

China's Soft Power Elements: Analysing Trends and Diplomatic Trajectories

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Article Information	Abstract
Received: Aug 29, 2025 Revised: Dec 27, 2025 Accepted: Dec 31, 2025	Soft power, as defined by Joseph Nye, refers to the capacity of a state to shape others' behaviour and perceptions through appeal and persuasion rather than coercion. Chinese soft power strategy encompasses various elements, such as cultural diplomacy, such as establishment of Confucius Institutes to promote language and cultural exchange worldwide, technology and innovation diplomacy, health diplomacy, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, infrastructure diplomacy, notably through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and climate diplomacy in order to enhance China's global influence. In response, the United States is strengthening bilateral relations, increasing economic and development assistance, engaging in cultural and educational diplomacy, as well as military cooperation and multilateral engagement in the Indo-Pacific. However, China's soft power faces substantial obstacles, including its authoritarian political structure and human rights concerns, which generate scepticism among democratic states, policymakers, and academics, and could impede its ability to foster a positive global image. By assessing these diverse facets of China's soft power, this research provides critical insights into how Beijing positions itself as a global leader in the 21st century. It also examines how this challenge to traditional Western dominance may shape the future of international relations.
Keywords <i>Soft Power,</i> <i>China,</i> <i>Cultural Diplomacy,</i> <i>Belt and Road Initiative,</i> <i>Challenges</i>	

1. Introduction

Soft power refers to the ability of one country to influence others using non-coercive means such as culture, diplomacy, and economic strength. The rise of China as a global economic powerhouse can be associated with an effort to increase its soft power at the global level. China, being the leading exporter and second-largest importer in the world, plays a vital role in global trade, which provides it a strong foundation for its broader cultural and diplomatic outreach.

China's soft power strategy is multifaceted and deliberately coordinated. Economically, initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Digital Silk Road (DSR) promote infrastructure development, trade integration, and digital connectivity across Asia, Africa, and Europe, strengthening

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China's influence among developing and emerging economies. In 2016, China introduced the RMB into the Special Drawing Rights (SDR) basket of the IMF, a major move towards improving China's position in global economic management structures (Akdağ, 2022). Through these programs, China not only advances its economic interests but also cultivates long-term diplomatic ties and regional goodwill.

Technologically, China's rapid advancements in AI, 5G, and digital infrastructure enable it to shape global standards in emerging fields, positioning it as a leading actor in the digital economy and innovation-driven global governance. In terms of global governance, China also plays an active role in multilateral frameworks such as the World Trade Organization, the United Nations, G20, BRICS, and regional forums such as the SCO, which enable China to shape global rules, norms, and decision-making processes in ways that align with its strategic objectives. Its participation in and support of such institutions strengthen its soft power as it struggles to influence world policies that can benefit its economic and political goals (Kivimäki, 2014).

Moreover, the cultural exchanges advocated by modern China, which include educational programs, Confucius Institutes, film, music, and gastronomy, have also emerged as vital instruments of its soft power projection. Global fascination with Chinese culture fosters a sense of cultural identity, thereby strengthening Chinese soft power (Herbert et al., 2021). Engagement with Health diplomacy, exemplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, further demonstrates China's use of humanitarian aid and medical assistance to foster goodwill and strengthen bilateral relations. Similarly, climate diplomacy and environmental initiatives enable China to advocate for sustainable development and project leadership on global challenges, while enhancing its international legitimacy.

Interestingly, the rise of China as an international player is credited to the realist approach of its leadership that portrays a profound understanding of geopolitical dynamics. By integrating traditional policies into the unique construct, China is emerging as a potential superpower in the twenty-first century. The influence of China's modernity has extended to its political *savoir-faire* and distinct soft power approach (Almotairi, 2021).

2. Literature Review

The current literature on China's soft power highlights the shift from culture-based appeal to a multidimensional instrument of diplomacy that is part of the wider strategic goals. Badawi and Wattar develop the notion of Chinese soft power diplomacy as an integrative approach that comprises non-interventionism, cultural outreach, and economic cooperation, especially in Asia and the Middle East (Badawi & Wattar, 2024). Their discussion places soft power within the process of Beijing's recalibration to the Western-dominated order and how narratives of peaceful rise and strategic partnership are being mobilised to reverse the image of China as a threat. However, the chapter is mostly descriptive, with no systematic tracking of shifts or diplomatic paths over time.

