in China or a Chinese tourist in Nepal, each bite reminds you of home (Shrestha, 2023). The narratives of the border residents indicated the food habits across the border was comparable. Preference of Chinese tourist for Chinese food while visit to Nepal indicated the economic strategies for hoteliers and restaurants. Participatory observation of touristic destination, Thamel revealed numerous restaurants and guest houses holding signboards in Chinese language. Just like any other Chinese product in a day-to-day life of citizens of Nepal, Chinese food has also become an optional cuisine for Nepali families going out for a dinner or lunch. A strong tie emerged among border residents of Nepal-China border due to

common culinary habits. The introduction of Chinese food by the hotels and restaurants of touristic destinations indicated a strategy to build up strong ties with Chinese tourist opting for Chinese food.

Cultural appreciation and respect for each other culture has also been prominent factor in shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The willingness of Chinese to visit and take part in the festivals such as Holi also supplemented the narratives of cultural appreciation. However, there were communities of people who look upon the news and feeds from media to make perceptions about the Chinese people. While illegal activities involving Chinese national in Nepal is an event to look into but the media, often carrying the voices of politicians have direct influence on how Nepalese think of Chinese nationals. Hence such, public perceptions of Nepalese towards Chinese have significant influence on people-to-people relations among Nepal and China. And with the growing coverage of mobile infrastructure and handheld smart devices, these public perceptions are likely to change even quickly.

Communication technologies, whether for business or family turned out to the new mode of interaction or communication between the people of Nepal and China. The language student indicated how “Pleco”, an Android phone application helped him to learn Chinese apart from the classes. The souvenir shopkeeper spoke of how “Wechat” has helped him communicate with his Chinese supplier in China. One of the border residents admitted the usage of online social media for communication with relatives who lived across the border line in China. Digital interactions turned out to be a habit or culture among people of both nations and that this culture has influenced the relations among them. Digital media now played a significant role in maintaining more dispersed strong-tie relationships and has extended our ability to

develop and maintain weak-tie relationships (Dickinson et al., 2017). Hence, it is argued and further justified (in sections below) that the “communication technologies” will continue to influence people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The physical conversations are expected to reduce and the weak ties is maintained, weakening the construct of strong ties.

The cultural components of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China is a captivating complexity of cultural exchange dating back centuries. The cultural interactions explored in this section provide valuable insights into the early stages of their relationship and the components that have shaped their bond over time. From the exchange of Buddhist teachings and scholars to the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, the ties between Nepal and China have evolved and endured, transcending political changes and external influences. This rich cultural context sets the stage for a deeper exploration of the dynamics and complexities of their people-to-people relations. The next section explored into the economic components that flourished and influenced people-to-people relations.

1.1.2 Factors of Economic Interactions

The economic interactions that started with barter trade from time immemorial, witnessed many ups and downs with the rise and fall of governments in Nepal and China (Upadhya, 2012; Mulmi, 2021). The first agreement between China and Nepal on economic aid was signed in October 1956 (Khadka, 1999; Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). The analysis of import-export of Nepal covering from 2007/08 to 2016/17 trade volumes between Nepal and China indicated trade imbalance expanding from 228 million to 1 billion between 2007/08 to 2016/17, highlighting the significant difference between countries (S. Gautam, 2023).

However, Nepal is paving the path to prosperity with new trade agreements and existing and proposed activities with China.

With particular focus on the interactions among Nepalese and Chinese during trade, the research explored four potential components of economic interactions, where people-to-people relations were visible. The interactions in trade usually started as weak ties where buying and selling was the only reason for interactions. The provisions for Newar traders to open “*kothis*” (shops) in Lhasa marked the development of strong ties with Chinese. The economic interactions that started with barter system has now seen a paradigm shift due to invent of modern communication systems and tools. Namely four areas of economic interactions: Nepal-China trade, FDI from China to Nepal, tourism, and cross-border labor migration have been identified as potential economic components where people-to-people interactions influenced relations between these people.

The ancient trans-Himalayan trade route, also known as *The Silk Road* connected Nepal, China, and other regions of Asia played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism as well. The term Silk Road was coined by the German traveler, geographer and scientist Ferdinand von Richthofen in 1877, who made seven expeditions to China from 1868 to 1872 (Wenle, 2017). Buddhism left an indelible mark on the economic relations between Nepal and China, indicating a connection between economic and cultural networks.

The bilateral trade between our two countries is in increasing trend in recent years (Government of Nepal, 2022). Nepal’s trade with China is largely conducted through Tibet and Hong Kong and six points along the Nepal-China border have been officially opened for overland trade. These points are Rasuwagadhi, Rasuwa-Kerung (Gyirong) County; Tatopani (Kodari) Sindhupalchok-Zhangmu County; Hilsa,

Humla-Burang, Burang County; (Ko Rala) Lo Manthang, Mustang-Zongba County; Kimathanka, Sankhuwasabha-Zhentang, Dinggyne County; and Olangchung Gola, Taplejung-Ri'og County (Embassy of Nepal, 2022; Rana, 2020). Although, China is the second largest trading partner of Nepal constituting 13.09 percent of Nepal's total trade in FY 2078/79, the total foreign trade of Nepal with China decreased by 15.4 percent to NPR 231.5 billion in FY 2079/80 (Ministry of Finance, 2023). However, economic ties have grown significantly, with China becoming one of Nepal's major trading partners and a significant source of foreign investment and development assistance (Dahal, 2022).

Impact of bilateral cooperation with China in Nepalese economy has been analyzed in terms of FDI from China to Nepal, trade between Nepal and China, economic assistance from China to Nepal, and tourist arrivals from China over the period of 2000-2019 (Kharel et al., 2021). The results showed that there have been positive influences on Nepalese economy with bilateral economic cooperation of China. As such with flow of Chinese technical human resources in such FDI projects, the interactions between Nepalese and Chinese have increased. In terms of total FDI stock, India ranks top position with Rs.88.6 billion followed by China (Rs.33.4 billion), Ireland (Rs.20.9 billion), Singapore (Rs.16.1 billion), and Saint Kitts and Nevis (Rs.15.1 billion) (Nepal Rastra Bank, 2023). The report further indicated that China's FDI stock is mostly concentrated in hydropower projects and the manufacturing sector (especially cement industries). Hence, it is argued that such FDI projects introduced and influenced people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

While the numbers indicate, the long-term dependency of Nepal with China, it was imperative to indicate level of interactions between the people of these two

nations made possible due to trade throughout the history and today. Interactions usually started with a weak tie, however, with continuous interactions with the same person, it is argued that the relations got stronger. Trust in trade has been identified as a crucial element that can promote people-to-people contact and lead to cultural relations.

Tourism, one of the most important economies of Nepal is also another profound area where numerous interactions happened between the people of two nations. This research included the experiences of Nepalese in tourism industry particularly of tourist guide, souvenir shopkeeper, taxi driver, waiter, hotel manager, Chinese bookstore employee, paragliding rider, Jeep driver, restaurant owner, trade agent, barber, and truck driver. Their experiences of interactions with Chinese counterpart indicated both weak ties and strong ties in the relations. Apart from their experiences, the interviews of Nepal China experts also echoed the importance of tourism in strengthening people-to-people relations.

Chinese outbound tourism is massive and Nepal is an enticing destination for tourists around the world and hence, micro-level engagement can strengthen people-to-people relations (Karki, 2020). Apart from Chinese outbound tourism, digital technologies have impacted interactions in tourism. The smartphone, with its logistical, relational, informational and mobile entertainment functions is now used extensively in the tourism domain (Dickinson et al., 2017). Hence, it is argued that digital communication tools have not only diversified the strong ties but also have maintained the weak ties. For example, with the invent of online maps, the offline interactions with strangers where a weak tie is created, have decreased.

Along with tourist interactions, interactions in cross-border labor migration between Nepal and China among border residents emerged as an important

component of economic interactions that influenced people-to-people relations. Participants often spoke of cross-border labor migration for short term and seasonal at Mustang and Rasuwa. However, Tatopani of Sindhupalchowk had a stable labor economy as one of the participants from Tatopani indicated. The expert's narratives on his visit of Purang (or Burang) county of Tibet revealed his interactions with the Nepalese working as labor. Apart from labor migration short term or seasonal, there are Nepalese working in health, engineering and professional services. The 52-year-old who has been living and doing business in Tibet since 1994 indicated about 130 migrant workers and 160 long-term residents from Nepal in Lhasa now, and there are about 100 Nepali people living in Tibet's Shigatse city (Nyima & Daqiong, 2020). However, with earthquake and covid-19, the vibrant labor economy of Tatopani border have almost come to an end.

Although the Nepalese migrant network in China is not comparable to other countries of migration option, the existence of such network itself is an indication that there exist people-to-people relations. In comparing weak ties and strong ties in relation to migration, there are two elements that must be examined: the ability of the network to facilitate migration; and the ability of the network to provide support in the country of migration (Kuschminder, 2016). The historical evidences of migration of Nepalese especially from Newar community had already established a strong tie with the people of Tibet. However, with Nepalese administration reaching to once an isolated valley, some locals at the Limi valley have opted for illegal means of income because of new border rules (Mulmi, 2021).

The analysis of Nepal-China economic interactions revealed that people-to-people relations is influenced by trade, foreign direct investment, tourism, and cross-border labor interactions. Historical trade highlighted the evolving economic ties,

starting with barter and developing into modern trade facilitated by communication technologies. Key areas such as bilateral trade through border points, tourism interactions involving various service industry roles, and labor migration demonstrated both weak and strong ties. These interactions, driven by economic necessity and facilitated by trust and digital tools, raised cultural connections. The experiences of Nepalese individuals in these sectors highlighted the importance of sustained interactions in strengthening people-to-people relations. Despite challenges like natural disasters and political changes, the persistence of these networks illustrated the long-term nature of Nepal-China people-to-people relations.

1.1.2 Factors of Diplomatic Interactions

The historical ties between Nepal-China laid the groundwork for formal diplomatic relations, which Nepal and China established in August of 1955 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019; Bhattarai, 2017; Mulmi, 2021; Dahal, 2017; Dhungel, 2017; Shrestha, 2005; Lohani, 2005). R. K. Dhungel (1999) mentioned that in the history of Nepal, a ruling king named Udayadeva, together with his entire family member had fled to Tibet for political asylum in around 619-636 A.D. because of coup that occurred in the court of Nepal. Hence, it is argued that diplomatic interactions were also recorded in the history of Nepal.

However, since 1955, many diplomatic interactions have occurred among the top-level officials between the two nations. These diplomatic interactions served as the foundation for a dynamic relationship between Nepal and China. Further, Sharma (2018) indicated that China-Nepal relations during the first 35 years of their diplomatic relationship demonstrated strong political ties and China's generous assistance to Nepal's development, although their economic and cultural exchange

remained quite limited. The author also indicated that there was little economic and cultural exchange between China and Nepal before 1990.

The new democratic government after 1990 declared that it would maintain the non-alignment and Panchsheel principles in its foreign policy. Hence, the modern dynamics of Nepal-China relations are marked by an array of strategic collaborations and mutual interests that transcend traditional diplomatic engagements. As the diplomatic interactions of the region continues to evolved, both Nepal and China have recognized the immense potential for cooperation and partnership in various sectors. The two nations have engaged in several major infrastructure projects, such as the construction of roads, railways, and hydropower plants, reflecting their commitment to enhancing connectivity and promoting regional development (Murton & Lord, 2020).

Beyond economic cooperation, Nepal and China have increasingly collaborated in areas such as defense, security, and disaster management, aiming to address common challenges and promote stability in the region (PTI Feeds, 2017; The Himalayan Times, 2017). Similarly, cultural and educational exchanges have played a crucial role in deepening mutual understanding and friendship between the two countries. Scholarships and student exchange programs have facilitated the flow of Nepali students to China for higher education, fostering greater cultural exchange and creating lasting connections between the youth of both nations (Adhikari, 2015).

While the contemporary dynamics of Nepal-China relations have been characterized by positive growth and cooperation, the relationship has also encountered challenges and complexities. Geopolitical factors, regional dynamics, and global power structures continued to influence the people-to-people interactions (Poudyal, 2022) . He further argued that Nepal's involvement with strategy-loaded

projects like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) put it under pressure to accommodate the geopolitical interests of both superpowers while adhering to its policy of non-alignment. As both nations navigate their respective interests and sensitivities, diplomatic engagements remained crucial in finding a balance that serves their mutual interests and promotes regional stability.

Although Chinese help and “gifts” have been present in Nepal for some time, the BRI has garnered significant attention and discussion within the country. BRI officially announced by the Chinese President spans 85 countries and aims to enhance trade and goods, cultural and peoples exchange between China and Europe (Karlis & Polemis, 2019). For Nepal, the BRI holds particular significance due to its strategic geographical location between China and India. However, the initiative has also sparked debates and concerns about its potential implications for Nepal's sovereignty, economic dependency, and environmental impact. While China's officials had been careful in suggesting that the OBOR is an economic “initiative”, the underpinning geo-political and geo-strategic considerations suggested OBOR of having “strategic” considerations (Kondapalli & Xiaowen, 2017).

As Nepal carefully navigated its participation in the BRI, it faced the challenge of balancing its national interests while engaging in a complex geopolitical landscape involving China, India, and other international actors. If there are no such benefits, BRI proposals for resuming other border links between Nepal and Tibet will be seen by the Nepalese as empty talk (Pyakurel, 2019). Pandey (2022) wrote that it has been five years since Nepal closed an agreement with China on expanding its global infrastructure project, the BRI, into the Himalayan country. It was important to discuss exactly what benefits the BRI offers to people living in these bordering areas.

While evaluating the benefits of the BRI, this study in particular emphasized its potential impact on people living in bordering areas and their cross-border mobility. The movement of border residents developed strong ties in the past. However, with recent incidents such as covid-19, the strict rules have been implemented obstructing the cross-border mobility. Cross-border mobility whether for animal grazing or attending festivals, served a conduit for historical cultural exchange. However, with recent restrictions, the people-to-people contacts are diminishing and hence the relations are influenced. BRI, with one of its pillars as people-to-people connectivity is expected address this cross-border mobility issues.

Nepal for the first-time signed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation under the Belt and Road Initiative on May 12, 2017 and the MoU mentioned that it shall remain valid for three years. Under article II, areas of cooperation, five broad domains have been agreed upon. They are Policy Exchange, Facilitates Connectivity, Trade Connectivity, Financial Integration, and People Connectivity (Government of Nepal, 2017). With particular interest in people connectivity, the MoU stated it as:

The two side shall promote people-to-people exchanges, cultural exchanges, encourage the establishment of sister-city relations; facilitate cooperation agreements on media, education, health, culture, arts, tourism, biodiversity protection, poverty alleviation, public welfare, agriculture development and etc.; set up regular exchange programs, think tanks, students and youths, among others. (Government of Nepal, 2017, p. 3)

Five years have passed and yet no significant development or change can be witnessed. Pandey (2022) in interview with senior official of the Nepalese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who requested anonymity, told that the Chinese and Nepalese

governments were currently engaged in the BRI's project implementation plan. The author indicated that with acquisitions of Beijing pushing debt traps in Sri-Lanka, many countries like Pakistan, and Malaysia, have started reviewing more closely the conditions of BRI deals. While evaluating the significance of the BRI in Nepal, it is imperative to remember that the current 'BRI moment' is just one part of a broader history of connectivity and infrastructural diplomacy between Kathmandu and Beijing (Murton & Lord, 2020).

Apart from diplomatic interactions on cross-border mobility which are security sensitive, *aid and assistance* from Chinese government was identified as one of the important factors of diplomatic interactions that influenced how Nepalese look upon Chinese. Since, the first "Agreement between China and Nepal on Economic Aid" in October 1956 and from the mid-60s, the Chinese Government has been pledging grant assistance to the Government of Nepal under the Economic and Technical Cooperation Program. While Chinese assistance to Nepal falls into three categories: Grants (*aid gratis*), interest free loans and concessional loans, it has greatly contributed to Nepal's development efforts in the areas of infrastructure building, industrialization process, human resources development, water resources, health, sports and education (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

Sharma (2018) indicated that post-1990, particularly G. P. Koirala's China visit in 1992 emphasized mutual trust and cooperation, strengthening bilateral relations in economy, trade, culture, and education. Alongside scholarships, every year to a total of 100 Nepalese students are studying in China and they been providing Chinese language training for 200 tourism entrepreneurs (40 per year) of Nepal for five years as of March 2016 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). While only a handful of elite Nepali students were enrolled in Chinese institutions until the 1960s, the

number steadily picked up after Deng Xiaoping came to power and China worked at re-building partnerships with its neighbors (Upadhyay, 2023). He further stated that Nepali students can currently apply to more than 100 universities across China in both self-funded and scholarship programmes.

Interviews with the participants at Bishwo Bhasa Campus, TU and with experts also indicated how Nepalese students are enrolled in different educational streams in China. Interestingly, one of the Key informant interviews with a PhD scholar at Communication University of China indicated how most of the Chinese are unknown about Nepal and Nepalese community. “We are yet to be introduced to the Chinese mass”, she indicated. Education and scholarship component made possible through diplomatic interactions after 1990 have influenced people-to-people relations and remained a potential domain where further enhancement is necessary. The exchange of students is, hence argued to expose more about Nepal and its historical relations with China among different Chinese community.

Exchanges visits apart from educational visits served as an important component of diplomatic interactions which shaped the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Diplomatic interactions included the visit of top leaders on both sides, including Chairman Mao Zedong, Premier Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, President Xi Jinping, former Nepalese kings Mahendra and Birendra, and prominent leaders such as Tanka P. Acharya, B. P. Koirala, K. N. Bista, G. P. Koirala, Pushpa Kamal Dahal, and K. P. Sharma Oli (Bhattarai, 2017). However, in recent years, apart from top level visits, the exchange visit comprises citizens from different civic societies such as political parties, press and media, and cultural societies. However, such visits have been lopsided as efforts from Nepal government to entertain the same from Chinese society is negligible.

As dynasties rose and fell, and empires expanded and contracted, the people-to-people interactions between Nepal and China remained a constant feature in diplomatic discourses. Cultural exchanges that enriched the traditions of both nations, leaving indelible imprints on their art, architecture, language, and cuisine was always considered in political decisions made by the leaders. While political boundaries may have shifted, and empires may have given way to nation-states, the historical threads of people-to-people interactions continued to resonate in the present.

In conclusion, despite the richness of people-to-people interactions between Nepal and China, this relationship is not without its challenges and complexities. One of the significant issues that emerged is the fear of domination and dependency among the Nepalese people (Pandey, 2022). As the two nations strengthen their economic and political ties, there is a growing concern among some Nepalese individuals about the potential consequences of over-reliance on China and the potential impact on their sovereignty and independence. Furthermore, the covid-19 pandemic brought new challenges to people-to-people interactions between the two countries. Travel restrictions and border closures, impacted cross-cultural exchanges and economic activities. However, amidst these constraints, technology and digital connectivity have played a pivotal role in facilitating communication and sustaining relationships. Identifying and addressing challenges were crucial in fostering a more robust, constructive, and sustainable relationship.

In this study, a comprehensive qualitative approach was adopted to investigate into the qualitative variables of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The research design encompassed multiple data collection methods, including participatory observation, local perspective interview (with locals at three Nepal-China borders) and semi-structured interviews (with foreign relations experts) to gain

a holistic understanding of the experiences and perceptions of individuals from diverse backgrounds. The interviews were conducted with language students (studying Chinese language) at Campus of International Languages, Tribhuvan University, as well as students studying in China who were on vacation in Kathmandu.

Moreover, interviews were also carried out with border residents of three key border crossings - Tatopani, Rasuwagadhi, and Kora La, which captured the insights from individuals living in Nepal-China border. To ensure a comprehensive representation, interviews were also conducted with participants from prominent tourist destinations, such as Thamel in Kathmandu, as well as Sauraha, and Pokhara. The participants included souvenir shop owners, business houses, tourist guide, Chinese restaurant operators, and individuals who had interacted with Chinese nationals. Most importantly, perceptions from 19 experts on Nepal-China relations, including journalists, politicians, bureaucrats, diplomats, and former ambassadors, were incorporated into the research. By adopting this methodology, the study aimed to generate a comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

In light of the findings, this study offered several key suggestions to enhance and strengthen people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. First and foremost, fostering language exchange programs which served as a powerful tool in bridging cultural gaps and promoting cross-cultural understanding. Chinese language learning centers in Nepal can be further strengthened, while more scholarships and opportunities for Nepalese students to study in China should be encouraged to facilitate language and cultural immersion.

Secondly, promoting tourism as a means of cultural exchange can be strengthened by enhancing infrastructure and facilities to cater to Chinese tourists, thereby providing them with an enriching experience of Nepal China historical and cultural relations. Moreover, initiatives to develop tourism routes that encompass both countries' historical and cultural sites is expected to strengthen mutual appreciation and awareness. Thirdly, facilitating trade and business activities in the border regions is suggested to create economic synergies and foster stronger interpersonal connections between the business communities of Nepal and China. By addressing trade barriers and streamlining customs procedures, the flow of goods and services can be expedited, creating a positive impact on people-to-people relations.

Additionally, encouraging people-to-people interactions through academic exchanges, cultural events, and youth programs enhanced a sense of mutual respect and appreciation between the younger generations of Nepal and China. These initiatives instated a spirit of friendship and cooperation, nurturing a lasting bond for the future. Lastly, diplomatic efforts that emphasized cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, and soft power initiatives played a vital role in shaping a positive image of both nations in the eyes of their respective citizens. By leveraging diplomacy to promote cultural understanding a foundation of trust and cooperation can be established, laying the groundwork for enhanced people-to-people relations.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Contemporary academic literatures on people-to-people relations lacked richness but analysis of historical literatures indicated enriched people-to-people relations. Karki (2020) observed a significant shortage of literature on “people-to-people relations” between Nepal and its northern neighbor, China. This literature, however, focused on the tourism sector did not reflect the comprehensive list of

factors that determined people-to-people relations. Although the article is rich in comprehending the research gaps yet the findings lacked methodological justification. While historical ties are discussed, contemporary people-to-people relations—particularly after relations shaped by trade, digital interactions, and cross-border exchanges—remain underexplored. This gap becomes even more apparent given the limited focus on grassroots-level interactions in Nepal’s foreign policy toward China, which primarily emphasized infrastructure development.

Bhattarai & Khan (2020) have argued language as an inevitable instrument to promote people-to-people relations with the claim that Chinese entrepreneurs in Nepal find it hard to communicate in English. The authors have put forward the argument through literature review which primarily focused on tourism endeavors and less on language as a “factor”. Although language has been put forward, the domain of language along border communities that determine people-to-people relations has not been explored. Similarly, the author spoke about Confucius centers in Nepal, however, is it not clear whether Chinese language in Nepal acted as a soft power of China or a utility.

Existing studies on Nepal-China relations have often prioritized bilateral trade, economic agreements, and geopolitical strategies, overshadowing relational dynamics at the community level. For instance, while the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) promotes connectivity through infrastructure projects, the potential of these projects to enhance people-to-people interactions remains underutilized. Similarly, cultural diplomacy and community engagement, which are vital for fostering strong bilateral ties, have received minimal attention in both academic research and policy-making.

A comprehensive list of factors has been presented by Nyaichai and Adhikari (2023) that determined peoples’ engagement in public diplomacy. However, they

indicated that Nepal's foreign policy has yet to adequately address people-to-people relations with China. The authors identified significant shortcomings in Nepal's public diplomacy strategies, suggesting the need for more effective policies to promote cultural exchange, academic collaboration, and community engagement. Compared to Nepal's robust people-to-people relations with India, which benefit from shared language, religion, and cultural practices, Nepal-China relations appear underdeveloped, the authors supplemented. The article, which focused on Chinese public diplomacy in Nepal through constructivist views, have missed the mercantilism view that have shaped the Nepal-China relations. Also, the interconnectedness among the various factors and their sensitivity did not appear the article.

The evolving digital culture further complicated the dynamics of people-to-people interactions. With the advent of digital communication platforms, cross-border mobility is no longer the sole determinant of relational bonds. However, the implications of these technological shifts remain largely unexamined in the context of Nepal-China relations. Earlier, Murton (2017) highlighted geographical spaces around Nepal-China border corridors, share ethnic identities and commonalities in religion, food, dress, and language alongside distinct cultural practices. Despite these shared aspects, there is limited research on the strength (strong or weak) of these interactions between these cross-border communities.

Apart from the story of Gyalpo Sherpa by Uprety (1998), the present-day articles and books rarely reflected the grassroot level exploration of people-to-people relations. Lately, Mulmi (2021) incorporated the story of a Newar merchant in his book which depicted his journey from Kathmandu to Lhasa and his day-to-day activities as a trader in Lhasa. While diplomatic visits and exchanges have increased and made it to the academic papers, the grassroot interactions at border areas or the

economic interactions between Nepalese and Chinese are absent. Such gap in knowledge, produced difficulty in formulating diplomatic ties.

The absence of well-defined strategies addressing people-to-people relations in Nepal's foreign policy is further reflected in the inconsistent implementation of bilateral agreements. For example, while the BRI explicitly includes "people-to-people bonds" as a pillar, projects in Nepal predominantly centered on physical infrastructure. Additionally, Nepal's efforts to promote its culture and soft power in China remain minimal compared to China's robust cultural diplomacy efforts, such as the establishment of Confucius Institutes and scholarships, (Nyaichai & Adhikari, 2023).

Methodological approach to people-to-people studies in most of the articles employed literature review as their primary tool and claims were made based on the analytical power of the author such as Bhattarai & Khan in 2020, G. Dahal in 2019, and M. K. Dahal in 2017. While not the scope of this study, quantitative approach to people-to-people relations among two nations are barely available in the context of Nepal and China. Even the qualitative approach mostly followed literature review ignoring the other tools such as focus group discussion, personal interviews and key informant interviews. Such problems in methodological approaches were identified as one of the problem statements.

Despite historical ties and the growing importance of bilateral interactions, limited research has been conducted on the specific factors shaping these relations and the role of Nepal's foreign policy in influencing them. The natural disasters followed by COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent policies greatly restricted cross-border mobility, underscoring the crucial role of technology in sustaining people-to-people relations. In conclusion, this research seeks to address the knowledge gap

surrounding these dynamics and factors influencing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. To address these issues, this research focused on the following questions:

- i. What are the factors that influence people-to-people relations between Nepal and China?
- ii. How does Nepal's foreign policy address people-to-people relations between Nepal and China?
- iii. How to strengthen people-to-people relations between Nepal and China?

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this qualitative study is to explore and understand the factors that influence people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The specific objectives are:

- i. To identify the key factors influencing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.
- ii. To analyze Nepal's foreign policy on people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.
- iii. To find potential strategies for strengthening people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study made a significant academic contribution by exploring into the factors that influence people-to-people relations between Nepal and China with particular focus after 1990 and until 2024. Through participatory observation, personal interviews and key informant interview, this research generated fresh insights and perspectives on the topic. By examining the experiences of Nepalese who interacted with Chinese at different locations of Nepal, the study added to the existing

body of literature on international relations, cultural exchange, and diplomatic studies. The findings had the potential to expand our understanding of the interconnectedness of the three networks discussed above.

Understanding the dynamics of people-to-people relations displayed immense importance for policymakers, diplomats, and government officials engaged in bilateral relations between Nepal and China. This study's findings provided valuable insights into the various factors that shaped these relations and informed the development of policies and initiatives to focus on each factor separately. By illuminating the key drivers and challenges in people-to-people interactions, the research offers practical implications for policymakers seeking to promote cultural understanding, economic cooperation, and diplomatic engagement between Nepal and China.

People-to-people relations had a direct impact on the social and cultural fabric of societies. By exploring the experiences, attitudes, and interactions between individuals from Nepal and China, this study elaborated the broad concept of cultural economic, and diplomatic networks where interactions happened. The research findings contributed to fostering cultural understanding, tolerance, and appreciation between the two nations. The insights gained from this study can help in developing programs and initiatives that promote cultural exchange, educational collaborations, trade and tourism between Nepal and China, thereby enriching the social and cultural ties between the two countries.

1.5 Delimitations

A limitation of this study lied in its use of the grounded theory approach, which, while valuable for generating theory from participants' perspectives, is inherently shaped by the researcher's interpretation and coding decisions. It examined

people-to-people relations specifically from 1990 onward to 2024, a period marked by increased cross-border engagement following Nepal's political changes and China's economic expansion. Geographically, the research centered on key locations that facilitated these interactions, including educational institutions (Bishwo Bhasa Campus), major tourist destinations (Thamel, Sauraha, and Pokhara), and strategically significant border areas (Tatopani in Sindhupalchowk, Rasuwagadhi in Rasuwa, and Kora La in Mustang). This research did not include all the legal border-crossings between Nepal and China due to time and resource limitation. The study covered the ideas of Nepalese people from diverse backgrounds. Due to unavailability and reluctance in participation, Chinese participants were not included in this study. However, interaction of the participant (Nepalese) with Chinese was a mandatory criterion for participation.

A qualitative research methodology was employed, incorporating participatory observation, personal interviews, and key informant interviews. Temporally, the research was confined to 2024 AD. The study was framed within social network theory, which provided a lens for understanding the interconnectedness of cultural, economic, and diplomatic networks. The seventeen factors identified during the research period have been categorized under these three networks instead of enveloping it under a single category. This categorization was done due to the strength of such standalone networks in influencing the other networks. Additionally, the study did not extensively explore official government perspectives or policy formulations of Nepal and China, as its focus remained on informal and interpersonal interactions. These delimitations defined the scope of the research, ensuring clarity within its established boundaries.

1.6 Organization of the Study

This study on people-to-people relations between Nepal and China has been carefully organized into seven chapters, each contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics shaping people-to-people relations. Chapter one served as a robust introduction, establishing the research questions and underlining the importance of exploring the factors influencing the relations, examining Nepal's foreign policy, and identifying potential strategies for strengthening connections. In Chapters two, the literature review navigated through existing research, offering insights into the historical and contemporary context with theoretical underpinnings.

Chapter three, conceptual framework and research methodology particularly emphasized grounded theory while the utility of Social Network Theory (SNT), providing a solid theoretical basis for the subsequent analysis. It also described the qualitative methodology employed in this study, with focus on participatory observation, personal interviews, and key informant interviews. These methods are chosen deliberately to capture the complex interactions within various networks, including those of border residents, tourists, academicians, official visitors, high-level dignitaries, and traders. Chapters four, five, and six revealed the findings, according to the research objectives set forth. The final chapter, the summary and conclusion of this study is found in Chapter seven. Suggestions were put forth for policymakers, stakeholders, and individuals interested in nurturing and fortifying the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review section of this study aimed to critically analyze existing research, theories, and concepts that underpin the dynamics of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. This section provided a comprehensive overview of the key factors influencing these relations, the role of Nepal's foreign policy in addressing people-to-people relations, and the potential areas for strengthening the relations. By exploring relevant literature, this section aimed at creating a robust theoretical framework that guides the investigation into the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

Addressing the objectives was on focus during the literature review. In par with the first objective of identifying and examining the key factors that contributed to the development of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, the literature review explored into various events that shape these relations while, focus was made on events after the democratic movement of 1990. However, the study also included an exploration of major historical events before 1990 that influenced the relations. Additionally, theories such as social network theory and intercultural communication theory was examined to shed light on the mechanisms through which these factors operate and impact people-to-people relations.

The second objective involved analyzing Nepal's foreign policy through the dynamics of people-to-people relations with China. This section investigated Nepal's foreign policy approach towards China with special focus on the bilateral or agreements between Nepal and China after 1990. By drawing from scholarly works on foreign policy analysis, this section assessed how diplomatic strategies, trade agreements, and regional alignments have influenced the development of people-to-

people relations and cultural exchanges between the two nations. Finally, for third objective of exploring potential strategies and measures for enhancing and fostering positive people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, the review drew on studies that highlighted successful models of cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, and public diplomacy initiatives employed by countries to strengthen their bilateral ties. Concepts such as soft power, cultural diplomacy, and public engagement have been examined to provide a theoretical foundation for proposing strategies that can be implemented in the context of Nepal-China relations.

2.1 Theoretical Foundations on People-to-people

People-to-people relations between Nepal and China were the construct that reflected their position within the broader context of international relations (IR). At the same time IR in the political theory draws much from the works of John Rawls, Jurgen Habermas and Michel Foucault. (Dryzek et al., 2006). Speaking of political theory in the twenty-first century, Heywood (2004) asserted that normative and ideological concepts such as liberty, equality, justice and rights were revived from the emergence of social movements in the 1960s, as reflected in the works of new generation of political theorists such as John Rawls and Robert Nozick. Rawls, in particular stressed the political conception of right and justice that applies to the principles and norms of international law and practice.

Anything, from a plan to piece of abstract knowledge can be described as theory. Even though, particularly in the USA, political theory is seen as subfield of political science, Heywood, (2004) emphasized on the study of ideas and doctrines that have been central to international relations, as in political thoughts. With varying traditions, approaches and styles, Dryzek et al. (2006) defined international relations

theory as an interdisciplinary endeavor whose center of gravity lies at the humanities end of the happily still undisciplined discipline of political science.

Burchill and Linklater (2005) focused on presenting both traditional and more contemporary theories, illustrating how each framework explains state behavior, global conflicts, cooperation, and the changing dynamics of international relations. By introducing nine major theories (Realism, Liberalism, The English School, Marxism, Critical theory, Postmodern, Constructivism, and Feminism) the editors emphasized the diversity and richness of the IR discipline, highlighting the importance of theoretical frameworks for understanding the complexities of global politics. Regardless of how world politics restructuring unfolds, we are moving into an era characterized by power sharing among diverse regions, states, and political entities of varying sizes and roles. Reality-based geopolitical theory will continue to be a valuable tool for understanding, predicting, and formulating the structure and direction of the world system (Cohen, 2015).

As the study investigated into the realm of political theory, it was essential to recognize its relevance to the analysis of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. While previous studies have frequently leaned on established international relations theories such as realism, liberalism, and constructivism to study Nepal-China dynamics, this research utilized a distinctive course by prioritizing relational thinking, specifically within the domain of social network of individuals. Departing from the traditional lenses of realism's emphasis on power, liberalism's focus on cooperation, and constructivism's exploration of shared beliefs, Gilde (2014) indicated the social network theory provided a lens finely tuned to the complexities of connections and interactions between individuals.

Social networks played a pivotal role in shaping people-to-people relations, both at the individual, institutional and state levels. Social network theory is an umbrella term for theories that focused on individuals, teams and organizations, and the web of interpersonal relationships that both constrain and enable human action in these social systems (Fuhse, 2015; Nimmon et al., 2019). This theory examined how social connections, both offline and online, influence the spread of information, ideas, and influence. It is particularly relevant in today's interconnected world, where social media and digital platforms have transformed the way people connect and share information. Social network theory shed light on how global and national networks impacted international relations, public opinion, and the formation of transnational communities.

In the context of Nepal, social network theory can be applied to understand how interpersonal relationships, connections, and networks influence various aspects of society, including politics, trade, and cultural exchanges. For example, it can be used to analyze how personal relationships and social networks among individuals, communities, or organizations in Nepal and China facilitate people-to-people interactions, trade partnerships, and cultural exchanges. Social network theory can also be used to explore the role of diaspora communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other social actors in shaping the relationships between the two countries. Speaking of the social network and analysis, (Freeman, 2004) wrote:

In social science, the structural approach that is based on the study of interaction among social actors is called social network analysis. The relationships that social network analysts study are usually those that link individual human beings...Network analysts often examine links among

groups or organizations—even among nation-states or international alliances.

(Freeman, 2004, p. 2)

Freeman's description of social network analysis, which involves the study of interactions among social actors, can also be applied to understanding people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. In the geopolitical context, these relations extend beyond individual interactions to encompass various levels of engagement, including those between governments, organizations, and international geopolitical dynamics. When examining people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, it was essential to consider not only individual connections but also the broader network of interactions influenced by cross-border mobility.

Burchill and Linklater (2005) argued that the study of international politics, developed in the Western academy after World War I, has been marked by persistent debates over its fundamental features. These debates have encompassed diverse perspectives on the subject matter, ranging from state relations to transnational economic ties, international interdependence, global systems of dominance, and more recently, globalization, they further added. The discipline has also struggled with methodological disagreements, questioning whether empirical data, historical evidence, Marxist approaches, systemic analyses, or constructivist insights are the most appropriate ways to understand international political phenomena.

Focusing on the intergovernmental organizations, Hafner-Burton & Montgomery (2006) argued that intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) play a crucial role in promoting peace among states. Traditionally, scholars have focused on IGO membership as a factor influencing individual states, similar to economic development and regime type. However, the authors used social network analysis and highlighted that IGO memberships created a distinct distribution of social power,

influencing conflicts between states. In essence, the study demonstrated that the configuration of states within IGOs networks significantly influences international relations and the likelihood of peace or conflict.

Dorussen and Ward (2008) utilized network analysis to contend that the primary contribution of IGOs to international stability does not necessarily arise from their direct and individual impact, given the general institutional weakness of IGOs. Instead, they argued that IGO membership establishes network connections among states, enabling more effective intervention in potential conflicts, either individually or collectively. The IGO network also provided both direct and indirect communication channels, with the latter acting as partial substitutes for direct diplomatic ties. This article indicated the importance of intergovernmental organizations such as UN or SAARC in building relations and ties between individuals.

Connecting trade networks and Kantian peace, the authors again published another article in the following year. Dorussen and Ward (2010) explored the idea that international trade promotes peace, a concept rooted in classical-liberal arguments. It emphasized that trade not only creates economic connections but also fosters a sense of a global community. The commonly used measures to assess the peaceful effects of trade are deemed insufficient. As the global trade network has become denser over time, the significance of indirect links through specific third countries have diminished. Overall, the findings suggested that since World War II, there has been progress toward realizing the classical-liberal vision of a security community formed by trading states.

Border policies, diplomatic relations, and regional alliances can either facilitate or hinder interactions between individuals, organizations and nations. Social

network analysis in the context of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China took into account the multi-layered network of interactions (among actors) involving individuals, organizations, and government all of which collectively shape the overall relationship between these two countries. Various collection of research traditions has shaped the current state of social network theory. Liu et al. (2017) indicated that years after 1990 have witnessed extensive applications of key network concepts in diverse research contexts, and the field has also constantly been updated with more refined network measures and analytic tools.

These ongoing disputes reflect the enduring and dynamic nature of the field, where scholars continue to contest not only what should be studied but also how it should be studied. However, Gilde (2014) used relational dimension among the states and indicated that realist, liberalist and constructivist theories have not explicitly and systematically incorporated the relational dimension in their explanation of international politics. The author highlighted the need for social network theory in understanding the relational aspects of ties that exist between states and that seem to influence the way in which they act.

Social network theory emerged as a crucial and relevant perspective within the landscape of Nepal China international relations. In the backdrop of persistent debates over the subject matter and methodologies, social network theory offered a valuable lens through which to comprehend the intricacies of global interactions. It underscored the significance of relationships and interactions between actors, acknowledging that international relations are not solely determined by state-centric views or systemic forces but are profoundly shaped by the connections between individuals and groups (Böhmelt, 2009; Gilde, 2014; Manger et al., 2012). This perspective recognized the role of ideas, norms, and identities in shaping state

behavior, aligning with the constructivist tradition. Moreover, social network theory provided a dynamic framework that captured the evolving nature of international relations, emphasizing the social construction of reality and the influence of social structures on shaping individual and collective actions.

According to social network theory, individuals are not isolated entities but are parts of social connections and relationships. In the context of Nepal and China, this theory gains particular relevance as it highlighted the interconnection of interactions, exchanges, and collaborations that determined the ties between the people of these two nations. In the context of the Nepal-China relationship, social network theory highlighted how individuals, organizations and states are linked through various social connections. These connections extend beyond formal diplomatic channels and encompass informal networks formed through cross-border trade, educational exchanges, tourism, and cultural activities. Social network theory allowed us to explore how these connections influence the development of cross-cultural relationships and foster cooperation between Nepal and China.

The significance of social network theory in the context of Nepal-China relations lies in its ability to provide a lens through which we can understand the multidimensionality of people-to-people interactions. By mapping and analyzing the social networks that facilitate these interactions, insights were gained into the patterns of communication, information flow, and collaboration between individuals and communities from both countries. Like Granovetter in 1973 stated in his economic sociology theory of "The Strength of Weak Ties," geographical proximity facilitated frequent and regular interactions which strengthen relationships. Geographical proximity allows for easier travel and transportation between Nepal and China, making it more convenient for people from both countries to engage in trade, tourism,

and other forms of collaboration. Again, he stated that proximity can lead to the formation of strong ties and networks, which in turn foster trust and cooperation between individuals and communities (Granovetter, 1973). Similarly, various such social networks that unite Nepal and China were further explored to uncover the underlying mechanisms that contributed to the resilience of people-to-people relations.

2.2 Factors Influencing People-to-people Relations

The literature review within objective I, "Factors influencing people-to-people relations," has been structured into three distinct networks of interaction: cultural, economic, and diplomatic. Literatures justifying these three networks have been reviewed in the following section and has been discussed and analyzed accordingly. The culture sub-section explored into the rich historical ties that have spanned centuries, revealing the evolution of cultural cooperation between the two nations. Cultural exchanges, highlighted in this sub-section, underscored the profound impact of shared traditions, artistic influences, and religious practices in fostering connections. The trade dimension explored the complicated network of trade, investment, and economic collaborations that have played a pivotal role in influencing the people-to-people relations. Finally, diplomatic network, shed light on the strategic events and historical contests that have affected the bond between the two countries. Collectively, these three sub-sections offered lenses to investigate the factors that contribute to the development of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, providing a robust foundation for the subsequent analysis within this study.

2.2.1 Cultural Factors of People-to-people Relations

The socio-cultural contacts between Nepal and Tibet have been long and intimate and the seventh century constituted a turning point in the relations owing to

two factors: first, the growth of mercantilism in South and East Asia and, second the emergence of powerful kingdom of Tibet and the rise of Nepal (Uprety, 1998).

Earlier, Shah (1989) indicated that Tibetan king and abbots employed Nepali teachers of Buddhism to copy Buddhist religious manuscripts and also to translate them into Tibetan from Sanskrit during Licchavis reign. Nepal not only developed her trade with India, Tibet and China but also acted as a linking road for the development of trade between India and China (Shrestha & Singh, 1972). Dhungel (1999) highlighted that Nepal played a significant role in transmitting Mahayana Buddhism to Tibet during the Licchavi dynasty. This bond was further strengthened by the royal marriage between Nepali Princess Bhrikuti, daughter of King Amsuvarman, and Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo (620–650) (Manandhar, 2004).

