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China's Soft Power in the Context of the BRI: Three Case Studies

Abstract

In 2013 China announced the start of The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). By building infrastructure in countries across the world, China hopes to strengthen itself economically and reshape the international balance of power. Evidence from other works suggests this strategy may be working. However, this thesis suggests that the BRI is not a fool-proof method of persuading other countries to join China's sphere. In fact, China may be hindering its use of soft power through actions not wholly related to the BRI.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The concept of China's rise and the Belt and Road Initiative often go hand in hand. Since Xi Jinping's rise to power in 2012, China has asserted itself in Asia and in other parts of the globe militarily and economically. The BRI is an example of the latter, as China has invested billions into infrastructure projects designed to better connect the country to Asia, Europe, Africa, and parts of South America. With this massive initiative comes fears that China is using it as a powerplay to persuade participant nations into joining its sphere of influence. This persuasion is what can be characterized as soft power, or using non-coercive means to get what one wants. Whether the BRI can do this or is currently doing this, is up for debate. Some scholarly works have been done on the subject, but the field is still generally lacking. This is the central question this thesis seeks to answer: Is the BRI increasing China's soft power?

For the sake of thoroughness, I will begin by discussing the BRI and the background on it. I will then discuss the literature and definition of soft power and move into a discussion of the BRI and its soft power potential. Thereafter, I will discuss China's grand strategy, previous work

done on finding the soft power effects of the BRI, and then begin the quantitative and qualitative analyses which center around three countries that are participants in, or are greatly affected by, the BRI.

The quantitative analysis will consist of three regressions as well as an examination of raw data based on public opinion data and tariff data (both of which will act as proxies for soft power). The qualitative section will include a historical narrative and a subsequent analysis using original research to determine the causes behind my findings. The historical analysis will provide some evidence for my findings, but primarily serves to contextualize the relations and behaviors of the countries I examine. Due to the enormity and global reach of the BRI, I have chosen to look at three individual countries which are India, Russia, and Vietnam.

The choice to examine these three nations is based on geography, history, and the current realities these nations face. India has been an aspiring economic powerhouse for decades and is both an unwilling participant in the BRI and competitor to China. Despite not being an official signatory of the BRI, China still invests in India and India is a participant on a proxy basis (Devonshire-Ellis, 2020). Russia, China's old enemy and powerful neighbor, has now found itself behind China with the two nation's roles essentially inverse. Vietnam, meanwhile, has found itself becoming much closer to the U.S and is a prime target for Western manufacturers. Furthermore, all three countries are under the BRI umbrella and have physical borders with China. This may not mean much by itself, but when one considers the PRC's goal of a stable and friendly periphery, the attitudes and ambitions of these countries mean much more.

Most of this will be elaborated in the history section, but China has territorial claims in all three countries, including new ones in the South China Sea which directly affect Vietnam's sovereignty and economy. India's borders continue to be threatened, not to mention it is

essentially surrounded by China and its ally, Pakistan. BRI maritime routes go through the Indian Ocean as well, meaning India is encircled from the land and sea by China or its proxies. Russia is a more unique case, as it lacks salient border disputes and Russia's economic ambitions mostly lie in Europe. However, technological and trade imbalances make the otherwise cordial relationship more complicated, as well as the fact that BRI investment in Russia is primarily to secure China's growing energy needs. While I would like to examine all of China's neighbors, only these three countries will be looked at in-depth.

I had expected to find that increased investment would lead to more favorable public opinions of China, and lower trade barriers in the form of lower tariffs on Chinese imports in all three countries. Based on what I have learned in the past about the BRI, it seemed that increased infrastructure investment, the prestige of the projects, and the power that the projects provide China would lead to such a result. However, I find evidence that the opposite is true for India and Vietnam. There is falling public opinion in both countries, while tariffs have largely remained stagnant. This less favorable public opinion is not due solely to the BRI, rather, it is due to a host of other factors that are unrelated to the BRI such as aggressive Chinese military maneuvers and prolonged border conflicts. Russia offers an interesting perspective, as perceptions of China among the Russian populace are favorable. Still, these favorable opinions are not due to the BRI and instead are borne from the convenient and warm relationship China and Russia have.

Chapter 2: Background of the Belt and Road Initiative

Overview and Goals of the BRI

The BRI is an umbrella term for China's goals to build trade, financial, and people-to-people connectivity, as well as promote growth across dozens of different nations and six main economic corridors. These corridors encompass China, Mongolia, Russia, Eurasia, Central and West Asia, Pakistan, the countries of the Indian subcontinent, and Indochina according to the OECD (2018, 3). There is also the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road which is connected to these six corridors and has routes to Africa and Europe and through the Arctic Circle (Ibid, 9-11, 13).

Asia, generally lacking in infrastructure and infrastructure investment (Ibid, 3, 5-6), provides China an opportunity to fill the gap and have mutually positive benefits. The Asia Development Bank warns that the region is spending only half of what is needed to maintain current economic growth and to deal with the growing specter of climate change (Russel & Berger, 2019, 9). By using the BRI to invest in infrastructure, China can help develop markets for its products in the long run, expand the usage of Chinese currency, alleviate excess industrial capacity in the short run, and overall put itself in a position to continue its economic prosperity (Ibid, 3). This is somewhat self-explanatory, as development and the expansion of infrastructure make trade and communication easier and allow for economic growth to occur, thus creating new markets and expanding old ones.

The "Belt" part of the BRI deals with the construction of the six economic corridors mentioned above, also referred to as the Silk Road Economic Belt in general as it includes many nations who used to be along the old Silk Road (Rolland, 2019). These corridors' main goal is to facilitate trade, investment, and stimulate growth in both participant nations and China (OECD,

2018, 10). These corridors will strengthen “multi-modal” (Ibid, 10) transportation that integrates road, rail, air, and water transport as well as build up infrastructure along major routes and ports of entry (CPC Central Committee, 2016, 80). They will also strengthen China’s resource, food, and energy security, as these routes pass through a very resource-rich part of the world (OECD, 2018, 10). These parts of the world are still developing, hence China’s desire to move low-tech and “dirty” industries to these nations or to the poorer western provinces which are also a crucial region in the scope of the BRI (Ibid, 17-18). This would ensure their development and lessen the inequality between the coastal and inland provinces (Ibid, 15) and the new transport infrastructure would guarantee that these materials can move into and around China.

High standard (meaning lessened illicit activity and less exchange of fake or pirated goods) free-trade zones are another aspect of the “Belt” portion of the plan, which will help create a network of free trade zones along the corridors of the Silk Road Economic Belt, with Xinjiang Province being the hub of these free trade zones (Ibid, 10). Cultural exchange is another crucial aspect of the project as well, with China seeking to connect other nations in the realms of education, science, culture, sports, tourism, health, and Chinese medicine among others (Ibid, 10). The “Road” portion refers to maritime roads and ports. These maritime roads, or the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road as it is also known as, will be connected to the economic belts via ports which China has already constructed or is in the process of constructing (Ibid, 9, 11).

Financing the Initiative

The financing for the BRI projects comes from a variety of state and private sources. The bulk of the funding comes from Chinese policy banks, as well as the large state-owned commercial banks (Ibid, 18-21, Belt and Road News, 2019). These banks, including the China Development Bank and the Bank of China, have provided the bulk of the funding for the

initiative via low interest loans (Chatzky & McBride, 2019; OECD, 2018, 18-21; Belt and Road News, 2019). China also has its sovereign wealth fund, the China Investment Corporation, which gives the country policy capabilities unmatched even by the United States (Markey, 2020, 26). Furthermore, the nature of these banks allows China to bankroll large projects without the conditions present in the private sector or multilateral lenders (Ibid, 27). While China has done well so far in funding the numerous projects under the BRI, it may run into some issues in the future.

Financing Issues and General Issues

As China attempts to reduce levels of debt in its own economy while still requiring huge investments in poorer regions, it may run into financing issues (OECD, 2018, 21-22). The Chinese government injects capital into its public and state financial institutions via low borrowing costs which makes it easier for Chinese firms to borrow money, thus making them prime candidates for undertaking BRI projects (China Power, 2018). There are also fewer strings attached for nations looking to construct BRI projects (Ibid). Of course, China is aware of this and in April 2019 China's financial minister and central bank governor promised to strengthen debt management and leverage private funds for BRI financing (Jia, 2019). The hope of this is to create long-term sustainable investment while preventing debt risks via financial cooperation, equity investment, and attracting more private funds (Ibid). Specifically, China is trying to draw on other sources of money so they can continue funding the BRI, even if it means not going forward with some projects due to their high-risk profile.

On the flip side, some worry about China putting developing nations into a debt trap that would make them financially vulnerable to Chinese political and economic interests (Refinitiv, 2019, 5-6). Thus far, these worries are mostly unfounded and instead point to uncertainty in

China's outbound lending since there has been many issues with debt in borrowing countries. Asset seizures have been a rare occurrence and China's leverage in negotiations is small, with most cases ending in favor of the borrower (Ibid, 6).

While it would seem odd that China is not abusing its power to a Westerner, Refinitiv points out that at the end of the day, China is looking to strengthen its economy but not at the expense of other nations (Ibid). China is keenly aware that forcing its neighbors and BRI participants into debt traps is a poor strategy to tap into future markets and increase soft power, since these nations tend to have high populations, lower development, and thus, the prospect of growth and revenue. The true threat comes from the poor credit ratings and high risks many of the BRI participant nations have, as they have poor investment grades or none at all (OECD, 2018, 21-22). It remains to be seen whether these projects are viable and will provide China a return on its investment.

Some other criticisms of the BRI lie in the lack of transparency, unfair advantages, and the financial losses that have occurred in some projects. Regarding the lack of transparency, the biggest issue is no one is quite sure how large the BRI is (Baltensperger & Dadush, 2019, 12). The numbers are generally vague and vary between sources on how large the scope of the project is, mostly because China's banks do not disclose lending sums (Ibid). Furthermore, some projects are done via deals where resources or ownership of things like ports and mines are exchanged for projects (Ibid). This contrasts to institutions like the World Bank who are transparent and whose investments are subject to a transparent review process (Ibid).

China's state-owned enterprises cause issues as well since they have unfair economic advantages such as subsidies, soft-budget constraints, and tend to favor Chinese suppliers (Ibid, 11). This has allowed China to go forward with the BRI in some places where Western or other

private firms would not want to do business given the risk is too high (Ibid). Subsidies and soft-budget constraints allow China's state-owned enterprises to disregard many risks that would drive away private firms since private firms do not have the state acting as a backstop to financial loss (Ibid).

Still, even with the reduced risk and the state acting as a backstop for Chinese firms, there have been various projects which have resulted in losses for China that could signal trouble ahead for the BRI. Some projects, like an oil refinery in Ecuador or a railway connecting Addis Ababa to Djibouti have seen large financial losses or been canceled altogether (Ibid). In general, clients have been having trouble repaying and the report by Baltensperger and Dadush (2019) alleges that Chinese operators are not doing their due diligence and paying attention to this (Ibid, 11-12).

Some projects are also too large relative to a recipient nation's GDP, thus making lending unsustainable since these nations are unable to pay back the enormous amounts of money (Ibid, 12). As mentioned previously, many of the recipient nations also have poor credit ratings, investment grades, or weak governments and are taking on large amounts of debt to finance the projects. This could lead to significant troubles for Chinese firms, financial institutions, and the recipient nations if too many projects end up failing. There have also been significant issues with China using Chinese labor for these projects in recipient countries as well, with citizens growing angry over the loss in jobs (Economy, 2018, 195).

Even with the issues that the BRI has, its potential to aid China's economic growth cannot be understated. Infrastructure, access to new markets, more trade routes, and the movement of industry lay the groundwork for China's transition to an advanced industrial economy. These economic changes also give China the soft power weapons it needs to spread its

influence and project power. However, soft power is a finicky concept which I will describe and define for the purposes of understanding how it works and how it fits into the BRI.

Chapter 3: Soft Power

The Theory and Definition of Soft Power

There is a lot of contextual ground to cover on the concept of soft power, the BRI's use of soft power, China's grand strategy, and other scholarly works on the subject. To begin, I will start off with the topic of soft power and lay out which definition of it I use in this work. Due to the ambiguity and controversy surrounding soft power, defining it is crucial to the analysis.

According to Nye (2004), there are two types of power: Hard and soft power. Soft power uses persuasion and non-aggressive means to gain desired outcomes, while hard power rests primarily on using economics and military might to gain desired outcomes. As Nye (2004) puts it, people and nations can change their opinions due to carrots and sticks, or inducements and threats (Ibid, 5). Admiration of values, following an example, aspiring to achieve a similar level of success, and other non-coercive ways to get others to do what one wants are what constitute soft power. The power of attraction and the ability to shape preferences can co-opt others to do things one wants. In other words, soft power is attractive power. It combines influence, persuasion, and attraction to produce a desired outcome without the need to threaten or bribe (Ibid, 6)

Does this mean soft and hard power are two completely different ways to achieve desired outcomes? No, they are not, according to Nye. There is instead a spectrum with hard and soft power existing at either end. Hard power commands to change what others do, while soft power co-opts and attracts (Ibid, 7-8). For example, a strong economy provides the resources for

sanctions and payments but can also be a critical source of attractiveness or act to fund attractive ventures and projects. Sometimes soft and hard power resources can end up using the opposite type of power's forces to influence others, for instance a nation with a strong military may attract other nations who wish to emulate and achieve the same command power that nation has (Ibid, 7). Also, not all soft power is necessarily powerful, and it has its limits, just as hard power may not achieve the desired outcomes. Sometimes, attractive aspects of a country can end up hurting it when adopted by others, such as Japan's innovative manufacturing techniques in the 1980's (Ibid, 15). In other words, it is not a fool-proof method of influencing others and achieving desired outcomes.

