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**Nepal Geopolitical Pivot: Four
Global Initiatives Fueling
HUMINT Dominance**

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Abstract

Amid intensifying India-China-US rivalry, Nepal, located in the lap of Himalayas, has emerged as the critical fulcrum in South Asia, whose alignment tips regional power dynamics. This article analyses how Beijing leverages its newly launched Four Global Initiatives (4GIs) i.e. Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Civilisational Initiative (GCI), and the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) between 2021–2025 as sophisticated vectors for expanding its peculiar Human Intelligence (HUMINT) operations. Following the 2025 Gen Z-led “Nepo Baby” uprising and the Oli government’s removal, Beijing pivoted from ideological patronage to pragmatic co-optation. As Nepal increasingly aligns with Chinese economic-security frameworks, it inadvertently enables HUMINT embedding under development cover. Through the 4GIs prism, this study reveals how benign looking initiatives cloaks a strategic HUMINT soft power convergence aimed at stabilising the fragile Balen Shah regime, normalising Pax Sinica norms, and transforming Kathmandu’s democracy into a compliant node in Beijing’s intelligence-driven architecture, hence securing Nepal as a crucible for China’s narrative war and regional dominance.

Keywords: Human Intelligence (HUMINT), Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), Global Civilisational Initiative (GCI), Global Governance Initiative (GGI)

Introduction

Nepal, a landlocked buffer state nestled in the Himalayas and home to the world’s highest peak the Mount Everest, known locally as Sagarmatha in Nepali and Qomolangma in Chinese, occupies a pivotal geostrategic position in South Asia. Sandwiched between two competing Asian giants, India and China, both of which possess some of the world’s oldest and richest civilisations, Nepal serves as a critical geopolitical crossroads in the region. With its turbulent political history marked by the Maoist insurgency uprisings, economic collapse, and fragile recovery, Nepal is poised as an ultimate strategic prize in the sharpening Indo-China

contestation. Amidst the growing India-China rivalry and change of government in Nepal, China has intensified its expansion into Nepal through public diplomacy, fostering economic dependence via infrastructure projects and trade, while leveraging the country's Hindu domination alongside its deep-rooted Buddhist heritage sites like Lumbini, Buddha's birthplace, serving as cultural bridges. This aligns with China's "Five-Finger Policy", explicitly framing Nepal as one of the five fingers (along with Arunachal Pradesh, Bhutan, Sikkim, and Ladakh) extending from the Tibetan palm, as articulated in Mao Zedong's geopolitical vision to encircle and influence the subcontinent (Chellaney, B. 2020).¹

China has recently launched Four Global Initiatives (4GIs) i.e. the Global Development Initiative (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Civilisational Initiative (GCI), and the Global Governance Initiative (GGI) in quick succession between 2021 and 2025 to reorient its global engagement from the Belt and Road Initiative's (BRI) hardware-heavy trajectory towards a holistic software supremacy, mitigating debt-trap optics through economic dependencies (GDI), security architectures (GSI), cultural narratives (GCI), and normative orchestration (GGI) {Cheung, K. 2025}.² For landlocked Nepal, now under a newly formed government in the wake of the Gen Z protests, these tools highlight its precarious balancing act, thereby amplifying its geostrategic significance for both India and China.

China is systematically expanding its southwards footprints in neighbouring Nepal through its 4GIs sophisticated public diplomacy instruments and gradually shifting from the BRI overt infrastructure focus to a holistic "software supremacy" strategy. Through the GDI, Beijing deepens economic dependence by funding priority projects and offering concessional loans framed as "win-win" development, thereby mitigating debt-trap optics while securing Kathmandu's alignment on their core interests like the 'One-China' policy. The GSI amplifies this by embedding security architectures, including police training, counter-terrorism cooperation, and intelligence sharing, positioning China as a stabilising force amid Nepal's political turbulence and reducing New Delhi's traditional security monopoly. Culturally, the GCI leverages shared Buddhist heritage, promoting Lumbini as a trans-Himalayan spiritual corridor to counter India's narrative, fostering people-to-people bonds through Confucius Institutes (CI), media partnerships, and scholarship exchanges that normalises Chinese norms. Finally, the GGI orchestrates normative alignment, encouraging Nepal's support for China's vision of

“democratised” multilateralism in UN forums, thereby insulating Beijing from Western criticism. Collectively, these 4GIs reframe China not as an expansionist power, but as a benevolent partner, exploiting Nepal’s fragile recovery to embed long-term strategic dependencies. This multi-layered approach transforms Nepal into a critical node in China’s “Five-Finger Policy”, subtly encircling India while advancing Beijing’s Himalayan ambitions without triggering overt backlash.

