



RESEARCH PAPER

Evaluating China's Soft Power Discourse: Assumptions, Strategies and Objectives

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ABSTRACT

Both hard and soft power are important in promoting China's dominance. It is possible to argue that China has risen significantly in terms of economic and financial measurement criteria over the last 30 years, developing and increasing its hard power. The nation has substantially increased its soft power at the regional and global levels due to its cultural dimension and, in particular, its efficient foreign policy. The present investigation sought to address the key question: What is the essence of China's soft power, and what principles are behind it? This study emphasises the importance of Confucian culture in understanding the fundamentals of Chinese soft power and demonstrates how China has been able to utilise its efficient tools of economic activity and foreign policy to leverage various opportunities in cultural diplomacy to achieve significant impact around the world, particularly in its soft power areas of focus.

Keywords | China, Cultural Diplomacy, Fundamentals, Principles, Soft Power

Introduction

During the last two decades, there has been a great deal of research into the field of international relations regarding the order of the world system and its changes. China's massive upsurge in recent decades, given its enormous economic growth and ability to influence it regionally and internationally, has led analysts to scrutinize the issue. Meanwhile, some experts believe that the world in transition from the traditional order with the hegemony of the United States of America has shifted to a new order with other major powers, including China (You, 2018). Some have even gone so far as to call China the future global power. Accordingly, Ayegbusi, Folarin, Udoh and Folarin, (2022) consider the nature of the bilateral relationship between the United States, the only ruling superpower, and China, the most important emerging power, to be the most important component of international relations in terms of its effects and consequences on today's global relations and politics. Many thinkers believe that China, as the most populous country in the world, with the most economic growth in the world, as well as its enormous political, economic, and more recently military capacity, will be able to challenge U.S. hegemony (Xin & Matheson, 2018).

According to Chen and Duggan, (2016) China, which until 15 years ago was a regional power that focused on fundamental issues of domestic security and rebuilding its economic power, is now addressing a wide range of global issues such

as environmentalism, energy security, and the stability of the international monetary system, counterterrorism, Health issues and prevention of nuclear weapons proliferation is extremely active. The rise of China's power has been accompanied by the expansion of its influence in most parts of the world. Currently, the country has established economic ties with most regions of the world (Ayegbusi, Folarin, Udoh & Folarin, 2022). This increase in influence is likely to be accompanied by a decrease in the influence of other powers. In East Asia, China has sought to increase its ties with countries in the region in various areas. In Central Asia, China has gained a lot of influence, and since democratization is not one of its interests and goals, countries in this region tend to favour China more than Russia and the United States. Indeed, China's increasing influence in Asia has diminished the influence of other powers. Since democratization is not one of its interests and goals, countries in this region tend to favour China more than Russia and the United States. Indeed, China's increasing influence in Asia has diminished the influence of other powers (Rahman, 2019). The diplomatic approach of China illustrates the nation's soft power. The "rejuvenation of the nation" is accomplished by means of collaborations, partnership efforts, and the dissemination of cultural norms through the Confucius institutes. This has concentrated mostly on forces of attraction. Diplomatically, China has conducted a "charm offensive" to improve partner confidence in Chinese policy discourses, techniques, and projects. This research poses research questions that what is the essence of China's soft power, and what principles are behind it? And how may soft power be used to distinguish China with other established powers?

This qualitative content analysis-based research is structured into four parts to address these research questions: The first part of the study discusses the Soft Power theory. The second part of the study discusses the characteristics of Chinese soft power. The third part of the study discusses the strategies of Chinese soft power. The fourth part of the study discusses the promotion of Chinese Culture and language as its soft power.

Theoretical Framework

Joseph Nye, a prominent international relations scholar, divides power into two types: hard power and soft power. Nye introduced the concept of soft power in 1990 as an alternative to hard power in an article in Foreign Policy. Hard and soft power are interconnected because both can be considered dual facets of the ability to achieve the desired goal by influencing the behaviour of others. In the most comprehensive definition of soft power by Joseph Nye, soft power is defined as: "*Soft power is the ability to shape the preferences and preferences of others by relying on the element of persuasion through the use of the element of attraction*" (Nye Jr., 2005). According to Nye, soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction, not money or force. In other words, soft power is the ability to obtain desirable through gravity, not through coercion or enticement. Soft power has given us more influence than balance-of-power policies. Without unity and cooperation with other countries, war cannot be waged anywhere. Soft power means persuading others to do what we want them to do; people get more involved than they have to do. Soft power relies on the ability to shape the interests of others. Some scholars consider soft power to have five key elements: culture, ideas, development model, international institutions, and international image (Albert, 2018).

