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Research Article

**EDUCATIONAL INVESTMENT AS SOFT POWER:
CHINA'S STRATEGY IN CULTIVATING QATARI HUMAN CAPITAL**

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the strategic use of education as a tool of soft power, focusing on China's investment in the education of Qatari human capital. It explores how education, a non-coercive form of influence, contributes to China's global reputation and socio-economic progress. The research employs a mixed-method approach, including quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to assess the impact of Chinese educational investments on Qatari students. The findings indicate that China's educational support, through scholarships and cultural exchange, positively influences Qatari students' perceptions and fosters a favourable image of China. The study highlights the significance of educational investment in building soft power, with China utilizing scholarships and cultural programs to attract international students, particularly from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. The effectiveness of China's soft power strategy is demonstrated through increased educational cooperation under the "Belt and Road" initiative, contributing to China's global influence and international relations.

Keywords: Soft power, Educational investment, China, Qatari students, International relations.

INTRODUCTION

Nations aim to enhance their global standing and socio-economic development through a blend of hard and soft power strategies. Soft power, as defined by Kalin (2011), allows countries to influence others through their cultural, educational, and political appeal without coercion. This form of power is crucial in diplomacy and international relations, emphasizing cultural exchanges and education to wield influence (Baykurt and De Grazia, 2021). Research indicates the significant role of soft power in shaping international perceptions and relationships, with education being a pivotal area for investment, particularly in fostering human capital as noted by Mayo (2016).

Education emerges as a strategic tool for global influence, with major powers, including China, investing in higher education to nurture foreign human capital, thereby facilitating innovation and collaboration (Darling-Hammond, 2015; Zreik, 2021). China's focus on Arab students, through scholarships and educational programs, aims to strengthen ties and develop skills relevant to modern challenges (Roberts and Ching, 2021). The effectiveness of these educational investments is seen in the diverse international student body in China, notably from countries aligned with the "Belt and Road" initiative, highlighting education's role in long-term international relations and economic development (Hussain and Shen, 2019; Ahmad and Shah, 2018; Tian and Liu, 2021). Education, as linked to early economic theories by Petty and Smith, is fundamental in cultivating human capital, with both direct and indirect benefits from such investments (Folloni and Vittadini, 2010).

The nexus of culture and education emerges as a potent soft power tool, spotlighting trends in socio-economic growth and cultural diversity (Lai and Lu, 2012). Key emerging nations like Brazil, Russia, India, and China are advancing human development through education, aiming to foster innovation-centric economies. Investment in education, particularly in attracting international students, is recognized as a crucial soft power strategy (Li and Xue, 2023). The proficiency of these students in the host country's sciences, culture, and language enhances their social capital, effectively extending the influence of their native cultures abroad (Odrowaz-Coates, 2018). Such educational engagements empower hosting nations to project their soft power globally, surpassing traditional military might. The focus on developing domestic education systems and treating educated returnees as assets reflects a strategic approach to leverage soft power for national benefit (Zhao, 2014). This study corroborates the efficacy of soft power, exemplified by China's investment in Qatari education, underlining the transformative impact of soft policy measures on both donor and recipient nations.

RESEARCH METHOD

Our mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data analysis, allowed us to assess the impact of education on Qatari students. Initially, the quantitative data were gathered through a questionnaire divided into three sections: basic information, career development, and applicant satisfaction. The satisfaction survey's factor analysis examined 8 factors, each with 5 to 15 questions. For data analysis, including reliability, factor, correlation, and regression analyses, SPSS and AMOS software were employed.

In the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted featuring 7 questions focused on the students' educational experiences in China. These structured interviews utilized open-ended questions to gather in-depth data.

Finally, we applied SWOT and TOWS analyses to pinpoint the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats related to studying in China, based on the students' personal experiences. This comprehensive approach provided a nuanced understanding of the educational impact on Qatari students.