The research article by Kim et al. is a quantitative and methodological innovation, as it focuses on Chinese soft power in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, using big-data sentiment analysis and topic modelling based on English-language news coverage (Kim et al., 2023). They show that their overall sentiment is shifting toward politicised accounts, but at the same time, they report diversifying their sources of soft power into digital and social media. Notably, the article contributes to the development of the soft power theory by resolving the issue of quantitative operationalisation. However, its media-centric nature limits soft power measurement to perceptions without much understanding of the concomitant transformation of diplomatic intent and policy tools.

Huang and Meng discuss tech diplomacy, a new element of Chinese foreign policy (Huang & Meng, n.d.). They use historical-discursive approaches to show that Beijing has institutionalised technology-based diplomacy to challenge Western hegemony and justify alternative global norms. Although this

work sheds light on the ideational and institutional aspects of soft power's influence in the field of technology, it mostly focuses on the formation of discourse rather than integration across domains.

The existing literature examines isolated aspects of soft power, regional diplomacy, media perceptions, and technological narratives in China. There is a significant gap in the systematic examination of how these elements work together over time to form consistent diplomatic pathways. This gap has been addressed in this research study through an integrated analytical framework.

3. Objectives of Research

The primary objective of the research is to critically examine the concept of soft power in China and the ways it has evolved over the years. The study seeks to find the recent changes in the Chinese diplomatic affairs, including cultural diplomacy, trade relations, the role of media, and technological penetration. It attempts to analyse the role of these tools/elements of soft power in the Chinese foreign policy as well as its foreign image. The other objective is to contemplate geographical and theoretical contrasts in the way China has enacted soft power, and the trend is contextualised within the greater argument of shifting power and the governance of the international system. The paper also aims to bridge the gaps in the study in terms of theoretical and empirical studies.

4. Research Methodology

The methods used in this study are qualitative and analytical, which are based on a literature review and discourse analysis. Peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and credible academic sources on Chinese soft power are analysed critically. It is based on the thematic research that the study classifies the significant soft powers and traces their diplomatic courses of action in different spheres. Through comparative analysis, the continuities and developments in Chinese soft power over time are analysed. This methodology enables the way of looking at trends, patterns, and strategic implications in situating them together.

5. Conceptualising Soft Power of China

As formulated by Joseph Nye, soft power is the “ability to attract, co-opt, and shape the preferences of others rather than coerce them, and it primarily stems from intangible resources such as a country’s culture, political values, foreign policies, and the perceived legitimacy of its actions.”(Nye, 2004). According to Nye, it is the ability to influence others in the way one wants without using coercion. A significant source of soft power is that of culture. According to Lee Kuan Yew, a former Singaporean senior minister, soft power is achieved when other countries envy and even want to emulate aspects of the civilisation of a certain nation(Foo, 1996). China has been using soft power practices to enhance its economic expansion in reaction to changes in the international economic and political arena. China has specific privileges that make it easier to augment its influence. The grandeur of China attracted an unceasing number of diplomats, merchants, religious leaders, and scholars to seek power, riches, inspiration, and guidance over an area of nearly three thousand years.

Over decades, soft power has been one of the primary approaches of China to reinforce the economic and geopolitical partnerships with the states of the region and countries far away. China has resolved many of its territorial disputes, joined several treaties, and taken part in several international and regional bodies, such as ASEAN, SCO, G20, and BRICS, among others. China has tried to establish a constructive role in the problem of the North Korean nuclear dilemma, the Darfur crisis, and the global climate disaster. In addition, China has significantly increased its involvement in international peace-making activities. The diplomatic approach, commonly referred to as smile diplomacy in China, has seen a lot of Chinese officials visiting foreign countries. Moreover, China has been at the forefront of promoting the Chinese language to the rest of the world, based on the fact that the language is important in the enhancement of cultural attractiveness. Over the years, China has inaugurated Confucius Institutes in numerous countries to expand its culture and language.