A country's soft power is mainly based on three sources:

- The culture of that country; in positions that are attractive to other actors;

- The political values of that country, when tangible and alive at home and abroad;
- The foreign policy of that country; when they appear legitimate and have moral legitimacy

As China continues its rapid economic growth and international empowerment, China has increasingly realized the role of soft power in its foreign strategy. China has increasingly tended to develop soft power to advance its diplomatic strategy. As China's soft power is emerging, it must consider plans to boost its diplomatic strategy by estimating external demands on its soft power. In the last few decades, since the beginning of the reforms in China, China has first strengthened its hard power indices, and in recent years has focused on strengthening its soft power, relying on these capabilities, and especially economic strength (Beeson & Xu, 2016).

Characteristics of Chinese Soft Power

The amount that China relies on the growth of its soft power has significantly increased. Despite the fact that various Chinese dynasties have traditionally been a source of attraction and appeal for others, particularly in East Asia and the ancient territory it conquered, modern China has been perceived as a revolutionary, revisionist, and hard-power focused state since 1949 (Rahman, 2019). Before the turn of the 21st century, softer forms of power were not given as much importance as they are today. Many people believe that China did not have a clear and integrated soft power projection plan and its application before to the global economic recession that began in 2008. This is despite the fact that increasing China's soft power is an important objective. According to Longhurst, Nitza-Makowska and Skiert-Andrzejuk, (2019) the Chinese government's soft power is still perceived as being unreliable, reactive, and lacking in vision.

In light of historical and ideological considerations, Chinese intellectuals and politicians did not recognise democracy, individual freedom, and cultural openness as important components of soft power, as Joseph Nye emphasised and advocated. This was despite the fact that these characteristics are key components of soft power (Nye Jr., 2016). They were of the opinion that Nye's presumptions on the idea of soft power were inaccurate. They were intrigued by the underlying idea that "soft power provided a way of influencing other states through non-coercive means" (Nye Jr., 2017). As a result of this, it is absolutely necessary to acquire an initial comprehension of the Chinese concept of soft power as well as the ramifications of this concept. The concept of soft power held by China is based on three attractive characteristics: beauty, brilliance and benignity (You, 2018). The humane ideas, practises, and customs that have been passed down from generation to generation in China are credited by the country's political and intellectual elite as being the primary factor in China's rise to global prominence (Ayegbusi, Folarin, Udoh & Folarin, 2022). The writings and teachings of Confucius provide support for the concept of benignity by praising a leader who relies on moral authority and moral strength rather than coercion and force. This demonstrates that Confucius believed moral authority and moral strength to be more effective than coercion and force. According to Ghorbani Sheikhneshin, Vakili and Amoei, (2020) the Chinese favour the kingly style, also known as wang dao, over the hegemonic approach, which is more commonly referred to as ba dao. This is the present behaviour of the United States of America, which is currently the superpower in the world. The Chinese vision of soft power is

inherently benign and co-optative, in contrast to the American self-definition of soft power, which the Chinese perceived as hegemonic (Gauttam, Singh & Chattu, 2021).

Second, the core of China's soft power is the idea of brilliance. China's economic growth and model are examples of their brilliance, which not only enabled them to survive the global financial crisis but also enabled them to contribute to the global economic recovery in the post-crisis period. Another illustration of China's ingenuity is how the country is working to pull hundreds of millions of its citizens out of abject poverty (Aliyev, 2020; Beeson & Xu, 2016; Chen & Duggan, 2016). In addition, as a major rising power, it has closely adhered to the five principles of peaceful coexistence and non-interference, avoiding intervening in the internal affairs of other nations, this has allowed it to maintain a peaceful cohabitation with other nations (Erickson & Strange, 2015).