Limitation of the Research

Given that the sample for this study did not encompass all students from the GCC region studying in China, a more detailed and extensive investigation is warranted. Additionally, comparing this with the soft power policy of another country could yield very intriguing results.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF SOFT POWER POLICY

The concepts of hard power, soft power, and smart power are fundamental in the fields of political science and international relations. The theory of soft power was introduced by Professor Joseph Samuel Nye Jr. of Harvard University, who defined soft power as the ability to indirectly influence the interests and circumstances of a target country. This influence is achieved through the appeal of a nation's culture, values, and language (Nye, 1990). Hayden (2012) further recognized soft power as a means of achieving international objectives through agreement, persuasion, and attraction, rather than through coercion. Thus, soft power operates through the strategic use of cultural diplomacy, educational initiatives, and other means to persuade and integrate nations into a cooperative social framework (Nye, 2004). According to foreign policy analysis, soft power is built on three main pillars.

1. Civilization (attraction with fascination)
2. Political reputation (reaching destination domestically and abroad)
3. Foreign policy (legal) (Li, 2009; Zreik, 2022a).

Hereof, the soft policy formation of China could be the following:

- Head-Diplomacy
- Main body-Political value
- Arms and legs-Cultural policy

This illustrates that China is seen as a key player on international platforms through its blend of diplomacy, political values, and cultural policies. Conversely, Joseph Samuel Nye Jr. has argued that transforming hard power, such as economic might, into soft power is viable given the current global economic interdependence. He also pointed out that every nation's soft power strategy is distinct, reflecting its unique characteristics, in his 2013 research. Moreover, Nye highlighted the differences in soft power approaches, noting that the United States' soft power involves public participation, unlike the soft power strategies of China and Russia (Nye, 2004).

For this reason, contemporary major powers and industrialized or developed countries prioritize safeguarding their spheres of influence and national interests through soft power strategies. Soft power is viewed as both a resource and an opportunity, whereas a soft power policy is considered a guarantee of power and security. However, some Western scholars have criticized Professor Nye for the perceived limitations of his soft power strategy, arguing that it focuses solely on the aspect of attraction, including resources and opportunities, rather than on strategic implementation of soft power (Roselle et al., 2014).

STUDENTS' SATISFACTION IN HIGHER EDUCATION OF CHINA

Zhao et al. (2012) distinguished consumer satisfaction in transactions from service quality, the latter being an attitude from long-term outcomes. Anderson et al. (2006) observed student evaluations as short-term attitudes towards educational experiences, blurring the lines between service quality and educational satisfaction. Bitner (1990) linked service quality directly to customer satisfaction, contingent on meeting expectations. Variations in student satisfaction arise from diverse programs and cultural backgrounds (Arambewela and Hall 2009). Clemes et al. (2013) analyzed academic satisfaction in China, focusing on Administrative, Physical, Core Educational, Support Facilities, and Transformative Quality to assess the influence of soft power on Qatari student development.

GCC students benefit from over 500 annual scholarships, including from the Chinese Government and President Xi, surpassing offerings from countries like Australia. This supports GCC region education delegates in evaluating their Chinese university experiences based on education quality satisfaction.

This study defines satisfaction as Qatari students' perceptions of Chinese university facilities and environment quality, assessed across several categories including personal life improvement, education, economy, culture and society of the home country, academic support, and overall satisfaction with the scholarship and living conditions in China. Reliability and factor analyses underpin the quantitative data analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW OF SOFT POWER POLICY

Wang Huning's seminal 1993 article introduced soft power as a concept, emphasizing its potential through the global spread of culture. He suggested that a culture recognized universally contributes significantly to a nation's soft power (Patapan and Wang, 2018). China now allocates \$10 billion yearly to soft power, exceeding the investments of the US, UK, France, Germany, and Japan combined (Carminati, 2022; Zreik, 2022b). The country offers scholarships to Gulf Cooperation Council students and promotes Chinese language studies, with educational institutions teaching in Chinese increasing from 550 to 1,760 between 2002 and 2010 (Gao and Hua, 2021). This reflects a broader trend where soft power, through language, culture, education, and diplomacy, plays a critical role in shaping international dynamics (Wojciuk et al., 2015).

The 2019 "The Soft Power 30" Portland survey ranked China 27th worldwide in soft power implementation, highlighting its cultural influence and financial leadership through initiatives like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Edney et al., 2019). China and South Korea are noted for their favourable image among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) youth, attributed to their appealing entertainment and education sectors (Hopkyns, 2017; Ulrichsen, 2018). This demographic shows a high regard for the investments from these countries, underscoring the potency of soft power among younger generations.