Despite abundant cost-effective technological intelligence options, China with the world’s second-largest human asset pool, subtly integrates its peculiar Human Intelligence (HUMINT) capabilities with tech-driven methods. Beijing has refined these operations by fusing them with public diplomacy, reducing detection risks, accelerating operational tempo, and heightening ambiguity to ensure a resilient, multi-layered espionage ecosystem. This approach is particularly potent in the underdeveloped Himalayan region. This article identifies China’s distinctive HUMINT footprints within its evolving 4GIs in Nepal, building on incremental intelligence successes achieved through BRI-era public diplomacy. Operating amid sharpening Indo-China contestation, these networks methodically gather intelligence fragments while maintaining plausible deniability under legitimate business, cultural, and security cooperation. Tracing Beijing’s pivot from COVID-hit BRI infrastructure towards normative power projection via the 4GIs, this study establishes explicit connections between HUMINT operations and 4GIs activities. By systematically identifying intelligence elements embedded within development aid, security partnerships, cultural exchanges, and governance forums, the article demonstrates how China transforms a volatile Nepal, recently reshaped by a new government pursuing a pragmatic, balanced foreign policy between India and China, into a crucible for intelligence-driven global dominance, transcending debt-trap optics to achieve holistic software supremacy in the Himalayan theatre.

Unique Chinese HUMINT Operations

Despite the global revolution in disruptive technologies offering cost-effective, instantaneous data harvesting without human risk, China has not abandoned HUMINT. Instead, Beijing has innovatively evolved its doctrine to smartly blend traditional human-centric

operations with cutting-edge AI analytics and cyber tools to subtly reduce detection risks, accelerate operational tempo, and heighten ambiguity. This strategic integration has also ensured a resilient, multi-layered espionage ecosystem that transcends mere technological reliance, leveraging human nuance alongside digital scale to maintain a decisive intelligence advantage and has also turned HUMINT into a hybrid force multiplier for influence and intelligence dominance. This integration also compensates for technology's inherent inability to unravel the complexities of the human mind or capture nuanced cultural insights, such as customs, trust dynamics, and social cues that machines cannot replicate due to data-driven limits on sarcasm, dialects, and contextual subtlety. While humans build the rapport necessary for soft intelligence, real-time technology amplifies this advantage: AI instantly analyses inputs for predictive modeling and fuses them with other sources, creating a synergistic loop where human intuition guides digital precision.

Paul Moore, a former China analyst for the FBI, explains the difference between various agencies this way. "If a beach were a target, the Russians would send in a sub, frogmen would steal ashore in the dark of night and collect several buckets of sand and take them back to Moscow. The U.S. would send over satellites and produce reams of data. The Chinese would send in a thousand tourists, each assigned to collect a single grain of sand. When they returned, they would be asked to shake out their towels. And they would end up knowing more about the sand than anyone else" (Wise, D. 2018).³ Contrary to the traditional tradecraft of intelligence collection by a specialised agent, Chinese agencies use the policy of "thousand grains of sand or mosaic approach or human wave or citizen spying" wherein they basically employ numerous Han people and their diaspora settled abroad. China's HUMINT strategy leverages a vast network of seemingly ordinary individuals to gather fragmented data, later synthesising it into a complete intelligence picture. Beijing's creativity in combining all elements of "societal power" i.e. espionage, information control, industrial policy, political and economic coercion, foreign policy, military threats, and technological strength poses a formidable challenge to the rules-based international order (Mayal, D. C. S. 2024).⁴ Despite technological advancements, China continues to prioritise HUMINT, aligning it with broader foreign policy goals. By blending traditional methods with modern tools, Beijing has strengthened its capacity to collect vital intelligence, fueling its rise as a global economic and military power. This integration

underscores China's strategic focus on securing competitive advantages, driving economic growth, and expanding its influence worldwide.