As for how soft power is formed, a country's soft power rests primarily on three resources: Culture, political values, and the country's foreign/domestic policies (Ibid, 11). Universal cultural values and foreign policies that promote common interests and values are more likely to lead to increased soft power (Ibid, 11). Domestic policies that conflict with the values or policies of other nations can harm the impact of soft power, just as domestic policies that are in-line with other nations' ways of thinking can strengthen it (Ibid, 13-14). Domestic and foreign policy that conflicts with each other can also harm soft power, an example being the 1992 Rodney King beating occurring just after the United States fought to liberate Kuwait in the Gulf War.

The ways in which soft power can then be spread are about as cut and dry as the definition of soft power itself. There are a multitude of ways it can be spread that have unquantifiable effects on the outcomes of others due to the nature of soft power: its nature depends on context (Ibid, 12). This context involves willing interpreters and receivers who are needed to realize soft power's effects (Ibid, 16). Without willing interpreters or receivers, soft

power ultimately fails to spread. An example of this provided by Nye is American films that portray the United States as attractive in some countries and cultures, may have the complete opposite effect in others (Ibid, 12).

Critiques of Soft Power

Even with Nye's description of soft power, scholars have found soft power a difficult concept to grapple with. When it comes to soft power being applied in the real world as policy, Wilson (2008, 601) mentions how proponents of soft power have not adequately integrated their position into a single framework. Their arguments are framed poorly, as they are institutionally weak and naïve. This criticism, along with Ramo (2009) who argues that soft power cannot deliver hard results because of its softness, calls into question the general practicality and efficacy of soft power.

While these two criticisms are more general, Yukaruç (2017) describes three main, specific criticisms of soft power which are its originality, the immeasurable nature of it, and the excessive focus on the agent. These three issues appear to be the biggest in the overall debate, but plenty of smaller issues exist as well that will be mentioned below. The issue with originality stems from the fact that Nye's definition resembles other approaches in international relations (Yukaruç, 2017, 496). For instance, E. H. Carr divides power into three categories: Military power, economic power, and power over opinion. Carr was a classical realist who wrote about this in the 1940's and his work emphasizes the importance of psychology and public opinion since elites need the approval of individuals. The Gramscian approach to international relations also bears similarities, since exercising hegemony requires a combination of force and consent (Ibid, 497). Further, hegemony filters through the structures of society and it functions through

things like the media, religion, and education (Ibid, 497). There is an emphasis on consent and co-option rather than using force to get what one wants in both approaches.

Soft power's inability to be measured stems from the nature of proving if one country changes behaviors because of another country's soft power. Unfortunately, this is impossible (Ibid, 498). While attempts are made to measure it, there is no true way to quantify or discern soft power effects on other countries. A true causal chain cannot be established between one country's action and another's reaction, to put it another way. This criticism is also mentioned by many other scholars as well. Seymour (2020) makes a distinction between how soft and hard power can be measured. While hard power can be measured by the number of soldiers, money, or bullets a country has, soft power has no straightforward way of measurement. In other words, hard power's resources can be counted as can its results and applications. Soft power, on the other hand, is more abstract much like its aims and goals. Lastly, the agency of actors is the third major criticism mentioned by Yukarıç. Whether soft power derives from the state or society is unclear, as according to Nye, states are not the only ones who possess soft power. Corporations, celebrities, and civil society groups who states do not control can wield soft power (Yukarıç, 2017, 500).

Blanchard & Lu (2012) also criticize Nye's definition of soft power because of the element of coercion and how poorly defined the term is, especially in relation to China's soft power. Coercion is an element of soft power despite the implication that military elements are not a part of soft power (Blanchard & Lu, 2012, 568). Changing troop deployments or changing the configuration of a military's hardware can have soft power effects because it involves neither force nor hard elements, yet coercion is definitely involved. At the very least, such military moves do not constitute co-option which is generally what soft power entails.

As for figuring out what soft power is in terms of China, the authors have three methodological issues that must be solved for scholars of China and soft power. The first is an analysis must identify the targets of China's soft power endeavors as well as the message China is trying to project. Second, it must be assessed if China's soft power endeavors have achieved anything in terms of changing the country's allure. Third, it must be determined if the changing impressions truly mean anything in terms of policy (Ibid, 575).

Yet another indictment of soft power comes from Eric Li (2018) as he details the post-Cold-War expansion of liberal, democratic states. The West's soft power was at its height, and nations joined the ranks of liberal democracies as they followed the West's lead. However, Li argues that the West grew too confident in the potency of its soft power. This confidence led to the somewhat ironic use of tremendous hard power to ensure the spread of democratic values and to keep states in line. The Iraq War and the Libyan intervention are two prominent examples he mentions. There was an illusion that soft power could exist on its own, when it was truly an extension of hard power. He uses an example of a poor but liberal, democratic United States as an example, saying no countries would aspire to be the U.S simply because it has a democracy. Money and military power back up soft power. While Li's argument is not one that tries to dismantle soft power as a concept, it tries to clear up misconceptions of soft power and how limited it can be when it is applied in the real world. One moment a country can wield immense soft power, but in the next moment lose it due to a variety of unforeseen factors and circumstances. Li's article paints a cautious and critical picture of soft power that shows the practical limitations and misconceptions it has, backed up by real world examples.

To conclude, soft power is difficult to pinpoint when it comes to precisely defining, measuring, and using it. While the concept in general is helpful to classify things that are not

explicitly hard power or that do not seem like hard power, it is not easy to fully flesh out a definition or way to operationalize soft power. Soft power is utilized by states and it is naive to think that coercive measures are not at work when it comes to wielding influence; especially when commerce, trade, capital flows and infrastructure investments are involved. In the end, soft power can face practical limitations as well when it is applied. The West has learned this the hard way as the attractiveness of liberal democracy has waned in favor of state-capitalism, nationalism, and general authoritarianism.

The Definition of Soft Power

To help clarify the ambiguity of soft power in this work, I will be using a definition of soft power proposed by Henne (forthcoming) in which soft power is a cultural-symbolic instrument of power. This means it is a tool states can use to influence others without relying on military (force) or economic resources (sanctions). Such power emerges out of the relations between states, that is, a nation must deploy soft power and simply having it is not enough. It is only power to the extent a state uses it. The specific definition I will be using in this work is: *China's soft power is diffuse and used to fragment the traditional world order.* By “diffuse”, China's use of the BRI is not an immediate, tangible, or causal connection between it and the BRI-affected countries. Rather, the mere connections formed by the BRI allow for Chinese influence to spread out to the affected countries.

The word “fragment” relates to the idea that a state uses soft power to disrupt an opposing world order, which is the Western, traditional world order. As will be discussed later, China is forming a secondary international system with itself as the leader. By using the diffuse connections formed by the physical links of the BRI, China is attempting to bring other countries into its sphere of influence. Shambaugh (2015), Markey (2020), and Rolland (2020), as well as

other authors in this piece, discuss China's attempts at creating an alternative international system. To reiterate the definition of soft power I am using, any reference to soft power going forward will be to diffuse soft power meant to fragment international cooperation under the traditional world order. Rather than target a specific country with clear initiatives to increase attractiveness and persuade, China is targeting a host of nations with investment and infrastructure projects designed to connect dozens of Old and New World countries.

This connectivity, while primarily economic in nature, also allows people, information, and culture to diffuse out from China which constitutes a secondary, albeit critical, function of the BRI. Further, instead of using these diffuse connections to increase international cooperation under the current system and its institutions like the World Bank or IMF, China is attempting to undermine the Western world order by substituting it for one under China's control. Hence, fragmentation. The following chapter will elaborate on China's use of the BRI as soft power as well as its use of institutions to carry out its grand strategy.

Chapter 4: The BRI as Soft Power and China's Grand Strategy

Is the BRI Soft Power?

Before delving into the BRI's soft power components, China's soft power institutions, and its overall grand strategy, it is important to take a step back and ask the question: Is the BRI soft power? Thus far, it has been taken for granted that the BRI is a source of soft power. While this thesis seeks to answer the question of whether the BRI is an effective source of soft power in the countries being studied, it is important to see if scholars consider the BRI to possess or have the potential to possess soft power in the first place.

As discussed earlier the BRI will increase connectivity. Rahman (2019) argues that the BRI's trade and exchange programs allow it to manifest soft power. Working off the definition of soft power that Nye uses (the three parts: culture, political values, foreign/domestic policy), Rahman points out how a successful BRI will link China to many nations and create a diverse marketplace where knowledge and experience can be distributed to participating nations (Rahman, 2019, 308). Companies, brands, commercial goods, and cultural goods will proliferate, and distribution will be more easily facilitated owing to the BRI's extensive infrastructure.

Rahman argues that these things are not only economic, but also intellectual, spiritual, and emotional since products convey manner, ideology, and identity (Ibid, 308). "Culture cannot be separated from this mass trade process because each product carries a narrative to be sold." (Ibid, 308). Furthermore, Confucius Institutes, exchange programs, and vocational training are mentioned as being expanded under the BRI. Tourism is another important factor too, as the project will connect different nations to heritage sites and facilitate travel to festivals and other attractions (Ibid, 309-310).

As for transferring domestic political values, the China Dream concept is manifested via the BRI. As mentioned, China's western provinces are underdeveloped and targeted under the BRI. This project will increase domestic equality in the western provinces, as well as connect these provinces to neighboring countries and routes. Thus, economic activities will be mobilized not just in the poorer areas of China, but also around it. This is incredibly important for Central Asia, an area lacking in development. Rahman claims that this imperative to develop these regions is in-line with the objectives of the China Dream: Improving domestic living standards as well as those outside China (Ibid, 314).

This may not seem like a significant transfer of values until one looks at it from the perspective of legitimacy. The BRI is attractive for some nations because of its potential to grow their economies. If it is perceived that the BRI is only enhancing domestic living standards in China and not in other participant nations, this is not good for the legitimacy of China or the BRI. The values of the China Dream from an international perspective would appear hypocritical (Ibid, 315). There is also the “peaceful rise” aspect, which was promoted by the previous leaders of China to gain acceptance and legitimacy from other nations. The BRI promotes certain aspects of this rise, such as scientific development, modernization, and domestic improvement (Ibid, 312).

Finally, the foreign policy side of the BRI is the last part of Nye’s soft power that Rahman puts into the terms of the initiative. China’s aid strategy, which is without the traditional strings-attached approach that actors such as the World Bank and IMF have, is attractive to nations looking for other sources of funding (Ibid, 318). This funding, coming from Chinese banks, is then used to fuel BRI projects without the perceived influence from conditional aid. Rahman says this type of aid scheme builds soft power for a variety of reasons. The aid is not coercive, and the benefit is mutual, as the recipient gains infrastructure and China gains access to resources, trade routes, and a variety of other things (Ibid, 319). It should be noted that Rahman does not discount the various factors that may sour China’s soft power in the eyes of other countries. He mentions debt traps, Chinese dominance, and project mismanagement/governance issues as possible foils for China’s soft power.

Cultural Promotion, Diplomacy, Institutions, and the BRI

Rahman’s justification for the BRI being soft power is further supported when one considers how media, publishing, education, arts, as well as other non-military and non-

development domains are being targeted by China and supplied with large amounts of capital (Shambaugh, 2015, 100), mainly as a means to increase soft power. Diplomatic outreach or host diplomacy is another important strategy China is employing, using multilateral forums such as the BRI Forum and the World Economic Forum to put China in a position of global importance and visibility (Markey, 2020, 35-36; Shambaugh, 2015, 105). China Global Television Network, Xinhua News, Chinese officials having presence on social media platforms, and cultural theme parks have been some specific examples of the cultural aspects related to China's soft power push (Markey, 2020, 36-37). They are also referred to as weapons of China's "discourse war," in which Beijing is pushing back against anti-China sentiment across the globe (Shambaugh, 2015, 103).

The controversial Confucius Institutes and Chinese-sponsored professorships at U.S universities are some further examples (Markey, 2020, 38-39). Confucius Institutes, originally created to teach Chinese language and culture have morphed into a means to influence overseas debates and silence critics (Markey, 2020, 38-39). The China-United States Exchange Foundation is a Hong Kong based non-profit that sponsors professorships, and its chief executive was indirectly linked to the Communist Party's United Front Work Department. This entity is a propaganda arm of the party tasked with winning over non-party members (Markey, 2020, 38-39). These tactics are a clear manifestation of China's desire to co-opt others by promoting its culture and values. They give people access to news and information that is sanctioned by the state, penetrate education systems, and facilitate diplomatic engagement in world forums, among other things. How does this tie into the BRI? The initiative helps facilitate the promotion of culture via communications infrastructure, electricity access, and connecting countries by road, rail, air, and sea. Increased wealth among the public because of jobs and economic growth allow

foreigners to travel to Chinese cultural sites and purchase consumer goods like smartphones, which can act as a vector for disseminating Chinese culture and values.

While not expressly part of the BRI, China has also been building new international institutions which work alongside the BRI to build soft power. China has a mixed global reputation which impedes its ability to be seen lightly by the world. Beginning in 2007, under then President Hu Jintao, China began a campaign to improve its perceptions abroad. The 17th Central Committee of the CCP in 2011 declared that it was a national goal to “build our country into a socialist cultural superpower.” Just two years later under President Xi Jinping, the BRI was announced for the first time. In addition to the BRI, China had been constructing new institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the New Development Bank (NDB) among others to build an alternative architecture to the Western order (Shambaugh, 2015, 100). These new institutions are referred to as “soft-power ventures.” At the time of the article, Beijing’s pledges backing the ventures added up to \$1.41 trillion by 2025 (this has been surpassed already). While such institutions and projects are economic in nature and accomplish economic goals, their effects go beyond growing China’s economy.

