

CHINA'S NON-WESTERN SOFT POWER POLICY IN ESTABLISHING A NEW ORDER: A REVIEW OF STRATEGY AND RESOURCES

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Abstract

State power, in the modern era, is not just based on the concepts of political, military, and economic efficiency. The rise of globalization and interdependence of states, in the international system, have led to the centralization of a new concept known as "soft power". The concept was primarily developed by Professor Joseph Nye, and the West rationally employed it as a political approach to establish their liberal hegemony. Recently, China has made significant efforts to enhance its soft power capabilities. To analyze China's soft power, this research study primarily adopted a qualitative research approach to examine non-Western aspects of China's soft power, including cultural diplomacy, Educational Resources, financial influence, and global governance initiatives, with specific attention giving to the Belt and Road Initiative. The findings demonstrate that China's soft power strategy incorporates both conventional aspects, such as, Confucian values and cultural exchange, as well as modern tools like the neo-Confucian idea of a "harmonious society and the attraction of economic and media influence. China's diplomatic efforts and economic strength have contributed to its expanding influence in the developing world and challenging Western dominance. The study examines China's soft power strategy and compares it to Western soft power to highlight its unique characteristics. Moreover, the study aims to assess whether China presents a new interpretation of "soft power" and how it effectively utilizes its resources to accomplish its objectives.

Key Words: Soft Power, Non-Western Model of Soft Power, Chinese Soft Power, Confucianism, Cultural Diplomacy, Discourse, Peaceful Development.

Introduction

Traditionally, the measure used to determine the ability of great powers was associated with examining their strength in war. Today, however, the emphasis on military power and occupation is no longer as important as it was. Regarding international power, the factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more important. Joseph Nye identifies five trends in the world in terms of change: economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in underdeveloped countries, the spread of technology, and changing political issues. Military and economic power, which previously dominated international relations, are now less dominant and hazardous. Resources that were previously disregarded in connection with the expression of power in the international arena are starting to play a more significant role.¹

¹ Weili Wang, "China's projection of 'soft power': media events, personalisation, and domestication in the era of Xi Jinping". PhD thesis. University of Loughborough, 2020. file:///C:/Users/khetam721/Downloads/B615217_Thesis.pdf.

Joseph Nye defines soft power as a state's ability to persuade other states to do what the state wants, without the use of force and coercion. Soft power, if applied successfully, allows states to achieve their goals and maintain their influence without intervening militarily or dropping bombs on other countries.²

Since the end of the Cold War, soft power has emerged as a crucial concept in the foreign policy of the majority of states, particularly those seeking to impose their political, economic, military, cultural and ideological hegemony without relying on military force or paying significant costs. With its economic expansion and modern military prowess, China is attempting to recognize its position and role in reshaping global international order. China intends to be a major power while presenting itself as a non-coercive force. To achieve this, it has returned to its ancient philosophical traditions and conceptions. In parallel, China has abandoned the revolutionary and aggressive mindset of the Maoist era and transitioned from “keeping a low profile” to “peaceful development” and “developing together”.³ The foundation of China's soft power is its expanding economic power, which has emerged as a key instrument in its foreign policy in the new millennium.

In China soft power is primarily discussed at two levels: as part of foreign policy and national development strategies. China's foreign policy seeks to promote peaceful relations abroad and a 'harmonious society' at home. In this sense, China's diplomacy primarily aims at maintaining its position as a world power within the international system. Moreover, China's strategy aims to control the regional and global balance of power and influence that the United States still dominates. In 2005, the State Council Information Office published a white paper entitled China's Peaceful Development Road, in which it emphasized China's desire to uphold its international status through peace and cooperation. In the paper, China reassessed the problems and crises of the contemporary world. China emphasized that the modern world has "more opportunities than challenges," which is a positive aspect of international relations.⁴

Significance of the research

Due to its implications for international relations, global influence, and the dynamics of power in the modern world, understanding China's evolving soft power strategy is crucial. This study significantly contributes to a deeper comprehension of the tools, strategies, and narratives employed by China to shape its global image and expand its influence, particularly through its non-Western soft power strategy. It provides valuable insight on China's efforts to project soft power through its economic endeavors, foreign engagements, and cultural diplomacy.

The importance of this study lies in its capacity to advance scholarly knowledge of the challenges posed by China's rise to the existing world order and the implications for international business. By integrating previous studies, the research provides a comprehensive analysis of the academic issues associated with China's ascent. Furthermore the research sheds light on China's approach to utilizing soft power within the context of contemporary studies by examining the perspectives of Chinese policymakers and academics. This examination contributes to the existing body of knowledge on soft power, offering a unique viewpoint that is instrumental in understanding China's role and impact

² Joseph S. Nye, “Soft Power.” *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (January 1, 1990): 153. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>.

³ Mingjiang, Li. “China Debates Soft Power.” *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* 2, no. 2 (December 21, 2008): 287–308. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pon011>.

⁴ Michael M. Du, “China's ‘One Belt, One Road’ Initiative: Context, Focus, Institutions, and Implications.” *The Chinese Journal of Global Governance* 2, no. 1 (June 16, 2016): 30–43. <https://doi.org/10.1163/23525207-12340014>.

on the global arena. Ultimately, the study provides policymakers, scholars, and business leaders with valuable insights to navigate the complexities of China's rise and its implications for the international order by addressing the academic issues associated with China's emergence and its non-Western soft power strategy.

Research problem

The main issues revolve around the shape and future of China's rise globally. China's rise as a global power is examined through addressing several key questions, with particular emphasis on the following paramount question: How has China developed its non-Western soft power strategy? What resources and strategies does China use to project soft power? And how effective is China's soft power strategy in replacing Western soft power in shaping the development of a new world order?

Research methodology

The research method utilized in this study is the descriptive-analytic method, which aims to achieve a precise understanding and reveal the true dimensions of global phenomena and issues. An important principle underlying this descriptive approach is to define the phenomenon under investigation, collect detailed data, examine and explore it, and understand the many dimensions and relationships involved in the process in understanding uncovering the content of China's soft power strategy and assessing how well China can reshape its non-Western soft power strategy.