Among the prominent Buddhist scholars from Nepal who migrated to Tibet was Lichhavi-origin Lama *rgyal-mtshan*, a renowned Tibetan-Sanskrit translator who contributed to Buddhist literature by translating important texts like *Caryakriya* and *Yogatantra* (Dhungel, 1999). Interestingly, he noted that during the medieval period, Ananta Malla (reign: 1274-1308), has maintained indirect relations with the Mongol court in China through the Sakya monastery in Tibet. In response to a request from the Sakya-pa Lama, a group of artisans led by *A-ni-ko* (1245–1306) was sent to Lhasa. The author claimed that, although *A-ni-ko* is absent from Nepali records, Chinese records indicated close ties between Nepal and the central Tibetan monasteries. However, Rose and Scholz (1980) stated that the interaction of a variety of cultural and intellectual influences originated from India and occasionally in Tibet is vividly apparent in all aspects of Nepali culture.

Manandhar (2001) highlighted the direct contact of Nepal with the Peking government through quinquennial missions to China starting from 1972 and ended on

1906. Pandey (2005) along with various historians on Nepal-China relations have stated that after marriage of Vrikuti, the Kerung route was subsequently opened for trans-Himalayan trading and communication. Since then, Nepal for several centuries developed itself as an entrepot for trade and other commercial activities between China and Nepal (Acharya, 2022). Marking the year 2005 as the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and China, Pandey (2005) on historical evolution of cultural cooperation stated that:

Cultural exchange has long been a hallmark of the bilateral relations between Nepal and China. At the highest level, while the formal visits have set the tone of the bilateral relations to grow and flourish...the people-to-people contact especially on the level of the common people across the border is so intimate that it cannot be precisely evaluated. (Pandey, 2005, p. 53)

Regarding the historical studies on people-to-people connections, Mulmi (2021) recently indicated that despite previous works by European scholars—including Brian Hodgson, Sylvian Levi's study, stood out in one particular respect. Appraising Levi's work of 1989 which incorporated the historical views of Nepal through Tibetan and Chinese documents, the author further claimed that until then Nepal had been viewed through the lens of India, as an offshoot of its dynastic histories or Indian cultures, and little attention was paid to its interactions with Tibet and China; a view that dominates popular discourse around the country.

Nepal and China have a common outlook of life at the most fundamental philosophical level. "The whole edifice of our culture is based upon the thought and practicing of living in harmony with nature: To be one with Nature; liberation from our petty-self and to become one with the Self-unbound" (Maskey, 2017, p. 138). These spiritual connections not only fostered religious understanding but also laid the

groundwork for cultural exchanges. Apart from Buddhism that binds Nepal and China, Shakya (2017) indicated that relations begun to take deep roots since the Chinese travelers *Faiyan* and *Hwanshan* came to Nepal in 5th and 7th centuries AD respectively. They wrote historic travel records about Nepal, which were the first written evidences of tracing the Nepal-China relations.

Shrestha (2017a) have used the term *janti marga* (dowry road) to indicate the historical Rasuwagadhi route which connected Nepal to China through Kerong following the marriage of Bhrikuti to Srong-tsen Gampo. This landmark event of marriage not only connected Nepal with China but also turned Kathmandu into political center connecting Indian and Tibetan markets. The Nepalese and Chinese princesses, who carried a treasure trove of Buddhist idols and artifacts as part of their dowries, helped to expand Buddhism in Tibet (Shrestha, 2017b). Citing the works of Mary Slusser in 1982, Mulmi (2022) claimed that Patan, at least, with its interlocking web of viharas, had become essentially a Buddhist university center not unlike the celebrated ones of Bengal and Bihar.

Before the mid-18th century, Nepal was a grouping of hill regions. However, King Prithvi Narayan Shah of the Gorkha region initiated an ambitious military endeavor. By the close of the 18th century, Nepal, which had previously referred to the valley containing Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan, transformed into the contemporary nation it stands as today. However, the Tibetans had become more suspicious of Prithvi Narayan's intentions, particularly following his incorporation of Hinduism as a fundamental aspect of state strategy during his unification process (Upadhya, 2012).

This highlighted the complex relationship between cultural factors and economic factors in the context of Nepal's engagement with Tibet even in history.

Prithvi Narayan's decision to prioritize Hinduism in state policy not only raised suspicion among Tibetans but also had practical implications for trade. The issue of coin exchange demonstrated the clash of perspectives between the Gorkhalis and Lhasa, with each side emphasizing different values for the coins. This dispute showcased how cultural divergence was intricately linked with economic matters. This historical account underscored the significance of understanding the interdependence of cultural in shaping economic and diplomatic relations and strategic decisions. While culture has often played a pivotal role in fostering people-to-people connections, there has also been instances where it has posed challenges.

Although construction of stupas played a very prominent role in the spread of Buddhist culture, which eventually came to dominate the entire area to the north of the Himalayas, this (domination of Buddhist culture) became a divisive factor in Nepal-Tibet relations as in later centuries Nepal was increasingly Hinduized, while Tibet retained its Buddhist character. Speaking of the culture Upadhyaya, (2012), stated that although Tibet has been central to the Sino-Nepalese relationship, Nepal's formal contacts began with China's thirst for Buddhist texts, artifacts and codes from the wider Gangetic heartland. The concepts of Hindu and Buddhist civilizations have shaped the values in the making of foreign policy in Nepal and conduct of relations between states (Baniya, 2023). Therefore, even when cultural interchange fostered connections, it also brought about challenges.

With Newars being the prominent in trans-Himalayan trade, it could not be a surprise for cultural exchange at the level of people-to-people. Emphasizing the role of Newari traders in combining Buddhism and Hinduism, Mulmi (2021) stated:

The Newars of Kathmandu (Newar is an anglicised spelling for the Newa people) have long practiced a uniquely syncretic culture that merges aspects

of Tibetan Buddhism, Vajrayana, with Brahminical Hinduism. Nepal valley was a complex society where Brahminical Hinduism, which had royal patronage, existed alongside Tibetan Buddhism, which gathered momentum as interactions with the Tibetan plateau continued to grow through trade, particularly by those who belonged to the Newar Buddhist merchant caste of Urays. (Mulmi, 2021, p. 43-44)

Newar community in Kathmandu emerged as a key node in the early network of contact with Tibetans, and by extension, with China. Through trade routes and exchanges with difficult terrain, the Newar community established strong ties with Tibetan traders, laying the foundation for enduring economic and cultural connections. A 1990 proceeding article from the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich on Newar community stated that:

...I was drawn toward this inter-disciplinary endeavor through my field work among Newar Buddhists of Kathmandu, whose kinship, mercantile, and religious ties spanned Nepal's mid-hills, southward to Patna, Calcutta and Sri Lanka, east to Burma and north-east to Bhutan, Lhasa and even Beijing, and westward as far as Ladakh. In the Himalayas, a wide variety of diaspora trade network existed. Prominent were Kashmiri, Bengali, Marwari and Tibetan traders in Nepal's history alongside, Nepalese traders of Newar, Thakali, Sherpa and Manangi ethnic background. (Lewis, 1990, p. 168)

Apart from affiliation through Buddhism, other cultural factors have also influenced the people-to-people relations or ties or bond between Nepal and China from the historical review. They are language, shared festivals, transnational marriage, language, food, and cultural appreciation. Language, as a powerful medium of connection, acted as a bridge, enabling smoother interactions and understanding.

However, in the field of international relations language policies are rarely studied nor studies on language policies have not systematically taken into account the international dimension (Virtanen, 2002).

Cultural diplomacy is the concept that refers to the exchange of art, information, ideas, and other elements of culture between nations and their people to promote and extend mutual understanding (Mamchii, 2023). Similarly, cultural appreciation has been described as a way of honoring another culture through exploration and seeking an understanding as a way to honor that culture, beliefs, and traditions. Cultural appreciation by Nepalese towards Chinese culture, evident in various forms such as art, customs, and daily practices, served as a mutual exchange of respect and understanding.

Food preferences, including shared food habits, also determined people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Though food is the basic need of human being, it is the best way to express the culture and the tradition of a community (Kunwar, 2017). Marriage and kinship ties between Nepalese and Chinese, witnessed in cross-cultural unions and familial bonds, further added as the factors of people-to-people relations. The relationship between Nepal and Tibet (China) are centuries old, with the Sherpa people, the Gurung people and the Thakali people of Nepal sharing close linguistic, cultural, marital, and, ethnic ties with the Tibetan people of Tibet (China) (Shahi, 2019). Kafle (2017) while appreciating the arrange marriage of Chinese guy with a Nepalese girl indicated that:

While this was not the first time that a cross-country marriage has been conducted in the Himalayan country, for many it became even more spectacular and as it was a Nepalese lady and a Chinese man who were tying the knot together... They got married as per both the ethnic Newari tradition

and traditional Chinese culture amid the presence of around 50 people from both the bride and groom's sides. Representatives from the Chinese Embassy in Nepal also witnessed the marriage ceremony. (Kafle, 2017, p.1)

Additionally, the unique practice of cross-border land usage for grazing and cultivation reinforced a shared heritage, where people from both sides engage in communal activities that traverse geopolitical boundaries. These interconnected networks contribute to a rich and dynamic people-to-people connections, highlighting the diverse factors that shape the intricate relationship between Nepal and China. However, illicit activities have also been reported by Mulmi, (2021), where traders smuggled items across the borders as administrative monitoring can into existence.

Moving forward with the discussion, it was clear that culture has been a vital aspect that bonded people of Nepal and China. However, it is not the sole factor at play. Economic interactions and geopolitics have also tied with culture, influencing the depth and nature of these connections. Apart from the network of cultural interactions, evident from the literatures above, economic interactions (from barter to digital era) and diplomatic interactions also equally contributed in influencing people-to-people relations. It is argued there that these three networks (cultural, economic and diplomatic) are interconnected and mutually influential. This multidimensional perspective was crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Efforts have been made in the following section to justify different trade or economic interactions which contributed to people-to-people bond between Nepal and China.

2.2.2 Economic Factors of People-to-people Relations

Economic interactions between nations have long been a powerful driver of economic prosperity and cultural exchange. Focusing on the economic and political

dimension of Nepal-Tibet relations between 1850 to 1930, Upreti, (1998) stressed that economic parameters not only guided diplomatic relations but often directed the path and momentum of overall Nepal China relations. Furthermore, the author also claimed that the socio-economic relationship between the Nepalese and Tibetans in Lhasa was certainly a very important aspect of Nepal-Tibet relations. Later, Regmi (1999) argued that Buddhist monasteries appeared to have played an important part in the barter trade with Tibet as “they supplied rice, ghee, paper, iron and other commodities to Tibet in exchange for salt and wool”. These literatures through historical events traced the evolution of trade between these two nations, beginning with ancient trade routes that connected the people of Himalayan region, both in Tibet and China.

Nepal-China economic cooperation dates back to the formalization of bilateral relations in 1950’s (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2023). It was during the Lichhavi dynasty that trade across the Himalayan passes originated which initiated the people-to-people interaction. Rose and Scholz (1980) earlier justified and wrote:

The Himalayan passes to the north of valley were opened and extensive cultural, trade, and political relations were established. In the process Nepal transformed from a relatively remote backwater into the major intellectual and commercial entrepôt between south and central Asia. (p. 11)

Economic transactions along these routes acted as strong ties, linking key trading hubs and fostering a network of shared influences. Nodes within this economic network, representing cities and waypoints, formed central points of interaction, facilitating the exchange of goods and cultural practices. Highlighting the foregoing account of economic intercourse between Terai and adjoining areas

of northern India, the passage below further highlighted the economic connections between Nepal, China and India.

Trails of ancient north-south highways from Jumla to Surkhet through Dullu and references to horsemen and horse chariots in contemporary inscriptions indicate that trade between Tibet and the southern plains had once flourished through Nepal's Tarai region. Butual, a part of the kingdom of Palpa was an important trade center where gold ore, brass, iron, copper, borax, bees-wax and other products of northern areas were exchanged for different varieties of cotton goods by merchants of India, Bhutan and Tibet. (Regmi, 1999, p. 20)

Similarly, the passages from Mulmi's interview with Pragya Ratna Tuladhar provided a rich and evocative glimpse into the historical trade relations between Nepal and Tibet, underscoring on the cultural and personal dimensions of this trade. It encapsulated the essence of how trade was not just about economic transactions but also about forging enduring people-to-people connections. This adventurous aspect of trade, combined with the uncertainty of whether one would return, reflected the risks and challenges that traders willingly embraced in pursuit of economic opportunities and cultural encounters (Mulmi, 2021).

In conclusion, Pragya Ratna's recollections provided a compelling narrative of how trade between Nepal and Tibet transcended economic transactions to become a conduit for cultural exchange, adventure, personal growth, and deep connections. This personal account serves as a testament to the multifaceted nature of trade relations, emphasizing that trade is not just about commerce; it's about the people and the stories that enrich the historical interaction of nations. Speaking of the trade, a book, first published in 1966 and reprinted on 2004, also highlighted the involvement of

Newari communities along the trans-Himalayan trade system that flourished on from Lichhavi dynasty. The passage below by Joshi and Rose (2004) indicted:

From the sixteenth to the twentieth century, a large share of commerce between northern India and Central Tibet was channeled through Kathmandu Valley. Lamaistic monastic institutions in Tibet, Newari commercial families in Kathmandu Valley, and Hindu and Muslim trading communities in north-central India cooperated in the operation of complex, highly profitable trade structure. (p. 15)

Within the high-caste Uray group of Newars, multiple sub-castes find their origins in craftsmanship and commerce and Tuladhars ('one who works with scales'), were the most dominant sub-caste in trans-Himalayan trade (Mulmi, 2021). While religion may have formed the root of the socio-political relationship between Tibet and Nepal, trade was the backbone for cultural exchanges, the author claimed. He further claimed that with Hinduism's caste restrictions, which forbid social exchanges with outsiders, it is no surprise that the most enterprising trans-Himalayan traders were inevitably Buddhists.

Sen (1971) was reviewed which justified historian Bal Chandra Sharma's claim on the beginning of India's commercial relations with Nepal and Tibet pushing back to as early as fifth century. He further indicated that Chang K'ien, the Chinese general and explorer of Central Asia in the second century BC, testified that there was a trade between North Eastern India and South-western China in Chinese silk and bamboo flute along with other things. Such were brought in India and were carried through the entire length of north India to as far as Afghanistan and Central Asia. Often Indo-mongoloids (including both from Nepal and India) as intermediaries in this trade, the author asserted from the account of Yuan Chwang, Tang annals and

other sources, about the overland trade route from Bihar to Tibet and China through Nepal.

Highlighting the historical economy of Nepal, which is closely tangled with that of northern India, Joshi and Rose (2004) indicated that there exist at least eighteen pass areas between Nepal and Tibet, of which only two are really feasible for extensive commercial purposes. Recently, emphasizing the term *Silk Road*, (Shrestha, 2017b) mentioned about three main passes for trans-Himalayan trade. He wrote:

Nepalese archaeologists in collaboration with UNESCO, while studying, have found three routes of the ancient trade route connecting China and South Asia through Nepal. In the east, from Old Magadha (Patna) to Betiya, Hetauda, Bhimfedi, Kathmandu, Sankhu, Chautara, Listikot, Tatopani, Sigatse, Lhasa, Chengdu and finally to Xian. In the center, along the banks of Bodhgaya (Banaras), Kapilvastu, Lumbini, Butwal, Kali Gandaki, and Mustang to Lhasa. In the west, from Vanaras to Surkhet, Dailekh, Jumla, Simikot and finally to Mansarovar. (Shrestha, 2017b, p. 1)

During the closing decades of 17th century, from the ledger of an Armenian merchant named Hovhannes Joughayetsi claimed about the commercial link between India, Nepal and Tibet (Sen, 1971). Foreign travelers during 17th century began speaking not only of a flourishing trade between Bengal, Nepal, Bhutan and Tibet but also of the caravans of merchants coming from China, Tatar and Persia (Upadhyay, 2012). The presence of silk in the caves of upper Mustang has been verified by research team from America and Nepal's archeological department and can be found in the mentions of National Geographic Television, National Geographic Society and the American research institute, Sky Door Foundation (Shrestha, 2017). Since then, the discourse of silk route in Nepal has been the prime subject among the scholars and

civic societies and foreign affair experts. Speaking of the traders along the silk route, Newar community has played a significant role.

The pioneers of Nepal-China trade, Newar community must not be forgotten for their role in initiating and shaping the trade what exist today. Newar traders conducted business in Tibet, put on Tibetan clothes, spoke the language, worshipped at the same temples and celebrated the same festivals as the locals, and even entered into relationships with Tibetan women, they rarely integrated into Tibetan society (Mulmi, 2021; Shrestha, 2017b; Upadhya, 2012). Mulmi (2021) in particular indicated that the traders had organized themselves into eight different *guthis*, an informal social order. Upadhya (2012) on Newars also wrote that Kathmandu gained joint authority over Kuti and Kerong and its Newar merchants were permitted to establish 32 trading houses in the Tibetan capital.

Rise and fall of dynasties have influenced the trade and economic interactions which ultimately was reflected in people-to-people relations. Historical events in the early 18th century, such as restoration of the Dalai Lama as ruler in Tibet and rise of an ambitious young king in Gorkha across the Himalayas also influenced trade (Upadhya, 2012). The wars or the treaties and agreements called by rulers of Nepal with China or India were the results of injustice or misbehave to the Nepalese traders along the Silk Road. According to Mulmi (2021) this eventually led to first war with Tibet in 1788 and claimed that unsatisfied by the Tibetan's proposal over the use of debased currency and exchange rate as one of the reasons.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, entrepot trade between Tibet and British India had developed through the Chumbi valley route to the east of Nepal, leaving Nepal's economy isolated except for a small trade with India. The term *entreport* has been mentioned in almost all the articles and books to describe the

position of Nepal in trade between Tibet and India (Bhattarai, 2010; Bhattarai, 2017; Joshi & Rose, 2004; Rose & Scholz, 1980; Shrestha, 2017b). The historically famous Silk Road used to link China with the countries in the West up to Mediterranean for trading of goods several centuries back (Tuladhar, 2014). He further added that Nepal can revive her role as entrepot in the trade between China and India.

Nepal's primary connections with the north were resultant from its political, economic and religious connections with Tibet until the pre-modern era (before 1950). It is only after 1950 that China emerged as Nepal's immediate neighbor. The fall of Rana regime raised concerns on economic aspects apart from political and social justice. However, Sharma (2018) claimed that there are little economic and cultural exchange between Nepal and China before 1990. Sharing similar thoughts, Khadka (1992) claimed that concerns with economic development took its place beside political legitimacy and social justice in the intellectual debates that flourished during the 1950s and led to the dramatic increase in the economic activities of central government in the 1960s and 1970s.

Although foreign aid, Indian excise-tax returns, earning from tourism, and repatriated earnings from smuggling and employment in India have enabled Nepal to balance its payments and maintain foreign reserve equal in 1978 to nine times of import, the balance became more precarious in recent years (Rose & Scholz, 1980). After long negotiations, separate trade and transit treaty was signed and a MoU on Industrial and Economic cooperation was signed with India in 1978, which satisfied Nepal's demands for symbols of independence as well as India's demand for effective smuggling controls.

Critical observations from literatures of (Dahal, 2019; Joshi & Rose, 2004; Khadka, 1992) indicated that relations with China at government or individual level was influenced by its relation with India. Mulmi (2021) in particular mentioned that:

While the religious, cultural and economic ties between India and Nepal are, without doubt, the backbone on which the political relationship is built, it is this ‘special’ nature of the ties that Nepali leaders since 1950 have chafed at. Those who have ruled Nepal—although many have come to power because of Indian support—perceived India as a threat to their rule, and encouraged anti-Indianism to cement their positions in Kathmandu. (p. 25)

He further talked about contemporary India’s insecurities over losing its influence and primacy in Nepal and South Asia to China. Partially because of China’s ambitions, greatly because of mismanagement of New Delhi’s political affair during the post-Maoist conflict, which peaked with the 2015 blockage, has been the key arguments among leaders to look north, wrote Mulmi (2021) along with (Acharya, 2022). The trend has been also observed in many other articles and journals, and in academic discussions, for instance, historical archives are reviewed for the number of blockades that India imposed on Nepal are popular subjects among many.

This section explored literatures on how these trade connections became integral to the exchange of goods and ideas, the role of Buddhism in facilitating trade, and the impact of political changes on cross-border commerce. The narrative took take us through the medieval trade routes, the influence of colonialism, and into the modern era of bilateral trade agreements and economic cooperation. Along the way, the research examined the challenges and opportunities that have shaped the trade relationship and dug into how trade has influenced the daily lives and cultural ties of the people on both sides of the border.

In conclusion, the historical account of trade between Nepal and China reveals a rich painting of economic cooperation, cultural exchange, and geopolitical dynamics that have significantly influenced people-to-people relations over the centuries. This journey through history has highlighted several key points that underscored the complexity of this relationship. First and foremost, trade has been a fundamental driver of connectivity between Nepal and China, dating back to ancient times. The exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures along the trans-Himalayan trade routes laid the foundation for enduring connections between the two regions. These trade routes were not mere conduits for commodities; they were also pathways for the transmission of cultural values, religious beliefs, and artistic expressions.

Buddhism played a pivotal role in facilitating trade and cultural exchange between Nepal and Tibet. Monasteries and religious institutions acted as hubs of commerce and learning, fostering cross-border interactions among scholars, traders, and pilgrims. The interlinking of Buddhism with trade created a unique bond between the people of Nepal and Tibet, transcending economic interests to encompass spiritual and intellectual dimensions.

Diplomatic engagements and power shifts in the region had a profound impact on trade relations. The rivalry between Nepal and Tibet, as well as external influences such as British India, shaped the ebb and flow of traders. Wars, treaties, and territorial disputes interrupted this history, underscoring the interplay of politics and commerce in impeding the people-to-people relation that emerged through trade. The Newar community emerged as pivotal actors in the trade relationship, particularly in the context of Nepal's entrepot role. Newar traders displayed remarkable adaptability, conducting business across the border with China and forging deep cultural connections while maintaining their distinct identity. Their contributions were central

to the economy of Nepal and hence, people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

As trade evolved, so did the patterns and dynamics of people-to-people relations. The adventures of traders like Pragya Ratna Tuladhar exemplify the personal growth and cross-cultural experiences that trade facilitated. These narratives demonstrated that trade was not just about economic transactions but also about forging enduring friendships, mutual respect, and shared memories, the attributes of people-to-people relation. In the modern era, diplomatic considerations continued to influence the Nepal-China trade relationship. The triangular interplay of culture, trade, and diplomacy is especially pronounced in contemporary times. Nepal's delicate balancing act between its cultural affinity with India and its economic engagement with China reflected the perceptions of Nepalese towards Indian and Chinese respectively. The "China card" has become a strategic tool, and Nepal's leaders navigated a fine line to safeguard their nation's interests while managing the expectations of both neighboring giants.

Stating economic cooperation is one of the most important dimensions of Nepal-China bilateral relations, Prasad (2016), indicated that the first attempt to enhance the economic cooperation between Nepal and China was legally made only after the signing of agreement on trade between two countries on 20 September 1956. Since then, number of Nepal-China agreements have been made. The table 1 below compiled from the publication of (Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, 2021) indicated twelve such agreements.

Table 2.1*List of Nepal China agreements*

S.N.	Agreement Description	Agreement Year (AD)
1	Protocol of the Phytosanitary Requirements for the exports of Citrus Fruit from Nepal to China Between Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Development of the Government of Nepal (MoALD) And General Administration of Customs of the Peoples' Republic of China.	2019
2	Protocol on Implementing Agreement on Transit Transport between the Government of Nepal and the Government of the Peoples' Republic of China	2019
3	Agreement on Transit Transport between the Government of Nepal and the Government of People's Republic of China	2016
4	Agreement between the Government of Nepal and Government of the People's Republic of China on Management of Ports in Nepal-China Boarder Areas	2012
5	Rules of Origin and Related Procedures on Goods Eligible for Duty-free Treatment	2010
6	Memorandum of Understanding Between the Ministry of Commerce and Supplies, Government of Nepal And Government of Tibet Autonomous Region of The	2009

	People's Republic of China On The Establishment of Nepal-China's Tibet Trade Facilitation Committee	
7	Agreement of Co-operation for Industrial Product Inspection between General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine of the People's Republic of China (AQSIQ) and Nepal Bureau of Standards and Metrology (NBSM	2005
8	Agreement between The Government of the People's Republic of China and His Majesty's Government of Nepal on Trade and other Related Matters between the Tibet Autonomous Region of China and Nepal	2002
9	Agreement between His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Government of People's Republic of China Concerning Bilateral Road Transportation	1994
10	Protocol on the Application of the Agreement between His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Government of the People's Republic of China Concerning Bilateral Road Transportation	1994
11	Trade and Payments Agreements between His Majesty's Government of Nepal and the Government of the People's Republic of China	1981
12	Agreement to Maintain the Friendly Relations Between China and Nepal and on Trade and Intercourse Between the Tibet Region of China and Nepal	1956

Note. Adapted from Ministry of Industries, Commerce and Supplies, *A book of Nepal China Agreements*, 2021.

Economic interactions, whether in the regular transactions of border areas or the substantial volume of trade via road and air, indicated both strong and weak ties between the people of Nepal and China in their interactions. In the border regions, where utilities are exchanged on regular basis, economic transactions acted as the foundation for building strong ties. The consistent exchange of goods, services, and resources created a network of interdependence, fostering a sense of community and shared livelihood. Simultaneously, the volume of trade, facilitated by road and air connections, contributed to a broader economic network. Moreover, within the framework of relational thinking, economic interactions with weak ties led to unexpected connections, such as friendships and marriages. Individuals engaged in trade, whether at the border or through larger commercial ventures, developed weak ties that evolved into deeper relationships over time.

In essence, economic interactions, regardless of scale, play a pivotal role in shaping both strong and weak ties between people of Nepal and China. The economic network, when viewed through the principles of social network theory, provided insights into the multifaceted connections that contribute not only to economic prosperity but also to the rich social fabric of relations, friendships, and cultural exchanges between the two nations. However, economic interactions just like cultural interactions are subject to changes with diplomatic decisions and dynamics indicating the connectedness of cultural, economic and geopolitical interactions. The section below highlighted the major diplomatic factors and dynamics that influenced people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

2.2.3 Diplomatic Factors of People-to-people Relations

Among various diplomatic factors, Nepal's geographical proximity with China influenced the state decisions and interactions with people of China. Political entities, much like individuals in their social network or communities, are interconnected through ties that influenced information flow, decision-making, and the overall geopolitical landscape. Geopolitics plays a significant role in shaping the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, nations sharing borders. Trying to summarize the holistic geopolitics, Cohen (2015) wrote:

When geographers reengaged in geopolitics in the 1960s and 1970s, they introduced theories based upon universalistic/holistic views of the world and the dynamic nature of geographical space. Three approaches predominated: (1) a polycentric international power system; (2) a unitary economically based world system; and (3) an environmentally and socially ordered geopolitics. (p. 30)

Summarizing the diplomatic relations of Nepal in first half of twentieth century of Nepal, Upadhyay (2012) stated that:

With the turn of the century (after 1901), as new players like Russia, Japan and Germany emerged in the region, the British sought to use Sino-Nepalese contacts to further their own interests. Nepal, however, was intent on using its political influence in Tibet to bolster its regional profile. (p. 173)

The emergence of new players in the Asian region turned influenced the overall diplomatic network of Nepal. The interactions between these nations during this period can be understood through the lens of influence and power within the network. Attributing to geographical proximity of Kathmandu and New Delhi, Cohen (2015) further stated that:

During the Cold War, Nepal's monarchs sought to distance themselves from Indian control by balancing their relationships with China, the Soviet Union, the United States, and India and maintaining a nonaligned policy.

Nevertheless, and especially since the end of the Cold War, India remains the most influential foreign power in Nepal because of the countries' geographical proximity, their cultural affinity, and the substantial economic aid that India renders to Nepal. (p. 362)

Geography of Nepal remains a constant and a major determinant of nation foreign policy Pokhrel (2021) and that Nepal has remained a strategic location for big powers since the Cold War. Nepal has successfully mobilized various regional and international actors so as to avoid both unwarranted influence by any one country and any possible political games that might be played by competing countries (Khadka, 1992). India's difficult relations with many of its smaller neighbors mean that they have long looked for cooperation with other powers to limit New Delhi's dominance. The Himalayan states (Nepal and Bhutan) and island republics (Sri Lanka and Maldives) are enjoying the new attention paid to them by Beijing and are acutely aware of the economic benefits that come from strengthening ties with China (Ball et al., 2021).

Diplomatic ties of Nepal which was limited to China and India turned global after the end of Rana regime. However, India and China then and now still matter in the internal affairs of Nepal. The expansion of diplomatic and developmentalist linkages between Beijing and Kathmandu has been characterized by new forms of infrastructure-oriented Chinese aid, the cultivation of public-private partnerships involving Chinese firms, and the intensification of trans-Himalayan trade, popularly

and diplomatically described as “a handshake across the Himalayas” (Murton & Lord, 2020).

The contributions of King Mahendra in expanding relations with nations other than India and China is mentioned in almost geopolitical literatures about Nepal. In the historical evolution of geopolitics which is reflected in foreign relations, Khanal, (1973), stated that:

King Mahendra had dominated the Nepalese political scene for over a decade and a half and particularly since the Royal take-over of 1960. He identified himself with the twin objectives of nationalism and development; but the nationalist and politician in him got the better of the reformist. (Khanal, 1973, p. 211)

Under Tribhuvan, New Delhi had defined the principles and the conditions under which Kathmandu interacted with the rest of the world. The new monarch, Mahendra, was more assertive about Nepal’s independent place in the international community. During Mahendra’s tenure political relations were established with a large number of countries and on a different basis than in the past. The United States, Soviet Union, and China all established embassies in Kathmandu in the 1958-1960 period and were followed thereafter by numerous other states from all regions of the world (Rose & Scholz, 1980).

The historical dynamics of influence and power have shaped the people-to-people relations, as nations have strived for strategic advantages and alliances. These historical power dynamics underscored the importance of understanding the broader geopolitical context between Nepal and China. King Birendra succeeded the throne after the death of King Mahendra in January 31, 1973. Speaking of the diplomatic role of King Birendra, Khanal, (1973) wrote that King Birendra was careful to

reiterate and reaffirm the basic principles of Nepal's foreign policy of nonalignment and peaceful coexistence.

Nepal–China relations went on the upswing immediately after signing the treaty in September 1956. The following month, Prime Minister Tanka Prasad Acharya led a 12-member official delegation on a ten-day tour of China, the first Nepalese prime minister to visit a country other than India for nearly half a century (Upadhyaya, 2012). The author spoke of B. P. Koirala's diplomatic relations with India and China. He wrote:

... Koirala traveled to China in March where in one public statement he made a veiled criticism of Beijing's policy toward New Delhi. Announcing a \$21 million grant, Beijing decided to set up residential embassies in Kathmandu and Beijing. The Chinese were also keen to sign a non-aggression pact, but the Nepalese, in ostensible deference to Indian sensitivities, declined. Then Beijing proposed a treaty of peace and friendship, which Koirala asked to be delayed for further consultations. (Upadhyaya, 2012, p. 203)

A recent book by Mulmi (2021) also highlighted the crucial aspect of trade in the region and its connection to people-to-people relations, especially in the context of changing geopolitics. This shift in trade practices, while born out of necessity, also had profound implications for people-to-people relations. While these endeavors were undertaken out of economic survival, they also brought people from diverse backgrounds into contact, creating networks and interactions that, while illicit in nature, played a role in shaping the people-to-people relations in this region. He wrote:

As modern geopolitics and consumerism made it infeasible for the barter economy of old to continue, some in Limi first took to means that broke

existing laws. With the salt trade reduced to a shadow of its former self and Tibetan antiques no longer readily available by the late 1980s, traders felt there was no other option than to tap the region's last remaining asset—its remoteness, which guaranteed a certain degree of invisibility. In the words of a local trader remembering the 1990s. Many people did illegal business, but they had no choice. (p. 49)

To be residents of such an in-between place—and not just in material terms but also geopolitically, tangled in Nepal's international forays while receiving nothing in return—is understandably frustrating, wrote Mulmi in his interview with locals of Lo Manthang, Mustang. Geography is the most fundamentally conditioning factor in the foreign policy of states because it is the most permanent (Diehl, 1991, as cited in Khadka, 1992). Nepal's location between the two giants of Asia, India and China explains how critical diplomatic ties are, not only for international relations but also for domestic stability.

Without due recognition to bringing out desirable changes in their social and political institutions and systems, developing countries like Nepal is still striving for economic development. To this blindness Khadka (1992) claimed that theories of development in 1950s and 1960s treated it purely in terms of mechanistic linear relationship between investment, saving and growth. He further claimed that even the theories of 1970s and 1980s, which focused on growth and distribution, failed to address the problems of socio-political and institutional changes.

Small countries situated in highly strategic areas between larger and more powerful neighbors must, by necessity, formulate strategies and policies. Nepal's economic policy, like its foreign policy, was closely integrated with that of the Indian government, and New Delhi's guidance on such issues was usually the critical factor

in Nepali decision making. The economic instruments of governance are becoming increasingly important as geopolitical rivalry returns, and China's BRI and other geo-economic developments are justifiably seizing the interest of experts and government communities (Ball et al., 2021). With Kathmandu, since 2014, in particular, the provision of Chinese financial support and technical expertise indicated an important reorientation of development planning and implementation (Murton & Plachta, 2020).

At times, diplomatic strategies have been a positive element in evolving policies and strategies for countering perceived threats from neighboring countries. However, even a decade of Rose's writing, Khadka (1992) stated that Nepal's geopolitics have been less effective in recent periods because of the country's inability to less its economic independence on India. Similarly, Baral (2012) indicated that Nepal's geopolitical context can only be connected to its two traditional neighbors-India and China- but it has become evident that the geopolitical environment is determined not only by the establishment but also by emerging powers.

Speaking on the first year of diplomacy of China under the new leadership, (Bhattarai, 2014) indicated that President Xi has introduced the concept of "new type of power relations" to guide China's foreign diplomacy. Recognizing its modern significance President Xi, in diplomatic visit to Central Asia in September and South East Asia in October, 2013 realized the idea of jointly building the Silk Route Economic bent and 21st Century maritime Silk Route—both together became OBOR or BRI (Simkhada, 2017). The author also highlighted that one of the pillars is cultural exchange with emphasis on people-to-people relations.

Throughout history, the diplomatic interactions between Nepal and other nations have been driven by nationalism, sovereignty, increased relations to countries

beyond India and China, and emphasis on economic interactions. The initial focus on nationalism and sovereignty shaped the foundations of diplomatic engagements, laying the groundwork for strong ties based on shared values and interests. Over time, an expanding global exposure beyond neighboring giants, India and China, introduced new dimensions to the diplomatic network. This exposure created weak ties with a diverse array of countries, fostering diplomatic relationships and cultural exchanges.

However, it is in the later stages, with an amplified emphasis on economic interactions, the diplomatic network witnessed the consolidation of both strong and weak ties. Economic considerations, including trade alliances and strategic partnerships, have become pivotal in shaping the diplomatic landscape, influencing the strength and nature of ties within the global network. Therefore, Nepal's diplomatic interactions reflect a complex interplay of nationalism, global exposure, and economic interests, contributing to the formation of a dynamic diplomatic network characterized by both robust connections and evolving relationships.

2.3 Foreign Policy and People-to-people Relations

In formulating foreign policies, the ultimate guide must be their implication for the needs and interests, the welfare and dignity, of individual human beings, rather than for the alleged holiness of symbols and institutions (Kelman, 1970). He further indicated that what can or cannot be done in foreign relations is heavily determined by the structure of the legal system and the decision-making apparatus within a nation, by role definitions, by power considerations, by external influences, and by real conflicts of interest.

Foreign policy is the group of strategies employed by a state to safeguard its nations interests and achieve its goals (Briggs, 2010). While analyzing the evolution of various determinants of foreign policy in selected East Asian Countries, Zakowski

(2017) mentioned four types of determinants of state foreign policy: external objective (such as international law, position of a country in international system or evolution of the nearest international environment), external subjective (such as the international perception of a state and its nation or foreign policy concepts and quality of diplomacy of foreign governments), internal objective (such as geographic, demographic, economic potentials or sociopolitical system of a given country) and internal subjective (such as foreign policy concepts, quality of diplomacy or attitude of the society towards the international environment in a particular state).

Recent academic studies on borders explain that borders have become principal zones of state transformation central to the social and economic growth and development of states and their local and regional communities (Fiagbe, 2023). Speaking on the historical *formal* ties between Nepal and China who share border, Upadhya (2012) stated that:

Although Kathmandu valley had no formal ties with China since the mid-Malla period, the Gorkhali ruler recognized the implications of the Qing's growing power in Tibet. Prithvi Narayan would go on to describe his new country as a "yam between two boulders," a phrase that continues to epitomize its geo-political precariousness. (p. 56)

However, Pandey (2005) indicated that during the reign of King Pratap Malla, Kathmandu has signed a commercial treaty with Tibet authorizing the Newar merchants to mint coins for Tibet. The treaty also conditioned Tibet not to trade with India using other routes.

At the time of establishment of modern diplomatic relations between Nepal and China, the representatives of the two countries issued a joint communique on August 1, 1955 which stated that both governments agree to follow five principles

(panchashel) of co-existence: a) respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, b) non-aggression, c) non-interference in each other's internal affairs economically, politically, ideologically, d) equality and mutual benefits, and e) peaceful co-existence (Shrestha, 2005). Shrestha (2014) also supported that foreign policy of People's Republic of China is based on "Five Principles of peaceful coexistence". However, in history, after its conquest of Tibet in 1951, China began to make friendly offers to Kathmandu, but with evident deference to India's wishes and interests. It was only after India signed a treaty with China on the Tibet question in 1954, for instance that Kathmandu began seriously consider the establishment of diplomatic relations with Beijing.

In 1990, foreign relations were not a primary focus for Nepal, though ties with India were emphasized, as seen in Prime Minister Krishna Prasad Bhattarai's early visits to New Delhi and the SAARC summit in Maldives (Koirala, 1991). Nepal's reliance on foreign aid was evident in Finance Minister's trips to Europe, where countries like France, Switzerland, and Germany pledged development support, debt relief, and assistance with World Bank projects. Bhattarai's diplomatic efforts restored trade relations with India, resolved transit issues, and secured economic concessions, such as enhanced credit and preferential access for Nepali goods. Additionally, Nepal addressed India's security concerns and eased restrictions on Indian nationals working within the kingdom to foster better bilateral relations.

Baral (1992) mentioned that no substantive development has taken place in Nepal's relations with its neighbors, India and China, the same "yam between the boulders" policy formulated by King Prithvi Narayan Shah is being followed with a greater degree of courtesy. Simkhada (2018) also claimed that the traditional "yam between the boulders" concept, remained the most fundamental reality of Nepal's

foreign policy and diplomacy. Even, Baniya (2023) recently mentioned that the divine quotations of King Prithvi Narayan Shah; ‘Nepal is a yam between two boulders’ still reverberates in Nepal's foreign policy, especially in relations to Nepal's geopolitical location between India and China.

Although Nepal’s society is predominantly agriculture and subsistence oriented rather market oriented, it is extremely sensitive to external economic influences, particularly those stemming from India. Khadka (1992) claimed that with the influence of communism about to cross the Himalayas, U.S. strategist thought only a stable government could contain it and as a result U.S. signed a four-point agreement on 23 January 1951 with the Rana regime of Nepal. Recently, Sarkar (2017) stated that after Nepal joined the UN in 1955 and the Colombo Plan 1956, multilateral agencies started to provide assistance to Nepal, in the form of grants and loans. Jaiswal & Ranjan (2022) stated that active internationalism in Nepal that continued from 1960-1990 received new energy after the restoration of democracy in 1990 and even after the transition from monarchy to the secular federal democratic republic in 2008.

Nayak (2008) analyzed the growing involvement of major powers like China, the United States, and the European Union in Nepal since the 1990s, particularly due to their strategic interests, aid contributions, and diplomatic relations. The author highlighted how Nepal’s political transformation, from the democratic movement of the early 1990s to Maoist-led violence by the mid-1990s, attracted these powers’ engagement. This involvement influenced Nepal’s internal and regional politics, prompting India and China to adjust their policies toward a “New Nepal.” While India’s role as a neighboring actor was acknowledged, the study focused on extra-regional powers and examined their implications for India’s geopolitical interests.

KC and Pandey (2018) noted that public diplomacy in Nepal evolved significantly, particularly after 1990, as part of the democratization process, transitioning into a more modern practice under the concept of New Public Diplomacy. Comparing the Panchayat and Post-1990 regimes, they observed that public diplomacy was more effectively practiced in the latter period. Informants acknowledged the enhanced effectiveness of public diplomacy after 1990, while some believed it was more impactful during the Panchayat era. The authors emphasized that public diplomacy was understood as fostering people-to-people relations, with the post-1990 period demonstrating greater adaptability and success.

Baral (2018) highlighted that Nepal's foreign policy has undergone various phases, marked by significant shifts influenced by historical circumstances. These phases include a neutral and non-aligned approach, a policy of isolation, periods of special relations, an equidistance strategy, a zone of peace initiative, and continued non-alignment. Regardless of who governed, the primary aim of crafting specific foreign policies was to maintain power. Even after the transition to democracy, foreign policy choices largely reflected party interests. When rulers failed to address domestic issues, they often shifted focus to external affairs, which frequently led to complications. Such scenarios imposed considerable constraints on the nation's ability to pursue an independent foreign policy.

The diversification of Nepal's foreign policy in the early 1960s was an attempt to ensure regime security and its territorial integrity against perceived threat from its neighbors and also to reduce its dependency with India (Pokhrel, 2021). Jaiswal & Ranjan (2022) noted that following the political changes in 1990, Nepal's political elites increasingly aligned with democratic principles influenced by India and the West. At the same time, longstanding territorial disputes, such as the Lipulekh-

Limpiyadhura-Kalapani issue, resurfaced in the 1990s and again in 2019.

Recognizing the limitations of bilateral approaches, Nepal shifted from a domestically focused development model to greater integration into the global economy through multilateral trade frameworks including the World Trade Organization, the South Asian Free Trade Area, and BIMSTEC.

