

## A NEW FACE OF CHINA: SHARP POWER STRATEGY AND ITS GLOBAL EFFECTS

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**Abstract:** *China's rapid emergence as a great power in the world has not only influenced the actions of other countries, but also introduced new concepts to academic discourses. One of these concepts is sharp power, which has entered academia to theoretically explain China and Russia's rise. More particularly, China's actions to consolidate its position as a great power and to restore its image, have given rise to this concept. Its influence in other countries is intangible in nature and tools, but it has great tangible effects. At first, this article seeks to examine sharp power as a new concept and explain China's influential behaviours. Second, it will study the rationale of China's sharp power and then scrutinize its indicators in the world. The paper assumes that China has infiltrated the world by using intangible but powerful tools and is consolidating its foothold in different countries.*

**Keywords:** *China, Sharp Power, Hard Power, Soft Power, Influence, Strategy*

**Rezumat:** *O nouă față a Chinei: strategia „sharp power” și efectele sale globale. Ascensiunea rapidă a Chinei ca mare putere nu numai că a influențat acțiunile altor țări, dar a introdus și noi concepte în discursurile academice. Unul dintre acestea este „sharp power”, care a intrat în circuitul științific și a explicat din punct de vedere teoretic ascensiunea Rusiei și a Chinei. Noul concept, apărut după 2014, se aplică inclusiv la acțiunile Imperiului Celest de consolidare a imaginii și a poziției sale de mare putere. Influența acestui stat asupra altor țări este greu sesizabilă atât ca natură, cât și ca instrumente, dar are efecte tangibile mari. În introducere, este prezentat noul concept și aplicabilitatea sa la politicile de influență ale Chinei. Ulterior, articolul va studia rațiunea folosirii acestei politici de către China și va analiza influența acestui tip de politică în lume. În final, autorii încearcă să demonstreze că acest tip de politică*

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*a Chinei s-a manifestat deja în mod evident în lume, folosind instrumente intangibile, dar puternice, ajutând astfel la consolidarea poziției Imperiului Celest în diferite țări.*

## INTRODUCTION

Power has long played a central role in the dynamics of both domestic and international systems. Dahl defines power as “A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.”<sup>1</sup> Traditionally, the physical aspects of power dominated discussions, but its interpretation has evolved over time due to the practices of international actors and scholarly efforts. In today's world, Chinese foreign policy is redefining power through the concept of ‘sharp power,’ which Beijing views as a potent tool for extending its global influence. Sharp power is a relatively recent addition to the discourse of International Relations, largely emerging from the experiences of non-democratic and authoritarian regimes. Though this concept is often associated with China, it has also found relevance in describing Russia's foreign policy conduct since the mid-2010s. The annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 marked a significant turning point, sparking heightened interest in the study of ‘hybrid warfare’ and laying the early foundations for the concept of sharp power in contemporary international politics.<sup>2</sup>

Various terms and frameworks have been used to describe Russia's approach to global influence, including ‘coercive diplomacy,’ ‘active measures,’ and the ‘Gerasimov Doctrine.’<sup>3</sup> Collectively, these describe the complex and dynamic nature of Russia's global behaviour and contributed to the conceptualization of ‘sharp power’ as a distinctive mode of influence in international relations. Common elements across these frameworks encompass propaganda, disinformation, cyber operations, and influence campaigns on social media, energy and economic leverage, support for extremist political movements, espionage, and covert operations.

Nevertheless, it is China that academia designates as an exemplar of sharp power in its international behaviour. China's aspirations for global economic

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<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Dahl, *The Concept of Power*, in “Behavioral Science”, 1957, Vol. 2, no. 3, pp. 202-203.

<sup>2</sup> Andis Kudors, *Russia and Latvia A Case of Sharp Power*, New York, Routledge, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Ryan C. Maness, Brandon Valeriano, *Russia's Coercive Diplomacy: Energy, Cyber and Maritime Policy as New Source of Power*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; Olga Bertelsen, Jan Goldman, *Russian Active Measures*, New York City, Columbia University Press, 2021, *passim*; Oscar Jonsson, *The Russian Understanding of War: Blurring the Lines between War and Peace*, Washington D.C. George Town University Press, 2019, *passim*.

dominance and political influence necessitated a re-evaluation of the concept of power. As the prevailing international order constrained the use of military might by states in pursuance of their objectives, China developed sharp power as a strategy to enhance its global reach.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the concept of 'sharp power' was coined in the West to describe China's disruptive influence on traditional power dynamics in the international arena. It lies in between hard power and soft power, using tactics that manipulate information. China's behaviour in the context of sharp power is neither so bullying as to require the use of military force nor so peaceful as to be placed in the realm of soft power. Hence, China's approach has shifted from attraction-based soft power to penetration-based sharp power. It wants to expand global influence by distracting and manipulating information, rectifying its image and undermining adversaries.

This study seeks to examine China's actions and strategies on the international stage, particularly within the framework of sharp power. It seeks to thoroughly examine various facets of China's foreign policy conduct, shedding light on its multifaceted dimensions. The study addresses some key questions: how is the nature of sharp power defined within the context of China's foreign policy, what motivates China's emphasis on sharp power, and what tools and indicators are employed in wielding this form of power? Through a descriptive-analytical approach, the research posits that China employs sharp power to manipulate information, engage in self-censorship, sway public opinion, and take retaliatory measures. The primary motivation behind this approach is to weaken US hegemony and bolster the international standing of the ruling regime. China's sharp power indicators manifest in the realms of media, politics, academia, and the economic sector.

