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To Fortify China's Soft Power Diplomacy

Abstract: This work is an extension of Policy recommendations on strengthening China's soft power. Although many scholars both Western (International) and Chinese (National) have immensely highlighted soft power diplomacy in several dimensions. This paper argues that China has strong soft power resources, but does not have an effective international media presence to sell its story. Moreover, China lacks a global presence yet as McDonald's, KFC, dollars, and Hollywood have a strong Economy, Culture, and History. Therefore, I propose in this paper that China can enhance its soft power by fast-food chains with Chinese characteristics that I give the name of Chi-Fast and Chinese Film productions with the collaboration of Chinese Film Stars working with other regions in general and BRI countries in specific. By producing Film and video games with Chinese Characteristics (I would name it Chi-Film) and adding other languages and cultures of the regions would appeal a large number of people nonetheless, along with a strong foothold of Chinese Media globally and specifically presence in BRI countries.

Keywords: *Soft power, China, BRI, Chi-Fast, Chi-Film*

The related article has been prepared in accordance with "Research and Publication Ethics".

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The inkling of soft power can possibly be marked out back to Mencius, who believed that “righteous causes garner support, while unrighteous causes do not (得道多助, 失道寡助)”. Although, Joseph Nye devised the term “soft power” in a 1990 article in *Foreign Policy*, outlining it as; “*A nation’s ability to co-opt rather than coerce, persuade rather than compel, to set agendas and to attract support. Soft power, for Nye is composed of (1) the appeal of a state’s values, (2) the legitimacy of its foreign policy, and (3) the attractiveness of its culture*”(Nye, 1990,153-171).

Conversely, Chinese scholars disparage Nye’s proclamation that supremacy gushed from the alleged triumph of institutions designed by intrinsic worth suitable well with the Confucian model of governance by moral elites ‘(德治天下)’. Chinese influential and intellectuals are trying to comprehend what China can make sure to escalate its cultural charm ‘(得道多助, 失道寡助)’.

By declaration of President Hu Jintao at the 17th National Congress of 2007, “*The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will definitely be accompanied by the thriving of Chinese culture. We must enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country. We will further publicize the fine traditions of Chinese culture and strengthen international cultural exchanges to enhance the influence of Chinese culture worldwide*” (Jintao, 2007). China officially launched its pursuit of cultural soft power’ (文化软实力).

During the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2014, Xi Jinping remarked, “*We should increase China's soft power, give a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's messages to the world*” (*China Daily*, 2014).

China is already disseminating the soft power through customary apparatuses of soft power such as stimulating ‘Chinese language, educational exchanges, media expansion, and pop culture icons’. Moreover, ‘Confucius institutes, Educational exchanges, through other societal and cultural channels, including literature, art, film, music, scholars, sports figures and even through zoo exchanges (Pandas)’. Figures like film director ‘Zhang Yimou’, actor ‘Jackie Chan’, pianist ‘Lang Lang’, professional athletes ‘Yao Ming and Li Na’, ballet dancer ‘Tan Yuanyuan’, and pop singer ‘Jane Zhang’ are off-the-record cultural envoys. However, some of the Chinese academics have further shed light through different narratives.

Chinese Scholars Narrative

Several Chinese Scholars proposed a number of policy recommendations, for instance, Tuo posited the need of China is to create a positive image worldwide and that can happen when China positions itself globally (Tuo [蔡拓], 2010). His argument depicts the importance of Chinese Culture in constructing the state of affairs. Mingwei suggested that China could enhance soft power by building communication system through Chinese Culture, which ought to have a foreign appeal and a methodical tactic (Mingwei[周明伟], 2012).

On the Contrary, Hua argued that China should prepare grounds for soft power development through hard power because significance of a hard power cannot be overlooked therefore, if China obtains support “*for important international events and domestic cultural development*” China will incorporate its influence (Hua[门洪华], 2007).

Moreover, Zhangrun ([许章润], 2016) posited, “*The term ‘culture’ used by government branches is mostly focused on ideological work, which serves state power through historical and political ideologies. Consequently, when the state talks about ‘cultural soft power, cultural engineering, and cultural industry,’ these terms are illustrated with reference to the construction of political legitimacy and nationalism, rather than with reference to civilization and human enlightenment. However, there is overlap between the two concepts and there are no prohibitions between having conversations about them*” (Wilson Center, 2020). Furthermore, three passages for exercising soft power such as ‘formal, economic, and cultural diplomacies’. He argued that by setting all the nuts and bolts together it would be an ‘integrative model of soft power’ (Li & Worm, 2010, 69).

Moreover, another famous Chinese scholar Xuetong advocated that China could enhance soft power by increasing Political Power. He argued that ‘Political power is the central of a country's soft power’, but he particularized that Cultural strength cannot be understood as soft power. He expounded that both political and cultural power build up soft power. He further explicated, “*China’s comprehensive national power will increase at a higher rate if we use political power, instead of economic power as the foundation for our comprehensive national power*” (Xuetong[阎学通], 2007).

Zhongying in 2014 recommended enhancing Soft power by “Huairou” (mollification) strategy, he strongly recommended using “*Huairou 怀柔 an ancient Chinese ruling strategy*”. He argued that Soft Power notion has been imported from US to China. Hence, the term has been misinterpreted and misrepresented in China subsequently Huairou or in another words’

mollification could solve problems in China's foreign relations because mollification means, "*pacifying and winning the hearts of foreigners through tributary trade*" (Zhongying[庞中英], 2014).