Chinese 4GIs: A Synergistic Architecture

The 4GIs quartet marks Beijing's strategic evolution from BRI's infrastructure focus towards a synergistic architecture methodically challenging the Western liberal order. This holistic framework addresses perceived global governance deficits: the GDI introduces growth models, the GSI reshapes security paradigms, the GCI drives cultural exchanges, and the GGI establishes governance rules. Internally synergised, these initiatives dismantle liberal democratic norms and systematically shifts influence from Western institutions to Beijing's state-centric paradigm. By forging economic dependencies (GDI), delivering security-technology partnerships (GSI), crafting legitimising narratives (GCI), and institutionalising gains through rule-making (GGI), the 4GIs generate a self-reinforcing cycle where material reliance, security alignment, ideological convergence and normative orchestration amplify China's geopolitical leverage (Cheung, K. 2025).⁵ Chinese official narratives frame the 4GIs as an 'organic whole': the GDI provides the material foundation, the GSI safeguards peace, the GCI builds value consensus, and the GGI supplies institutional guarantees. Under 4GIs cloak, Beijing disseminates techno-authoritarian ideas through economic power: the GDI funds digital dependencies like Beidou satellites and AI rules; the GSI markets surveillance tools as peacekeeping aid; the GCI defends censorship as cultural sovereignty; and the GGI seeks to transform existing bodies like the UN while proposing parallel institutions, such as the Hong Kong-based International Organisation for Mediation (IOMed), launched on 20 October 2025, to resolve disputes through mediation (Cheung, K. 2025).⁶

China's 4 GIs and HUMINT Operations

Rob Joyce, Senior Cyber Security to US NSA in 2019 while comparing cyber threat from Russia and China said "I kind of look at Russia as the hurricane. It comes in fast and hard. China, on the other hand, is climate change: long, slow, pervasive". This metaphor underscores the strategic divergence between Russia's immediate tactical threats and China's structural systemic transformation. The 4GIs evolve beyond BRI's visible "debt-trap" megaprojects, executing slow, progressive steps to reshape global norms and deliberately mirroring climate change's gradual

inevitability. This paradigm shift repositions China as a provider of global public goods, addressing deficits in growth (GDI), security (GSI), civilisation (GCI), and governance (GGI). Unlike BRI's overt infrastructure, these initiatives embed influence invisibly: GDI creates economic dependencies via equity FDI; GSI normalises PLA security architectures; GCI counters Western hegemony through cultural narratives; and GGI secures Global South allegiance via normative frameworks. China's 'boiling frog' strategy, gradually escalate pressure until nations are trapped without realising the danger. Through the BRI-to-4GIs evolution, the Global South nations incrementally accept China's trap i.e. loans to leases (upon payment failure), then security pacts, and finally full economic dependency. This establishes a Chinese world order via diplomacy and 'mutual benefit' narratives rather than military coercion. Xi Jinping's vision triumphs as Beijing's interests are reframed as 'global public goods' through development aid, security cooperation, and cultural partnerships and normative institution-building. This patient, pervasive strategy has quietly secured structural dominance without triggering alarm, methodically reshaping the international order to align with a multipolar paradigm. Such subtle recalibration compels rivals to gradually adapt to a Sino-centric reality as inevitable, often before realising the transformation has occurred.

Chinese 4 GIs and HUMINT/Influence Operations in Nepal

Nepal's journey from debt-fueled fury in 2022, marked by public backlash against the stalled Pokhara International Airport (PIA) and Sri Lanka-style default fears, to strategic alignment by 2026 validates Beijing's incremental strategy. Crucially, Nepal officially supports only the GDI while categorically rejecting the GSI as contradictory to its non-aligned policy, remaining non-committal on the GCI and unendorsing the GGI. Yet cooperation has subtly extended: during PM Prachanda's September 2023 visit, 12 agreements operationalised GDI through agriculture, digital economy, and green development MoUs (National Herald India, 2023; The Kathmandu Post, 2025).⁷ Beijing converted distressed BRI debt into equity in hydropower, transforming PIA into a strategic asset. Despite rejecting GSI, Nepal expanded bilateral security coop, thus allowing Chinese border presence. GCI-style cultural diplomacy at Lumbini proceeded without formal endorsement, while GGI-aligned debt conversions advanced bilaterally under UN frameworks. Thus, Nepal became a GDI-centric laboratory where China

achieves software supremacy, embedded in infrastructure and security, despite Kathmandu's official denial of joining GSI, GCI, or GGI.