To sum this up, rather than claim legitimacy on ideology, China is trying to show the world how great its culture and system of state capitalism is via economic growth and lifting nations from lower levels of development (Markey, 2020, 2). This rationale lines up with Nye (2004) and Shambaugh’s (2015) descriptions of soft power: China is trying to co-opt other nations into following its lead by making an example of itself. This co-option is diffuse as there is no specific effort to influence a set number of specific countries. It relies on the hope that infrastructure and other projects under the BRI umbrella will facilitate the growth in connectivity and allow China to follow through with the more abstract goals such as spreading culture. The

allure of rapid development and growth is also enough to sway nations based on Nye's analysis, and it appears China is aware of this as well.

China's Grand Strategy

Finally, China's grand strategy must be discussed to contextualize all the previous information. The BRI's stated goals, China's new institutions, and China's institutional/cultural ventures being accessory to the BRI, all fit into China's end goals. As mentioned, China's use of soft power appears to be diffuse and used to fragment, that is, China is trying to spread influence over a large geographical area and fragment the existing world order. This section details the specifics of these, and the goals China has under Xi Jinping. Further, it also describes the old strategy of China prior to Xi Jinping that China was carrying out beginning around the 1980's.

Prior to Xi Jinping's ascension to power in 2012, China had a doctrine to remain focused on itself and its periphery. The result of following this doctrine would then create the environment needed for China to become a world power. Since Deng Xiaoping's rule in the 1980's, China's grand strategy had been *taoguangyanghui yousuozuowei* or, roughly translated, "keep a low profile, bide your time, and seek achievements." (Kato, 2019). This diplomatic tactic was supposed to conclude once China became a major power and then China would reorient itself. Since 2012, this tactic is no longer in use as China is now a major power and practicing diplomacy as such. Some reasons for this change are economic, and simply because China changed how it perceives itself. For instance, China overtook Japan around 2010 as the world's second largest economy and is inching closer to the U.S (Ibid). Xi's predecessor, Hu Jintao, did not perceive China as a developed nation, meaning it had to catch up to the West before the strategy could be changed (Ibid).

Now, emboldened by the success of its state-capitalist system and China's development, Xi appears to be working towards a bipolar world order with the United States and China as its powers (Ibid). Danner and Martin (2019) corroborate Kato's analysis of pre-2010s Chinese grand strategy and the apparent transition to a more assertive China. Keeping a low profile and the peaceful rise articulated by high-ranking officials in the late 1990s held until the turn of the decade, with the 2008 financial crisis marking the moment "biding one's time" transitioned to "the time has come" (Ibid, 194). The U.S was weakened, China was helping rescue Western states from a worse financial crisis, and China appeared to be gaining ground on the U.S. Thus, China became more assertive and proactive in pursuing its rise (Ibid).

Kato sums up China's major power diplomacy into four points: economic expansion, political penetration, friendship creation, and core interest protection. The economic aspects of this have already been discussed, but politically China is seeking to influence nations to gain new ties which in turn leads to the creation of friendly states who can protect (or are otherwise important to) China's core interests (Kato, 2019). These points align with the imperatives of the Resolution on the CPC Central Committee report from 2017. This resolution clarifies several of China's goals relating to foreign policy and its role on the world stage, namely China's role as a world leader. The Congress stresses China's peaceful development, cooperation, and mutual benefit, as well as strengthening friendship and cooperation with other countries based on the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (more on this later). The BRI is mentioned as a key part of this plan to promote international cooperation, and the Congress affirms China will "continue to take an active part in reforming and developing the global governance system" (CPC, 2017). The Congress also restates its commitment to Xi Jinping's desire to strengthen the military and

“adapt military strategy to new conditions,” as well as creating a modernized and world-class armed force. (Ibid).

If the concept of China trying to fragment the existing world order is one that is unconvincing thus far, the NBR report *China's Vision for a New World Order* offers insight into Beijing's dissatisfaction with how the world is run and provides evidence that China is attempting to establish partial world hegemony, mostly in the global south. As Foreign Affairs Committee chairperson Fu Ying said in 2016, the world order is akin to a Pax Americana. It is unfair, perpetuates Western dominance, and keeps China's influence down despite the progress the country has made (Rolland, 2020, 14). In 2017 Xi Jinping himself affirmed that China should “guide” the international community to “jointly shape a more just and reasonable new international order” (Ibid, 15). This is not the only time he has indicated his intentions for China to take a lead role in reforming the international system, and Beijing has attempted to change the perception that its efforts to transform the world order are a mere powerplay (Ibid, 16). Beijing claims it is asserting its position on behalf of the entire developing world.

This paper also mentions the concept of institutional power, which involves the ability to influence and shape other's behaviors while safeguarding one's own interests via rules, procedures, systems, and norms. Some listed institutions that will give Beijing the ability to increase this power include the AIIB, Silk Road Fund and the NDB (Ibid, 45). However, China is also working within the existing system to further its interests despite the criticisms of Western hegemony. One example is Chinese diplomats' attempts to insert the BRI into the works of the Human Rights Council and into the agenda of the UN's Agenda for Sustainable Development (Ibid, 46). Still, the main ambitions are to rally support from Asian neighbors, developing countries, and BRI participant nations and work within the existing international order while

simultaneously developing its own (Ibid, 47-48). This is not to say that China is trying to completely dominate the world, rather it is trying to make the world safer and less hostile to its existence (Ibid, 48).

To conclude, China's use of soft power is using mostly diffuse influence to co-opt countries and fragment the old-world order. Rather than use military and economic force to coerce, China has decided to use economics and influence to persuade others. The BRI, international institutions, China's growing media and cultural presence, and other institutions/programs are all part of China's grand strategy to cement itself as a major power. No longer a developing nation dependent on the West, China is further developing its economic and diplomatic power to build itself a group of nations who can support its interests. In the context of Russia, India, and Vietnam, China is using the BRI, along with other soft and hard power strategies, to coerce or force these nations into abiding by its agenda.

Chapter 5: Literature Review

With the background on the BRI, soft power, and China's use of soft power discussed, this portion of the thesis will be dedicated to discussing previous works relating to China's investments and soft power. While the field is small, the concepts and results of each study are nonetheless interesting and shed light on the results I obtain from the analysis later.

A first of its kind paper by Voon and Xu (2019) attempts to discern the impact of the BRI on China's soft power and international perception. The authors obtain their soft power variable from Pew Research and obtain the outward direct investment (ODI) variable from the China Bureau of Statistics. 38 countries from 2011 to 2016 are examined, with over a third of the sample being BRI participant nations. The ODI data indicates that there is higher investment in

participant nations following the start of the BRI compared to non-participants. The raw trend line displays a slightly inverse relationship between ODI and China's soft power, but upon using a difference-in-difference regression, the authors obtain new results. This regression captures the differential impacts of the BRI on BRI-participant countries compared to non-BRI countries after 2013.

As it turns out, there is a significant decline of China's soft power after 2013. The authors attribute this to the positive influence of economic factors being canceled out by negative political factors. The authors also disaggregate land route countries and maritime route countries, finding that soft power increases significantly in land route BRI countries, but not in maritime route countries. Local labor substitution by Chinese workers, loss of autonomy and identities, and potential project mismanagement are some mentioned factors that may be canceling out the positive effects of infrastructure development. Furthermore, Chinese investment in general has a statistically significant positive impact on soft power, but this impact is not significantly different between the pre-BRI period and during the BRI.

China's Belt and Road Initiative and Regional Perceptions of China (O'Trakoun 2018) is a quantitative piece that examines Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI) and data on people's perceptions of China from the Asian Barometer Survey. It also uses business confidence surveys to examine if increased FDI leads to better perceptions of the business environment. O'Trakoun uses ordered logit regression with the respondent's impression of China as the dependent variable, controlling for country fixed effects and socioeconomic effects. The business confidence variable is correlated to the results from the regression on a graph. The results suggest a highly statistically significant effect on Chinese FDI inflows and an improvement in perceptions of China. Chinese FDI also leads to better perceptions of the business environment

as well. Furthermore, perceptions of the United States were looked at, and it was found that more favorable perceptions of China led to an improvement of perceptions of the United States. This suggests that perceptions are not a zero-sum game, contrary to some beliefs. While this paper and the previous one seem to negate the purpose of this thesis at first glance, the issue with these papers is that they take an ahistorical perspective and focus purely on quantitative analysis of this subject. This thesis considers history and other qualitative aspects. Further, two papers that reach contradictory conclusions merits additional study into the subject to see which one is closer to the truth.

Another work looks at how the Belt and Road Initiative is portrayed in a given nation's media. Using the GDELT database, the authors gather data on the frequency with which a topic appears in the news and the sentiment of the topic or the tone. This database is updated every 15 minutes and covers TV broadcast as well as print/online news. From there, they aggregate the tone of news articles in each country into an average to gauge the country level perceptions of the BRI. Higher tone ratings reflect more supportive sentiment towards the BRI while lower ratings indicate negative sentiment. Overall, the BRI has a slight positive perception globally, though on the regional level Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa scored highest on perception. South Asian countries tend to hold a negative view with India, Bhutan, and the Maldives among the top nations with negative perceptions of the BRI. Still, there is no statistically significant difference between BRI participants and non-participants. The authors also examine BRI-related articles referring to trade, investment, and other topics as keywords are important in shaping people's perceptions. Using OLS regression the authors determine that the key word "trade" has the most relevant effect in explaining differing perceptions. The more a country's media

mentions trade related to the BRI, the more likely it is for the country's media to portray the BRI negatively. The keyword "investment" is not significant.

Despite the field being relatively small, there is still useful, albeit conflicting results obtained from these studies. On one hand, China's investments lead to increased soft power, while on the other there is an ambiguous effect on soft power that is dependent on geography and politics. Borrowing from the methods of these studies, I conduct my own quantitative analysis to find any statistical relationship, as well as a qualitative analysis to explain my results. The methods of these analyses can now be laid out, given that the extensive background on the concepts this thesis deals with are now described.

Chapter 6: Hypothesis and Methodology

With the background and literature review complete, now comes the hypothesis and methodology. I discuss the model, variables, and methodology for analyzing my data. Before beginning, I will state my hypothesis which will form the basis from which I will conduct the analyses. I hypothesize that greater investment over time will lead to more favorable public opinions on China and lower tariffs on Chinese imports in the country I am examining.

The Model

Three random-effects GLS regressions will be run in Stata. The reasoning for using this type of regression is because there are no fixed effects in the sample of countries I use. Fixed effects may include things like gender, race, or other things that cannot change, which do not apply given I am dealing with public opinion, trade data, and investment data over a period of time. In other words, the variables I use vary and a fixed-effects GLS regression would require I have some variables that have time-invariant effects and values. One limitation with a random-

effects regression is that omitted variables can cause bias in the results, which will likely affect my own results. This is an important reason for the inclusion of the qualitative analysis, though I attempt to control for variables that might interfere in the regressions.

The Variables

The first random-effects GLS regression will be one for the percent favorable public opinion (pubop). The second and third will be for most favored nation simple (mfnsimp) and most favored nation weighted (mfnweight) average tariffs, both of which will be expressed in percentages. There will also be three control variables: Freedom House scores (fh), the conflict dummy variable (conflict), and the ratio of Chinese imports to world imports in a given country (importshare). Freedom House and conflict will be used in the public opinion regressions, while import share will be used for the trade regressions. These dependent variables and their respective controls will be run with yearly BRI investment (or in the case of India, foreign direct investment) as the independent variable. I hypothesize that public opinion will be positively related to the amount of investment in each country, while both tariff variables will have an inverse relationship to investment. In addition, more positive public opinion will coincide greater trade openness in the form of lower tariffs, and vice versa.

Public opinion data in this case is a proxy for soft power, much like the Voon & Xu (2019) piece. Pew's public opinion data is expressed in the percentage of respondents who hold a "favorable" view of China. Most favored nation (MFN) tariffs come from the WITS, run by the World Bank. Trade variables in the form of MFN simple average of tariffs and MFN weighted average tariffs for a given nation on Chinese goods will be used as a proxy for soft power as well as an indicator of economic openness to China. Economic factors can occupy a grey area between hard and soft power as Nye points out. Their relevance in this study is primarily to see if

China's soft power is influencing its ability to access new markets for its products which, in turn, can be used to promote culture as mentioned by Rahman (2019).

The Freedom House control variable is there to account for possible media manipulation to turn the public for or against China. The higher the value, the freer a nation is, meaning the media is likely less under the control of the state. To reiterate, the Freedom House variable will only be relevant in the public opinion regression. One might point out how authoritarian Russia and Vietnam are, thus rendering public opinion useless. Therefore, the Freedom House control exists. Even so, public opinion still matters in authoritarian states as such regimes can be more brittle than a democracy (Coyer, 2014).

Conflict, expressed as a dummy variable 1 or 0, will be used to indicate if there was some sort of armed standoff, border incursion, or other violent event that happened in each year. Such events can turn public opinion against China and occur only in certain years, necessitating their inclusion to account for possible fluctuations in public opinion. Import share will be the control for the MFN tariff regressions and it will also be expressed in a percentage. Import share is there primarily to control for macroeconomic fluctuations, such as the 2016 mini-recession. Without this, Chinese imports may inexplicably drop and indicate a nation is taking harsher measures against Chinese products. It may just be total imports fell due to various economic pressures in a particular year. Afterwards, a qualitative analysis will be done where the unique histories of each are discussed in the context of the regression results.

The qualitative analysis will use Sino-Indian, Russian, and Vietnamese foreign relations history as case studies. Process-tracing, a method that attempts to identify the intervening causal chain and causal mechanism between an independent variable(s) and the outcome of the dependent variable, will be used to examine each country. The dependent variables here are the

same as the ones from the regression, and the independent variables include, but are not limited to, the ones in the regressions. There are many forms of process-tracing, but this study will use a historical narrative presented in the form of a chronicle. This historical narrative will be used to supplement various explanations for the current situation each country is facing with China. The historical narrative is also there for the reader to have a better knowledge of the complicated history these countries have with China. Having historical context, even without using it to directly support an assertion, is still important to understanding the bigger picture when it comes to China and its relations with neighboring countries.