Since the restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepal's foreign policy has been significantly shaped by globalization and liberalization, marking a shift towards a more open and interconnected approach (KC, 2024). He further stated that the adoption of a liberal multiparty democracy brought changes, including the rise of Marxist political parties, whose actions and beliefs influenced Nepal's policy directions. Proponent of the People's Multiparty Democracy (PMPD), emphasized safeguarding Nepal's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and independence while critiquing global capitalism. This period reflects Nepal's efforts to balance its strategic position between China and India while adapting to new global political and economic realities.

Johnny (2024) analyzed Nepal's foreign policy, emphasizing its defensive realism and non-alignment strategy to address security threats posed by its nuclear-armed neighbors, India and China, while capitalizing on their economic and trade opportunities. The study highlighted that Nepal's hedging strategy significantly reduced economic dependence on India, particularly after 2014, while strengthening ties with China through initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), though caution was advised against the risks of debt-trap diplomacy. The analysis further noted that India's authoritarian tendencies and rising religious fundamentalism have pushed Nepal toward a closer alignment with China, while also underscoring the strategic importance of partnerships with both China and the USA for economic

development and internal security. Despite strong cultural and economic ties with India, Nepal's balanced approach, including its collaboration through the BRI and MCC, was commended for mitigating external influence and fostering favorable trade relationships.

In conclusion, foreign policy and people-to-people relations were dynamic, shaped by Nepal's geopolitical position, historical ties, and evolving political landscape. Studies highlighted Nepal's strategic balancing act between its neighbors, India and China, through principles like non-alignment and defensive realism. The "yam between two boulders" metaphor continued to define Nepal's foreign policy, reflecting its cautious navigation of external pressures. Historical milestones, such as treaties with Tibet, the Panchasheel principles, and modern diplomatic engagements, showcased Nepal's efforts to safeguard sovereignty while fostering economic ties. Political shifts, from the Rana regime to democratic transitions post-1990, significantly influenced foreign policy approaches, emphasizing globalization, multilateral trade, and strategic partnerships.

People-to-people relations or bonds or ties are often discoursed as an essential subject for practitioners of foreign policies and scholars of international relations and world politics. A number of compound concepts similar to "people to people exchange" can be found in English, such as "people to people contact", "people to people engagement", "people to people diplomacy", "people to people dialogue", "people to people cooperation", "people to people communications, and so on (Liwei, 2021a). He further stated that as for those "civil diplomacy" or "public diplomacy" that are promoted, guided, and funded by the government to serve explicitly the country's foreign policy objectives, they constitute only a special area in the mass of civil exchanges. While global engagement for economic endeavors was visible from

the literatures, the section below summarized strategies used by nations to enhance people-to-people relations.

2.4 Strategies to Strengthen People-to-people Relations

Converting resources into realized power in the sense of obtaining desired outcomes required well-designed strategies and skillful leadership (Nye, 2004). In a bid to promote people-to-people relations, China and Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation 1999 and on the Youth Exchange in 2009. Since then, both countries have been executing youth exchange programs through scholarships/fellowships provided by the Government of China (Gauttam et al., 2021). For its long-term benefit Beijing will strengthen its economic engagement and people to-people relations with Nepal (Pokhrel, 2021). On people-to-people relations, Yang, (2017), stated:

One Belt One Road is a huge project covering different regions with diverse cultures and beliefs. Designed primarily to promote “unimpeded trade, as one of the five major goals of OBOR, it is necessary to improve people-to-people bonds”. This will not only improve cultural understanding but help in overcoming the difficulty of doing business without knowing others culture. (p. 15)

All the strategies made or any policies that are formulated by the government with relation to another government was ultimately done for well-being of people irrespective of the nationalities. It was clear that strategies related to people-to-people relations must be prioritized for harmony among the people in the networks of culture, economy, and diplomacy. On the diplomatic level, Simkhada (2018) stated that after the Maoists came to power, China increased its engagement with Nepal by sending various academic, political, economic, and security delegations, including

high-level visits from Foreign Minister and Lieutenant General of the PLA. These efforts demonstrated China's intent to strengthen political ties and address security concerns. The proposal of a new Treaty of Peace and Friendship further highlighted China's strategic evaluation of its role in Nepal.

Apart from infrastructural connectivity, a prime strategy for increasing and strengthening people-to-people relations, cross-border provisions stood as one of the important strategies to enhance people-to-people relations. The people at the border areas are culturally connected irrespective of border lines. Over the past decade, the concepts of border have gained resonance in several disciplines within social sciences (Ullah & Kumpoh, 2018). The author dealt with geographical borders in the Southeast Asian (SEA) region where most countries in SEA share borders with each other. Southeast Asia's heterogeneity has crucial implications for neighbourly relationships, trade, border constructions, migration and refugee flows for all the countries. The study argued that border types determine the level of relationship between neighboring countries and security outcome, trade and population mobility.

Diplomatic interactions such as visits of government officials or leaders as indicated earlier by Simkhada (2018) have opened opportunities for strengthening people-to-people relations through discourse and decision on physical connectivity. Regarding diplomatic interactions contribution in enhancing people-to-people connectivity, Government of Nepal, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2020) stated that:

Similarly, our relations with China have further strengthened with the historic visit of President Xi Jinping to Nepal, presenting new opportunities for expanding and deepening the areas of cooperation. The Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network will offer an important platform to Nepal to pursue its development endeavors. (p. 4)

Connectivity infrastructure development have direct influence in trade and economy which ultimately strengthen people-to-people relations. In Nepal, the evolving infrastructure development, either state-led or international financing road development, have put local population at the crossroads of change such as new border controls, construction booms, tax regime adjustments, and shifts in political economies (Murton, 2020). Importantly, this interplay of infrastructural changes goes beyond reshaping the physical and political landscape—it directly impacted people-to-people relations. As roads cut across regions, they served as conduits not only for physical mobility but also for the exchange of cultures, ideas, and, inevitably, interpersonal connections.

Along with road connectivity or land connectivity, equally important was the air connectivity which also demonstrated the interactions among people of Nepal and China. Kobierecki (2021) aimed at conceptualizing the term *aviation diplomacy* and indicated the interconnected between aviation and diplomacy to some extent. The author claimed that the famous visit by UK's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain to Munich to hold diplomatic talks over the future of Czechoslovakia in 1938 marked a turning point in this context. Aviation provided the possibility to travel long distances quickly, which changed the face of diplomacy in the twentieth century. However, the relationship between aviation and diplomacy is not only about allowing diplomats and state leaders to meet more easily and perform diplomacy, it contributed to proceeding of globalization.

Educational strategies such as higher education and scholarship programs often discoursed under soft power strategy or public diplomacy was yet another significant network composed of numerous people-to-people interactions. Large numbers of Nepalese students are now going to China for higher studies. Higher

education is an emerging and useful strategic tool for promoting Chinese public diplomacy in Nepal, which basically aims at promoting mutual understanding, cooperation and exchanges between China and other countries (Nyaichai & Adhikari, 2023). The authors highlighted that the scholarship programme has directly contributed to increasing people-to-people relations between Nepali youths and Chinese.

China also conducted teachers for Chinese language courses in several academic and language institutes in Nepal. Scholarship strategies in education within a broad diplomatic network have strengthen people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. With such exchanges, the influence of this community is expected to grow. However, understanding the motive behind the China's help, gift, or collaboration or loan must be carefully scrutinized. Speaking on people-to-people relations between China and Africa, Centre for Africa-China Studies (2023) stated that:

From whatever perspective one chooses to appraise China-Africa relations, much analysis tends to be state-centric. Frequent visits between Chinese and African politicians and China's investment in Africa are often the main centers of academic attention... However, latterly there has been an increasing presence of non-state-actor Chinese citizens in Africa. Thus, the face of China in Africa is assuming a new dimension. No longer perceived as a unidimensional object, China evokes different images in Africa depending on who is appraising it. (p. 1)

Governments have always used cultural means to meet their objectives, but in recent years a new range of cultural and social 'diplomats' have gained renewed status, from universities and scientists, to museums and non-governmental

organizations (Briggs, 2010). Speaking on the role of education sector the author further indicated that higher education is one of the most important players in a local area's foreign policy. Over time, as the student immersed themselves in the Chinese environment, relationships with local individuals were established, and they become a part of academic and social networks. These strong ties characterized by deeper connections, trust, and frequent interactions were often observed among the participants of this study.

A recent study by Upadhyay (2023), indicated that Nepali students can currently apply to more than 100 universities across China, most of which are in Beijing. The author claimed that the Chinese government started providing scholarships to international students in 1956. The author indicated that no academic institution from Tibet has been enlisted on the Chinese Embassy website thus far. Though in low numbers, Nepali students have been enrolled in universities across China, concluded in the study.

Equally important was strategic economic agreements which dated back to the formalization of bilateral relations in 1950s. The first "Agreement between China and Nepal on Economic Aid" was signed in October 1956 and from the mid-80s, the Chinese Government has been pledging grant assistance to the Government of Nepal under the Economic and Technical Cooperation Program in order to implement mutually acceptable development projects (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Measuring the impact of personal relations on economic outcomes is difficult. This is because these two aspects of our life are often closely intertwined – social ties facilitate economic interactions, but at the same time people with whom we interact for economic reasons end up becoming acquaintances or even friends (Ortiz-Ospina,

2019). However, researchers have found empirical support for the idea that social connections do, indeed, have large effects on economic outcomes.

Bandelj (2015) indicated that the importance of social relations has been captured by the notion of embeddedness, deriving from argument that economic behavior, as human behavior in general, is embedded in networks of social relations. Conceiving relationality as central of economy, the author recognized that relational work is shaped by third parties, organizational and institutional contexts. Thus, it is argued here that strengthening people-to-people relations between Nepal and China through the understanding of existence of relations among various networks is important.

Understanding the importance of cooperation, both nations, Nepal and China have been promoting people-to-people relations through regular hosting of cultural festivals, friendly visits of the peoples of different walks of public life, exhibition, cultural and film show, and food festivals (Embassy of Nepal, 2022) . Sister city relations between the cities of two countries are growing. These relations are basically meant for carrying out exchanges and cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, transportation, science and technology, culture, tourism, education, sports and health.

In conclusion, while the government of Nepal recognized the pivotal role of strategies such as culture promotion, student exchange programs, economic promotions, and tourism initiatives in bolstering people-to-people relations with China, the practical implementation faced considerable challenges. The complexities arise from the interplay between various facets of relations, for example the delicate balance between diplomacy and economy. Despite the acknowledgment of the significance of these strategies, Nepal encounters limitations, resulting in a disparity when compared to the efforts made by China. The challenges stem from multifaceted

factors, including resource constraints, geopolitical difficulties, and the need for clear policy frameworks. It has become crucial to address these complexities systematically, fostering an environment favorable to strong people-to-people relations. Recognizing the disparities and complexities is the first step towards formulating effective strategies.

2.5 Research Gaps

In China, the number of officially registered Buddhist temples rose by about 68% from 20,000 in 2009 to 33,500 in 2018 (Pew Research Center, 2023). This study also found that few tourists went to Hanshan Temple for sightseeing, while about half for multiple reasons which, including sightseeing, praying for good fortune and engaging with Buddhist history. Interesting to note here and a gap to analyze was the Chinese attachment with Buddhism. Is it a culture, a practice that has been carried on from generations or is it just a touristic amusement? As, Scott (2016) earlier found that Buddhism operated as a tool of diplomacy in a competitive way, as China and India both seek influence among Buddhist countries. The author further added, following the collapse of the Hindu monarchy in 2008, Chinese officials have been ready to play the Buddha card in this new post-Hindu setting in Nepal. These literatures presented a gap in the research on Buddhism, it's connection with the people, it's diplomatic perspective and above all, it's true essence of teaching.

A handful of Nepalese writers have mentioned the term people-to-people in their study of relations between Nepal and China. Despite more ups and downs in Nepal-India relations Dahal (2019) indicated that relation is multi-faceted and is basically characterized by an open border and a strong contact between people to people. He further stated that people-to-people relation are always good and stable while the government-to-government relation has many ups and downs. However,

there remained the gap in literature on the “strong-ness” of Nepal China people-to-people contact. Karki (2020) further stated that it was difficult to find literatures on people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

Impact of bilateral cooperation with China in Nepalese economy has been analyzed in terms of FDI from China to Nepal, trade between Nepal and China, and economic assistance from China to Nepal and tourist arrivals from China over the period of 2000-2019 (Kharel et al., 2021). However, the cross-border labor migration from the border points for short and seasonal periods have not been accounted for in the measurement of economy of Nepal. Such, labor activities accounted as the main income source for the households in Nepal China border settlements at least for those in Nepalese side. The argument here is such labor migrations is expected to increase contacts and interactions with Chinese, a start of weak ties. But a huge gap existed in the study or in the literature of such labor economy and people-to-people relations.

Language, as a powerful medium of connection, acted as a bridge, enabling smoother interactions and understanding. However, in the field of international relations language policies are rarely studied nor studies on language policies have not systematically taken into account the international dimension (Virtanen, 2002). The Tibetan language spoken by the residents of border areas both in Nepal and China served a strong tie along the Nepal China border settlements (Pandey, 2005). Equally important is the Mandarin Chinese language among Nepalese with the surge of Chinese tourist in Nepal (Shrestha, 2017a). This indicated dual nature of language: cultural and commodity. There existed a huge gap in the analysis of language from these two lenses when looking at Nepal-China people-to-people relations.

Review of Nepal's foreign policy revealed several gaps in research when compared to the broader international literature. Globally, studies often focused on the

influence of media in shaping foreign policy, analyzing how narratives and public opinion pressurized decision-makers to adopt particular stances. However, in Nepal, there was limited exploration of how domestic or international media shaped foreign policy debates or influence key actors' decisions. This absence limited the understanding of how external narratives or public sentiment impacted Nepal's engagement with its neighbors and global powers.

Since 1990, Nepal's foreign policy has faced notable transition reflecting a clear shift toward economic liberalization, regional integration, and infrastructural cooperation, imitating broader global trends of globalization and cross-border connectivity. However, public diplomacy has remained underemphasized, with limited focus on people-to-people relations. The nation's dependency on foreign aid and economic support has constrained its ability to formulate independent and assertive policies, leaving it susceptible to the strategic interests of larger powers like India and China. Additionally, Nepal has not effectively leveraged multilateral platforms like SAARC to advance its trade and regional cooperation interests. Its diplomatic strategies have been inconsistent without a cohesive long-term vision for balancing ties with its neighbors. Furthermore, there has been a slow response to emerging global trends such as climate change and digital transformation. Addressing these gaps required a proactive, independent, and adaptive strategies of foreign policy that integrated state-to-state relations with broader multilateral and community-level engagements.

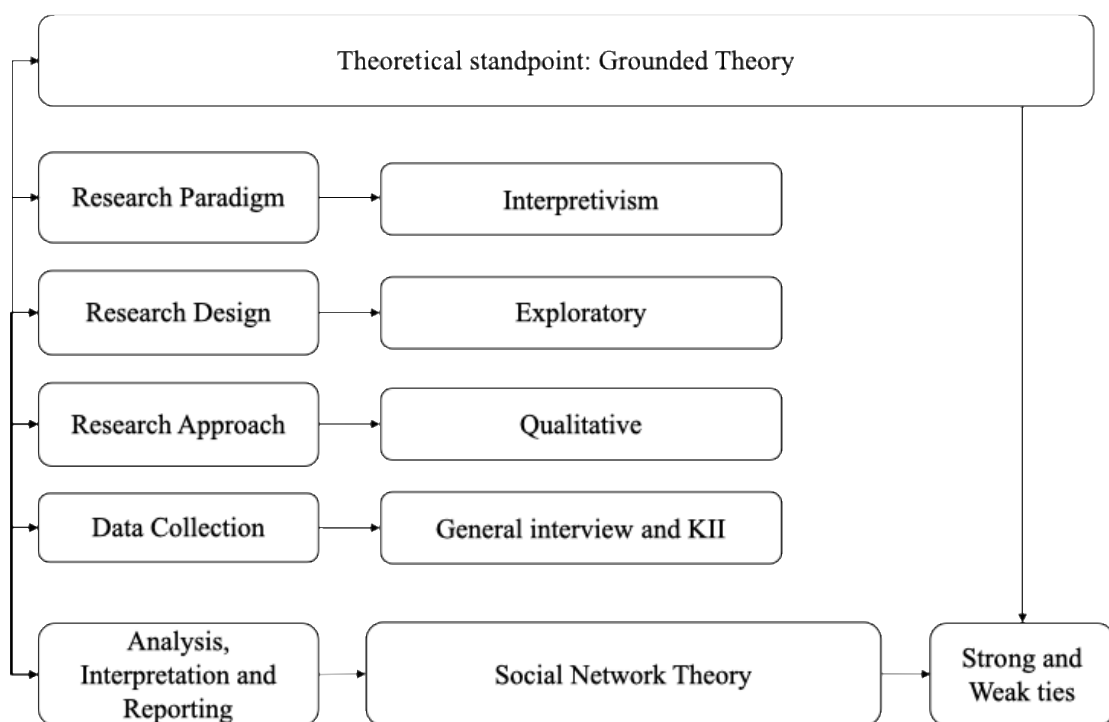
2.5 Conceptual Framework

This study employed Social Network Theory as its theoretical standpoint to examine people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. SNT emphasized the significance of connections and relationships among individuals and groups,

providing a lens to understand how such ties shape social interactions. For methodological approach, Grounded Theory pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1999) was conceptualized. As a qualitative research method, the research started with data collection and analysis to find the themes rather exploring the pre-existing themes. This allowed for identification of complete factors that influenced people-to-people relations. However, rooted in SNT, the study sought to understand how individuals and entities act as nodes (actors) that build the network and the relationship between these nodes.

Figure 2.1

Conceptual Framework for the study of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China



Note. Adapted from literature review and developed by author

The figure above represented the author’s conceptual framework incorporating methodological approach to analyze people-to-people relations. To interpret the nature of these relationships, Granovetter’s theory of relations in social network was

applied. Strong ties (e.g., cross-border marriages, religious pilgrimages, long-term trade) were distinguished from weak ties (e.g., tourism, digital exchanges, casual trade). These ties were not isolated but functioned within and across the three thematic networks, revealing a dynamic web of relational connectivity. This framework enabled understanding of how informal interpersonal interactions—ranging in intensity—contribute to bilateral relations, often beyond the reach of state-led diplomacy. Based on the above-mentioned concepts the figure below represented the pictorial view of the conceptual framework of the study.

2.6 Operational Definitions

People-to-people relations

Defined as the interpersonal and group-level relationship between Nepalese and Chinese individuals that occur through everyday encounters for diplomatic interactions cultural activities, and trade.

Cross-border interactions

Refer to any form of communication between Nepalese and Chinese individuals or communities that occur across or near the national borders, including formal and informal engagements at physical border points.

Social network theory

Used in this study as a framework to analyze the structure and quality of people-to-people relations, emphasizing the roles of individuals (nodes) and the nature of their relationships (ties) within interconnected networks that span cultural, economic, and diplomatic domains.

Nodes and connections

In the context of this research, ‘nodes’ represent individual actors (such as traders, students, or diplomats), while ‘connections’ refer to the social relationships or interactions between them that form a larger relational network.

Strong ties

Operationalized as frequent, emotionally close, and trust-based relationships—such as family ties or long-term friendships—that support sustained and influential people-to-people interactions.

Weak ties

Defined as less frequent or more casual social connections—such as those with tourists, business clients, or social media contacts—that are crucial in expanding the reach of information, opportunities, and cultural understanding between Nepal and China

Relational thinking

Used in this research to describe the approach of understanding individuals and phenomena in terms of their relationships, emphasizing how social connections and interdependencies influence behavior, identity, and cross-border engagement.

Interconnectedness

Refers to the degree to which individuals and networks across Nepal and China are linked through social, cultural, economic, and diplomatic exchanges, forming a web of mutual influence and shared experiences.

Qualitative research

Operationalized as the researcher's direct and immersive engagement in social settings (e.g., border towns, marketplaces, festivals) to observe, record, and understand the nature of interactions between Nepalese and Chinese individuals.

Participatory observation

Operationalized as the researcher's direct and immersive engagement in social settings (e.g., border towns, tourist destinations) to observe, record, and understand the nature of interactions between Nepalese and Chinese individuals.

Triangulation

Used in this study as a methodological strategy that combines data from multiple sources such as participatory observations, personal interviews, and key informant interviews to enhance the credibility, validity, and richness of the research findings.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study of people-to-people relations is guided by specific philosophical considerations, namely, ontology, epistemology, and axiology. Our ontological stance revolved around the belief that there are socially constructed realities (people-to-people relations) that influence human perceptions and thus the behavior. This is in alignment with a constructivist view of the social world. From an epistemological perspective, the research acknowledged the importance of interpreting and understanding the subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals to derive insights. This added itself to an interpretivist or qualitative research paradigm. Furthermore, the axiological position recognized the inherent values of researcher, both ethical and cultural, that shaped the research process and interpretations. With these positions of research methodology, the researcher identified methods and tools for the analysis of factors that influenced people-to-people relations Nepal and China.

3.1 Research Design

This qualitative study on people-to-people relations between Nepal and China employed a grounded theory approach to uncover the underlying factors influencing these interactions. Initially, open-ended and semi structured interviews were conducted with 36 general participants, selected based on their direct interactions with Chinese individuals. These interviews took place at various strategic locations, including border areas, touristic destinations, and the Campus of International Languages at Tribhuvan University. Through these interviews, the study gathered rich, detailed data that allowed us to identify initial themes and patterns in the cultural, economic, and diplomatic interactions between Nepalese and Chinese individuals.

As the research progressed, it was clear that experts' insights were necessary to expose the interactions in diplomatic network which shaped or influenced the daily interactions of cross-border residents as analyzed from the general interviews. Therefore, additional interviews with 19 experts on Nepal-China relations conducted. The data collection was stopped once the no new factor (theme) or their underlying component emerged. This iterative process of data collection and analysis facilitated the suitability of a grounded theory that accurately reflected the complex and interconnected networks which influenced people-to-people.

The thematic analysis of these diverse data sources enabled us to identify and categorize key factors and elements that shape these cross-border relations. The selection of Social Network Theory to underpin our analysis and interpretation was informed by our theoretical and data-driven exploration, which revealed the interconnectedness of individuals, institutions, and societies in Nepal and China. This theoretical lens facilitates the differentiation between weak ties and strong ties within the social network, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the relationships and interactions within the context of Nepal-China people-to-people relations.

3.2 Participants and Research Locations

While not designed, over the period of research, this study engaged 55 respondents, comprising 19 experts in Nepal-China relations through key information interviews and 36 participants from general interviews from different locations, alongside participatory observations in various settings from July 2022 to May 2024. However, three out of 19 experts were interviewed in May, 2024, after suggestions from the examination of draft report of this research. Research locations included visits to Bishwo Bhasa Campus, Thamel, Sauraha, Pokhara and three Nepal-China

border areas which provided a rich backdrop for our data collection. From these locations around 36 participants agreed to participate in the research.

A purposive sampling approach was primarily employed, focusing on participants who had direct interactions with Chinese citizens. The selection criteria were straightforward yet integral to the research objectives: participants needed to have engaged in exchanges or interactions with Chinese nationals. This criterion was applied consistently across the various phases of data collection. As the research unfolded, the initial participants, who were Chinese language students at Bishwo Bhasa Campus, Tribhuvan University, played an active role in finding the next participant and guiding the subsequent data collection process. Their valuable suggestions subsequently influenced the research design, leading to further data collection in tourist destinations like Thamel, Pokhara, and Sauraha, as well as border regions in Tatopani, Kora La, and Rasuwagadhi.

With the saturation of categories and necessity of experts' experience, 16 experts responded to take part in the research among the 24 contacted. These experts were selected in close coordination with the supervisors and their contribution in the field of Nepal China relations. The open ended semi-structured questions were administered to the site of their choice. While most of the experts' interview were held in their private residents, few were conducted at Tribhuvan University premise. The three expert interviews which followed after the review of draft report of this research were interviewed online. While no new emerging themes emerged out of their experiences, the participants reported strategies within the existing themes to strengthen people-to-people relations.

3.3 Nature and Source of Data

Participatory approach of data collection with the combination of observation, personal interviews, and Key Informant Interviews (KII) formed the three major strategies of research methods and sources of data. The research methods were primarily qualitative and included textual and discourse analysis with historical archives and foreign policy documents of Nepal. Data collection started with open interviews to get a broad picture of participants experience. Each interview was recorded and listened frequently before transcribing in English language ensuring the preservation of detailed responses. This approach captured the richness and depth of participants' experiences and perspectives, providing a comprehensive view of people-to-people relations.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection process is the foundation upon which this study is built. For the first phase of data collection, personal interviews at Bishwo Bhasa Campus, Tribhuvan University, a semi-structured interview format was adopted. Open-ended questions provided the initial framework for these interviews. As the discussions progressed, the questions evolved to explore themes and concepts that arose from the participants' narratives. The conversation with participants were in their preferred location such as cafeteria at Bishwo Bhasa Campus or in their private residence.

In the subsequent phase, personal interviews conducted at locations such as Thamel, Pokhara, and Sauraha followed a similar semi-structured format. This approach ensured consistency in data collection and permitted the emergence of common themes across different touristic areas. The personal interviews with participants not only were limited to randomly approached spot interviews but also the interviews with fellow passenger along the journey. The review of these

interviews led the necessity for observations at border areas of Nepal and China. Three border areas were purposively selected and visits were made to gather knowledge of people-to-people relations.

In the border area interviews at Tatopani, Kora la, and Rasuwagadhi, data was collected primarily through semi-structured interviews as well, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. Cultural relations usually tied border residents of Nepal and China along with trade and government policies. To give the final shape to the research, a key informant interview (KII) was conducted among the people who had long experiences and knowledge in people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The participants were current and former diplomats, professors, politicians, journalist, former ambassadors and local representatives of border districts.

The KII conducted with Nepal-China experts in Kathmandu utilized a semi-structured format as well. These interviews were designed to tap into the expertise of individuals well-versed in Nepal-China relations and international affairs. This format facilitated a deep and structured exploration of specific themes and concepts crucial to this research. In addition to semi-structured interviews, field observations and participation were vital components of data collection, especially during visits to border areas. The comprehensive use of semi-structured interviews, combined with field observations, yielded rich qualitative data that formed the basis for the subsequent analysis.

3.5 Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was employed to identify, code, and categorize recurring themes from the interviews and observational notes. This involved a systematic process of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Thematic analysis,

combined with software tools, facilitated the extraction of meaningful and interconnected themes. These themes were refined and categorized into three primary factors: Cultural interactions, economic interactions and geopolitical interactions.

In the data analysis process, the collected data (audio recordings) were transcribed and strictly examined with the differentiation based on the location of the interviews. Simultaneously, the data analysis encompassed the key informant interviews (KII) conducted Nepal-China relations experts in Kathmandu. These experts, with their in-depth knowledge and extensive experience in the domain of Nepal-China relations, provided valuable insights. The process of data analysis involved similar steps for the KII, where thematic categories were developed to capture the perspectives of these experts.

3.5.1 Data Transcription

The transcription process for the audio recordings followed a straightforward but time-intensive approach. Each interview, whether it was a general interview or a key informant interview (KII), was meticulously transcribed manually. This method involved listening to the recorded interviews and simultaneously typing the spoken words into a Microsoft Word document. Importantly, transcription was performed without the aid of automatic speech recognition software. The decision to transcribe manually was made to ensure accuracy and maintain the integrity of the participants' narratives.

As the interviews were conducted in a mix of languages, including Nepali, English, and Chinese (for few terms), the transcription process required proficient language skills to accurately capture the nuances of the conversations. The transcription was done in English language by a trained transcriber to preserve the original meaning and context of the responses. The manual transcription process is

labor-intensive, demanding a careful and attentive approach to ensure that every word and nuance is accurately captured. Once the transcription was complete, the resulting Word documents served as the primary source of data for analysis.

The decision to forego automated transcription software was rooted in the recognition of the intricacies of the study's multilingual and multicultural context. Automatic transcription tools may struggle to accurately transcribe conversations that incorporate various languages, colloquialisms, and cultural references. By transcribing manually, we could maintain the quality and richness of the data, which is essential for conducting a nuanced and contextually sensitive analysis.

3.5.2 Data Coding and Categorization

In the first phase of data analysis, which focused on interviews conducted at Bishwo Bhasa Campus, initial codes were carefully examined and grouped into broader themes. These initial codes provided by participants included reflections on language, cultural dynamics, business, cross-border interactions, government initiatives, and education. By engaging in a thorough process of open coding, we identified recurrent patterns and commonalities within the data. These patterns were subsequently organized into broader themes that influenced people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. This systematic categorization enabled a more structured and comprehensive understanding of the narratives shared by the participants.

Similarly in the second phase and subsequent phases of data coding, the initial codes derived from the transcribed interviews conducted at different locations. In the final phase, the KII of sixteen participants from Kathmandu was analyzed to understand the common themes or keywords representing all the participants. Again, the three broad themes encapsulated the codes identified during KII with Nepal-China relation experts.

3.5.3 Themes and Categories

In this research, the investigation into the factors shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China involved diverse participant groups. Each category of participants contributed unique insights, yielding a spectrum of themes pertinent to this study. These categories encompassed individuals from Bishwo Bhasa Campus, Tribhuvan University, representing the academic and language community; participants from popular tourist destinations: Thamel, Pokhara, and Sauraha, offering perspectives from Nepal's tourism industry; residents of Nepal-China border areas, including Tatopani, Lo Manthang, and Rasuwagadhi, whose experiences shed light on the significance of these geographic regions; and Nepal-China relations experts, who brought extensive knowledge of international dynamics into the discourse.

These categories served as lenses through which different dimensions of people-to-people relations were explored. Each group generated distinct themes and narratives, which, when combined, offer a comprehensive understanding of the complex tapestry that is Nepal-China people-to-people relations. The final themes, developed by consolidating the themes from each category, will provide a holistic perspective and guide our exploration of the intricate interplay between culture, economics, and geopolitics that influence and determine these relations.

3.5.4 Interpretations

Based on the themes from each category, it's clear that several common factors run through these diverse perspectives on Nepal-China people-to-people relations. From the themes derived from your participants, three overarching factors that significantly influence these relations: Cultural interactions, economic interactions, and geopolitical interactions were interpreted as broad themes.

These three factors provided a foundational framework for understanding people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. They indicate that these relations are influenced by complex cultural bonds, economic opportunities, and the intricate geopolitical dynamics between the two nations. While each category brings its own distinctions, these common threads form the core of the overall interpretation, illustrating the multi-dimensional nature of these relations. These factors are interconnected and influence one another in shaping the dynamic between people from Nepal and China.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

This research adhered to strict ethical guidelines to ensure the protection and respect of all participants involved. Prior to conducting the interview, informed consent was obtained from each participant. They were provided with comprehensive information about the study's purpose, the nature of their participation, and their rights, including the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. Confidentiality was strictly maintained; participants' identities were anonymized (where necessary) to protect their privacy, and any potentially identifying information was excluded from the transcriptions and subsequent analyses.

Additionally, the interviews were conducted in a manner that respected the participants' cultural and social contexts. Sensitivity to cultural respect for local customs and traditions were prioritized to ensure that participants felt comfortable and respected throughout the interview process. The data collected were securely stored and only accessible to the research team, ensuring that all information remained confidential and was used solely for the purposes of this study.

The research also followed ethical standards regarding the handling and reporting of data. Findings were presented accurately and honestly, without fabrication or misrepresentation, ensuring the integrity of the research process and outcomes. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, reinforcing the commitment to upholding ethical principles throughout the study. The following sections below present the findings of the research chaptered from four to six in accordance with the objectives of the research.

CHAPTER IV
FACTORS INFLUENCING NEPAL CHINA PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE
RELATIONS

Understanding the fundamental building blocks that shaped people-to-people relations between the people of two nations is of paramount importance in the context of global interconnectedness. This chapter explored the key factors that influence people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The factors or the causes that influenced people-to-people relations have been assumed to exist in the network, a relational thinking. For example, the network of cultural interactions consisting of actors (Nepali and Chinese) and the relations or ties are due to Buddhism or language.

By recognizing and analyzing these key factors, explanations had been made to gain insights into their interconnectedness. The three network which influenced the people-to-people relations between Nepal-China were culture, economic, and diplomatic networks. These categories provided a structured framework for our analysis, allowing us to explore deeper into each aspect. The sections below provided comprehensive exploration of these prime factors, beginning with an examination of the factors that influence people-to-people relations within the cultural network.

4.1 Cultural Network

Cultural interactions significantly shaped the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Buddhism, originating in India and flourishing in Tibet, has spread through scholars and monks and traders is evident from the above literature review. Nepal's association with Tibetan Buddhism has influenced the religious and cultural landscape, with monasteries, temples, and cultural centers serving as important landmarks. The promotion of tourism has also been deterministic for people-to-people relations, with Chinese tourists favoring cultural destinations in

Nepal. However, the interactions in tourism have been explained in detail in economic interactions. Not just Buddhism, the common language that is spoken in and around the border regions of Nepal and China along also had profound influence in people-to-people relations.

Other influential cultural factors were the shared festivals, trans-national marriages, food, cultural appreciations, digital communication and public perceptions that have shaped the contemporary people-to-people relations between the two bordering nations, Nepal and China. However, with strong relations, there are issues that have been narrated by the participants due to current political dynamics along with natural and environmental causes. Hence, cultural relations alone cannot determine the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China in this post-modern pragmatic perspective. Supporting this claim with example of India and Pakistan, a professor at department of international relations and diplomacy (DIRD), TU indicated that:

Culture has an important role is influencing people-to-people relations. But if we have political conflicts between two nations, the cultural bond barely comes into play. If the state-to-state relations in not cordial, no matter how much cultural closeness exist between people of two nations, people-to-people relations will not flourish. (K. K.C., key informant interview, February 23 2023)

However, another participant, a female lecturer at same university who acquired her doctoral in international relations from the Yunnan University, China argued that it is the people-to-people ties have shaped the contemporary relations between Nepal and China, be it at individual or government level. She indicated:

... But for me, how I see things, looking from the history, it was people-to-people contact or bond or ties that shaped other dimensions of international relations between Nepal and China. Be it the time when Buddhist monk came to Nepal for search of Knowledge or the marital relations to speak of, between two nations. It was only after the 2015 earthquake these narratives found the break in public. (L. Nyaichyai, key informant interview, February 20, 2023)

China has consistently emphasized the importance of people-to-people exchanges in its diplomatic discourse and actions. To comprehend this, it was essential to adopt a historical-cultural perspective, as contemporary interstate relations in the 21st century are more globally interconnected economically, politically democratized, and technologically advanced (Yongtao, 2015). However, in case of Nepal-China relations, with rich historical interactions and common border, the cultural factors played even bigger role.

Buddhism, transnational marriage, festivals, language, food, cultural appreciation, digital communication and public perception have been found to determine people-to-people relations between Nepal and China and these have been categorized under cultural network. These eight cultural factors are not just the contemporary factors but also have profoundly influenced the people-to-people relations in Nepal-China history as well. The cultural interactions among the border residents of Nepal and China along with the interactions between Nepalese and Chinese at Kathmandu, Pokhara and Sauraha revealed strong ties and well as weak ties between Nepalese and Chinese. The sections below, summarized each component of cultural interactions accountable for influencing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

4.1.1 Buddhism

While the border participants did not extensively discuss about the religious practices of the Chinese, the input from experts highlighting Buddhism as a factor that influenced people-to-people relations. One of the participants, a driver once inquired about his Chinese passenger's religion. "He said that we don't have religion in China", reported the participant (K. Rayamajhi, general interview, December 3, 2022). However, Buddhism, being a shared practice, served as a common ground for understanding relations between people of both nations as echoed by all the experts. This shared *religious element* contributed to building stronger ties, facilitating cultural exchanges, and fostering mutual understanding, which aligned with the principles of social network theory in creating connections through shared norms and values.

All the experts agreed Buddhism, as cultural factors that determine people-to-people relations but it is not the only factor that determines people-to-people relations in today's contemporary world. A professor at the DIRD indicated that:

Buddhism is like one of the fundamental means to bond Nepal China relations through Bhrikuti. We can say that Buddhist pilgrimage, Buddhism and Buddha have been soft power of Nepal in China. And that interchangeably alter our diplomatic relations. For example, the monasteries in China have numerous monks for Sindhupalchowk and Humla and many other parts of Nepal. These Nepalese monks were highly respected as they were from Nepal, land of Buddha. So, Buddhism is one key factor to establish diplomatic relations with China and hence will influence people-to-people relations between two nations. (K. K.C., key informant interview, February 23, 2023)

Describing these relations with Chinese counterpart as weak tie due to official interactions, Mr. K.C also indicated of strong tie among the Chinese and Nepalese in

Burang county. Further, one of the former ministers and ambassadors to China who now focused much on the Buddhism argued it as one of the cultural pillars which bonds the people of two nations. He stated that:

The relations with North or the relations due to Buddhism is less very less spoken. Our leaders speak of Lumbini for quick benefits only, in reality they do not have northern relations or buddha in their heart. So, cultural barriers are only in the thoughts of people. China globalized Buddhism more than India. China was able to preserve Buddhism when it was almost condensed in Nepal and India by Muslim emperors. We all know about Buddhahadra who worked on the Buddhist scripts and its translations. The recent excavation team at Kapilbastu also indicated the reality of Buddhahadra. (H. L. Shrestha, key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

Strongly supporting Buddhism as a crucial factor in cultural network, an element of strong social tie between the people of China and Nepal, one of the key experts, a former ambassador started the interview with focus on Buddhism. He stated:

Buddhism is a common factor in people-to-people relations, when its between Nepal and China. In south we have open border so there are no problems of visa, currency or language. However, the relations with the North are some sort of restricted to say, with visa and passport requirement. But in history, it was the Chinese monks such as Wu Cheng or Faxian who first initiated people-to-people relations. (R. Acharya, key informant interview, February 25, 2023)

Strong ties emerged within communities of Buddhist practitioners, scholars, and institutions engaged in academic collaborations and spiritual practices.

Pilgrimages to key Buddhist sites acted as strong tie generators. In contrast, weak ties also formed through broader interactions at Buddhist events, tourist encounters, and casual exchanges. These weaker connections contributed to a broader network, introducing diversity and expanding the reach of cultural and spiritual influence. Similarly, one of the expert participants, once a PhD student at China also spoke of how Chinese related Nepalese with Buddha and Buddhism. She stated that:

They often use the word Buddha when they meet any new Nepali student or colleagues. Even, my professor, with whom, I hardly interacted apart from academics, often respected me or sort of, when they realize I am from Nepal and land of Buddha. There are monasteries and heritage places in China where you are offered free entry for Nepalese only. This sort of activities or policies make us feel we are close to Chinese people as well. However, having said that, we must also acknowledge the fact that in general Chinese do not know about Nepal as a country. (K. Bhuju, key informant interview, February 21, 2023)

Kriti Bhuju's interactions with her colleagues or her professors (especially her supervisor) was limited to study, beyond that only her colleagues (very few) shared about her family. The strong tie that emerged with her few colleagues provided her a sense of belonging and emotional support. Important to note here was the mention of Buddha which developed a sense of connection among Nepalese and Chinese.

Sharing similar thoughts on Buddhism as one of the deterministic factors for people-to-people relations, one of the participants, former chief secretary of GoN also mentioned about Gautam Buddha and his preaching's in Chinese literatures. He further elaborated that:

Our relations with China are founded by culture. We have Buddhahadra in literatures who first visited China. Also, it has been justified that Buddhism as a religion flourished during the time of Gautam Buddha. Chinese monks also visited Nepal during the 5th and 7th century. From China, journey to Asia by monks such as Xuanzang and Faxian, described Lumbini. The description of Nepal by them is a valuable source. (L. M. Paudyal, key information interview, May 12, 2023)

Almost all the participants who were considered as experts for the research indicated Gautam Buddha and Buddhism as a culture that connected people-to-people along with other factors. Interestingly, H. L. Shrestha who now focused on Buddhism further elaborated about Buddhism. He indicated that:

Interesting is to know the word Chiniya Lama (Chinese Lama) the narratives these days used for a monk in Boudha, Nepal. History has it, a monk teacher from Xichuan acted as an interpreter between Nepal and China during Nepal's war with Tibet. Happy with his service, the then ruler of Nepal provided settlement for him in Boudha. Now a days the term Chiniya Lama Institute is more discoursed. Or, there is another, Duppa Lama from Bhutan in Swyambhu. Similarly, another lama, Han Lama in Lumbini. So, the argument I am trying to make here is, even in Buddhism there is so much diversity. The Chinese monastery in Lumbini receives almost Han Buddhist from all over the world. So, in Nepal, Chinese have two religious places, one Boudha, with Chiniya Lama another the Chinese monastery in Lumbini. Also, in Nepal the Newar Buddhist practice the culture which has the aspect of Tibetan Buddhism, Vajrayana. (H. L. Shrestha, key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

With the perception of Hiranya Lal Shrestha and other experts, it was clear that Buddhism is more cultural than a soft power strategy in foreign policies in current years. Hence, critical perspective of Buddhism cannot be ignored given that when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power in 1949, it decided to adopt an official policy of atheism (Maheshwari, 2021). He further stated that under Xi Jinping, the CCP has tried to infuse all religions with a 'Chinese' characteristic to further its own agenda. The author claimed that Buddhism into two separate sects in China; the distinct form of Tibetan Buddhism practiced in the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) by six million ethnic Tibetans, and the CCP-approved version called Chinese Buddhism practiced by over 250 million Chinese people.

Buddhism as a cultural diplomacy has been adopted by India as well. Scott (2016) found that Buddhism operated as a tool of diplomacy in a competitive way, as China and India both seek influence among Buddhist countries elsewhere in Asia and among international Buddhist organizations. He claimed that China's use of Buddhism is straightforwardly tactical and to a degree disingenuous while India has incorporated genuine spiritual elements into its use of Buddhism, albeit within a setting of Hindu reinterpretation of Buddhism. Not just China and India, in recent years, a number of Asian countries have increasingly turned to Buddhism as a balm to relieve tense relations and foster cultural understanding (Chai, 2022).

The most common Chinese translation of "religion," zongjiao (宗教) is usually understood as a form of organized religion and the government have officially recognized five zongjiao: Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam, Protestantism and Taoism (Pew Research Center, 2023). Affiliations, beliefs and practices closely associated with these religions are typically described as zongjiao while, Confucianism, as well as folk beliefs and practices, are not typically considered zongjiao. In the early 2010s,

state and local authorities – eager to boost their local economies and cultural pride by promoting religious tourism – often permitted and even encouraged the construction or renovation of Buddhist, Taoist and folk religion temples. By 2012, religious venues which are mostly Buddhist and Taoist – reportedly accounted for nearly half the country’s top-rated (or 5A-rated) tourist site. This research clearly indicated Buddhism as a soft power strategy in China’s foreign policy.