6. Analysing China's Soft Power Elements

The Chinese government has undertaken to become more appealing to the foreign world in the past decade. According to the former Chinese President Hu Jintao, the rich Chinese culture will flourish along with the massive renaissance of the Chinese nation(2018). Analysing the Chinese soft power tools such as educational exchanges, cultural diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and media image, this section delves into understanding how China applies soft power to influence international relations.

6.1 Cultural Diplomacy of China

Cultural diplomacy can be defined as the strategic use of culture, which includes language, art, exchanges, and customs, in strengthening the relationship with countries and boosting the soft power of a particular country in the international arena. China is employing cultural diplomacy as a key strategy for expanding its global influence, while leveraging its rich history and varied cultural heritage. Classical Taoism and Confucianism, key guiding principles of Chinese philosophy, promote harmony, mutual respect, and sharing ideas. These ideals are deeply rooted in modern China, as it focuses on collaboration and mutual understanding across cross-cultural boundaries.

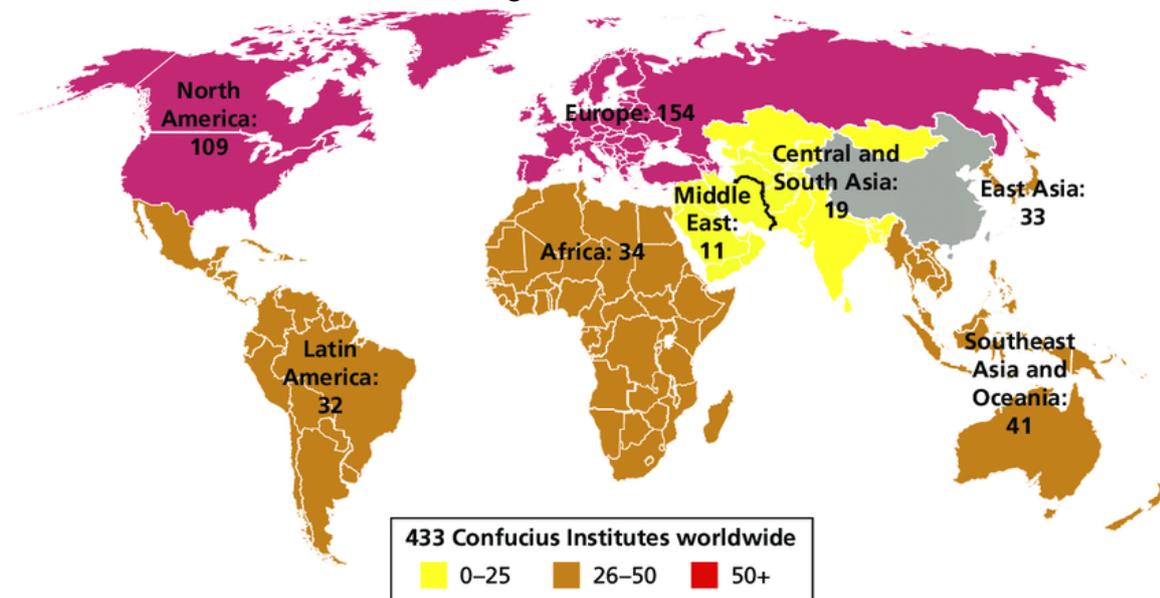
The idea of soft power, conceived by Joseph Nye in 1990, has been deeply applied in the political and intellectual discourse of China(Sweet, 2017). On the one hand, Zhang noted that the people-oriented ideology, major challenges, and central spheres of Chinese cultural soft power are quite distinct from those of Joseph Nye. Some of the differences raised by Zhang include how the concept of soft power conceptualises principles, power, and culture, the latter being just one element of culture. He argues that Nye's definition of culture is too narrow, as culture is required to formulate political beliefs and foreign policy. China sees culture as the basis of its soft power and the source of its national might. One of the most important soft power instruments, culture helps China reinforce its image worldwide through cross-cultural exchanges, helping convince the rest of the globe that China is a civilised, trustworthy nation. The importance of culture has grown to the extent that soft power and cultural power are equivalent.