In addition to the historical narrative, original research will be done to fill in more recent time gaps and elaborate on potential causes. This research will be in the form of both long and short form news articles as well as reports. The reasoning for this is these works are contemporary and general themes can be picked out across them, allowing me to aggregate information into more general points. George & Bennett (2005) discuss this type of process-tracing, saying it is often used when data or theory is lacking and when a researcher prefers a higher level of generality/abstraction in the explanation (George & Bennett, 2005, 211). Also, it is difficult to eliminate all potential rival explanations (Ibid, 207), and this study aims to offer a general path by which the dependent variable ended up the way it did should the hypothesis be incorrect.

While soft power theory certainly is not lacking, BRI-related theory and data is lacking. Process-tracing and the regressions being used together will hopefully aid in the development of soft power theory in the context of China/the BRI as well as better explain why each case study yields the results I find.

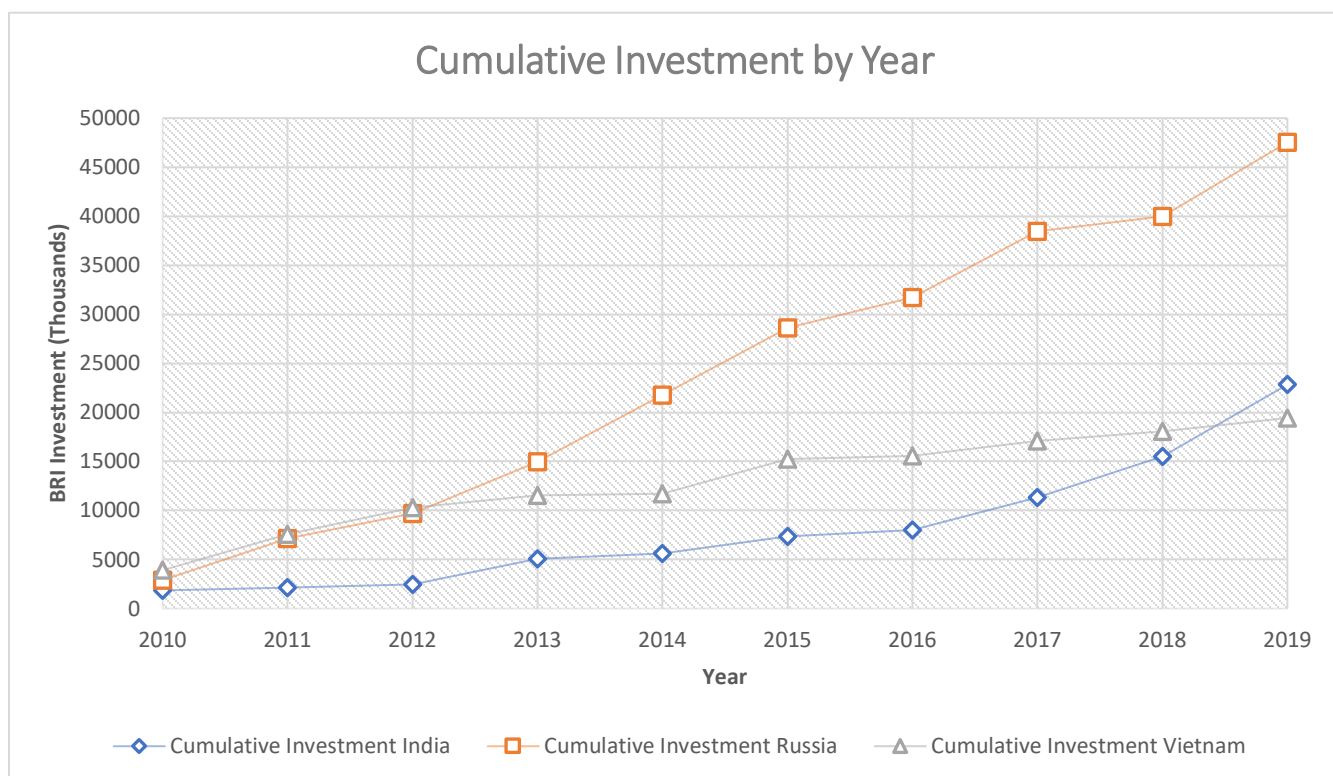
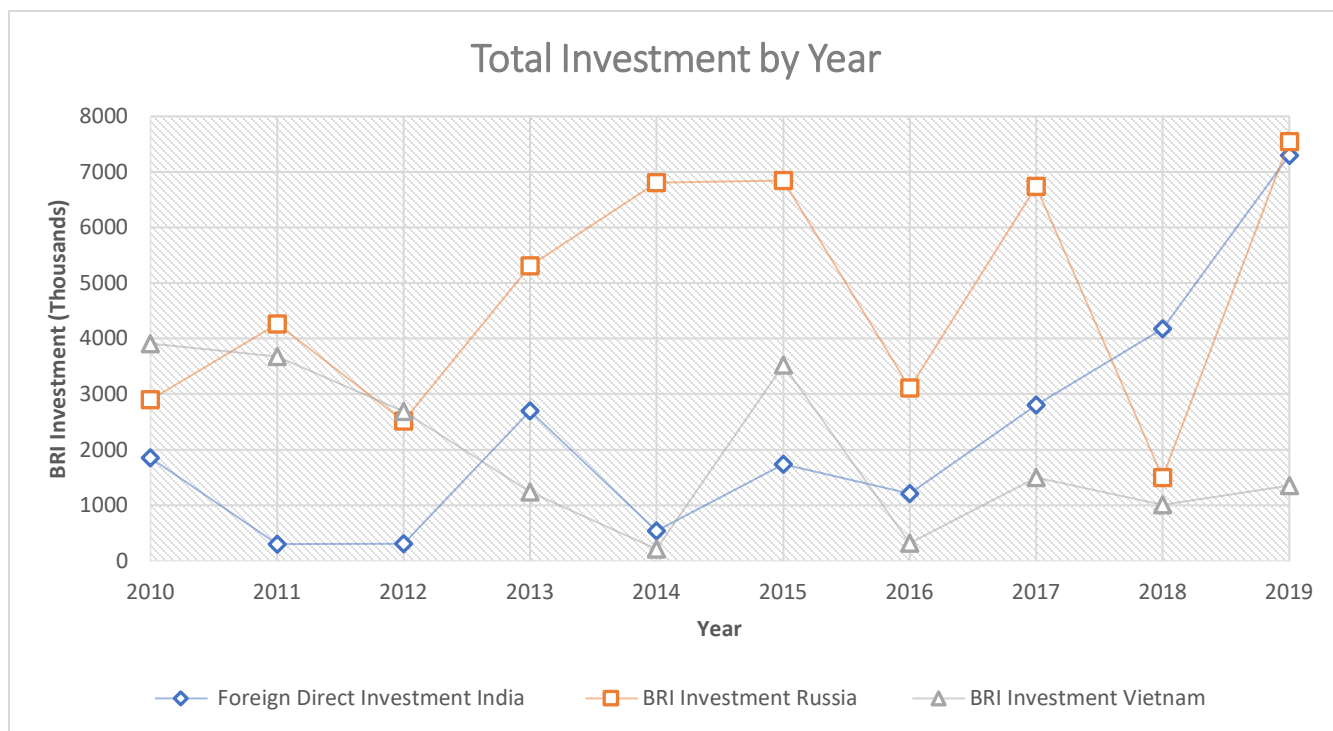
Chapter 7: Quantitative Results and Analysis

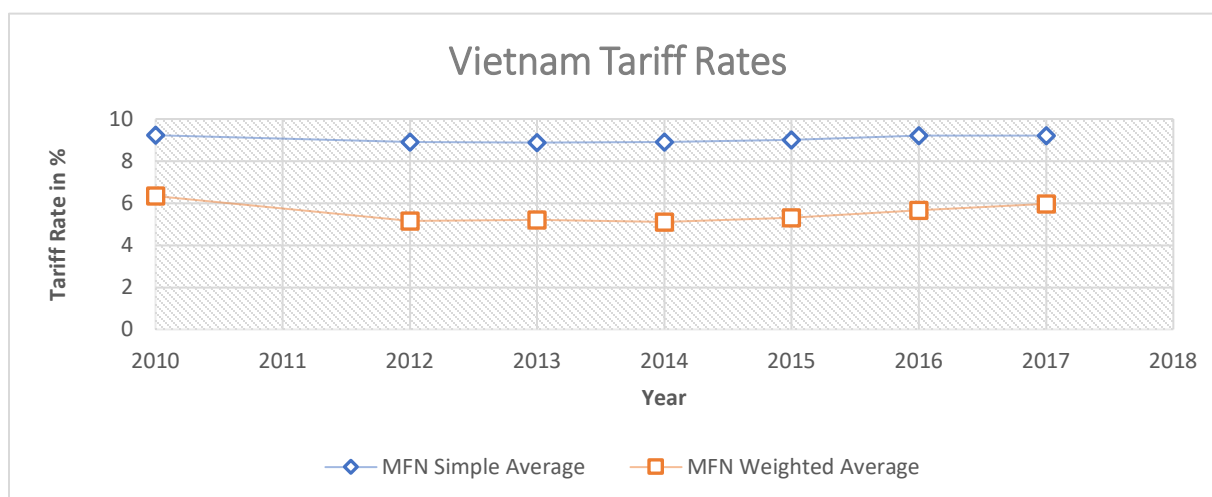
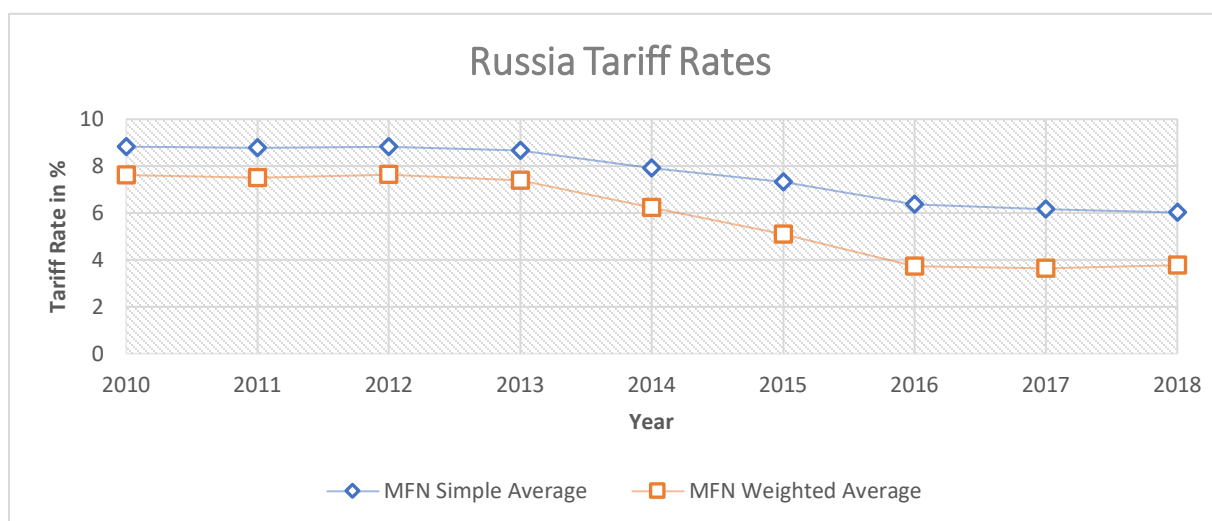
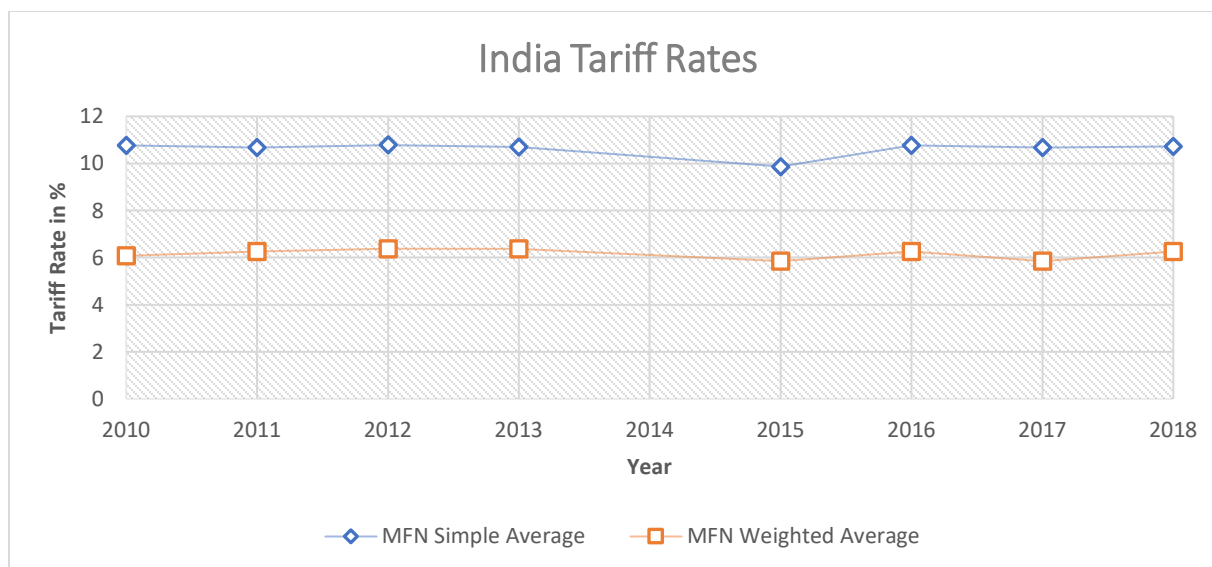
This section contains the raw investment data for India, Russia, and Vietnam, the raw public opinion data, and the raw tariff data. It also contains the three regressions done using this data. It appears, based on the regressions and raw data, that my hypothesis is not supported. As a result, I discuss various reasons for why this might not be true and will later conduct a qualitative analysis to find out the reasons behind the data I have collected.