A study indicated that individuals who engage in regular religious activities and build social connections within their religious communities tend to report higher life satisfaction (Lim & Putnam, 2010) . The same study suggested that the positive effect of friendships within a religious congregation on life satisfaction depends on the strength of one's religious identity. However, it doesn't find substantial evidence supporting the idea that other private or personal aspects of religious beliefs significantly impact life satisfaction, except through regular attendance and building social connections within a community.

The Buddhist communities that are shared between these two nations determined and influence the people-to-people relations. Thus, it is argued that through an analysis of cultural practices, shared religious events, and the development of social ties within these communities, we can understand how these factors contribute to individuals' overall life satisfaction and shape the dynamics of interpersonal relations. Remarkably, an article from 1990 indicated that we cannot fully understand Buddhist history in the Himalayan region or in the Kathmandu Valley without taking into account the trans-regional relations the diaspora *Newar* merchants sustained across the Indo-Tibetan Himalayan frontier (Lewis, 1990).

In recollection, the exploration into the role of Buddhism in shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China revealed a complex narrative deeply

rooted in cultural connections and shared religious elements. While border participants provided insights into the practical interactions among individuals, the perspectives of experts illuminated the broader cultural significance of Buddhism. The shared respect for Gautam Buddha and the propagation of Buddhism as a cultural pillar emerged as a binding force that surpassed geographical boundaries. The recognition of Lumbini as the birthplace of Buddha held symbolic importance, fostering soft power diplomacy of Nepal. As echoed by experts, the dynamics of Buddhism not only influenced interpersonal connections but also played a pivotal role in shaping diplomatic discourse. However, talks of infrastructure links to bring “Buddhist tourism” trails from China into Nepal through an extension of the Qinghai–Lhasa railway line down to Lumbini has been a source of concern for India (Scott, 2016).

The diverse expressions of Buddhism within the communities, from *Chiniya* Lama in Boudha to the Chinese monasteries in Lumbini, demonstrated the complex web of cultural interconnectedness, often with geopolitical strategies of both the nations. Irrespective of this complexity the shared events and practices among different “Buddhist groups” developed a sense of community and belonging, contributing to overall life satisfaction. This cultural and spiritual connections served as evidence to the permanent influence of shared cultural practices in shaping the strength of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

4.1.2 Transnational Marriage

Transnational marriage, between Nepalese and Chinese influenced how individuals look at people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Marriage, a deeply rooted aspects of human connection transcended individual interactions, extending their influence to the broader realms of culture, society, and diplomacy.

Furthermore, the intermingling of kinship ties across borders contributed to the formation of a shared identity that bridged the gap between Nepalese and Chinese border societies. The study of dynamics of transnational marriage in the context of bilateral relations exposed the richness of cultural interplay. In this search, the study explored into the personal stories, traditions, and rituals that highlight the significance of marital and familial bonds in shaping people-to-people relations.

In Thamel, K. Khatiwada, (on August 16, 2022), the proprietor of a souvenir shop, shared a compelling personal narrative that indicated the interconnectedness fostered by marriage across the Nepal-China domain. He revealed a familial link, as his brother's union with a Chinese woman (during academic pursuit) unfolded during the interview. Mr. Khatiwada illuminated the harmonious blend of cultures within this cross-cultural marriage, stating, "Although she is from a different culture, whenever she is in Nepal, he tries to follow the culture here." This commitment to cultural adaptation underscored the adaptability within the social network, as individuals actively engage in practices that promote understanding and unity. As the participant hinted at future plans, mentioning, "They are having good relations and planning to have kids too," it amplified the enduring nature of these relationships, perpetuating cultural connectedness through the generations. In the realm of social network theory, this stood as evidence to the strength of ties that goes beyond cultural boundaries, shaping a shared space where diverse traditions meet.

In Tatopani, Upper Mustang, and Rasuwagadhi, a distinctive cultural integration unfolded through the frequent occurrence of marriages between Nepalese and Chinese individuals. Situated in these border regions, the prevalence of such unions served as a noteworthy observation in the findings. The geographical proximity of these areas functioned as a natural conduit, fostering connections that

transcended borders and extended into the domain of kinship. A strong tie illustrated itself in these matrimonial ties, where the formed bonds not only linked individuals but also linked cultural practices. These marriages emerged as key nodes in the social network, facilitating the exchange of traditions, languages, and ways of life.

The insights from L. Sherpa (on October 20, 2022) from Tatopani, Sindhupalchowk, noting marriages between Nepalese girls and Chinese boys, indicated the presence of social bonds and the acceptance of intercultural unions. Her verbal expression, conveyed it as usual practices and a sense of strong kinship relations. This observation stands as evidence to the development of personal relationships and a growing intercultural understanding within these cross-border communities. Furthermore, Dukke K. Bista (on November 10, 2022), from Lo Manthang with the mention of stories about individuals with relatives on the Chinese side, underscored the significance of family connections in maintaining cross-border cultural relations. These familial ties, facilitated through official channels that allow visits, served as concrete evidence supporting the argument that marriages and kinship play a pivotal role in shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Together, these narratives reflected a cultural network of transnational marriage and personal connections that contributed to the culture shared between the two political nations.

Notably, the narratives of L. Chhumu from Rasuwagadhi (on December, 2022) indicated the how marriage was common and that those marital relations were good. L. Chhumu, around twenty years old and who recently completed her 12th standard, was visiting her hometown at Timure, the final town before the border-crossing at Rasuwa. She indicated of having experiences of visiting Chinese side, Gyirong where her relatives still stay. She further shared:

Two girls from our village got married to Chinese boys. They are having good relations after the marriage. One of them is living in Lhasa while other at Gyirong. Since, we speak the same language, we do not have problem in communication or sharing ideas and feelings. If we can resume the cross-border activities, not only this place will develop but also the kinship relations with them will flourish. (L. Chhumu, personal communication, December 5 2022)

Transnational marriages are the display of how strong the relation is between Nepalese and Chinese residing at the border settlements. However, with mobility restrictions, the border residents often expressed sadness as their visits have been contained and controlled after the pandemic. Apart from the border residents, experts also acknowledged the transnational marriage between Nepal and China. A professor at the DIRD, TU, in particular went on to say:

However, is it not easy to make a bold statement on the robust relations of the northern people with their Chinese counterpart. The people of the northern border share similar and intimate relations with Chinese comparable to the relations between Nepalese and Indian in the southern borders. The geography and the terrains are harsh, however, the shared culture, the transnational marriage and cross-border trading are examples of profound historical and contemporary people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. (K. K.C., key informant interview, February 23, 2023)

Transnational marriage acted as a network strengthening the cultural interactions that determined people-to-people relations. However, a serious martial issue has been raised by an expert where she represented the case of Lapchi village of

Dolakha district. The trans-national marriage which was facilitated for many years have almost come to a halt. She spoke:

...issue in marriage, why, because after earthquake Chinese border policies put interference on the marriage relations of Nepalese and Tibetan. A particular community of Lapchi village would get associated with or married to people of their own community. This was facilitated by cross-country marriage. To talk about Lapchi, it is 182 square km area which Nepal received on exchange for another village (phalak) in 1962 with China. I have written an article naya muluk in Nepal Views last year about this. So, if we look at the history its people-to-people relations only which shaped the relations today. (L. Nyaichyai, key informant interview, February 20, 2023)

In conclusion, transnational marriage emerged as pivotal determinant in shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. From historical literatures on Bhrikuti and observations from border areas and touristic destinations, transnational marriage developed a sense of strong relations among the respondents. The accounts shared by participants, such as K. Khatiwada (on August 16, 2022) in Thamel and those in Tatopani, Upper Mustang, and Rasuwagadhi, illustrated the development of personal relationships and intercultural understanding through these unions. The narratives emphasized the profound impact of family ties and social bonds in fostering cross-border cultural relations, highlighting the interconnectedness across the national boundaries. However, the post-earthquake and COVID-19 has witnessed the imposition of policies that, in some instances, have created impediments to such connections as indicated above. The restrictions on marriages and visits between relatives have introduced new challenges. Hence, evident from the history, literatures, and participants, it is argued here that transnational marriage is a

detrimental factor that determines people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

4.1.3 Festivals

Recalling the festival seasons at Tatopani, one of the border participants, Bal Bahadur Shrestha (on October 24, 2022) indicated, “During festivals, almost five to six thousands of livestock particularly, mountain goats were imported in a day from China”. But with the closure of border after the earthquake, the traditions of Chinese traders coming to Nepal with herds of cattle have declined and almost stopped, he further added. Sharing the similar experiences on mobility in Lo Manthang, participant Dhan Bahadur Gurung indicated that:

Of course, the absolute closure of border areas has directly and indirectly affected the lives of cities like Lomanthang that share a lot of cultural similarity. Apart from those provisions of cattle grazing within defined areas across the border also increased interactions. The relations between the people of Nepal and China in the border areas have been historically good. This suggests a sense of cultural ties between the two nations. (personal communication, November 4, 2022)

In the context of the grazing community, strong ties were seen within the local communities on both sides of the border who have a shared traditions of allowing and participating in cross-border animal grazing. The closure of the border and the imposition of rules disrupted these strong ties, leading to a sense of loss and sadness among the communities. Similarly, weak ties were observed in the interactions between the local communities and those who come from Tibet for the sales of livestock. These interactions, while not as deeply rooted as the local connections, contribute to the overall network. Weak ties often bring fresh information and

resources from outside the immediate community. The closure of the border and the restrictions on such activities affected these weak ties.

Along with these traditions, participants at the border area also spoke of common festivals organized every year, sometimes twice a year across the border on Chinese land. People-to-people interactions have involved through such festivals as well. However, Ashok Lama of Mustang added that:

We are losing our festivals and events that reflected the closeness among the people of two nations. And these relations are in fact are more important compared to physical boundary lines. Efforts have to be made to open the border for the people of Mustang and visitors". The "tigi festival" where people from both sides of the border participated in festivals like the sacrifice of mountain bull for the god. This reflects the importance of shared cultural rituals and festivals in the region. We also observed events in the Chinese market where lamas (Nepalese monks) used to dance during festivals. This demonstrates cultural exchange and cooperation between the people of Upper Mustang and their Chinese neighbors. (personal communication, November 8, 2022)

One of the participants, an administrative officer living in Lomanthang also highlighted cultural aspects related to border interactions. During the "mela" or festival, border crossings would open, and local people, particularly from areas like Lomanthang and Chhosar, were given priority. This tradition allowed cultural exchanges between people on both sides of the border. Usually, the fresh relations started with a weak tie but with open borders for days and frequent interactions, they built strong ties. Additionally, the participant mentioned being treated well during

their visits to the Chinese side, emphasizing the importance of interpersonal relationships and cultural exchanges in border regions.

Dhukke K. Bista, 71 years old, recalled an era when it was easy to cross the border and travel in Chinese territory. During that time (when Dhukke was 17 years old), cultural exchanges were common, and both Nepalese and Chinese people visited each other's regions. Shared practices such as grazing yaks in each other's territories indicated the depth of cultural ties between the two nations. "Twice in a year during the month of Baishak and before dasain, the border used to open for 7 days on the occasion of *mela* (festival) and even that has stopped after covid-19", he further added.

The unhappiness in Dhukke could be observed during the interview due to restrictions in cross-border. Apart from the celebrations, procuring foods and household utensils were other major problems faced due to such restrictions. The common festivals celebrated on both sides of the border represented strong ties within the communities. The joint participation in these festivities created a strong bond between the Nepalese and Chinese border communities. The act of visiting the Chinese side during these festivals fosters a deeper connection, creating shared memories and reinforcing the sense of community. These shared festivals also contributed to weak ties by attracting participants from both sides who may not have regular interactions. However, the closure of the border and disruptions caused by events like the earthquake in Tatopani and the impact of COVID-19 have led to weakening of these ties. The reduced frequency of cross-border interactions during festivals resulted in a loss of cultural exchange and diversity.

However, interesting to know was the intervention of communication technologies which emerged as a pivotal means to communicate with their relatives or

Chinese counterpart. The impact of communication technology such as WeChat and social media on cross-border social networks was visible among the border residents and touristic destinations. Whether it's a communication between a family member (strong ties) or a communication between traders of Nepal and China (weak ties) through WeChat, technology enabled continuous interaction, providing insights into how participants stay connected and mitigate the impact of physical separation.

Narendra Tamang, (on personal communication, July 26, 2022) spoke of new communications and relations established by the internet and telecommunication traditions of modern day. He mentioned the role of digital media and the internet, which have contributed to Nepal's appeal as a travel destination for Chinese tourists. This pointed to the impact of technology and online networks in shaping people-to-people relations, aligning with the digital dimensions of social networks. Similarly, a resident of Timure Lapka Chhumu, Rasuwa expressed her views how digital technology has become an alternative to mode of interaction, although she missed Chinese chocolates which she used to get when border was open for her to visit Chinese markets. She elaborated:

Before covid-19 outbreak and lockdown, we were allowed to visit our relatives residing in Gyirong around 24 kilometers from the border. But now we interact through social media. We had a good relation with Chinese people. I haven't able to see or purchase Chinese foods these days. It was after covid-19 that everything got contained. While visiting Chinese territory, the Chinese police and authorities are very concerned about the Nepalese visitors. Back when cross border mobility was normal, we used to get almost everything from the Chinese market. Also, the Chinese used to buy a lot of green chilies. (L. Chhumu, personal communication, December 5, 2022)

Most of the participants who have visited the Chinese border and stayed for long spoke of how they were treated well during his stay at the Chinese market place for days. Pasang Tamang of Lo Manthang in particular stated, “They (Chinese) treated us like brothers, since we stayed long (2/3 nights) in their hotel while procuring commodities in the Chinese market (personal communication, November 11, 2022). He further added that, “now with absolute closure, such relations are getting cold and soon will be forgotten”. The statement reflects the traditions of cultural aspect by indicating the warmth and friendship between the Nepalese and the Chinese, as they were treated like "brothers" during their visits to the Chinese market. This speaks to the cultural exchange and the strong interpersonal relationships that were formed when borders were open. Such relationships often outpaced mere economic transactions.

In the display of Nepal-China cross-border relations, the advent of digital technology has not merely been a conduit for communication; it has been a transformative force, reshaping the way of interactions. The digital era has birthed a new realm of possibilities, allowing individuals to think beyond geographical confinements. Through the lens of social network theory, we witnessed the dynamic interplay of strong ties, weak ties, and the resilience of these networks in the face of physical barriers. In the markets near the border and the touristic destinations, the digital conversations created virtual bridges that span across cultures. As we navigated the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, it was clear that the landscape of cross-border relations is evolving, with digital technology acting a bridge for change. In an age where borders are both physical and virtual, the exploration of these relations through the prism of social networks becomes not just insightful but imperative.

Reflecting on the shared festivals along the Nepal-China border, the findings present a rich cultural connection that have evolved over time. Through participant narratives, it was evident that festivals served as focal points for people-to-people interactions, fostering strong ties within border communities. The joint celebration of festivals across the border highlighted strong bonds created through shared values and traditions. The act of visiting each other's regions during festivals nurtured deeper connections, creating lasting impressions. Moreover, these shared festivals contributed to the formation of weak ties by attracting participants who may not have regular interactions. However, the closure of the border and disruptions caused by significant events weakened these ties, resulting in a loss of cultural exchange and diversity.

4.1.4 Language

Language has been identified as one of the cultural factors that determined people-to-people relations. Whether it's the Tibetan language that is spoken by the border residents of Nepal and China or the Nepalese speaking Mandarin with her boss in Kathmandu, language seemed to have a positive and strong tie between the people to two nations. Narendra Tamang (personal communication, 26th July, 2022), tourist guide during interview at the Bishwo Bhasa Campus indicated the same. "Language has an incredible power to connect people," noted the participant. He emphasized how speaking Chinese allows him to establish rapport with his clients. "I was respected while speaking in Chinese language with the tourists," he shared, underscoring the significance of language proficiency in enhancing trust and mutual respect among individuals.

This interview exemplified the connections between language proficiency, social networks, and people-to-people relations. As a professional tourist guide with a

deep understanding of the Chinese language, the participant stood as a prime illustration of the role of language in shaping strong social ties, a fundamental concept in social network theory. His journey into the world of Chinese-speaking tourists demonstrated how language proficiency can profoundly influence an individual's social network. Starting as a guide in 2012 and eventually mastering Chinese language since 2017, his transition was primarily driven by the surge in Chinese tourists, illustrating the economic aspect within the realm of cultural elements. This economic incentive led to the development of "strong ties" with Chinese tourists. As he guided a group of Chinese, he not only shared language but also culture along the journey. This interplay of language and social networks, as observed, echoed the findings of social network theory, which emphasize that strong ties are developed through shared languages.

His experiences highlighted the role of language in fostering cross-border economic interactions too. He points out that "with basic Chinese language proficiency, earning 50,000 to 60,000 Nepalese Rupees is not an issue." This financial aspect, he suggested, is just one side of the broader network of connections. Furthermore, his observations regarding the preferences and behaviors of Chinese tourists provided valuable insights into the social dynamics and experiences that occur within these networks. This multifaceted interaction among language, culture, economics, and social networks is evidence to the complex interplay of factors that underpin people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

Apart from the interview with participant Narendra Tamang from Bishwo Bhasa Campus, three other participants Dil Maya Ale, Gyanu Rai and Pratikshya Pradhananga also echoed the commodity value of language along with the dimensions of people-to-people connections. All three participants demonstrated how language

proficiency, particularly in Chinese, significantly influenced their interactions with Chinese individuals. Dil Maya Ale, an experienced Chinese language teacher, highlighted that her Chinese colleagues also viewed English language proficiency positively. This aligned with the idea that language proficiency, including English and Chinese, acts as a facilitator of cross-cultural connections within their network of people speaking same language.

The interviews also underscored the practicality of Chinese language proficiency, not just for social interactions but also for professional growth. Participants, Gyanu Maya Rai and Pratikshya Pradhananga both acknowledged the rising inflow of Chinese tourists into Nepal as a motivating factor for learning the language. Their desire to work in the tourism sector emphasized the link between language proficiency and employment opportunities. These findings support the idea that the social network plays a vital role in influencing individuals to make decisions related to language acquisition and career paths. Gyanu Maya Rai, in particular noted that when Chinese individuals encounter Nepalese who are proficient in English, they are more willing to engage in conversations. This highlighted the role of language proficiency in facilitating communication and fostering a sense of belonging.

Participant, Keshav Gyawali, who worked at the China's Tibet Book Store in Thamel, provided insights into the cultural aspects that shape people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The bookstore's focus on Chinese culture, education, and politics served as an example of cultural appreciation and intellectual exchange, as he noted, "Our store serves books on culture, education, and politics of China" (personal communication, August 10, 2022). The interview also emphasized the role of language in people-to-people interactions. While the China's Tibet Book Store distinguished Chinese culture, he mostly used English in his personal

interactions with Chinese clients due to inability to speak in Mandarin. This showcased the practicality of English as a language of communication and highlighted the significance of language proficiency to bridge linguistic divides. The desire of a Chinese individual to exchange language lessons, teaching Chinese in return for learning Nepali, exemplified the potential for linguistic exchange to facilitate cultural understanding and foster connections. These narratives highlighted the importance of language in building bridges between individuals from different linguistic backgrounds.

Similarly, Krishna Khatiwada's experiences in his *Khukuri* store revealed the preference of language in fostering people-to-people relations. While he does not speak Chinese, he observed that Chinese tourists often prefer to visit shops who attended them in Chinese language. This language preference emphasized the significance of effective communication, and the shops that accommodate it tend to attract more Chinese visitors. Padam Bhandari, a tourist guide from Sauraha mentioned, "I took a year of training on Chinese language... but few Chinese start conversations" (on September 22, 2022). The ability to communicate in Chinese enabled stronger ties with Chinese tourists who visit Nepal, however when the conversation is very limited as indicated by Padam, the importance of language is rarely felt.

One concept that aligned with above findings is the notion of linguistic accommodation and its impact on social relationships. Individuals modify their language use to accommodate the linguistic preferences of their social network (Milroy, 2000). This aligned with our observation of Krishna Khatiwada's *Khukuri* store, where the preference for Chinese language among Chinese tourists influences their choice of shops. This suggested that accommodating language preferences

within a social network is a strategy to enhance ties and communication. Additionally, the concept of social networks (as speech communities) emphasized that language was a marker of group identity. In our findings, Padam Bhandari's training in the Chinese language reflects an effort to align with the linguistic preferences of the Chinese tourists. However, the limited nature of the conversation, as noted by the participant, is an interesting point of analysis. Milroy's work provided a theoretical lens to interpret the dynamics within the social network, where language proficiency contributed to both inclusion and the extent of communication.

The importance of language in determining people-to-people relations or ties was evident even from the participants for border areas. A network of people existed who can be labelled as "speech communities" as they share similar language (Tibetan or *Lama* language) with the people across the border. The shared language became the marker of a specific type of connection, perhaps a stronger tie within the network when communicating with individuals from the other side of the border. Hence, it is argued that language operated as a social marker, influenced group dynamics, and contributed to the formation of distinct speech communities within the broader social network of border interactions between Nepal and China.

Focusing on the speech communities at Nepal China border who share similar language also with the Tibet of China, one of the experts shared an event which happened to him before forty years. He stated:

... around 40 years ago, in (Santa Bhawan) Patan Hospital, a Tibetan refugee's baby was also born there. The grandmother of that baby talked to one of Nepalese (a thakali). Surprised with their talks, I asked the Nepalese woman, "Do you understand and speak Tibetan language?". She replied yes and stated that our language and their language have similarities. Why am I

telling this story, because our relations with Northern neighbor is less spoken and yet to study more. What I feel is that our Nepalese at the district bordering China speak and understand the language spoken across border. (J. R. Acharya, key informant interview, February 22, 2023)

The cultural perspective of language was visible from the insight of Mr. Acharya. Lamu Sherpa (on personal communication, October 20, 2022) from tatopani used the term "*do maase*" (speaking two languages Nepali and Tibetan) to represent individuals who could communicate in both Nepali and Chinese languages with the traders. This language fluency is a crucial aspect of *translation* culture which not only facilitated culture interactions but enhanced economic interactions as well. Interestingly, participant Dinesh Thakur from Tatopani, (on personal communication, October 23, 2022) a barber mentioned that despite language barriers, he had Chinese customers who used symbols to indicate their preferences or the type of haircut they desired. This non-verbal communication method signified a degree of cultural adaptation and exchange between individuals from both sides.

Dhukke K. Bista, a local representative from Lo Manthang highlighted the importance of language, specifically Tibetan, which was spoken by both Nepalese and Chinese people. Language similarity fostered cultural connections and easier communication. Similar was the case with the resident of Rasuwagadhi, a driver who indicated that:

It was not difficult to work with them. Our language is similar to the Chinese in Gyirong. I personally don't have any relatives out there but I have strong bond with them as we speak same language. I have even made friends with Chinese truck drivers. We don't get enough time to share personal talks because of work. Most of them are friendly while the Chinese policemen are

very harsh and rude. It must be their job which is very important and sensitive.

(D. Tamang, personal communication, December 7 2022)

However, an experience of another souvenir shop owner at Thamel has a different story where language is barely an important aspect when it comes to economic or business communication with Chinese. Although Shiv did not speak Chinese, his interactions, often involved the use of calculators as a tool to overcome language barriers (on personal communication, August 14, 2022). His experience highlighted the practical necessity of effective communication, even without language proficiency, in catering to Chinese customers and conducting transactions.

More insights on speech communities between Nepal and China were observed from KII. One of the experts indicated about that origin of languages that are common among border residents along with other ethnic groups. He further added that:

When speaking about language, you can find very deep-rooted relations because you will have found dozens of ethnic groups in Nepal speaking languages that originated from Tibeto-Burman language. You can refer many linguistic authors for that. Communities such as Newar, Rai, Gurung, Magar, and many more use language with one syllabic word which is very much similar to Tibeto-Burman languages. So, the argument here is the similarity on the influence in Southern Nepal by Pandits of Hinduism to the influence by Lamas in North. (H. L. Shrestha, key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

The role of language in shaping and enhancing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China is deterministic. As observed from the narratives of participants from Bishwa Bhasa Campus, language proficiency, particularly in Chinese, acts as a bridge of communication, transcending the cultural divide and

forming connections among Chinese nationals. These connections extended beyond strong ties, promoting weaker ties that can flourish within the social network of Nepalese and Chinese. As social network theory suggested, these ties, whether strong or weak, contributed to a broader web of connections that enrich people-to-people relations and nurture cultural understanding. Furthermore, participants pointed out that addressing misconceptions and biases about Nepalese culture among Chinese individuals is essential for creating a more conducive environment for cultural exchange. Thus, it is argued that the power of language to connect and the potential for both deep and surface-level ties determined the importance of linguistic proficiency in enhancing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

Not only the commodity value, language also served as a means of interaction among the border communities of Nepal and China. The common language spoken by both, Nepalese and Chinese at the border settlements have become a strong tie that connected these border residents. Often replied as Tibetan or Lama language, the narratives of border residents echoed a strong relation among the people who speak the same language irrespective of nationalities.

Upon reflection, the analysis of language within the framework of social network theory revealed its dual significance in shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Language emerged as a commodity and cultural asset that shaped the dynamics of social networks where it operated. The narratives of participants also emphasized the economic value of language proficiency, particularly in Chinese, acting as a bridge for cross-border interactions and contributing to professional growth. This aligned with social network theory, where language proficiency formed "strong ties" within the network, fostering deeper connections and mutual respect. Simultaneously, language operated as a cultural marker, influencing

group identity and facilitating cultural understanding. The shared language, be it Tibetan or Lama, served as a strong tie connecting border residents, emphasizing the cultural importance of language in shaping people-to-people relations.

4.1.5 Food

Food is an essential aspect in understanding the culture of a society, and an important medium for cultural expression (Chang et al., 2010). Literatures on historical events indicated food as an essential factor in Nepal China relations. In 647 A. D., when first mission was sent to China under the leadership of King Narendra Deva, Manandhar (2004) indicated that:

...the presents included rare plants a such as Spinach, a white plant “like the onion” (possibly a leek or shallot), a strange plant “acrid-smelling drug (possibly a pepper)”, “a bitter leaf vegetable” resembling lettuce, “a vinegar leaf vegetable”, and an aromatic “Western Celery”. Since then, these items have been added to Chinese food. (p. 36)

The culinary landscape since then has emerged as a significant facet shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, particularly observed in popular tourist destinations like Thamel, Pokhara, and Sauraha. The discerning palate of Chinese visitors has driven a notable increase in the number of Chinese restaurants in these areas, marking a tangible manifestation of cultural exchange. The surge in Chinese tourists post the 2015 earthquake prompted a corresponding growth in Chinese dining establishments, catering to the preferences of the influx of visitors. However, the dynamics shifted after the global outbreak of COVID-19 in 2019, leading to a decline in tourist numbers and subsequently affecting the restaurant scene. This phenomenon underscores the intimate connection between gastronomy,

tourism, and people-to-people relations, highlighting the role of cuisine as a dynamic force in cultural engagement between Nepal and China.

An intriguing aspect of Akendra Deuda's (personal communication, August 17, 2022) observations pointed to Chinese food preferences. He noted that many Chinese visitors have a preference for Chinese cuisine over Nepali dishes, and he even recalls an incident where a Chinese tourist had an adverse reaction to Nepali food. This insight highlighted the role of culinary exchange in shaping people-to-people relations, as food served as a cultural bridge or a point of cultural contrast. Padam Bhandari (on personal communication, September 22, 2022) pointed out, "They are very serious about food. They don't prefer Nepali or Indian Dish unless not available." Food preferences are a significant cultural aspect. Chinese tourists' preference for their cuisine represents a strong cultural tie within their group. However, it can create weaker ties with local Nepali cuisine and culinary experiences. However, the story at Tatopani is not similar to how a Nepalese perceive Chinese in tourist destinations such as Thamel, Pokhara or Sauraha. Lamu Sherpa (on personal communication, October 20, 2022), a local food shop owner stated that "There were times when Chinese security personals visited local hotels in tatopani and share our regular foods".

Apart from findings of preference of food by Chinese tourist, participants from the border area indicated of having their culinary habits similar to Chinese border residents. Taking an example of noodles, a local restaurant owner of Upper Mustang, participant Ashok Lama, stated:

Noodles are like stable diet out here and the people cross the border also feel the same way. It was my father who taught me how to make thukpas, a Tibetan noodle dish. I remember, it was the first dish I ever cooked. I don't

know about the origin of this thukpas, but they (villagers) say it originated from eastern Tibet. So, this dish also indicate that we have culinary culture that were common between the people of Nepal and China. We usually have flatted noodles but when I visited Pokhara and Kathmandu, the noodles they served in thukpas were round in shape. (A. Lama, personal communication, November 8, 2022)

Apart from noodles, key informant, Anil Giri (on key informant interview, May 10, 2023) spoke of how *momo* (dumplings) was introduced to Nepal from China and has become the only option for lunch or snacks in Nepalese community.

Similarly, (H. L. Shrestha, key information interview, February 17, 2023) also supported the fact that dumplings were introduced by trans-Himalayan traders of Nepal who frequently travelled Tibet for business and trade. The food habits emerged as a potent force shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, evident in diverse settings from popular tourist hubs like Thamel, Pokhara, and Sauraha to border regions like Tatopani, Rasuwagadhi and Upper Mustang. The influx of Chinese tourists post-2015 earthquake triggered a surge in such establishments, acting as cultural bridges. However, the onset of COVID-19 led to a decline in tourism, impacting this culinary engagement. Notably, Akendra Deuba, (on personal communication, August 17, 2022) observed strong preferences for Chinese cuisine among Chinese tourists, emphasizing the role of food as a cultural bridge or contrast.

4.1.6 Cultural Appreciation

Cultural appreciation was found to be a crucial aspect of people-to-people relations between nations. It involved the recognition, understanding, and respect for the cultural heritage, traditions, and practices of another community. In the context of

Nepal and China, cultural appreciation played a significant role in fostering positive relations. The exchange of cultural elements, such as traditional practices, festivals, and art, contributes to building a sense of shared identity and understanding. It went beyond economic and diplomatic factors, creating a foundation for meaningful connections between individuals.

In our specific context, we already highlighted instances of cultural appreciation, such as Chinese tourists showing interest in Nepali products like *pashmina* and *Khukuris*, and the influence of Nepali cultural products in Chinese communities. These interactions signified a mutual exchange where both cultures are valued and embraced. Cultural appreciation can also be observed in language preferences, where efforts to communicate in the other's language, like learning Chinese in Nepal, demonstrated a willingness to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps.

Moreover, the shared festivals between border communities, common religious practices, and the impact of cultural products like movies indicated a deep-seated cultural connection. It's through these cultural exchanges that people developed a sense of familiarity and affinity, contributing to the broader fabric of people-to-people relations. Below are few findings from the excerpts of participant which further analyzed how these cultural exchanges influence perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, and how they contribute to building a more robust and interconnected relationship between the people of Nepal and China

Keshav Gyawali's work at the China's Tibet Book Store in Thamel illuminated the theme of cultural appreciation (personal communication, August 10, 2022). The bookstore's specialization in Chinese culture, education, and politics exemplified the appreciation of Chinese intellectual and cultural contributions. His statement, "Our store serves books on culture, education, and politics of China,"

encapsulated this aspect. Dil Maya Ale (on personal communication, July 28, 2022) emphasized the need for cultural education and preservation, suggesting that the Chinese should have a better understanding of Nepalese culture. This indirectly pointed to the importance of cultural appreciation in shaping people-to-people relations. She emphasized how Chinese people are interested in and enjoy celebrating Holi, which is a well-known festival in Nepal. This suggests that Nepalese festivals, like Holi, can be appealing to Chinese tourists, highlighting the role of cultural festivals in shaping people-to-people relations.

Cultural festivals like Holi play a significant role in shaping people-to-people relations between Nepalese and Chinese individuals. Dil Maya shared her observations from a Holi celebration in Basantapur, emphasizing the appeal of this colorful festival to Chinese tourists. However, her account also highlighted the complexity of such interactions. While the Chinese people were excited to experience and celebrate Holi, they were confronted with misbehavior from some Nepalese individuals, ‘possibly fueled by alcohol’, she added. Such incidents, though isolated, can leave negative impressions on Chinese tourists. Despite such challenges, festivals like Holi remain a potent means of cultural exchange and appreciation. These experiences emphasized the importance of promoting cultural understanding to enhance the quality of people-to-people relations and create a more welcoming environment for Chinese visitors.

Akendra’s observed that the Chinese tourists show a keen interest in understanding and appreciating Nepali culture and lifestyle (personal communication, August 17, 2022). He highlighted the shared political philosophy between the two countries, which contributes to a better bond. The Chinese visitors often speak highly of Nepal's favorable weather and climate, indicating their attraction to the natural

beauty of the region. Their enthusiasm for cultural exploration extends to an appreciation of Newari culture, reflecting their cultural curiosity. However, he also pointed out that Chinese tourists are sensitive to cultural preservation, and they prefer to interact in their own language. This cultural sensitivity is further reinforced by their inclination to teach the Chinese language to Nepalese citizens. As Arun Thapa, (personal communication, September 19, 2022), a waiter in one of the restaurants in Sauraha, shared valuable insights into his interactions with Chinese customers, highlighting their distinct behavioral patterns. He further stated:

I have not encountered many (Chinese customers) but the ones I met, talk less. I served one Chinese customer daily for almost a month. He must be working on a Chinese project but we hardly interact; he sits in a corner, orders food, and works on a laptop with headphones. (A. Thapa, personal communication September 19, 2022)

Such events when analyzed theory social network theory suggested that the relationship with this Chinese customer represents a weak tie. The infrequent and limited interaction, coupled with the customer's intense focus on work and minimal communication, characterized a connection that may not foster deep social bonds. However, the customer's reticence and solitary dining behavior may indicate a preference for keeping interactions formal and transactional. The waiter reflected one facet of the broader network of connections between Nepal and China. The participant's experience with the Chinese customer illustrated the diverse nature of people-to-people relations. While some connections are robust and entailed significant communication and shared experiences, others, like this one, may be more transactional and reserved, representing a weaker tie in the social network that connected individuals from both nations.

Cultural appreciation from the Chinese side or Chinese diplomacy is visible even from historical events. Lila Nyaichai spoke of the cultural appreciation by stating how Bhrikuti is still respected in Tibet, China. She stated:

Yesterday I visited Bajrayogini temple, found out it's a temple of green star representing Bhrikuti. I remember, even in Tibet, the temples and monasteries have their main doors faced towards Nepal, the hometown of Bhrikuti. See how they still appreciate the historical characters and combine it in modern day practices. (L. Nyaichai, key informant interview, February 20, 2023)

Similar incident of cultural appreciation had been observed by Ram Karki, during his visit to China as a delegate from political party. He indicated:

During my visit... I went to Nanjing. There is a park and there were photos of leaders of Nepal. What have we (Nepalese) done? Also, as I was walking down the streets in one of the cities, I found a group of Chinese (especially ladies) dancing on a tune of Nepali song. I have recorded it in my mobile.

Later I asked about how they know the tune. They are unable to answer. I said it's a Nepal song while one of the ladies replied with just a word, 'Hind' (indicating it as an Indian song). The argument here is the cultural appreciation of people of other nations by the Chinese people irrespective of their origins. (Key informant interview, April 10, 2023).

A way of honoring another culture through exploration and seeking an understanding in a way to honor that culture between the people of Nepal and China has a long history. Understanding and appreciating Chinese culture is a sensitive process for Nepalese individuals engaging in interacting with Chinese. The appreciation of participants went beyond surface-level observations and explored into understanding the particulars of Chinese traditions, customs, and ways of life. It

involved recognizing the diversity within Chinese culture and appreciating the historical, artistic, and philosophical aspects that shape the Chinese identity.

One key element in this cultural appreciation is the respect for personal space. From the study it was found that Chinese culture places importance on personal boundaries and privacy. Nepalese individuals engaging with the Chinese community have shown an awareness of and respect for this cultural aspect. Observations, such as the use of calculators for communication in business transactions when language barriers exist, demonstrate a sensitivity to respecting personal space. Participants also indicated how Nepalese cultures are being appreciated in China. Chinese tourists' demand for *Khukuris*, symbolizing bravery and featured in Chinese culture and video games, also demonstrates a form of cultural exchange, where Nepali products are embraced and shared within the Chinese community.

In conclusion, the exploration of cultural appreciation in the context of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China uncovered interconnectedness. The reciprocal exchange of cultural elements, coupled with a willingness to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps, played a central role in fostering shared identity and understanding. Instances of appreciation, whether demonstrated through interest in products, language learning, or participation in cultural festivals, contributed to the development of both robust and more reserved ties within the social network connecting individuals from both nations. Applying social network theories, these findings underscored the dynamics of cultural exchanges, shaping connections that varied in strength and depth.

4.1.7 Communication Technology

The advent of communication technology, particularly the spread of online social media platforms like WeChat, has introduced a transformative dimension to

both cultural factors and economic activities, reshaping the landscape of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The integration of WeChat into economic interactions has not only facilitated swift communication but has also altered the dynamics of trade and exchange. In the realm of social network theory, these technological advancements have given rise to both weak ties and strong ties. The influence of communication technology on economic interactions thus underscored its pivotal role in shaping the relations between individuals and businesses across the Nepal-China border.

Shiv Prasad Kafle (on personal communication, August 14, 2022) mentioned about the transformation of Thamel into a hub for Chinese businesses selling Pashmina scarves via “TikTok live”. This exhibits a two-way economic exchange, where both Chinese and Nepali individuals engage in economic activities thus enhancing people-to-people relations. Acknowledging the contributions of technology particularly online payment gateways and business features of “Wechat” for online business, participants argued that flow of Chinese tourist is directly linked with the economic prosperity of Thamel that too immediate after the earthquake. The communication with Mr. Kafle indicated the change in the economic activities due to influence of digital communications and payment methods. Equally important is the observation where Lapka Chhumu used social media with chat features to talk to her relatives in Gyirong (on personal communication, December 5, 2022).

The communication technologies especially the social media, online market and payment gateways have become a new bridge for continuation of economic interactions between Nepalese and Chinese. It can be easily argued that Chinese products have penetrated of daily life of almost every Nepali. Arguing that technology

will change the way people interact and focusing on virtual world of internet, participant, Anil Giri stated:

...Now see, apart from Chinese language students, Chinese food, Thamel (so called China Town), culture tradition and literature, technology connects people-to-people. The mobile phones we use and the Chinese products in everyday life is so technology driven. The argument here is that technology is shaping people-to-people relations. The business hassles (payment) are being solved by technology this will ultimately strengthen people-to-people relations. Technology and people-to-people becomes a whole new domain of research. There is a new level of people-to-people relations, the virtual relations or ties or bond. During covid we all interacted virtually, traders too, and employees as well. These changes in people-to-people relations, demand redefinition of people-to-people relations. (key informant interview, May 10, 2023)

In the existing physical interactions between Nepal and China, the transformative influence of communication technology emerged as a cornerstone shaping the way they interact. A network of Nepalese has developed a digital culture in their interactions with Chinese counterpart. This community, comprising buyers, sellers, daily wage laborers, cross-border shoppers, and small business ventures, has witnessed a paradigm shift propelled by technological advancements. Through the lens of social network theory, the concept of weak ties found expression in the expansive online networks facilitating casual interactions, disseminating information, and broadening the scope of economic engagement. Simultaneously, the strengthening of strong ties is evident in the direct and instantaneous communication channels afforded by platforms like WeChat, fostering trust and reliability in business

relationships. The mix of these weak and strong ties within the digital realm signified a dynamic transformation in people-to-people relations, emphasizing the indispensable role of digital and online interactions in enhancing interconnected cross-border economic community.

4.1.8 Public Perception

Public perceptions of Nepalese towards Chinese nationals and government has been described as the culture of those Nepalese who judge relations based on media narratives. Although their personal interactions are often good, they make judgements based on media and political narratives. Public perception, shaped by media narratives and political, and academic discourses emerged as determinant in people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Participants across various regions consistently revealed a tendency to compare China and the United States, framing them as rival nations competing for influence in Nepal. This comparison extended to major geopolitical initiatives, particularly BRI from China and MCC from the United States. These initiatives, seen as expressions of soft power, were often interpreted through the lens of national interest, with concerns raised about potential attempts to exert influence and control over Nepal. However, Nepal's friendly relations with China have returned benefits to the Nepali society with China extending good deals on cooperation on socio-economic upliftment. He stated that:

Nepali people remember how China extended its helping hands to mitigate great sufferings caused by the devastating earthquakes of April, 2015, and subsequently to relieve hardships caused by the undeclared Indian economic and trade blockage from September 2015 to February 2015. In fact, China's cooperation during the time of both those sufferings and hardships have won

hearts and minds of the Nepali populace. Truly, China has become a good friend in the need of Nepal. (M. Shrestha, 2017, p. 305)

Narratives from the participants indicated that they perceive China as a good neighbor and always ready to help as we (Nepal and China) are historically related. However, perceptions are shaped by information circulating around media, politics and academics. Akendra Deuba's comments reflected the perspectives of Chinese tourists on Nepali bureaucracy, corruption, and certain political agreements such as the Millennium Challenge Cooperation. While many Chinese visitors respect Nepali culture and desire prosperity for Nepal, they have concerns about issues like immigration and official processes (personal communication, August, 2022). His observations underline the significance of efficient governance and diplomatic readiness to meet the expectations and concerns of Chinese tourists. However, suggesting to focus less on media narratives backup up political agenda, participant, H. L. Shrestha argued whatever the narratives are, development cooperation will continue. He indicated:

Other things to be clear is that China will not help Nepal in the cost of India. China sees India as big a big market and it does not what to lose it. China's competition is with America not India. China doesn't want to use India to compete with America because Chinese leaders are pragmatic. China does not want Nepali leaders to play China card or India card, this is evident from the period of Mao Zedong. It is a Mao's dream of three friendly nations, China, Nepal and India. (H. L. Shrestha, key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

Narratives surrounding crimes involving Chinese nationals, as reported in the media, contributed to a shift in public perception. Instances such as ATM vandalism, match-fixing, and illegal trading of currency and gold involving Chinese individuals

were cited by participants. These incidents, reported in the news, became influential factors altering the way Nepalese people viewed Chinese tourists. The impact of these negative perceptions on people-to-people relations cannot be understated, as they introduce a layer of mistrust and apprehension.