As the importance of culture as a soft power tool has increased, the term is often used to refer to cultural soft power, with culture comprising not only Western cultural elements adapted to the Chinese cultural context, but also socialist and Marxist principles that are entirely Chinese(Becard & Menechelli Filho, 2019). The leaders of China have realised that their country needs to develop soft power and a strong national identity to be a great player in the 21st century. Foreign policy is informed by the internal political goals of the Communist Party of China (CPC), which considers culture and cultural projection to be a key resource. Among the long-term goals of the CPC in enhancing domestic administration and the global standing of the PRC are increasing the state's cultural security and cultural soft power. The effectiveness of the PRC's cultural diplomacy can be further demonstrated by the establishment of what could be defined as the CPC's ideological carnival(Becard & Menechelli Filho, 2019).

6.1.1 Confucius Institutes

One notable endeavour of the cultural diplomacy by China to promote the Chinese language and cultural appeal to other nations is the Confucius Institutes. They facilitate academic interaction and international knowledge and have become an important part of the policy of Chinese soft power. The Chinese government established the Confucius Institutes in 2004, which are founded on the concepts of the ancient Chinese philosopher. Such organisations provide educational courses, language lessons, and workshops to enhance the understanding and perception of the Chinese culture by the participants. The Confucius Institutes have swept the world after their establishment. They collaborate with foreign bodies and colleges to build them, and this offers them a huge market and facilitates cross-cultural communication and human relations. The Confucius Institute, being present in over 149

countries as of 2024, proves that the Chinese government is serious about solidifying its soft power and promoting global awareness (Mandarin, 2015). This is one of the objectives of the newly created network of Confucius institutes alongside the Goethe Institute, the British Council, and Maison française, which aims to offer a better image of China to the rest of the world.



Source: Scobell et al. 2020 Publication

The Confucius Institutes are aimed at restraining the influence of Taiwan by advancing forms of Chinese interpretations made by Beijing and extracts of the Beijing-centric viewpoint, rather than the traditional Chinese scripts employed in Taiwan (Gill & Huang, 2023). One of the primary areas of concern of these Institutes is the Chinese language instruction, mainly in Mandarin. The language programs are useful to students and professionals who want to learn Chinese for various reasons, such as academic goals and business. The institutes also host concerts, cultural activities, and exhibitions, which give a holistic experience of the Chinese culture. Confucius Institutes have a severe impact on the global image. These institutes offer an alternative narrative to the mainstream preconceptions and biases of the nation by providing the real information about the Chinese culture, language, and traditions.

6.1.2 The Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF)

CIEF is sponsored by the Chinese government and managed by the Ministry of Education to fund Confucius Institutes. This source of funding assists in making their operations sustainable, and the Chinese culture and language are always advertised. The Confucius Institute is regarded by many host schools as an avenue for collaborating with China in educational initiatives. Alliances such as this can assist nations to move closer as they can share students, research, and collaborate on courses. The fact that higher education in China is getting increasingly globalised does have its disadvantages and advantages, though.

On the one hand, it contributes to the increase of Chinese higher education on the global level and market acceptance of the quality of its programs. Conversely, it has caused concern among the neighbouring countries that Beijing is brainwashing its citizens through its power (Nye, 2004).

6.2 Technology and Innovation Diplomacy

In the contemporary era, technology and innovation have emerged as significant contributors to the influence of a nation in the world. China has acknowledged that technology and innovation policy could serve adequately as a way of enhancing its soft power. It is currently one of the technological leaders in the world due to its spectacular advancement in AI, 5G technology, and space research.

These achievements have been smartly exploited by the leaders of the country to enhance relations with other nations, demonstrating the innovativeness of the country. The trend of technical diplomacy in China demonstrates the desire of the country to promote its influence by exchanging technological advancements (Mingjiang, 2019).

6.2.1 Economic Technologies

The BRI, the main foreign policy of China, serves as a platform of creative and technological diplomacy. The BRI has five dimensions of connectivity, which include infrastructure connectivity, policy coordination, financial integration, Trade and Investment Facilitation, and people-to-people interaction. By incorporating technology cooperation into the BRI framework, China has made it possible to transfer digital connectivity, advanced infrastructure, and e-commerce solutions to the partner countries. This plan of action increases the image of China as a generous donor of technical development in the world. Within a globalised environment, the technological and scientific potential of any country would determine its strategies and socioeconomic position in the world, particularly in science, technology, and innovation (STI). The institutionalisation and creation of STI in China began in the middle of the 20th century through the CPC.