GDI and Chinese HUMINT in Nepal

GDI, launched at the UN General Assembly in September 2021, advances the UN 2030 Agenda through six core principles: development as a priority; a people-centred approach; benefits for all; innovation-driven development; harmony between humanity and nature; and results-oriented action. Targeting poverty reduction, food security, health, financing gaps, climate action, industrialisation, digital economy, and connectivity, the GDI frames China as the Global South's advocate against Western imbalances, quickly garnering support from over 100 countries and an 80-nation "Group of Friends". In September 2025, during the 80th UNGA session, China partnered with the UN Office for South-South Cooperation to launch the \$10 million China–UN Global South–South Development Facility (2025–2030), accelerating practical, small-scale projects in technology and capacity building. In Nepal, these initiatives transform the country from 'landlocked' to 'landlinked', but primarily towards Chinese markets, creating asymmetric trade dependency. Unlike the debt-heavy BRI, GDI projects are framed as politically palatable "South–South Cooperation" aligned with UN SDGs, quietly securing strategic footholds in Nepal's food, energy, and transport sectors (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025; United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, 2025).⁸

Under the GDI, China strategically selects projects in Nepal that addresses immediate livelihood needs while embedding long-term economic dependency, often bypassing stalled BRI megaprojects. The Nepal Smiling Children Project, launched in May 2020 and selected as the first-batch GDI project in 2022, provides meals to 3,600 impoverished students across Kathmandu, Dolakha (Tibet border), Mahottari and Saptari (Indian border) districts, serving as a high-visibility soft power tool that directly links Chinese aid to grassroots welfare. Similarly, the support to schools and communities for pandemic prevention and green recovery, executed jointly by China's CIDCA and UNDP, targets 15 northern (Tibet border) districts, delivering health infrastructure and green energy solutions that subtly strengthens China's presence in sensitive Tibetan border zones under development's guise. In seven years, the China Foundation

for Rural Development' (CFRD) Nepal office has implemented 15 projects across 57 of 77 districts, benefiting over 5,50,000 people. In energy, the Upper Marsyangdi Hydropower Project (50 MW, operational since 2017, developed 90% by China's Sino Hydro exemplifies GDI's fusion of "green development" and covert influence: publicly framed as an SDG flagship advancing Climate Action and Clean Energy, it embeds Chinese engineered control and potential HUMINT footprints under the benign garb of community empowerment (Xinhua, 2022; The Kathmandu Post, 2022; Nepal Khabar, 2022; United Nations Development Programme, n.d.; 2025; Global Carbon Council, 2025).⁹

Nepal and China have signed a BRI framework cooperation agreement during Nepal's PM Oli's visit to China. Ten projects identified by Nepal for execution under the BRI are Tokay-Chhahare tunnel road, Hilsa-Simikot road project, Kimathanka-Khandbari road and bridge, Jilong-Kerung-Kathmandu cross-border railway, Amargadhi City Hall in Dadeldhura, Jilong-Kerung-Rasuwadhi-Chilime 220KV transmission line, Madan Bhandari University, Kathmandu Scientific Centre and Science Museum, China-Nepal Friendship Industrial Park in Damak, and Jhapa Sports and Athletic Complex (Sharma, S. 2024).¹⁰

GDI in Nepal functions as a sophisticated, dual-use architecture for embedding China's HUMINT assets along both the Indian and Tibetan frontiers. Under the benign guise of "South-South Cooperation" and SDG-aligned poverty alleviation, Beijing systematically places intelligence operatives posing as aid workers, engineers, and development experts into critical nodes of Nepal's infrastructure and borderlands. Along the Indian border, the Nepal Smiling Children Project and school-based green recovery initiatives in Nepal provides unrestricted access for Chinese intelligence agency (i.e. Ministry of State Security {MSS}) to map terrain, monitor Indian Army movements, and recruit informants among marginalised communities opposite Bihar and West Bengal. Similarly, the China-Nepal Friendship Industrial Park in Damak (Jhapa) creates a controlled economic zone near India's Siliguri Corridor, co-opting local elites for economic espionage. In the North, GDI-funded schools in Himalayan districts normalises Chinese presence, enabling surveillance of Tibetan refugee flows. Critical infrastructure also serves as espionage nodes: the Upper Marsyangdi hydropower project positions hundreds of Chinese engineers inside Nepal's national grid, gathering real-time intelligence on energy vulnerabilities while locking the system into Chinese technical standards.

From Kathmandu, Huawei and ZTE operates under the Digital Silk Road (DSR) cover, recruiting tech-savvy Nepali youth as long-term telecom assets for signals intelligence. This GDI-enabled network relies on a “whole-of-society” approach, where thousands of Chinese nationals rotate through platforms with plausible deniability. Economic dependency created through jobs, contracts, and aid offers coercive leverage to turn local partners into compliant informants. By embedding these entities within Nepal’s development architecture, Beijing transforms aid into a resilient, multi-layered espionage ecosystem that operates in plain sight, ensuring granular intelligence collection on political shifts, Indian military dynamics, and Tibetan activism without triggering counter-intelligence alarms.

