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# Soft Power: China on the Global Stage

Alan Hunter

## Introduction

The year 2009 marks a new high-point in China's international reputation. The 2008 Beijing Olympics were certainly a huge success, a visible marker of the Asian rise to power and prestige that has been flagged up in academic and popular media for several years. Then, China seemed to be by far the most resilient of the major economies during the global financial crisis: its economy is still predicted to grow, although at a slower pace, while almost every other major country is in recession. Yet the past two years have not been easy, either for China or for its Asian neighbours. 2008 was supposed to be a great year for China, first-time host of the world's biggest international sporting and media fest, the Olympic Games. But suddenly a spring of high hopes turned to tragedy on 12 May 2008, day of the earthquake that devastated the country's western provinces, killing an estimated 100,000 and displacing five million. All Chinese people and foreigners who have grown to love China were shocked and appalled at this natural disaster that came so soon after Cyclone Nargis hit Myanmar on 2 May.

Relief operations in Myanmar were almost as unmitigated a disaster as the cyclone itself, but the generally positive reporting from China that globally dominated TV screens made plain, even to dyed-in-the-wool China-bashers, that the nation was united in its response to the earthquake; that the military was committed to the relief operation, that many experts were rapidly deployed to the region, and that the central political establishment had mobilised maximal resources to support victims of the disaster. International coverage of the earthquake relief efforts and various other China-related news stories also demonstrated that China had become an integrated aspect of world media, as well as of global economy and international politics. One example is the UK hosting in summer 2008 of China Now, the largest Chinese cultural festival ever held in Europe. But a few months earlier in April, the Chinese Olympic PR machine had been totally out-manoeuvred by pro-Tibetan protesters. The topic of integration and media exposure raises the subject of "soft power" and the questions: how is China perceived by the non-Chinese world? Does China generate goodwill, or antipathy? Does the Chinese leadership consciously generate soft power, or is it a more spontaneous outcome of economic and artistic activity?

China, in common with other great nations, has its own traditions of international relations. From the 1950s to the late 1970s, a period usually characterized as "Maoist", many of the country's international security preoccupations related directly to two struggles. First was that between the Soviet bloc and the West. Second was the rivalry between China and the Soviet Union, in the form of territorial disputes in border regions and competition for hegemony, specifically over international communist movements and generally over developing countries. There was a radical shift of policy after 1978, and establishment of the reform principle of sustaining a

peaceful international environment for the several generations it took China to transform into a modern industrialized power. By the 1990s, this guideline had transposed into a strategy of cautious partnership with the USA and a major commitment to improved multi-lateral ties, especially in Asia, but also on other continents.

Developments in the international environment by 2009 had not derailed this strategy but did instigate new scenarios. One of the most obvious was the intensive worldwide search for the raw materials – hydrocarbons and metals especially – that China needed to fuel and maintain its economic boom. As all other industrial countries faced this challenge, potential conflict with traditional customers for similar goods became an issue that needed careful management by all parties. Another development was ever-growing expenditure on arms and the perceived need, in Asia as elsewhere, for nations to maintain credible deterrence against other regional powers.

This paper considers a further dimension of international relations, namely “soft power”. The author do not propose to make a detailed critique of the “soft power” concept, but rather to use it as a basis for evaluating aspects of China’s rise and stated commitment to peace. This is a relatively new field of study; partly because China’s rise is itself relatively recent, and partly due to lack of sinological expertise among interested commentators. A fully-fledged literary review, therefore, is not possible at this stage, but The author would like to draw attention to a handful of relevant publications.

## **Review of Literature**

In 1990, Joseph Nye published the book which first popularised the term “soft power”, referring primarily to ways in which a nation’s cultural resources constitute a form of power that enhances, or even substitutes for military and economic strength. In simplistic terms, Nye explained: “The basic concept of power is the ability to influence others to get them to do what you want. There are three major ways to do that: one is to threaten them with sticks; the second is to pay them with carrots; the third is to attract them or co-opt them, so that they want what you want. If you can get others to be attracted, to want what you want, it costs you much less in carrots and sticks.”<sup>1</sup> Cited examples of soft power include the attraction of normative values, media, business practices, education, and language.

Nye published an influential paper and later a book giving an accessible overview of the field of study<sup>2</sup>. He expands as follows the basic concept: there is a spectrum of behaviour, differentiating hard power at one extreme and soft power at the other. The spectrum runs from command and coercion, through inducements, agenda-setting and attraction, to end with a successful deployment of soft power: co-optation. When this

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

<sup>2</sup> Joseph S. Nye, “The Decline of America’s Soft Power”, *Foreign Affairs*, May/June 2004; and *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).

is accomplished, the “target” of soft power does not feel threatened or persuaded into supporting an agenda, but actually identifies with it. He effectively becomes a long-term, close ally and supporter of the exponent of soft power, because he feels a sense of shared values, goals and way of life. He would be pleased if his country were to emulate the projector of soft power.

In parallel, a nation might deploy a variety of other resources to achieve the same goals. Hard power is accomplished mainly by military force, or at least credible threat of it; less “hard” techniques might be payments, even bribes, or institutional pressures; and soft power is developed by promoting cultural values and sympathy.<sup>3</sup> Examples Nye gives of United States soft power include global brands, films and TV programmes, universities, book and music sales, internet sites, reputation for science, technology, and wealth creation.<sup>4</sup> He also notes, a point we return to later, that America’s reputation, and hence soft power, has taken a severe battering in recent years, partly because of the invasion of Iraq. His book continues with a detailed analysis of the role of soft power in US diplomacy and public life; he moreover makes limited but useful observations on soft power in Europe and Asia, in the latter instance focusing mainly on Japan.

The theme of soft power in Asia is not extensively researched by Western scholars, although a few publications have appeared online and in print in the past few years. A recent paper by Gill and Huang highlights important aspects of China’s recent diplomacy in the wider sense, including its education, developmental model and growing participation in international institutions.<sup>5</sup> The authors argue that despite its many successes, China’s soft power project is undermined by factors such as perceived widespread corruption; lack of international credibility; and foreign policy inconsistency. The author also found two useful conference papers available on the internet, but not yet for citation, by Italian sinologist Barbara Onnis on China’s soft power and Tsuneo Akaha on that of Japan.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile McCormick argues in *The European Superpower* that soft power has been a key resource in Europe’s efforts to counterpose itself to the US by projecting the image of a continent more cultured and peaceable than North America.<sup>7</sup> Chinese researchers are starting to address the issue, as in the major publication in 2006 from Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences.<sup>8</sup>

Kurlantzick’s *Charm offensive: how China's soft power is transforming the world* is the main English-language study so far.<sup>9</sup> This book is a major achievement in being

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<sup>3</sup> Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 33-35.