Results and Discussion

Defining Soft Power

Many definitions of soft power as well as different views on the concept are available. This research considers that it is essential to emphasize the common aspects of this idea. First of all, it is important to note that Joseph Nye is known as the inventor of the concept of soft power. According to Nye, soft power is a "descriptive rather than a normative concept" that has the power to influence people's thoughts positively or negatively.⁵ Nye argues that soft power entails having the ability to capture other people's attention and persuade them to comply with your objectives.⁶ When one can influence another person's preferences over their choices, their own chosen outcome eventually becomes their preferred outcome. Nye emphasizes an important dimension of soft power which is the ability to persuade and to build strong relationships and cooperation through attraction rather than force or money. It results from people being drawn to a nation's culture, political beliefs, and policies. Our soft power increases when people view our policies as morally justifiable.⁷

Nye's argument relies on two rational aspects. Firstly, having the necessary hard power resources does not always ensure the expected outcomes. For instance, Nye emphasized that despite being a superpower, the United States was unable to prevent the horrific 911 attacks. Furthermore, it is difficult to compare the capabilities of the U.S. military to other countries, but this aspect of strength did not help the U.S. to win the war in Vietnam.⁸ Secondly, soft power involves more than only the capacity for persuasion or the ability to

⁵ Jeanne M. Wilson, "Soft Power: A Comparison of Discourse and Practice in Russia and China," *Europe-Asia Studies* 67, no. 8 (October 30, 2015): 1171–1202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2015.1078108>.

⁶ Nye, Joseph S. *Soft Power : the Means to Success in World Politics*. New York :Public Affairs, 2004.

⁷ Nye, Joseph S., 5.

⁸ Nye, Joseph S., 3.

move people through argument, though that is a significant aspect of it. It also has the capacity for attraction, and attraction frequently results in compliance. When a nation's image is considered credible and positive through the lens of the whole world, its goals and actions are viewed positively in international news reports.⁹

The relationship between soft power and hard power

Soft power is different from hard power because there is no coercive power to force the enemy to comply with demands and objectives. The two basic sources of hard power in the world are coercion and inducement. Soft power, on the other hand, is the ability and the use of non-coercive activities to achieve higher goals through attractiveness as opposed to coercion and forceful persuasion. In this case, State A draws State B's attention and gets the other State to do what it wants without using coercion or any other coercive measures.¹⁰ To better understand Nye's thoughts on soft power, two key points are worthwhile to emphasize. First, Nye argues that hard power and soft power are not opposites. He believes that soft power is only another way to exercise power; he does not deny the significance of hard power as state power. Whereas hard power is produced by the military, soft power is created by human culture. Conceptually, soft power and hard power are two independent powers. Nye thinks that soft power is just another form of power and is not a substitute for hard power. Second, traditional hard power sources like the military and the economy occasionally contribute to the production of soft power. For instance, Nye emphasizes how the use of military resources in the mission of rescuing residents during natural disasters like floods and earthquakes is going to boost the soft power of states.¹¹

Table 1. Action types and resource utilization of the hard power and the soft power.¹² (Lin and Hongtao 2017)

	Hard power	Soft power
Behavior type coordinates	command Stress Induced	Setting the agenda attract absorb
Most likely to use of resources	force transaction Sanction bribery	Political Values Institutional system Cultures. Foreign Policies

Soft power resources

Nye highlights three sources of soft power: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it upholds them both domestically and internationally), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and have moral authority).¹³

⁹ Nye, Joseph S., 3-4.

¹⁰ Peter Volten, Hard power versus Soft power or a balance between the two? *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 5, no. 2 (2016): 91–91. 10.20991/allazimuth.257679.

¹¹ Weili Wang, 25.

¹² Li Lin, Leng Hongtao. Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory and Its Revelation Towards Ideological and Political Education, *Humanities and Social Sciences*. 5, no 2, (March 2017) , 69-74. doi: 10.11648/j.hss.20170502.13.

¹³ Li Lin, Leng Hongtao, 70.

When it comes to culture as a form of soft power, Nye mentions how Hollywood movies and other popular American culture have an impact on the younger generation in Japan, which make their admiration for American culture an illustration of American soft power. Similarly, the former Soviet Union was able to attract followers through communist ideology. Nye argues that legitimate foreign policies (such as public diplomacy) and popular culture, as well as political values, contribute to the US's exceptional achievement in international affairs when compared to other states. Furthermore, international institutions or foreign policies in which the United States has played a significant role in creating and managing, such as the International Monetary Fund, which inherently embraces liberal and free-market ideals, reflect American culture.¹⁴ The state can appear attractive to others by using the three sources described above.

Most of the components listed above, including culture, institutions, political values, and legitimate foreign policy are intangible resources. Nye, however, argues that occasionally hard power, such as economic and military power, might result in soft power. For instance, using military power to provide earthquake assistance abroad can create an attractive picture.¹⁵

Finally, Nye claims that agenda-setting, persuasion, and attraction are the three most important strategies to build soft power. The parenthetical requirements are essential for determining whether potential soft power sources translate into attractive behavior that can influence others to act positively. When using soft power, the factors that shape the target are crucial, or the objectives themselves are just as crucial as the agents. Both attraction and persuasion are social constructions. Soft power is a dance that requires partners.¹⁶

CHIN'S UNDERSTANDING OF SOFT POWER IN THE HISTORICAL TIMELINE

During the Cold War

China has historically remained a center of attraction for others, particularly the East Asian countries that were under Chinese control. China was viewed as a revolutionary, revisionist, and hard power-focused state throughout the Cold War. The soft forms of power received little attention before the turn of the twenty-first century.¹⁷ China's foreign policy initially concentrated on how to end its international isolation and was less outward-looking. China had focused on internal conflicts within its own country.¹⁸

Early studies and literature on soft power versus hard power have always referred to mental power versus material power. The ideological elite in the 1990s consistently held the view that this form of mental power influenced Western foreign policy toward nations that opposed capitalism. For instance, the fall of the Soviet Union was significantly influenced by Western soft power. In the 1980s, Western culture had an impact on student movements that were protesting non-Western systems.¹⁹

The Jiang Zemin era (late 1989-2002)

¹⁴ Lai, Hongyi, and Yiyi Lu. *China's Soft Power and International Relations*. Routledge, 2012.

¹⁵ Nye, Joseph S., Jr. *The Future of Power*. PublicAffairs, 2011.

¹⁶ Nye, Joseph S., Jr, 84.

¹⁷ Mirza, Muhammad Nadeem, Hussain Abbas, and Muhammad Qasim Nizamani. "Evaluating China's Soft Power Discourse: Assumptions, Strategies, and Objectives." *Global Strategic & Securities Studies Review V (IV)* (2020) 40–50. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2020\(v-iv\).05](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2020(v-iv).05).

¹⁸ Li, Mingjiang. *Soft Power : China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 211.