Third, the development of China's very own growth model is a shining example of the brilliance of Chinese soft power. People from all over the world are drawn to it, despite the fact that it has significant cultural, political, and economic disparities. The foundation of China's soft power rests on the cultural and civilizational trajectories of its people. Chen and Duggan, (2016) have differentiated Chinese soft power from predominantly American and Western conceptions of the soft power. They argue that although conceptions of soft power in China are rooted in the cultural norms of traditional China, notions of soft power in the United States are rooted in contemporary cultural characteristics. The foundation of economic and development ideas are the primary pillars of China's soft power, whereas the United States places a greater focus on liberal political and civic principles (Gallarotti, 2016).

The resources, nature, strategy, and applications of the Chinese government's soft power have all improved during the past few years. In the modern, globalised setting, it is acknowledged as having been reimagined and imaginative, and it is promoted on the basis that because its methods are regarded benign, it will be more acceptable to the worldwide community (Beeson & Xu, 2016). It is a widely held belief that China's cultural resources are the primary pillars around which its soft power strategy is founded. However, the particular presentation differs from case to case. However, culture is not the only element included in China's plan for exercising soft power. Both the policy and practise of China's soft power are dependent on a diverse array of sources and instruments.

Other examples of Chinese soft power include the traditional Chinese values of righteousness and virtue as well as China's contemporary policy of seeking win-win outcomes in its dealings with the rest of the world. According to Flew, (2016) the fundamental premise of soft power is that a nation will garner admiration if it possesses admirable cultural practises, traditions, and an intellectual base. China, in contrast to the United States, views moral authority and moral principles as valid sources of attraction that strengthen the influence base. This is in contrast to the United States' view of soft power. The Chinese strategy for achieving soft power is a combination of economic statecraft and measures related to Chinese foreign policy. They find China's foreign policy goals, such as equality and partnership connections, and its economic diplomatic measures, such as trade, aid, investment, and the integration model of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to be appealing. It is possible that this will prove to be essential for improving the creative potential and practical utility of China's soft power. It is possible to say that the notions of China's soft power are built on soft foreign policy initiatives such as collaboration, integration, as well as economic and cultural diplomacy. As a result of this, it is vital to perform a

comprehensive examination of the Chinese government's soft power initiatives and the significance of these efforts to international relations.

Chinese Soft Power

The principles of China's soft power can be explained in three cultural, economic, and political dimensions:

Cultural Dimensions

Culturally important elements such as language, civilization, art, religion, mass media and educational institutions are important foundations of China's soft power. This ancient country has a remarkable historical past that has been combined with Confucian ideas and values and the traditions of thousands of years of Chinese civilization, one of China's most effective leverage in its soft power strategy (Ding, 2010). Confucius and Chinese literature and literature, one of the world's five most enduring languages, are among the most effective Chinese cultural tools in the area of soft power. Many Chinese recognize China's traditional culture as the most important source of Chinese soft power, based on a long history of uninterrupted history, a wide range of traditions, symbols, and civilizational backgrounds. The Chinese believe that history best demonstrates the superiority of Chinese soft power.

The Chinese nation has a long history compared to other nations. More importantly, Chinese culture has influenced the vast region of East Asia for centuries and, in particular, has been an inspiration to the countries of the region for the pattern of development (Aliyev, 2020). The Chinese development paradigm, known as the "Beijing Consensus", is widely regarded by many as a source of soft power that can make it attractive to other countries. Focusing on Chinese culture can well explain the influence of China's soft power, as the Chinese have been able to bring many aspects of its culture to other societies. This way, if a country can use all the resources of its power to attract others and contribute to an acceptable culture, its soft power will increase. China has been able to increase its soft power because of its foreign policy and how it has exercised its cultural power internationally over the past two decades. The main characteristic of Chinese foreign policy over the past two decades can be seen in the emphasis on cultural dimensions, confidence-building measures, the resolution of border disputes, participation in multilateral institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and efforts to reduce ideological conflicts (Aliyev, 2020; Beeson & Xu, 2016; Chen & Duggan, 2016; Ding, 2010).