## SHARP POWER

Sharp power is a concept that has emerged in the West to describe foreign policies and behaviours of China and Russia in recent years. Christopher Walker and Jessica Ludwig coined the term for the first time in 2017 to describe how authoritarian regimes opt for the manipulation of culture, education systems, and media in other countries.<sup>5</sup> However, being a new concept and due to its novel

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<sup>4</sup> Andrea Benvenuti et al., *China's Foreign Policy: The Emergency of a Great Power*, New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 175.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Walker, Jessica Ludwig, *From 'Soft Power' to 'Sharp Power': Rising Authoritarian Influence in the Democratic World*, in *Sharp Power: Rising Authoritarian Influence*, 2017, p. 12.

application, sharp power is typically confused with soft, hard, and smart power. It is defined as the ability to influence others to achieve the desired results not through attraction or persuasion but through distraction and manipulation of information. The practices of countries such as China and Russia that have no aspect of persuasion to influence democratic societies as well as creating narrative are the essence of sharp power.<sup>6</sup> The effort to divide or replace ideas, values, and norms or to spread the debates is a kind of narrative.<sup>7</sup>

Joseph Nye, however, sees sharp power as an old concept in International Relations that has been used in the past by two vying blocs during the Cold War. According to him, sharp power is a kind of information warfare and the use of fake information for malicious purposes. The goal is to conquer the minds and hearts of the target countries. Soft power pursues the same goal, but sharp power skilfully manipulates the target country or society and tries to impress the audience by destroying facts and reshaping them through fake information. Nye also believes that the real goal of sharp power is to shape public consciousness and the minds and views of leaders worldwide, as well as to undermine western democratic processes.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, one of the topics discussed in the definition and explanation of sharp power is the controversy over its distinction and similarities with the concepts of hard power and soft power. Although Nye considers sharp power as an offshoot of hard power that seeks to manipulate information, many researchers distinguish between the two concepts. Hard power is a realistic tool for states' interaction. This type of power is exercised primarily through military and sometimes through economic means. Nye argues that sharp power is a kind of hard power because it uses coercive means to force states to do something favourable. States use this kind of power by either disseminating false information or manipulating it for hostile purposes.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, in the context of hard power, the actors use military tools to achieve their goals, but a state that uses sharp power acts in a way that is not

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr, *China's Soft and Sharp Power*, in <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-soft-and-sharp-power-by-joseph-s--nye-2018-01> (Accessed on 15.10.2022).

<sup>7</sup> Olga Leonova, *Sharp Power: The New Technology of Influence in a Global World*, in "World Economy and International Relations", Vol. 63, 2019, no. 2, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr, *How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power*, in <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-soft-power>, (Accessed on 17.11.2022).

<sup>9</sup> Jingkai Shao, *Exploring China's 'Sharp Power': Conceptual Deficiencies and Alternatives*, in "Waseda University", Vol. 6, 2019, no. 2, p. 133.

clear and can be easily denied. For example, during elections, spreading fake news on social media without being identified can impact the political process in a rival country. Manipulation of electoral results may undermine confidence in democracy. When states can easily deny allegations of such interference, it becomes challenging for the target state to respond by military force. Thus, sharp power is distinguished from hard power because it is intangible.<sup>10</sup>

Walker and Ludwig, as proponents of the concept, define sharp power as a form of information warfare being waged by authoritarian states, principally China and the Russian Federation, to shape public perceptions and behaviour around the world, using tools that exploit the asymmetry of openness between their restrictive systems and democratic societies.<sup>11</sup> Authoritarian regimes aim to rebuild their image in the democratic world and undermine democratic attractions. They use sharp power, a subset of hard power that employs intangible tools. Unlike soft power, sharp power incurs a penal consequence in addition to soft penetration. While soft power is a Western and a liberal approach to expanding influence, sharp power is used by authoritarian regimes to extend their influence.<sup>12</sup> In the method of action, too, sharp power is different from soft power. Sharp power is more of a reactionary aspect that aims to manipulate and revise existing information about the country. Soft power, on the other hand, has an action aspect and is used to promote values in target countries. When a country utilizes soft power, it uses reward instead of persuasion or coercion. This characteristic marks the major difference between soft power and hard power. Furthermore, because the implementation of sharp power and soft power is similar and both share common tools, the boundary between the two is subtle. However, the main indicator that distinguishes sharp power from soft power is compulsion. Soft power relies on attraction, not coercion, but sharp power relies on censure, creating distractions, and manipulating information.<sup>13</sup>

Sharp power is also different from smart power. Smart power combines components of hard and soft power and uses them simultaneously.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ethan Greene, *Sharp Power: How Foreign Election Interference is Changing the Global Balance of Power*, in "WWU Honors College Senior Projects", 2020, p. 5-6.

<sup>11</sup> Andrea Benvenuti et al, *passim*.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr, *How Sharp Power*, *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> June Teufel Dreyer, *Roundtable on Sharp Power, Soft Power, and the Challenge of Democracy: A Report from the 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Association for Chinese Studies*, in "American Journal of Chinese Studies", Vol. 25, 2018, no. 2, p. 152-153.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr, *Security and Smart Power*, in "American Behavioral Scientist", Vol. 51, 2008, no. 9, p. 1352.

Nevertheless, in sharp power, while the tangible tools of hard power are ignored, coercion and subversive destruction are used.

### CHINA'S SHARP POWER: RATIONALE AND PURPOSES

To gain an understanding of Chinese sharp power, it's essential to explore significant historical instances, as some elements of this power can be traced back to historical practices in China. From the ancient tributary system to the enduring teachings of Confucianism and the spread of the Chinese script, China's influence has transcended its borders for centuries. The tributary system of China was a diplomatic arrangement where neighbouring states recognized China's supremacy by offering tribute to the Chinese emperor. In exchange, they gained access to trade and protection. This system maintained peaceful relations, spread Chinese culture, and reinforced China's dominance in East Asia, lasting for centuries under various dynasties, reaching its zenith during the Ming Dynasty, particularly under the rule of the third emperor, Yongle (1360–1424).<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, the ancient Silk Road served as a vehicle not only for trade but also for cultural exchange, allowing China to disseminate its culture, philosophy, and technology to neighbouring regions. Additionally, the voyages of Admiral Zheng He and the enduring relevance of ancient strategies like *The Art of War* demonstrate how China's strategies of influence have persisted over time.<sup>16</sup>

China's sharp power strategies diverge from conventional soft power tactics by aiming to persuade and manipulate global audiences, encouraging them to try out such political and value systems in their local communities. This approach extends to infiltrating Western democracies, Latin America, the US, Central and Eastern Europe, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, targeting influential figures and elite students. The list includes wide range of influential politicians, academicians, journalists and retired diplomats. Incumbent and ex-government officials and elite students are also spotlighted by Chinese sharp power.<sup>17</sup> Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has accelerated its efforts to shape public opinion through

<sup>15</sup> Asim Doğan, *Hegemony with Chinese Characteristics. From the Tributary System to the Belt and Road Initiative*, New York, Routledge, 2021, p. 56.