One of the participants spoke of how Chinese public view Nepal and Nepalese. Their shared experiences reveal that there are prevalent misconceptions among some Chinese people who regard Nepal as part of India. These misconceptions are based on facial appearances and limited cultural understanding. Gyanu Maya Rai, a PhD scholar at the Chinese universities, emphasized the need to challenge these stereotypes and change perceptions, as a significant number of Chinese individuals are unaware of Nepal as a sovereign nation (personal communication, 28th July, 2022). Her assertion aligned with the social network theory, which emphasized the role of network connections in influencing individuals' perceptions and attitudes.

Rumors and discourse about the constructs such as China America rivalry and their competition for global power is also found among the residents of border areas that were visited. Participants from Mustang alluded to rumors in the villages about the presence of American spies, which are believed to be linked to China's decision to close the border. This highlighted the influence of geopolitics narratives and rumors on cross-border activities. Dictating the role media Simkhada (2018) stated that:

Media plays a vital role in shaping perceptions and influencing policies. But a number of problems affect the Nepali media. First, they all depend on the major global networks as their sources for international news. Second, many media outlets and mostly the vernacular weeklies are under the influence of some political parties or groups making them highly biased. (p. 305)

Amidst all the public narratives on newspapers and media, experts argued Nepal and China relations to be problem free. They all looked China as a good neighbor and healthy development partners. Chinese support in all forms such as aid, grant, loan, and partnership has been respected by the people of Nepal. While China has been successful in fostering people-to-people connections along with physical connectivity, most of the participants agree on the insufficient strategies of Nepalese government in enhancing the people-to-people relations.

4.2 Economic Network

China's role in Nepal's economic market is profound and extensive, influencing nearly every aspect of daily life for the Nepali people. From electronic gadgets like mobile phones and televisions to garments, shoes, and an array of consumer goods, China's products were ubiquitous. This profound presence highlighted the deep economic interdependence between the two nations. While debates occasionally arise about the quality of certain Chinese products, the fact remains that China has significantly impacted the Nepali market. The Chinese influence extends beyond just products; it reaches the masses through affordable and up-to-date technology. This accessibility ensured that the average Nepali is in step with the global world, despite limited economic resources. The economic ties between Nepal and China run deep, touching various aspects of commerce, trade, and consumer culture. This relationship formed the foundation of the economic interactions in understanding the dynamics of people-to-people relations between these two nations.

This findings section of the study explored the multiple factors of economic interactions that significantly influence the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. These interactions are thoughtfully categorized under distinct headings.

"Nepal China Trade" reflected on the trade interactions at border area as well as at city markets, showcasing a network of Nepalese and Chinese in the trading community. Foreign Direct investment of China in Nepal has increased more interactions of Nepalese with Chinese indicating strong ties with frequent interactions. Tourism, one of the economic pillars of Nepal, offered much interactions among different stakeholders within the sector. Although, tourism interactions indicated weak tie, the stories of participants such as tourist guide highlighted the sense of belonging and emotional attachment during the interactions. Weak-tie relationships are associated with bridging capital which is considered important for reaching out of a close-knit group to others with different resources or new information (Dickinson et al., 2017). Finally, cross-border labor interactions made possible due to economic objective also offered a new insight which was often missed in the study of economic relations between Nepal and China.

4.2.1 Nepal China Trade

During a visit to Thamel, a renowned tourist hub in Nepal, observation of numerous signboards adorned with vibrant Chinese characters were visible. These characters expressively conveyed the multitude of businesses catering to the Chinese populace, ranging from tour and travel agencies to bookshops and authentic Chinese restaurants. This vivid picture was not just a mere display but evidence to the flourishing economic activities between Nepal and China. These economic interactions are of vital importance in people-to-people relations, as they serve to create a shared economic space where the citizens of both nations come together. Such vibrant commercial activities reflect the cultural and economic ties between Nepal and China.

Although all the participants from Thamel appreciated the time when Chinese tourist flourished, that too after the earthquake of 2015. However, one the participants, Shiv P. Kafle (personal communication, August 14, 2023) indicated some challenges due to such interactions. He added “Chinese tourists sometimes buy Nepalese products and replicate them in China, potentially impacting the local business”. This dual perspective shows that while there is an appreciation for Nepalese culture, it can sometimes be subject to economic competition. Similarly, another participant, a manager at the Chinese food restaurant also indicated the involvement of Chinese in crime related activities remembering the newspaper incidents like ATM vandalism, match-fixing, illegal trading of currency and gold. He indicated, “these activities changed the way we look at the Chinese tourist and question first on his motives of visit” (A. Deuba, personal communication, August 17, 2022). The impact of these weak ties and these diverse perceptions within Thamel's community showcase the complexity of interactions between Nepalese and Chinese individuals.

For further exploration to find the grounded factors that determine the people-to-people relations Tatopani border in Sindhupalchowk district was visited during October of 2022. This border crossing was once a vibrant place to be and offered number of interactions among the Nepalese and Chinese. However, the border-crossings were closed and restricted since 2015 earthquake. A passage from Ram Tamang, a resident of Sindhupalchowk illustrated the economic interactions between Nepal and China through this border trade (personal communication, October 16, 2022). He mentioned the import of various goods into Nepal, including lentils, sugar, vegetable oil, and rice, electronic goods, textiles, garments, and shoes. He further

added, “The trade across this border point was not only essential for business but also played a role in Nepal's import and export activities”.

Karma Lama, a resident of Tatopani, few meters from the border crossings whose interactions with Chinese visitors primarily revolved around the exchange of goods represented weak relations apart from general connotations about the economic importance of Tatopani border crossings (personal communication, 19th October, 2022). These limited contacts are transactional and serve specific purposes, such as trade. Her observation that Chinese visitors do not buy much from her shop as they carry everything, highlighted the economic self-sufficiency and preparedness of Chinese tourists. However, such left no room for the initiation of interactions. On top, the closure of the Chinese border market and the relocation of inhabitants from there to Shigatse, as mentioned by her, had obstructed the communication between two nationals. It not just impacted cross-border trade, local businesses, and livelihoods but also the opportunities for developing strong ties in the relations between Nepalese and Chinese.

Along with the other four participants, Lamu Sherpa also mentioned that she used to purchase goods such as blankets and juice from the Chinese market (personal communication, October 20, 2022). This implied a level of trade and economic engagement between people on both sides of the border. The mention of exports, including lentils, sugar, and vegetable oils, highlighted the economic transactions that occurred between Nepal and China. This trade had economic implications for local communities.

One of the participants, a business agent referred to the significant import and export activities at the Tatopani border before earthquake of 2015. Goods mentioned include fast-moving consumer items, electronics, clothing, livestock, rice, and flour.

These trade activities highlighted the economic significance of the border point for both Nepalese and Chinese businesses. On the level of Nepalese Chinese interactions, he added:

There were days when almost 3000 Nepalese took one-day pass from the ticket counter. When the border was open to business and crossings, lots of people from Nepal used to visit Chinese border market with one-day pass. Apart from one or two incidents the interactions were harmonious relation among the people of two nations. Chinese businessmen trusted Nepalese counterpart and agents. As a citizen of Sindhupalchowk district, I had obtained a red card which allowed me for infinite in and out in the Chinese border market. (B. B. Shrestha, personal communication, October 24, 2022)

The Tatopani border in Sindhupalchowk district served as a critical case study for examining the economic interactions that determined people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Participants reflected a clear picture of the cross-border trade that once characterized this region. Goods ranging from lentils, sugar, and vegetable oil to electronics, clothing, livestock, rice, and flour were exchanged, emphasizing the economic vitality of this border point. These trade activities not only sustained local businesses but also played a crucial role in Nepal's import and export activities.

Apart from these imports and exports, there is a social network, comprising both strong ties, like the deep trust shared between Chinese and Nepalese businessmen, and weak ties, characterized by transactional exchanges for specific purposes. The closure of the Chinese border market and the relocation of its inhabitants to Shigatse had far-reaching economic consequences for both sides, affecting cross-border trade, local businesses, and livelihoods. Harmonious

interactions have been exemplified by one of the participants, which included the issuance of red cards for unlimited entry into the Chinese market (B. B. Shrestha, personal communication, October 24, 2022). The economic ties in this border region were indicative of the existence of social network made possible through trade, a blend of frequent interactions and trust. This network determined the indispensable role of cross-border trade in shaping people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

Border residents of the closest village to Nepal-China crossings, Lo Manthang in Mustang also shared the similar experiences of cross-border trading with that of residents of Tatopani, Sindhupalchowk as discussed. The cross-border trade that was carried out for centuries not just facilitated the people-to-people relations but also propagated the relations with cultural bondage, a strong tie. The reference to locals procuring commodities during festivals in the Chinese market indicated a history of trade and commodity exchange between the residents of Upper Mustang and Chinese sellers. “This trade was a significant economic activity”, stated Pasang Tamang a local resident of Lo Manthang (personal communication, November 11, 2022). The mention of tourists visiting Upper Mustang with the expectation of a market place to buy souvenirs from the Chinese border market similar to Tatopani market indicated the necessity of market place at Nepal China border at Lo Manthang. The historical trade and commodity exchange between the two communities were not just about goods; they were about building relationships.

The economic ties provided a platform for cultural and social exchanges as well. As people from both sides frequently engaged in trade and interacted during festivals and events, this naturally nurtured a sense of friendship. The people of Upper Mustang expressed their deep desire to resume border activities, not just for economic

benefits but also to reignite the cultural and social ties that were temporarily disrupted. They recognized that these connections were as vital, if not more so, than the economic aspects.

The economic aspect of cross-border interactions is evident through the discussion of trade passes and trade activities. Participants mentioned of businessmen from Jomsom and residents of other districts crossing the border for trade during the "mela" which reflected the economic interactions provided by open borders. The closure of the token (pass) system, even for the residents of Lo Manthang, due to the covid-19 outbreak highlighted various issues for interactions with Chinese. Therefore, mobility restrictions have a significant impact on people-to-people relations.

All the participants emphasized the significance of border crossings for trade. The closure of the border had a direct impact on commodity prices. It resulted in a surge in commodity costs, particularly livestock, which affected the local economy (A. Lama, November 8, 2022). He mentioned of the exchange of goods, including agricultural products and clothing, between Nepal and China. The closure of the border has economic effect for the locals, as they relied on cross-border trade for their livelihoods. This is particularly evident in the case of the participant's village, where people eagerly await the resumption of border crossings for economic benefits. Arguing why the border provisions must resume, Pasang Tamang, a local shop owner added "Since the border points are closed, most of the items for his shop is procured from Beni and Pokhara which has become costly these days due to additional transportation charges" (personal communication, November 11, 2022). While not a major trade point between Nepal and China, the stories from Lo Manthang revealed the network of people who are engaged in cross-border trade for daily livelihood. This

network influenced people-to-people relations at border settlements. Challenges like pandemics have reduced interactions.

Rasuwagadhi border crossing discoursed in news and academic literatures after the earthquake and economic blockage. With frequent natural calamities at the tatopani of Sindhupalchowk, the restaurant business woman now preferred Rasuwagadhi border crossings (K. Sherpa, personal communication, December 9, 2022). Recollecting the time before covid-19 pandemic, a participant indicated, “Before covid-19, the border crossings were open for people of Rasuwa district for trade to Chinese side till Gyirong (around 25 kms from Nepal China border)”. He further went on to say:

People from other districts had to acquire one day pass to get to the Chinese side. When borders crossings were regular, noodles, flour, handicraft and Buddha Chitta prayer beads were mostly exported from Nepal. Almost every consumer item, from foods to readymade goods such as clothes, electronics and vehicles were transported to Nepalese side on a regular basis before covid-19 and lockdown. Items like thermos bottle and blanket were among the popular ones as they were cheap and reliable. Chinese imported Nepalese items as mentioned above to cater the demand of Kerung city. (K. Rayamajhi, December 3, 2022)

The historical continuum of cross-border trade between Nepal and China, extending from the Lichhavi dynasty to the present day, underscored its pivotal role in shaping people-to-people relations. Notably, historical records documented the minting of Nepalese coins for use in Tibet, and the existence of Nepalese business establishments in Sigatse, Tibet. Over time, the dynamics of this economic exchange have evolved, with contemporary trade characterized by a substantial import flow

from China to Nepal, juxtaposed against a comparatively modest export volume. However, the earthquake of 2015 in Nepal and the disruptive influence of the covid-19 pandemic have cast limitations on the once-flourishing border crossings, introducing contemporary challenges to these enduring economic interactions.

4.2.2 Tourism

“Every Chinese tourist visiting Pokhara, inquire about thee paragliding and scenic beauty” said Saroj Thapa Magar, a paraglider at Pokhara (personal communication, September 6, 2022). However, a professional taxi driver in Pokhara, shared an interesting perspective of people-to-people relations that determined how weak ties can change the perception of Nepalese towards Chinese tourist (C. Bhandari, personal communication, September 9, 2022). He pointed out that Chinese tourists tend not to give tips, unlike some other tourists of different nation. Another participant, however, pointed out important factor which indicated the appreciation made on culture through touristic activities (A. Shrestha, personal communication, September 11, 2022). He stated, “A Chinese movie featuring Pokhara's paragliding attracted many Chinese tourists to Nepal”. The perspectives shared by different stakeholders in Pokhara highlighted the complexity of people-to-people relations between Nepalese and Chinese individuals, shaped by both economic interactions

Economic interactions between Chinese tourists and Nepalese hosts, particularly in Thamel, Pokhara, and Sauraha, played a key role in fostering people-to-people relations. Thriving businesses and cultural exchanges created shared spaces for engagement, though complexities emerged. While Chinese tourists were valued for their adventurous spirit, concerns arose over economic competition, product replication, and occasional criminal activities. In border regions like Sindhupalchowk, Mustang, and Rasuwa, trade and social networks shaped interactions differently.

Ultimately, the interplay of commerce, culture, and social ties defined the nature of Nepal-China people-to-people relations.

4.2.3 Cross-border Labor Migration

Transnational labor migration, as found in the three border regions of Nepal China border, served as an interesting side of the social network. It reflects the interconnectedness and interdependence of communities living on either side of these borders. In the case of Tatopani to Sigatse, Rasuwagadhi to Gyirong, Kora la to Drongpa county, and the border crossing in Humla, labor migration also emerged as a vital thread weaving together the people of two nations. Residents frequently traversed these borders for employment opportunities, creating strong ties between the labor migrants and their host communities for seasonal and also for more than a year. The reliance on such migration for livelihood highlighted the economic necessity that drives these connections. An expert's recognition of a similar phenomenon in Humla reinforced the significance of these transnational labor movements. Khadka K.C., indicated:

In Burang many Nepalese labor from Humla and Bajura work on daily wage basis. Their earning is much better to the Nepalese in gulf nations. Research also indicated that they are much comfortable happy with their lifestyle as well. When such labors travel India, they are looked out as bahadur or kancha, but those from Humla and Bajura in Burang are highly respected by the Chinese counterpart. One interesting example, you know, there is Burang Udyog Byapar Sangh, it's like a bazar, market and totally managed by people from Darchula, Bajura and Humla. These merchants, they acquire their items from Ason, Kathmandu, consisting of utensils made out of copper and brass, idols and statues, and transport it all the way to Burang. The argument here is

cross-border labor migration between Nepal and China has influenced people-to-people relations. (Key informant interview, February 23 2023)

In essence, transnational labor migration within these border regions established a complex social network marked by strong ties, characterized by shared economic interests, and underlined the integral role it plays in determining people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. It was found that easing restrictions on cross-border labor migration at the border districts is a pivotal strategy for enhancing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. By doing so, not only can the economic development of border districts be positively impacted, but it can also pave the way for increased cultural exchange, mutual understanding, all essential elements in strengthening people-to-people relations.

Recollecting the moments before the earthquake, B. B. Shrestha (on personal communication, October 24, 2022), indicated how weak ties were created due to one day pass allowed for Nepalese visitors of all over the country. Back then he was issued a red card as a citizen of Sindhupalchowk which allowed him for infinite in and out between the two nations but within a limited territory. He further stated that:

There were days when almost 3000 people took one-day pass from the ticket counter. Apart from past fast moving consumer goods (especially juice and biscuits), electronics and clothing were major items of import from Nepalese businessmen. During festivals, almost 6000 livestock particularly, mountain goats were imported in a day from China. (B. B. Shrestha, personal communication, October 24, 2022)

Apart from the mention of goods, the indication of the issuance of one day pass to 3000 people in a day highlighted the importance of border markets in creating weak ties. Despite the apparent brief interactions, it was worth noting that even such

short engagements can lay the groundwork for future connections. Individuals who participate in these market visits are expected to encounter each other again, leading to the development of stronger ties over time.

4.3 Diplomatic Network

Diplomatic dynamics was found to be a crucial factor to the connections of people between Nepal and China, significantly influencing the nature of people-to-people relations. In the following sections, we explored the diverse dimensions of this diplomatic domain, each elements contributing uniquely to cross-border connections. From the cross-border mobility that facilitated direct interactions to the pivotal role of tourism, aid and development initiatives, educational exchanges, and shared concerns about global issues, we navigated through the multi-layered factors that underscored the dynamic relationship between these two nations. The diplomatic dynamics not only shaped the physical interactions of individuals across borders but also leaves an indelible mark on the perceptions that people hold on both sides.

4.3.1 Cross-border Mobility

Since 2002, “border inhabitants” Nepal China border who live within 30 km of the border on both sides have been issued “border citizen cards” which allow them to cross the border without a passport or a visa, and travel up to 30 km on the other side (Shneiderman, 2013). Cross-border mobility determined the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The excerpt from participant Karma Lama, Tatopani indicated the impact of diplomatic decisions, such as border closures and relocations, and is evident in the description of the Chinese border market's closure. “These decisions can affect people's lives, local economies, and cross-border interactions” she added (on personal communication, October 19, 2022). Her uncertainty about whether the border markets will resume highlighted the diplomatic

interactions surrounding border trade and movement that determined people-to-people relations. Diplomatic relations and government policies, influenced the resumption of activities at border points. The mention of her visits to the Chinese side for various items and interactions with Chinese individuals underscored the importance of cross-border mobility. Hence diplomatic interactions affected people-to-people relations in border areas.

Bal Bahadur Shrestha indicated that natural disasters like the earthquake and flooding, coupled with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, have led to the temporary closure of the border and cross-border mobility in Tatopani (personal communication, October 2, 2022). His role as an agent mediating the movement of goods between Nepal and China in tatopani border echoed the easiness in cross-border mobility. Agents like him facilitate trade and interactions between individuals from different regions, acting as connectors in their social network. Although cross-border mobility was forbidden in Mustang through Kora la, participant Dhan Bahadur Gurung along with Dhukke K. Bista acknowledged that there have been official interactions between Chinese and Nepalese officials (on personal communication, November 10, 2022). “However, no efforts have been made to continue cross-border mobility for the people of Lo Manthang,” Dhukke added. Appealing the elected leaders to open the border, primarily for shorter access to Kailash Mansarovar he, highlighted the importance of cross-border mobility. He further added:

We are least concerned about the reasons for absolute closure of the border crossings, but we want it to resume like it was before. Resuming border activities only once is also fine with villagers and me but complete shutdown is not acceptable. At least many saman (commodities) can be procured at that time. (D. K. Bista, personal communication, November 10, 2022)

Similar to other two borders visited, Rasuwagadhi border crossings was also restricted with only few containers permitted in a day (when visited in December 2022). A female participant who completed her 12th standard and was visiting her hometown, Timure, indicated of having experiences of visiting Chinese without any hassles. She also indicated having relatives in Gyirong. Upon further investigation she indicated that:

Before covid-19 outbreak and lockdown, we were allowed to visit our relatives residing in Gyirong around 24 kilometers from the border. But now we interact through social media. It was after covid-19 that everything got contained. While visiting Chinese territory, the Chinese police and authorities are very concerned about the Nepalese visitors. Back when cross border mobility was normal, we used to get almost everything from the Chinese market. (L. Chhumu, personal communication, December 5, 2022).

The diplomatic decisions on cross-border mobility have directly influenced the people-to-people relations where, even kinship connections are diminishing. Review of papers on cross-border cooperation who share border also indicated how border rules have affected the cross-border mobility. Speaking of cross-border interactions and mobility between US and Canada, the passe below indicated that:

Particularly pertaining to the United States, which after the 9/11 disaster became an extreme advocate of border security and national security, the security of their border regions continues to be one of their most enforced foreign policies, regardless of their economic interdependence with Canada. Not only is the execution of border security measures costly for both the United States and Canada, but the imposed border measures also tend to put a

strain on the movement of people and goods across US-Canada border regions, thereby impacting cross-border cooperation. (Fiagbe, 2023, p. 23)

Regarding the trans-Himalayan crossings, Nepal-China has 43 border crossing points (Shrestha, 2017). The practice of cross-border land use for pasture grazing emerged as a prominent cultural factor that connected the lives of border residents between Nepal and China. With shared history, this practice reflected not only a pragmatic solution to local needs but also a deep-seated economic utility. However, the narratives of both residents and experts voiced that the act of grazing animals across borders established itself more than a utilitarian strategy; it emerged as communal tradition that fostered people-to-people relations living in close proximity to border lines. This played a pivotal role in shaping the daily lives, relationships, and mutual understanding among these communities. The exploration into cross-border cultural practices translated shared experiences that extends beyond geographical demarcations.

Commenting on the price hike in for yaks and sheep, Ram Tamang, (personal communication, October 16, 2022) indicated that these border communities have historically shared ties, whether through trade, shared traditions, or cultural exchanges. His experience of being allowed to graze cattle within a specific radius sharing territories of both the nations, even crossing borders, indicated the historical cultural connections between the regions. Dhukke K. Bista also recalled, “Back then our yaks used to graze around Chinese territory and even their yaks were allowed to graze in Nepalese territory without any charges when formal agreement was made between the officials of two nations” (personal communication, November 10, 2022). Experience of expert, Lila Nyaichai also indicated how the grazing or cross-border

land usage for crops are still in practice beyond administrative restrictions. She shared:

Last to last year I visited the village Lapchi, where aama (an old woman) served her potatoes to me. Upon inquiry, I found that the potatoes were grown on the land that belongs to Tibet or China. The old lady said, “we have a farm there and we grow vegetables and we don’t have any problem”. The farm is accessible by 2 hours of walk. (L. Nyaichai, key informant interview, February 20, 2023)

This deeply rooted tradition has not only provided practical solutions to local needs but has also served as evidence to the continuing ties among border residents of Nepal. Shared histories, intertwined traditions, and cultural exchanges find expression in the grazing of animals across borders—a communal norm that transcends geopolitical boundaries. As witnessed through the experiences of participants, the act of grazing becomes more than a utilitarian strategy; it becomes a shared experience that enhances people-to-people relations. The stories of grazing cattle within specific territories, spanning both Nepal and China, highlighted the historical and cultural bonds between these regions. Even in the face of administrative restrictions, the cross-border land usage endured, illustrating the strength of cultural practices beyond formal constraints. Through the lens of social network theory, this cultural thread became a crucial tie that bonded communities and contributed to the mutual understanding that extended beyond geographical boundaries.

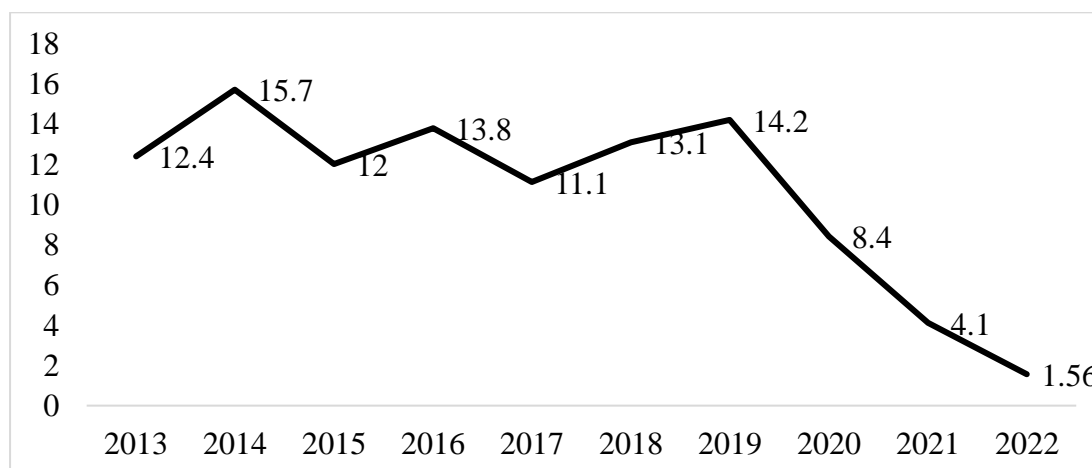
In conclusion, the exploration of cross-border mobility, specifically the practice of grazing animals, illuminated cross-border mobility as significantly influencing interactions of border residents between Nepal and China. The narratives of participants, recounting experiences of grazing cattle within specific territories

spanning both nations, highlighted the cultural bonds that transcended geopolitical boundaries. However, certain diplomatic interactions or (decisions after interactions) seemed to subdue this cultural foundation influencing people-to-people contact. The findings indicate a network of Nepalese and Chinese people who are engaged in cross-border mobility for livelihood. Through the lens of social network, this mobility network was identified as a factor which not only retains the stronger tie but also create weak ties.

The construct “cross-border mobility” while expressed as land mobility above across the border also included the Nepali Chinese contact made possible by air. With such constructs Nepalese participants from tourism community especially guides (for Chinese tourist), tour and travel service provider of touristic destinations (Thamel, Pokhara and Saurav), taxi drivers, translators, and restaurant service providers were approached. Speaking of tourism before the COVID-19 and the earthquake of 2015, Nepal has now become a popular destination for Chinese people—China now is a country to send largest number of tourists in Nepal (Sangroula, 2014). He further added that he people-to-people communication have significantly enlarged over the years—both countries are emerging as increasingly popular destinations for people of both countries. The figure 1 below indicate the percentage of Chinese tourist in the respective year.

Figure 4.1

Percentage of Chinese tourist from the year 2013 A.D. to 2022 A.D.



Note. Adapted from Nepal Tourism Statistics 2022, Government of Nepal, 2023

As seen above, the percentage of Chinese tourists visiting Nepal fluctuated significantly between 2013 and 2022. The figure indicated the sharp decline in the year 2020 and onwards. However, the tourism sector is recovering at a fast pace with decline of the Covid-19 pandemic worldwide (Government of Nepal, 2023).

4.3.2 Aid and Assistance

Chinese assistance to Nepal falls into three categories: Grants (aid gratis), interest free loans and concessional loans. The Chinese financial and technical assistance to Nepal has greatly contributed to Nepal's development efforts in the areas of infrastructure building, industrialization process, human resources development, health, education, water resources, sports and the like (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Nearly, one-third of Nepal's revenue, as for instance in 1972-1973, came from foreign aid (Namboodiri, 1979). Nepal's readiness to respond enthusiastically to China's aid overtures had, therefore, deep-rooted economic compulsions, the author added. By 1973, of the 46 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, which received Chinese aid, Nepal ranked 11th in terms of total volume of aid received.

The Chinese financial and technical assistance to Nepal has greatly contributed to Nepal's development efforts especially in the areas of infrastructure building, establishment of industries, human resource development, health, education, water resources, sports etc. (Embassy of Nepal, 2022). The embassy further stated that the Chinese Government announced 3 billion RMB for 2016-2018 to be utilized in reconstruction projects. Lately, during the visit of Chinese President H.E. Xi Jinping on 12-13 October 2019, China has announced to extend a 3.5 billion RMB grant to Nepal for the period of 2020-2022.

Alongside cross-border mobility, aid and assistance between the two countries not only demonstrated a diplomatic alliance but also created numerous points of contact for individuals involved in these projects. One of the participants from Department of International Relations and Diplomacy, DIRD stated that:

Development cooperation, like when we think about ring road, we think about China so, such cooperation does influence people-to-people relations. For example, the recent training center build for APF at Matatritha from Chinese aid is worth mentioning here. There is even a construction project going on right here TU campus by Chinese contractors. There are so many such projects under Chinese assistance creating a social capital for themselves in Nepal. (K. K.C., key information interview, February 23, 2023)

The mention of “*creating social capital*” by the above expert signaled the existence of social network among Nepalese and Chinese in Nepal. Aid established a foundation of goodwill and shared efforts, while development assistance and projects, produced many professional connections often characterized by weak ties. Along with these weak ties, new interactions were found between Chinese and general Nepalese in their day-to-day work which initiated new social networks. These interactions, both

voluntary and project-driven, align with social network theory, illustrating the strengthening of ties through shared activities and collaborative ventures. As these exchanges flourished, they contributed to the network of relationships between the people of Nepal and China, adding new social networks.

The failure of Bhrikuti Paper Factory, Gorakhkali Rubber Udyog, Hetaunda Kapada Udyog, Harisiddhi Tile Karkhana, Himal Cement, Kathmandu-Bhaktapur Trolleybus and Bansbari Leather often appeared in papers of critical political authors of Nepal. However, a columnist, criticizing on top leaders' decision, advocated on developmental perspective to strengthen people-to-people relations. He stated that:

With economic development, economic cooperation and aid to Nepal by Chinese increased. The story of Trolley Bus, Bansbari Leather Shoes, they are there but the argument is that there are positive vibes among people. For example, if MCC translates into a good development project, irrespective of all these protests, people will tell the tales of Americans. So, the development projects should also be taken important factor for people-to-people relations though not a foundation. There are lots of documents that speak of development aid and projects of Chinese in Nepal. These projects developed people to people relations. These projects start interactions between politician and bureaucrats. This will create positive vibes among people. Also, opportunities are created. See, the trade that was limited with Tibetans expanded to Mainland China, this can be attributed to contemporary political relations. Until Rana and Panchayat regime our relations were limited to Tibet only. (A. Giri, key informant interview, May 10, 2023)

Lakpa Chhumu of Rasuwa also indicated a positive attitude towards the effort of both government in executing a school development project (personal

communication, December 5, 2022). She admired the efforts of Chinese government and indicated, “The government of China through China Aid is constructing a big school in Timure this also indicate good relations among government level as well.” However, the *dilemma* side of Chinese assistance and especially BRI in Nepal can be found among many Nepali authors. Amidst all the media narratives about Nepal and China development cooperation through aid and assistance such as BRI, H. L.

Shrestha clarified that:

So why BRI is so important to talk has a small story. The Chinese government called me at Chengdu University, for lecture on China and South Asia topics. That time blockage happened, Oli (the then prime minister of Nepal) went and signed Trade and Transit Treaty. The students were from all South Asian nations. When it was time to speak...So, the argument here is BRI is an instrument to convert Nepal from landlocked nation to land linked nation. So again, the perspective matters here on the narratives of people, whether they want Nepal to stay as landlocked nation or land linked. (Key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

Apart from tangible connections, Pandit (2017) stated that BRI also seeks to connect people along the route through cultural understanding, financial integration, social integration and interaction, educational ties and other intangible connections. However, success depends on a host of financial, geopolitical and social factors. Similarly, speaking on China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) of BRI, Prathibha (2017) stated that the Chinese leadership would require the institutional knowledge of the western global governance system of the India to establish or reform global economic norms.

A critical assessment by Rajeshwor Acharya was made during the interview where he expressed dissatisfaction over the decision of Nepalese government in a contract involving Chinese contractor. He voiced that:

China is investing in Nepal. If you look at the economic survey by foreign ministry and bulletin from Rastra Bank, you will be clear about the investment pattern. What I say is that policy must be consistent. One or two frauds that I have seen is, for example, of Budi Gandaki project. The government cannot say no, to the contractor who got selected from global tender process. How can we do that? Imagine how they (Chinese) might have felt. Although they (Chinese) did not speak about this to me. (R. Acharya, key informant interview, February 25, 2023)

In the collective voices of the participants, an acknowledgment emerged regarding the impactful role played by the Chinese government in enhancing people-to-people contact through extensive aid and assistance. The sentiments expressed are one of appreciation for China's substantial contributions in comparison to the perceived efforts from Nepal. These endeavors, under the umbrella of aid and assistance, not only served as tangible symbols of bilateral cooperation but also significantly contributed to enhancing the ties between the people of Nepal and China.

4.3.3 Education and Scholarships

Interactions that occur in the contexts of tourism, of exchange of students and scholars, of international business operations, of international scientific or professional meetings, and of participation in the variety of nongovernmental international agencies in the areas of health, education, welfare, economic development, religion, science, and arts in long run influenced international politics (Kelman, 1970). The domain of educational opportunities and scholarships stood as a

crucial diplomatic factor under the broader framework of geopolitical interactions, delineating the contours of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

A notable side of this interaction is the availability of scholarships for Nepalese students to pursue higher education in China, creating a pathway for academic exchange (Upadhyay, 2023). Particularly prominent in fields such as medicine and engineering, this educational bridge has expanded to encompass a spectrum of disciplines, reflecting a diversification of academic pursuits, the author further indicated. The presence of Nepalese students in Chinese institutions is evidence to the growing educational ties between the two nations. In a bid to promote people-to-people relations, China and Nepal signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation 1999 and on the Youth Exchange in 2009. Since then, both countries have been executing youth exchange programs through scholarships/fellowships provided by the Government of China (Gauttam et al., 2021).

Narendra Tamang during interview indicated to look for education sector which also facilitates a lot of people-to-people interactions (personal communication, July 26, 2022). Similarly, Shiv Prasad Kafle from Thamel also indicated that, “Since many Nepalese students are choosing China for their further education, most of the Chinese will know about Nepal” (on personal communication, August 14, 2022). However, a different story was narrated by a barber shop at Tatopani, who wish to move to Kathmandu for his son’s higher studies. He indicated:

There were three barbershops in Tatopani but now only I remain. With very low income and responsibility towards son’s education, I plan to shift the shop somewhere in Kathmandu. Earthquake of 2015 and series of flood in the consecutive years. And the border closure is what was expected. Although I

am planning to leave, I hope for border points to open. There is a need for bachelor's level of education in Tatopani. Also, there are enough students for such level of education. (D. Thakur, personal communication, October 23, 2022)

Had there been higher education facilities in the Tatopani area, the participant would have stayed resulting in his frequent interactions with Chinese like before. Although his story cannot be directly connected to educational relations between Nepal and China but the fact that Dinesh's interaction would increase with higher education infrastructure at Tatopani remains justifiable. Also, if the government's planned of border re-opening, tatopani would be lively market again. Speaking of the areas of people-to-people relations expert Khadka K. C. indicated that tourism, education and business are three areas where people-to-people relations have been increasing (on key informant interview, February 23, 2023). Nepal China relations' expert H. L. also supported the education sector which determined people-to-people interactions which soared after 1990. Supporting the efforts of Chinese government in providing education to Nepalese students, he indicated:

Another aspect of people-to-people relations is education as well. The affordable education in China helped distribution of education as well ultimately influencing people-to-people relations. Nepalese students have been studying China for short term and long-term courses. Most of the multinational countries have recruited Nepalese because his/her academic profile along with Chinese language proficiency. (H. L. Shrestha, key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

International education, serving as a significant influencer in soft power and a crucial aspect of public diplomacy, embraced numerous benefits. These advantages

encompassed the capacity to create economic value, advance a nation's foreign policy objectives, and actively contribute to both economic expansion and cross-cultural dialogue. Gauttam et al., (2021), stated that:

To fulfill its geopolitical objectives in South Asia and bring Nepal closer to China, Beijing utilizes the channel of higher education through its investment in Nepal's education sector. From making Mandarin compulsory in schools to offering a range of scholarships with the establishment of various institutions, Beijing is making a range of efforts to win the hearts and minds of common people, as well as the leadership of Nepal. (p. 12)

Although major educational levels such as bachelors, masters and PhD were found to be the degrees Nepalese students opt for in China. Apart from this, learning language as *education* has also been found to be prevalent among students of Nepal as evident from Bishwo Bhasa Campus, Tribhuvan University. Leela Nyaichyai who completed her doctoral studies from China narrated about how, these interactions along with other societies or network of Nepalese people exist or have relations with Chinese people. She narrated:

In education, we usually talk about language and mainstream education levels students who interact with their colleagues in China or in Nepal. But there is also a group, a community of people engaged in maintaining relations with Chinese counterpart. Let's say, TU Center for South Asia, Nepal China Geography Society and Nepal China Geographics Society. The trend of students towards China is increasing. However, having said that, coronavirus pandemic might have affected the cross-country people-to-people educational interactions in recent years. (L. Nyaichai, key informant interview, February 20, 2023)

It is argued here that complementing formal educational channels are exchange programs facilitated by Chinese civic societies. Ram Karki who just returned from his China visit organized by the political party of China shared his experience about how educational and exchange programs enhance people-to-people relations. He also expressed the disappointment of Nepal government in applying the similar strategies for enhancing people-to-people relations. Sharing similar thoughts, participant, Anil Giri, a journalist and a writer further added:

In education, scholars have increased. Before 1990, it was few courses with limited quota. But now look at the number of streams offered in China. Now students are more positive to go to China. Earlier it was about job after the education but now job is available in China too. Even global opportunities are there if you are graduates of good Chinese universities. But the problem is that, relations must be two ways, the efforts from government of Nepal is not comparable to China. It has become one way like from China only. We have to pull more students, teachers, research scholars from China. This is not done from our side. One can also go through empirical studies on Chinese in Nepal. (key informant interview, May 10, 2023)

The educational programs, scholarships, trade fairs, and civic societies' exchange program enables weak ties in the initial stages of people-to-people interactions. However, with time strong ties will be built among the people. Speaking of the advantage of such programs, Lilamani Paudel indicated:

Student exchange or education, affects people-to-people relations a lot. People connect from different sides and hence, they develop culture. Connections remains even after student life. So, there is chances of further connection. If people feel that government is doing good, the people-to-people relations will

automatically develop. Nepal as a visiting country is also endorsed by China's government. Similar to the cultural programs, scholarships and language centers are all government responsibilities. (key informant interview, May 12 2023)

All the nineteen participants (experts) in this study expressed their educational strategies for enhancing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. They all agreed that educational network will build strong ties in quick time as there will be frequent interactions among Chinese and Nepalese studying in China. The collaborative exchange programs acted as conduits for knowledge sharing, contributing to a deeper appreciation of each other's educational systems, societal values, and cultural hints. In this intersection of education and diplomacy, the intricate network of relationships between individuals from Nepal and China gained further richness and depth.

Almost all the experts agree that the modern relations with China, state-to-state is "*problem free*" and efforts made by Nepal government is not sufficient in enhancing people-to-people relations. People-to-people relations at individual (general) level have not flourished to its level although the initiatives have been started. Speaking of scholarships from Chinese universities, Khadka K. C. stated:

But when it comes to individual level it is not much flourished due to geographical conditions and inaccessibility. However, since 2016, after the third trade blockage by southern neighbor and followed by signing of trade and transit treaty with China and cooperation on Belt and Road Initiatives, hundreds of Nepalese people have visited China. Even in our department hundreds of students are already in China for higher studies under BRI scholarships. So, there is a gradual increase in understanding of people-to-

people relations after signing of BRI to say. (Key informant interview, February 23, 2023)

In summation, education and scholarships, emerged as dynamic elements within the diplomatic landscape, shaping the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. The availability of scholarships, diverse academic pursuits, and cross-cultural exchanges contributed to a deepening understanding between individuals from both nations. These initiatives were not only indicative of the current state of relations but also represented a pivotal juncture that evolved with shifting bilateral policies. As instruments of soft diplomacy, educational interactions played a crucial role in enhancing connections, which is subject to the geopolitical currents that shape the wider narrative of Nepal-China relations.

4.3.4 Exchange Visits

Exchange of bilateral visits immensely contributed to nurturing Nepal-China bilateral relations and promoting the understanding between the two countries (Embassy of Nepal, 2022). The historical agreements were basically meant for carrying out exchanges and cooperation in the fields of economy, trade, transportation, science and technology, culture, tourism, education, sports and health, personnel, etc. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Moreover, the MoU on BRI cooperation aimed at promoting cooperation on policy exchanges, infrastructure connectivity, trade connectivity, financial integration and connectivity of people.

Attributing to the formalization of Nepal-China relations in 1955, Rajeshwor Acharya, former ambassador argued that interactions among Nepalese and Chinese before the formalization was mainly due of trade. After the formalization many delegates from Nepal have visited China and vice-versa. The further stated:

Even Laxmi Parsad Devkota have been to China, which can be verified in Niranjan Bhattarai's book. During King Birendra's visit to China, the President of China Jiang Zemin said that when I look at the white pagoda, it reminds me of the warm relations between Nepal and China. I have indicated his in my book too. Nowadays, the contacts and connections are very large. Earlier there were less transportation infrastructure. (R. Acharya, key informant interview, February 25 2023)

The interview with Mr. Rajeshwor Acharya provided a clear picture of the historical visit made by the leaders of Nepal to China after the formalization. The literature review also justified the claims of visit of top leaders by the participant. The participant also attributed connectivity to current people-to-people interactions. He went on to say:

It must 2013 BS [1956 or 1957 in AD] when I was still a school student, Dharma Raj Thapa visited China as a part of cultural exchange. He even wrote a song where he described a Chinese lady. Earlier communist delegations mostly visited China. Many politicians from China also visited Nepal. Even head of state, former Premier of the People's Republic of China, Zhou Enlai visited Nepal twice. We all know about conversation on Mount Everest between BP Koirala and Zhou Enlai. Nowadays almost all our prime ministers have the tradition of visiting China. All our former kings, Mahendra, Birendra and Gynendra have visited China. Tanka prasad Acharya was the first prime minister to visit China followed by BP Koirala. (R. Acharya, key informant interview, February 25, 2023)

While the frequency of visits by Nepalese have increased, trade and economics interactions have been prioritized by both the governments. Nepal

regularly participated in various trade fairs and exhibitions organized in China including in China International Import Expo (CIIE) held in Shanghai in November every year. Nepal-China's Tibet Economic and Trade Fair is the regular biannual event hosted by either side alternatively to enhance business interaction and promote economic cooperation between Nepal and TAR, China. Nepal-China Non-Governmental Cooperation Forum was established in 1996 which is led by the President of the Federation of the Nepali Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FNCCI) from the Nepali side and the Vice Head of the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce (ACFIC) from the Chinese side (FNCCI, 2022). It was an initiative to mobilize the apex business organization of both sides to enhance cooperation between the private sectors of the two sides.