Economic Dimensions

China has begun the process of becoming a global economic power for the past two decades and has made significant progress and progress along that path. At a time when most countries in the world were experiencing problems during the economic crisis, China continued to grow. Today, there is less of a market with no Chinese goods or no Chinese investment offer. The progress of the Chinese economy is such that it is rapidly overtaking the American economy and becoming the world's largest economy. The economic dimension measures a country's power by measures such as calculating GDP, access to raw materials and energy sources such as oil, gas, coal, uranium, sufficient water, fertile land, advanced technology and industry, and other criteria. In a post-American book, Farid Zakaria states that it has now made China a unique set of factors: one of the world's largest, the fastest growing economy, the largest producer, the second consumer, the largest saver and the second cost

Military builder (Erickson & Strange, 2015; Flew, 2016; Gallarotti, 2016). China's average annual economic growth rate of about 10 per cent has surprised the world; and, with China joining the WTO in 2001 and passing private property laws in 2007, the trend has continued. At present, China's foreign exchange reserves amount to \$ trillion, three times that of Japan and twice that of the European Union. In addition, it has become the largest destination for foreign direct investment. In 2000, China accounted for only 7.1 per cent of the world's GDP. In 2010, the figure rose to 13.3 per cent and is expected to rise to 20.7 per cent by 2020 (Gauttam, Singh & Chattu, 2021).

In 2000, China moved above Italy to become the world's largest economy. In 2005 it surpassed France as the world's fifth largest economy (Ghosal Singh, 2016). According to Huq, (2019) in 2006, it surpassed the UK, and in 2007 China became the world's third-largest economy, surpassing Germany. It also surpassed Japan in 2010 and became the world's second-largest economy after the United States (Jain, 2018). Over the past three decades, as a result of the dynamic economic growth and the growing international trend, China has not only become an international business hub, a destination for tourism and cultural magnets, but also a positive outlook for soft power. It has increasingly made China a popular host country for international students. As per Jakimów, (2019) China's economic growth was 7.4 per cent, as expected, in 2014, but this did not keep foreign investors wary of the vast country. China is today recognized as one of the world's hubs of production because of its political and economic stability, massive resources, cheap labour and improving infrastructure. According to the United Nations Trade and Development Conference, China attracted \$ 128 billion in foreign investment in 2014, while the United States attracted only \$ 86 billion in foreign investment two-thirds less than in 2013 (Kang, 2017).

As such, China has surpassed the United States and has become the largest destination for foreign merchants to invest in. In short, China's set of economic developments has made China's development model attractive to other developing countries. Measures such as providing financial and economic aid, direct investment, active economic diplomacy, low-interest loans and humanitarian assistance to develop Third World countries have expanded and strengthened China's soft power in most parts of the world (Karakir, 2018).

Political Dimensions

Politically, China's effective and dynamic presence in the United Nations Security Council and its veto, active participation in regional treaties and organizations such as ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, play an active role in North Korea's nuclear case as well as in the nuclear issue. The Islamic Republic of Iran has added to the influence and influence of its soft power in the global arena. China's cooperation with international organizations and its active involvement in UN peacekeeping operations, as well as its policies of attracting tourism and ideological attractions are also the foundations of its soft power. Perhaps the greatest contemporary source of Chinese soft power in the field of political values is the model of development of the People's Republic of China, which has recently been dubbed the "Beijing Consensus" by Joshua Cooper Ramo. Characterized by the Beijing consensus is a desire for fair, peaceful and high-quality growth, but it lacks the conviction of the same solutions, such as the economic and political liberalization that the West often promotes, and at the same time a strong desire for innovation, experience, and self-defence of national boundaries and interests.

The development model of the People's Republic of China is increasingly being considered by developing governments due to the tangible failures of neoliberal fiscal restructuring programs implemented in Latin America, Asia and Russia. China has been extremely cautious in multilateral agreements over the past decades and has had deep territorial and border disputes with many of its neighbours. But it has shifted in its foreign policy; it has joined the World Trade Organization and has been actively involved in many UN peacekeeping operations. China has hosted six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear crisis, resolved many of its differences with its neighbours, and is a key member of regional organizations including the ASEAN and the Shanghai Organization. This new Chinese diplomacy, based on the theory of "China's peaceful emergence theory", has thwarted foreign propaganda (based on the Chinese threat theory) as well as alleviating other countries' fears of increasing power (LaForgia, 2017).