Pei Minxin suggested three points in the support of his argument that soft power is a key to make China stronger. First through political ideology with Chinese Characteristics to balance "*Western society's value system centered on liberty and democracy in order to be fully respected internationally*" second through implementing social bureaucratic reforms, third through innovation from technology to pop culture (Minxin[裴敏欣], 2004).

Likewise, Xueliang highlighted innovation and he argued, "*China's Think Tanks need novel knowledge sources*". By opening symposiums to a large public and reforming, the system of think tanks could be a good approach, however; some topics are politically sensitive so while advising and talking about 'political, economic and military security issues as well as domestic and foreign policy' one needs to be careful. Nonetheless, he asked rhetorically "*What is the point of spending money and building think tanks if everyone simply unswervingly supports, agrees, and follows the existing policy?*" (Xueling [丁学良], 2016)

By building, its own 'knowledge system' (which is a key to having substantial soft power in the international arena) needs to be unique and not colonized by western ideas suggested by Singaporean Professor and Director Zheng Yongnian ([郑永年], 2016) of East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore.

By promoting RMB and improving international negotiation's expertise, as somehow Hu Jiangyun (a researcher at the Development Research Centre of the State Council) proposed in his article "China's soft power room for improvement". He posited although "*the use of RMB in settling bilateral trade has also been on rise, and some neighboring countries and regions have even started to carry out offshore transactions in RMB*" but there is a room for improvement.

Likewise, he argued that China overall with its 'stable currency, improved living standards, and stronger economy and greater ability to deal with crises', has demonstrated a mounting soft power and has acquired international admiration. Nevertheless, China has a lot to do to improve Soft Power. A firm and unswerving base is mandatory in zones such as 'exports, overseas investment, national image building, and international negotiations'. He further declared, "*There is a particular need for intangible and tangible results achieved in these areas to be broadcast outside of its borders. China has been slow in creating a more positive image, despite the fact that it has been involved in developmental work beyond its borders for decades*".

Jiangyun blatantly confessed the discrepancy of Chinese officials and business tycoons' negotiation skills has undercut China's position in 'international trade, investment and cooperation'. Therefore, these underperformances resulted in poor negotiations for instance, 'What starts as an advantageous situation may consequently become the opposite and incur high costs'. The fiascos in the previous dialogs to institute bilateral trade agreements and undertakings is undeniably a febleness in China's soft power (Jiangyun, 2012).

Discussion & Recommendations

It is undoubtedly challenging to gauge Soft power by nature. Whereas there are a small number of assessable metrics to scale power, China's hard work give the impression to have had diminutive upshot in heightening its favorability. Therefore, it is suggested to enhance its effective media presence globally. Actually, it is a bottleneck preventing overseas audiences from seeing, understanding and interacting with modern China. Although, current efforts have had varying results, for example, CGTN is quite established within Africa but it had its license temporarily revoked in the United Kingdom. Therefore, tailoring the media package and network for each country is a big consideration, whether to collaborate with local organisations like did with Fairfax and ABC (although the Fairfax deal was later scrapped) or by boosting its broadcasters. However, one needs to remember what works in one country may not in another, and what works in one country may not always work.

Moreover, in many countries WeChat app does not function like other international apps such as WhatsApp is almost everywhere, but people cannot install WeChat with that freedom. Because of China's media and internet policies, and the West's active limitation and censorship of Chinese content defines China is fighting an uphill battle. Although, China has strong soft power assets, including cultural heritage, overseas linkages, an enviable lifestyle, it does not have an online overseas presence to boost it, and in the West, this is actively resisted as well. It is a big barrier, possibly a war of attrition. China cannot get effectively get a foothold into Western platforms, and its own platforms are banned or denigrated (such as Tiktok & WeChat).

China has had Confucius institutions in many countries but also those all well are being scaled back, with universities canceling their relationship. China needs to develop exchange programs with top universities of developing countries not with the west only (American or European Universities) therefore Chinese presence as students in other societies will also help to disseminate Chinese culture also strengthen soft power.

In some ways, China is probably more looking at salvaging what overseas influence it can have rather than growing it. It has been heightened during the pandemic under the pretext of 'combatting misinformation' but it existed before the pandemic nonetheless pandemic just triggered the anti-sentiment. Chinese media outlets were flagged as 'State controlled' organisations on Western platforms before COVID19, including Twitter and YouTube. In addition, even before COVID, there were regular measures by those companies to remove users flagged as Chinese 'bots' or influence operations.

To sum up, in my opinion, soft power is not as powerful as people think it is, I think soft power follows hard power. If you have the hard power, you can dictate the environment that soft power works in. Soft power in many ways can be just seen as 'who controls the narrative' like Edward Said proposed and in the case of the US we already have witnessed.

Nonetheless, to enhance China's soft power I further suggest that China does not have a global presence yet as McDonald's, KFC, dollars, and Hollywood has despite having strong Cuisine culture and history. Therefore, China can enhance its soft power by introducing a fusion of Fast and Chinese food(I would suggest Chi-Fast), and teamwork of Chinese Film Stars with other countries Film making industries(I would name it Chi-Film) and introduce multi-cultural movies with the addition of other languages alongside the Chinese language would interest the people all over the world.

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