The visit of political personnel (and also the participants for this study) such as Ram Karki, Dr. Shekhar Koirala, and Gopal Khanal was evident to the exchange visit that facilitated even the political sector of Nepal. Similarly, the researcher's short visit as language students from Bishwo Bhasa Campus to China indicated how such visits are orchestrated to showcase the historical and modern development of China. The establishment of Confucius Institute in Nepal which received many Chinese in education exchange program also highlighted the exchange visits. All these exchange visits are attributed to government's cooperation and decision indicating the importance of geopolitical interactions that not just shaped the personal relation among the leaders and diplomats of both nations but also the general people.

The importance of yet another social network, among the journalists between Nepal and China in the past and current exchanges was found from the interview of experts. In particular, one of the incidents with Jaya Raj Acharya, an encounter with Chinese journalist was worth noting for the depth of relations. He narrated:

I met a Chinese journalist back in 2021. 2021 was the 50th years of Chinese membership in UN. Nepal has played a big role for Chinese membership in UN. I showed them the poem, praising the works of Chinese government in building the Kodari Highway at Tatopani, Sindhupalchowk written by my father. Later on, CCTV went on to make a documentary video and translated by father's poem to Chinese language. The documentary was broadcasted and few days later they gifted me a Chinese version of my late father's poem. (J. R. Acharya, key informant interview, February 22, 2023)

Such act of re-presentation of historical events and valuing them even today by the Chinese society created an emotional attachment and characterized by strong tie towards Chinese government. The Nepali and Chinese version of the poem is attached as appendix d and e respectively at the end of this report. Apart from the act of Chinese government is celebrating the historical achievement, the language proficiency of the journalist supplemented her interactions with Nepalese, thus, strengthening the relations.

The exchange visits of range of people from different walks of life between Nepal and China played a vital role in shaping people-to-people relations. These interactions created both strong and weak ties within their social network. High-level official visits, business engagements, and educational exchanges contribute to the formation of strong ties, fostering deep connections and shared experiences among key stakeholders. On the other hand, the narratives from participants also highlighted the need for more concerted efforts from the Nepalese government (such as language proficiency) to actively engage in building these connections. Despite the potential for strong ties, the establishment of more frequent and diverse exchanges is essential to create a robust and balanced social network, fostering understanding, collaboration,

and trust between the people of Nepal and China. Hence, it is argued that exchange visits, rooted deep in history, increased interactions among Nepalese and Chinese influencing how Nepalese feel about Chinese and China as a whole.

4.3.5 Crisis Management

Crisis events such as earthquake of 2015 and pandemic of 2019 brought a paradigm shift among Nepalese on their view towards both neighbors. Within the diplomatic dimensions that influence people-to-people relations, this section on "*Crisis events*" explored interactions regarding challenges and solutions on natural disasters, environmental concerns, and pandemics. These diplomatic interactions ultimately influenced the relations among individuals of Nepal and China. Natural disasters, such as earthquakes and floods, was found to have a profound impact on cross-border mobility and cooperation. Environmental concerns such as melting of snow, shared water resources to climate change demanded joint efforts. The global challenge of pandemics, as exemplified by events like covid-19, introduced a dimension of security and cooperation. This section highlighted the findings that such crisis events shaped and redefined the foreign relations, influencing the dynamics of people-to-people relations between the two nations.

The earthquake of 2015 and landslides had a significant impact on people-to-people relations. The closure and difficulties in resuming border activities highlighted how geopolitical factors, such as disaster management can influence the flow of people and goods. Ram Tamang (on personal communication, October 16, 2022) stated, "The earthquake of 2015 and frequent landslides changed the economic picture of tatopani border crossings...One can only imagine of earlier years where interactions are enormous". The desertion of border market areas after the natural disasters and government's delay in resuming the border crossing even after years

reflected diplomatic factor in play. The reopening of border points was influenced by diplomatic and political decisions made by the governments of Nepal and China.

The covid-19 pandemic significantly disrupted people-to-people movement between Nepal and China, impacting various aspects of cultural exchanges, economic interactions, and diplomatic engagements. Dhukke K. Bista on how cross-border activities were disrupted by covid-19 stated:

We had good relations. We could buy commodities such as Maida (flour) from Chinese market which was easy. It was after covid-19 breakout that we were stopped from visiting the border market for procuring commodities. The villagers including myself have received relief materials during lockdown from Chinese government as a gesture. The solar plant for lighting purpose was been installed by Chinese government and they regularly visited for maintenance. They (Chinese government) are very helpful. The government of Nepal must prioritize the border issues and resume border activities for good relations. (on personal communication, November 10, 2022)

The impact of crisis events, specifically the earthquakes of 2015 and the subsequent covid-19 pandemic, was visible across the border regions of Tatopani, Rasuwagadhi, and Upper Mustang, influencing policies and regulations that governed people-to-people relations. In Tatopani and Rasuwagadhi, the aftermath of the earthquake led to the complete closure of the borders, a measure further intensified by the challenges posed by the pandemic. Landslides and infrastructural damages further compounded the situation, disrupting the flow of people and interactions. Similarly, in Upper Mustang, particularly at the Kora La pass, the policies introduced during the pandemic played a pivotal role in constraining people-to-people relations then and thereafter. These crisis-driven policy changes have not only restricted cross-border

mobility but have also altered the dynamics of daily interactions, reflecting the interplay between geopolitical events and cultural events.

Speaking on the strict policy on cross-border mobility by Chinese government, one of the experts expressed the need of self-preparedness rather depend later. He further narrated that:

China's strict security policy did affect the trade and economy along with the livelihood of border residents; however, the borders did open after long and trade and other activities continued. It is irrational to think, China will help us or India in that case, in the time of crisis and disaster. We have to do it ourself as they will do for themselves. So, because of their national security policy we are disadvantaged as we were not prepared. (K. K.C., key informant interview, February 23, 2023)

However, interesting to note was the increasing Nepalese and Chinese (tourist) interactions after earthquake of 2015. One of the experts argued that it after the earthquake that people-to-people relations between Nepal and China came into narratives of foreign relations experts, newspapers, media, scholars and of the general Nepalese mass. (L. Nyaichai, key informant interview, February 20, 2023). The economic support, after the earthquake of 2015 and until covid-19, provided by Chinese tourist was reported by all the participants at touristic destinations. Particularly in Thamel, K. Khatiwoda (on personal communication, August 16, 2022) stated, "post-earthquake was a difficult period for Thamel's business but Chinese tourists helped a lot to put Thamel in good economic shape".

Amidst all the concerns (national/international) on global warming and climate change, Shambhu Ram Simkhada had interesting note to share. Positive on the melting of snow at the Himalayas for connectivity, he stated that:

Historically, the Himalayas represented both closeness as well as distance in Nepal China people-to-people relations with the focus being mostly at the government-to-government levels. But with the gradual melting of the snows in the Himalayas, greater opening up of China, including Tibet and greater connectivity the level of Nepal China people-to-people interactions are increasing significantly. As outlined earlier, this will also increase the level of Paradox of Proximity, meaning vitality, complexity and sensitivity which needs handling with priority and sensitivity. To enhance the friendly relations further but avoid misunderstanding, increasing the level of understanding of each other through various tools and let small, individual behaviour be generalized as that of the society or country will be crucial. (S. R. Simkhada, key informant interview, February 18, 2023)

In conclusion, apart from the cultural and economic interactions, diplomatic interactions as discussed above have equal role in influencing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. These board representation in three networks were justified by their respective factors and has been claimed to influence people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. While the quantitative analysis of these factors was out of the scope of this research, the analysis showed association among these three networks. The qualitative statements of participants confirmed the impact on cultural interactions due to diplomatic decisions and vice-versa or economic impact due to diplomatic or cultural interactions and vice-versa. With the concept of relational thinking, these three broad themes emerged as a distinct three networks, each comprising of strong and weak ties. Also, interconnectedness presented itself as a strong attribute influencing each other.

4.4 Discussion

The identified seventeen factors categorically fitted into three broad categories of cultural, economic and diplomatic domain under further scrutiny. Each domain capable of influencing other domains were studied in a network perspective.

Buddhism, as echoed by almost all the expert participants, stood as primary factor that connected people of Nepal and China, yet we are unable to tap the benefits. The economic activities that started from barter system still connected the people of two nations. Be it a monk who came in search of knowledge or a trader in order to exchange, the interaction different categories of people of these two bordering have deepened the relations which can be broadly studied in cultural, economic and diplomatic networks, each independent yet capable of influencing. With the identification of the answer to the first research question, factors that influence people-to-people relations, the next findings chapter below dealt with the Nepal's foreign policy in addressing people-to-people connections.

CHAPTER V

NEPAL'S FOREIGN POLICY AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS

Foreign policy decisions were rarely the outcome of a single, coherent actor operating in isolation. Rather, they emerged from a dynamic interplay among political elites, opposition parties, bureaucracies, media, and interest groups—each influencing the agenda and shaping discourse. However, it's the political elites, the primary actor such as Head of the state, prime minister, minister, and senior officials at state agencies who make decisions (Hafner-Burton et al., 2013). However, in practice, this meant that even when policies appear strategic on the surface, they are often the product of negotiation, compromise, and institutional contestation. This is particularly evident in small states like Nepal, where institutional structures have increased after 1990 along with the interactions with economically powerful neighbors, India and China (Poudel, 2021).

The ten bilateral agreements signed between Nepal and China after 1990 (as indicated in table 1 in p. 59) reflected a clear shift toward economic liberalization, regional integration, and infrastructural cooperation, mirroring broader global trends of globalization and cross-border connectivity. However, even in this more modern and outward-looking diplomatic context, people-to-people relations remain largely absent from the formal language and scope of these agreements. These documents predominantly aim to facilitate trade flows, customs harmonization, transportation logistics, and quality assurance—all of which are essential for enhancing bilateral relations. Yet they position people more as beneficiaries of state-led development than as active agents of cross-border social or cultural engagement.

This chapter with the objective to display the findings of second objective of this research, have been divided in three sub-sections. The first sub-section discussed

the findings on historical agreements and people-centric provision in the foreign policies of Nepal. The second, sub-chapter focused on the agreements and policies after 1990 while the final sub-chapter concentrated on the state-centric diplomacy on people-to-people relations.

5.1 Historical Agreements and People-centric Policies

Formal economic engagements between Nepal and Tibet dated back to 1650 AD when King Pratap Malla concluded a deal with the Tibetan government that gave Nepali traders in Lhasa the right to mint silver coins for Tibet, and recognized Kathmandu as a center for entrepôt trade between India and China passing through the southern Terai plains (Ojha, 2022). With the rise and fall of central authority of Nepal, the significance of “influence from the Northern border” remained high in Nepal’s foreign policy sphere. An article from 1971 AD indicated:

The fall of Rana’s and the almost simultaneous changes in India and China, pitched Nepal forward suddenly into the modern era. The inrush of modern ideas and technology has the effect of stirring up a society which had been static for ages. The most important result was the growth of the spirit of nationalism. (Kant, 1971, p. 204)

Following the unification of Nepal by King Prithvi Narayan Shah in 1769, an office known as the “Jaishi Kotha” was established to manage foreign affairs, with a particular focus on maintaining relations with Tibet and China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). They further stated that the political revolution of 1950 marked a turning point for Nepal's foreign ministry, leading to the establishment of an independent Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1951. During that period, Nepal rapidly expanded diplomatic relations, joined the United Nations and the Non-Aligned

Movement, and established ties with over 26 countries, gaining significant international recognition.

Due to greater influence of geographical, economic and socio-cultural factors of southern neighbor, the policies were often cultivated by the interest of government of India. However, the accession of King Mahendra to the throne in April 1955, defined the task of basic principles of a different Nepalese foreign policy to preserve and assert Nepalese independence and the economic development of the country. Establishment of diplomatic relations between Nepal and China on August 1955 based on five principles of peaceful co-existence and most importantly the trade and intercourse agreement between the Tibet region of China and Nepal in 1956 was crucial step in the history of Nepal's foreign policy (Kant, 1971; Kumar, 1963; Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, 2021).

In recent times, Khanal (2019) also claimed King Mahendra to be the architect of Nepal's foreign policy after the Rana regime. He further elaborated that the King extended Nepal's foreign relations and initiated substantive relations with China. He also argued that during King Mahendra's tenure (1955-1972), Nepal maintained diplomatic relations with many countries and got the membership of United Nations. Nepal became the member of Afro-Asian community and participated in Bandung conference. However, the importance of foreign relations became more crucial, as China underwent rapid economic growth with presence in the global economy as well.

Foreign policy of China towards Nepal was also a matter of quest for this research. Tibet has always been the strategic interest in China's foreign policy towards Nepal and that China always wanted to obtain Nepal's commitment to

neutrality on the Tibetan issues. Speaking of the Chinese foreign policy objectives in Nepal during the period between 1960 and 1990 AD, Khadka (1999) indicated that:

...its [Chinese] foreign policy had three interrelated objectives in Nepal.

These objectives were: (a) strategic-to safeguard its vital strategic interest; (b) political-to present itself as a major competitor of India and a counterweight against Indian influence, neutralize or reduce US, western and Soviet influence in Nepal, and to keep Nepal independent and neutral and free from domination by any power, regional or global; and (c) economic- to support Nepal in its effort to reduce dependence on India and to strengthen economic ties between its Tibet region and Nepal. In evaluating the relative importance China attached to its foreign policy objectives, the strategic component was predominant from the fifties through the sixties, while the political and economic objectives appeared to dominate the seventies through the eighties.

(p. 62)

Similarly, highlighting the foreign policies of Nepal in seventies and early eighties, one of the participants indicated that:

In the 1970s and early 1980s, Nepal continued its policy of equidistance between China and India. Though China recognized India's influence in Nepal, it was also trying to counter Indian influence by supporting Nepal's independence and calling for foreign non-interference. When King Birendra proposed to the international community, during his coronation, to recognize Nepal as the zone of peace, China was one of the first countries to support it.

(B. Basnet, key informant interview, May 12, 2024)

Prior to the 1990s, Nepal did not follow the traditional concept of balancing power between India and other major states. Instead, as Poudel (2021) observed,

Nepal consistently leaned toward India while also seeking diversity in its foreign relations to maintain neutrality. This suggested that what Nepal called “balancing” wasn’t about evenly managing influence from India and China. Also, it was neither practical nor politically feasible for a small state like Nepal to maintain a true balance of power.

Assuming economy as foreign policy tool, Institute of Foreign Affairs (2021) indicated that before the 1990s, the main concern of countries and foreign ministries, in relation to diplomacy, was regarding security and politics, but the changing world presented opportunities, challenges, and threats in the form of economic development and international trade. The report concluded that with the world changing its preference from war and military power to economics and trade, it was both natural and essential for governments and foreign ministries to transform their approach to diplomacy as well.

Building on the insights from the literatures on Nepal's foreign policy, it was evident that a wide spectrum of actors influences Nepal's foreign policy, with the central determinant being the authority in power and their perspective against influencing factors. Speaking of the elite actors such as King Birendra and Prime Minister Kirti Nidhi Bista, Khanal (1973) represented a holistic picture of actors during monarchy. He stated:

The monarch played a central role, emphasizing nonalignment and peaceful coexistence while maintaining a nationalist approach. The government, through Prime Minister Bista’s goodwill visits to India and China, worked to strengthen regional ties and normalize trade and transit relations with India. Foreign states like the United States supported Nepal’s development efforts through aid and agreements, while regional neighbors India and China

remained pivotal in shaping Nepal's geopolitical strategies. Additionally, international organizations like the United Nations and the Non-Aligned Movement provided platforms for Nepal to expand its diplomatic reach and gain global recognition. (p. 215)

The fundamental objective of Nepal's foreign policy has been to enhance the dignity of the nation by safeguarding sovereignty, territorial integrity, independence, and promoting economic wellbeing and prosperity of Nepal. It is also aimed at contributing to global peace, harmony and security (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Interestingly, recent review report on Nepal's foreign policy by (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020) indicated that, Nepal's relationship with China was marked by cordiality, friendship and cooperation and "the reporting period remained historic in terms of substantive growth in the bilateral relations with the exchange of high-level visits, bilateral consultations and *people-to-people* exchange". Hence, it is argued here that, the construct *people-to-people* have been endorsed in recent foreign relations document of Nepal.

A book published by Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies (2021), listed around twelve agreements between Nepal and China. As stated earlier, the agreement of September 1956 AD has been the starting milestone to strengthen *people-to-people* relations. Paragraph III of article 4 of the agreement made provisions taking historical, religious, and cultural factors in account. It stated:

The High Contracting Parties agree that pilgrimage by religious believers of either country to the other may continue according to religious custom.

Personal baggage and articles used for pilgrimage carried by the pilgrims of either Party shall be exempted from taxation by the other Party. (Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, 2021, p. 105)

Along with religious and pilgrimage provisions for the people of Nepal and China, merchants or traders have also been specifically mentioned in the agreement of 1956 AD. Regarding traders the agreement stated:

Traders of the two countries known to be customarily and specifically engaged in trade between the Tibet Region of China and Nepal, their wives and children dependent on them for livelihood and their attendants, not covered by Sub-paragraph 3 of this Paragraph, who enter into the Tibet Region of China or Nepal as the case may be for the purposes of trade, shall hold passports issued by their respective countries and visaed by the other Party, or certificates issued by their respective Governments or by organs authorized by their respective Governments. (Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, 2021, p. 106)

The geography of Nepal and China as they shared border, special provisions were also made for people for people of border districts. The inhabitants of the border districts can cross the border for petty trade, to visit friends or relatives, or for seasonal changes of residence and they need not hold passports, visas or other documents of certification. Similarly, after few decades, replacing the earlier Trade and Payments Agreements signed between the two Contracting Parties on 1974 AD, “Trade and Payment Agreement” was signed between two countries on November, 1981. The agreement also focused trade routes, commodities for import and export, and payment, special provisions were made border residents for their economic improvement. The article VIII of the agreement stated that:

With a view to improve the economic life of the border inhabitants, the two Contracting Parties agree that the border inhabitants of the two countries, may, within area of 30 Kilometers from the border, carry on the traditional

trade on barter basis, which shall not be subjected to the limitation of the above-mentioned provisions. (Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, 2021 p. 98)

The agreement made on 2002 AD between Nepal and China also mostly focused on the interactions of border inhabitants along with pilgrimage, trade and trade routes. The agreement of 2009, considering the need for promoting bilateral trade for the mutual benefit of the two countries and desirous of developing trade, Nepal-China Tibet Trade Facilitation Committee was established. However, Ojha, (2022), stated that several meetings of the Nepal-China Tibet Trade Facilitation Committee have been held over the past years, but the traders and business communities cannot find any useful decisions and facilitative actions to resolve the issues being faced by them at the Tatopani and Rasuwagadhi border points.

In 2010, to further consolidate and develop the traditional good neighbourly and friendly relations between the people of the two countries, and promote the bilateral trade and movement of people between the two countries, an agreement was signed between Nepal and China. Six trading points in each side (Nepal and China) was agreed upon and upgraded however, the provisions for border inhabitants remained the same as that of 2002 AD. The most important of all, considering the landlocked-ness of Nepal, a transit transport was signed between Nepal and China in 2016 which paved the way for right to have permanent access to and from the sea and right to freedom of transit transport. The agreement provided Nepal with access to Chinese port in Tiajin, Shenzhen, LInayungang, and Zhanjiang along with dry ports at Lanzhou, Lasa, and Rikaze of China (Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, 2021).

In particular, recollecting the history, Buddhist scholars were the historic foundations for bilateral relations between Nepal and China (Nyaichai & Adhikari, 2023). The authors, quoting the Peking Review of 1960, further indicated that:

Formal diplomatic relations between Nepal and China were established on 1st August 1955. With this documented timeline, it could be noticed that China's official presence in Nepal started in the middle of the 1950s. When BP Koirala visited Beijing, he expressed how fascinated he was to see the then China's development. The political, economic and social revolution in China was the alluring motivation for the Nepali agrarian society. (Nyaichai & Adhikari, 2023, p. 11)

In conclusion, the examination of Nepal's foreign policy particularly after 1956 AD until 1990 AD indicated various historical agreements, and highlighted a multilayered relationship that goes beyond geopolitical considerations. The provisions in the agreements, particularly those from 1950 onwards, emphasized not only economic and political ties but also highlighted the importance of people's roles in foreign policy formulation. However, the post-1990 agreements deepen state-level cooperation but do not advance a people-centered diplomacy. This points to an opportunity for future engagements to go beyond trade and infrastructure, incorporating policies and programs that empower communities, encourage social understanding, and build soft-power ties between the two countries. These agreements, acknowledging historical, religious, and cultural factors, have enhanced interactions at multiple levels, from pilgrimage and trade to the movement of inhabitants in border districts.

5.2 Post 1990 Agreements and Policies

The mainstream political parties can be credited with driving the institutionalization of democracy in Nepal's post-1990 political landscape. Thapaliya (2019) argued that Nepalese political parties were instrumental in establishing and consolidating democracy through their leadership of the popular uprisings of 1990 and 2006–07. He noted that the major parties consistently endorsed democratic principles and committed to a parliamentary system enhanced by provincial decentralization. These parties also organized the creation of governance institutions and accountability mechanisms to uphold these goals.

After the democratic shift in the early 1990s, Nepal undertook a significant economic transformation, embracing liberalization, privatization, and globalization, with objectives of socio-economic development combined with foreign policy objectives (Nepal Foreign Affairs, 2014). From the promotion of foreign trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) to enhancing eco-tourism along with religious and cultural events, economic diplomacy became a plausible means to achieve its foreign policy objective of economic advancement (Institute of Foreign Affairs, 2021). Although, after 1990 economic interactions increased rapidly, foreign aid still remained a major strategy of Nepal's foreign policy.

Corelating GDP and foreign aid from the period of 2000/2001 to 2022/2023, Dangal et al. (2024) indicated that foreign aid is vital for economic development. However, he further indicated that the significant variability in GDP and inconsistent funding levels for grants and loans indicate that the economy is experiencing growth and challenges. Nayak and Rai (2024) indicated political instability as one of the challenges for foreign investors in Nepal. The authors indicated that, while China became a major investor in Nepal after 2008 although, India still remained the largest

source of FDI, particularly in hydropower, Indian businessmen have played crucial role in Nepal's economic development since 2014. After 1990, private sector is one of the major actors in hydropower development and contributing about 50% of total generation till 18/19 (Bhatt & Joshi, 2024). Hence, the interplay of foreign aid and foreign investment depicted how multiple actors engage in foreign policy to achieve economic development after 1990.

Constitution is the major guiding document of the overall affairs of the nation. The Constitution of Nepal 2072 has made clear provision about Nepalese foreign Policy. Part four of the constitution has made the provision of directive principles, policies and obligations of the state. Under the topics 'Policies of States' the state has the aim to conduct an independent foreign policy based on the Charter of the United Nations, non-alignment, Principles of Panchasheel, International law and the norms of the world peace taking into consideration of the interest of the nation (Baral, 2018). However, the historical findings from the literature indicated many diplomatic interactions (in policies and agreements) that influenced people-to-people.

The focus on enhancing economic wellbeing and prosperity in Nepal's foreign policy aligned with the objective of promoting bilateral relations through mutual benefit. However, despite these formal agreements, recent challenges at border points, as noted by Ojha (2022), suggested that effective facilitation and resolution mechanisms were crucial for translating these diplomatic efforts into tangible benefits for the people on both sides. As the literature indicated, the emphasis on people-to-people connections is not only symbolic but integral to the evolving dynamics of the Nepal-China relationship, reflecting the shared cultural, historical, and geographical aspects that form the foundation of social networks where meaningful interactions take place. In this study, the findings from the excerpts of participants also

emphasized the role of people in shaping the recent Nepalese foreign policies towards China.

Nepal's foreign policy towards China after 1990 has been characterized by a strategic balancing act that reflects Nepal's desire to maintain sovereignty, promote economic development, and ensure regional stability. Here's an analysis of how Nepal's China policy has evolved in the post-1990 period, especially in the context of geopolitical shifts, economic opportunities, and internal political transformations. Foreign affair expert and diplomat, Bhekh Bahadur Thapa during the interview also indicated that foreign policy of any country must be state-centric while focus must be made on the people (key informant interview, May 28, 2024). Post-1990 agreements revealed a state-centric orientation, focused on trade, transit, and infrastructure.

While such agreements are ultimately meant to benefit people economically, they failed to institutionalize or promote people-to-people interaction such as cross-border marriages, cross-border festivals, educational exchanges or tourism liberalization. However, marked by friendliness, mutual support and understanding and appreciation of each other's aspirations and sensitivities, Nepal and China have maintained strong and cordial bilateral relations. Leela Mani Paudyal, recalling the sound foreign relations and policies after 1990 to till date, indicated Nepal-China bilateral ties as "*problem-free relations*". He further supplemented that:

Nepal's socio-political landscape has undergone numerous transformations, including seven constitutions and over twelve government transitions. Yet, a salient feature of our relationship with China is its non-interference in Nepal's internal affairs. China's global presence as an economic powerhouse, coupled with its unselfish approach to aiding Nepal, adds a unique dimension. Unlike many other nations, China extends its hand without concealed agendas or

stringent conditions, an attribute that underscores the reliability of this partnership. Nepal's consistent adherence to the One China Policy serves as an anchor for this relationship, governed by the principles of Panchasheel, which prioritize diplomacy over confrontation. (L. M. Puadyal, key informant interview, May 12 2023)

Although the participant indicated that the relations between Nepal and China is problem-free, the field visit of the border locations displayed issues, reflected in the voices of people at border locations. Similarly, Pandey (2022), also mentioned about the issues BRI faced in its implementation. The author also spoke of the border issues over pillar number 57 in Dolakha district, which was a major crisis of contention. Various newspaper articles also indicated disputes have often surfaced in Humla, Gorkha, and Kimathanka (Sankhuwasabha). Hence, apart from being problem-free relations between Nepal and China, there are issues such as border disputes and refugee problems.

Despite few foreign policy crises between two nations, both the countries are abiding by the ideals of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019). Experts somehow agreed that peoples' concerns rarely made up to policy level even after 1990. On the similar note, speaking on the omissions of analysis of people-to-people relations in foreign policy of Nepal Khadka, K. C. indicated:

In foreign policy one significant leader can make big difference. Dissatisfied with his father's international policies, King Mahendra came up differently to bring a paradigm shift in the international policies. This indicates role of individual in foreign policy. Since the time of great Prithivi Narayan Shah, Bhimsen Thapa, Jung Bahajur, Chandra Shamsher, Tribhuvan, Mahendra,

Birendra, B. P. Koirala and in recent days the government of K. P. Oli and Nepali Congress, the people-to-people relations or the individual level analysis of foreign policy is missing. (key informant interview, February 23, 2023)

Although the participant hinted towards the role of specific actors of foreign policy, he later on indicated the lack of study on the relations between people of two nations at ground level. Sharing his experience on the travel to Burang City in Lhasa and with proudness, he indicated how respectful Chinese were towards Nepalese. The participant also mentioned about the trust factor that Chinese officials have towards Nepalese over other nationalities when it came to trade.

On actors of Nepal's foreign policy, Karki (2023) wrote that from the time of the Panchayat regime till the restoration of the multiparty system in 1990, the envoys (diplomats) would be appointed at the discretion of the king on a merit basis coupled with high-caliber professional expertise and their past profile. A former prime minister and a former Chief justice of the Supreme Court also became ambassadors during this time. The other consideration in appointing ambassadors included the persons who were characterized to be especially suitable to secure the host country's support in some specific issues of national importance.

According to Bhattarai (2018), the high-level bilateral visits between Nepal and India in 2014 highlighted the significance of state leaders as central figures in shaping foreign policy. Prime Minister Sushil Koirala's participation in Narendra Modi's swearing-in ceremony emphasized the value of symbolic gestures and adherence to diplomatic protocols in fostering bilateral relations. Modi's visit to Nepal, his address to the Nepalese parliament, and his focus on the "four Cs"—

cooperation, connectivity, culture, and constitution—demonstrated the influence of personal diplomacy in crafting foreign policy narratives.

Owing to geopolitical positioning of Nepal, participant, H. L. Shrestha indicated Nepal stands in between the global powers and its role is very critical. He further added, “After 1990, the internal conflicts, whether situational or orchestrated becomes advantageous for global powers to play their roles but the government or the oppositions all must have single view on foreign policies” (key informant interview, February 17, 2023).

National interest was mentioned frequently by the authors enquiring about nation’s foreign policy. Singh (2011) discussed how consensus on foreign policy can be attained by investigating on three agenda: issues/interest, institutions and individuals. The author claimed that domestic politics is the biggest problem of Nepal’s foreign policy. On the other hand, in recent times, due to greater influence of geographical, economic and socio-cultural factors of southern neighbor, the policies were often cultivated by the interest of government of India (Upadhyaya, 2012).

However, Adhikari (2018) argued that while the principles of Nepal’s foreign policy foreign are based on certain principles, such as those underlined by the UN Charter, non-alignment, Panchsheel, international law and world peace outlined in Nepal's constitution, they are insufficient to address the growing demands of the country's foreign policy, national security, and strategic priorities. To this, Johny (2024) claimed that Nepal has avoided traditional power balancing with India and China, instead adopting a strategic hedging approach—leveraging its non-aligned status to benefit from both neighbors without committing to either.

Although the geopolitical relations between Nepal and China have been marked by friendliness, China have acknowledged that it cannot substitute India for

the uninterrupted flow of goods and services to and from Nepal. India's role in shaping Nepal-China people-to-people relations was prominent as Nepal is almost entirely dependent on India for transit to and from the rest of the world. Highlighting the importance of India, one of the former ambassadors indicated that:

Well, the connectivity and relations are increasing, what I feel is that there are problems and we should not hide it. The border land encroachment issues are very much politicized. I have written in my books about the closing of factories in Nepal. We cannot change our neighbors so problems must be brought to table and talked about. China is world's production factory whose economy is comparable to America and other big nations. Yet we are unable to get the economic benefits from such big neighbor. India is there too. We can also get benefits from them. (R. Acharya, February 25, 2023)

Along with the border issues, the participant clearly indicated the influence international actors in Nepal's foreign policy. While positive on the growing interactions of Nepal in international relations network, he pointed out the opportunities that are being missed due to our domestic competition. Focused more on the economic perspective, the participant displayed positive notes on Nepal China people-to-people relations and the influence of international actors in Nepal's foreign policy.

China and India both have been assisting in Nepal's development accomplishments with economic and technical cooperation. However, Gokhale (2021) argued that "New Delhi's close relationship with Nepal, bound in history and culture, and the misperception about China's relations with Nepal before 1950 have contributed to a skewed understanding of Sino-Nepali relations". The author

suggested that non-interference in day-to-day Nepali politics by Delhi will be a good beginning but may not be enough by itself. He further suggested that:

The Nepali desire to feel different from India, coupled with lingering doubts over Sikkimization, could be addressed by a clear and unambiguous endorsement of Nepal's independence and sovereignty by New Delhi. Related to this, it may be the right time to update some of the elements of the relationship, beginning with the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. (Gokhale, 2021, p. 22)

Sensitive towards securities of the both the neighbors and even towards other countries and non-alignment is the key to state-centric foreign policy. The geopolitical location of Nepal made it vulnerable due to interest of global powers. One of the professors at TU stressed that:

Including existing relations, we should be very careful for we are trapped into geopolitical rivalry. Our southern neighbor India seems to align with American Indo-Pacific Strategy. And USA also eyeing very closely to Nepal, as China is becoming a major global power, one of the rivals of United States of America. Hence, Nepal has become volatile and vulnerable battlefield in the quest for global and regional power. We should not form any kind of alliance with security concerns of America or China. Hence, non-aligned, neutral and protecting neighbors' interest will be the sustainable means of protecting our national interest. (K. K.C. key informant interview, February 23, 2023)

Trust, an attribute of good relations between two people was also applicable for two nations. China is a longstanding ally of Nepal, employing multiple strategies to deepen bilateral ties. Its development assistance, framed as South-South

cooperation, directly engages Nepali society, while its “good neighbour” policy extends beyond politics to social spheres Nyaichai & Adhikari (2023). However, the lack of trust on Nepalese government and the political actors, the China based projects are being delayed. One of the participants indicated that:

At the time when China was interested in security aspects, introduction of MCC in Nepal changed the way China looked at Nepal. China wants us to know that Nepal is being played by international powers. Our politicians need to show their trust when dealing with China. The problem I am arguing here is the reliability factor that is missing among the leaders of Nepal. There are leaders who are influenced by India and as such Chinese project executions are paused. The problem among the leaders is also that they lean towards different power for personal pride and position. (H. L. Shrestha, key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

From the above, triangular relations between Nepal, China and India on government-to-government interactions were noticeable. India and China have economic and cultural relations dating back to centuries (Scott, 2016). Chinese leaders have made it clear that they do not view India as China’s strategic rival (B. Basnet, key informant interview, May 12, 2024). H. L. Shrestha made it more clear by saying:

Other things to be clear is that China will not help Nepal in the cost of India. China sees India as big a big market and it does not what to lose it. China’s competition is with America not India. China doesn’t want to use India to compete with America because Chinese leaders are pragmatic. China does not want Nepali leaders to play China card or India card, this is evident from the

period of Mao Zedong. It is a Mao's dream of three friendly nations, China, Nepal and India. (key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

In conclusion, Nepal's foreign policy towards China after 1990 has largely been shaped by state-centric priorities focusing on trade, transit, infrastructure, and non-alignment. These agreements, though framed to serve national interests and economic development, rarely address or institutionalize the people-to-people dimensions that are essential for long-term relational trust and social connectivity. Despite constitutional provisions and rhetorical commitments to peaceful coexistence and mutual respect, the lived experiences of citizens—especially in border areas—remain disconnected from policy-level discourse. As expert interviews suggest, Nepal's geopolitical sensitivity, internal political instability, and over-reliance on formal diplomacy have overshadowed the soft power potential of cross-border cultural, educational, and social exchanges.

The phrases from participants, such as “*many Chinese do not know Nepal*”, must be treated as the root problem in formulating foreign policies of Nepal towards China. The cultural, economic and diplomatic interactions have developed its own network which is rooted deep and will be for eternal. It is the actors who change while the network remains stable with numerous strong and weak ties. Therefore, the foreign policy of Nepal towards China must acknowledge this network structures during policy formulation.

Network perspective or relational thinking, a new dimension in international relations, displayed new processes in international state behaviour that have not yet been researched (Kurki, 2020, 2022; Kurki & Colin, 2013). In case of Nepal's foreign policy, diplomacy along the social structures of culture, economy and diplomacy was found to strengthen people-to-people relations. Strategies to strengthen the people-to-

people relations were narrated by almost all participants. While participatory approach and personal communications at respective locations gave insights on the people-to-people relations, experts suggested strategies that addressed all their problems as well.

5.3 People-to-people Aspect in Nepal's diplomacy

After the promulgation of the 2015 Constitution, several high-profile visits highlighted the active involvement of government actors in shaping Nepal's foreign relations. Kamal Thapa, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, played a significant role through his visits to India and China in 2015, amidst economic blockades and political unrest in the Terai. Similarly, Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli visited India and China in 2016, emphasizing Nepal's diplomatic outreach to its neighbors. Leaders such as K.P. Sharma Oli aligned closely with China through initiatives like the Belt and Road, while Pushpa Kamal Dahal and Sher Bahadur Deuba worked to balance relations by strengthening ties with India (Miele, 2017). These leaders navigated Nepal's foreign relations amid significant domestic and regional challenges.

In Nepal's diplomacy towards China, the vital role of people-to-people interactions often remained underemphasized or overlooked. While high-level diplomatic engagements and infrastructural projects dominate the agenda, the everyday social and cultural connections between communities along the border receive little attention. This gap created challenges that directly affect the lives of people living in these areas. For instance, cross border mobility even after the lockdown period affected the relations that was maintained by festivals. Yet, these grassroots interactions are seldom factored into diplomatic strategies. As one participant, G. Dhan Bahadur (on personal communication, November 4, 2022)

observed, “The festivals keep our bonds alive, but they rarely enter official discussions.”

Moreover, restrictions at border crossings hindered family reunions and traditional exchanges. In Rasuwagadhi, family members are frequently stopped from crossing for visits, disrupting social ties that have existed for generations. According to C. Lama from Rasuwagadhi (on personal interview, December 5, 2022), “Family visits are the lifeblood of our border communities, but diplomatic policies often prioritize security over these human connections.” Similarly, longstanding practices such as shared grazing land for cattle have nearly ceased, causing economic and social strain for pastoral communities. Key informant and resident of Lo Manthang, D. K. Bista (on November 10, 2022) pointed out, “Our livelihood depends on shared pastures, but these arrangements are fading due to rigid border regulations.”

Diplomacy between Nepal and China has largely centered on infrastructure collaboration, with major projects emphasizing roads, bridges, and connectivity. However, this focus neglected the immediate and practical needs of border residents and civic society groups engaged in cross-border exchange. R. Tamang from Tatopani, Sindhupalchowk (on October 16, 2022) remarked, “Infrastructure is important, but it cannot replace the daily human interactions that sustain our relationship.” The disproportionate emphasis on physical development often overshadowed people-to-people diplomacy, which China itself recognizes as a pillar of BRI. While China has highlighted people-to-people exchanges in its policy framework, Nepal’s project proposals remain heavily skewed towards infrastructure, often missing opportunities to strengthen social and cultural ties.

Furthermore, Nepal’s diplomatic discourse often invokes the “China card” narrative, especially in media and public debates during tensions with the southern

neighbor. One of the expert participants, Lila Nyaichyai raised dissatisfaction over the political narratives of “*China card*” and elaborated:

We (Nepal) being situated in a strategic position between two super powers, cannot afford to play India card or China card. This raises concern to both the neighbors. We have to accept that they are both developing and expanding. So, we need our both neighbors. The delay in the execution of BRI projects will not send positive message to the people of China. We need to very careful while implementing our foreign policies as a sovereign nation. Non-alignment is the key in foreign policies. (key informant interview, February 20, 2023)

The narration of the word, “*China card*” was found in the interview of the many experts who participated in this research. It often denoted diplomatic interaction with China to encounter Indian government’s strategic movement in Nepal. One of the participants, a former ambassador, hinted clear picture of the use of China cards by the rulers and leaders, as he stated that:

China card is much known concept in Nepal’s foreign policy. It has to do with extracting concessions from India using China. In the 1960s, King Mahendra used China card to take Nepal out of India’s overwhelming dominance. One of the clear examples of it would be the closure of Indian check posts at the Nepal-China border in 1969. King Birendra tried it to use unsuccessfully during the Nepal-India economic impasse in 1988-89. King Gyanendra also applied it when he ran the country directly and India was not pleased. He pushed for China, for instance, to be welcomed as an observer in the South Association for Regional Cooperation. Maoist leader, Pusha Kamal Dahal tried to China card when his party became the largest in the Constitution Assembly of 2008. Other leaders particularly from the left, have used China

card on various occasions. Placing on Nepal-China relations on a higher plane compared to Nepal-India relations publicly is only one example of it. (B. Basnet, key informant interview, May 12, 2024)

While various government actors and Nepalese civic societies have acknowledged the importance of exchanges with China, their activities remain limited in scale and impact. Krishna K.C., a journalist (on personal interview, May 16, 2023) expressed concern that “While official channels recognize the value of people-to-people relations, grassroots efforts lack sufficient support and visibility.” This disconnect highlighted the need for Nepalese diplomacy to better integrate and prioritize social and cultural interactions alongside strategic infrastructure development.

Regarding areas of diplomacy and investment of resources, Anil Giri stated, “Government should spend accordingly to increase people-to-people relations. We opened so many Nepalese mission offices at China, but in Nepal we just have one. There should have been one in Pokhara, or Sauraha, why not?” (key informant interview, May 10, 2023). Kriti Bhujju also acknowledged that foreign policy of Nepal towards China is very good on papers but lacks the implementation (key informant interview, February 21, 2023). Emphasizing the role of political parties in shaping foreign policies, the participants from political organization argued for unity among political parties when it comes to foreign relations. Shekhar Koirala, in particular stated:

We need internal reformation. Parties must be united. When government is active, party is inactive. People go to Ministry not the party office. Parties must back up government and government must support parties. So, the main question is how much we respect institutional structure. The ruling and

opposition party must work close in close coordination. The responsible person must meet the foreign delegates, instead of their near ones. Apart from this, cultural exchange, think tank exchange, and teachers exchange helps a lot in people-to-people. It is necessary to improve people-to-people relations. The development of immediate neighbors represents great opportunities for us.
(key informant interview, March 4, 2023)

Positive on the steps taken by GoN, even if small, Nyaichai & Adhikari (2023) stated that the number of Nepali students studying in China is increasing every year and will increase more in the future because both governments have agreed on people-to- people relations. The authors have summarized nine soft power strategies to GoN to cope up with Chinese public diplomacy. They are listed in the table below.

Table 5.1

Soft power strategies recommended for GoN

SN	Strategies
1	Defined objectives and programmes
2	Purposeful publicity of Nepal’s Prides and Achievements
3	Education targeting foreign students
4	Establishing Nepal centers in foreign universities
5	Exchange of visits
6	Celebration of Nepali festivals abroad
7	Organizing cultural and other programs abroad
8	Hosting seminar and discussion programmes
9	Budgetary arrangements

Source: Adapted from Chinese public diplomacy in Nepal by Nyaichai & Adhikari,

2023. Copyright@2023 by Policy Research Institute

In conclusion, despite the official recognition of people-to-people relations in diplomatic rhetoric, their practical integration into Nepal's foreign policy with China remains limited and under-resourced. The voices of those living in border regions, civil society actors, journalists, and former diplomats revealed a consistent theme: the human dimension of diplomacy has been overlooked in favor of economic interests, particularly in infrastructure development. While these were important, they cannot substitute for the everyday cultural, familial, and social ties that constitute the bedrock of long-term international goodwill. Along with the infrastructural development the section below illustrated strategies as voiced by the experts for inclusion of people-to-people relations in foreign policy of Nepal to strengthen the existing relations.

5.4 Discussion

Foreign policy of Nepal has always been balancing the *only* two neighbors and maintaining the status-quo in the international system. Documentations, starting from the Constitution of 2015, have well-stated the objectives of Nepal's foreign policy and the strategies to achieve such objectives. Participants, especially experts, echoed that as an independent nation, China is doing all it can to prosper the economic sector of Nepal. However, the internal conflicts mainly based on political ideologies overshadowed the economic projection and hence, developmental partnership between Nepal and China often gets delayed.

Diplomacy is the key to effective implementation of Nepal's foreign policies towards China. Understanding how different people from different walks of life interact with each other and knowing what strengthens the relations is the way forward to better relations. It is even more important to understand interactions as most of the interactions today are happening over digital platforms, replacing physical interactions.