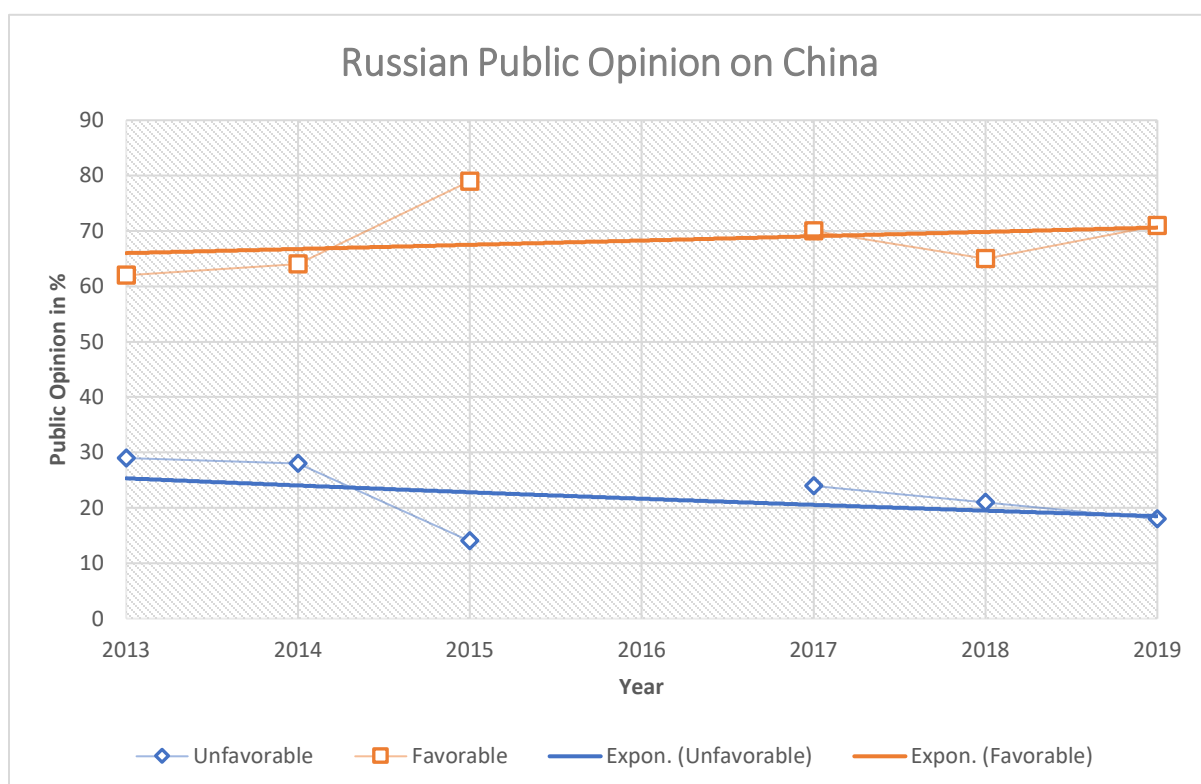
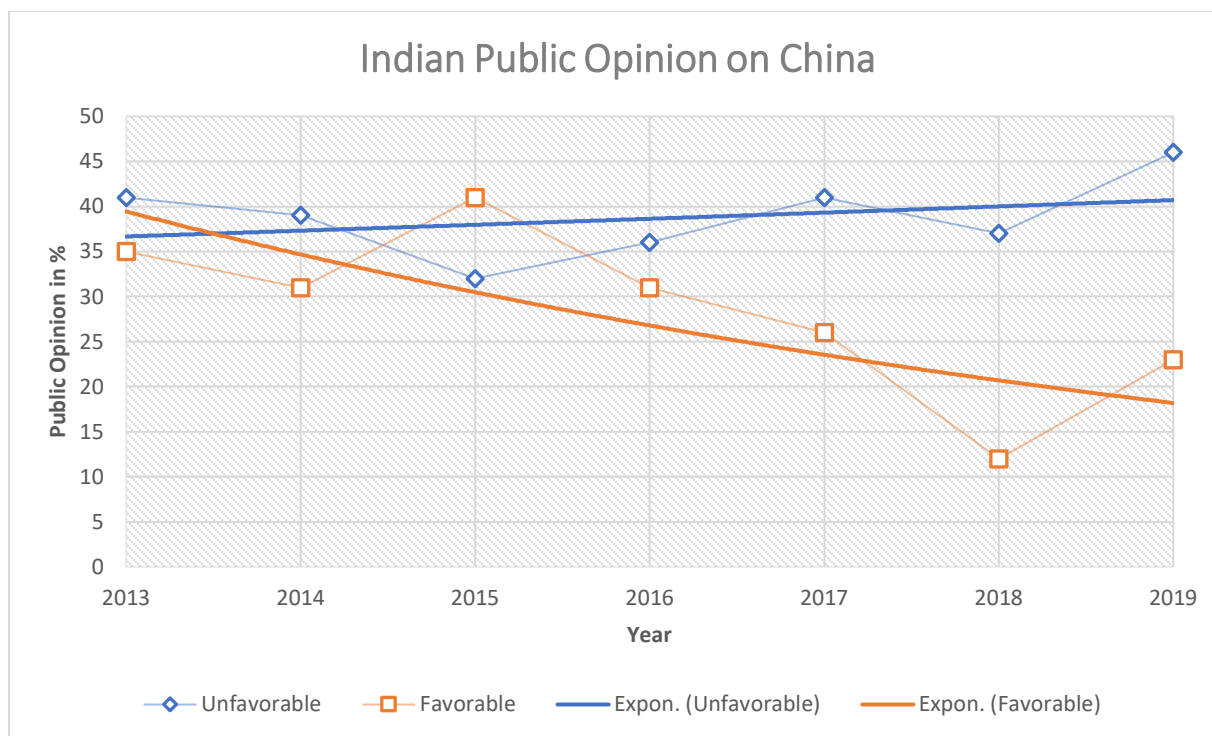
Regressions

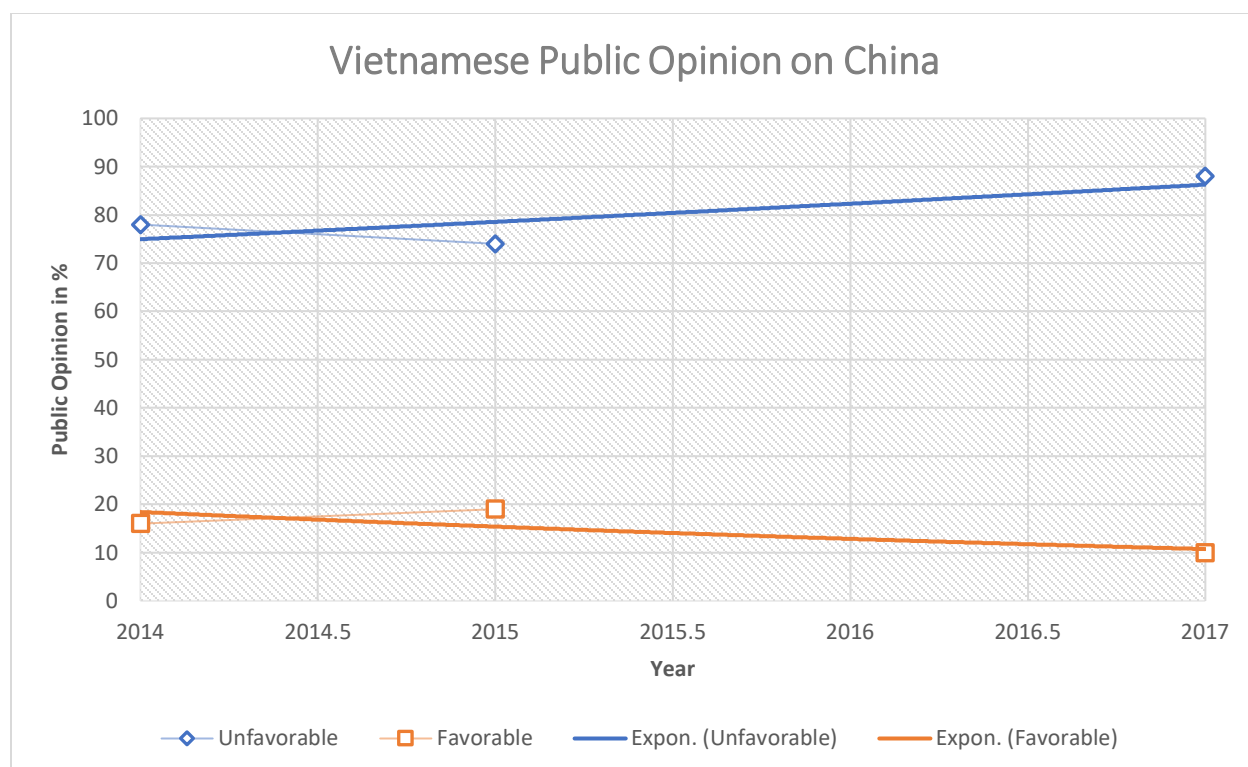
pubop	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
brivalue	2.63e-11	2.15e-11	1.22	0.221	-1.58e-11	6.85e-11
conflict	-.1499967	.1247384	-1.20	0.229	-.3944794	.0944861
fh	-.0017113	.002064	-0.83	0.407	-.0057566	.002334
_cons	.4598478	.1458227	3.15	0.002	.1740406	.745655
mfweight	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
brivalue	-9.57e-13	1.13e-12	-0.85	0.397	-3.17e-12	1.26e-12
importshare	-.0783504	.0445317	-1.76	0.079	-.1656309	.0089302
_cons	.0740864	.0109039	6.79	0.000	.0527151	.0954578
mfnsimp	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
brivalue	-3.78e-12	1.54e-12	-2.46	0.014	-6.79e-12	-7.69e-13
importshare	-.1194863	.0606026	-1.97	0.049	-.2382653	-.0007074
_cons	.1237492	.014839	8.34	0.000	.0946652	.1528331

Raw Data









Quantitative Analysis

For public opinion, the public opinion variable (pubop) is not statistically significant unless the control variables, Freedom House score and conflict (fh & conflict) are removed. For trade, MFN simple average of tariffs (mfnsimp) is statistically significant, while MFN weighted average (mfweight) is not. The import share (importshare) control is included in both regressions and taking it out does not change the statistical significance of either variable.

While the relationship is positive and insignificant for public opinion, this is not enough to show that the BRI is doing a good job at swaying the public towards having a more favorable view of China. It is also not enough to show that the opposite may be true either. However, the raw public opinion data fitted and unfitted to the trend lines show that public opinion appears to be falling in both India and Vietnam. In India, unfavorable opinion has increased slightly while favorable opinion has fallen significantly. Meanwhile, in Russia, favorable opinion remains high

and relatively steady. This raw data suggests something is driving public opinion, but it likely is not BRI investments. Hence, the relationship remains unclear and does not support any of the studies mentioned in the literature review. One study suggests that FDI raises public opinion, while another suggests BRI investment lowers public opinion. It is highly likely that qualitative effects are interfering with the results and will require more analysis in the qualitative section.

This begs the question of whether the conflict and Freedom House controls are even important in the regressions. I do not think they are, especially considering how negative the public opinion in India and Vietnam is. Both countries have legitimate reasons to dislike China, and the fact that India and Vietnam have low opinions despite being a free and unfree country respectively indicates something else is more important here. Even accounting for the media manipulation that occurs in Vietnam, this manipulation is done to secure the regime's stability and control latent anti-Chinese sentiments. The more important things in the case of these two countries are likely the threats to their economies and threats to their sovereignty. Even if the media were completely free and the public free to say whatever they like, I believe the public opinions in both countries would be unusually low. Russia's public opinion of China is high by comparison, but as will be seen later, Russians have legitimate economic reasons to like China that transcend freedom and conflict.

As for the trade variables and regressions, only one of the two dependent variables are statistically significant. MFN simple average tariff rates and investments have an inverse and statistically significant relationship. MFN weighted average tariff rates and investments have an inverse relationship, but it is not significant. This suggests that in some ways, the BRI may be lessening trade barriers overall, but when it comes to tariffs weighted by trade value, the relationship becomes unclear. MFN weighted average tariffs are weighted by the product import

shares, or how much of an imported product comprises the total imports. The more trade in a category of products, the more weight it is given. The relationship disappears when looking at such tariffs, though the coefficient remains inverse. This indicates that investment may not be lowering trade barriers in recipient nations, especially in certain product categories. The lack of evidence for a relationship with this variable show that other factors are overriding the desire to lower trade barriers if there even is a desire to lower them in the first place.

Tariffs have remained largely stagnant in India and Vietnam both before and during the BRI years. Only Russia has an apparent decrease in tariffs since the start of the BRI (perhaps this is the reason MFN simple average is statistically significant and falls as investment goes up). Again, there are likely other effects at play that explain the mismatch between raw public opinion data and tariff data. The biggest is that India and Vietnam rely on China economically. Despite their pivots to the West in recent years and new tariffs on Chinese goods, the sheer volume of trade and globalization seem to be keeping tariffs where they are. This, coupled with the fact that tariffs were relatively stable before the BRI, suggests that there is no significant effect here. Even with Russia's decrease in tariffs, this is probably due to other factors outside the BRI. A similar conclusion will be reached in the following sections.

There are limitations to using this type of statistical model, including the possible omission of variables I mentioned earlier. In addition to that, there is the low sample size and the low number of observations. This means missing data for a particular year will also omit the other data for that year, which significantly decreases the number of observations. With a longer time horizon and more data, I believe I could remedy this. However, this is an important reason I have included the qualitative analysis as it adds nuance and support to my quantitative findings.