GSI and Chinese HUMINT in Nepal

GSI, launched at the Boao Forum for Asia on 21 April 2022, articulated six core commitments: indivisible security, respect for sovereignty, UN Charter adherence, addressing legitimate security concerns, dialogue-based dispute resolution, and comprehensive coverage of traditional and non-traditional threats. Rejecting Cold War alliances and zero-sum games, the GSI prioritises state-centric stability through cyber sovereignty, biosecurity, and AI governance, positioning Beijing as a neutral mediator for Global South security dilemmas while contrasting western collective defence models. Operationalised via a February 2023 concept paper and forums like the Global Public Security Cooperation Forum, the GSI showcases Chinese surveillance and digital infrastructure as “win-win” solutions. Over 90 bilateral and multi-lateral documents now incorporate GSI language, systematically converting GDI-driven economic dependencies into enduring security partnerships that embed Chinese standards. In Central Asia, SCO-backed counterterrorism drills are enhancing PLA interoperability with regional militaries. The GSI’s signature achievement remains China’s March 2023 mediation of Saudi-Iran rapprochement, restoring diplomatic ties after seven years and securing both nations’ commitments to GSI principles, a breakthrough hailed by 100+ countries that expanded China’s Middle East footprint and embedded GSI concepts into bilateral agreements globally (Shah, 2024; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024; Freeman et al., 2024; Aboudouh, 2023).¹¹

Although, Nepal has repeatedly clarified that, it has neither supported nor joined China's GSI, despite Beijing's claims during former PM Oli's August 2025 SCO visit, however the practical alignment is evident through Kathmandu's adoption of Beijing's domestic security model, particularly in preventive policing and surveillance. Since 2016, the Safe City Project has dramatically expanded CCTV coverage across Nepal including border regions using affordable Chinese firms with AI-enabled facial recognition, creating technological lock-in funded by Chinese grants that raises strategic autonomy concerns under China's National Intelligence Law (NIL). Beyond hardware, institutional interoperability deepens through annual *Sagarmatha Friendship* joint military exercises, Armed Police Force border cooperation, and extensive Nepal Police training programs that transfers Chinese operational norms without formal GSI accession. Nepal's absence of a robust data protection framework i.e. no dedicated regulator or cross-border transfer restrictions, leaves citizen data from Chinese surveillance infrastructure legally unprotected and vulnerable to extraterritorial access under the NIL (CESIF Nepal, 2026).¹²

China operationalises its GSI in Nepal by deploying dual-use infrastructure that fuses humanitarian aid with covert HUMINT. Key assets include the world's highest weather station (8,800m, installed May 2022) and a 5G base station equipped with HoloSens surveillance technology (6,500m, April 2020) on Mount Everest, which monitors high-altitude military and aviation activities (Xinhua, 2022; South China Morning Post, 2020).¹³ The December 2024 Joint Statement formalises this framework through a three-tiered boundary system and a dual-use Integrated Check Post at Korala, Mustang, embedding Chinese liaison officers within Nepal's border apparatus to access patrol logs and recruit local guides for tracking Indian infrastructure. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2024; CESIF Nepal, 2026).¹⁴ This structure also provides plausible deniability for intelligence gathering by MSS officers posing as engineers in the Safe City Project harvest data from AI-enabled CCTV in Tibetan neighbourhoods; PLA instructors in *Sagarmatha Friendship* exercises recruit Nepali commanders to monitor Indian and US deployments; and surveyors at Mount Everest cultivate Sherpa porters as informal sensors. In addition, Chinese advisors at the National Emergency Operation Center (NEOC) correlate data from surveillance cameras, border sensors, and disaster relief systems to synthesise intelligence on political shifts and security vulnerabilities. By bundling espionage within SDG-aligned aid, China transforms engineers, teachers, and trainers

into a non-attributable intelligence ecosystem that tracks Indian military movements and Tibetan dissent without triggering counter-espionage alarms (Katmandu Journal, 2025; Associated Press, 2025; Alves, 2025).¹⁵