This is aimed at promoting manufacturing-based economic growth and strong and viable industrial growth. The CPC political elite proposed to focus on the STI-related investment projects in China because the country faced constant conflicts, and negative attitudes toward other countries were a certain historic value, and other domestic and societal disintegrations. The STI diplomacy of China was formed in the context of an economic, social, and political system completely different from that of the US and Europe. This has been influenced by the economic, social, and intellectual interactions of China. (Reghunadhan, 2021).

6.2.2 South-South Cooperation in Technology

The South-South Cooperation (SSC) notion has acquired essential significance in the developing nations in recent decades, so that it would be possible to cooperate and share knowledge, resources, and skills. China is a significant participant in international affairs and has been striving to sell the South-South Cooperation of technological orientations to other Third World countries. The involvement of China in SSC could be traced back to the Bandung conference of 1955, which represented the spirit of mutual aid, non-interventionism, and equality. Gradually, China has transformed over time from a recipient of international aid into a contributor based on technological advancement and economic development. Such a change has witnessed the development of powerful SSC programs in other fields, and technology is one of them (*China South-South Cooperation Network*, n.d.). China has a significant location of technology in the SSC of this country.

It deals with the transfer of technological skills and expertise to the recipient nations by building capacity seminars, training, and technology transfer agreements. Second, the individualisation of the projects depending on the needs and goals of the partner countries is carried out to create a sense of proprietorship and sustainability. Further, the Chinese SSC in its technology transfer is not a solitary idea but has a connection of information sharing, promotion of innovations, and capability forming concerning the research and development facet. Implementation of technology-oriented SSC in China has many ways. These are joint research programmes, establishing technology parks and dispatching Chinese specialists to the partner nations. These schemes stimulate exchange of ideas and experiences, localise technology, and form cross-border forums. Despite its success, the presence of different administrative systems, technological disparity between partner nations, and the fear of intellectual property rights pose challenges to this endeavour.

6.2.3 Thousand Talents Program of China

The Thousand Talents Program (TTP) is a mass and disputable Chinese initiative that is meant to introduce foreign expertise. In other countries, the skilled Chinese workers were draining out of their universities; hence, the program was launched in 2008 to counter this brain drain, and this was the Thousand Talents Program. The ultimate aim of the Thousand Talents Program is to repatriate high-quality researchers, professors, and professionals of Chinese origin back to China or to bring in foreign talent to enhance the scientific, technological, and economic growth of China. This is done using multiple incentives such as funding research, competitive payments, accommodation allowances, and state-of-the-art research facilities. The TTP has three key types: the Thousand Talents Plan of Professionals, Thousand Young Talents Plan, and Overseas Experts Recruitment Program, which cover different classes of specialists(2023b). TTP has brought numerous professionals worldwide and has enhanced the academic and research environment in China by bringing new perspectives, approaches, and a network to intellectual China. The programme has also enabled the returnees to collaborate with the local researchers and brought immense scientific discoveries and advancements. (Lewis, 2023).

6.3 Health Diplomacy as Soft Power Tool

Health diplomacy can be described as political practices aimed at attaining the enhancement of international relations and global health promotion. It highlights inherent connections between foreign policy and the health sector, as well as constitutes a significant component of novel diplomacy that began to develop during the Cold War, with the penetration of foreign policy into the majority of spheres and concerns. (Jing et al., 2011).

Beijing views developing countries and third-world countries as its key allies, and health diplomacy is one of the critical instruments that can be used to forge international partnerships. The health diplomacy of China has been built over a long period of time. Many Chinese provinces have established strong relationships with some nations over the past decades through the financing of medical teams. Moreover, health cooperation enabled China to gain the support of its former colonies and was a strategic approach to seek membership in the UN, which was achieved successfully in 1971. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the capabilities of China to interact with other countries. Beijing emerged as a very crucial donor to underdeveloped countries, and Chinese vaccines had a massive impact on the global immunisation efforts despite their comparatively low effectiveness rates.