CHAPTER VI

STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE RELATIONS

The new roads are mainly seen as a way to bring back the once-thriving trade across the Himalayas (Saxer, 2014). He further added, “These may be new roads, but what they facilitate is an old trade: brokering between neighbors.” Participatory observations to border areas depicted the same during the research. Physical connectivity (especially roads in Nepal) however, has been a major strategy by GoN to enhance and strengthen people-to-people relations.

Rechberg and Guo (2019) suggested that a shared culture of operations embedding shared knowledge management practices is necessary to ease interpersonal tensions and strengthen people-to-people bonds between participating nations of the BRI. Hence, apart from infrastructural connectivity, cultural diplomacy, student exchange programs, tourism promotion, exchange visits, scholastic (thinktank) dialogues, media collaboration, and transliteration of Nepalese literatures have been categorized as strategies for strengthening Nepal-China people-to-people relations.

6.1 Infrastructural Connectivity

Infrastructural connectivity, especially road construction has been one of the major strategies to enhance people-to-people relations. China under the new leadership with President Xi Jinping at the top has laid great emphasis on promoting and strengthening friendlier and more cordial relations with all the countries of the world, in particular neighboring countries (Acharya, 2014). Since the emergence of Xi Jinping as the president of China, special focus has been given on connectivity—opening China to the outside world (H. L. Shrestha, 2017a). Almost all the participants narrated that infrastructure connectivity is the key to strengthening

people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. However, connectivity comes at a cost and there is always economic analysis. Sharing his personal experience during his travel to Burang of Tibet, one of the key informants indicated some of the challenges associated with connectivity. He indicated:

Connectivity is the key if you want to enhance the people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Having said that, we must also accept the fact that, Chinese (border) side has very low population. Although connectivity is the key to enhancement of people-to-people relations, challenges also arise, that is the low population density. However, for the trade to flourish, we must try and reach for mainland China through highways and railways, which is a plus point for us. All the seven provinces of Nepal must have connectivity with Tibet and finally to mainland China. (K. K.C., key informant interview, February 23, 2023)

Another key informant, Chakka Bahadur Lama, a local representative of Humla district also verified the economic challenges such as transportation and limited Chinese market on the Chinese Side (key informant interview, April 2, 2023). However, Murton (2017) analyzed the border corridors in Mustang and found that “on the basis of everyday experiences in Mustang and other districts of Nepal’s northern borderlands, it is evident that new road infrastructures do not benefit everyone equally (p. 258). Hence, careful scrutiny is needed in the projects under Chinese development projects, be it transport, hydropower or shipment facilities.

On the economic perspective of BRI in Nepal, H. L. Shrestha emphasized connectivity to enhance people-to-people relations between Nepal and China and clarified the discourses of Nepal’s involvement in AIIB. He suggested:

Regarding our nation's involvement on AIIB or BRI, the government called me for my opinions... Also, I suggest to use the loan with a productive and profitable strategy. Instead of building roads to connect Kathmandu, we can develop a road that connects Tibet with Lumbini. Tibet is connected by railways. So even if only 10 percent of people come to Lumbini it is profitable. We should look at areas where investment generates profit and this way grants and loans will be justifiable. (key informant interview, February 17, 2023)

From an economic perspective, Nepal viewed BRI as an opportunity to address its infrastructural gaps, enhance regional connectivity, and stimulate trade and investment. By linking Nepal more closely with China and other BRI partner countries, the initiative is expected to reduce the country's dependence on a single transit route, diversify markets, and create avenues for energy, transport, and industrial development (Baral 2018). Proponents argued that BRI projects could generate employment, attract foreign direct investment, and integrate Nepal into wider global value chains. However, concerns remain regarding financing modalities, debt sustainability, and Nepal's institutional capacity to effectively manage large-scale infrastructure projects, which may shape the extent of BRI's economic benefits for the country (Prasain, 2024).

Infrastructure shaped both material practices and social relations, with profound implications for state formation, borderland identity, and geopolitical security. By analyzing highways and fences along the Nepal–China border, Murton (2017) demonstrated how bureaucratic processes and aid-driven interventions contribute to creating a border corridor. Through a dialectical lens of mobility and containment, the author displayed that infrastructure both facilitated movement and

imposed constraints. Ultimately, he argued that infrastructure is not merely developmental but also a geopolitical and social instrument that embedded state power, capitalism, and new forms of rural–state relations.

While connectivity across border has always been a topic of discussion in foreign policy crisis, it had different utility for domestic tourist. Lekhnath Bhandari, who has been to Chinese market across the friendship bridge at Sindhupalchowk, was expecting the same in Kora La, Mustang. However, he has different feelings as he reached there to nothing but a pillar numbered 24 where “Nepalese tourists take pictures” (personal communication, November 11, 2022). He added, “the government should work and make this a marketplace at Kora La, considering easy access and beautiful landscapes Mustang has to offer and roads are the key.

Connectivity is important in strengthening people-to-people bond because along with the restitution of already existed strong ties, economic interactions come into account creating weak ties. Prasad (2016) also indicated that it is necessary to interlink the border region with road and railway network which will enhance the trade between Nepal and China in future. A recent desk review by Prasain (2024) on BRI projects in Nepal recommended on considering national interest and conducting more studies focused on the geopolitical constraints and long-term economic effects before implementation of the projects. The author claimed that it’s been seven years yet no single BRI project has started. However, a recent news article on October 2024 published by The Kathmandu Post indicated that two mini projects of Nepal (Panda Pack Project and Amity Living Water Project) have been listed in the output document of the third Belt and Road Forum for international Cooperation, which concluded on October 18 2024.

In conclusion, the emphasis placed by China, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, on promoting friendly relations with neighboring countries has led to a concerted effort towards enhancing connectivity. The participants in our study echoed the sentiment that infrastructure connectivity is pivotal for strengthening people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. While challenges such as low population density in some Chinese regions were acknowledged, the overall consensus was that connectivity, particularly through highways and railways, serves as a key driver for the flourishing of economic interactions and cultural exchanges. Despite economic analyses pointing to challenges, the consensus remained that connectivity acted as a catalyst, creating new networks and fortifying existing ones between the people of Nepal and China.

6.2 Cultural Diplomacy

Scholars hold the perception that cultural diplomacy influenced ideas, norms, and identities, fostering a positive image and understanding of a country. Culture as diplomatic element is often discussed under broad topic of soft power strategies as means of influencing and shaping international relations. About a decade ago, “Soft power” was a relatively new concept in Chinese discourse. Drawn largely from the works of Joseph Nye, it has quickly caught on among China’s policy circles (Wang, 2011). Sharing similar thoughts Wang (2008) also indicated that:

The concept of soft power has been widely used by scholars, officials, and reporters. For instance, the 2007 White Paper on Chinese Foreign Affairs highlights the importance of soft power; the 17th Communist Party of China (CPC) Congress Report urges China “to enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people’s basic cultural rights and

interests. This is the first time that a document from the highest authoritative government body has promoted “soft power. (p. 258)

Nye, (2004), claimed that soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture, its political value and its foreign policies. Culture as a construct has also been seen used by the scholars when writing about public diplomacy. Speaking on the public diplomacy, a role of government to strengthen people-to-people, d’Hooghe (2005) stated that public diplomacy may not be a current term in China, yet China has certainly developed a remarkable array of activities that together form a consistent and quite effective public diplomacy policy.

As China wanted to enhance its global presence and influence, it has employed various soft power strategies to engage with Nepal and other neighboring countries. Investments in infrastructure, cultural exchange programs, and educational opportunities in China have created opportunities for people-to-people interactions and cultural understanding between Nepalese and Chinese individuals (Maskey, 2017). By employing these soft power strategies, China aims to foster a positive image and build goodwill among the people of Nepal.

However, the concept of soft power also invited critical examination from scholars and analysts. Some argued that soft power can be used to manipulate and influence public opinion, obscuring the underlying political and economic interests of powerful nations (Cohen, 2015). In the context of Nepal-China relations, this critical perspective prompted to carefully analyze the intentions and implications of China's soft power initiatives and their impact on people-to-people interactions. Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s work on soft power has provided a valuable understanding on the complexities of contemporary international relations (Hartig, 2012; Melissen, 2005; Nye, 2008). In the context of Nepal-China relations, the concept of soft power explored on the

strategies employed by both nations to shape public perceptions and cultivate positive relations. By examining soft power dynamics, deeper understanding into people-to-people interactions and the bilateral ties between Nepal and China was obtained.

The soft power projection of China was visible in Nepal. The Confucius Institute at Kathmandu University and the recently inaugurated at Tribhuvan University (Xinhua, 2022) served as evidence to the same. However, arguing that the efforts made from government of Nepal to enhance people-to-people relations are not sufficient, Anil Giri recommended strategies for enhancing people-to-people relations. He stated:

But the problem is that, relations must be two ways, the efforts from government of Nepal is not comparable to China. It has become one way like form China. We have to pull more students, teachers, research scholars from China. This is not done. One can also go through empirical studies on Chinese in Nepal. (A. Giri, key informant interview, May 10, 2023)

The culture of cross-border land grazing or the shared festivals which happens regularly at the border areas between Nepal and China are losing its importance. The closure of certain border crossings has brought forth significant challenges for border communities, particularly impacting age-old traditions such as marriages and the ability of relatives to meet freely. Recognizing the profound cultural and social implications of these closures, there is a pressing need for suitable diplomacy initiatives to address the concerns of these communities.

Culture diplomacy, often studied under the topic of public diplomacy was found as profound strategies to enhance people-to-people relations. The cultural artefacts, Buddhism, and the exchange of Buddhist monk were the historic foundations for bilateral relations between Nepal and China (Nyaichai & Adhikari,

2023). At recent times, China is involved in Nepal through Chinese language teaching, economic assistance, trade, investment, education, student exchanges, and visits of politicians, the business community, journalists, civil servants and other people from different spheres of the Nepali society. While, China has been efficiently working to strengthen people-to-people relations, the efforts made from Nepal's side is undermined.

In conclusion, cultural diplomacy included initiatives such as, cross-border cultural events and virtual festivals that celebrate shared heritage, joint celebrations, and facilitated communication channels through technology to keep families connected. Transparent information dissemination about the reasons behind border closures and the implementation of special considerations for essential human interactions, like family events, are crucial components. Furthermore, crisis response mechanisms, support services, and collaborative policy dialogues can collectively contribute to a diplomatic approach that not only navigated the challenges posed by closed borders but also underscored a commitment to preserving the cultural richness of these regions. In doing so, governments can foster a sense of understanding, cooperation, and shared resilience among border communities.

6.3 Student Exchange Programs

Upon exploration, educational programs within the realm of Sino-Nepalese people-to-people relations highlighted a notable imbalance in efforts. China's commitment to fostering educational cooperation is evident. Their strategic move not only facilitates knowledge exchange but also lays the foundation for stronger people-to-people ties. Contrastingly, the efforts from the Government of Nepal (GoN) appear relatively modest in comparison, signaling a potential area for growth and enhanced collaboration. Arguing that the efforts made from government of Nepal to enhance

people-to-people relations is not sufficient, Rajeshwor Acharya recommended strategies for enhancing people-to-people relations by stating that:

But the problem is that, relations must be two ways, the efforts from government of Nepal is not comparable to China. It has become one way like form China...Buddhism can be one of the sectors which can strengthen people-to-people relations. How much can we offer Buddhism to China? CBA, Chinese Buddhist Association, there is 30 crore members. That is largest Chinese NGO. Have we thought about those people in offering Nepal as one of their destinations? (key informant interview, February 25, 2023)

While there is acknowledgment of cooperation on Chinese language programs, the broader scope of affiliating Chinese university courses was expected to strengthen people-to-people relations. It is imperative for the GoN to consider and prioritize such innovative strategies, acknowledging their potential to create a robust educational environment and contribute people-to-people ties between the two nations.

Similarly, Simkhada (2018) conceptualized the idea of at "Trans Himalayan Institute of Higher Learning" bringing wisdom and knowledge, experience and creativity from both sides of the Himalayas for a new convergence of ideas and ideologies for peaceful and tolerant, democratic progressive political, economic security. According to the former Indian ambassador to Nepal, Ranjit Rae (2021), China has established 26 'China Study Centres' across Nepal, aimed at strengthening cultural and educational interactions (Upadhyay, 2023). According to Rae, many Nepali students study in Chinese universities, and there is a steady exchange of delegations and study visits between the two countries, the author further stated. In

recent years, Confucius Centres have been rejected for being propaganda machines of the CPC as China has now opened China Cultural Centres (CCCs) around the world.

While Chinese efforts are inevitable, Nepalese government has not invested in similar initiatives to cater Chinese students. One of the participants said:

I have seen how much effort the Chinese government puts into enhancing people-to-people relations through scholarships and educational opportunities. I myself completed my PhD at a Chinese university, and I can say that those years of study not only gave me academic knowledge but also helped me understand Chinese culture and society much more closely. These scholarships create strong bonds between our two countries because many Nepali students like me return home with positive experiences and networks. However, I feel that Nepal's efforts are not comparable—our government has not invested in similar initiatives to welcome Chinese students or to expand cultural and educational exchanges. If both sides contributed equally, the people-to-people relations would become much stronger and more balanced. (L. Nyaichai, key informant interview, February 20, 2023).

In conclusion, the dynamics of people-to-people relations in the educational domain highlighted a notable imbalance in efforts between the two nations. While China exhibits a robust commitment to fostering educational cooperation, the initiatives from the Government of Nepal appeared comparatively modest, suggesting an area ripe for collaborative enhancement. Rajeshwor Acharya's critique emphasized the importance of reciprocal efforts, urging Nepal to explore strategic avenues like promoting Buddhism for a more balanced engagement.

The integration of Chinese university courses and the proposed concept of a "Trans Himalayan Institute of Higher Learning" hold promising potential for creating

a robust educational environment, contributing significantly to strengthened people-to-people ties. Additionally, the establishment of 'China Study Centres' and the shift toward China Cultural Centres highlighted evolving strategies that can further bolster cultural and educational interactions. Embracing these initiatives aligned with social network theory, fostering deeper cross-cultural understanding and collaboration.

6.4 Tourism Promotion

Tourism, as a global and multidimensional phenomenon, extends beyond economic activity to serve as an instrument of peace, cultural diplomacy, and international cooperation. Functioning within spatial patterns of cross-border mobility, international tourism fosters intercultural dialogue and mutual respect by drawing people to cultural, historical, and recreational sites (Karki, 2020). Strategic investment in this sector enables states to generate sustainable employment, enhance national income, and strengthen their global visibility. Ultimately, tourism contributes not only to development but also to the advancement of public diplomacy and international relations

Upon close examination of tourism promotion within the context of encouraging Nepal-China people-to-people relations, it was evident that such collaborations hold immense potential for fostering a deeper understanding between the two nations. Notably, China has actively endorsed Nepal as a preferred destination for Chinese tourists, with places like Pokhara already enjoying fame and popularity among Chinese travelers. This endorsement served as a witness to the positive impact of tourism in enhancing cultural exchanges and interpersonal connections.

While Pokhara continued to be a well-established destination, among Chinese tourist network, places such as Lumbini, emerged as a promising prospect. Lumbini, with its rich cultural and historical significance as the birthplace of Lord Buddha, hold

the potential to become a key cultural tourism location. The inclusion of Lumbini in the itinerary for Chinese tourists not only enlarged the spectrum of experiences but also contributed to the diversification of tourist destinations within Nepal.

Indicating tourism as a part of culture and historically driven, participant Narendra Tamang informed about the happiness of Chinese tourists during their visit. The further added:

The growth of digital media and the internet also helped Chinese tourists opt for Nepal as their travel destination. We see how food menus are being adjusted according to the needs of Chinese tourists. The Chinese tourists when served with Chinese dinner after their long days of trek, they were very happy. The paragliding in Pokhara was screened in one of the Chinese movies and that attracted many Chinese tourists to Nepal and paragliding in Pokhara was a must for every one of them. (N. Tamang, personal communication, July 26, 2022)

Narendra, as a professional guide is a perfect example how weak ties—between a guide and tourist can further turn into strong ties through touristic connections. As he guided Chinese tourist, he met a Chinese professor who further helped to obtain higher studies in China. The weak tie of the participant as a guide in touristic network turned into a strong tie in academic network.

Experts' analysis indicated that one of the pillars of BRI, people-to-people connectivity is a noting concept which Nepal can benefit from. Apart from strategies to connect people through exchange visits, tourism interactions stand out, as it offered natural interactions. Connecting BRI with tourism development and ultimately people-to-people bond, participant, J. R. Acharya indicated:

Tourisms must be attached with BRI. BRI will promote global tourism. So, what should Nepal do is, in cooperation with Chinese tourism, establish two cultural capitals Kathmandu and Lhasa and two religion capitals, Mansarovar and Lumbini. If we can connect these four places our tourism will boom. China's off-season will inspire tourist to visit Nepal while off-season on Nepal will inspire tourist to visit China thus, attracting global tourist through cooperation. This concept will be economically viable among other tourism projects. What we should do is link three Himalayan tourism spots, Thimphu, Kathmandu, Lhasa. There is another attraction to tourist if we can connect Gilgit (Pakistan), Lhasa and Kathmandu where all the highest peaks in the world will be connected. We can capture World tourism opportunity through BRI. We are landlocked but not air locked. (key informant interview, February 22, 2023)

There is uneven infrastructural development in the border areas of Nepal and China which makes it challenging for Nepal to improve connectivity and hence tourism. Hence connectivity, is the key to tourism and ultimately to enhancement of people-to-people relations. Similarly, making connections with roads and infrastructural connectivity with tourism, participant Khadka K. C. indicated that:

Coming back to connectivity again, there is a much better transport infrastructure on the Chinese side compared to Nepal in Hilsa of Humla district. In our side Nepal Army has been helping the government to build roads, however there are much improvements to be made. Example, for Mansarovar tourism if a good highway from Nepalgunj to Hilsa could be constructed then, millions of Indian could go and stop in Humla before they

proceed further. However, as of now they have to use air transport which only handful can afford. (key informant interview, February 23, 2023)

The interconnection between tourism and connectivity infrastructure is a dynamic process where improved accessibility fueled tourism growth, while tourism, in turn, spurs the demand for enhanced and expanded infrastructure, creating a positive feedback loop that benefits both sectors. This interconnected development is crucial for fostering sustainable tourism practices and ensuring the long-term economic and social benefits for the communities involved.

6.5 Exchange Visits

Exchange visits, within Nepal China relations, acted as vibrant nodes of the network that binds the two nations. Rooted in the principles of social network theory, these forums served as invaluable platforms for the exchange of knowledge, ideas, and cultural insights. Beyond the immediate event, these visits contributed to the formation of professional networks, collaborative initiatives, and shared goals. Exchange visits emerged as catalysts for meaningful interactions, contributing to the interconnected networks between Nepal and China. Therefore, it is argued that exchange visits were found to strengthen people-to-people relations.

Speaking on the visit of Nepal political elites to China or vice versa, one of the participants indicated that:

I believe visits of political leaders between Nepal and China are very important for people-to-people relations. When I saw a high-level Nepali delegation visiting Beijing last year, it gave me confidence that our countries value each other. These exchanges send a strong message of friendship, and ordinary citizens like me feel that such cooperation will eventually improve our lives too. (K. Bhujju, key informant interview, February 21, 2023)

Similarly, the souvenir shop owner at the Thamel also hinted the same with businessmen are allowed to visit Chinese cities. He stated:

From my own experience as a small entrepreneur, business exchanges play a big role in connecting people. I once joined a delegation to Guangzhou where I met Chinese business partners and learned new ideas about marketing. That trip not only helped me expand my work but also made me realize how trade can bring our societies closer. Meeting people face to face builds trust that official agreements alone cannot achieve. (K. Khatiwoda, personal communication, August 16, 2022)

Exchange visits, be it elites or non-elites, indicated a strategy to strengthen people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Apart from strong ties that existed because of the exchange visits, new ties or weak ties are also expected to increase with such visits.

6.6 Scholastic Dialogue

Scholastic dialogues have been identified as one of the key strategies to strengthen people-to-people relations. These dialogues acted as dynamic nodes in the broader network, fostering collaboration among researchers, experts, and think tanks from both Nepal and China. Rooted in the belief that knowledge transcends borders, scholastic dialogues created a structured space for in-depth discussions, idea sharing, and collaborative endeavors. Through these dialogues, researchers and experts form professional networks, cultivating relationships that extend beyond the immediate academic setting.

One of the participants who frequently travelled China shared in experience where importance of academic dialogues was important. He stated:

I believe that exchanges of think tanks and academic dialogue are very important to strengthen people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. For example, during a visit to Beijing, I participated in a policy dialogue where I met a Chinese colleague working on rural development. In one of our conversations, he shared an innovative idea about using mobile technology to connect farmers with local markets. That discussion inspired me to think about how a similar model could be applied in my own community in Nepal. (R. Acharya, key informant interview, February 25, 2023)

Experiences like these show how scholarly exchanges not only build mutual understanding but also generated practical solutions that benefit both societies. China–Nepal think tank cooperation played a crucial role in strengthening bilateral relations and building a “China–Nepal destiny community,” providing intellectual support for initiatives like the Belt and Road (Wang 2024). The collaboration has achieved significant progress through specialized institutes, scholarly publications, forums, and public diplomacy to enhance people-to-people ties. However, gaps remain in institutional capacity, cognitive alignment, and reliability of knowledge outputs. Strengthening capacities, addressing emerging topics, and ensuring objectivity can expand the influence and effectiveness of think tanks as a driver of deeper China–Nepal relations.

Recently, as part of an exchange of think-tank experiences, knowledge, and ideas, Dr. Khagendra Dhakal, Chairperson of the Nepal Policy Institute (NPI), visited the China Think Tank Research and Evaluation Center (CTTREC) at Nanjing University on June 18, 2024, upon the invitation of CTTREC Director Prof. Gang Li (Nepal Policy Institute, 2024). This visit highlighted the growing partnership between NPI and CTTREC aimed at fostering collaborative efforts in policy research and

evaluation. Similarly, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024) released a press statement indicating the event, “Nepal-China Relations: Challenges and perspectives” as think tank event.

The collaborations forged within scholastic circles contributed to the enrichment of both nations' intellectual landscapes, facilitating the exchange of expertise and the development of joint research initiatives. As these collaborative efforts unfolded, the ripple effect within the network becomes apparent, amplifying the impact of scholastic dialogues on people-to-people relations. This intellectual interconnectedness served as a catalyst for mutual understanding, fostering a shared knowledge base that exceeds national boundaries and reinforced the scholarly bonds between Nepal and China.

6.7 Media Visit and Collaboration

People connectivity and exchange has been one of the main pillars of China's ambitious BRI. Following the MoU, Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024) stated that the two sides shall promote people-to-people exchanges by facilitating cooperation agreements on media along with several other structures. Considering the importance of media in the role of influencing people-to-people relations, it has been comprehensively discussed as one of the main strategies to strengthen the relations between Nepalese and Chinese.

Media visits and collaborations represented pivotal nodes in Nepal China relations, where the exchange of information and narratives played a crucial role in shaping people-to-people relations. In the context of social network theory, these interactions contribute to a multifaceted understanding between the two nations. Media visits served as bridges connecting journalists, broadcasters, and content creators, fostering cross-cultural communication and expanding the narrative

landscape. Collaborative initiatives between media entities from Nepal and China amplified the impact, creating a network of shared stories and perspectives.

As journalists engaged in collaborative projects, they not only disseminated information but also contributed to a more clear and balanced portrayal of each other's countries. The ripple effect extended beyond the immediate participants, influencing public perceptions and shaping the broader social network. By fostering media collaborations, Nepal and China can strengthen the informational ties that bind their people, paving the way for a more interconnected understanding and appreciation of each other's cultures and narratives.

Assumptions must be made when linking people-to-people relations and diplomacy. Yongtao (2015) suggested that at least three assumptions can be made about it. First, it is fundamentally about communicative activities; second, it makes possible more entities as players in diplomacy; and third, it is about production, management and distribution of public goods. On a realist perspective and based on the strategic positioning of Nepal on the political map, foreign policies must be based on non-alignment principles.

Nepal needed to develop a strong combination of public diplomacy, soft power, and digital diplomacy to leverage its cultural, historical, and natural heritage, along with its democratic achievements, for the country's benefit (Nyaichai & Adhikari, 2023). Simkhada (2018) earlier, conceptualized the idea of at "Trans Himalayan Institute of Higher Learning" bringing wisdom and knowledge, experience and creativity from both sides of the Himalayas for a new convergence of ideas and ideologies for peaceful and tolerant, democratic progressive political, economic security. In US-China relations both sides are able to appreciate the strong and weak ties in their security mechanism such as periodic strategic dialogue. No such dialogue

mechanism exists between China and the regional neighborhood in South Asia (U. Gautam, 2014).

Therefore, it is argued here that narratives from media or scholars are very important factors that influence people-to-people relations. This collaboration of media or the network includes and develops people-to-people interactions where relations strengthen. Finally, the seven strategies discussed above for strengthening people-to-people relations has been argued for maintaining the existing relations and forging new ones. The border issues need immediate action as the culture that connected Nepal-China border residents is losing its importance. The hard-hit tourism industry needs immediate attention as it provided newer Chinese mass an introduction of Nepal. The mode of communication is changing with the growth in communication technologies. Discourse on the impact of technological changes in Nepal-China relations is suggested for further analysis of people-to-people relations.

6.8 Sports Diplomacy

Sports diplomacy has historically demonstrated its capacity to bridge divides where formal political negotiations falter. A prominent example is the so-called Ping-Pong Diplomacy of the early 1970s, when table tennis exchanges between China and the United States created an informal channel for dialogue amidst Cold War hostilities (Wang, 2011). The invitation of the U.S. team to China in 1971 not only softened mutual perceptions but also laid the groundwork for President Nixon's historic visit to Beijing in 1972, which transformed bilateral relations (Wang, 2008). This episode illustrated how sporting interactions, by operating outside traditional statecraft, can foster trust, reduce tensions, and advance diplomatic breakthroughs.

Almost all the experts argued that sports diplomacy had played a significant role in fostering people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. They pointed

out that in recent years, formal agreements had been signed between sports associations of both countries, enabling regular exchanges of coaches and athletes, as well as joint training programs in China. Experts also noted that Nepali teams had traveled to China for intensive preparation ahead of major competitions, while China had provided substantial support in the form of sports equipment, training facilities, and capacity-building initiatives. Furthermore, grassroots programs, such as the donation of sports kits to Nepali schools, had been implemented to promote cultural exchange among youth. These activities, they emphasized, had not only enhanced athletic performance but also strengthened mutual understanding and goodwill between the two nations.

Recalling the recent development in sports, one of the participants mentioned:

In recent years, I have seen more young people here getting interested in Chinese martial arts, especially wushu. Our local sports clubs have even hosted Chinese coaches, and some of our athletes went to China for special training. It is good for our youth because it gives them discipline and international exposure. But I also remember that not everything between Nepal and China in recent times was about sports—there was that incident during 2008 Summer Olympics Beijing, when Tibetan monks tried to stage a silent protest march in front of the Chinese visa office in Kathmandu, and it became a tense moment in the city. (Anil Giri, on key informant interview, May 10, 2023)

Sports diplomacy offers a neutral, culturally resonant platform that can persist even during moments of political strain, enabling sustained engagement at the community level. In the case of Nepal and China, the promotion of Chinese martial arts like wushu has provided opportunities for interpersonal connections, capacity-

building, and youth engagement. However, sports exchanges are never entirely detached from politics; they can serve as soft power instruments. Thus, while political events may temporarily overshadow cultural initiatives, sustained sports diplomacy helps keep open lines of interaction, contributing to the foundation for bilateral relations.

6.9 Transliteration of Nepalese Literatures

An important aspect pointed out by few of the experts was the idea of transliteration of Nepalese literatures in Chinese. The sense of emotional attachment was indicative of the strong relations that existed between the participants and their interactions with Chinese counterpart. A poem from Nepalese writer describing the bravery of Chinese in building the Arniko Highway which later got translated into Chinese is a mark of strong tie. Similarly, to broadcast the same on national television of China was another gesture in building Nepal's reputation among Chinese nationals.

Sushil Lamsal, current ambassador in particular pointed out the historical literatures where monks from mainland China visited Nepal especially Kathmandu, Patan and Lumbini were engaged in literature translation. He further stated that:

I even read in an article one of the monks took around 500 books [buddhist text in Sanskrit] from the parts of Nepal and India. You now that time there were no political countries or maps. Similarly, we have heard of Buddhahadra who was involved in translation. See this is important. Learning language is important but to understand our [Nepalese] culture in their [Chinese] mother tongue is even more important. For example, my question is, "have we translated BP Koirala's story in Chinese?" He was a prominent figure in Nepal China relations. I don't know if books of Nepali

authors who write on Nepal China relations have been translated into Chinese. (S. Lamsal, key informant interview, May 28, 2024)

Similarly, the employee of bookstore “China’s Tibet Book Store” revealed how Chinese cultural books are being translated and showcased in the store (K. Gyawali, personal communication, August 10, 2022). The store contained books in both Chinese and English languages. Most of the books reflected the historical evolution of China. Hence transliteration of popular Nepalese literatures in Chinese was found to strengthen people-to-people relations.

One of the participants shared his personal story which highlighted the importance of transliteration of Nepalese historical books in Chinese language. He went on to say that:

I strongly feel that Nepal’s historical books should be transliterated and translated into Chinese so that more people in China can learn about our country. At present, only a handful of Chinese really know about Nepal’s deep history, even though our civilizations have been connected for centuries through Buddhism, trade, and cultural exchanges. I realized this during my visit to Beijing, where I was invited to speak at a small program. Some Chinese scholars there were curious about Nepal’s history. They had heard of Lumbini and a few names like Arniko, but beyond that their knowledge was very limited. That experience stayed with me, and I thought that if books written by our historians, about Nepal’s ancient kingdoms, cultural ties with Tibet, or even our role in South Asian history, were available in Chinese, many more people would appreciate Nepal in a meaningful way. (R. Acharya, key informant interview, February 25, 2023)

In conclusion, the transliteration of Nepalese literature into Chinese has proven to be an effective way to enhance people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Historical efforts, such as the translation of Nepalese poems celebrating the Arniko Highway and the Buddhist texts carried by monks, underscored the deep cultural ties between the two nations. Experts highlighted the need to translate works like those of BP Koirala to further enhance people-to-people relations. With digital advancements, such translations can now reach wider audiences rapidly, fostering stronger mutual appreciation and connections.

6.10 Discussion

Foreign aid, while primarily aimed at supporting economic development and institutional capacity, also influences people-to-people relations by fostering educational exchanges, cultural understanding, and social connectivity between donor and recipient countries. Malla (2012) rationalized the aid seeking behaviour of small states and emphasized that Nepal needed foreign aid primarily to reduce poverty, harness its water resources, address challenges of being landlocked, and integrate into the growing global economy. However, Pandey (2017) stated that the aid absorptive capacity of Nepal is found to be poor due to the inadequate infrastructure, complexity of public procurement act, prolonged bureaucracy procedures and administrative inefficiency. In addition, the priorities of donors and their interest and complexities have also contributed to low absorptive capacity of aid in Nepal, he further supplemented.

Nepal's active participation in regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) reflected its commitment to regional cooperation and multilateral diplomacy. However, Bhattarai

(2021) recently indicated that SAARC is also being perceived as ‘zombie’ organization today by scholars on international relations who described three different types of regional and international organizations-alive, dead and zombie. The author stated that since its inception, SAARC has been caught up in the conflict between India and Pakistan.

An article focusing on the progress of Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the year 2020, (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020) indicated that Nepal till now has established diplomatic relations with 168 countries around the world. The report indicated that Nepal took active participation in multilateral bodies like UN, NAM, G77 and WTO while, actively participated in regional cooperation such as SAARC, BIMSTEC and ACD. The report further highlighted the development of Nepal’s foreign relations despite COVID-19 pandemic facilitated by digital communication as well. The report indicated the role of multiple actors in formulating a foreign policy namely: leaders of major political parties, foreign policy experts, think-tanks, academia, media, civil society and the business community, showcasing the complete actors of foreign policy. Yet, the Nepalese academic field lacked the actor-specific studies.

The inevitable fact that Nepal being small state made it difficult to cope up with big economies such as US, China, India or Russia. Budhathoki (2023) examined the significant influence of international law on the foreign policymaking of sovereign states, emphasizing how legal instruments like treaties, conventions, and human rights laws shaped state interactions. However, it pointed out that while powerful nations like the United States, China, and Russia often bypassed these laws, smaller states like Nepal and Bangladesh tended to comply more fully. The paper also discussed how the domestication of international law, following either monism or dualism, affected foreign policy formulation.

While major powers adopted a realist approach, smaller states were more likely to adhere to liberal principles, focusing on cooperation and the observance of international legal norms. Cohen (2015) in his third edition of *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations* discussed how a state's foreign policy is heavily influenced by its geographic position and national interests, shaped by the global balance of power. He argued that foreign policy cannot be fully understood without considering factors such as proximity to global powers, access to resources, and strategic location relative to geopolitical rivals. Cohen introduced the concept of "geostrategy," which emphasized the crafting of foreign policy based on geographic advantages and challenges.

Relational thinking, as a recent development in the study of foreign relations, introduces novel processes in international state behavior that remain underexplored (Kurki, 2020, 2022; Kurki & Colin, 2013). In the context of Nepal's foreign policy, strategies embedded within the social structures of culture, economy, and diplomacy have been observed to reinforce people-to-people relations with China. The analysis treats each of these networks—cultural, economic, and diplomatic—as distinct yet interdependent, emphasizing their individual agency while acknowledging their mutual influence. These networks are historically situated, rooted in the evolving interactions between the two nations across different periods of engagement.

CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study explored the factors influencing people-to-people relations between Nepal and China after 1990 AD until 2024 AD, Nepal's foreign policy approach to these relations, and strategies to strengthen them. The findings, analyzed through the lens of social network theory, highlighted cultural, economic, and diplomatic interactions as the key networks shaping these relations. This chapter summarized the study's key insights, presented conclusions, and suggests future research directions.

7.1 Summary

This study explored the dynamics of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China, with a particular focus on how cultural, economic, and diplomatic networks shape everyday interactions. Field visits were conducted in three border locations, where general interviews with local communities captured grassroots perspectives on cross-border interactions. These findings were further enriched through expert interviews, which provided broader contextual insights. Together, these approaches allowed the study to document both lived experiences and policy-level viewpoints, creating a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

The study identified seventeen factors organized under three primary networks—cultural, economic, and diplomatic—that shape Nepal-China people-to-people relations. These factors highlighted the significance of cultural ties, trade and economic activities, and the impact of diplomatic decisions. The study also examined the extent to which Nepal's foreign policy has addressed people-to-people relations, revealing both attention to and gaps in policy measures. Furthermore, strategies for enhancing such relations between Nepal and China were identified.

7.2 Findings

Since 1990, Nepal-China relations have undergone significant transformations, particularly in economic cooperation, infrastructure development, and diplomatic engagements. China has emerged as Nepal's second-largest trading partner, with increased foreign direct investment (FDI) in sectors like hydropower, manufacturing, and infrastructure. The expansion of trade through land routes such as Tatopani and Rasuwagadhi, coupled with Nepal's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) since 2017, has strengthened economic interdependence. Additionally, the surge in Chinese tourists and the growing number of Nepalese students pursuing higher education in China have deepened cultural and people-to-people exchanges. However, mobility restrictions, particularly after the 2015 earthquake and COVID-19, have affected cross-border trade and traditional interactions among border communities.

The study concluded that in the cultural network factors such as Buddhism, transnational marriage, festivals, language, food, communication technologies, cultural appreciation, and public perception were the factors that influence people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Strong familial ties contributed to social cohesion, trust, and the exchange of cultural practices. Economic interactions, encompassing Nepal-China trade, foreign direct investment, tourism, and transnational labor migration, were key factors within the economic network influencing people-to-people relations. Within the diplomatic network, cross-border mobility, aid and assistance, education and scholarships, exchange visits, and crisis management were prime factors that influenced people-to-people relations.

Although Buddhism has historically contributed to fostering cordial people-to-people relations, its role is increasingly complex. As Scott (2016) noted, Buddhism

has also been strategically utilized as a diplomatic tool, with China and India competing for influence among Buddhist-majority nations. Following the collapse of Nepal's Hindu monarchy in 2008, Chinese officials have actively leveraged Buddhism as part of their diplomatic engagement. This highlighted a critical gap in understanding how Buddhism operated at the intersection of cultural ties, diplomatic strategy, and its foundational teachings. Future research should examine the interplay between Buddhism's cultural significance and its evolving role in geopolitical maneuvering. By investigating how Buddhism is perceived and utilized across different networks—by individuals, religious institutions, and state actors—scholars are expected to uncover whether it serves as a genuine cultural bond or a strategic instrument in international relations.

Cross-border mobility (among border residents) had been a defining element of Nepal-China people-to-people relations, facilitating trade, cultural exchange, and familial ties. Historically, border crossings at Tatopani, Lo Manthang, and Rasuwagadhi enabled economic and social interactions, strengthening community bonds. However, policy shifts, natural disasters, and the COVID-19 pandemic have led to mobility restrictions, disrupting these interactions. The resumption and expansion of cross-border movement required strategic policy interventions, improved infrastructure, and diplomatic efforts to ease travel barriers. Future research is expected to explore the long-term impact of cross-border mobility constraints on social and economic networks. Furthermore, the potential role of communication technologies in complementing physical mobility to sustain Nepal–China people-to-people relations emerged as a promising area for inductive exploration.

Various festivals—characterized by shared rituals and practices—served as important relational factors within the cultural network among border communities.

These events facilitated interpersonal connections and helped sustain cross-border traditions and a shared sense of identity. Likewise, linguistic ties played a foundational role in enhancing communication and mutual understanding. Based on these findings, future research was suggested to explore the impact of shared festivals on community cohesion, as well as to examine how language proficiency, exchange programs, and linguistic adaptation contributed to the strength and durability of Nepal–China people-to-people relations.

Communication technologies such as *Internet-based Messenger* and *e-commerce* created virtual interactions in the social network. Exploring the influence of digital economic interactions on cross-cultural relationships, the role of social media in connecting businesses and individuals, and the dynamics of trust-building in digital spaces were concluded as probable areas of inquiry. An unexplored area was the resilience of economic networks in times of crisis. Research must investigate how communities reliant on cross-border trade or labor migration navigated and adapted during crises. Exploring how shared economic activities contributed to the exchange of cultural practices, rituals, and traditions within the social network is advocated for future inquiry.

The role of education, scholarships, and exchange programs in the formation of social ties between Nepal and China was also highlighted in this study. Research was encouraged to examine the lasting effects of educational exchanges on individuals' social networks, the contribution of shared academic experiences to cross-cultural understanding, and the influence of educational diplomacy on long-term relationships. Aid and assistance were identified as potential links within the diplomatic network, while tourism functioned as a direct channel for both economic interaction and cultural exchange. This study also concluded that shared tourist

experiences enhanced interpersonal connections and that tourism patterns shaped perceptions and interactions between Nepalese and Chinese communities, offering strategic insights for strengthening people-to-people relations.

Crisis events were found to have reshaped the social networks between Nepalese and Chinese individuals. The adaptive strategies employed by communities during such crises, the role of social networks in coping with and recovering from disasters, and the long-term effects of crisis-induced policy changes on social connections were recommended as key areas of further inquiry. Public perception—shaped largely by media narratives—was observed to influence how Nepalese formed opinions about the Chinese government and, by extension, Chinese individuals. The investigation of media's role in shaping perceptions, the impact of political discourse on interpersonal relations, and the development of strategies to mitigate negative perceptions that hinder people-to-people relations were prioritized for future policy formulation. Additionally, the study concluded that future research should examine the role of virtual spaces, digital diplomacy, and online platforms in strengthening foreign relations, offering insights into the evolving nature of the diplomatic network.

Nepal's foreign policy towards China has gradually incorporated people-to-people relations, primarily through cultural diplomacy, academic collaborations, and economic partnerships. Buddhism has been leveraged as a soft power tool, but scholars (and participants) argued that its role in Nepal-China relations is influenced by geopolitical competition between China and India. Furthermore, cross-border mobility remains a concern, as restrictions imposed after the 2015 earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted trade and cultural exchanges. Nepal's policy initiatives, such as educational scholarships and tourism promotion, have aimed to strengthen ties but required greater strategic implementation.

To further enhance Nepal-China people-to-people relations, the study concluded eight key strategies. Strengthening infrastructural connectivity by improving road networks and cross-border transport systems can facilitate easier mobility and trade. Cultural diplomacy, including Buddhist exchanges, shared festivals, and linguistic collaborations, increased mutual understanding. Expanding student exchange programs through increased scholarships and research partnerships fostered long-term educational ties. Tourism promotion can be enhanced by addressing language barriers and improving tourism infrastructure to facilitate cultural interactions. Encouraging exchange visits and scholastic dialogue between academic and professional institutions improved intellectual and diplomatic engagement. Finally, media collaboration played a vital role in shaping public perception, countering misinformation, and reinforcing positive narratives. Together, these strategies provided a comprehensive framework for sustainable and meaningful Nepal-China people-to-people relations.

7.3 Conclusion

Answering to the first research question, the study concluded with 17 factors that influenced people-to-people relations between Nepal and China categorized under three networks (cultural, economic and diplomatic). Cultural elements such as Buddhism, transnational marriages, festivals, language, food, cultural appreciation, communication technologies, and public perception played a fundamental role in influencing people-to-people ties. Similarly economic activities under Nepal China trade, tourism and cross-border labor migration influenced people-to-people relations. Finally, diplomatic factors such as Cross-border mobility, Aid and Assistance, Education and Scholarships, Exchange visits, and Crisis Management influenced people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

In line with the second research question, this study examined the provisions facilitating people-to-people interaction within Nepal's foreign policy toward China. While the majority of formal agreements since the establishment of bilateral relations have primarily focused on trade, specific measures have also been adopted to allow cross-border movement for religious purposes and livestock grazing. The Government of Nepal demonstrated a commitment to enhancing people-to-people ties; however, frequent disruptions, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have necessitated policies that restrict physical mobility. Additionally, natural disasters have adversely affected economic activity. Despite the expression of local concerns, Nepal's foreign policy has yet to adequately address the historical significance of border routes and the associated challenges of connectivity.