GCI and Chinese HUMINT in Nepal

On 15 March 2023, at the CPC Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting, Xi Jinping launched the GCI, championing civilisational diversity while promoting peace, development, equity, justice, democracy, and freedom through China's state-centric governance. Rejecting "clash of civilisations" rhetoric, the GCI emphasises mutual learning over Western universalism. Through rebranded Confucius Institutes (now under the Chinese International Education Foundation since 2020) and World Internet Conference platforms, Beijing exports "Confucian-digital authoritarianism", thus normalising cyber sovereignty and algorithmic control. DSR tools i.e. Huawei 5G, AI surveillance, and data localisation, shields authoritarian regimes from Western sanctions and challenge US-led liberal frameworks. The 10-11 July 2025, Beijing Ministerial Meeting on Global Civilisations Dialogue secured endorsements from over 600 delegates across 140 countries under "Safeguarding Diversity of Human Civilisations", deepening China's penetration in Eastern Europe. China's June 2024 UNGA resolution establishing June 10 as the 'International Day for Dialogue' among civilisations was unanimously adopted and by December 2022, China had secured 43 items on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage roster, effectively instrumentalising cultural diplomacy to reshape global norms (International Department of the CPC Central Committee, 2023; Mayal, 2025; Urhová, 2024; Yang, 2024; China.org.cn, 2025; Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee & International Department of the CPC Central Committee, 2025; State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2024).¹⁶

The GCI finds fertile ground in Nepal, wherein shared Buddhist heritage and centuries of people-to-people exchanges provide a natural conduit for Beijing's soft-power projection. Officially, Nepal has declined to join the GCI, citing its non-aligned foreign policy and constitutional commitment to Panchsheel principles. Yet beyond cultural programming, the GCI serves as a force multiplier for China's broader strategic objectives. Over 900 Mandarin teachers

are now active across Nepal, while Beijing promotes its films, arts, and culture through initiatives like Nepal's inaugural China Film Day (09 January 2025), co-organisation of the annual South Asia International Book Fair, and university partnerships with Tribhuvan University, Sanskrit University, and Lumbini Buddhist University. China has also expanded scholarships (new Chinese Ambassador Scholarship for primary and secondary students) and launched the October 2024 Youth Pioneer Program to cultivate Nepali youth leaders through visits to China and community projects. These efforts signal a strategic shift towards long-term normative influence via Nepal's next generation (Bhattarai, K.D. 2025).¹⁷

The CI's at Tribhuvan and Kathmandu Universities, now educating over 50,000 Nepali Mandarin speakers, exemplify the GCI's operationalisation of soft power. By embedding Chinese cultural narratives within language training and positioning Beijing as essential to Nepal's economic future, these institutes simultaneously normalise Chinese values, erode Western ideological dominance, and recruit the next generation of pro-China leadership (Xinhua, 2023, CESIF Nepal, 2025; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2023; The Annapurna Express, 2022; Confucius Institute at Tribhuvan University, 2024).¹⁸ Aligning with the GCI's "mutual learning among civilisations" narrative, China has instrumentalised Nepal's Buddhist heritage through the LBU and Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU) MoU and the 2025 "One Belt, One Road Buddhist Culture and Art Conference". This GCI-aligned "Buddhist diplomacy" contest India's entrenched cultural hegemony in the Nepal by positioning Beijing as a co-custodian of shared spiritual traditions, while reframing China's geopolitical rise as a benign civilisational revival rooted in Asian continuity. With the Dalai Lama's succession looming, Beijing has intensified Buddhism as a strategic tool to shape regional loyalties in contested borderlands including Ladakh, Tawang, and Bhutan also (Lumbini Buddhist University, 2024, 2025; Civils Daily, 2025).¹⁹

Under the guise of "people-to-people exchanges", the December 2024 Joint Statement weaponised cultural programming to advance Beijing's strategic narratives in Nepal. The agreement commits Nepal to "support" the China Culture Center's activities, while pledging to "harness" this infrastructure alongside CI's for bilateral cooperation. This institutionalised framework enables Beijing to subtly shape Nepali public opinion on their sensitive issues and recasting geopolitical messaging as apolitical cultural engagement (Government of Nepal,