<sup>16</sup> Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, translated by Thomas Cleary, Colorado, Shambhala Publications, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Roman Štěpař, *China's Sharp Power: How China Seeks to Influence and Coerce its Neighbors*, (Master Thesis, Charles University Faculty of Social Sciences, 2020), p. 6. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/bitstream/handle/20.500.11956/118653/120360972.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1>.

manipulation and censorship, with evidence of penetration in various sectors. Notable examples include espionage recruitment within American intelligence agencies, leveraging economic power to stifle free speech in the National Basketball Association controversy, and compromising data security in the Marriott breach. Cyber-attacks on the US Navy further reveal China's persistent use of cyber means to undermine American national security.<sup>18</sup>

Given the significance of China's sharp power, the question arises as why a country like China resorts to this power. One reason is that the country has little to say about soft power and has failed to act. China has everything a country needs to bolster soft power, but it has not made significant progress. In this respect, it is lagging behind not only the US but also its neighbours, including Japan and South Korea.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, exercising hard power comes at a high political expense. The world is sensitive about resorting to hard power for achieving goals and securing interests. At the same time, using hard power is also economically very costly, whereas, new information and communication technologies have made the use of sharp power both cheaper and reduced the possibility of retaliation.<sup>20</sup>

Another reason that has drawn China's attention to sharp power is the political culture of the CCP. Andreas Fulda believes that China's sharp power is not a novel issue. This approach has been the focus of Communist leaders since 1935, before the communist revolution. After the establishment of PRC, the CCP used double policies of 'rule by bribery' and 'rule by fear' under the united front method to reinforce the regime. The former was implemented by giving privileges in the form of patronage, but the later by the use of coercion. The second method, which was done with the tactic of filing citizens' information or *dang'an zhidu* (dossier), caused widespread self-censorship.<sup>21</sup>

Sharp power is much more suitable for maintaining regime stability and national security than soft and hard power. Given China's huge population of over 1.3 billion, its vulnerability is also infinite. The rivals can create trouble for China's growth and stability and try to undermine its national security and territorial integrity. The CCP may have strong control over the flow of ideas within its political system, but outside, it is not possible. Although it controls the media, religious groups,

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<sup>18</sup> William J. Holstein, *The New Art of War – China's Deep Strategy inside the United States*, New York, Brick Tower Press, 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph S. Nye, Jr, *Is the American Century Over?*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2015, p. 47.

<sup>20</sup> Roman Štěpař, *China's Sharp Power*, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Andreas Fulda, *The Struggle for Democracy in Mainland China, Taiwan and Hong Kong: Sharp Power and its Discontents*, London, Routledge, 2020, pp. 84-87.

online chats, and civil society associations, it cannot cut off or control its citizens' treatment of the outside world. These citizens can develop negative views of the CCP after leaving the country. Thus, they can threaten the legitimacy of the CCP and influence Beijing officials' interactions with the outside world.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the CCP has resorted to covert and organized investment in the form of media and other tools of sharp power to become more powerful in the international arena.

China utilizes sharp power to change the international community's view of this country and to present itself as a prosperous and responsible nation. In addition, China wants to use sharp power to neutralize or soften potentially harmful views of the West. Both China and Russia are dissatisfied with the current world order and try to change the norms that guide the existing order. To protect their interests, they try to develop a more favourable international attitude towards the sovereignty and actions of authoritarian countries. Motivated by revisionist approach, both countries struggle to increase their capacity in terms of sharp power to revise global narratives. Some argue that because the two countries are relatively less attractive to the West, through a campaign of spreading false information and distorting facts, they seek to make their political systems better embraced.<sup>23</sup> Given that the level of trust in democracy and respect for liberal values in the world has substantially declined<sup>24</sup> China and Russia try to exploit the situation. China uses its sharp power capacities to diminish the importance of democracy in the eyes of grass roots. It also goes further and establishes itself as a more enduring leader in the international system.<sup>25</sup>

China's adoption of sharp power also aligns with its goal of challenging the US and disrupting its dominance on the global stage. The CCP considers the US as the self-assumed hegemon of the current international order and its main adversary. By its centenary, China envisions a long-term strategy to first become a great modern socialist country and then disrupt the US-led world political and economic order.<sup>26</sup> In this pursuit, they employ a multifaceted strategy that includes intelligence

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<sup>22</sup> Peter Gries, *Nationalism, Social Influences, and Chinese Foreign Policy*, in David Shambaugh (Ed.), *China and the World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 73.

<sup>23</sup> Their goal is to improve the perception and acceptance of their political systems, even if these systems differ significantly from Western ideals. This strategy aims to garner support or understanding for their policies and governance, potentially on both domestic and international fronts; Natasha Lindstaedt, *Democratic Decay and Authoritarian Resurgence*, Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2021, pp. 107-108.

<sup>24</sup> Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2022*, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Ethan Greene, *Sharp Power: How Foreign Election*, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> Angang Hu, *2050 China: Becoming a Great Modern Socialist Country*, Gateway East,



operations, cyber warfare, information campaigns, united front initiatives, unconventional military actions, and economic leverage. Recent research, such as that conducted by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, explores China's engagement strategy with the US, utilizing the framework of political warfare to illuminate their methods. Notably, China has been implicated in cyber-attacks compromising data for roughly 80 per cent of American citizens since 2014. Additionally, China's use of the Wolf Warrior approach underscores the CCP's strategy by rejecting US-led global governance and promoting anti-American sentiments.<sup>27</sup>

Beijing, on the one hand, expands its influence in different countries to restrain Washington, and on the other, it builds clandestine footholds on American soil to undermine it from within. Moreover, China has created a vast band of agents to penetrate both American political and security administration and its business community, thereby both strengthening its power and influence and weakening its rival.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, China employs sharp power to actualize its strategic narratives, notably during Xi Jinping's leadership, which comprises the 'Chinese Dream' and 'Chinese Wisdom.' The 'Chinese Dream' seeks to reinstate China's historical greatness and global significance, while 'Chinese Wisdom' emphasizes the concept of a harmonious, equitable world based on shared destiny, aiming to overcome historical biases and centuries of imperialist humiliation and play a pivotal role on the international stage.<sup>29</sup> Aspiring to annex Taiwan to its territory, Beijing tries to achieve a fully integrated status by 2049 (the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of PRC).<sup>30</sup>

In this respect, China's sharp power utilizes crucial tools. For instance, Confucius Institutes and Chinese companies like Huawei and ZTE have raised serious controversies and challenges in the West. In pursuing global infiltration operations, Beijing often pursues its goals through the Chinese diaspora, cultural associations, chambers of commerce, Chinese students, and the international media.