<sup>5</sup> Bates Gill and Yanzhong Huang, “Sources and Limits of Chinese Soft Power”, *Survival*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 2006, pp. 17-36.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Onnis, “Monopoly broken-again? The emergence of China’s alternative soft power”, paper presented at the Sixth Pan-European Conference (SGIR/ECPR) Turin, September 12-15, 2007; and Tsuneo Akaha, “Debating soft power in Japan’s security policy”, paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Honolulu, March 2-5, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> John McCormick, *The European Superpower* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Shanghai shehui kexue yuan, Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi yanjiuyuan. *Guoji tixi yu Zhongguode ruan lilian* [International system and China's soft power]. (Beijing Shi, Shishi chubanshe, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm offensive: how China's soft power is transforming the world* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007).

the first systematic attempt at mapping Chinese attempts, especially in the past decade, to win allies and influence around the world through various classic soft power techniques, such as education and cultural exports. Kurlantzick sees China's relative success in the soft-power game as directly related to the US's spectacular failures in recent years: China's rise mirrors US decline, particularly evident in the alienating affect on millions of people around the world of the Bush administration's unilateralism and military aggression. Internal events like the response to Hurricane Katrina, moreover, led many to perceive the US as inherently racist, polarized, and careless of the welfare of its own people. We cannot be sure to what extent Chinese leaders are aware of the US's squandering of its soft-power "capital", but they certainly seem committed to extending China's.

Kurlantzick correctly notes that the success of the Chinese development and poverty-reduction model resonates positively in the developing world:

China seems to have enjoyed striking success and poverty reduction that other developing countries can't help but notice. At the same time, the Washington Consensus has failed many developing nations. During the late 1980s and 1990s, many African and Latin American nations opened their economies, slashed their tariffs and undertook other painful economic reforms, yet few nations in either Latin America or Africa saw their economies take off.<sup>10</sup>

During the course of his analysis, Kurlantzick builds on an important observation he made in an earlier publication:

When Joseph Nye coined the term *soft power*, he originally used a more limited definition, excluding investment and aid and formal diplomacy—more traditional, harder forms of influence. In the context of Asia today, both China and its neighbours enunciate a broader idea of soft power, the idea that soft power implies all elements outside of the security realm, including investment and aid.<sup>11</sup>

He also notes that different degrees of soft power apply to elites and the general public.

Chinese scholars have produced more on the subject than Western researchers. Recent Chinese-language publications include an overview of works by Liu and Wang<sup>12</sup>; and an interesting policy analysis by Yan.<sup>13</sup> An excellent paper by Joel Wuthnow also analyses much of their outputs.<sup>14</sup> Recent Chinese debate is in three main areas. First, that soft power might be critical to achieving long-term strategic success in a world

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's Charm: Implications of Chinese Soft Power", *Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief*, No. 47, 2006, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Liu Qing and Wang Litao, 'Jinnian guonei ruan lilian lilun yanjiu zongshu' [A summary of recent domestic research on soft power theory], *Guoji luntan* [International Forum], 2007, no. 3, pp. 38-43.

<sup>13</sup> Yan Xuetong, 'Zhongguo ruan shili youdai tigao' [The path for China to increase its soft power], *Zhongguo yu shijie guancha* [China and World Affairs], 2007, no. 2:2.

<sup>14</sup> Joel Wuthnow, 'The Concept of Soft Power in China's Strategic Discourse'. *Issues and Studies* vol. 44 no. 2 (June 2008), pp. 1-28.

where the USA wields overwhelming military power. This policy area sees soft power as a necessary adjunct to hard power, a point argued since around 2000 in the context of the “comprehensive national power” (*zonghe guoli*) analyses. Second, soft power enhances China’s aspiration to become natural leader of the developing world. There are two possible approaches to this end; advertising the stunning success of the “Chinese development model” as a superior achievement to anything the US or its allies can offer; and engaging in “economic diplomacy” through aid, investment and other instruments. Third, Chinese leaders understand that to counter fears of the new superpower that might naturally arise, especially in neighbouring Asian countries, they need to promote China’s image as reasonable, peace-loving, responsible and non-expansionist.

Yan raises in his article the pertinent point that China’s global reputation depends largely on international perceptions of its domestic politics. Moves towards greater social justice, democratization, stability, sustainable growth and environmental improvements, therefore, form a kind of “internal soft power” which feeds into the leadership’s vision of a harmonious society, and also directly into international prestige and leadership.

The “soft power” field of study is thus, in general, established, but relatively recently and with much scope for development. My intention in this paper is to present arguments on soft power thinking within Chinese culture, to compare Chinese soft power with that of a number of other states, and to draw conclusions on its relative effectiveness.

## **Chinese traditional thought and its ‘new’ theory of soft power**

Nye’s earlier cited studies refer to practices which pre-date his coining of the term: for example the propaganda values of the Roman Empire could make a fine case-study. Obvious attempts at soft power in an earlier generation were the Soviet and US competitive attempts to win “hearts and minds”, both in Europe and in developing countries. A prime example of US activity in the Cold War was the now infamous Congress for Cultural Freedom, which the CIA subsidized from 1950 to 1967; a more recent ploy is providing scholarships for Iranian young people to study in the US. I am undecided whether or not one should welcome such initiatives; one could argue that even if they have little effect they are certainly preferable to military spending and unlikely to do as much harm. If power-blocs are driven to compete, cultural rather than military competition is surely less destructive.

### **Two Components of Chinese Concept of Soft Power**

The author would like to argue here that the concept of “soft power” has been a fundamental part of military thinking in China for over two thousand years. Generations of Chinese leaders have adopted the stratagems and long-term planning elegantly stated in Sunzi’s *Binfa* [Art of War], in around the fourth century BCE.<sup>15</sup> These stratagems did not remain in an ivory-tower of military theory, but formed a

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<sup>15</sup> A convenient new English translation is Sunzi, *The Art of War*, translated into English by Denma Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala, 2002).

key element of statecraft: a carefully crafted strategy to confuse putative rivals, throw them off balance, and hopefully “win victories without striking a blow”. Indeed so popular are many of the strategies that they have become part of Chinese folk heritage, passed down in story-cycles and novels like the *Tale of the Three Kingdoms*, now a popular film and TV show.

Sunzi argues that military action should be just one element, and not that most important, of an integrated approach to security; one in which diplomatic alliances, with emphasis on such stratagems as deceiving enemies and undermining their home fronts; secret logistical preparations; winning over enemy civilians, soldiers, and leaders; avoiding defeats and casualties; maximizing victories; and predicting the aftermath of war before engagement, are more crucial than mere fighting. Many of Sunzi’s phrases have passed into daily language, for example *bing yi zha li* (war is based on deception); *yiruo kegang* (use gentle means to overcome the hard and strong); *bishi jixu* (avoid the enemy’s strengths and strike at his weak point). The Chinese Communist Party top leadership, after decades of guerrilla warfare, were certainly familiar with all such ruses. Writer on military affairs David Lai contrasts this approach with the Western emphasis on overwhelming speed, confrontational force and technological superiority.<sup>16</sup>

Moral leadership by exemplar is another component of “soft power”. Even if claims to moral integrity have little basis in fact, they can nevertheless be promoted through propaganda, as in the Cold War rhetorical assertions that the US was a bastion of freedom and democracy; or that the Soviet Union was a paradise of equality and public goods. Again, this concept resonates in Chinese tradition. Confucianism is a main paradigm of Chinese governance which although hierarchical, is ideally reciprocal and ethics-based. The ruler is expected to demonstrate moral excellence, taking wise decisions on behalf of his subjects to keep the state secure and prosperous. As long as he does so, he holds a “heavenly mandate” and should be supported by all. If he should deviate significantly from moral norms, he will sooner or later lose the mandate. Widespread and justified popular opposition and a change of ruler will follow. One often finds, even at much lower levels of Chinese institutional life, a strong sense of obligation on the part of seniors to respect the interests of their subordinates, towards whom they are expected to act fairly and generously. They expect in return loyalty and hard work.