Empirical studies further validate China's soft power success, revealing positive perceptions of Chinese investment in countries like New Zealand, Nigeria, Lebanon, Mexico, South Africa, and Brazil (Huffer, 2020; Lovric, 2016). This research aims to delve into China's soft power influence on Qatari youth through educational investments, assessing the shifts in their attitudes towards China and elucidating the factors driving these changes.

FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

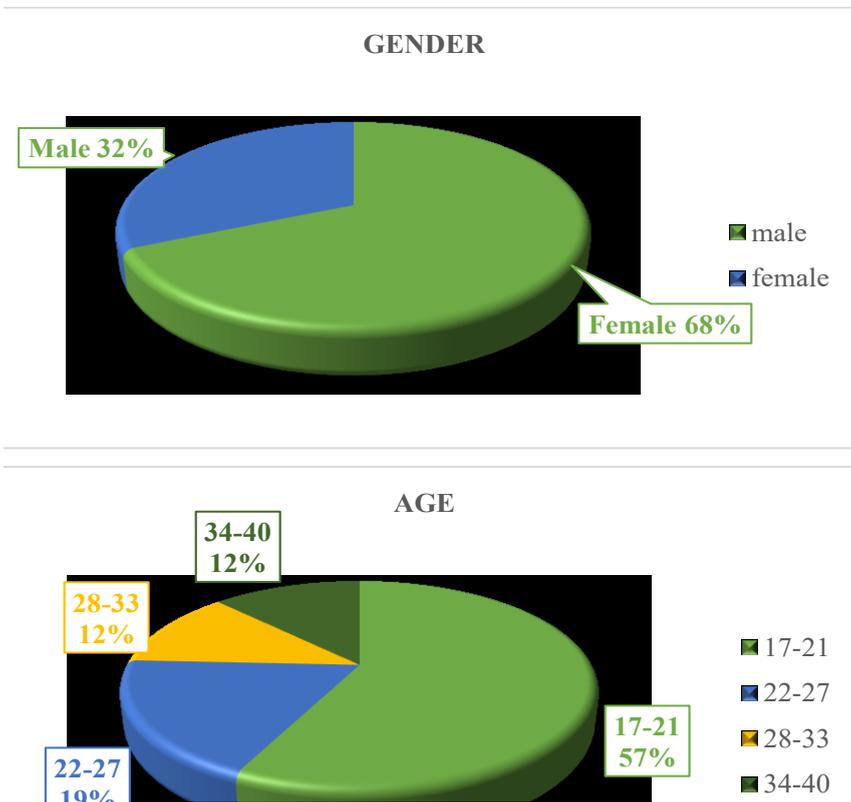
I. Quantitative Data Analysis

Our study employed SPSS 26 and AMOS for analyzing the quantitative data from the questionnaire, which was divided into several sections. The initial section collected demographic data through 13 questions on personal and academic backgrounds, including prior experience with Chinese language studies, intentions for studying further in China, and educational completion status. This information was gathered to explore the relationship between student demographics and their satisfaction levels, assessing the impact of China's soft power through educational initiatives.

Subsequent sections of the questionnaire evaluated respondents' career trajectories before and after their studies, aiming to link career advancement with China's educational investments as a soft power strategy. Another segment focused on personal and academic experiences, comparing the Chinese education system with those of respondents' home countries, and gauging overall satisfaction with the study experience in China.

The study concluded with correlation and regression analyses to determine the effect of educational investment on the personal and professional lives of students and alumni, based on their responses.