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Springer Nature, 2020, p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> Jones, Seth G., Emily Harding, Catrina Doxsee, Jake Harrington, Riley McCabe, *Competing without Fighting: China's Strategy of Political Warfare*, Washington, Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), August 2023.

<sup>28</sup> Roger Faligot, *Chinese Spies: From Chairman Mao to Xi Jinping*, trans. Natasha Lehrer, 2nd ed., London, C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2019, p. 393; Hannah Rabinowitz, Evan Perez, Lauren del Valle, *FBI Arrests Two Alleged Chinese Agents and Charges Dozens with Working Inside US to Silence Dissidents*, in <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/04/17/politics/fbi-chinese-agents/index.html> (Accessed on 04.10.2023).

<sup>29</sup> Yi Edward Yang, *China's Strategic Narratives in Global Governance Reform under Xi Jinping*, in "Journal of Contemporary China", Vol. 30, 2021, no. 128, pp. 300-306.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Gries, *Nationalism, Social Influences*, p. 190.

## THE MEDIA

The Chinese are very sensitive to the way foreigners perceive them and their country's foreign policy. The officials in Beijing frequently accuse the Western media of disseminating a negative image of China. Thus, constructing a positive image of the country abroad has been one of the key issues for the CCP.<sup>31</sup> According to the Bloomberg study, between 2008 and 2018, China invested \$2.8 billion in media.<sup>32</sup> In October 2021, in a repressive move, it banned foreign investment on the Chinese media.<sup>33</sup> This project has been accelerated under Xi Jinping, who emphasizes the need to bolster international communication and promote China's narrative globally.<sup>34</sup>

China has 33 radio stations in 14 countries, with Xinhua as the mainstay of its news coverage in its multiple offices around the world. China aids global foreign media and grows its international Chinese media presence. Beijing's main target is the Third World countries i.e., Africa and its neighbouring countries such as Pakistan, Cambodia and East Timor. Chinese international media conveys the CCP's official narratives to counter Western biases and present a more favourable image of China.<sup>35</sup> As part of the Chinese government-sponsored network and broadcast programs in support of Beijing, it has established radio stations in Italy, Hungary, Finland, Romania, Spain and the Western Balkans. Being established as a global band, their mission is to broadcast positive news about China in Chinese, English as well as Turkish and Italian. The CCP's relations with these companies are hidden.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Ingrid d'Hooghe, *Public Diplomacy in the People's Republic of China* in Jan Melissen (Ed.), *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 91.

<sup>32</sup> Andre Tartar, Mira Rojanasakul, Jeremy Scott Diamond, *How China is Buying its Way into Europe*, in <https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2018-china-business-in-europe/> (Accessed on 27.11.2022).

<sup>33</sup> Bo Gu, *China Proposes Plan to Block Private Investment in Media*, in <https://www.voanews.com/a/china-proposes-plan-to-block-private-investment-in-media/6281977.html> (Accessed on 05.12.2022).

<sup>34</sup> David Bandurski, *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*, in <https://chinamediaproject.org/2016/02/22/mirror-mirror-on-the-wall/> (Accessed on 18.12.2022).

<sup>35</sup> Sarah Cook, *China's Global Media Footprint: Democratic Responses to Expanding Authoritarian Influence*, in "National Endowment for Democracy", 2021, p. 6.

<sup>36</sup> Koh Gui Qing, John Shiffman, *Beijing's Covert Radio Network Airs China-Friendly News Across Washington, and the World*, <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-radio/> (Accessed 02.06.2023); Rufin Zamfir, Andrei Tiut, *Chinese Influence*

Also, in recent years, China has bribed magazines and media outlets to censor news and information that are not to the liking of the CCP. In 2017, Chinese officials asked the University of Cambridge to remove a total of 315 articles related to the Tiananmen Massacre, the Cultural Revolution and the Taiwan issue. Meanwhile, the US-based National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR) said the same request had been made by Chinese officials to remove nearly 100 articles from the journal.<sup>37</sup> In 2017, Clive Hamilton's book *Silent Invasion: Chinese Influence in Australia* was declined three times by Australian domestic publishers for fear of Chinese backlash. Hamilton's research showed how Australian institutions and industries were affected by a multifarious influence and control system directed by the CCP. This included multiple sectors such as educational institutions, media, mining, agriculture, tourism, ports and the national grid.<sup>38</sup>

Some believe that the CCP's influence in Australia has found strategic value in the sense that Australia is an ally of the US, and Beijing seeks to weaken this alliance.<sup>39</sup> Chinese officials have stepped up pressure on Chinese-language and foreign-language media outlets, calling for the dismissal of journalists and newspaper editors who criticize the CCP.<sup>40</sup> For example, China's pressure on foreign media led to the removal of Lei Jin, editor-in-chief of Global Chinese Press, following his work to spread the word about the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. The editor-in-chief of the Chinese Canadian Post was fired after writing an article criticizing Chinese Canadian and pro-Beijing Michael Chan. He later filed a complaint with the B.C Human Rights Tribunal for proceeding against China.<sup>41</sup> In September 2018, Azad Essa, an Independent Online journalist (a news-analytical website in South Africa), found out that his page was closed after writing an article about the oppression of Uighurs in China.<sup>42</sup> The list of such cases is so long that it does not fit in this space.

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*in Romania*, Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), <https://cepa.org/comprehensive-reports/chinese-influence-in-romania/> (Accessed 02.06.2023).

<sup>37</sup> J. Michael Cole, *The Hard Edge of Sharp Power: Understanding China's Influence Operations Abroad*, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, 2018, p. 16.

<sup>38</sup> Clive Hamilton, *Silent Invasion: China's Influence in Australia*, Melbourne, Hardie Grant Publishing, 2018, p. 15.