### **Chinese Thinking on peace in the context of soft power**

The author would like to make a few observations about Chinese thinking on peace, conflict and values in the context of “soft power”. Christianity, Islam, and free-market or liberal values have profoundly influenced the West and West Asia. China’s ideological heritage, on the other hand, includes Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism as well as, more recently, Marxism. On a practical level, in earlier times much of the West lived on pastoral agriculture, hunting, fishing and trade, but Chinese economic survival depended on crop agriculture, especially rice cultivation in the south and

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<sup>16</sup> David Lai, *Learning from the Stones*, (Carlisle, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2004).

millet in the north. Hydraulic engineering was, and remains essential to supporting crops and preventing flood damage. These contrasts of ideology and practical means of subsistence inevitably result in differences between the Chinese thinking about war and peace and that of Western cultures.

Certain Chinese vocabulary illustrates characteristic Chinese concerns. The two characters commonly used for peace are *he*, implying harmony, and *ping*, something level, like the flat surface of a lake. Regaining peace may be called *chuhai*, which means getting rid of weeds or obstacles: preparing the earth for cultivation by removing pests; or removing blockages in a channel to make water flow smoothly. One of the great traditional anxieties of the Chinese state is expressed in the character *luan*, disorder, or *zheng*, violent internal conflict. Other than at times such as the anti-Japanese war and the Cultural Revolution, Chinese culture has not glorified the armed forces; it has indeed often regarded them as a refuge for ne'er-do-wells. But Chinese governments nonetheless feel justified in calling in the army (*bing*) when they feel major civil unrest is getting out of hand. Recent examples, both of which played extremely badly in the global media, are the suppression of the student movement in 1989 and the protests in Tibet of 2008. Ter Haar also makes the point that there is undoubtedly a strong current of violence in traditional Chinese society which it is in the interests of the literati to downplay.<sup>17</sup>

## **The Dynamics of China's Pursuit of Soft power**

### **Peaceful Rising**

There is consensus among economists that, if there are no major international upheavals, China will become the second largest economy in the world within the next five years. It is already a serious competitor of the US and other advanced economies in the acquisition of oil, minerals, and infrastructure contracts in Iran, Saudi, Brazil and elsewhere. Its political influence has increased dramatically in the past five years, in Asia and in Africa especially. There are more differentiated analyses of its military strength, but as far as I have seen, no serious commentator regards China as vulnerable to conventional military attack, other than from the USA. A global shift of power of this magnitude, however, implies potential international armed conflict. China's extraordinary domestic economic growth, although positive on the whole for the majority of the population, has also inevitably given rise to social tensions that could occasion mass protests. The two main likely flashpoints are land-grabs and environmental destruction, and extreme inequalities of wealth. Whether or not social protests in the latter regard achieve a positive outcome or lead to violence and even greater poverty depends on many factors. The Chinese government, therefore, is under serious international and domestic pressure.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Barend J. Ter Haar, "Rethinking Violence in Chinese Culture", in Goran Aijmer and Jos Abbink eds, *Meanings of Violence: A Cross Cultural Perspective* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), pp.123-40.

<sup>18</sup> See studies by Erica Downs, *China's Quest for Energy Security* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2000); Forney, Mathew, "China Quest for Oil", *Time* 25 October 2004, pp. 30-35; Jan Kalicki and David Goldwyn eds., *Energy and Security: Towards a New Foreign Policy Strategy* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press 2005).



China would be regarded within conventional international relations or security studies as having two overriding concerns; the first, how to handle the relationship with the US, which takes top priority because the US alone among world powers possesses military might overwhelmingly superior to that of China. China perceives the US as an aggressive and unpredictable super-power, and China probably presents a main threat to US economy. The second possible adversary is Japan: a nation of industrial and military power comparable to that of China, and with whom it has an exceptionally bad history, which is closely allied to the US and Taiwan; and which is also a rival for massive undersea oil reserves.

A simple analysis of military spending and review of high-technology military matériel shows that China is at a massive disadvantage compared to the US and Japan. The US military budget is more than ten times that of the PRC; and the US and its closest allies, the UK and Japan, account for at least two-thirds of global military expenditure. Excellent reports on China's military capabilities from the US perspective, incidentally, are freely available on the US Department of Defense website.<sup>19</sup> The US, moreover, is beyond conceivable competition as regards military technology. Chomsky summarizes many fields in which the US could deploy offensive armaments against which other nations have no defensive or counter-attack options: US weaponry includes ballistic missiles, space-based weapons systems, hypersonic missiles, IT surveillance systems, and bio-weapons.<sup>20</sup>

On the one hand, therefore, Chinese leaders undoubtedly understand the fundamental equation that any major military confrontation involving the US and/or Japan would be an unmitigated disaster for China. But, on the other hand, there are many other countries that either feel threatened by the US or who would at least like a good relationship with the world number two or number three power, i.e. China. Ideological or humanitarian considerations apart, therefore, it makes perfect sense for China to devise a strategy along two main lines; first, avoid military conflict, but most especially with the US and its closest allies; second, work on bi-lateral and multi-lateral alliances with as wide a range as possible of political and trade partners. Several scholarly works published in the last two years contribute to an analysis of China's "peaceful rising", for example those in English edited in 2006 by Hunter and Guo; and those in Chinese by Yan and Jin.<sup>21</sup>

## **International competition for resources**

Competition for resources is now a key issue for all major powers. As the largest in population among all developing countries, and with the fastest-growing manufacturing base, China's need for natural resources is truly enormous. One analyst recently showed that among ten countries with populations of over 100 million, China is second from bottom as regards indigenous natural resources: only Japan is worse

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<sup>19</sup> < <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/> >

<sup>20</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance*, (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 226-37.

<sup>21</sup> Hunter, Alan, ed., *Peace Studies in the Chinese Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Guo Sujian, (2006): *China's Peaceful Rising in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006). Yan Xuetong and Jin Dexiang eds., *Dongya heping yu anquan* [Peace and Security in East Asia], (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 2005).

off. As population growth puts even more pressure on resources, effective political handling of resource issues is thus essential, because shortages could threaten the future of the country. Maintaining stable resource supplies, therefore, is a factor crucial to determining whether or not China can continue its development trajectory in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>22</sup>

The West now fears competition from China for access to global resources, particularly oil and gas.<sup>23</sup> Henry Kissinger has mooted competition over hydrocarbon resources in coming years as the most likely cause of international conflict.<sup>24</sup> As Hu Jintao showed at an Asian summit in 2005, Beijing leaders are also well aware of the issue. Hu stated that achieving balanced and orderly growth through proper handling of the energy issue is a Chinese priority: China would focus on energy conservation and effective use of resources, as well as fresh exploration and new imports. But to satisfy its demand for oil and other resources China must explore many different options on every continent.<sup>25</sup> The government announced in 2002 a new policy encouraging its three major national oil corporations to “go out” (*zouchuqu*) and ensure secure overseas energy supplies: through direct purchases, exploring and drilling programmes, constructing refineries, and building pipelines.<sup>26</sup> The Chinese oil demand between 1993 and 2002 grew by almost 90%, and now stands at around six million barrels a day, some 40% of which has to be imported. Conversely, about 40% of oil-demand growth worldwide from 2000 to 2004 is attributable to China.<sup>27</sup>