The contribution policy of China was significantly influenced by geostrategic reasons, whereby the promoters were focused on the neighbouring countries and the main players in the BRI. Health diplomacy was an important factor in the interactions of China with the rest of the world. The Chinese approach to matters regarding health in the world has undergone a significant transformation over the last half-century. The new awareness of the Chinese leadership that it participates in worldwide health programs enhances the international credibility of the country as a contributor to world welfare. (Huang, 2010).

6.3.1 China's "Health Silk Road" Strategy

The Health Silk Road (HSR) is a project in the framework of China's BRI dedicated to the promotion of the healthcare industry and facilitation of global collaboration in the sphere of public health. The main goals of the HSR are to enhance the Chinese global health impact, global health partnership, and healthcare infrastructure(Yuan, 2023).

China was the first nation to adopt the HSR strategy in the course of the Ebola outbreak between 2014 and 2016. It showed a rapid and strong response, which was much more effective than the activities of the numerous countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In addition, China has significantly increased the funds it provides to foreign health agencies, including Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, WHO, and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS,

Tuberculosis, and Malaria. These donations underscore the effort of China to fund international health and collaborate with other countries on international health.

Besides, China offers low and middle-income countries technical and capacity-building aid to tackle a number of health concerns. Indicatively, China has been dispatching medical teams to most African nations since the 1960s to offer medical care and training prospects to the local medical professionals. The HSR has widened this project with thousands of Chinese medical professionals actively involved in over 50 countries around the world. China is also an active participant in giving humanitarian assistance and emergency response in the case of an international health emergency (Yuan, 2023). The way China reacted to the outbreak of the COVID-19 epidemic is indicative of the rising global health leadership of the country. China was willing to aid and assist nations in distress through the epidemic by providing medical materials, expertise, and funds to nations that were affected.

6.3.2 Chinese “Vaccine Diplomacy” during COVID-19

The notion of vaccine diplomacy has become a new aspect of Chinese foreign policy, which was conditioned by the COVID-19 pandemic as a part of its global health diplomacy. By early 2021, China had become one of the leaders in the COVID-19 vaccine manufacturing, producing more than 170 million doses as of March 2021. The concept of Chinese vaccine diplomacy dates back to July 2020, when Beijing exported to Brazil its first vaccines to test them. Therefore, it immediately signed agreements with individual partner governments, most of which are low- and middle-income countries. Egypt was one of the first to use vaccinations produced by Sinopharm, a Chinese business, in December 2020.

By June 2021, the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Wang Wenbin, declared that Beijing had distributed 350 million doses of its vaccines to its overseas allies and had donated to more than 80 third-world countries in urgent need and sold to over 40 countries. At the very beginning, China targeted its vaccine diplomacy efforts at the governmental level, but later preferred to engage in the help through COVAX. Wenbin pointed out that the provision of Chinese vaccinations to COVAX will increase their efforts in the global response (Kobierecka, 2023). The epidemic provided China with an advantage in terms of strengthening its position as a leader, particularly through the application of health diplomacy as a soft power process (Gauttam et al., 2020).

Moreover, the mask diplomacy was also another strategic approach of China, which is combined with the distribution of the necessary medical resources, such as sanitisers, and financial support. The delivery of masks and supplies to the under-resourced hospitals and local charities has largely changed the image of China during the COVID-19 pandemic (2020).

6.4 Infrastructure Diplomacy and China’s Soft Power

Another area in which China has emerged as a formidable player of soft power is infrastructural diplomacy, which has become one of the core components of the Chinese foreign policy. In recent decades, China has specifically invested in infrastructure projects around the world, which stimulates the growth of the economy and the relations between China and other countries. This has provided China with access to key resources, markets, and trade routes. At the same time, it enhances its global image as a conscientious global citizen who is keen on supporting the economic progress of other states. The twofold nature of this approach enables China to manipulate and win the trust of countries that will benefit from its investments.