¹⁹ Sheng Ding. *The Dragon's Hidden Wings : How China Rises with Its Soft Power*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008.

After the Soviet Union's collapse and the Eastern Bloc saw significant political changes, many other countries that were still defending Marxism started to change. Due to these circumstances, many individuals both inside and outside of China started to worry about the future of socialism and questioned how far it could be implemented in China. Despite the issues, challenges, risks, and difficulties China experienced in the two decades that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union, China showed no signs of impending collapse. Why is this? The reason for this is that both governmental and academic attention was given to substantial advancements in both practice and theoretical study of soft power. Experiences and lessons from both inside and outside of China were also taken seriously.²⁰ Efforts were intensified on six fronts. First, people need to be equipped with scientific notions. The combination of Marxism with recent developments in China is the most recent development in the world. Second, people should be guided by correct public opinion. Third, reform programs need to be carried out systematically; socialist structures for the military, government, economy, culture, society, and ecology, as well as for the social and political parties, should be combined with the new Chinese characteristics. Fourth, socially productive forces must be developed in order to create a central economy. Sixth, historical nihilism, capitalist news coverage, and modern liberalism should all be questioned and checked because they are all incorrect.²¹

Since the 1990s, soft power has been commonly discussed by Chinese scholars. The Chinese argued that the West manipulated these soft power instruments to promote and legitimize their policies by controlling international discourse, institutions and rules. Soft power was, therefore, viewed as a Western prerogative, fundamentally a component of the moral and political high ground that the West dominated. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the transformation of the bipolar system marked by the "Cold War" between ideologies, the Chinese tried to adapt to Western democracies.²² Chinese policymakers thought that the Soviet Union's collapse was connected to an overemphasis on military expenditures. Modern Chinese scholars and politicians held the view that the USSR had sufficient hard power (i.e., military and economic capabilities), but insufficient soft power, which was why the USSR finally failed. For instance, Li Jie, a former vice director of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, argues that cultural and social norms, rather than military, political, or ideological means, were accountable for the fall of the Soviet Union.²³

The Chinese leadership formally used the term soft power at the 17th Party Congress, where Hu Jintao, the general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, equated soft power with "socialist cultural development" and "cultural creativity of the entire nation". On this occasion, US hegemony was not compared with Chinese soft power. Instead, shaping and advancing Chinese soft power was intended to benefit internal objectives. Chinese soft power, precisely, is intended to better defend people's cultural rights, enrich [Chinese]

²⁰ Zhang, Weihong. "China's Cultural Future: From Soft Power to Comprehensive National Power." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 16 (4) (2010) 383–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630903134300>.

²¹ Zhang, Weihong, 385.

²² Mattias Munk-Petersen. *Soft Power in China: An historical analysis of the notion and role of soft power*. M. dissertation. Aalborg University, (2013), https://projekter.aau.dk/projekter/files/76794829/Soft_Power_in_China.pdf (Accessed: 13 March 2023).

²³ Mattias Munk-Petersen, 43.

society's cultural life, and increase people's ambitions for progress.²⁴ Chinese leaders have always used soft power as a tool to "reform the cultural system". In these contexts, "soft power" was seen as part of a comprehensive national capacity aimed at strengthening domestic and national unity.

The Hu Jintao era (2003-2012)

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, China's military and economy continued to rise rapidly and took part in international affairs actively. As pointed out before, traditional hard power sources like the military and the economy can help produce soft power, for instance, by using financial resources and military power to support international peacekeeping operations. However, when used improperly, as was the case with the US invasion of Iraq, hard power sources can sabotage soft power.²⁵

With the decline in US hegemony after the 9/11 attacks and concerns about the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Chinese's tendency to use soft power increased. China did great efforts to develop its soft power. With "superpower ambition," China acted as a major player in a changing global environment during this time. As a result of this change, China was able to establish effective ties with both regional and extra-regional states. Extraordinary technological advancements, as well as China's growing political, economic, and trade relationships with a huge number of countries were considerably contributed to China's increasing influence in global affairs.²⁶

Although China had used soft power through various practices, soft power was not included in China's national development strategy until Hu Jintao made the first official recommendation for it from the 8th China Federation of Literary and Art Circles in 2006. There were two primary purposes behind national cultural soft power. First, it can improve national unity, promote innovation, and satisfy the demands of people's spiritual lives; and second, it can heighten competition in the struggle for comprehensive national power on the international stage.²⁷

At the scientific level, the first academic institution dedicated to the study of Chinese soft power was established by Hunan University in July 2009. This institution was known as China Center for Cultural Soft Power Studies. Since its foundation, the center has emphasized conducting soft power research within the context of China's vision, Chinese characteristics, Chinese style, and Chinese voice. In just four years, six seminars were held at the national level and two at the international level, aimed at formulating and advancing China's soft power characteristics. The establishment of research institutions and projects increased public awareness of the significance and necessity of soft power studies and produced theoretical frameworks for Chinese-specific soft power.²⁸

²⁴ Zhang, Weihong. "China's Cultural Future: From Soft Power to Comprehensive National Power." *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 16 (4) (2010) 383–402. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10286630903134300>.

²⁵ Grosse, Robert, Jonas Gamso, and Roy Nelson. "China's Rise, World Order, and the Implications for International Business." *Management International Review* 61, no. 1 (March 3, 2021): 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11575-020-00433-8>.

²⁶ Hal Brands and Jake Sullivan, *China Has Two Paths To Global Domination*. (MAY 22, 2020) <https://carnegieendowment.org/2020/05/22/china-has-two-paths-to-global-domination-pub-81908>.

²⁷ Weili Wang, 41.