In November 2004, Chinese President Hu signed 39 commercial agreements with Latin American countries; investments in Argentina alone mounted to US \$ 20 billion. On a later visit in 2005, vice-president Zeng signed a key agreement with Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez on oil and gas explorations; China also announced it would extend favourable trade credits to Cuba. By 2005, China had offered more than US \$ 50 billion of investment to countries within the US “backyard”, and has pursued a similar strategy in sub-Saharan African countries. Chinese businesses are participant in many projects, including major infrastructure development; corporations also invest heavily in oil production, notably in the Sudan,

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<sup>22</sup> Examples of PRC academic work on this topic are Zhang Lei, 2002: “Zhongguo guojia ziyuan huanjing anquan de guoji bijiao fenxi” [International comparative analysis of China’s national resources], in *Zhongguo Ruan Kexue* [Chinese Soft Sciences], Vol. 8, 2002, pp. 26-30. Zhang Yong, *Huanjing anquanlun* [The theory of environmental security] (Beijing: Zhongguo huanjing chubanshe, 2005).

For environmental security within China see Yu Changmiao, “Quanqiu hua beijing xiade guojia huanjing anquan wenti” [Problems of environmental security in the context of globalization], *Zhongguo dangzheng ganbu luntan* [Chinese Official Discussion Materials], Vol.2, 2002, pp. 11-14; and Xie Zhenghua, “Xinshidaide huanjing baohu” [Environmental Protection in the New Era], *Qiushi* [Seeking Facts], Vol.12, 2005, p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Jan Kalicki and David Goldwyn, *Energy Security*, provide an excellent overview.

<sup>24</sup> Caroline Daniel, “Kissinger Warns of Energy Conflict”, *Financial Times*, 2 June 2005, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> See Liu Xinhua, “Zhongguode shiyou anquan jiqi zhanlue xuanze” [China’s oil security and strategic options], *Zhongguo xiandai guoji guanxi* [China’s Contemporary International Relations], Vol.12, 2002, pp. 35-46.

<sup>26</sup> Flynt Leverett and Jeffrey Bader, “Managing China-U.S. Energy Competition in the Middle East”, *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2005, pp. 187-201., at p. 193.

<sup>27</sup> US Department of Energy, *China Country Analysis Brief*, August 2005.

Angola and Nigeria.<sup>28</sup> An online newspaper report in December 2005 evidenced the fierce competition between China and the US for African “black gold”.<sup>29</sup>

China’s potential competition with the US in West Asia and North Africa could be an even more sensitive issue than that in Latin America and East Asia. “The potentially explosive combination of a China less willing to passively accept US leadership and the prospect of competition between China and other states for control over vital energy resources poses particularly critical challenges to U.S. interests in the Middle East.”[citation? Polisher] Frequent high-level exchange visits between Beijing and West Asian leaders endorse economic ties. Altogether, reflecting the title of a recent study, China is a future hegemon whose rise inevitably engenders new trans-national dynamics. We have therefore explored China’s need to avoid military conflict, its massive economic development, and its need to secure resources as important contexts for Chinese soft power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>30</sup> The author believe climate change is another factor which will become even more urgent and prominent in the immediate future.

## **Chinese Soft Power Projection**

So, given a historical and cultural background in “soft-power” and “moral leadership” and intense but hopefully non-military competition with the US and other states, it may be logical to expect that China will use peaceful means to project itself on to the world stage, for example, through culture, education and media presence. Areas where Chinese soft power is already apparent are those of Chinese religion and traditional culture; Chinese universities and Mandarin as lingua franca; Chinese media, tourism and sport; Chinese Diaspora, and Chinese cultural/political presence in Southeast Asia and Africa.

### **Religion and traditional culture**

The PRC is keen to promote itself as homeland of traditional Chinese culture – which of course it is. Arts and crafts like music, dance, embroidery, acupuncture, herbal medicine, martial arts, and *feng shui* are all booming within China, and also part of the popular cultural scene in most countries of the world: The Eiffel Tower, for example, symbol of European culture, was decked out with Chinese decorations around the time of Chinese New Year in 2005. China also liberalized its laws on religion in 1978, since when several religions, especially Buddhism and Christianity, have flourished. Surprisingly enough, Chinese are now active in various international Christian ministries, and in Buddhist groups networking across Asia.

An important example is that of spring 2006, when Beijing hosted the World Buddhist Forum, a kind of Buddhistic Olympic games. Buddhism is either a national or

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<sup>28</sup> Joshua Eisenman and Devin Stewart, “Sino-Japanese Oil Rivalry Spills into Africa”, Institute for the Analysis of Global Security, <[www.aigs.org](http://www.aigs.org)> , 19 January 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Thilo Thielke, “Gangsters and Africa’s Black Gold Rush”, *Der Spiegel* online edition, 7 December 2005, <<http://service.spiegel.de/cache/international/spiegel/0,1518,389138,00.html>> , 19 April 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Neil T. Carter and Arthur P. J. Mol, “China and the Environment: Domestic and Transnational Dynamics of a Future Hegemon”, *Environmental Politics* Vol. 15 No. 2, 2006, pp. 330-344. Another good overview is Avery Goldstein, Avery, *Rising to the Challenge: China’s Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

majority religion, or at least that of a significant minority, in at least a dozen Asian countries, including of course Japan: in fact, part of the (limited) good will that exists towards China in Japan is precisely because many schools of Japanese Buddhism trace their origins to China, where “home” monasteries still exist. Despite decades of repression earlier in the century, Chinese Buddhists are now justifiably proud of having renovated hundreds of large, historically important monasteries, and take their place among pre-eminent world Buddhist nations of the future.

### **Chinese Universities and Promotion of Mandarin**

African students have long benefited from university programme scholarships: they typically go to China and spend two years studying Chinese language before going on to courses in technology, medicine, or engineering. Growing numbers of self-financing Asian students – from Thailand, Vietnam, Korea and elsewhere – are also attracted to under- and post-graduate study in China. Chinese students, on the other hand, now constitute a significant proportion of university students internationally; they form either the largest or second largest proportion of foreign students in Japan, the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada. This movement of young people implies a growing Chinese presence amid an intellectual and social bonding of social elites; also that Mandarin is likely to become an important international business language, especially in Asia. According to research cited by Wuthnow, in 2006 there were already 140,000 foreign students studying in mainland China, about 75% of them from East Asia. The Chinese government was at that time also increasing its scholarships to students from Africa.<sup>31</sup>

Educational upgrading is another top national priority at the elite edge of university life. China has announced that it wants its universities to rival the best in the world within a decade, and is investing billions of dollars to that end. One part of the strategy is to invest in hardware; certain Chinese universities now incorporate research facilities equivalent to anything in the West. Another is to recruit and offer attractive packages in China to leading academics, often ethnic Chinese either from the PRC or other parts of the Chinese world, who have had illustrious careers in the USA or Europe. A recent example is Andrew Chi-chih Yao, one of the USA’s top computer scientists, recruited in 2004 from Princeton to a Beijing university.