<sup>39</sup> Christopher Walker, Jessica Ludwig, *From 'Soft Power'*, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup> J. Michael Cole, *The Hard Edge of Sharp Power*, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> Xiao Xu, *Dismissed Chinese Newspaper Editor Files Human-Rights Complaint in B.C.*, in <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/dismissed-chinese-newspaper-editor-files-human-rights-complaint-in-bc/article36224584/> (Accessed on 09.01.2023).

<sup>42</sup> Natasha Joseph, *A New World Order*, in "Index on Censorship", Vol. 50, 2021, no. 1, p. 70-71.

Moreover, the China International Television Corporation and the China-Africa Private Development Fund (CADFUND) were established to control seven per cent of the broadcasters. Bloomberg reports that in the past decade, China has invested nearly £3 billion in various media to make a profit.<sup>43</sup> Since 2014, in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Chinese universities have held programs aimed at educating journalists. By this investment, these journalists were expected to reflect on China's positive traits once they are back.<sup>44</sup> Other study shows that Beijing employs approximately 1,000 African journalists each year to provide them with a positive view of China and its power. This initiative is referred to as constructive journalism.<sup>45</sup> By strategy of "borrowing the boat to reach the sea", China intends to dominate the media contents worldwide. Even this country funds American radio programs in 15 US cities through China Radio International.<sup>46</sup> Positive news about China and its economic development can influence US public and official opinion and shape its official (trade and fiscal) policy towards China.

### POLITICIANS AND CHINESE BANDS

When discussing public diplomacy and the exercise of sharp power, it's important to highlight the Chinese diaspora as well. There are approximately five million Chinese diaspora, half of which is living in the US who potentially play a role in promoting Chinese culture and lobbying for Chinese political interests. Over the years, Beijing has established over 80 pro-Chinese unions among the Chinese communities around the world and held regional conferences to guide them to establish a united global network. Through these organizations, Beijing has funded and developed many cultural, economic, and educational activities to support these groups and encourage them to invest in China.<sup>47</sup>

These large groups of the Chinese overseas community also serve as another important asset to China's sharp power, led by the UFWD.<sup>48</sup> The UFWD sees the Chinese diaspora as key aides not only in promoting and implementing China's

<sup>43</sup> J. Michael Cole, *The Hard Edge of Sharp Power*, p. 17.

<sup>44</sup> Renée DiResta et al, *Telling China's Story: The Chinese Communist Party's Campaign to Shape Global Narratives*, in "Hoover Institution", 2020, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> Fei Jianga et al., *The Voice of China in Africa: Media, Communication Technologies and Image-building*, in "Chinese Journal of Communication", Vol. 9, 2016, no. 1, p. 2.

<sup>46</sup> Sarah Cook, *Chinese Government*, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> Ingrid d'Hooghe, *Public Diplomacy in the People's*, p. 191.

<sup>48</sup> Suisheng Zhao, *China's Foreign Policy Making Process: Players and Institutions*, in David Shambaugh (Ed.), *China and the World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 99-100.

policies, including the BRI, but also as a tool to counter anti-Chinese activities abroad. In China's view, this power can be used against human rights activists, Tibetan secessionists and supporters of Taiwan's independence. Chinese diaspora associations frequently stage large protests against Falun Gong and pro-Tibetan groups. Supporting patriotic education, the Chinese Ministry of Education has issued guidelines for the establishment of multidimensional networks between Beijing, Chinese foreign students, and foreign missions. Around 350,000 Chinese students in the US are showing a growing interest in lectures and extracurricular activities with significant relevance to China.<sup>49</sup> The Chinese Professionals Associations of Canada (CPAC) is considered as an organization with close links to Beijing. The delegation is part of the National Congress of Chinese-Canadians (NCCC), a group that pursues the interests of the CCP in Canada. According to Chen Yonglin, the former secretary of the Chinese consulate in Sydney, the Congress and its affiliates in other countries are at the forefront of Chinese-backed groups. It has been launched by the Chinese Embassy in Ottawa to infiltrate the Chinese community and the Canadian government.<sup>50</sup>

China also enjoys a powerful influence on politicians. In recent years, there have been revelations about the relationship between ministers and representatives of other countries with China especially in New Zealand, Canada and Australia. There have been manifestations that these people have abused their position to influence relations between the two countries. For instance, Sam Dastyari, an Iranian-Australian member of Australia's Labor Party, was fired. He was accused of preventing Wan Mann, his party's spokesman at the State Department, from meeting with democrat activists in Hong Kong. Moreover, a document had been issued by him urging the Australian government to respect China's geopolitical claims in the South China Sea. Further disclosures revealed that two Chinese companies, one owned by Huang (a person close to the Chinese government), had donated some 7.6 million Australian dollar to the two main political parties in the past decade. Consequently, Australian lawmakers passed laws to prevent foreign aid.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> William J. Holstein, *The New Art of War*, p. 86-92.

<sup>50</sup> Matthew Little, *Michael Chan and the Troubling Thumbprint of the Chinese Communist Party in Canada*, in [https://www.theepochtimes.com/michael-chan-and-the-troubling-thumbprint-of-the-chinese-communist-party-in-canada\\_1395433.html](https://www.theepochtimes.com/michael-chan-and-the-troubling-thumbprint-of-the-chinese-communist-party-in-canada_1395433.html) (Accessed on 13.01.2023).