²⁸ Sitti Marwah and Ratna Ervina. *The China Soft Power: Confucius Institute in Build Up One Belt One Road Initiative in Indonesia*. *Journal of Foreign Language studies, Linguistics, Education*,

The Xi Jinping era (2013 – present day)

Since taking office in 2013, the current Chinese President Xi Jinping has advanced the use of soft power. At the 12th collective learning conference of the Communist Party of China's Political Bureau at the end of 2014, President Xi emphasized that achieving the Twin Centenary Goals and the Chinese Dream of Great Rejuvenation requires enhancing the state's cultural soft power. At the beginning of the Xi Jinping era, in reference to China's understanding of cultural soft power, President Xi emphasized that all influences resulting from the cohesion, vitality, creativity and communication abilities of the nation's culture should be regarded as fundamental factors.²⁹ Moreover, President Xi concentrated on improving how China expresses its messages to the outside world. Just a few months after taking office, in August 2013, Xi put forth the idea of conveying China's stories (to the world) well. Since then, there has been a strong emphasis placed on the external communication of Chinese messages. For instance, in a speech given at the China Global Television Network's inauguration on December 31, 2016, Xi suggested that the relationship between China and the rest of the world is undergoing historic transformations. The world must learn more about China, and China must learn more about the world.³⁰

According to "The 2019 Asian Power Index," China came in the second place after the United States in terms of the region's cultural influence. According to "The Asian Economic Relations Index," which measures economic soft power, China came in the top place with 97.5 points. China ranked first with 96.2 points in the ranking of diplomatic influence in Asia. Japan came in second with 90.9 points. The United States with 79.6 was in the third spot. South Korea with 69.7 came fourth. Russia with 68.7, became the sixth. India with 68.5 points ranked seventh. China's influence among East Asian nations is steadily growing, demonstrating that they also benefit from China's rapid economic expansion.³¹

In fact, China has a fantastic opportunity to take on some global responsibilities due to former US President Trump's isolationist "America first" rhetoric. The first illustration of this can be seen in President Xi's address in Davos. Making large investments and launching the Belt and Road Initiative to further advance its relations with other nations across the world pave the way for China to build a golden age. According to surveys of public opinion that the Pew Research Center conducted in 25 countries in 2018, on average, 45% of people had positive views of China and 43% had negative views. The majority of the 12 nations have positive views of China. In Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, attitudes toward China tend to be more positive.³² The broad perception of China in the public sphere around the globe can be said to be complex. There are roughly equal numbers of people who think positively and negatively about China. As a result, it may be said that China's reputation in the world is not very clear. According to the PEW survey, a median of 70% of people worldwide think China will have a bigger influence on world events than it had. How does China express its messages to the outside world? Just 31% of people worldwide, on average, have positive views of the US. Russia has a rate of 42%, Germany

Literatures, and Cultures, .1, no 1 (2021) 23-37.

²⁹ Weili Wang, 42.

³⁰ Weili Wang, 43.

³¹ Zekeriyya Akdag, *The Role of Soft Power in China's Struggle for Hegemony*. PhD Thesis, Üsküdar Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi (2022). <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/2282202>.

³² Zekeriyya Akdag, 13.

at 35%, India at 27%, France at 22%, and England at 21%. China at 60% will therefore have a considerably greater impact in the future than it has ever had, according to the vast majority of people around the world.³³

China's soft power: conceptions and characteristics

Soft power occupies a significant area of contemporary research and debate by both scholars and politicians.³⁴ To understand the meaning and characteristics of China's soft power, it is necessary to focus on Chinese and non-Chinese interpretations objectively. As the famous thinker Michel Foucault puts it, 'power is everywhere' and 'comes from everywhere'. Power creates a reality that transcends politics and manifests in routine actions through the use of control, suppression, and denial techniques. In addition, Foucault acknowledges that discourses are created and controlled by the state, not necessarily in opposition to it.³⁵ The vast soft power of the Chinese state needs to be reevaluated and compared with the complex, contradictory, and varied manifestations of soft power produced both inside and outside of China. The following discussion examines the meaning and conceptualization of soft power in the discourse and knowledge of Chinese policymakers and scholars; it also compares them in light of Nye's understanding of the concept.

Along with China's "peaceful rise", debates over soft and hard power have emerged in China. Scholars have conducted substantial research on the concept of "soft power," mostly in Beijing and Shanghai academic circles. These studies have both developed and challenged Joseph Nye's concept of soft power. Joseph Nye always emphasizes the ability to influence, persuade, and the ability to debate. Nye also articulates that the development of national institutions, values, cultures and policies as the influence of the state in the development of soft power. He accentuates the importance of the legitimacy of the state and governmental institutions in shaping how others perceive soft power. Furthermore, he views the political system, transparency, corruption, and domestic human rights situation as important factors in promoting state soft power through the lens of others. Efforts have been made to adapt Nye's "soft power" concept into the Chinese context by several well-known Chinese scholars, including Yan Shuetong, Men Honghua, and Kang Xiaoguang. However, they could not agree on what aspect of soft power was most important.³⁶

China's soft power discourse has mainly been founded on two major schools of thought. The dominant view among prominent sociologists and philosophers in China is that "the core of soft power is culture," echoing the concept initially put forth by Wang Huning in the 1990s. Many viewpoints, maintained by a few international relations experts, do not disregard the value of culture but instead focus on how soft power resources are used. They conclude that political power is the core of soft power³⁷ According to Yan Xuetong, political power is the most effective component of the concept of "soft-power". Men Honghua believes that China's concept of "soft power" rests on China's own culture, ideas, and development model.³⁸

³³ Zakeriyya Akdag, 14.

³⁴ Li, Mingjiang, 288-289.

³⁵ Bruno, Greg C. Blessings from Beijing: Inside China's Soft-Power War on Tibet. University Press of New England, 2018.

³⁶ Hongyi Lai, Yiyi Lu . China's Soft Power and International Relations. Routledge, 2012.

³⁷ Bonnie S. Glaser and Melissa Murphy, Soft power with Chinese characteristics the ongoing debate. (2008) http://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/090310_chinesesoftware__chap2.pdf.

³⁸ Bonnie S. Glaser and Melissa Murphy, 13-14.

According to Yu Xintian, the main proponent of the School of Culture, soft power encompasses thoughts, ideas, and principles, as well as institutions and policies that are all rooted in a country's culture and cannot be separated from it. Yu, the former head of the Shanghai Institute for International Studies (SIIS), argues that "the more modern the ideology, the more people accept it and the more likely it is to build the country's soft power."³⁹ The "culture and values" school of thought has been emphasized by the Chinese leadership as an essential component of soft power discourse. The use of the neo-Confucian idea of "harmonious society" by former President Hu Jintao is an example of how the Chinese elite, a holdover of imperial Chinese political culture, recognizes the symbolic power of highbrow intellectual discourse tailored to political ends. President Xi Jinping announced recommendations to better convey China's "soft power" message and "advance China's cultural soft power by disseminating modern Chinese ideals". The "China dream" with its many slogans, has been officially recognized as a key strategy for promoting such cultural soft power.⁴⁰