In response to the third research question, the study identified multiple strategies employed to enhance people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. These include infrastructural development, cultural diplomacy, student exchange programs, tourism promotion, exchange visits of political, business, and cultural actors, scholastic dialogue, media visits, sports diplomacy, and the transliteration of Nepalese literature into Chinese. Collectively, these measures aim to enhance mutual understanding, strengthen social and cultural ties, and facilitate sustained interpersonal and institutional engagement across the two countries.

7.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributed to the existing body of knowledge on Nepal–China relations by providing an in-depth exploration of people-to-people relations from both grassroots and expert perspectives. By conducting field visits to three border locations and engaging in general interviews with local communities, the research captured lived experiences and everyday interactions. Recognizing the limitations of general

interviews alone, the study further incorporated expert interviews, which enriched the analysis and provided a broader contextual understanding. Through systematic examination, the research identified 17 interrelated factors that influenced people-to-people relations, offering a framework that connected cultural, economic, and diplomatic dimensions. Additionally, by assessing whether Nepal's foreign policy adequately addressed people-to-people ties and by outlining potential strategies the study not only highlighted existing gaps but also offered practical pathways for strengthening bilateral relations. In doing so, it advanced scholarly understanding of cross-border social networks and contributed to policy discourse on advancing ties between the people of Nepal and China.

7.5 Recommendation for Further Research

This study recommended several areas for further research to advance the scholarly understanding of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China. Although it identified 17 interrelated factors shaping such relations, subsequent research could focus on individual factors such as cross-border marriages, Buddhism, or tourism to generate more precise and context-specific insights. In addition, the study suggested that quantitative approaches would be valuable in examining the correlations and relative strengths of these factors, thereby complementing the qualitative findings with empirical measurement. It also emphasized the importance of applying social network theory more rigorously within the field of international relations, particularly to analyze how cultural, economic, and diplomatic networks intersect and influence one another. Pursuing these directions would contribute to both theoretical refinement and the development of evidence-based policy strategies for strengthening sustainable people-to-people relations between Nepal and China.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Personal interview questionnaire**

1. Have you interacted with Chinese nationals? If yes, could you briefly describe the nature of these interactions?
2. Can you tell me more about your interactions with the Chinese?
3. How do you feel about the relations (strong or weak ties) with the Chinese you spoke?
4. Can you describe me how the Chinese feel about Nepalese or Nepal?
5. In your opinion what connects the people of two nations? Please describe.
6. Based on your personal experiences, how do you describe the overall state of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China?
7. In your opinion what can be done to strengthen the relations between the people of these two nations?
8. Any concluding remarks, if you want to add?

Thank you

**Note: The questions were ordered as above, however, during the time of administration, the order was ignored as responses were received spontaneously.

Appendix B

Key informant interview questionnaire**

1. Can you provide a brief overview of Nepal-China Relations?
2. From your perspective, how have cultural interactions between Nepal and China influenced people-to-people relations? Can you share specific instances or initiatives?
3. In your experience, what role do economic collaborations, such as trade or business interactions, play in shaping people-to-people relations between the two countries?
4. How do geopolitical factors impact people-to-people relations between Nepal and China? Are there any notable instances or trends you've observed?
5. What initiatives or efforts have been undertaken by the governments of Nepal and China to enhance people-to-people relations? How effective do you find these initiatives?
6. From your perspective, what are the key challenges and opportunities in furthering people-to-people relations between Nepal and China?
7. How do you view the role of connectivity and infrastructure development, such as roads and railways, in strengthening people-to-people ties?
8. Based on your experience, what recommendations do you have for improving and strengthening people-to-people relations between Nepal and China?
9. Based on the current situation how do you look at the future of people-to-people relations between Nepal and China?
10. Any concluding remarks, if any?

Thank you

**Note: The questions were ordered as above, however, during the time of administration, the order was ignored as responses were received spontaneously.

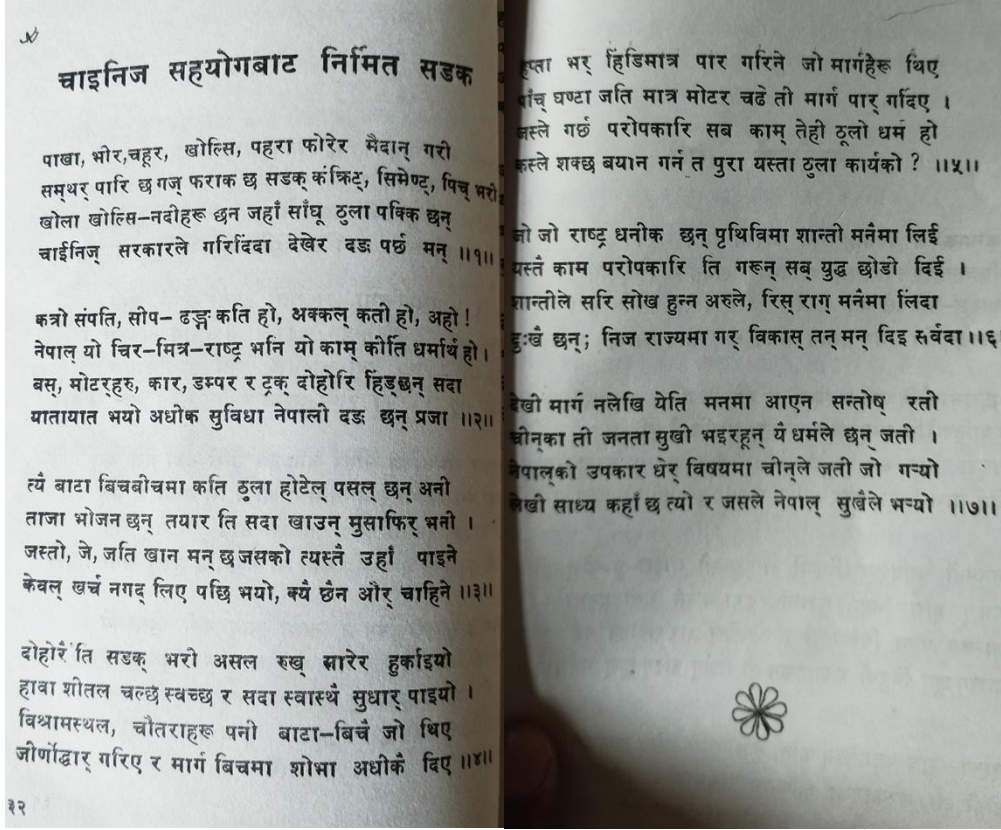
Appendix C

List of participants.

SN	Name	Gender	Permanent Address	Profession	Age	Interview Day	Month	Year	Interview Location
1	Narendra Tamang	M	Kavrepalanchowk	Student/Guide	30	26	July	2022	Kathmandu
2	Dil Maya Ale	F	Sindhuli	Chinese language teacher		28	July	2022	Kathmandu
3	Gyanu Maya Rai	F	Solukhumbu	PhD Scholar in China		28	July	2022	Kathmandu
4	Pratikshya Pradhananga	F	Kavrepalanchowk	Chinese language student		30	July	2022	Kathmandu
5	Keshav Gyawali	M	Palpa	Bookstore employee/Student	23	10	August	2022	Kathmandu
6	Shiv Prasad Kafle	M	Shyanjga	Souvenir shopkeeper	49	14	August	2022	Kathmandu
7	Krishna Katiwada	M	Dhading	Souvenir shopkeeper	39	16	August	2022	Kathmandu
8	Akendra Deuba	M	Dhangadi	Chinese restaurant manager		17	August	2022	Kathmandu
9	Saroj Thapa Magar	M	Beni	Paragliding rider	33	6	September	2022	Pokhara
10	Chetnath Bhandari	M	Pokhara	Taxi Driver	34	9	September	2022	Pokhara
11	Ashish Shrestha	M	Pokhara	Souvenir shopkeeper	38	11	September	2022	Pokhara
12	Rajendra Thapa	M	Baglung	Tour Guide	30	14	September	2022	Pokhara
13	Arun Thapa	M	Narayangarh	Waiter		19	September	2022	Sauraha
14	Amit Neupane	M	Sauraha	Hotel Manager	32	20	September	2022	Sauraha
15	Padam Bhandari	M	Butwal	Chinese Tour Guide		22	September	2022	Sauraha
16	Ram Tamang	M	Tatopani	Jeep Driver	62	16	October	2022	Sindhupalchowk
17	Karna Lama	F	Tatopani	Shopkeeper	52	19	October	2022	Sindhupalchowk
18	Lamu Sherpa	F	Tatopani	Restaurant Owner	44	20	October	2022	Sindhupalchowk
19	Dinesh Thakur	M	Sarlahi	Barber	43	23	October	2022	Sindhupalchowk
20	Bal Bahadur Shrestha	M	Sindhupalchowk	Trade Agent		24	October	2022	Sindhupalchowk
21	Dhan Bahadur Gurung	M	Syangja	Jeep Driver	50	4	November	2022	Jomsom
22	Dinesh Pariyar	M	Pokhara	Jeep Driver	29	6	November	2022	Jomsom
23	Ashok Lama	M	Upper Mustang	Restaurant Owner		8	November	2022	Lo Manthang
24	Kiran Gurung	M	Kathmandu	Tour Guide		9	November	2022	Lo Manthang
25	Prabesh Sherchan	M	Lo Manthang	Restaurant Owner	60	9	November	2022	Lo Manthang
26	Nirdarshan Thakali	M	Jomsom	IT Officer		10	November	2022	Lo Manthang
27	Prem Raja Paudel	M	Gulmi	Administrative officer		10	November	2022	Lo Manthang
28	Dhukke K. Bista	M	Lo Manthang	Local Representative	71	10	November	2022	Lo Manthang
29	Pasang Tamang	M	Lo Manthang	Shopkeeper	52	11	November	2022	Lo Manthang
30	Lethknath Bhandari	M	Arghakhanchi	Teacher		11	November	2022	Lo Manthang
31	Kumar Rayamajhi	M	Kathmandu	Jeep Driver	38	3	December	2022	Rasuwagadhi
32	Lakpa Chhumu	F	Rasuwa	Student		5	December	2022	Rasuwagadhi
33	Padam Thapa Magar	M	Nuwakot	Government Service		6	December	2022	Rasuwagadhi
34	Bharat Adhikari	M	Kathmandu	Custom Officer		7	December	2022	Rasuwagadhi
35	Dawa Tamang	M	Rasuwa	Truck Driver	44	7	December	2022	Rasuwagadhi
36	Kanchi Sherpa	F	Sindhupalchowk	Restaurant Owner		9	December	2022	Rasuwagadhi
37	Khadga K.C.	M	Kathmandu	Professor		23	February	2023	Kathmandu
38	Hiranya Lal Shrestha	M	Budanilkantha	Former ambassador		17	February	2023	Budanilkantha
39	Lila Nyaichyai	F	Kathmandu	Lecturer		20	February	2023	Kathmandu
40	Kriti Bhuju	F	Bhaktapur	Journalist		21	February	2023	Bhaktapur
41	Jaya Raj Acharya	M	Kathmandu	Former ambassador		22	February	2023	Kathmandu
42	Rajeshwor Acharya	M	Kathmandu	Former ambassador		25	February	2023	Kathmandu
43	Shambhu Ram Simkhada	M	Kathmandu	Former ambassador		18	February	2023	Kathmandu
44	Shekhar Koirala	M	Kathmandu	Politician		4	March	2023	Kathmandu
45	Sundarnath Bhattarai	M	Kathmandu	Politician		17	March	2023	Kathmandu
46	Chakka Bahadur Lama	M	Humla	Former MP		2	April	2023	Kathmandu
47	Madhav Sapkota	M	Sindhupalchowk	Local Representative		5	April	2023	Kathmandu
48	Ram Karki	M	Kathmandu	Politician		10	April	2023	Kathmandu
49	Anil Giri	M	Lalitpur	Journalist		10	May	2023	Kathmandu
50	Leelamani Paudyal	M	Kathmandu	Former ambassador		12	May	2023	Kathmandu
51	Krishna KC	M	Kathmandu	Journalist		16	May	2023	Kathmandu
52	Gopal Khanal	M	Kathmandu	Politician		17	May	2023	Kathmandu
53	Bhagirath Basnet	M	Kathmandu	Former ambassador		12	May	2024	Kathmandu
54	Sushil Lamsal	M	Kathmandu	Current Ambassador		14	May	2024	Kathmandu
55	Bhekh Bahadur Thapa	M	Kathmandu	Former Diplomat	87	28	May	2024	Kathmandu

Appendix D

A poem written by the father of Jaya Raj Acharya, Kabiraj Narnath Acharya about the construction of Arniko Highway in 1984.



Appendix E

Translation of the above poem by China Central TV in 2021

中国援建的公路

纳拉那特·阿查里雅

斩断峭壁悬崖，除去漫坡荒草，填平了沟壑深谷
混凝土，水泥和沥青，筑起坦荡宽阔的道路
巨大坚固的桥梁跨越溪水，沟涧与河流
感谢中国政府给了我们这美妙事物

伟大的财力，杰出的技术，出色的计划和构思
尼泊尔自古是友好邻邦啊，这项工程当有非凡的荣誉
轿车，卡车，公交车，你来我往，川流不息
交通变得如此容易，令尼泊尔人民惊叹不已

许多餐厅和商店沿路边开张
刚出锅的热饭随时供旅行者品尝
无论想吃什么都可获得
出发前只须把钱放进你的行囊

绿树陪伴在公路两旁
风儿时时吹拂清新凉爽有益健康
树荫下的休息处还是旧日亭台
却修葺一新增加了路边的美丽风光

99

昔日一周的艰辛旅行
今朝只需五个钟头的车程
唯有虔诚的人能做此善事
语言不足以赞扬这伟大的工程

愿世上的富国都心存和平
愿它们都做仁慈的事，而摒弃战争
和平是最大的幸福，全心全意建设国家吧
妒忌和猜疑只会带来困境

面对公路唯有诉诸笔墨能安慰我不平的心绪
愿中国人民因做此善事而永远欢愉
中国在尼的无私事业难以尽述
中国朋友使尼泊尔充满幸福

REFERENCES

- Acharya, C. (2017). *Chin Chihauda*. Shangrila Books.
- Acharya, J. (2002). *Adunath Khanal: Jiwani ra bichar*. Sajha Prakashan.
- Acharya, J. (2014). China's new leadership and Nepal-China relations. In China Study Center (Ed.), *First Year of China's Diplomacy: Under the New Leadership* (1st ed., pp. 135–137). China Study Center.
- Acharya, R. (2022). *Kutnitik Diary* (R. Acharya, Ed.; 1st ed.). Kamala Acharya.
- Adhikari, D. R. (2018). A small state between two major powers: Nepal's foreign policy since 1816. *Journal of International Affairs*, 2, 43–74.
- Adhikari, R. R. (2015). Silk route: enhancing Nepal-China connectivity. In R. R. Adhikari (Ed.), *Silk Route: Enhancing Nepal-China Connectivity*. Institute of Foreign Affairs.
- Ball, D., Béraud-Sudreau, L., Huxley, T., Mohan, C. R., & Taylor, B. (2021). Asia's New Geopolitics: Military Power and Regional Order. In B. Rhode, J. Mazo, & M. Marsden (Eds.), *Asia's New Geopolitics*: Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003255994>
- Bandelj, N. (2015). Thinking about social relations in economy as relational work. In P. Aspers & N. Dodd (Eds.), *Re-Imagining Economic Sociology* (1st ed., pp. 227–251). Oxford University Press.
- Baniya, K. (2023). *Nepal-China relations on emerging security dynamics (2007 - 2020 A.D.)* [Doctoral Dissertation, Tribhuvan University].
<https://elibrary.tucl.edu.np/bitstream/123456789/18793/1/Full%20thesis.pdf>
- Baral, B. N. (2018). Changing dynamics of Nepalese foreign policy: Patterns and trends. *Journal of Political Science*, 18, 25–45.
<https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v18i0.20437>

- Baral, L. R. (1992). India-Nepal relations: Continuity and change. *Asian Journal*, 32(9), 815–829. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645073>
- Baral, L. R. (2012). *Nepal Nation-State in the Wilderness: Managing State, Democracy and Geopolitics*. SAGE Publications India.
- Bhatt, P., & Joshi, K. R. (2024). Hydropower development in Nepal: Status, opportunities and challenges. *Journal of UTEC Engineering Management (JUEM)*, 2(1), 125–135. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36344/utecem.2024>
- Bhattarai, G. (2021). Challenges to diplomatic efforts in resolving Nepal-India border problems in the Himalayas: A foreign policy analysis (FPA). *Nepal Public Policy Review*, 1, 1–30. <https://mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/6295>
- Bhattarai, G., & Khan, R. N. A. (2020). People-to-people façade of Nepal–China ties: a constructivist reading. *International Politics*, 58(2), 223–234. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00223-x>
- Bhattarai, M. K. (2018). Recent trends in Nepal’s foreign policy, and role and functions of our diplomats: A personal standpoint. *Journal of APF Command and Staff College*, 1(1), 76–81.
- Bhattarai, N. (2010). *Nepal and China: A Historical Perspective*. Adroit Publishers.
- Bhattarai, S. N. (2014). Diplomatic Initiatives of China’s New Leadership. In China Study Center (Ed.), *First Year of China’s Diplomacy: Under the New Leadership* (1st ed., pp. 1–15). China Study Center.
- Bhattarai, S. N. (2017). Trans-Himalayan Connectivity. In M. Shrestha & A. Shakya (Eds.), *Nepal-China Relations: New Avenues and Possibilities* (pp. 19–26).
- Böhmelt, T. (2009). International mediation and social networks: The importance of indirect ties. *International Interactions*, 35(3), 298–319. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050620903084786>

- Briggs, R. (2010). *The impact of foreign policy on local communities*. www.jrf.org.uk
- Burchill, S., & Linklater, A. (2005). Introduction. In S. Burchill, A. Linklater, R. Devetak, J. Donnelly, M. Paterson, C. Reus-Smit, & J. True (Eds.), *Theories of International Relations* (3rd ed., pp. 1–23). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Centre for Africa-China Studies. (2023). *People-to-People Relations*.
<https://www.cacs.org.za/people-to-people-relations/>
- Chai, J. M.-T. (2022). Buddhist Diplomacy: Potential for Regional Cohesion. *RSIS Commentary*. www.rsis.edu.sg
- Chang, R. C. Y., Kivela, J., & Mak, A. H. N. (2010). Food preferences of Chinese tourists. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37(4), 989–1011.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2010.03.007>
- Cohen, S. B. (2015). *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations* (S. B. Cohen, Ed.; 3rd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Dahal, G. (2019). An Overview of foreign relation of Nepal with China. *Journal of Political Science*, 19, 85–99.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v19i0.26700>
- Dahal, G. (2022). Chinese president’s visit to Nepal and consolidation of relations of two countries. *Journal of Political Science*, 22(1) 64–74.
<https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v22i1.43040>
- Dahal, S. H. (2019). *China-Nepal-India Triangle: The dark side of Indo-Nepal relations: Vol. I* (S. H. Dahal, Ed.). Sangrila Books.
- Dangal, D. N., Chapagai, S. D., & Ghimire, K. P. (2024). Contribution of foreign aid to GDP in Nepal. *Economic Review of Nepal*, 7(1–2), 16–23.
<https://doi.org/10.3126/ern.v7i1-2.72761>

- d'Hooghe, I. (2005). Public diplomacy in the People's Republic of China. In J. Mellisen (Ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (pp. 88–105). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Dhungel, D. N. (2017). Local Level Relationship between Nepal and China. In M. Shrestha & A. Shakya (Eds.), *Nepal-China Relations: New Avenues and Possibilities* (pp. 49–90). International Concern Center.
- Dhungel, R. K. (1999). Nepal-Tibet cultural relations and the ZHVA-DMAR-PA (Shyamarpa) Lamas of Tibet. *CNAS Journal*, 26(2), 183–210.
- Dickinson, J. E., Filimonau, V., Hibbert, J. F., Cherrett, T., Davies, N., Norgate, S., Speed, C., & Winstanley, C. (2017). Tourism communities and social ties: the role of online and offline tourist social networks in building social capital and sustainable practice. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 25(2), 163–180.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2016.1182538>
- Dorussen, H., & Ward, H. (2008). Intergovernmental organizations and the Kantian peace: A network perspective. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 52(2), 189–212.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002707313688>
- Dorussen, H., & Ward, H. (2010). Trade networks and the kantian peace. *Journal of Peace Research*, 47(1), 29–42. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343309350011>
- Dryzek, J. S., Honig, B., & Phillips, A. (2006). Introduction. In J. S. Dryzek, B. Honig, & A. Phillips (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (1st ed., pp. 3–41). Oxford University Press.
- Embassy of Nepal. (2022). *Bilateral Relations*. Embassy of Nepal.
<https://cn.nepalembassy.gov.np/bilateral-relations/>

- Fett, A. (2021). U.S. people-to-people programs: Cold War Cultural Diplomacy to Conflict Resolution. *Diplomatic History*, 45(4), 714-742.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/dh/dhab055>
- Fiagbe, M. (2023). *Factors Influencing Cross-Border Cooperation in North America* [University of Windsor]. <https://scholar.uwindsor.ca/major-papers/235>
- Freeman, L. C. (2004). *The development of social network analysis: a study in the sociology of science*. Empirical Press.
- Fuhse, J. A. (2015). Theorizing social networks: the relational sociology of and around Harrison White. *International Review of Sociology*, 25(1), 15–44.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/03906701.2014.997968>
- Gautam, S. (2023). Nepal and China Trade Relations. *Voice: A Biannual & Bilingual Journal*, 15(2), 68–82. <https://doi.org/10.3126/voice.v15i2.61452>
- Gautam, U. (2014). China: For Better National Security. In China Study Center (Ed.), *First Year of China's Diplomacy: Under the New Leadership* (1st ed., pp. 21–23). China Study Center.
- Gauttam, P., Singh, B., & Chattu, V. K. (2021). Higher education as a bridge between china and nepal: Mapping education as soft power in chinese foreign policy. In *Societies* (Vol. 11, Issue 3). MDPI AG. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc11030081>
- Gilde, L. 't. (2014). *Social Network Theory in International Relations Research: A Literature Review*. [The literature review, Tilburg University].
<https://arno.uvt.nl/show.cgi?fid=133127>
- Gokhale, V. (2021). *India's Fog of Misunderstanding Surrounding Nepal-China Relations*. carnegieIndia.org
- Government of Nepal. (2023). *NEPAL TOURISM STATISTICS 2022*.

- Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380.
- Hafner-Burton, E. M., Alex Hughes, D., & Victor, D. G. (2013). The cognitive revolution and the political psychology of elite decision making. *Perspectives on Politics*, 11(2), 368–386. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713001084>
- Hafner-Burton, E. M., & Montgomery, A. H. (2006). Power positions: International organizations, social networks, and conflict. In *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (Vol. 50, Issue 1, pp. 3–27). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002705281669>
- Hartig, F. (2012). Soft power in China: Public diplomacy through communication. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 5(4), 477–480. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2012.723390>
- Heywood, A. (2004). *Political Theory: An Introduction* (A. Heywood, Ed.; 3rd ed.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Institute of Foreign Affairs. (2021). *Economic Diplomacy and International Trade Facilitation*. <https://www.ifa.gov.np/uploads/media/pages/1650440215.pdf>
- Jaiswal, P., & Ranjan, A. (2022). *Nepal's foreign policy in a changing world* (P. Jaiswal & A. Ranjan, Eds.). Institute of South Asian Studies.
- Johny, E. (2024). Foreign policy strategies of Nepal between China and India: bandwagon or hedging. *International Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-024-00560-1>
- Joshi, B. L., & Rose, L. E. (2004). *Democratic Innovations in Nepal: A Case Study of Political Acculturation*. Mandala Publications.
- Kafle, S. (2017, January 24). *Feature: International marriages between Nepalese and Chinese youngsters gaining popularity*. Xinhua.
- Kant, R. (1971). Nepal's foreign policy and China. *India Quarterly*, 27(3), 203–212.

- Karki, N. (2020). Tourism: A Tool for Track-two Diplomacy in Promoting People-to-People Relations Between Nepal and China. *Journal of APF Command and Staff College*, 3(1), 49–71.
- Karki, N. B. (2023). Role of ambassadors in development diplomacy in the context of Nepal. *NCWA Annual Journal*, 1(54), 114–117.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3126/ncwaj.v54i1.54919>
- Karlis, T., & Polemis, D. (2019). The Belt and Road initiative. A geopolitical analysis. *IAME 2019 CONFERENCE*.
- KC, K. (2024). Foreign policy: From the perspective of people's multiparty democracy. *State, Society and Development: PMPD Perspectives*, 2, 45–52.
<https://doi.org/10.3126/ssd.v2i01.67199>
- KC, K., & Pandey, N. (2018). The post 1990 diplomatic practices of Nepal. *Tribhuvan University Journal*, 32(1), 83–104.
<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3126/tuj.v32i1.24773>
- Kelman, H. C. (1970). The Role of the individual in international relations: Some conceptual and methodological considerations. *Journal of International Affairs*, 24(1), 1–17. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24356661>
- Khadka, N. (1992). Geopolitics and development: A Nepalese perspective. *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 19(3), 134–157.
- Khadka, N. (1999). Chinese foreign policy toward Nepal in the cold war period: An assessment. *China Report*, 35(1), 61–81.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/000944559903500104>
- Khanal, G. (2019). Foreign policy of Nepal: Continuity and changes. *Journal of APF Command and Staff College*, 2(1), 97–102.

- Khanal, Y. N. (1973). Nepal in 1972: A search for a new base-camp? *Asian Survey*, 13(2), 211–216. <https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/2642737>
- Kharel, K. R., Upadhyay, Y. M., & Suman Kharel, S. (2021). Nepal-China bilateral economic cooperation empowering Nepalese economy. *Patan Pragya*, 9(2), 128–143. <https://doi.org/10.3126/pragya.42031>
- Kobierecki, M. M. (2021). Aviation diplomacy: a conceptual framework for analyzing the relationship between aviation and international relations. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 17(4), 293–303. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-020-00172-5>
- Koirala, N. (1991). Nepal in 1990: End of an era. *Asian Survey*, 31(2), 134–139. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2644923>
- Kondapalli, S., & Xiaowen, H. (2017). Grand Strategy in the Making. In S. Kondapalli & H. Xiaowen (Eds.), *One Belt One Road: China's Global Outreach* (pp. 37–64). Pentagon Press.
- Kumar, S. (1963). Nepal and China. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 24(1), 79–93. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41853961>
- Kunwar, R. R. (2017). Food Tourism Revisited. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 7, 83–124.
- Kurki, M. (2020). International Relations in a Relational Universe. In *International Relations in a Relational Universe*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198850885.001.0001>
- Kurki, M. (2022). Relational revolution and relationality in IR: New conversations. *Review of International Studies*, 48(5), 821–836. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210521000127>

- Kurki, M., & Colin, W. (2013). International Relations and Social Science. In T. Dunne, M. Kurki, & S. Smith (Eds.), *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity* (3rd ed., pp. 14–36). Oxford University Press.
- Kuschminder, K. (2016). Strong ties, weak ties: Exploring the role of networks in domestic worker migration from Ethiopia to the Middle East. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 25(4), 401–421. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0117196816673641>
- Lewis, T. T. (1990). Himalayan Frontier Trade: Newar Diaspora Merchants And Buddhism. In C. Ramble & M. Brauen (Eds.), *Anthropology of Tibet and the Himalaya* (pp. 165–178). Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich.
- Lim, C., & Putnam, R. D. (2010). Religion, social networks, and life satisfaction. *American Sociological Review*, 75(6), 914–933. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410386686>
- Liu, W., Sidhu, A., Beacom, A. M., & Valente, T. W. (2017). Social Network Theory. In *The International Encyclopedia of Media Effects* (pp. 1–12). Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783764.wbieme0092>
- Liwei, Z. (2021a). The gap between China’s people-to-people exchange policy and its aim to promote understanding among people in the world. In L. Lai To (Ed.), *Chinese People’s Diplomacy and Development Relations with East Asia* (pp. 10–29). Routledge.
- Liwei, Z. (2021b). The gap between China’s people-to-people exchange policy and its aim to promote understanding among peoples in the world. In L. L. To (Ed.), *Chinese People’s Diplomacy and Developmental Relations with East Asia* (1st ed., pp. 10–29). Routledge.
- Maheshwari, P. (2021, October). *Atheist China’s Buddhist Soft Power*. NIICE. <https://niice.org.np/archives/7421>

- Malla, G. (2012). *Politics of foreign aid in Nepal, 1951-1980: A study of development assistance from India, China, USA and USSR*. Adroit Publishers.
- Mamchii, O. (2023). *The Significance of Cultural Diplomacy In 21st Century*. Best Diplomats.
- Manandhar, V. K. (2001). *A documentary history of Nepalese quinquennial missions to China 1792-1906*. Adroit Publishers.
- Manandhar, V. K. (2004). *A comprehensive history of Nepal-China relations up to 1955 A.D.* (Vol. 1). Adroit Publishers.
- Manger, M. S., Pickup, M. A., & Snijders, T. A. B. (2012). A Hierarchy of Preferences: A Longitudinal Network Analysis Approach to PTA Formation. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 56(5), 853–878.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002712438351>
- Maskey, M. (2017). Trilateral cooperation between India, Nepal and China: A mirage or an idea whose time has come? In M. Shrestha & A. Shakya (Eds.), *Nepal-China Relations: New Avenues and Possibilities* (pp. 131–144). International Concern Center.
- Miele, M. (2017). Nepal 2015-2017: A post-earthquake constitution and the political struggle. *Asia Maior*, 28, 309–330.
- Melissen, J. (2005). The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice. In J. Melissen (Ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Milroy, L. (2000). Social Network Analysis and Language Change: Introduction. *European Journal of English Studies*, 4(3), 217–223.
[https://doi.org/10.1076/1382-5577\(200012\)4:3;1-s;ft217](https://doi.org/10.1076/1382-5577(200012)4:3;1-s;ft217)
- Ministry of Finance. (2023). *Nepal Foreign Trade Statistics*. www.customs.gov.np

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2019). *Nepal-China Relations*.
<https://mofa.gov.np/nepal-china-relations/>
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2020). *Report on Nepal's Foreign Affairs (2019-2020)*.
- Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies. (2021). *A Book of Nepal-China Agreements* (Ministry of Industry Commerce and Supplies, Ed.). Nepal-India Regional Trade and Transport Project.
- Mulmi, A. R. (2021). *All Roads Lead North: Nepal's Turn to China*. Westland Publications Private Limited.
- Murton, G. (2017). *Border Corridors: Mobility, Containment, and Infrastructures of Development between Nepal and China*. [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Colorado]. Graduate Dissertation.
https://scholar.colorado.edu/concern/graduate_thesis_or_dissertations/pg15bf04z
- Murton, G. (2020). Roads to China and infrastructural relations in Nepal. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, 38(5), 840–847.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2399654420911410g>
- Murton, G., & Lord, A. (2020). Trans-Himalayan power corridors: Infrastructural politics and China's Belt and Road Initiative in Nepal. *Political Geography*, 77.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2019.102100>
- Murton, G., & Plachta, N. (2020). *China in Nepal: On the Politics of Belt and Road Initiative Development in South Asia*.
- Namboodiri, P. K. S. (1979). China's aid to Nepal in perspective. *India Quarterly*, 35(2), 223–232.
- Nayak, N. (2008). Involvement of major powers in Nepal since the 1990s: Implications for India. *Strategic Analysis*, 33(1), 41–53.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09700160802518551>

- Nayak, N. R., & Rai, S. (2024). Foreign Direct Investment Flows: India to Nepal since the 1990s. *AIDIA Policy Review*, 2(2). www.aidiaasia.org
- Nepal Foreign Affairs. (2014). *Nepal's economic diplomacy*.
<https://nepalforeignaffairs.com/economic-diplomacy/>
- Nepal Rastra Bank. (2023). *Survey report on foreign direct investment in Nepal (2021/2022)*.
- Nimmon, L., Artino, A. R., & Varpio, L. (2019). Social network theory in interprofessional education: Revealing hidden power. *Journal of Graduate Medical Education*, 11(3), 247–250. Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education. <https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-19-00253.1>
- Nyaichai, L., & Adhikari, K. N. (2023). *Chinese Public Diplomacy in Nepal*. [PRI Publication No. 060]. Kathmandu: Policy Research Institute
- Nye, J. S. (2004). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. Public Affairs.
- Nye, J. S. (2008). Public diplomacy and soft power. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 94–109.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207311699>
- Nyima, P., & Daqiong. (2020, September 10). *Growth in Tibet benefiting Nepalese workers*. China Daily.
<https://www.chinadailyhk.com/hk/article/142766?showpdf=true>
- Ojha, P. (2022). *Many agreements, little action*. The Kathmandu Post.
<https://kathmandupost.com/columns/2022/04/03/many-agreements-little-action>
- Ortiz-Ospina, E. (2019). *The importance of personal relations for economic outcomes*. <https://ourworldindata.org/personal-relations-econ-outcomes>

- Pandey, L. (2022). *Nepal: What happened to China's "Belt and Road" Projects?* DW Global Media Forum. <https://www.dw.com/en/nepal-what-happened-to-chinas-belt-and-road-projects/a-61941737>
- Pandey, N. N. (2005). Promoting Nepal-China Cultural Cooperation. In N. N. Pandey (Ed.), *Nepal-China Relations* (pp. 53–70). Institute of Foreign Affairs.
- Pandit, P. (2017). A Political Economy Analysis. In S. Kondapalli & H. Xiaowen (Eds.), *One Belt One Road: China's Global Outreach* (pp. 86–113). Pentagon Press.
- Pew Research Center. (2023). *Measuring religion in China*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/>
- Pokhrel, K. P. (2021). Nepal-China-India relation: A Geostrategic perspectives. *Journal of APF Command and Staff College*, 4(1), 28–40.
- Poudel, S. S. (2021). "Balance" in Nepali foreign Policy: Experiences before 1990. *Prashasan*, 52(1), 189–197. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.3126/prashasan.v52i1.44583>
- Poudyal, B. (2022). Why Nepal Matters in the Geopolitical Chessboard. *Unity Journal*, 3(01), 13–26. <https://doi.org/10.3126/unityj.v3i01.43310>
- Prasad, U. S. (2015). Study of Nepal's Economic Relations with China. *Journal of Development and Administrative Studies*, 23(1–2), 23–32. <https://doi.org/10.3126/jodas.v23i1-2.15446>
- Prasain, I. (2024). The Belt and Road Initiative: Assessing Its Implications for Nepal's Development. *Interdisciplinary Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 5(2), 102–113. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ijmss.v5i2.69449>

- Prathibha, M. S. (2017). China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. In S. Kondapalli & H. Xiaowen (Eds.), *One Belt One Road: China's Global Outreach* (pp. 187–200). Pentagon Press.
- PTI Feeds. (2017, April). *Nepal, China Hold First-Ever Joint Military Exercises*.
<https://www.india.com/news/agencies/nepal-china-hold-first-ever-joint-military-exercises-eds-updating-with-fresh-inputs-from-shirish-b-pradhan-2034949/>
- Pyakurel, U. P. (2019). The BRI, Nepal's expectations, and limitations on Nepal-China Border relations. *Issues & Studies: A Social Science Quarterly on China, Taiwan, and East Asian Affairs*, 55(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1142/S101325111940006X>
- Rana, S. S. (2020, November 3). Considering the Nepal-China border. *The Record Nepal*. <https://www.recordnepal.com/considering-the-nepal-china-border>
- Ransom, H. H. (1968). International Relations. *The Journal of Politics*, 345–371.
<http://about.jstor.org/terms>
- Rechberg, I., & Guo, S. (2019). The Interpersonal Challenges of BRI: Developing People-to-People Bonds. In J. Syed & Y. H. Ying (Eds.), *Palgrave Macmillan Asian Business Series* (pp. 177–209). Palgrave Macmillan.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-14722-8_8
- Regmi, M. C. (1999). *A Study in Nepali Economic History* (M. C. Regmi, Ed.). Adroit Publishers.
- Rose, L. E., & Scholz, J. T. (1980). *Nepal: profile of a Himalayan kingdom*. Westview Press, Inc.
- Sangroula, Y. (2014). Nepal China Relationship: A New Prospect in the Context of New Leadership of China. In China Study Center (Ed.), *First Year of China's Diplomacy*: (1st ed., pp. 56–98). China Study Center.

- Sarkar, S. (2017). Foreign Aid in Nepal: Importance, Trends, and Government Initiatives. *The Economic Journal of Nepal*, 40(148).
- Saxer, M. (2014). New Roads, Old Trades: Neighbouring China in Nepal. In M. Saxer & J. Zhang (Eds.), *The Art of Neighbouring: Making Relations Across China's Borders* (pp. 73–94). Amsterdam University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.5117/9789462982581>
- Scott, D. (2016). Buddhism in Current China-India Diplomacy. *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs*, 3, 139–174.
- Sen, J. (1971). India's trade with Central Asia via Nepal. *Bulletin of Tibetology*, 22–40.
https://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/bot/pdf/bot_08_02_03.pdf
- Shah, R. (1989). Ancient and Medieval Nepal. *Kailash: Journal of Himalayan Studies*, 15(02), 22–84.
https://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/journals/kailash/pdf/kailash_15_0102_02.pdf
- Shahi, K. (2019, March 13). *Nepal-China Border at a glance*. Kamal Shahi.
<https://kamalshahi.wordpress.com/2019/03/13/nepal-china-border-at-a-glance/>
- Shakya, A. (2017). Nepal-China Relations: New Horizon with Better Perspective. In M. Shrestha & A. Shakya (Eds.), *Nepal-China Relations: New Avenues and Possibilities* (pp. 207–246). International Concern Center.
- Sharma, B. P. (2018). China-Nepal Relations: A Cooperative Partnership in Slow Motion. *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies*, 4(3), 439–455.

- Shneiderman, S. B. (2013). Himalayan border citizens: Sovereignty and mobility in the Nepal-Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of China border zone. *Political Geography*, 35, 25–36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2013.04.001>
- Shrestha, B. M. (2014). Foreign Policy of China and Its Economic Priority Over Politics. In China Study Center (Ed.), *First Year of China's Diplomacy: Under the New Leadership* (1st ed., pp. 45–47). China Study Center.
- Shrestha, B. N. (2017). Nepal-China Boundary Business and Connectivity. In M. Shrestha & A. Shakya (Eds.), *Nepal-China Relations: New Avenues and Possibilities* (pp. 279–292). International Concern Center.
- Shrestha, D. B., & Singh, C. B. (1972). *The history of ancient and medieval Nepal: In a nutshell with some comparative traces of foreign history*. https://himalaya.socanth.cam.ac.uk/collections/rarebooks/downloads/History_Ancient_Medieval_Nepal.pdf
- Shrestha, H. L. (2005). Political Aspects of Nepal-China Relations. In N. N. Pandey (Ed.), *Nepal-China Relations* (pp. 1–13). Institute of Foreign Affairs.
- Shrestha, H. L. (2017a). Nepal China Relations: New Avenues and Possibilities . In M. Shrestha & A. Shakya (Eds.), *Nepal-China Relations: New Avenues and Possibilities* (pp. 293–302). International Concern Center.
- Shrestha, H. L. (2017b). *Trans-Himalayan Silk Road* (1st ed.). Hiranyalal Shrestha.
- Shrestha, S. (2023). *Mythology, momos and pagodas: The cultural dimension of Nepal-China relationship*. CGTN. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2023-01-30/The-cultural-dimension-of-Nepal-China-relationship-1h16o1xLlpC/index.html#:~:text=Considered%20to%20be%20a%20staple,bite%20reminds%20you%20of%20home.>

- Simkhada, S. R. (2017). China's Belt and Road Initiatives and Nepal. In M. Shrestha & A. Shakya (Eds.), *Nepal-China Relations: New Avenues and Possibilities* (pp. 325–332). International Concern Center.
- Simkhada, S. R. (2018). *Nepal India China Relations in the 21st Century*. Mrs. Bindu Simkhada.
- Singh, M. K. (2011). *Nepal foreign policy*. Sumit Enterprises.
- The Himalayan Times. (2017, April). *Nepal-China joint military drill kicks off*.
<https://thehimalayantimes.com/nepal/nepal-china-joint-military-drill-kicks-off-sagarmatha-friendship-2017/>
- Tuladhar, M. R. (2014). Important Diplomatic Initiatives of China. In China Study Center (Ed.), *First Year of China Diplomacy: Under the New Leadership* (1st ed., pp. 16–20). China Study Center.
- Ullah, A. K. M. A., & Kumpoh, A. A. Z. A. (2018). Are Borders the Reflection of International Relations? Southeast Asian Borders in Perspective. *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs*, 5(3), 295–318.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/2347797018798253>
- Upadhyaya, S. (2012). *Nepal and the Geo-Strategic Rivalry between China and India*. Routledge.
- Upadhyay, A. (2023). Nepali Students in China: A Source of Soft Power for Beijing? In C. Xavier & J. T. Jacob (Eds.), *How China Engages South Asia: Themes, Partners and Tools* (pp. 15–26). Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP).
- Uprety, P. R. (1998). *Nepal-Tibet relations 1850-1930: Years of hopes, challenges and frustrations* (2nd ed.). Ratna Pustak Bhandar.

- Virtanen, A. M. (2002). Language policy and international relations-Central Asian experience. *World Congress on Language Policis*, 16–20.
- Wang, H. (2011). China's Image Projection and Its Impact. In J. Wang (Ed.), *Soft Power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wang, Y. (2008). Public diplomacy and the rise of Chinese soft power. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 616(1), 257–273.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312757>
- Wenle, H. (2017). The Maritime Dimension. In Kondapalli Srikanth & H. Xiaowen (Eds.), *One Belt One Road: China's Global Outreach* (pp. 114–159). PENTAGON PRESS.
- Xinhua. (2022). *2nd Confucius Institute inaugurated in Nepal*. Xinhua.
<https://english.news.cn/20220816/5218e495d7d143009c0f4c29cb93ba8a/c.html>
- Yang, Z. (2017). A Cultural Economy Approach. In Kondapalli Srikanth & H. Xiaowen (Eds.), *One Belt One Road: China's Global Outreach* (pp. 65–85). PENTAGON PRESS.
- Yongtao, L. (2015). People-to-People Exchanges in Chinese Diplomacy: Evolutions, Strategies, and Social Practice. *Stosunki Międzynarodowe - International Relations*, 4(51), 238–253. <https://doi.org/10.7366/020909614201511>
- Zakowski, K. (2017). Introduction: Determinants of International Relations in the East Asian Context. *Contemporary Asian Study Series*, 7, (7-112).
<https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/8088-376-5.01>