In addition to university student and staff movement, the PRC is also investing in promoting Mandarin as a leading language in Asia. Many overseas Chinese already speak a Chinese dialect, usually Hakka or Cantonese, although they may not read the script or speak Mandarin. As it is relatively easy for them to upgrade their language skills, they can use Mandarin as a working language; the PRC also hopes that natives of smaller Asian countries, such as Thailand and Kampuchea, will start to use Mandarin as a lingua franca for Asian business transactions. In the past few years, the country has opened or subsidised many Chinese language schools, including a network of “Confucius Institutes” -- a kind of Chinese equivalent to the British Council or Alliance Française.

### **Chinese Media, Tourism and Sport**

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<sup>31</sup> Wuthnow, ‘The Concept of Soft Power’ p. 13

Under the hard-line communist regime prior to 1978, Chinese international media were restricted to crude propaganda: translations of the Little Red Book, the Pravda-like Beijing Review, and two rather bizarre English-language illustrated propaganda monthlies. Again, the situation now is totally different. China is starting to dominate the Asia Pacific Chinese-language media, with recent successes in major movies, the popular music industry, and comprehensive news coverage. China is becoming a good online news provider, even in English, for anyone interested in researching official news and views about Chinese issues. China is also planning a major upgrade of its English-language broadcasting, and expects to contribute as a major player to both entertainment and news broadcasting in the Asia Pacific region.

The phenomenon of positive cultural interaction between China and its neighbours is reinforced by growing international tourism to China and of Chinese tourists to overseas holiday destinations. In 2005 more than 23 million Chinese took self-motivated trips outside of China, overtaking Western tourism in countries such as Thailand and Singapore. Chinese tourism to the EU is also set to rise, since most EU countries have now lifted restrictions on tourist visas to Chinese citizens. About 26 million foreigners visited China in 2007, the largest Asian contingents from Japan, Korea and Malaysia, and also many from North America and various EU countries, according to Chinese statistics.<sup>32</sup>

The issue of sport hardly needs mentioning, when China takes gold medals in all kinds of athletic events, and Chinese sportsmen and women are becoming a force within high-profile Western games like soccer and basketball. The 2008 Beijing Olympic games was assuredly a pivotal event: The author regard it as the final international status marker in the transition to global power. US military might precludes its becoming a second-rate power in the foreseeable future, but the world will know, if not already, that China is the other superpower on the block.

### **The Chinese Diaspora**

Statistics are not totally reliable, but some estimate a Chinese Diaspora of around 35 millions at the end of the twentieth century. Having hit 20 million or so in the mid-1980s, it has since rapidly grown. The majority are working people: business entrepreneurs and economic migrants of varying skills and resources. The Chinese are now a presence in more or less every country of the world, including those, for instance the DPRK, that allow extremely limited access to other nationalities. There are substantial Chinese communities across most of South America and in many African countries. Chinese people there work as merchants or operate restaurants, factories, shops or farms. Chinese companies also own and/or manage mines, infrastructure projects and industrial complexes.<sup>33</sup>

Apart from regulated migration, there is also the phenomenon of illegal population flow: it is estimated that in ROK alone there are about one million irregular Chinese

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<sup>32</sup> <[http://www.cnta.gov.cn/news\\_detail/newsshow.asp?id=A200812814385058844](http://www.cnta.gov.cn/news_detail/newsshow.asp?id=A200812814385058844)>

<sup>33</sup> Academic studies range from those of an earlier generation, e.g. Stephen Fitzgerald, *China and the Overseas Chinese* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), to several significant works in the past decade by Gregor Benton at Cardiff University, UK. Numerous stories about Chinese migration and influence appear almost daily on Internet news services.

migrants. Invisible and uncountable, many more millions must be in Japan, the EU, the USA and elsewhere. The majority are poorly paid, often working in construction, clothing sweatshops, or the sex industry. A proportion of unofficial migrants are also involved in organized crime. Chinese gangs operate in the murky waters of international drugs, arms, and people-trafficking, competing with outfits from Russia, ROK, Pakistan and Latin America. Certain analysts conjecture that these gangs are permeated with their respective – or rival – countries' security forces, forming a huge underworld of illegal, deniable transactions and deals worth thousands of billions of dollars.<sup>34</sup>

### **Chinese political presence in Southeast Asia and Africa**

Mainland Chinese have been migrating to Southeast Asia for centuries. Singapore's population is mostly ethnically Chinese, and the Chinese form significant minorities in Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand, among others. Irrespective of migration, Chinese culture has also been a defining influence on the culture of many Asian countries, including Korea and Vietnam. After 1949, relations between the PRC and its Asian neighbours were, on the whole, tense and unproductive. In the 1960s and 1970s, when US military priorities dominated Asia Pacific politics, the PRC was regarded as a "communist threat" if not "terrorist threat". This cast overseas Chinese, probably themselves predominantly anti-communist, in the highly assailable role of suspected communist sympathisers or infiltrators. The most tragic outcome of this period was the massacre in 1965-66 under Suharto's orders of an estimated half a million Indonesian Chinese. Certain Chinese intellectuals drew parallels between their community life in 1960s Indonesia and that of Jews in 1940s Europe, although in Indonesia there were fortunately no further large-scale massacres. The situation improved rapidly throughout the 1990s. Asian nations generally seemed to regard China as an economic rival but reasonable neighbour; also as an investment opportunity. At first, Asian companies invested heavily in Chinese manufacturing, tourism and other sectors. After China's economic boom, there was a reverse trend, and Chinese entrepreneurs and state-owned corporations invested heavily in other Asian countries.

Singapore and Malaysia started to promote in the early 1990s the concept of "Asian values", and the argument that many Western values (for example democracy and unlicensed freedom of expression) although admirable are not necessarily suitable for all societies, and specifically not for Asian ones. The concept of "Asian values" is presented as that of family-centred stability, harmony and prosperity, in contrast to the perceived Western values of freedom, human rights, and the right to protest. In this context, Chinese soft power projection helps maintain the high position of Asian values on the media agenda; although not hostile to, say, freedom of expression neither does it unconditionally endorse it.

In the past few years, there has been a sea-change in Asian perceptions of the PRC. China has dropped its revolutionary ideology, at least in dealings with the outside world, in favour of one that emphasises shared development goals. It invests finance and technology in oil and gas industries in Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia, and

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<sup>34</sup> For analysis of the global criminal economy see books by Loretta Napoleoni, for example *Modern Jihad: Tracing the Dollars Behind the Terror Networks* (London: Pluto Press, 2003).

provides skilled and unskilled labour to enterprises throughout the region. Equally important, China is now seen as a massive market for consumer goods, food, and other products. There are in addition three factors that account for stability in 1969 after the Sino-Soviet border dispute. First, after the Zhou-Kosygin talks of October 1969, both sides agreed to adopt measures to reduce the risk of escalation. Later that year, the Soviet Union proposed a number of conflict prevention measures, including limits on forward patrolling by each side beyond the line of actual control, which China reciprocated. Through the 1970s, Chinese-Soviet talks focused on conflict prevention, not sovereignty, reflecting shared goal of crisis management, not dispute settlement. These conflict management procedures nevertheless limited the potential for escalation. The US reputation in serious decline since the invasion of Iraq, China now convincingly presents itself in Asia as a “friendly elephant”, in the words of Prime Minister Wen Jiabao at a recent conference.