Although the Chinese leadership seems to support the culture school, not all academics agree that it is the foundation of soft power. Although their views do not deny the value of culture, they emphasize that the essence of soft power is not a state's culture or attractiveness. They think that a state's political power and power of manipulation play significant role in the formation of soft power. Professor Yan Xuetong of Qinghua University, the leading proponent of this school, claims that "to reinforce the soft power of China, the critical issue is to strengthen political power. Starting with politics is not the same thing as starting with culture." According to Yan and his colleague Xu Jin, soft power consists of three components: international attractiveness, international mobilization capability, and domestic mobilization capability.⁴¹

Chinese scholars and leaders typically take historical and ideational factors into consideration when formulating and defining soft power, but they disagree with Joseph Nye's emphasis on and promotion of democracy, individual freedom, and openness in culture as fundamental components of soft power. They think Joseph Nye's assumptions about the concept of soft power are profoundly flawed.⁴² Meng Honghua, a professor at the CPC Central Party School believes that, when examining China's soft power, the theory needs to be enriched to fit the Chinese reality. The Chinese approach to soft power is holistic; the domestic and foreign policy parts of its development are envisaged as an organic whole. This distinguishes China's soft power argument from Nye's, who viewed soft power primarily as a means of improving the international status of the United States. For instance, the notion of developing a 'harmonious society' at home and a 'harmonious world' internationally is viewed as providing a complete framework for the continued development of China's soft power. The majority of Chinese experts concur that soft power must be strengthened both domestically and internationally. This can be done by making Chinese culture, as well as its economic and political values, attractive to both Chinese and foreign audiences.⁴³ According to Hu Angang, a professor at Qinghua University and

³⁹ Bonnie S. Glaser and Melissa Murphy, 15.

⁴⁰ Paola Voci, Luo Hui. Screening China's soft power. (2017), file:///C:/Users/khetam721/Downloads/10.4324_9781315617930-1%20(1).pdf.

⁴¹ Bonnie S. Glaser and Melissa Murphy, 17-18.

⁴² Nye, Joseph S., "Soft Power and American Foreign Policy." *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (June 1, 2004): 255-70. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20202345>.

⁴³ Edward C. Chow, Andrew C. Kuchins, Jeffrey D. Bean and Stephen Flanagan. *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States Competition and Cooperation in the Developing*

advisor to the Chinese government, China's initiative to promote a harmonious society is “more influential and alluring than American democracy and human rights. What is soft power? This is China’s greatest soft power”.⁴⁴

China's concept of soft power is made up of three attractive qualities: benevolence, brilliance, and beauty which are quite different from the ways Americans perceive soft power. First, Americans state that soft power is hegemonic in culture, but Chinese conceptions of soft power is primarily cooperative and peaceful. Second, the concept of brilliance is the basis of Chinese soft power. The economic and growth model is used by China, which allows it to withstand the global financial crisis while also assisting in the post-crisis recovery of the global economy, which is a prime example of Chinese ingenuity. The efforts made by China to emancipate millions of its citizens from terrible poverty are another example of its ingenuity. In addition, this conception has faithfully followed the five principles of peaceful coexistence and non-interference as a major growing power, refraining from meddling in the domestic affairs of other countries. Third, China's distinct development model is a representation of the beauty of Chinese soft power. Regardless of the differences in its cultural, political and economic systems, it attracts people from all over the world. Chinese soft power is built on cultural and civilizational coordinates.

Chinese soft power, according to Hongying and Yeh-Chung, has clearly distinguished itself from Western and particularly American conceptions. They point out that while Chinese concepts of soft power are based on traditional Chinese cultural values, American ideas of soft power are based on contemporary cultural traits. Whereas Chinese soft power is built mostly on the attraction of economic and developmental models, American soft power promotes liberal political and civic values.⁴⁵

China’s Soft-Power: Policy and Resources

In order to consolidate its soft power, China's top leadership has pursued a variety of policies, strategies, comprehensive and multidimensional ways to develop cultural and socioeconomic resources. China's strategy and policy are not only to promote cultural capabilities and characteristics but also economic and trade initiatives, including regional cooperation and development strategies at various levels and dimensions. Under Xi, China has bombarded the world with a welter of new initiatives: “the Chinese dream,” “the Asia-Pacific dream,” “the Silk Road Economic Belt,” “the Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road,” “a new type of major-country relations,” and many others. However, accurate estimates are not available regarding the financial resources that China spends on soft power development projects. Chinese spending on soft power development initiatives is estimated to be above \$10 billion each year.⁴⁶

1) China’s Educational Resources

China has gradually become one of the leading study destinations for thousands of international students who flock to the country for undergraduate, master's and doctoral studies. According to data given by the Institute of International Education, China was the most popular destination for international students in 2017. Although a large percentage of

World. [online] N.W., Washington, D.C: the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), (2009). https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs_public/legacy_fi.

⁴⁴ Edward C. Chow , Andrew C. Kuchins , Jeffrey D. Bean and Stephen Flanagan, 29.

⁴⁵ Mirza, Muhammad Nadeem, Hussain Abbas, 42.

⁴⁶ David Shambaugh, China’s Soft-Power Push: The Search for Respect. *Foreign Affairs*, 94(4), (2015) 99–107.

these international students undertake self-financed studies, the China Scholarship Council (CSC) offers scholarships to international students who choose China as a destination to further their undergraduate or postgraduate studies. According to data released by the China Scholarship Commission, more than 440,000 international students were studying in China in 2016. These students came from 205 different countries. Most of these students were from South Korea, Thailand, Pakistan, the United States, Russia, Japan, Indonesia, Kazakhstan and India.⁴⁷

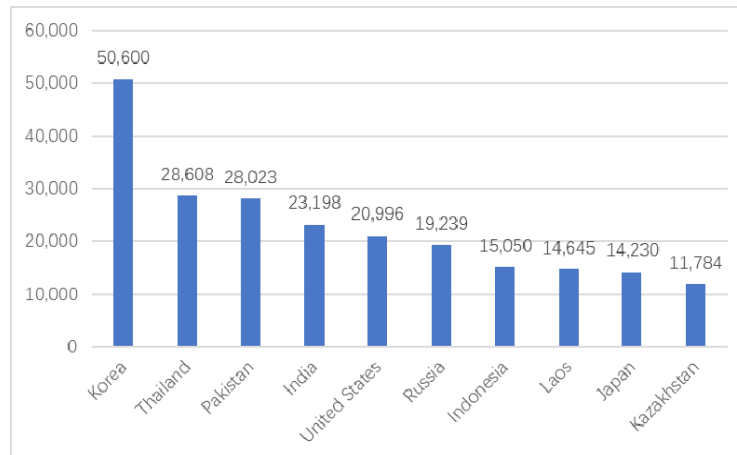


Figure 1. Top 10 Countries in China for Studying Abroad in 2018 (Unit: People).⁴⁸