In this connection, it should also be noted that the policy of granting Chinese higher education scholarships to developing countries' elite students on the continents of Africa and Asia should also mention the significant influence of China's influence and soft power expansion in these countries. And especially among their elites, it creates a spreading of Chinese culture and an increase in the interest of the elites and intellectuals in these areas for China and its policies.

China's International Media

Radio and television and the international media are an important part of any country's public diplomacy. Since the mid-1990s, the Chinese Communist government has been increasing its efforts to increase its competitiveness in the field of international radio and television. According to David Shamboog, post-Mao Chinese foreign propaganda stems from four main missions:

1. Introducing China to the outside world and promoting Chinese culture abroad;
2. Countering hostile foreign propaganda (such as Chinese threat theory).
3. Facing Taiwan's independence tendencies and promoting its solidarity with China;
4. Promoting China's foreign policy (Lo & Pan, 2016).

The Chinese media, meanwhile, have not been idle, helping to advance their country's goals. In recent years, China's state-owned media, including the media, has taken a different approach to African issues. China uses soft power methods and levers to try to align African public opinion with itself and Beijing's international politics, and in the meantime, it has to use the media. The Chinese state-run television network and the official Chinese news agency Shinhwa are reporting positive news about African governments. China has become increasingly dependent on Africa's natural resources for its growing economic needs and has called on the media to broadcast positive news about Africa to boost its exploits. Therefore, the media relations between Africa and China have grown tremendously and are constantly publishing different news from Africa. The work of the Chinese media in Africa has expanded to such an extent that even news agencies such as Reuters quoted Shinhwa and other Chinese media as reporting on Africa.

Chinese Culture and Language

After politics and economics, culture has increasingly become the third pillar of Chinese diplomacy, and today it grants more than a million cultural exchanges a year and exports its cultural products, particularly in the fields of film, art, music and music. It is also sports; the Chinese government has set up the "Confucius Institute" to promote and educate Chinese culture and language. In this way, China's active cultural diplomacy has helped improve China's image in the world. Today, more than 30 million people outside China are learning Chinese within these institutions; however, China's soft power is growing, with international criticism of the domestic political system as well as moral corruption in the country (Nye Jr., 2017). In addition to exporting goods and investing in the industrial and commercial sectors of the Black Continent, China has also sought to expand its cultural presence in the Black Continent since the early 1990s. Since the launch of Confucius Institutes in Africa, China has taught the Chinese language and culture in these countries and is currently operating in 13 African countries. These activities have led to the Chinese presence on the continent, according to official Chinese statistics, to one million people, which are said to have migrated to Africa by other means (Nye Jr., Economy & Shambaugh, 2016).

Other tools China uses in diplomacy to promote its soft power are efforts to expand Chinese culture and language in the world. Hanban is a government agency charged with promoting Chinese language education in other countries. It was founded in 1987 to coordinate China's efforts to promote and educate Chinese around the world. Since 2008, Hanban has provided foreign universities with funding to establish Chinese language and cultural studies centres (Confucius Institutes). In addition to money, the Chinese government is sending Chinese teachers to these universities. During these ten years, he founded the "Confucius Institute" at three universities in seven countries. A similar program runs in hundreds of foreign high schools. The project set is a good example of the country's soft power expansion. Confucian institutions act as the arm of the Chinese government, pursuing the goals of the government, whether in the recruitment and administration of academics, in the selection of courses, or in defining the scope of the discussions. The Confucius Institute aims to coordinate foreign relations, promote sociocultural understanding, globalize Chinese culture, and promote cooperation with foreign countries, and the so-called Chinese are embodied in Chinese public diplomacy or "smile diplomacy" (Sayama, 2016).

From the sports point of view, the Beijing Olympics also initiated efforts by the Chinese government to advance its soft power. The Beijing Olympic opening ceremony was heavily inspired by these themes, and the evidence is that the Chinese understand these aspects of Chinese culture more readily than non-Chinese audiences. Since then, China's state-run television broadcaster has expanded, and the Ministry of Education is funding a "Confucius Institute" overseas to promote Chinese culture and language. Branches of these institutes have been set up at North American universities. But the Chinese government's efforts in this regard have been challenged; in early 2014, the American University Professors' Union released a report criticizing Confucius institutions at US universities. These scholars believe that these institutions are a tool of the Chinese government and aim to "advance government programs to attract and control professors, select curricula, and limit the space for discussion." Discussions on Tibet, Taiwan, and the Tiananmen Square incident seem to be banned at these institutions.