China’s reputation in Africa is also flying higher than ever before. The Chinese have actually done aid work on that continent since the 1960s, but for ideological or political reasons, often backed leaders who proved to be renegades, for example Savimbi in Angola and Mugabe in Zimbabwe. There are now several strands to Chinese influence in Africa. One is technical and medical assistance. It is not widely known in the West, for example, that since 1963, some 15,000 Chinese doctors have worked in 47 African states and treated almost 180 million cases of HIV/AIDS. Another example is China’s provision of much of the expertise necessary to develop the nascent Sudanese oil industry.

African leaders appreciate the long-standing Chinese foreign affairs convention of non-interference in other countries’ internal politics. China is now a leading trade partner of many African countries, and Chinese demands, for raw materials in particular, allow African sellers a lot more room for negotiation, if nothing else, when dealing with Western or Japanese buyers. This influence in Africa has also given rise to controversy: for example, certain Western critics accuse the Chinese government of tacitly approving the Sudanese government’s crimes against humanity in Darfur. Research into African affairs, incidentally, has been a growth area in Chinese academia in recent years, with centres in Beijing, Jinhua and elsewhere. And Africa has become much better known to the Chinese public, for example through the 2003 TV series “A Passage to Africa”. The programme, a joint mainland-Hong Kong production compèred by celebrities, presented images of Africa more positive than ever before seen on Chinese TV, to the extent that it led to growth in Chinese tourism to Africa.

## **Chinese Soft Power in Perspective**

It is significant to compare Chinese soft power with that of certain other states. In this section, I briefly consider five other examples.

### **USA**

Perhaps the sharpest point of comparison, and one that may influence world events, is with the USA. It is a commonplace of history that major power-transitions are rarely achieved peacefully. If we are witnessing – as seems likely – a transition from a

virtually unipolar, US-dominated world system to a multi-polar one where China plays a major role, we can only hope it will be better managed than most previous changes. A major component factor might be: how does the USA perceive China's "peaceful rising", indeed, its soft power as well as its hard power?

So what are the broad outlines of the US world presence? It is necessary, albeit needless, to mention at the outset two or three givens: overwhelming US dominance in military technology; its lead in most areas of high-tech; and its massive trading and financial power. On a cultural level, though, things seem more complex. Millions of people around the world have bought into the "American Dream": affluence, consumerism, personal liberty and individualism, and in some places Protestant fundamentalism of various kinds. Successive generations of migrants from all over the world have entered the American melting-pot and settled down into US citizenship: some thriving, some desperate, but for the most part, all apparently happy enough with the basic tenets of US life.

More important, it is no exaggeration to say that in the past few decades business life around the globe has been fundamentally Americanized. Management styles, sales techniques, marketing campaigns, advertising, branding for the most part seem to have originated in the USA, and found ardent supporters and imitators around the world. If many classical cultural icons – Mozart and Leonardo – are European, most contemporary ones – Mickey Mouse and Macdonalds – are North American. Likewise, the US, as regards diffusion of English, and tourism, and education, and media, has an excellent gamut of soft-power resources. One example is the worldwide promotion of university "Business Schools" that offer MBA programmes to generations of students at sometimes outrageous prices. Most of the marketing carries implicitly American messages, usually featuring photographs of snappily dressed young men and women with gleaming teeth, blond hair, and enthusiastic smiles: evidently aspiring to a world of designer watches, business class flights, and meetings in five-star hotels. Clone business schools now exist in most countries, including China. Would there be a place in a modern business school for traditional Chinese values: modesty, respect for the elderly, loyalty?

The undeniable significance of US "soft power" is attributable to a variety of sources: global perceptions of its technological and business leadership, marketing wizardry with international brand-names, media dominance, English language, and alleged support for democracy and human rights. Europe might claim soft power status for cultural wealth, good governance, moderate diplomacy. If China is to stake a claim in the soft power territory, it may present itself as a more balanced, rational and supportive super-power than the USA; as natural leader of East Asia; as provider of education and aid with fewer strings attached; as provider of news and entertainment especially in the Asia Pacific; as tourist destination and also "exporter" of tourists; as motherland of important religious and cultural traditions. It is interesting to note two relatively new players in the soft power game, China's Asian neighbours India and Japan. As neither has been the subject of serious study, what follows are preliminary remarks.

### **Soviet Union and Russia**



From 1917 to 1989, the Soviet Union, other than at the height of Nazi power, was regarded as the main threat to the Western world. In addition to the economic, political and military rivalry known as the Cold War, both sides fought a kind of cultural war for the “hearts and minds” of vast constituencies, for example, working class political organizations in the West and independence movements in colonies. A comparison of the Soviet Union with China is important, because older CCP leaders learned much of their political technology from Stalin’s Russia. There are more marked differences than similarities, however, in the area of cultural power or soft power. Russian influence outside the Soviet Bloc was mostly confined to mainstream political activities: some legal, many illegal, depending upon the objectives and constraints of the situation. Examples are the influence of pro-communist press and trade unions in France and Spain in the 1930s, which gave Soviet leaders significant opportunity to affect the national politics in those countries.

But the Soviet Union generally lacked many, if not all of the advantages earlier outlined in the case of China. Its investments and economic activity outside the Eastern bloc were weak; it had little real impact on international media or tourism; it had a limited diaspora, which was anyway united in being anti-Soviet. Russian never became a world language. Russia did deliver aid and educational programmes for the benefit of developing countries, but does not seem to have created long-lasting loyalties. China also failed in most attempts to interest outsiders in communist politics, unless one counts the escapades of European Maoist chic in the 1960s. Possibly because revolutionary theory is no longer on the agenda, however, China’s neighbours are now being “attracted and co-opted”.

For a decade or more, during which, between 1990 and 1995, industrial output and GDP declined by about 50%, domestic issues dominated the Russian political agenda. It seemed that Russia (i.e. the Russian Federation) had little prospect or even interest in promoting its image overseas. Several factors, however, have motivated a more robust, or aggressive, engagement with foreign affairs since 2000. Probably most important was the Ukraine “Orange Revolution” between November 2004 and January 2005. A bitterly disputed presidential election was further marred by allegations that Russian political leaders and security services were supporting presidential candidate, Yanukovich to the extent of an assassination attempt by poison on the opposing candidate, Yushchenko. Conversely, Russians accused Yushchenko’s supporters of being overt and covert agents for pro-US, anti-Russian imperialist forces. Growing revenues and confidence arising from massive improvements in the economy emboldened Russia to confront pro-Western initiatives in neighbouring countries that had formerly been Soviet Union satellite states.

The hard power component of such confrontation can be analysed in military terms, for example in the Georgian campaign of August 2008. Certain Russian politicians, however, also understood that to regain former regional status they needed to project a new “soft power” image. The major medium is promotion of the “sovereign democracy” concept apparently formulated by the Putin administration. Although deliberately opaque the concept perhaps encompasses the following meanings.