Chapter 8: Qualitative Analysis

The Historical Narratives

With the quantitative aspects of this thesis complete, now comes the qualitative section. The purpose of the historical narratives is to illustrate how relations between the country being looked at and the People's Republic of China have evolved since the fall of the Republic of China. This narrative will include contemporary events as well given how crucial they are in the recent changes in relations. To begin, I will describe the history of Sino-Indian relations.

Sino-Indian Relations: 1950's to the 2010's

India and China's relations have been rocky since the late 1950's due to multiple border conflicts and ideological differences. Today, the border problem, India's wariness of China, and China's actions against India have led to a deterioration in bilateral relations that have been built up since the 1980's. New Delhi remains cautious of some portions of the BRI, mainly CPEC which has posed a direct threat to territorial claims and navigational freedom.

Sino-Indian relations started well in the mid-1950's. China realized that supporting armed struggle abroad was not a good diplomatic tactic (Jun, 92-92), and instead worked closely with India to create and promote the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. Both China and India sought to build solidarity among the new independent and post-colonial nations, with goals of economic and cultural cooperation, protection of human rights, etc. (Office of the Historian). Unfortunately, the late 1950's would see relations begin to break down as China and India had disagreements over the border. In 1959 Zhou Enlai, the Chinese foreign minister, would inform Prime Minister Nehru of India that China did not recognize the legality of the borders, given their roots in British colonialism (Chakravorty, 289-290). War would break out in 1962, though

skirmishes were happening on the border as early as 1959. The result would be closer Chinese ties to Pakistan, as well as Chinese control of the Aksai Chin, a smaller section of Ladakh (Ranganathan, 2016, 6). After the war, the Era of Pessimism would begin and was marked by prolonged bitterness and poor relations (Dar, 2016, 28).

The 1970's through the end of the Cold War would be quiet for the two countries. Relations would begin to normalize in the 1980's following leadership changes in both countries, but 1988 would accelerate normalization when PM Rajiv Gandhi visited China (Ibid, 29-30). Both countries agreed to settle the border issue peacefully, using a joint team of deputy foreign ministers to help accomplish this (Hongyu, 546-547). Joint teams at the ministerial level would also work to cooperate in the areas of technology, trade, and the economy (Ibid, 547). In 1993 both sides also expressed satisfaction with the achievements reached in negotiations by the joint working team and agreed the team should speed up work and expressed greater need to promote economic and technological exchange (Ibid, 547). During this period, bilateral trade also increased, and the two nations restored strategic cooperation at high levels (Ibid, 548).

The cause of this seemingly sudden improvement, however, goes beyond Deng's reforms as the most significant changes to Sino-Indian relations occurred along with the end of the Cold War. As will be discussed later, Sino-Soviet relations had been hostile for many years and the Soviet Union happened to be India's largest trade partner and key strategic ally. Once the Soviet Union broke up, India had to readjust its foreign policy and China saw an opportunity to further construct a peaceful periphery conducive to economic growth (Ibid, 548-549). Since both nations needed economic development, the strategy of peacefully settling the border issues and greater strategic, economic, and technological cooperation made sense.

Through the 2000's, visits between leaders of the two countries would continue and relations would grow stronger as bilateral trade and economic interdependence increased (Siddiqi, 65-66). Furthermore, China during the 2000's had moved away from supporting Pakistan's claim to Kashmir to balance relations between the two nations, mainly because China valued Pakistan's ties as well as India's growing economic ties (Ibid, 66-68). Despite these measures, the rivalry between the countries was apparent and would begin to hinder relations as the 2010's went on. India to this day remains reluctant to officially sign on to the BRI, despite receiving significant investment from China. The most well-known manifestation of this rivalry is the on-going border dispute, which has led to four major standoffs since 2013 along with minor events during this time (Ayres, 2020).

India's security interests also conflict with the BRI, specifically the Chinese-Pakistani Economic Corridor (CPEC), given that it runs through Indian claimed Kashmir yet it goes between Pakistan and China. This concern over Chinese-Pakistani cooperation is of concern to India given their unsolved border disputes and the fact that construction through disputed territory is de-facto recognition of Pakistani claims on Kashmir. In addition, there is also speculation for China's plans at Gwadar Port, the port that connects Pakistan and CPEC to the sea.

There is evidence that China may use this site as a naval base, but this remains to be seen (Sutton, 2020). CPEC also has an economic sphere, as India sees it as a potential counterbalance to its economic growth. While the foundation for these concerns may be shaky, India nonetheless perceives CPEC in this light (Aamir, 2020). Furthermore, China's rise raises concerns over India's manufacturing industries, as the nation wants to discourage Chinese imports (and world imports for that matter) and help grow its own manufacturing capability. This is not a new

phenomenon for India, as in the past Western competitors were often targeted by tariffs (Chan, 2019). This protectionist policy lines up with India's opposition to the BRI, as India fears the economic and military ramifications of BRI projects (Anklesaria Aiyar, 2018).

Sino-Soviet and Sino-Russo Relations: 1950's to the 2010's

Chinese and Russian ideological conflicts almost drove the two into a war during the late-1960's. As the Cold War ended and Russia's power waned, the power dynamics of the Soviet-era collapsed leading to a new relationship between Russia and China. This new relationship, founded primarily on mutual economic interests, has drawn the two countries closer together. These interests are primarily in the realm of energy, which Russia has a large supply and which China has a large demand for.

In the early days of the PRC, the Soviets and Chinese had been close economic partners. Mao modeled the Chinese economy after the Soviet economy (Garver, 2016, 48), and the Soviets transferred technical knowledge/undertook projects in China through the 1950's (Ibid, 55-56). Much like with India, relations began to sour in the late 1950's. The specialists working in China became a hinderance to Mao, who feared they might influence Chinese policy and undermine Chinese economic independence given many bloc nations were reliant on Soviet economic aid (Zhihua & Li, 2011, 130). As the decade ended and the failure of the Great Leap Forward was apparent, Mao began criticizing Khrushchev and relations worsened. The USSR went back on their commitment to helping China with its nuclear program (this was primarily to cooperate with the U.S) and recalled all personnel from China in 1960, citing that the Chinese could not be trusted (Gerson, 2010, 8-9).

Much like India, China had disputed borders with the Soviet Union. Moscow intimated that these problems could be solved peacefully (Ibid, 12), but negotiations halted after Mao remarked to a delegation of the Japanese Communist Party that China claimed large sections of Soviet territory (Ibid, 13). The mid-1960's would see a military build-up in Mongolia and the beginning of border skirmishes with the Chinese which would increase in intensity (Ibid, 16,19). In 1969 the Zhenbao Island ambush on Soviet troops would occur leading the Soviets to threaten China with nuclear attack in a coercive diplomatic move (Ibid, 27-28, 44). Both nations would negotiate instead (Ibid, 52), and China began to pivot towards the U.S to balance the Soviet threat. By the late-1970's the Sino-Soviet relationship would soften, but the Three Obstacles would hinder normalized relations.

These obstacles were the Afghan invasion, the troops in Mongolia, and the Cambodian occupation by Vietnam (Ibid, 5-6). Gorbachev's rise to power would not really change things between the two countries. The Three Obstacles still prevented rapprochement and Soviet liberalization made the Chinese suspicious, as Deng had growing reservations over this idea (Ibid, 13, 15). China had instead gone a different way by using Special Economic Zones. This dual track system of having a centrally planned economy and private elements is what began to generate rapid growth at the end of the 1980's while the USSR was slipping. As the Cold War drew to a close it would become apparent the Soviets could not aid China any longer (Ibid, 20).

The modern relationship China and Russia began in the early 2000's. Economic relations in the 1990's could be described as stagnant (Lubina, 2017, 160), as Russia was faltering. Furthermore, Russia's industrial base was located far away from China and there was still a latent perception of China being a backwards state (Ibid, 160). By the 2000's, China and Russia's trade volume increased but this was mostly due to energy cooperation, with Russia as a

supplier (Ibid, 166). Moscow was eager to start supplying energy to China and China was willing to receive given the mutual benefit for both parties (Ibid, 168). Russia built the ESPO pipeline to China in hopes that it would also give it access to other Asian markets (Ibid, 169-170). The plan would backfire, turning the pipeline into another source of energy for China and a far less lucrative deal for the Russians (Ibid, 171). Indeed, the relations between the two nations have flipped dramatically, with Russia's exports being primarily comprised of energy and China's being greatly diversified.

To China, Russia is a resource extraction area; a relationship that could be described as a neo-colonial arrangement (Ibid, 179). While investment money does flow into Russia, its primarily to its energy sector despite Russia's desire to sell more than just energy and raw materials to China (Ibid, 181). China still has its eyes on the West for technology and advanced products that Russia simply cannot produce (Ibid, 180), and for now it appears Sino-Russian relations will rest primarily on economic cooperation which is swayed in China's favor.

Sino-Vietnamese Relations: 1950's to the 2010's

Unlike the border conflict in India, Vietnam's border conflict with China is much fresher in the minds of the Vietnamese people. While the two countries have engaged in economic cooperation, their relationship remains cold as Vietnam tries to reduce its dependence on China. Further, China's South China Sea claims have led to armed standoffs in the sea, which directly threaten Vietnamese territorial sovereignty and economic interests.

China was eager to help Vietnamese communists fighting the French colonial forces in the early 1950's after Ho Chi Minh solicited help from China. As early as 1950 China began sending military advisers, weapons, and supplies to the Vietnamese communists. After the

Geneva Conference split Vietnam into the North and South, Ho Chi Minh wanted to expand into the South, but China wanted Vietnam to wait as China had just finished the Korean war and did not want to fight the Americans again (Wilson Center). Both the Soviets and Chinese pressured the Vietnamese to remain peaceful, but as the threat of American intervention in Vietnam grew in the early 1960's, China worked closely with the North Vietnamese to coordinate military operations in the event of an invasion (Jian, 359). Defensive and economic aid were given to Vietnam, and China would send troops into Vietnam to aid in the war against the Americans (Ibid, 371). However, 1969 would mark the turning point in relations as the Vietnamese grew closer to the USSR. Almost a decade later relations would begin to visibly deteriorate following China's "overseas Chinese" policy of helping ethnic Chinese abroad.

China accused Vietnam of mistreating the Chinese ethnic minority, leading to Chinese withdrawal of economic aid to the Vietnamese. This fully turned the Vietnamese to the Soviet side with them joining the Soviet economic sphere and declaring friendship (Ibid, 318-320). Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1978 would further hurt relations, as the Khmer Rouge was supported by China. In 1979 China launched a punitive war against Vietnam for this, successfully invading northern provinces albeit with heavy losses (Ibid, 320-321). Tensions would remain high until 1988, with China and Vietnam fighting on and off during the decade (Ibid, 321).

A secret summit would occur in 1990 between the two countries and normalized relations would begin in 1991 (Xiaosong & Womack, 2000, 1044-1045). This seemingly sudden shift came from the mutual goal of economic development since both countries wanted export markets and to increase trade along the border. Trade and economic cooperation grew throughout the 1990's, albeit with a growing Vietnamese trade deficit (Ibid, 1046-1047), and territorial

disputes on the border and in the Gulf of Tonkin were resolved as well (Ibid, 1045). However, much like India, the 2010's would see renewed hostility over the border and economic conflict.

Since 2004 China has been Vietnam's largest supplier of imports, but in 2012 China's economy began showing signs of a slowdown and Vietnamese export growth to China began decreasing (Thanh & Nguyen Thi, 2019, 17-18). A slight recovery occurred in 2017 (Ibid, 18), but the U.S-China trade war would put the trade relationship between China and Vietnam on a different trajectory. As of 2019, the U.S was Vietnam's largest export market and was becoming an attractive location for both Chinese and Western companies looking to manufacture cheaply and without tariffs (Samuel, 2020). Though the economic implications for China are important as most of this manufacturing is in textiles and "dirty" products that China is moving away from manufacturing, it does not appear trade is a reason for Chinese animosity towards Vietnam. The Vietnamese see it differently, but the main point of contention in the last decade has been over territory.

Though the two nations have solved some of their territorial disputes, the South China Sea remains a hotly contested area owing to overlapping claims and the resources the sea contains. The South China Sea is home to large reserves of untapped oil and natural gas as well as rich fishing areas and other natural resources. The sea is also a major shipping route (CFR, 2021). As for China and Vietnam, the two nation's EEZ's (maritime territory where a coastal nation has exclusive rights to the exploration and use of resources) overlap one another and China's Nine Dash Line of maritime territorial claims overlaps significantly with Vietnam's EEZ as well (AMTI, 2021). Within Vietnam's EEZ are large reserves of oil and gas, but China's Nine Dash Line significantly overlaps large portions of these reserves. As mentioned earlier in the

Russia section, China is not home to large amounts of oil and natural gas which, if supplies were interrupted, could spell economic disaster for the country.

By claiming these reserves China would be able to exploit and secure another source of energy. As a result, conflicts in the sea between the two nations have occurred since 2011 as China has engaged in increased maritime expansionism. Thus far, it seems the 2014 Haiyang Shiyou 981 oil rig standoff was the closest the two nations have come to open confrontation (Huong, 2020.). Still, China in 2018 and 2019 threatened Vietnam for allowing a Spanish oil company to operate rigs in the sea, leading to the company suspending operations twice. The BRI has also been a cause for worry among Vietnamese leaders, who are wary of China's ambitions given the historical context of its relationship with China (Van-Hoa et al, 2021).

The South China Sea issue and economics play into one another, as the BRI offers Vietnam opportunities for development but can also be a tool for Chinese influence. The seemingly risky position Vietnam occupies as a less developed neighbor of China is being balanced out, however, via economic and strategic ties to the U.S. In 2019, Vietnam and the U.S signed a cooperation framework for financing development projects, and other nations such as India and ASEAN nations offer other economic and strategic opportunities as well (Ibid.).