<sup>51</sup> Senéad Short, *Sharp Power: China's Solution to Maintaining the Legitimacy of its Non-Interference Policy*, (BS Thesis University of Iowa, 2018), p. 22-23. <https://iro.uiowa.edu/esploro/outputs/undergraduate/Sharp-Power/9984111232602771/filesAndLinks?index=0>,

In June 2017, ABC News Australia released a report that highlighted the strong impact of assistance from China-affiliated institutions on trade policy between Australia and China. The report revealed that between 2013 and 2015 over \$5.5 million worth of aid was provided to the Liberal Party and the Labour Party by companies and individuals affiliated with China.<sup>52</sup> In New Zealand, Anne-Marie Brady, a Chinese political expert at the University of Canterbury, revealed more secrets in a 2017 report. The report found that several New Zealand-born members of parliament with close ties to China, as well as many other politicians in the country, had received bribe. These bribes were channelled through the help of Chinese businessmen and CCP-sponsored organizations such as the Chinese Business Association in New Zealand. After the report was released, Brady's office was demolished.<sup>53</sup> In Canada, Richard Fadden, the former director of the country's intelligence agency, warned in 2010 that China's influence in Canada was manifesting itself in the most aggressive way possible. He exposed how the Chinese government paid hush money to Australian and Canadian officials in exchange for their silence on criticizing China.<sup>54</sup>

China uses its vast resources, investment, and large markets to influence other states by engaging retirees, civil and military officials in the target countries. While not all of these are illegal in their essence, the promise of preserving interests after retirement raises the question of whether in some cases these officials may be in China's favour in their decisions. In November 2017, a wealth of evidence emerged from the corruption of Chinese Energy Fund Committee Secretary-General Patrick Hu Chi Ping, who was charged by a US court with money laundering and violating foreign corruption measures. The investigation revealed that he had worked extensively with the UFDW. Moreover, recently he has played a significant role in advancing China's international influence through foreign cooperation and conferences. The subject of many of them has been Chinese claims on Taiwan and the South China Sea.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Chris Uhlmann, Andrew Greene, *Chinese Donors to Australian Political Parties: Who Gave How Much?*, in <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-21/china-australia-political-donations/7766654?nw=0&r=HtmlFragment> (Accessed on 17.01.2023).

<sup>53</sup> Anne-Marie Brady, *Magic Weapons: China's Political Influence Activities under Xi Jinping*, in [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/magic\\_weapons.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/article/magic_weapons.pdf), 2017, p. 25.

<sup>54</sup> Huhua Cao, Jeremy Paltiel (Eds.), *Facing China as a New Global Superpower: Domestic and International Dynamics from a Multidisciplinary Angle*, Singapore, Heidelberg et al., Springer, 2015, p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> J. Michael Cole, *The Hard Edge of Sharp Power*, p. 19.

According to Diamond and Schelle of the Hoover Institution, China has always sought to identify and nurture politicians in the US federal and state governments.<sup>56</sup> The Chinese also use lobbies and public relations to work with civil society activists. These activities, carried out with the support of the Chinese central government, facilitate congressional officials and staff to visit China. Chinese institutions are always looking for ways to communicate with Congressmen through lobbying and public relations. In 2017, the Sino-US Exchange Foundation spent about \$668,000 for lobbying, especially with the use of the Podesta Group and other groups in the US Congress on Sino-US relations.<sup>57</sup>

The Mercator Institute for Chinese Studies and the Global Public Policy Institute in a research argue that China is using a flexible and comprehensive approach to its influence in Europe. These methods include overt and covert tools in three areas: political and economic elites; media and public opinion; and civil society and academicians. China has infiltrated these countries through the very open gates of Europe and tried to bring them in line with its policies. The impacts of this asymmetric political relationship are manifested in the fact that European countries are increasingly seeking to formulate their policies in the form of blind obedience to China. It is said that if they train enough people in the right situations and places, they will start to change the subject without wishing to directly inject their views.<sup>58</sup> In other words, Beijing is indirectly trying to change the attitude of European leaders towards China through economic and diplomatic means.

### CULTURE AND EDUCATION

Cultural assets as traditional sources of soft power are also used in the framework of sharp power. China has established 525 Confucius Institutes in 146 countries including 105 in the US alone. These institutes which cover 9 million students are funded by Office of Chinese Language Council International.

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<sup>56</sup> Larry Diamond, Orville Schell, *China's Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance: Report of the Working Group on Chinese Influence Activities in the United States*, Stanford California, Hoover Institution Press, 2019, p. 7.

<sup>57</sup> Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, *This Beijing-Linked Billionaire is Funding Policy Research at Washington's Most Influential Institutions*, in <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/11/28/this-beijing-linked-billionaire-is-funding-policy-research-at-washingtons-most-influential-institutions-china-dc/> (Accessed on 19.01.2023).

<sup>58</sup> Maaïke Okano-Heijmans, Takashi Terada, *EU-Japan Relations in the Age of Competitive Economic Governance in Asia*, in Axel Berkofsky et al. (Eds.), *The EU-Japan Partnership in the Shadow of China: The Crisis of Liberalism*, London, Routledge, 2018, p. 104.

Confucius Institutes promote Chinese language and culture including the official Chinese narratives of Tibet and Taiwan, which often contradicts academic research.<sup>59</sup> Some critics believe that Confucius Institutes covertly promote a favourable view of the 'Chinese Model' in development sector and undercover debates on censored issues in China. This includes the Tiananmen Massacre and the rectification of perceptions about China as a fanatical and hard-line country that violates human rights. In the backdrop of these critics, the Confucius Institute at Stockholm University (founded in 2005 as the first Confucius Institute in Europe) was closed in 2015 due to criticism from staff and the public.<sup>60</sup> Western democracies like the US, Canada, and Australia are intensifying scrutiny of China's influence, with calls to limit or sever ties with Confucius Institutes at universities. A 2018 report from the Canadian Security Intelligence Service highlights the shared concerns among Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and the US about this matter, which appears to be more pronounced than in Europe.<sup>61</sup>

Of the Confucian Institutes around the world, 12 instances and 35 classrooms function in Canada alone.<sup>62</sup> Moreover, by the beginning of 2018, China established about 39 institutes and 11 Confucian classes in Latin America and the Caribbean, which receive over 50,000 students.<sup>63</sup> Critics present that the institutions offer an attractive view of China and prevent discussion of sensitive issues such as Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang. In fact, Confucius Institutes often act as a cover for clandestine activities by the Chinese government. There are signs of coercion, deviation and manipulation in these institutions that cannot be assessed in the form of soft power; rather, they are aspects of sharp power.<sup>64</sup>

On the other hand, China maintains several Scientific-Research programs and provides numerous scholarships. Given the need of Western universities to

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<sup>59</sup> Joshua Eisenman, Eric Heginbotham, *China's Relations with Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East*, in David Shambaugh (Ed.), *China and the World*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2020, p. 302; Zhidong Hao, *Academic Freedom Under Siege: What, Why, and What is to be Done*, in Zhidong Hao, Peter Zabielskis (Eds.), *Academic Freedom Under Siege: Higher Education in East Asia, the U.S. and Australia*, Berlin, Springer Nature, 2020, p. 26.