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024; The Rising Nepal, 2025).²⁰ Through targeted funding of South Asian Sinologists Conferences and trilingual publication projects like the China-Nepal Scholars Dialogue, Beijing cultivates pro-China intellectual elite capable of reshaping domestic discourse on sovereignty and regional security. The Second South Asia Sinologists Conference (June 2025), co-hosted by BLCU, explicitly seeks to build a “global Sinologists network” promoting Chinese academic principles, while the Phewa Dialogue (launched Dec 2024) creates a permanent track-II platform jointly managed by Sichuan University and Tribhuvan University. These initiatives operationalise the GCI’s “respect for civilisational diversity” framing to normalise Beijing’s narratives on Tibet and border issues, even as they marginalise dissenting voices. By offering lucrative scholarships and research grants to Nepali elites, China effectively weaponises academic cooperation to suppress Tibetan activism and embed its geopolitical priorities within Nepal’s intellectual ecosystem (Beijing Language and Culture University, Center for World Sinology, 2025; Centre for Social and Economic Progress, 2023; Sandia National Laboratories, 2022; The Indian Express, 2024).²¹ China’s GCI-branded scholarships cultivate a pipeline of Nepali students socialised in Beijing’s governance models, securing long-term normative alignment without formal treaties. This soft power network is reinforced by 35 China Study Centers (CSC) and CI’s clustered along the Indian border, functioning as dual-use hubs. Allegations indicate that UFDW operatives, posing as language instructors, exploit these platforms to recruit Nepali elites, extract sensitive intelligence on India-Nepal relations, and systematically suppress Tibetan activism (Centre for Social and Economic Progress, 2023; CESIF Nepal, 2025; Sandia National Laboratories, 2022).²²

GGI and Chinese HUMINT in Nepal

China’s GGI, unveiled by Jinping at the SCO+ meeting in Tianjin on 01 September 2025, is the fourth and latest pillar of Beijing’s decade-long strategy to reshape the global order around its norms and interests. Alongside the GDI, GSI and GCI, the GGI completes the quartet underpinning China’s vision of a “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” and systematically addresses core governance questions, “by whom, how, and for whom” by promoting five principles: sovereign equality, rule of law, multilateralism, a people-centred approach, and results-oriented efficiency. Positioning itself as the definitive response to the

global governance deficit, the GGI has garnered support from over 150 countries and international organisations, as confirmed by China's Foreign Minister on 08 March 2026 (Wei, 2025; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025; Xiao, 2025; Wang, 2025; Xinhua, 2026).²³

China strategically manipulates multilateral institutions to align them with CCP preferences by stifling opposition and censoring sensitive Human Rights issues. This tactic was exposed by former UN staffer, who documented Beijing's report alteration and marginalisation of democracy in UN forums. As US influence wanes under Trump's retrenchment, China fills the vacuum by penetrating existing bodies and launching new initiatives in AI, space, and deep-sea mining. Framed as South-South cooperation, the GGI fosters Global South reliance, embeds intelligence networks, normalises Chinese standards, and erodes Western norms. Despite UNSG hailing China as a "major pillar of international cooperation" in October 2021 (marking its 50th UNSC tenure), a 24 October 2024 House Committee report exposed Beijing's co-optation of the UN and WHO by shirking obligations while advancing Huawei and ZTE standards. Through financial leverage and key personnel placements in the FAO, ITU, and UNDESA, China blocks resolutions, prioritises sovereignty over liberal values, forges anti-Western alliances via aid, and systematically undermines institutional accountability (Mayal, 2025; Reilly, 2010; Lowy Institute, 2022; Guterres, 2021).²⁴ Economically, China's pledge to maintain communication with creditors, coordinate IMF support, and facilitate currency swaps with the Chinese Bank grants Beijing unparalleled leverage over Nepal's debt sustainability, thus creating a coercive environment where financially vulnerable officials in the Ministry and Bank can be turned into sources for sensitive data on sovereign negotiations and monetary policy (Das & Lin, 2024; International Monetary Fund, 2025; Nepal Rastra Bank & People's Bank of China, 2014).²⁵

The International Department of the CCP Central Committee (ID-CCP) serves as Beijing's primary conduit for party-to-party diplomacy, orchestrating reciprocal visits, governance seminars, and ideological training that expose Nepali cadres to China's development philosophy and global initiatives. This engagement fosters normative alignment, with Nepali leftist parties increasingly mirroring Chinese narratives on anti-imperialism, multipolarity, and Western decline. Beyond ideological affinity, the CCP cultivates cross-party relationships to ensure strategic continuity across regime changes, systematically grooming rising leaders who