During the Asian crisis in 1997-1998, China gave affected nations financial support and maintained the fixed exchange rate of its currency, renminbi (RMB). The global community has therefore changed its attitude towards China and recognised its positive contribution. The Chinese leaders have continuously claimed in the past ten years that their rise in the world arena will be non-violent and that it will not lead to hegemony. According to Barry Buzan, peaceful rising is a special and

indigenous concept with strong roots in the reform and opening up in China, which sets the groundwork of the entire strategy. It means that China is likely to use coercive politics of threats and intimidation and avoid open warfare. It is also unlikely that it will conform to the current international order; rather, it will aim at adjusting it towards its advantage without engaging in expensive wars that will hamper its domestic growth and economic progress.

6.4.1 Belt and Road Initiative: A Chinese Soft Power Tool

BRI entails Chinese initiatives to promote the development of a number of nations with the assistance of six major economic corridors, to improve business, financial, and personal connections. According to the OECD, these areas are Mongolia, China, Eurasia, Russia, West and Central Asia, Pakistan, Indochina, and the Indian subcontinent countries. Also, the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road connects all these six sectors and provides connectivity via the Arctic Circle, Africa, and Europe. Asia is also known to have a lack of infrastructure investment, and China could take the opportunity to benefit both countries.

The BRI is able to show soft power through its exchange and trade programs. BRI connects China with many countries and creates a dynamic market where the member countries can exchange information and experience. The comprehensive infrastructure of the BRI will ensure that business, brands, consumer goods, and cultural commodities will proliferate, hence making distribution easier. BRI, as a soft power tool, enhances China's credibility through strategic investments in various non-military and non-development sectors like the media, publishing, education, and arts. Together with these funding programs, diplomatic outreach and host diplomacy are instruments used by China to establish itself as a major player in the world, gaining more prominence.

6.5 Climate Diplomacy and China

The entry of China into global climate governance is more prominent than ever since it ratified the 2015 Paris Agreement. This rise is being driven by the growing diplomatic and discursive influence of China in climate politics, which is expressed by its strategic alliances with countries in the global South. China is also driving industrial-scale afforestation as a natural solution to climate issues, exporting its economic model, and selling a techno-centric solution to climate challenges. As part of this multidimensional strategy, China is increasing climate finance, facilitating technology transfer, encouraging renewable energy, and infrastructure adaptation in countries surrounding the global South. (Abbasi & Liaqat, 2024).

Barry Buzan asserts that Beijing stands as a unique and valuable opportunity to take the leadership role in the world, given the lack of strong leadership on the climate change front. In 2013 and 2016, China and the United States (US) started collaborating to create momentum towards signing a deal at the 2015 Paris summit. However, in 2017, President Xi Jinping delivered an important speech, which aligned with the withdrawal of the US from the Paris Agreement, when he reiterated that China was leading in taking action on global climate. This is the time when China announced that it was planning to assume the global climate leadership.

The US withdrawal of the deal enabled China to exert its control further on the regulation of global climate. As a matter of fact, China is beginning to play a more significant role in developing responses to climate change on a global level. It has not been keen on making serious moves towards climate change in the context of the UN long enough. This opposition to hardline climate commitments was experienced over a number of decades. However, China began to adopt a new approach and gradually became increasingly involved in global climate talks and efforts, particularly in the lead-up to and following the 2015 Paris Treaty. The role of China has also shifted, which signifies a change of perception and an emergence of realisation of the role that China has to play in addressing global climate change issues (2021).

China takes an active part in the international clean technology cooperation and the green investments in infrastructural systems of the economically disadvantaged states as a part of its decarbonization efforts. In this endeavour, China and France have included civilian nuclear energy, biodiversity conservation, climate change, and land degradation as important areas of cooperation. The two nations have engaged in pledging their obligations under the Paris Agreement and the Global Biodiversity Framework. French enterprises and Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) have formulated major deals, which are based on decarbonization. Such agreements involve numerous low-carbon innovative projects, such as the dealings between the EDF and the State Power Investment Corporation of China and the joint venture between the French CMA CGM and the Chinese COSCO Shipping and Shanghai International Port Group to supply port-based green methanol(2023a).