<sup>60</sup> Naja Bentzen, *Foreign Influence Operations in the EU*, in European Parliamentary Research Service", 2018, p. 21.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Wai-Chung Ho, *Culture, Music Education, and the Chinese Dream in Mainland China*, Springer Nature Singapore, 2018, p. 63.

<sup>63</sup> *Confucius Institute Latin America Regional Center Holds China-Latin America Forum on 'Bond across the Ocean,'* in [http://english.hanban.org/article/2018-01/29/content\\_716734.htm](http://english.hanban.org/article/2018-01/29/content_716734.htm). (Accessed on 01.07.2023).

<sup>64</sup> Christopher Walker, Jessica Ludwig, *From 'Soft Power' to 'Sharp Power'*, p. 22.



attract foreign students and charge tuition, China has taken advantage of this dependence. According to the latest statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Education, in 2019, 703,500 Chinese students were studying abroad. Chinese student associations work closely with Chinese embassies and consulates, using the opposition or critics of Chinese politics as leverage to force the cancellation of lectures or seminars. In 2017, when the University of San Diego in California extended an invitation to Dalai Lama, the leader of the Tibetan opposition for a speech, it sparked protests from the Chinese Students and Scholars Association, representing over 3,500 people. In other incident, a Canadian-based Chinese student mobilization was active in preventing Anastasia Lin, a former Chinese-Canadian model and fierce critic of the CCP, from attending Durham University.<sup>65</sup>

Chinese students also observe professors in their classrooms who make anti-Chinese statements. For example, when a professor at an Australian university described Taiwan as an independent state and used a map to show the Chinese-Indian border, Chinese students described the allegations against China as unfair. Such cases have forced university professors to self-censor and to refrain from discussing some sensitive issues, especially issues related to China's territorial integrity and its reputation. Because Chinese students serve as financial assets for Western universities, their officials are also reluctant to defend professors who have been expelled by Chinese students.<sup>66</sup>

In 2020, about 410,000 Chinese were studying in the US. The US officials and analysts believe that these are parts of China's ongoing and aggressive efforts to undermine the US industry, steal secrets and reduce its global influence, so that Beijing can expand and advance its agenda. Joseph W. Augustyn, a former CIA officer, believes that instead of trying to train experienced spies to infiltrate American universities and businesses, Beijing intelligence services strategically exploited Chinese students as available agents or secret infiltrators.<sup>67</sup>

## FINANCIAL INSTRUMENTS

Using financial capital and foreign investment is also the most important Chinese instrument for global influence. During the 2008 Financial Crisis, weaker

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<sup>65</sup> J. Michael Cole, *The Hard Edge of Sharp Power*, p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Carol Huang, Connie Chuyun Hu, *Study Hard but Do Tour to See the World: Tourism of Chinese Students who Studied in the United States*, in Belal Shneikat, Cihan Cobanoglu, Cem Tanova (Eds.), *Global Perspectives on Recruiting International Students: Challenges and Opportunities*, Bingley, Emerald Group Publishing, 2021, pp. 43-44.

European economies were in urgent and dire need of foreign investment. The CCP exploited the situation by hunting them into its debt trap. Pursuing tributary strategy, the party injected large sums of money into other countries in exchange for reducing their support for issues such as the rule of law and human rights in China. Beijing is said to have used the method to widen the gap among European countries. During the Greek Debt Crisis, China invested heavily in this country with a particular focus on the Port of Piraeus in 2008. China's state-owned shipping giant, China Overseas Shipping Group Co. (COSCO), acquired a 30-year concession to manage two terminals of the Port of Piraeus for a substantial €490 million, an amount significantly higher than the market price at the time. COSCO's investments did not stop there; they continued to expand and renovate the port infrastructure, making Piraeus their gateway to southern Europe, effectively quadrupling container traffic, and transforming the port into a vital hub for China's maritime trade with Europe. Years after this investment, Greece witnessed further cooperation with China, including a visit by Premier Li Keqiang that led to multi-billion-euro cooperation agreements. Despite political shifts in Greece's government and some labour concerns, China remained committed to its investments, ultimately gaining full management control of Piraeus in 2016 and investing a total estimated value of €1.5 billion in the project. COSCO's success in Piraeus has motivated China to pursue additional infrastructure projects in Greece, aligning with its broader ambitions to expand economic influence in Europe and the Mediterranean through strategic investments.<sup>68</sup>

These investments have brought political implications for China. As a member of the EU, Greece has used to oppose the EU's plans aimed at criticizing China's stance on the South China Sea. It is also the first European country to officially join China's Belt and Road Initiative. In June 2017, Greece blocked the passage of an EU statement to the Security Council, which criticized Chinese human rights record. In 2012, when the CCP introduced the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries (China-CEEC), Hungary was the first country to join. Like Greece, Hungary has always been reluctant to the EU's criticism of human rights abuses by China. In a report on Russia and China's activities in Europe, the Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) said that China wants to ensure that in the face of US global influence in China, Europe does not side with the US in a common front

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<sup>68</sup> Philippe Le Corre, *Chinese Investments in European Countries: Experiences and Lessons for the 'Belt and Road' Initiative*, in Maximilian Mayer (Ed.), *Rethinking the Silk Road: China's Belt and Road Initiative and Emerging Eurasian Relations*, Springer Nature Singapore, 2017, pp. 165-167.

against China. Beijing, on the other hand, is trying to dispel any European criticism of its poor record of human rights abuses. Serbia is another country that is more anchored in China. Annoyed by the EU's economic assistance to the country, it strongly welcomed China's cooperative stance.<sup>69</sup> Portugal, too, started to prefer China over the EU's collective agenda. Though it is not official part of BRI, it has entered a memorandum of understanding with China on this initiative.<sup>70</sup>