First, Russia and by implication other states, should be sovereign, meaning Western powers should not assume any rights of influence over them. Ukraine and Georgia have become infiltrated and subverted by the West. Second, Russia and its neighbours

have the right to interpret “democracy” in their own way, following their own traditions. Russia’s defence minister Sergei Ivanov expressed it: ‘If there is a western democracy, there should be an eastern democracy as well’. Even the Russian Orthodox Church has been dragged into this call for “democracy with Russian characteristics”. In April 2006 one of the Church’s leading spokesmen, Miropolit Kiril, addressed the question: “Are Western standards of human happiness applicable to all countries and cultures?” He answered clearly, they are not. Russia should develop its own version of human rights and oppose the Western “dictatorial stance that all other traditions must be silenced and subdued”; a clear echo of the 1990s debate about Asian Values.<sup>35</sup>

The ways and means of spreading “sovereign democracy” and related concepts, however, appear to push the borders of soft power techniques. One observer describes the methodology: “To develop an efficient infrastructure of ideas, institutions, networks and media outlets that can use the predictable crisis of the orange-type regimes to regain influence not simply at the level of government but at the level of society as well. Russia will not fight democracy in these countries. Russia will fight for democracy – *its* kind of democracy.”<sup>36</sup> To this end, the Kremlin is currently financing a large network of pro-Russian NGOs, think-tanks, networks and media interests throughout its former zones of influence. More sophisticated than the old Soviet propaganda, this represents a new order of “smart authoritarianism” which, Popescu argues, “is designed to create an intellectual milieu of sophisticated ideological support for the current Russian authorities”.<sup>37</sup>

## Europe

Europe is a more compelling comparison: not necessarily on a country-by-country basis, but in general terms. Europeans live all over the world, many of them well-established for generations in businesses and government agencies. The author would hazard a guess that most Europeans, wherever they reside, harbour positive feelings about their home continent, or at least are in no way hostile to it. English, French and Spanish, at least, are world languages. Europe enjoys a huge mobility of tourists, students and many other kinds of people. European music, films, art are widely respected around the world. And, with the exception of the UK, European countries are regarded, for example in the Arab world, as a restraining factor on US imperialism. Europe is known as a donor continent of aid and disaster relief, despite issues about structural imperialism and debt servicing; and countries like Norway and Switzerland are respected as peace-brokers.

Many objective indicators evidence these perceptions. For example, France ranks first in Nobel Prizes for literature; the UK, Germany and Spain are third, fourth and fifth. The UK, Germany and France rank second, third and fourth in Nobel Prizes in physics and chemistry. As regards public interest, Britain, Germany and France are third, fourth and fifth (behind the United States and Japan) in sales of music; Germany and Britain are third and fourth in book sales, and fourth and fifth as

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<sup>35</sup> See Nicu Popescu, ‘Russia’s Soft Power Ambitions’, *Centre for European Policy Studies, Policy Brief* no. 115, October 2006, pp. 1-2.

<sup>36</sup> Ivan Krastev, ‘Russia’s Post-Orange Empire’, [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net), 20 October 2005.

<sup>37</sup> Popescu, *ibid.* p. 3,

Internet website hosts. Soccer, first a British and then a European sport, dominates international passions, especially in South America and Africa: it is far more of a global presence than any American or Asian sport. Six EU countries (France, Spain, Italy, UK, Germany and Austria) are in the top ten tourist destinations of the world, and possibly half of all world tourist visits are to EU countries.

One major difference between West Europe and China, however, is that of stability and long-term perceptions. The whole of Europe, other than the Balkans, has had a fairly stable history for sixty years, during which time many of its institutions and actors have remained broadly similar: even the integration of the former Soviet bloc was smooth, as reflected in the apparent stability of the EU. During the same period, China, in comparison, lurched from pro-Soviet communism to Maoism, onwards to the Deng reforms and more recently to its communist-capitalist hybrid. The legal and constitutional parameters have shifted almost every year, and nobody seems confident as to where it all might lead.

The EU, rightly or wrongly, appears as one of the world's strongest civilizations as regards long-term stability, democracy, freedom and human rights. Compared to the US, and with the sad exception of the UK, it has an international reputation for problem-solving and multi-lateral partnership approaches, rather than unilateral militarization of conflict. And finally, Europe is regarded as having a progressive, liberal and "green" approach to many social issues, such as climate change, birth control, gay rights, and personal freedoms that may make it attractive to young people in many different parts of the world.

## **Japan**

The author mention above the dramatic rise in international reputation China has experienced in the past two decades. For very different reasons, Japan's reputation has also changed. Japan, together with Germany, was probably the most hated country in the world in 1945, after its abysmal conduct in the Pacific War, notably in China, Korea, Burma, and with regard to prisoners-of-war and civilian populations generally. There are still many unresolved sensitivities, such as history text-books, questions of compensation and public apologies: disagreements over these issues hinder warm relationships in the Asia Pacific region. Japan has nevertheless also made great strides in rehabilitating its international reputation. Indeed Nye writes:

Japan has more potential soft power resources than any other Asian country. Today, Japan ranks first in the world in the number of patents, third in expenditure on research and development as a share of GDP, second in book sales and music sales, and highest for life expectancy. It is also home to three of the top 25 multinational brand names (Toyota, Honda, and Sony).<sup>38</sup>

Japan has gained respect as the most successful early example of Asian modernization, and for being one of the world's most generous donors of overseas aid. Since 1945, the Japanese constitution has also strictly forbidden military activity outside its borders. Apart from the war-time legacy referred to above, however, there are arguably serious constraints on Japanese soft power. The first comprises two major economic vulnerabilities: Japan has the largest "ageing" population among the industrialized countries, and no clear strategy for dealing with the demographic

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "Soft Power Matters in Asia", *The Japan Times*, 5 December 2005

imbalance that will very soon afflict it; second, it is also extremely poor in, and dependent upon, natural resources. Moreover, Japanese society's English-language skills are relatively low, and the culture tends to be specific rather than cosmopolitan.

## **India**

India is probably China's closest soft power "competitor". There are several similarities. Until recently, India also generally received negative media attention: often portrayed in the Western media at least as a country full of starving beggars, at best picturesque, at worst a giant slum. There has been a dramatic turnaround. Among India's soft power resources are an extraordinarily successful diaspora, especially in the UK and the USA, where Indians hold top positions in IT, commerce, banking, and many other sectors; a massive movie industry; a huge shift of IT operations from the UK and the USA to Indian cities such as Bangalore; a vibrant scientific community, and world class higher education and research in many sectors.

India also reaps the benefits of an excellent knowledge of English language and Western cultures. But the Indian, like the Chinese diaspora, is also on home ground, in Southeast Asia. India's inbound tourist industry received 4.5 million foreign tourists in 2006, up 14% on the previous year.<sup>39</sup> People all over the world respect the Indian cultural heritage of yoga, classical music, cuisine, dance, religion, festivals, painting and literature. India is a democracy, and generally perceived as a peace-loving and non-aggressive country, with a reasonable human rights record and excellent freedom of expression.

The author however fears that soon our TV screens may once again be filled with sad pictures from India. Despite the influx of capital and IT operations, or perhaps even because of it, Indian society is experiencing serious polarization. Certain of the urban middle classes are improving their standard of living, and those talented young people who can access the top higher education institutions are more or less guaranteed a career inside or outside India. The situation for the majority of the population, however, especially the rural poor and migrants to cities, has if anything deteriorated. Between 1997 and 2004 more than 25,000 rural farmers took their own lives out of desperation, according to one report.<sup>40</sup> There is, sadly, massive scope for malnutrition, public health epidemics, water shortages and other grave issues. National, and especially local, government officials are widely perceived as corrupt and likely to steal aid or development funds. Although the national government is relatively stable, the level of corruption, gangster culture, nepotism and abuse of power in certain state administrations (for example that of Bihar with a population of more than 85 million) could qualify them as "failed states".