Qualitative Analysis

As was stated earlier, the hypothesis for this thesis is that increased investment leads to better public perception of China in each of the countries being examined as well as lower trade barriers. Taken together, this means China is successfully using the BRI to increase its soft power. A simple examination of the historical narratives and the raw public opinion/tariff/investment data reveals that this hypothesis is not supported in the case of India

and Vietnam. Something also does not fully correlate in Russia's case, as public opinion has been high and remained so since well before the BRI. Tariffs have indeed fallen in Russia, but simple examination alone appears to be enough to counter the original prediction. Therefore, I make the case that China's soft power efforts are failing when it comes to the BRI in these countries for a variety of reasons not captured in the data.

India

In India, many factors play into what can be characterized as failing Chinese soft power. They are primarily territorial threats, nationalism, media influence, and the implications of certain BRI projects. Despite decades of improving relations and bilateral ties, problems arose in the Sino-Indian relationship following the announcement of the BRI and its reluctance to sign-on, China's changing agenda, and the rekindling of a decades old border dispute.

Conflicts along the border picked up in intensity within the last decade and China has once again increased cooperation with Pakistan, India's enemy. CPEC, or the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, is a key project that New Delhi has expressed concern over. Neagle (2020) details India's qualms about CPEC as well as India's history of multilateralism and its engagements in other Chinese projects/institutions like the AIIB and NDB. The reason she mentions India's engagement with these institutions is to show that India is not against everything China does, especially when such institutions are truly multilateral and not a unilateral foreign policy initiative like the BRI is (in New Delhi's words). However, CPEC and the BRI are possible threats to India for two main reasons. The first is that the corridor runs through Kashmir, which amounts to de-facto Chinese recognition of Pakistani sovereignty in that region.

The second is the Gwadar Port, which sits at the end of CPEC, since it has been speculated that China is building a naval base there. This speculation was dismissed previously by the news media, but recent satellite photographs have shown these concerns are likely valid (Sutton, 2020). A naval base would give China a strategic advantage since it could interfere with Indian naval forces operating from the subcontinent, thus threatening Indian naval hegemony over the region and the freedom of navigation. The saliency of border disputes, the direct threats posed by certain BRI projects, and the implications of certain BRI projects shed light on why the Indian government is skeptical of China and why the Indian public's opinion is so low regarding China. China is seen as a threat to India's sovereignty, and the renewed rivalry between the two countries is likely harming China's abilities to win over the Indian populace.

Moving onto nationalism and the Indian media, a report done by Madan (2020), details Modi's ascension to power in 2014. It was believed at first that Modi would be like a Deng Xiaoping, who would look to China to strengthen India's economic and manufacturing capabilities. Some also hoped he would steer away from the U.S as well and limit cooperation with China's neighbors like Japan (Ibid, 2). In general, there was optimism in China that Modi would benefit the bilateral relationship and give China some concessions at the border as well as new opportunities to invest. Despite this, CPEC and the Chinese unilateral action at the border in 2014 were not looked on lightly by India, and India furthered cooperation with the U.S and Japan (Ibid, 3). For the following years, the relationship would remain strained and culminate in the Doklam crisis in 2017. The Doklam crisis in particular is interesting, as news articles from the time highlight the tension between the two nations. More specifically, Indian media often portrayed China in a negative or aggressive light and India as not having done anything to provoke China. In an article by Singh (2017), the author details "anti-India" rhetoric from party-

controlled media in China, Chinese nationalistic fervor, and other phrases that paint China as a jingoistic state popping up in the Indian media around this time.

Other news articles illuminate the broader situation with respect to this media phenomenon, best noted by Griffiths (2020) in an article for CNN. Both Indian and Chinese leaders have built public support on nationalism, which in this case translates to aggressive rhetoric being fed to domestic audiences. This media phenomenon is interesting and has enough importance to garner the attention of international media. Nationalistic fervor running high and anti-Chinese sentiment has been a recurring theme both historically and recently. This nationalism and media vitriol likely explains why the Indian public has had falling opinions on China as the BRI continued. The possibility of economic gains has been overridden by Chinese aggression and Indian nationalism that have grown stronger over the years.

Finally, the implications of BRI projects may be driving India away from China's sphere. In Comparative Economics with Professor Gedeon, she brought up a key implication that the BRI has when it comes to strategy and war. The fact that the BRI develops infrastructure over land and sea means it could potentially give China a major advantage in a war. More routes mean more ways to transport materiel and it is simultaneously harder for another force to cut off China's supplies of goods and resources. While this is more of an abstract point, the BRI nonetheless insulates China from threats that could cut off important resources and allows China to respond more efficiently to military issues. With multiple corridors across land and sea, China could easily encircle India. This, coupled with China's growing and advancing military, may be a lesser publicized reason behind India's Sino-skepticism.

Beyond security concerns, India does not seem very threatened by the BRI economically. Tariffs are indeed high on China, but India has some of the highest tariffs in the world. A

protectionist trade regime is nothing new for the country, and therefore does not necessarily indicate a negative reaction against the BRI and Chinese soft power, despite Indian fears that the BRI might harm the country's domestic industries. The notion that India is economically threatened by the BRI weakens further when Neagle (2020) mentions how India is in favor of other BRI projects that bring routes through the country. Instead, it indicates the influence is being overruled by other factors, such as India's perceived threat by China. This does indeed appear to be the biggest hurdle between good Sino-Indian relations and the success of soft power in India.

While there is some discussion about the border war and past animosity in the reasoning behind India's actions and the public's perceptions of China, history appears to be less important in India's case given the general lack of evidence and discussion on it. As mentioned earlier, India practices multilateralism and is not opposed to Chinese initiatives simply because they are Chinese. India is still enmeshed in the broader framework of the BRI and the institutions that work alongside it like the NDB. The reason Chinese soft power is not being wielded effectively in India is because a variety of Chinese actions and BRI-related factors drive away the Indian government and public. It is really a matter of trust, and India's perception of China is untrustworthy.

Vietnam

For Vietnam, despite exchanges between itself and China as well as ideological similarities, the two nations are not on good terms. For quite a while, China and Vietnam were relatively close and China aided North Vietnam's cause significantly. Following the overseas Chinese controversy, Vietnam's subsequent allying with the Soviet Union, and (most importantly) the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia, China launched a brutal punitive war against

Vietnam. While the 1990's and 2000's saw cooperation and increased bilateral ties, territorial conflict has driven the two farther apart. Vietnam's maritime territory in the South China Sea is threatened by China and the two countries have a very tenuous history, which are some of the primary causes of failing Chinese soft power.

To start off with the territorial aspects of the issue, China's actions are a direct threat to Vietnam which hurts the Vietnamese public's perceptions of China and causes the Vietnamese state to be wary of China. One of China's goals is to pressure Hanoi into ending its exploration of oil and gas in contested waters (Hutt, 2019), which was part of the reason for the oil rig standoff in 2014. As a result of China's activities, Hanoi is taking military matters increasingly seriously despite the military's relative weakness (Ibid). Indeed, there are rumors of a U.S-Vietnamese strategic partnership, though this is unlikely to occur anytime soon (Ibid). Even so, Vietnam is still balancing China with the U.S given how relations with the U.S have expanded significantly, especially in maritime security cooperation (Stromseth, 2020, 6). Vietnam has also worked strategically with Japan, despite continuing to receive BRI funds (Ibid, 6), and has also worked with other countries in the West in a bid to make new friends/partners (Hutt, 2019).

One interesting thing of note is a quote from the Vietnamese Information Minister in an article from the National Defense Journal. He says, "in the future, if war happens to our country, it will be a people's war to protect a developed country against the enemy's aggression... [he notes] in the wars against our ancestors before, and our Party later, our nation often faced enemies with outstanding military power and strength, but we took the offensiveness as the dominant ideology, instead of passiveness or passive defense" (Hutt, 2019).

Further, he adds that "offensive thoughts" (Hutt, 2019) create unity among the people, and a belief that they will not surrender regardless of how strong the enemy is. This quote has a

strong nationalistic vein to it that certainly has memories of past wars (against both the U.S and China) as a part of it. Indeed, Vietnamese people are nationalistic overall and remember the past imperial actions of China. The most recent example of these imperial activities is from the border war in the 1970's and 1980's which remains in the minds of the Vietnamese people (Quang, 2017). Sullivan (2015) details the wounds of the border war that remain open to this day from the perspective of the Vietnamese people. As the piece details, the people who were interviewed as well as the Vietnamese people in general have vivid memories of the war.

In addition, there is deep anti-Chinese sentiment stemming from the war as well as the many conflicts of the past. According to another person interviewed in the article, "The Vietnamese have had too much experience with the Chinese. The Vietnamese can't trust the Chinese. We've had too much practice." (Sullivan, 2015). Indeed, Vietnamese citizens in 2014 protested and targeted Chinese citizens/businesses following the movement of a Chinese oil rig into the Vietnamese territory of the South China sea. Beijing was forced to evacuate its citizens back to China as a result. In 2018, more violent protests erupted following fears that newly planned SEZs would cause an influx of Chinese businesses (Stromseth 6-7).

One common vein in these pieces is the silence both China and Vietnam's governments have regarding the war and the Vietnamese government's manipulation of the media. The war is fresh in the minds of the people, but there is not much talk about it coming from either government. However, Vietnam's government has drummed up anti-China rhetoric in the past, for instance in 2014 when the Chinese parked the oil rig in its waters. (Sullivan, 2015). Still, Vietnam is very careful to regulate these sentiments. All protests must have tacit approval from the regime, and Hanoi must be careful to appeal to the increasing anti-China sentiments of the

people while avoiding nationalism on a level that would harm its relations with China (Dien, 2020).

Therefore, it quietly regulates these sentiments via manipulation such as releasing well-timed programs regarding the war with China. A balance with this manipulation must be struck, as failure to contain the anti-China sentiment could harm the legitimacy of the regime and draw the ire of China. Vietnam must also be careful to regulate the online sphere where protests are organized and ideas are spread. (Ibid). This manipulation is carefully carried out to ensure there is no conflict with China as a result of the people's actions and to ensure the stability of the regime. Otherwise, failure to balance the people's sentiments could lead to action by China or unrest among the people, which is dangerous for an authoritarian state.

Despite the public sentiments and the country's apparent defensive posture against China, Vietnam is not reflecting these sentiments economically. Much like India, Vietnam does not appear to dislike the BRI simply for being the BRI. Funds still flow into Vietnam and China remains one of Vietnam's largest sources of imports, which suggests that the BRI is not the problem here. Rather, China's actions in the South China Sea appear to be the major driver of low public opinion. Tariffs do not change with the advent of the BRI, and even with Vietnam's desire to be less dependent on China, this does not seem like a reason for failing Chinese soft power. Therefore, I believe the territorial, nationalistic, and historical aspects of Sino-Vietnamese relations are the main driver behind the data I have collected.

The Vietnamese people have a very strong dislike towards China owing to a contentious recent history, and Vietnam's government is keenly aware of its military standing relative to China. If China were successfully projecting soft power into Vietnam, relations would be much better given how Vietnam does not want conflict with China. Despite a lack of direct correlation

and evidence regarding failing soft power due to economics, it can be argued that Vietnam's own industrial ambitions may contribute in some way to the cold relationship the two countries share, given that Vietnam's manufacturing sector is growing as are its exports to other countries. This means there is competition between Vietnam and China economically, however small Vietnam may be by comparison. The BRI would certainly allow China to market its own goods much more easily, possibly to the detriment of Vietnam. The Voon & Xu (2019) piece touches on this concept, alleging that competition from countries with similar export structures may harm Chinese soft power for maritime countries. In addition, China's maritime actions would also threaten trade and make it tougher for Vietnam to export its goods by the sea.

Russia

Russia is an interesting case in this study, as Sino-Russian relations are undoubtedly good by comparison. However, I argue that these good relations are not due to the BRI nor are they due to Chinese investment. Rather, ideology, economics, and the lack of salient border conflicts/sovereignty issues allow the two countries to be much closer. Despite the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960's and the balancing the two countries did against one another, it appears China's energy needs and the Russian switch to an energy focused economy had important implications on their relationship. Further, the geopolitical landscape has been unfriendly to Russia, driving the two closer together.

To begin with a piece by Hillman (2020), Russia is not threatened in the same way Vietnam and India are. In fact, many of Russia's prerogatives line up with those of China. Despite their unequal relationship and Russian economic dependence on China, the two nations are on very good terms. Both Russia and China are eager to reduce their dependence on Western financial systems and both are clearly not on the same side as the liberal West. Russian public

opinion of China is positive, and Chinese state media aggressively promotes partnership domestically and globally with Russia. Even with very little political integration and investment outside of energy, Russia stands to benefit from a close relationship to China.

However, this means the BRI is not the primary driver of these relations. Indeed, it is not even Chinese soft power. It is out of necessity for both countries, arguably more so for Russia. China needs a safe and uninterrupted source of energy, such as rail or pipelines coming directly over the Russian border. Russia needs markets for its energy, as Europe and the U.S have pushed back against the Russian energy industry. This rationalizes the partnership between both countries, but also negates the idea that soft power is playing a role here as there is no need to project soft power. State manipulation and economic imperatives seem to drive the high public opinion and lowering tariffs in Russia, not the BRI or China's desire to influence Russia.

Another author calls Russia and China's relationship one of "convenience that both value" (Gavin, 2021). Trade with China has helped Russia's industries weather sanctions and Russia is on track to be China's largest energy supplier. The main problem with the Sino-Russian relationship is that they are shallow. Trade and investment may link the two together, but as mentioned before there is very little political integration (Gavin, 2021). The Western countries the two seek to counterbalance are closely linked via NATO and intelligence sharing, while Russia and China are not that integrated. Gavin also mentions how neither country needs anything more from the other and there is no reason for them to go beyond economic partnership. What does this have to do with the BRI and Chinese soft power? Almost nothing.