In short, the tools and components that China uses to advance and expand its soft power in its target areas include a wide range of economic, political and cultural areas. Enhance cultural and academic exchanges, establish Confucius institutions and promote and teach the Chinese language, employ cultural diplomacy in foreign policy, participate in multilateral institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, invest in and provide financial and economic assistance, and participate in peacekeeping operations. The United Nations and the mediating role in regional conflict and the avoidance of interference in the internal affairs of other countries are all tools and strategies China seeks to expand and enhance its soft power around the world.

China's growing economic power, it seems, has moved the country from the periphery of world politics to the centre and attracted worldwide interest in Chinese culture and language. Based on the assessments made by China's soft power, it can be said that China has made significant gains in this area since its reform and "open door policy" in the 1970s. However, China's planning to advance its soft power will certainly face challenges because, firstly, in the era of expanding democracy, globalization and the information revolution, the Chinese development model with capitalist economics and despotic philosophy cannot be widely applied. Adopted as a viable alternative to free-market democracy and capitalism, this model has gained popularity in developing countries in the short term. Secondly, in a unipolar system, it will be very difficult for China to compete with the United States in expanding its soft power, especially in the field of public culture and political and economic institutions. Thirdly, today we are witnessing a decline in the sovereignty of nations in the age of globalization that has altered the balance of power in the international system, and as a result, non-state actors have gained more power in the global arena than ever before in history. While some of these actors, such as the international media network and international corporations may develop cooperative relationships with the Chinese government as a result of China's soft power rise, others such as the Falun Gong movement, the Tibetan expatriate community, and political dissenters may Organize international sympathy and support at a very low cost, transnational level, and discredit the Chinese government's efforts to present a positive image of itself. Thus, despite China's increasing ability to shape foreign policy agendas and views, it has a long way to go to achieve a level of soft power that will make it a true global leader (Shambaugh, 2015).

Conclusion

The 21st century is called the Asian century. The growth and development of Asian countries that began in the late 1970s were so rapid that at the end of the 20th century, in addition to Japan as an Asian economic giant, several other Asian countries, including China and India, were also among the major economies. And become successful worldwide. It can be said that the most important factor in the rise of Asian countries and their being among the great powers has been significant economic growth and development. Despite this economic growth, such countries as China, in addition to their continued economic growth and development, are also paying close attention to empowerment in other areas including the development of their nuclear, strategic, military and cultural activities. Over the past few decades, China has gained increasing power in various economic, military, and cultural dimensions, with analyzes of Chinese power and its various dimensions being of interest to international scientific circles. China's capabilities are growing across the East Asian region or the greater Indian Ocean and Pacific region. The region owns nearly 65 per cent of the world's new minerals and resources, 61 per cent of GDP

growth, and 47 per cent of international trade. China's strategic capabilities, its military structure, and its emerging military doctrine are all designed to achieve China's "core interests", which in the long run, reunite with Taiwan and protect its territorial and maritime claims. In the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

China has the economic and military power to gain equality with the United States, but in soft power, it still has a long way to go to compete with the United States; China has no major cultural industries like Hollywood, and its universities can compete with the university. - They don't have America. China lacks many NGOs that produce a great deal of US soft power. Politically, China suffers from corruption, inequality, lack of democracy and human rights, and a weak rule of law. While the "Beijing consensus" may be appealing to tyrannical and semi-tyrannical developing countries, it has weakened China's soft power in the Western world. Although China's new diplomacy has increased its appeal among its neighbours in Southeast Asia, China's continued war from its hard-line stance toward Taiwan has hurt its soft power position in Europe and the West. Although China is still a long way from the US in the amount and volume of its soft power, ignoring the gains it can make can be stupid. In the end, it can be said that China has been able to bring a positive image of itself to the world as a non-imperialist, peace-loving, non-imperialist superpower, relying on its public diplomacy and foreign policy and this resulting soft power. This is the peak of this country.

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