An important shift in the distribution of international students in China can be seen in the fact that around 64.9% (317,200) of the students in this survey were from countries that are part of the Belt and Road Project. In 2017, 180 different nations represented the 58,600 international students who received scholarships from the Chinese government or 11.3% of all international students. In a document published by the Ministry of Education in February 2016, it is suggested to create a network combining local and foreign students and experts to spread information about developing the “fatherland,” putting all overseas Chinese students in the role of “people-to-people ambassadors of the possibility”. The emphasis on using international students as a tool for public diplomacy and a source of soft power coincides with record numbers of Chinese students going abroad and foreign students coming to China.⁴⁹

2) Confucius Institute

Confucius was an educator and philosopher in ancient China. He is the founder of Confucianism, and many of his thoughts have greatly influenced the Chinese people for more than 2,000 years. It is a symbol of Chinese culture and its name has entered English dictionaries. The Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China established the Confucius Institute to teach the Chinese language and promote Chinese culture abroad.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ning, Xiaohua, and Guotao Ma. “Experience of Foreign Higher Education Service Trade and Its Enlightenment to China.” *World Journal of Educational Research* 7 (1), (2020) 130. <https://doi.org/10.22158/wjer.v7n1p130>.

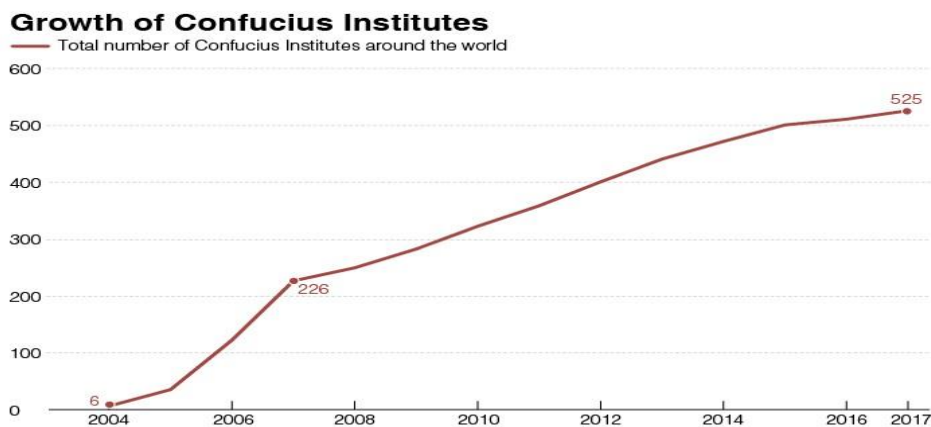
⁴⁸ Ning, Xiaohua, and Guotao Ma, 138.

⁴⁹ Bislev, Ane Katrine. “Student-to-Student Diplomacy: Chinese International Students as a Soft-Power Tool.” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 46, no. 2 (October 30, 2017): 81–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261704600204>.

⁵⁰ Wang, Hongying, and Yeh-Chung Lu. “The Conception of Soft Power and Its Policy Implications: A Comparative Study of China and Taiwan.” *Journal of Contemporary China* 17, no. 56 (June 19, 2008): 425–47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670560802000191>.

The Confucius Institute was established in Seoul in 2014. In less than 13 years, more than 1,000 Confucius Institutes and 500 Confucius classrooms have spread throughout 142 nations and regions of the world. China has adopted the experiences of England, France, Germany, Spain, and other nations in promoting the national language, one of which is to establish the Confucian Institute, a nonprofit educational institution aimed at teaching Mandarin and spreading Chinese culture. According to Ma Jianfei, Deputy Director General of the Confucian Institute, there are 516 Confucius Institutes and 1076 Confucius Classes in primary and secondary schools spread across 142 countries and territories, with more than 7 million alumni. Moreover, 100 million people have taken part in cultural events hosted by the Confucius Institute.⁵¹

Chinese diplomacy had five key objectives in the post-Cold War era: introduce China to the outside world, establish a desired image of the state that issued responses to distorted overseas reports about China, enhance the international environment around China, and influence foreign policy decisions. The establishment of the Confucius Institute by the Chinese government should be understood in this context, where the stated goal of the CCP is to strive domestically to build a harmonious society and a peaceful world in a global context with international prosperity. If you have been teaching Chinese in the short term, the Confucius Institute aims to spread aspects of Chinese culture overseas in the long term.⁵²



Confucius Institutes: The growth of China's controversial cultural branch.⁵³

3) Belt and Road Initiative-Vehicle of China's Soft Power

The rise of China's economic power and political influence in world politics indicates the type of power that China intends to transform. This behavior of China in international relations is consistent with the concept of soft power presented by Joseph Nye. According to Nye, a state's attraction due to its international reputation and consequent capacity to advance its interests through ideology and culture comprise soft power. One of China's key