John Hopkins School of Advanced International Relations' study puts China's investment in Africa at \$153 billion between 2000 and 2019.<sup>71</sup> In Latin America, China's loans exceed the total loans of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. These loans have strained diplomatic relations of several countries with Taiwan. For example, in June 2017, Panama announced that it had ceased its relations with Taiwan and instead recognized PRC. Likewise, in May 2018, El Salvador followed suit while in December 2021 Nicaragua cut ties with Taiwan and recognized China. Guatemala's incoming president intends to align with China, mirroring South American countries. Overall, in South America, all but Paraguay have made this shift, while Haiti and three smaller Caribbean nations maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan. This change reflected China's strategic approach of utilizing economic opportunities to secure diplomatic recognition in various parts of the world, including Africa. China often does not impose conditions for its loans, as opposed to the WB and the IMF, which make lending conditional on compliance with their terms. However, these loans require recipient countries to go for Chinese materials or services for their development projects. It also obliges them to diplomatically support China's objectives, including the One China policy. Lithuania's naming of Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius as 'Taiwan' in November 2021 challenged Beijing's One China policy, resulting in China's economic coercion tactics. This included an export embargo and informal secondary sanctions to caution companies buying Lithuanian products about potential issues in their China relations. This means that China is using its sharp power to force the target countries to come to terms with its trade conditions. In other words, escaping trade partnership with China implies losing the opportunity to

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<sup>69</sup> Karin von Hippel, *Axis of Disruption: Chinese and Russian Influence and Interference in Europe: Introduction to a New RUSI Series on Russia and China in Europe*, in "Royal United Service Institute for Defense and Security Studies", 2020, p. 14.

<sup>70</sup> António Raimundo, Stelios Stavridis, Charalambos Tsardanidis, *The Eurozone Crisis' Impact: a De-Europeanization of Greek and Portuguese Foreign Policies?*, in "Journal of European Integration", Vol. 43, 2021, no. 5, pp. 540-544.

<sup>71</sup> Kevin Acker, Deborah Brautigam, *Twenty Years of Data on China's Africa Lending*, in "China Africa Research Initiative", 2021, no. 4, p. 1.

receive tribute from that country in exchange for diplomatic engagement on the Taiwan issue. On the other hand, not doing business with China undermines the benefits of unconditional political trade.<sup>72</sup> Surprisingly, the Chinese government warned about 44 foreign airlines to include Taiwan in the list of regions under Chinese rule; otherwise, they would face punitive action. As a result of this warning, most of these companies reconciled.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to investing, China uses debt trap to achieve strategic interests that include ports mainly in South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa and even Europe. When Sri Lanka failed to pay its debts to Chinese companies in 2017, it ceded the right to use the port of Hambantota to a Chinese company for 99 years. Some also see anti-critics decision of Greece and Hungary in the EU declaration on the South China Sea in 2016, as a move imposed by Beijing in return for investment in these three countries.<sup>74</sup> The Chinese are seeking to increase their power by investing in important and critical infrastructures. This approach is intended to use it as a foreign policy tool to punish, coerce or incite other countries to favour China's stance and goals.<sup>75</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Sharp power has become a subject of focus as one of the areas of China's strength and tool of global influence. China's sharp power includes unique features such as the manipulation of information about the country. This nascent concept is in fact a reaction to the American and Western approaches to power, such as soft power and smart power. Realizing that non-Chinese versions of power in the current international system cannot be fit to Chinese political outlook, the country has sought to redefine the concept of power. In the form of sharp power, China has made covert and subtle efforts in the world of information with full skill to consolidate its influence in the international level. The intelligence services of many countries have concluded that China has infiltrated the policies of democracies and endangered their national sovereignty. In the form of sharp power, China has carried out secret tactics of infiltration with punitive consequences across the world.

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<sup>72</sup> George Ofosu, David Sarpong, *China in Africa: On the Competing Perspectives of the Value of Sino-Africa Business Relationships*, in "Journal of Economic Issues", Vol. 56, 2022, no. 1, p. 139.

<sup>73</sup> Zhidong Hao, *Academic Freedom under Siege*, p. 26.

<sup>74</sup> Stroikos Dimitrios. 'Head of the Dragon' or 'Trojan Horse?': *Reassessing China – Greece Relations*, in "Journal of Contemporary China", 32, 2023, no. 142, p. 609.

<sup>75</sup> Jeff M. Smith, *China's Belt and Road Initiative: Strategic Implications and International Opposition*, in "The Heritage Foundation", 2018, No. 3331, p. 16.

China's sharp power approach is rooted in the domestic and foreign imperatives of this country. China has invested in sharp power to domestically strengthen the communist regime and internationally restore its centrality in the international arena. It has also aimed at dislocating the US as the dominant global power. Other goal of China from sharp power is to undermine democracy in the world. In this context, by rectifying its own image, China has tried to project authoritarian regimes more stable than democracies. On the other hand, China's focus on sharp power is not devoid of stimuli. The costly political aftermath of using hard power and the country's inability to strengthen the attraction element of soft power for global influence have led sharp power to be chosen as the middle ground. The political culture of the Chinese Communist Party is another reason that has put sharp power at the forefront of foreign policy tools.

In the context of sharp power, China has used official and unofficial actors. In the declarative policies of China, the official organs of the government, especially the UFWD, have the mission of advancing the goals of this country in this format. Unofficially, China uses the Chinese diaspora and its students for execution of its sharp power. In this regard, China has used tools such as the media, political elites, academia, diaspora, and investment for global influence. In the meantime, students are considered the cost-effective tool to exercise sharp power, and investment is the most expensive. On the one hand, by investing in sharp power, China is persuading Western countries to give up their political considerations for China. On the other, because of China's sharp power, there are concerns about Western countries' emulation of the Chinese model. This implies that China's sphere of influence will extend beyond expectations in the international arena. One conclusion to draw is that China has made significant strides in expanding its global influence through sharp power tactics. In addition to China's deep-rooted history, economic clout has enabled it to establish relationships with numerous countries through BRI projects, which can lead to increased political influence. The proliferation of Confucius Institutes and the global reach of Chinese state-run media have also allowed China to shape narratives in its favour. However, whether China's sharp power efforts can be deemed successful is a matter of ongoing debate. Success in this context can be measured in different ways. China has gained more global influence but has also faced criticism from countries concerned about its tactics, such as debt-trap diplomacy and alleged human rights abuses. Especially The Covid-19 pandemic has also brought attention to China's global image and handling of international crises. China's sharp power continues to make not only a topic for further research in academia but also influences the balance of power approach in the international arena.

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