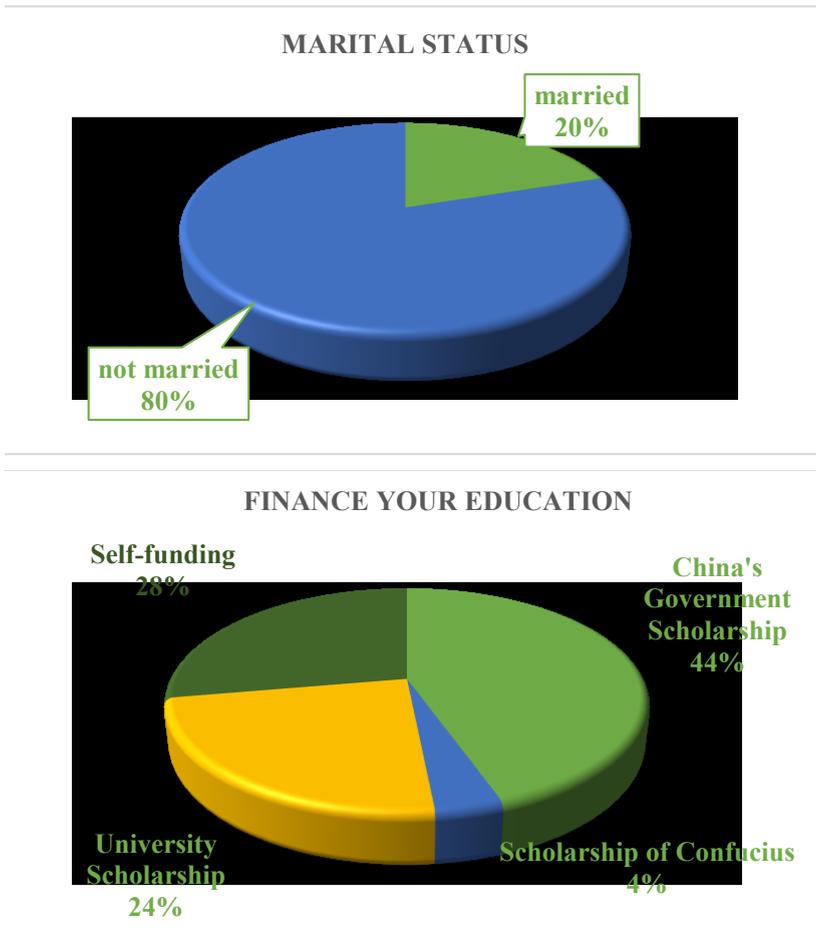
Figure 1. Gender and Age of Respondents



Source: Author's data

The Qatari population places significant emphasis on the education and development of their females, resulting in a majority of survey respondents being female (68%) compared to males (32%). The largest portion of respondents falls within the younger age group of 17-20 years, while a smaller segment consists of individuals aged 30 and above, who are more mature and likely to be married. Figure 1 reveals the evolving dynamics of soft power in Qatar.