India is also vulnerable to at least two destabilising factors: climate change and Muslim insurgencies. Bangladesh, immediate neighbour to the east, is likely to be the world's first major disaster zone as sea levels rise; the Indian state of West Bengal, with cities like Kolkata close behind it. Huge numbers of Bangladeshi immigrants, most of them illegal, already live in India; any repeated flood disasters will intensify pressure to migrate. West Bengal itself may lose much of its precious arable land,

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<sup>39</sup> <<http://windhorsetours.com/blog/2007/01/27/india-registers-record-foreign-tourist-arrivals-in-2006/>>

<sup>40</sup> <<http://www.navdanya.org/news/04july15.htm>>

which would provoke uncontrollable internal displacement. Meanwhile, both Pakistan and Bangladesh are home to Islamist extremists who have targeted Indian civilian populations on many occasions in the past decade. It is part of the “mission” of international *jihadi* movements to destabilise the Hindu majority and provoke rioting between Hindus and Muslims, either in the interests, as they see it, of spreading Islam, or to support Pakistani and Bangladeshi politicians in various ways.

## Policy Implications and Conclusions

Many areas for research might lead to interesting policy proposals, specifically with regard to the PRC, but possibly relevant to other countries.<sup>41</sup> I here consider four areas:

(1) Which countries or regions have been most successful in generating “soft power” and why? How could “success” be evidenced and measured? (2) What should be included under the rubric “soft power” and what excluded? (3) Should a nation adjust its “soft power” outreach to target different parts of the world? (4) Should soft power primarily target elites, popular culture, or both?

**How countries generate soft power** I have created a series of soft power indicators for various countries, using certain of the soft power components, such as diaspora and media, frequently mentioned by Nye and other writers. I have also allocated notional scores for each component to each country. These scores are more or less fictitious, or at least based purely on my personal reflections as an observer of international politics. Nevertheless, I believe this table shows a conceptual way forward. Defining the kind of empirical research that would be needed makes this a more rigorous and scientifically plausible exercise.

First, one would need to amass detailed knowledge of opinions in the “target” country on the “soft power generator”: e.g. one might ask the public in China “What do you think of India? Would you tend to support it in a dispute with the USA? Would you like to go there as a tourist? Do you like to meet Indian people in China?” Statistical information is another resource, e.g. number of Indian movies sold to CCTV. Second, to devise a methodologically sound set of parameters one would have to determine the most important elements of soft power. For example, is an active diaspora more important than a good tourist industry or university sector?

**What should be included under the rubric ‘soft power’** This is also an important discussion. When Nye first proposed the term, as far as I understand him, he specifically excluded financial incentives. He was focusing rather on the non-commercial, non-financial (and of course non-military) elements that might make one population sympathetic to another. There may, however, be an argument to broaden this definition.

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<sup>41</sup> I use the term ‘countries’ loosely, since I discuss, for example, the EU which is an association of states; the Soviet Union which no longer exists; and Chinese soft power which may include benefits to PRC, Taiwan, Singapore etc.

Critics have argued for decades that a large proportion of aid from wealthy countries to developing ones has ulterior motives. Some of it is crudely commercial, e.g. tying aid to purchase of goods and services from the donor country. Other is more subtle, e.g. financing popular projects in the developing country, making sure that both population and politicians know that a football stadium, for example, was built upon the generosity of a certain donor country. Is there anything wrong with such a gift? Should it be counted as legitimate “soft power”? Possibly, but one might also be aware of certain potential difficulties. For example, providing aid may be a great way to promote one’s own country. But is aid that is conditional upon certain kinds of support (e.g. votes in the UN), or whose withdrawal is threatened if the recipient country should support a political or economic rival of the aid provider, still “soft power”? It is, according to our earlier definition, rather bordering on manipulation, albeit monetary rather than military. Could, I wonder, such manipulation sometimes backfire? A country might, for example, give political support to a donor out of financial need or greed, but popular opinion in that country would nonetheless be resentful.

**Soft power regions** A sophisticated analysis would again show, I am sure, that soft power projection is ideally calibrated to public opinion in different parts of the world. For example, it is obvious that the US urgently needs to repair its image across the Muslim world. If it seriously wished to do so, it would have to downplay support for Israel, release Muslim prisoners, organise sports and cultural events, make a massive investment in education for Muslims and more. None of these activities, however, would improve its soft power projection in, say, Japan. There are already generally positive feelings between the two countries, based on shared interests like advanced technology, a common security policy and higher education. Positive reinforcement, therefore, may be all that is required.

As regards China, an analysis could go along the lines of soft power projection tailored to three key areas in the first instance. THE AUTHOR think we can assume that successful soft power projection would have different components in different regions.

**Elites or masses?** Should a soft power “offensive” be aimed at elite or mass groups? This may be a somewhat false distinction, in the sense that there is no rigid line, in most countries at least, between elites and masses. Elite classes, including politicians, are surely susceptible to popular culture, and the “masses” frequently change their politicians. Also, as soft power, it seems to me, operates over quite long time-spans, decades rather than weeks, it is less susceptible to the moods of whoever happens to hold power at a particular point in time. Nevertheless, a comprehensive soft power strategy might do well to distinguish between relatively elite and popular strata.

The everyday population of a country is possibly more likely to be influenced in the long-term by a genuine, long-standing commitment to, say, peace, sport and technological and cultural creativity. Elite classes are probably better informed, more widely traveled, sensitive to international stock markets and research in higher education, also to local security scares, human rights, and in their response to disasters. It might also be said that the focus of elite politicians is on short-term, visible political successes. The soft power projector needs to achieve differential goals for different target audiences.

To summarise, soft power can be a very useful asset in international politics. It may become increasingly so, as competition for resources intensifies but most countries refrain from using “hard” or military power. Much soft power “capital” is beyond the control of immediate politics: it may take centuries to build up, for example, cultural prestige in the areas of music or religion. Although, as in daily life, capital is usually painfully acquired over a long period it can also be quickly lost as a consequence of rash actions. On the other hand, governments, businesses, NGOs, citizens—especially film-makers, sports persons, writers, musicians and other artists—all somehow contribute to the image of their country.

The author believes the door is now open to further research in this area. Much has already started in China, for example the launch of Peace Studies at Nanjing University<sup>42</sup>; conferences on “intellectual support to Africa”<sup>43</sup>; and modern research facilities in Beijing, Shanghai, and other major centres.

The author has suggested in this article that several areas of soft power, including relative international strengths and weaknesses; the boundary markers of legitimate soft power; its adjustment to different audiences, now demand much closer analysis. The author see no reason why China should not have a bright future in the “soft power olympics”, or, for that matter the EU, India and other places. Fortunately, this is not a zero-sum game; neither are there many parallels with military confrontations. In this game, countries are encouraged to make positive contributions to world culture. The author conclude with a quotation attributed to former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, cited in a recent paper: “Soft power is achieved only when other nations admire and want to emulate aspects of that nation’s civilization”.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Liu Cheng, *Hepingxue* [Peace Studies] (Nanjing: Nanjing chubanshe, 2006).

<sup>43</sup> Held in universities in Suzhou, Chengdu, Beijing between 2005 and 2007.

<sup>44</sup> Lee Kuan Yew cited in Gill and Huang, “Sources and Limits”, p. 17.

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