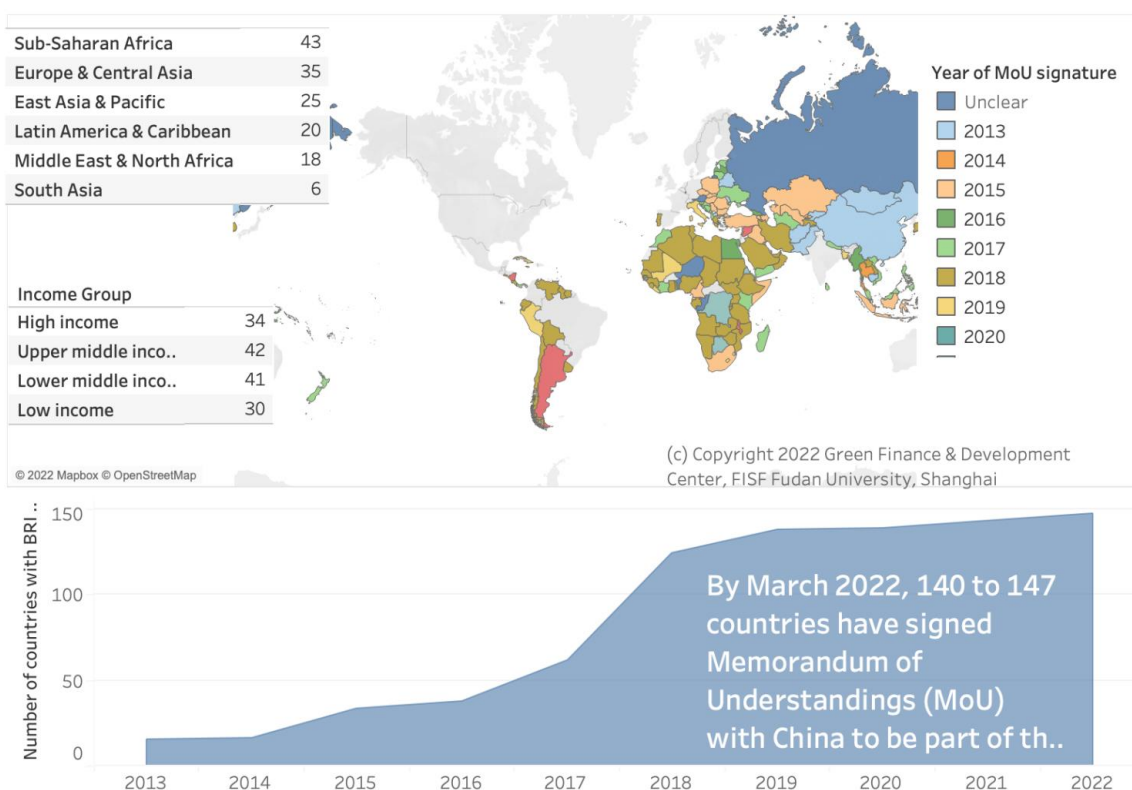
⁵¹ Sitti Marwah and Ratna Ervina. *The China Soft Power: Confucius Institute in Build Up One Belt One Road Initiative in Indonesia*. (2021) file:///C:/Users/khetam721/Downloads/23035-56773-1-SM.pdf (Accessed: 1 April 2023).

⁵² Kurlantzick, Joshua. *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World*. Yale University Press, 2007.

⁵³ Pratik Jakhar. *Confucius Institutes: The growth of China's controversial cultural branch*. (2019), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-49511231>.

goals in international politics is to try to export its successful development model, which scholars have credited with effectively rescuing hundreds of millions of Chinese from extreme poverty to other developing countries. The ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is seen as a key component of China's soft power foreign policy tool, which aims to increase China's influence in international politics. The BRI project aims at increasing interregional and intercontinental connectivity through a connecting system of roads, railways, pipelines and ports. China gave the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank \$50 billion since its inception, making up half of the bank's initial capital, in order to finance a portion of major international projects. Also, Beijing committed \$40 billion to the Silk Road Fund, \$25 billion to the Maritime Silk Road, and an additional \$41 billion to the New Development Bank (founded by the BRICS nations of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa).⁵⁴ China can help establish markets for its goods in the long run, increase the use of Chinese currency, reduce excess industrial capacity in the medium term, and generally position itself to prolong its economic prosperity by using the BRI to invest in infrastructure. This is rather self-explanatory because infrastructure improvement and development facilitate trade and communication while also promoting economic growth, which opens up new markets and widens existing ones.⁵⁵

Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative



Map 1: Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Islam, Md. Nazmul. Power of Bonding and Non-Western Soft Power Strategy in Iran: Comparing China and India's Engagement. Springer Nature, 2022.

⁵⁵ Bush, John W., "China's Soft Power in the Context of the Belt and Road Initiative: Three Case Studies" (2021). UVM Honors College Senior Theses. 393. <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/hcoltheses/393>.

⁵⁶ Christoph Nedopli., "Countries of the Belt and Road Initiative". (2023) https://greenfdc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Nedopil-2023_China-Belt-and-Road-Initiative-BRI-Investment-Report-2022.pdf.

The underlying message from the Chinese government regarding this project is that although this enormous idea of BRI was conceptualized by China, it is a project that can guarantee equal opportunities for member states all over the world. In other words, BRI is not a Chinese project, but a project belonging to the international community as a whole. Still, the conceptualization of the BRI project reflects part of an ambitious soft power strategy that could help China consolidate Beijing's goals and capabilities. Through the project, China aims to establish new ties and strengthen existing bilateral relations. Since 2013, the BRI project has ceased to be just a plan and has turned into a project being implemented by member states in different parts of the world. In this context, globally, it has signed Belt and Road cooperation agreements with “more than 140 states (defined here as countries that have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China on PMU), two-thirds of which are home to China. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has a significant impact on Chinese aid and overall cooperation with other developing countries. "This amounts to 62% of countries in the Caribbean; 67% of South American countries; 42% of Central American countries; 100% of countries in the Middle East; 97% of Asia (India is not signed up to the BRI); 57% of Oceania (Pacific); 73% of Africa, and 57% of Europe, see the following figure below".⁵⁷



Belt and Road Initiative: The Progress Made in the Belt and Road Initiative's Five Key Goals.⁵⁸

4) COVID-19, the Health Silk Road, and China's Soft Power

For several years, China has been one of the major contributors to global development, principally in the context of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, many of these efforts have been largely overlooked, mainly on Western media platforms and in traditional foreign aid rhetoric. China's foreign aid is a political and fundamental component of Beijing's foreign policy. The bulk of Chinese aid is not traditional aid but a mixture of concessional loans and other forms of non-monetary assistance, including the development of various infrastructure projects that use Chinese labor and technology. As the virus spread to other parts of the world in early 2020, China activated global humanitarian aid, this time under the full scrutiny of the international media.⁵⁹ China has moved swiftly to shift the focus from being the source of the virus to the one providing solutions and has also sought to turn the crisis into a geo-economic

⁵⁷ Islam, Md. Nazmul, 85.

⁵⁸ Tisna Tini., The Progress Made in the Belt and Road Initiative's Five Key Goals. (2019) <https://www.ottawalife.com/article/the-progress-made-in-the-belt-and-road-initiatives-five-key-goals?c=86>.