Figure 2. *Marital Status and Educational Finance of Respondents*

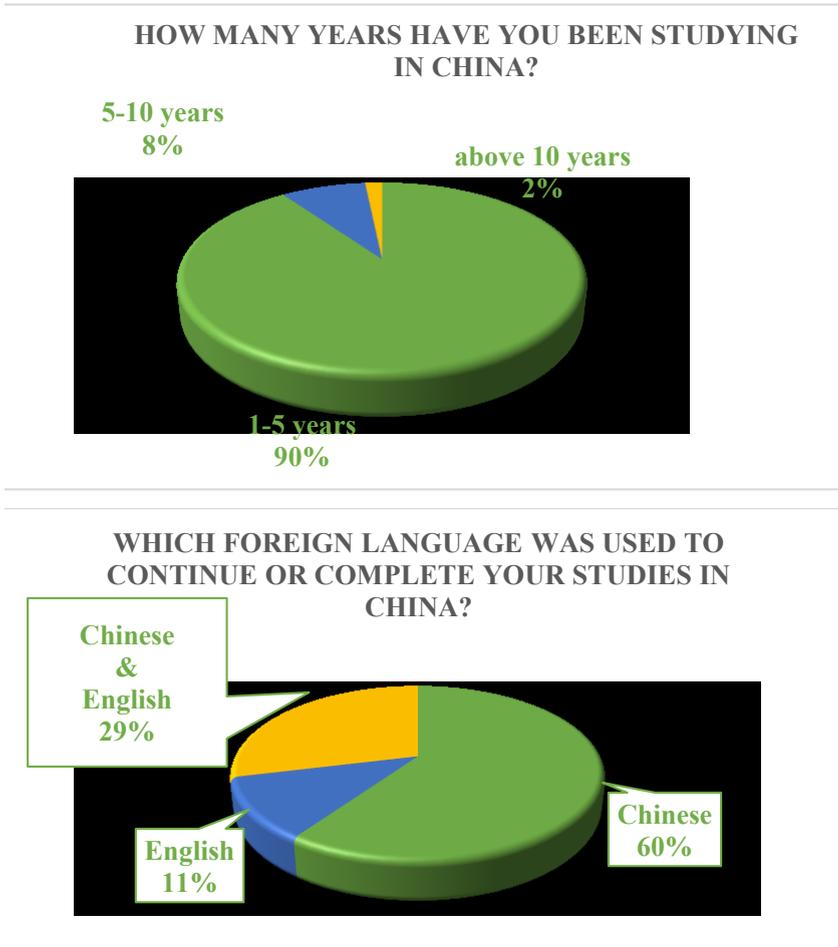


Source: Author's data

Figure 2 provides data on the marital status and sources of educational funding for the respondents. It shows that 20% of the respondents are married, which may influence their decisions and experiences regarding international study due to potential familial responsibilities. Understanding marital status helps in assessing the support systems and personal obligations that could impact students' academic engagement and success. Additionally, 44% of the students receive funding from the Chinese Scholarship Council, including 24% with university scholarships, while the remainder self-fund their studies. These find-

ings indicate that China's educational support primarily targets economic and developmental gains for the recipients, rather than focusing solely on spreading political values or cultural influence. This approach differentiates China's use of soft power in education from Western models, which often combine educational initiatives with the promotion of democratic values and cultural exchanges.

Figure 3. *Studying years and Foreign Language of Respondents*

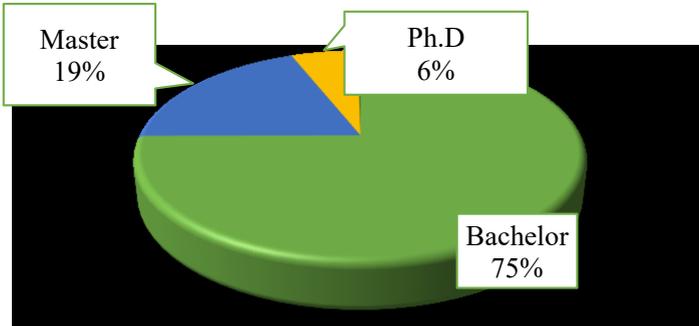


Source: Author's data

Most students (90%) have been in China for up to 5 years, primarily in bachelor's programs. A distinct 10% have resided over ten years, likely pursuing advanced degrees with their families. Sixty percent of Qatari students engage in Chinese-taught programs after a preparatory language year, whereas 29% study in bilingual programs, possibly due to language challenges. The rest are in English-taught courses, reflecting China's soft power growth through incorporating Chinese language into young students' education.

Figure 4. *Degree of Respondents*

Which degree are you pursuing or received from universities of China?



Source: Author's data

Figure 4 indicates that bachelor's degree students constitute the largest segment of respondents (75%), suggesting that younger individuals are more attracted to soft power policies, influenced by culture and language, compared to their older counterparts. Master's degree applicants account for 19%, while Ph.D. candidates represent only 6%, which may be attributed to the questionnaire targeting primarily bachelor's level students rather than those pursuing higher education. Figure 4 demonstrates that public diplomacy is an effective tool for attracting international students and facilitating exchanges, as younger individuals play a key role in generating long-term benefits for the host country by becoming third-party advocates.

Table 1. Profession and Region of Respondents

What is area of your studies?	Medical science	33	8.5	Which regions do/ did you study?	Beijing	69	17.3
	Law and legislation	29	7.5		Shanghai	51	12.8
	Education studies	14	3.6		Wuhan	32	8.0
	Psychology	12	3.1		Tianjin	16	4.0
	Economy and business	110	28.5		Huhehot	53	13.3
	Chinese language and culture	25	6.5		Xi An	5	1.3
	Engineering and technology	83	21.5		Dalian	13	3.3
	Agriculture	2	0.5		Qingdao	8	2.0
	Other	78	20.2		Harbin	5	1.3
					Chongqing	1	0.3
					Nanjing	10	2.5
					Hangzhou	9	2.3
					Hangzhou	10	2.5
					Another city	118	29.5

Source: Author's data

A significant majority of students (28.5%) from Qatar are enrolled in economics and business programs, underscoring their strong interest in these fields. Engineering and technology follow with 21.5% of students, mirroring China's leadership in these sectors. Only 0.5% study agriculture. Additionally, 29.5% of respondents study in various regions of China, indicating the broad presence of Qatari students nationwide, who in turn promote Chinese cultural diversity. Moreover, 17.3% are based in Beijing for their studies, emphasizing the capital's role as a cultural, historical, and attractive metropolitan area for international students, including Qataris.