advocate for China's priorities, particularly on their sensitive issues, thereby shaping Nepal's foreign policy consensus internally (CESIF Nepal. 2025).²⁶ Beijing also offers branded scholarships to cultivate a pipeline of Nepali bureaucrats and politicians socialised in Chinese governance norms, ensuring long-term normative alignment without requiring formal treaty accession (Centre for Social and Economic Progress. 2023).²⁷ This soft power infrastructure is reinforced by the China Culture Center in Kathmandu and track-II platforms like the Phewa Dialogue (The Rising Nepal. 2026),²⁸ which normalise Beijing's narratives while providing UFDW operatives with legitimate access to Nepal's political elite. The December 2024 Joint Statement further institutionalised China's penetration in Nepal by reaffirming UNGA Resolution 2758 and Kathmandu's One-China commitment while both sides agreed to deepen government, legislative, and political party exchanges to "consolidate political trust and share governance experiences (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China. 2024).²⁹ Though seemingly benign, the GCI provides direct cover for intelligence officers posing as policy advisors or liaisons from the ID-CCP to cultivate relationships with Nepali legislators, senior bureaucrats, and monarchy sympathisers, subtly recruiting them as assets during closed-door workshops on statecraft.

Nepal Change of Guard

China's role in the election of Nepal's new government led by Balen Shah and the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) following the March 2026 parliamentary polls marks a strategic pivot from overt ideological engineering to pragmatic adaptation. Historically, Beijing actively engineered Nepal's political landscape, most notably in 2017–2018 by brokering the merger of the CPN-UML and CPN-Maoist Centre to install a stable communist bloc aligned with its BRI objectives. This "left unity" project aimed to secure a compliant partner for trans-Himalayan connectivity and limit Indian influence. However, the 2026 election, occurring in the aftermath of the Gen Z-led uprising that toppled the previous establishment, shattered this architecture. The RSP's landslide victory (securing 182 of 275 seats) rejected the traditional communist parties China had cultivated for two decades. However, China's swift recalibration and offering \$4 million in election aid, immediately legitimising the new regime, and pivoting its rhetoric to "economic transformation" and "digital governance" demonstrates a sophisticated adaptability.

The new balancing government, while rhetorically nationalist and non-aligned, faces an existential imperative: it must satisfy a restless Gen Z demanding jobs, transparency, and rapid development while navigating the perilous narrow path between Indian security dominance and Chinese economic necessity. With India providing logistical support but limited capital, and the US retreating under Trump's "America First", Kathmandu's survival increasingly depends on the availability of Chinese resources concessional loans, grid infrastructure, and market access that only Beijing can deploy at scale.

Conclusion

Nepal has emerged as the definitive strategic crucible for China's evolving statecraft, where the 4GIs function not merely as diplomatic slogans but as integrated vectors for covert HUMINT expansion. Following the geopolitical backlash against the classical "debt-trap" narrative amidst heightened Sino-US rivalry exacerbated by US-Iran tensions disrupting energy corridors, Beijing has strategically pivoted in the Himalayan region. It now deploys the 4GIs quadret to recalibrate the BRI towards a sustainable, mutually compatible path, seamlessly embedding intelligence gathering within ostensibly benign developmental, security, cultural and governance initiatives. On the surface, the GDI secures economic leverage through hydropower equity and debt restructuring; the GSI legitimises security cooperation via border management and police training; the GCI institutionalises academic and Buddhist religious networks around Lumbini; and the GGI establishes deep relations with actors involved in Nepal's governance and legislative processes at the apex level. Yet on the ground, this benign-looking holistic approach allows Beijing to subtly infiltrate HUMINT footprints across Nepal's political, financial, government officials and social strata including academia, effectively bypassing traditional counter-intelligence scrutiny that focuses on overt espionage.

By fusing its 4GIs within Kathmandu's precarious geopolitical dilemma, China transforms Nepal into a secure logistical and intelligence hub essential for dominating the Himalayan frontier and monitoring India's strategic movements. The 4GIs framework ensures that even a Gen Z-driven, reformist government finds its policy space gradually circumscribed by structural dependencies: debt-equity swaps under the GDI, security interoperability under the GSI, the institutionalisation of academic and Buddhist networks around Lumbini under the GCI,

and normative alignment under the GGI. Ultimately, this represents a sophisticated evolution of Chinese power projection: a soft-power shell hardening into a resilient intelligence network that secures Beijing's strategic flank against US containment and India's regional hegemony in South Asia. Nepal is likely to remain firmly anchored within China's orbital influence, no longer merely a buffer state but a critical node in Beijing's architecture of holistic software supremacy and intelligence-driven global dominance, where political balancing acts inevitably tilt towards Beijing's orbit.

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