⁵⁹ Islam, Md. Nazmul, 89.

opportunity. Beijing has used mask diplomacy and other soft power techniques throughout the process.⁶⁰ In describing the nature of China's humanitarian response during the pandemic, the Chinese government described it as "the most intensive and comprehensive humanitarian relief operation since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949". Indeed, this is not China's first humanitarian response to this status, considering that China has played important humanitarian roles during other pandemic outbreaks such as SARS (2003), tsunami (2004), the Nepal earthquake (2015), and the Ebola pandemic (2014 and 2018).⁶¹

By sharing information and knowledge, providing medical supplies, sending out medical teams, and delivering vaccines, China has used the COVID-19 problem as a chance to increase its soft power. According to decision-makers and ruling elites, China's soft power has marginally increased, and its geopolitical influence in Mainland Southeast Asia has grown. China has received praise and appreciation from the neighboring states for successfully containing the pandemic epidemic, providing COVID-19 help, and advancing vaccine diplomacy. Nonetheless, there are some worries about China's strategic objectives.⁶²

According to statistics made public by Chinese customs, China exported medical products worth \$2 billion in the first 10 days of April 2020. Chinese companies, major in the production of medical supplies, have also cooperated with more than 100 countries. According to Mwangi (2020), China has already delivered thousands of protective suits, over a million test kits, and 5.4 million facemasks to African nations. In order to fight the COVID-19 epidemic, China had also sent medical teams to several African nations, including Algeria, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Burkina Faso, Sudan, Djibouti, and Côte d'Ivoire. Furthermore, to effectively address the coronavirus outbreak throughout the continent, medical professionals from more than 30 African nations attended webinars with their Chinese counterparts. According to Lina Benabdallah, Covid-19 had presented an opportunity for China to show that it was not just a product provider but also an authority on pandemic control and global health. The aforementioned facts demonstrate that China is quickly becoming a prominent humanitarian aid provider, a role that used to be exclusively held by the United States.⁶³

5) International Media

China has been expanding its media services internationally as part of a plan to improve its image internationally. Despite China's advancements in both economics and international affairs, foreign audiences still have a very limited, inaccurate, and biased view of China. China is portrayed negatively in news reports from both major print publications and news networks. China was portrayed as either challenging American principles or being a threat to American interests in four major U.S. television news networks' coverage

⁶⁰ Zahra Beg, Junior Researcher., "The Health Silk Road": Implications for the EU under Covid-19. (2020) <https://eias.org/publications/op-ed/the-health-silk-road-implications-for-the-eu-under-covid-19/>.

⁶¹ Islam, Md. Nazmul, 90.

⁶² Amit Gupta, Panda Power? Chinese Soft Power in the Era of COVID-19. https://ndupress.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/prism/prism_10-1/prism_10-1_40-56_Gupta.pdf?ver=Rvf3hjGeVbEE8rXeMgfIyA%3d%3d.

⁶³ Gauttam, Priya, Bawa Kartar Singh, and Jaspal Kaur. "COVID-19 and Chinese Global Health Diplomacy: Geopolitical Opportunity for China's Hegemony?" *Millennial Asia* 11, no. 3 (October 12, 2020): 318–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0976399620959771>.

of the country: ABC, CBS, NBC, and CNN.⁶⁴ China was described as "an aggressive, brutal, and dangerous place" in four major American print newspapers' coverage of the country: The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal. The unfavourable coverage and criticism of the 2008 Olympics in Beijing by Western media served as a wake-up call for Chinese policymakers, who realized the urgent need to promote China's stories proactively. As Sun (2014) summarized:

China needs to reclaim the 'discursive right' to tell its own stories, rather than let the West monopolize the global narrative of China.⁶⁵

The establishment of Chinese-owned international media outlets has enabled China not only to reach a wider global audience but also to showcase its positive largely underreported global initiatives in peace and development. In this regard, the state-run media outlet Xinhua has expanded rapidly, opening branches in 170 international bureaus with the goal of establishing 200 such bureaus by the year 2020. Moreover, China Daily and Global Times provide coverage of China's development initiatives across the globe, and their publications are available in English to a wider audience. In December 2016, the state-owned television network CCTV underwent a significant makeover and is now known as the China Global Television Network (CGTN). There are six media broadcasting channels.⁶⁶

Finally, Chinese thinking about the sources of soft power includes the three factors of soft power that Nye identified: culture, national institutions and values, and the content and approach of foreign policy. However, in terms of the first two elements, their emphasis differs from Nye's. Nye's analysis of US soft power emphasizes current American pop culture, whereas Chinese analysis of Chinese soft power reinforces traditional Chinese culture. While Nye highlights the attraction of American political institutions and principles, such as democracy and human rights, Chinese observers focus on the attraction of the Chinese economic development model. Furthermore, Nye has concentrated on enhancing the content and presentation of American foreign policy in order to increase the country's appeal abroad, in contrast to Chinese analysts who place great importance on the domestic foundation of soft power broadly defined, such as national coherence and government legitimacy.

Conclusion

Soft power is the ability to influence and attract others. Since soft power depends on soft image and international status, China's soft strategy strives to increase its soft power through public policy, culture promotion, and economic diplomacy. China concentrates on its soft power in order to reach its ultimate objective of rejuvenating the nation. Along with its more traditional goals, China is also emphasizing achieving domestic attractiveness, appeasing popular nationalism, and ensuring the legitimacy of its political regime. Traditional Chinese culture and the Chinese economic development model are the main subjects for debate in China when it comes to the factors that make the country so attractive abroad.

⁶⁴ Yacong Yuan., *Soft Power of International News Media: American Audiences' Perceptions of China's Country Image Mediated by Trust in News*. PhD Thesis, Philip Merrill College of Journalism (2017)
https://drum.lib.umd.edu/bitstream/handle/1903/19797/Yuan_umd_0117E_18208.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

⁶⁵ Yacong Yuan., 87.

⁶⁶ Islam, Md. Nazmul, 92.

The paper examined Chinese soft power models and their implications in relation to the Chinese foreign policy-driven control mechanism, whereby the Chinese state influences trade and production decisions rather than private companies and banks. Unlike China, an effective part of US soft power is produced by civil society, not by the US government—universities, Hollywood institutions and national culture. In light of the arguments provided in this study, the Chinese soft power model is different from the Western form of soft power. Some scholars and experts argue that China will develop intellectual confidence in the next 20 years and can more effectively dominate the economic, political, and military spheres, despite the fact that the effective use of Chinese power is not without challenges. Others should follow China's instructions rather than China listening to those of others. The world is already witnessing the early stages of China-dominated international politics and the soft power model.

It is too early to discuss the cosmic concepts and models China is presenting to the globe because it is currently only interested in its own welfares. The proposition of economic and commercial interests is the basic principle of any exchange, and it means that China, which flies on this principle, will also try to get more money and benefits from the other side. Nonetheless, this course of China's development creates the widespread notion that China must either develop a concept for a different global model for the United States or accept the current state of the international system as a non-revisionist state. Yet with its Belt and Road program, which travels from China to Europe via Central Asia and the Mediterranean, China is delivering a very strong message that contains implicit theoretical and practical ideological challenges to Washington's and the West's vision.

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