The Chinese and Russian relationship is purely economic in nature that exists mostly beyond the BRI. Something of note in the news articles regarding China and Russia's relationship is that the BRI is not mentioned. This is probably because Russia is already in

China's sphere and the only infrastructure China needs in Russia is energy infrastructure, unlike the publicized roads, rails, and ports of other BRI projects. China has no reason to spend more money than it needs to construct an extra railway or road in the relatively empty Russian wilderness across the border. There are no factories there, no labor supply, or anything else besides raw materials. Unlike the nations of Southeast and Central Asia, Russia is not in as dire need of infrastructure (at least in the Far East) since most of its industries are concentrated in the West. It instead needs markets for its energy which China has already supplied to it. Therefore, there is no diffuse use of soft power and there is no need to fragment because Russia is not aligned with the West or traditional world order.

Cause and Effect Summary Table

Country	Cause	Effect
India	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. An uptick in aggressive actions and standoffs along the disputed border occurring with greater frequency in the last decade. 2. China is working with Pakistan to build and complete CPEC, which includes the possibility of a Chinese naval base being built close to India's waters as well as de-facto recognition of Pakistani control over Indian claimed territory. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sino-skepticism among Indian leaders and nationalistic tendencies flaring in the media when such incursions occur. Nationalism then drives lower public opinion on China. 2. India perceives the BRI as a unilateral foreign policy initiative and becomes more wary of Chinese motives relating to certain BRI projects. India

	<p>3. The BRI would give China a strategic advantage where it could deploy naval, ground, and air forces more easily with lower chances of supply disruptions due to increased infrastructure.</p>	<p>will not commit fully to the BRI given the non-multilateral nature of it.</p> <p>3. Another potential threat to India's sovereignty that puts pressure on New Delhi.</p>
Vietnam	<p>1. China invaded Vietnam in the 1970's over the invasion of Cambodia, leading to a brutal war on the border and in the sea.</p> <p>2. China claims vast swaths of Vietnam's maritime territory in the South China Sea and has disrupted Vietnamese fishing and energy extraction operations.</p> <p>3. China is a major trading partner of Vietnam. Vietnam has a large trade deficit with China which has been an issue since the 1990's. At the same time, the U.S and Western countries have given Vietnam a way out of this situation as they</p>	<p>1. The Vietnamese populace has not forgotten about the war and the government carefully regulates the strong nationalistic sentiments that the public has. Public opinion is extremely low as a result.</p> <p>2. China's increasingly aggressive behavior in the sea has prompted a more defensive posture from the Vietnamese state, causing Vietnam to balance China with Western-aligned states.</p> <p>3. Despite taking money from the BRI, Vietnam is growing its industrial base and balancing China with the West.</p>

	target Vietnam for manufacturing investment.	
Russia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Cold War ended, and the Soviet Union fell. Communist rivalry disappeared and Russia's economy shifted to one based on energy. 2. There have not been significant BRI projects outside those in the Russian energy industry, nor do such projects center around where most of Russia's population is. 3. There is a general alignment of interests between Russia and China, especially considering sanctions on Russia which makes it more dependent on China. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. China's rapid growth has stimulated demand for energy, which China has very little domestic supply of. Russia became China's energy and resource supplier which is a mutually beneficial arrangement. 2. China can use Russia and Russia needs China, hence a stable relationship. 3. Leaders and the public in Russia have favorable views on China, and tariffs have also fallen on Chinese goods.

Qualitative Analysis Final Remarks

Based on the evidence presented in this section and in the historical narrative section, the most likely explanation is the BRI is not a soft power boon in any of these three countries as it may be in other underdeveloped, resource-rich countries. The BRI to India appears as a unilateral initiative to further Chinese interests which has kept India from officially signing on, and the

border disputes threaten its territorial sovereignty. Aggression in the South China Sea and a bitter recent history prevent Vietnam from forging a closer relationship to China. Both are wary of China's growing maritime ambitions whether that be in the South China Sea or the Indian Ocean and both have strong nationalistic ideas present among their populaces. Despite the potential economic gains both countries could receive from improved infrastructure, this potential has not driven them closer to China.

In fact, it is known to have backfired in India because of its reluctance to officially participate and because of CPEC. The BRI also seems to be doing little in Vietnam despite being an official signatory. Furthermore, as Professor Gedeon mentioned in her class Comparative Economics, the BRI's road, rail, maritime, and air infrastructure can be used to China's strategic advantage. Not only do multiple routes allow for the uninterrupted flow of goods, but they also allow Chinese materiel to be transported within and outside China in the event of a land-based or sea-based conflict. Gwadar Port is the prime example of this. Russia, meanwhile, is not subject to these same threats given the lack of border conflict and BRI investment in non-energy related projects. Based on the aggregation of information, China is failing in wielding soft power in India or Vietnam and China does not need to focus on Russia given their already close, convenient relationship.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

In this thesis I set out to see if China's BRI was having diffuse soft power effects in India, Russia, and Vietnam. The goal of these soft power effects being to fragment the traditional world order. In order to accomplish this, I provided background into the BRI and soft power, and conducted a quantitative and qualitative analysis. My hypothesis was that increased investment would lead to increased soft power in all three countries. Soft power in this case had two

dimensions: One that used public opinion as a proxy for soft power and another that used MFN simple average and weighted average tariffs as another proxy that captured the economic side of the BRI's soft power effects.

The quantitative analysis in this thesis yielded one statistically significant result out of the three random-effects GLS regressions that were run. In this case, investment and the MFN simple average of tariffs were inversely related and statistically significant, meaning the simple average of tariffs fell as the BRI went on. Despite the lack of statistically significant results, the raw data for public opinion and the trade variables yielded results that show the BRI may not be having the purported effects of increasing Chinese soft power. For the qualitative analysis, three historical narratives were done for each country to offer context and to display a causal mechanism for why the dependent variables are the way they are. In addition, I selected various reasons and explanations as to why relations were either good or bad depending on which country was being examined and offered evidence for each.

Generally, there has been much talk since 2013 about the BRI and the potential power its projects hold when it comes to winning over other nations. My research recalls fears that the allure of development and infrastructure would be too much for countries to resist, thus leading them into the arms of China and allowing China to counter the influence and power of the West. These general and unspecific fears usually focus on the roads, rails, ports, depots, and other basic infrastructure needed for goods to move and be produced with greater efficiency. As Rahman (2019) detailed, the BRI has a lot of potential to act as a weapon of Chinese soft power when it comes to the implications brought with these developments. Brands, businesses, and corporations can proliferate out from China using this new infrastructure. Greater access to electricity, higher wages, and other benefits afforded to rapidly growing economies would allow BRI recipients to

consume Chinese goods which can act as a source of soft power. Shambaugh (2015) and Markey's (2020) works detail the cultural side of the BRI's implications, namely through the proliferation of Chinese culture and media which will reach more audiences as a result of the BRI's infrastructure.

Furthermore, as economies grow and people become wealthier, tourism goes up and the newly build transport infrastructure would allow tourists to flock to China. To a Westerner keen on supporting their country's place as the dominant cultural and economic force on Earth, the implications of the BRI on China's ability to project soft power seems threatening. China appears to be setting itself up to be an alluring center of economic power (which is soft power in and of itself, according to Nye) with the ability to market and spread its culture system of government across the Old World. However, I believe my thesis shows these notions of an unstoppable rise that recenters global power to be unfounded based on the cases I examined.

If the BRI were truly a fool-proof weapon of diffuse soft power, then I believe it is not unreasonable to think that India and Vietnam would be much more friendly to China. The BRI's goals of development are lined-up with the prerogatives of both states, given how they want to boost domestic manufacturing and development. However, it is obvious neither are on China's side and have, instead, turned towards the West as a source of power to balance out China. These two cases show that not only is diffuse soft power not working, but this soft power is also not fragmenting the traditional world order either. Does this mean the BRI itself does not allow China to wield soft power or that the BRI is failing? No, in fact, it seems to be working in other countries which is a testament to its potential. My work simply shows that the BRI can work against China in the case of India or have its soft power effects overridden by other factors. If threats from China are salient enough, then the potential positive effects of the BRI may be

canceled out, which is something mentioned by Voon & Xu (2019) as a potential explanation for why some countries are not showing positive opinions of China.

Russia, while the odd one out regarding how it behaves towards China, is not a great way to examine the BRI's soft power. While investment is high in the volume of money going into Russia, the projects are all primarily energy related and the Sino-Russian relationship was positive in the years before the BRI was even announced. However, there may be some value in this finding as it shows the BRI's diffuse soft power cannot draw Russia and China any closer than they already are, though I still believe that the BRI is not a major draw for Russia anyways.

It is seemingly contradictory that China is going forward with the BRI in Vietnam and pushing for India to join, despite also taking aggressive actions against both them. One may ask whether China is even trying to win these countries over at this point, which is a very important question to address. It seems like China is not trying to co-opt either country at this point, and perhaps China's goal was to coerce India and Vietnam in the first place. The BRI may be a purely economic consideration meant to benefit China's economy, rather than perform the secondary function of increasing soft power.

Further, since both countries follow multilateral agendas and thus, will be unwilling to fully commit to China, China may be resorting to hard power to coerce them into submission or at the very least put them on the defensive. This would explain the aggressive military actions on the Indian border and in the South China Sea, since these actions directly contradict the narrative of a peaceful rise that China has pushed for a very long time. Of course, the BRI is an important way to project soft power in other countries by way of prestige projects and the promise of growth, but that is not the case for India and Vietnam. This explanation for the contradiction is intuitive conjecture but is nonetheless supported by some of my research. Even so, it appears the

aggressive actions have backfired and driven both countries further from China, which undermines some of the logic behind this explanation.

India and Vietnam are not the only two countries in China's backyard that are wary. Australia recently revoked a state government's deal to join China's Belt and Road Initiative. While Australia is a Western country, it is simply another example that China's allure is not as strong as some may think. One may also question if China's treatment of the Uighur population in Xinjiang (among other instances of Chinese state-sponsored racism and oppression) is hurting its image abroad as well. Xinjiang is a major domestic target for the BRI where lower-value industries have been moving to. Concepts like the China Dream and China's peaceful rise are tainted by these actions and undoubtedly have some effect on the ability to project soft power via transferring political values and foreign policy. While not quantifiable at this time, there is certainly a lot for future scholars to work with here if any should attempt to examine the other countries in the BRI in a similar manner as this thesis.

As far as BRI-related theory in general goes, this piece demonstrates how complicated it is to measure soft power and China's success at wielding it via the BRI. As is the case with other works related to soft power, there is no easy way to quantify and measure soft power, hence the use of proxies. As far as theory about the initiative itself goes, I have demonstrated three unique cases that help expand the literature on the BRI within each country, as well as highlight potential implications and consequences the BRI might have on China's soft power. Scholars of the BRI can now get a more in-depth glimpse at some of the factors driving India and Vietnam away from China, as well as the factors that pull Russia and China closer together. This shows that the BRI is not only vulnerable to other countries' agendas, but it also means China may not

get the secondary benefit of a more positive relationship with the recipient country or its neighbors.

Indeed, China may receive the opposite for the latter. This may be a window into the limits and efficacy of the entire BRI itself given that two very different countries, those being India and Vietnam, face similar threats and display somewhat similar negative reactions. The evidence I have collected also sheds light on the apparent disconnect between economics and how countries react to threats. Despite the threats posed by China, India and Vietnam continue to import Chinese goods and China continues to import their goods. While the trade war did occur, there were no punitive measures taken as a reaction to the BRI, let alone China's actions on the border or in the South China Sea. Even accounting for the qualms India has with CPEC, both India and Vietnam allow Chinese investment or have otherwise participated in the BRI in some way.

It is unfortunate that the regressions were not as illuminating as hoped, but it appears that the low number of observations and small sample size hampered the investigation as empirical data is limited. The one statistically significant regression done for the MFN simple average is undermined simply by looking at the raw tariff data, as Russia's tariffs on Chinese imports fell while India and Vietnam's remained stagnant. Still, the raw data demonstrates that the BRI may not be opening markets in these two countries which has implications on the ability of China to market its goods and thereby spread its soft power. Russia's tariff decrease does not appear to be related to the BRI and seems to be more of economic necessity following sanctions and a generally unhealthy economy.

For a long time, scholars and journalists have advertised the BRI as China's gambit to give it control of the East and Global South. The BRI would strengthen China's economy and the

allure of infrastructure would be too much for any nation to resist. However, as this study has shown, the BRI is not powerful enough to do this in certain cases, as the perception of China by many countries is untrustworthy. China is foiling itself through its own actions, thus negating any positive effect or externality the BRI might have on relations with India and Vietnam.

As for how this fits into the broader soft power debate, I believe these case studies help illuminate how limited soft power can be if wielded incorrectly. The BRI has the potential to be a critical source of Chinese soft power, especially considering the cultural projects and the ability for Chinese culture, brands, and media to be disseminated along the land and sea routes. Further, it also can be a major driver of tourism in China as new wealth is created in China's periphery, which then attracts tourism. The prestige aspects of the BRI as well as the allure of economic growth for a country's leaders and businesses on the geopolitical front is another way it can be used to further Chinese soft power. Even with all these potential benefits, the analysis shows this potential is being wasted.

To conclude, this study did not find the hypothesized outcomes that the BRI was winning over the nations being looked at. In fact, the analysis points to a conclusion that it could potentially work in the opposite direction or not do anything at all. Diffuse effects are indeed being felt in some way, but they are not working to really fragment the world order in a way that could seriously threaten the West. Indeed, the West appears to have a few hold outs in China's immediate periphery who will likely hold on despite China's growing power.

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