7. US Response to Chinese Soft Power Diplomacy

South Asia has been a key area of influence in the struggle between the US and China over the last few years. The swift growth of soft power in South Asia is raising more and more concerns in Washington about the possibility of China shaping the political, economic, and cultural landscapes of the countries in this region. The US has come up with countermeasures in relation to the soft power of China in the region.

The most important strategy is to strengthen the bilateral relations with South Asian nations. In its bilateral trade agreements, cooperation in security concerns, and cultural exchanges, the United States has enhanced its diplomatic relations with countries such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and India. The rationale behind these programs is to exert more American influence in the region and build confidence.

The United States has also increased its funding and investments towards South Asia, funding infrastructures, health education, and services. The US-led Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad, is another significant diplomatic and security formation in the Indo-Pacific region. The Quad, which comprises Australia, the US, India, and Japan, is also a significant instrument in addressing the problems regarding security in the region and promoting stability through limiting the expanding influence of China. Cultural diplomacy should be part of the efforts the United States makes to combat the soft power of China.

The US government also finances educational and cultural exchanges to empower interpersonal relationships and promote American ideals, concepts, and culture across the region (Gupta, 2013). The United States and its allies in South Asia have strengthened their military alliance because of the security issues in the area. To offset the military influence and military strength of China, this is achieved through intelligence dissemination, joint military operations, and the sale of arms.

The multilateral participation is also one of the weapons of the United States against the soft power of China. The United States of America (US) supports South Asian countries to participate in regional entities and initiatives such as the Quad (comprised of the US, India, Japan, and Australia) that promote democracy and economic collaboration. The United States is actively strengthening cybersecurity and countering attempts at misinformation as China develops its digital presence all over South Asia. These efforts would maintain the information ecosystem and protect the region against over-intervention by other countries (Gupta, 2013).

8. Challenges to Chinese Soft Power

China is confronted with numerous challenges as it seeks to gain more worldwide power. To begin with, the Chinese political system, being authoritarian, might pose a greater challenge to Beijing in encouraging a positive international image, especially in democracies where issues related to human rights are highly scrutinised. Also, the weakness of the soft power of China is the way the

international community criticises its domestic policies, especially its treatment of the minorities and its attitude towards Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Second, mistrust exists toward the intentions of China because of its aggressive foreign policy, in particular, in the South China Sea, and its economic policies, including debt diplomacy within the framework of the BRI. Despite the contribution of these programs to gaining influence in developing countries, due to the common rise of the question about economic dependence and neo-imperialism, they reduce the appeal of China's soft power.

The Chinese influence is also blocked by ideological and cultural rifts. Regardless of its intentions to spread the Chinese culture and language, Confucius Institutes have been met with criticism and distrust in different countries, thus leading to the shutting down of such institutions because of concerns of political influence and propaganda.

Finally, due to government regulation and cultural barriers that restrain the innovative aspect needed to reach international markets, the media and entertainment industry, which is a significant tool in the soft power strategy, cannot be easily extended internationally.

9. Conclusion

China's soft power policies are a complex and dynamic means of promoting international cooperation, shaping public opinion, and furthering domestic goals. China has shown a significant desire to increase its soft power internationally. The patterns and trajectories of China's soft power indicate a complicated and dynamic environment with essential ramifications for diplomacy and international relations. China's capacity to strike a balance between advancing its culture, economic interests, and values, addressing foreign issues, and acknowledging the range of global opinions will determine the success of its soft power measures. China's soft power will probably change over the next several years due to shifting international dynamics; its ability to succeed will rely on its flexibility, openness, and capacity to forge connections with diverse nations and cultures. Soft power will remain an essential part of China's foreign policy toolkit as it becomes increasingly involved in international affairs. It will shape its contacts with other countries and affect their opinions and attitudes toward China. China's soft power is not without its difficulties and disagreements, however. Human rights, censorship, and transparency issues have clouded China's soft power initiatives, leading to conflicting views around the world. Over time, China's soft power strategy will depend on how well it handles these worries and responds to scepticism worldwide. Furthermore, China's soft power trends would be greatly influenced by the global geopolitical environment. China will face competition from other superpowers, such as the US, in its efforts to gain more clout and advance its ideals internationally.

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