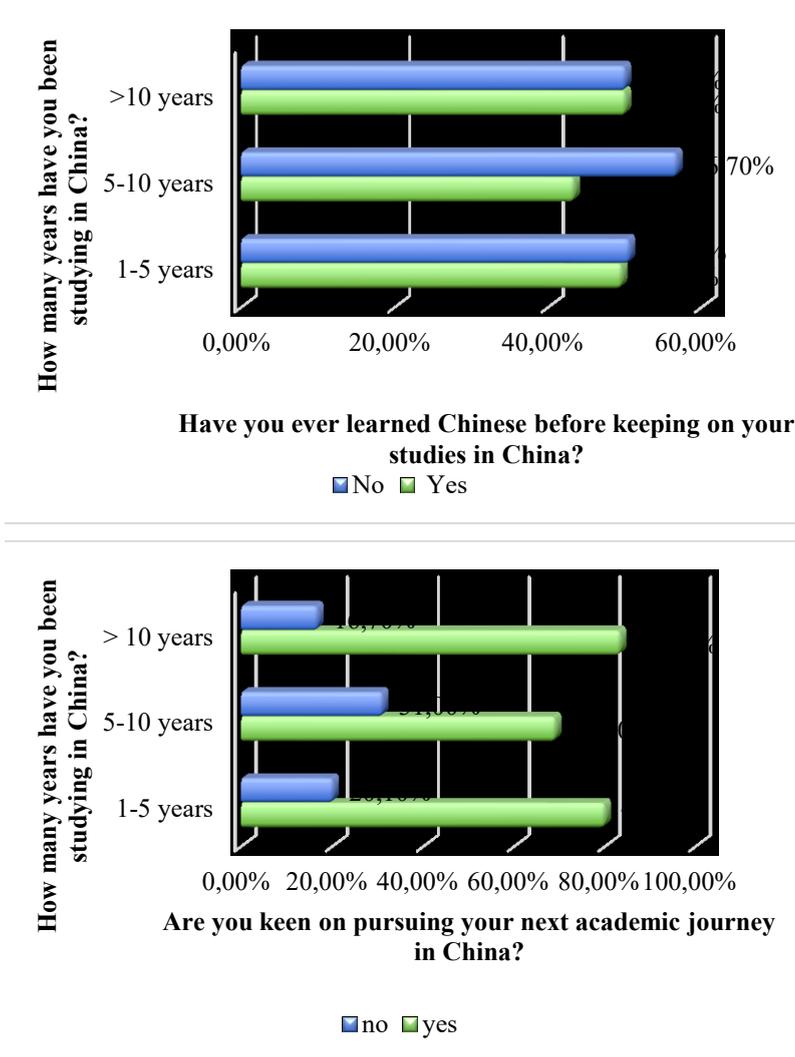
Table 2. Studying Experience of Respondents

Questions	Answer	Frequency	Percent
Have you ever learned Chinese before keeping on your studies in China?	Yes	192	48.7
	No	202	51.3
Are you keen on pursuing your next academic journey in China?	Yes	287	79.1
	No	76	20.9
Are you planning to continue your studies in abroad?	Yes	220	61.6
	No	137	38.4
Have you already completed your studies in China?	Yes	133	36.5
	No	231	63.5

Source: Author's data

Table 2 reveals that over half of the applicants (51.3%) lack prior Chinese language experience, prompting the China Scholarship Council to encourage Qatari youth to embark on a year of Chinese language study under a full scholarship, showcasing an aspect of soft power through cultural and linguistic engagement. Furthermore, a vast majority (79.1%) wish to continue their education in China post-graduation, with 61.6% considering studies abroad, outside China. Among these, 63.5% are actively pursuing further education, with three-quarters working towards a bachelor's degree in China. This aligns with Joseph Nye's (2004) view that education acts as a vehicle for cultivating soft power via cultural interaction, highlighting the pivotal role of higher education in soft power strategies.

Figure 5. Experience of Learning Chinese and Continuing their Studies

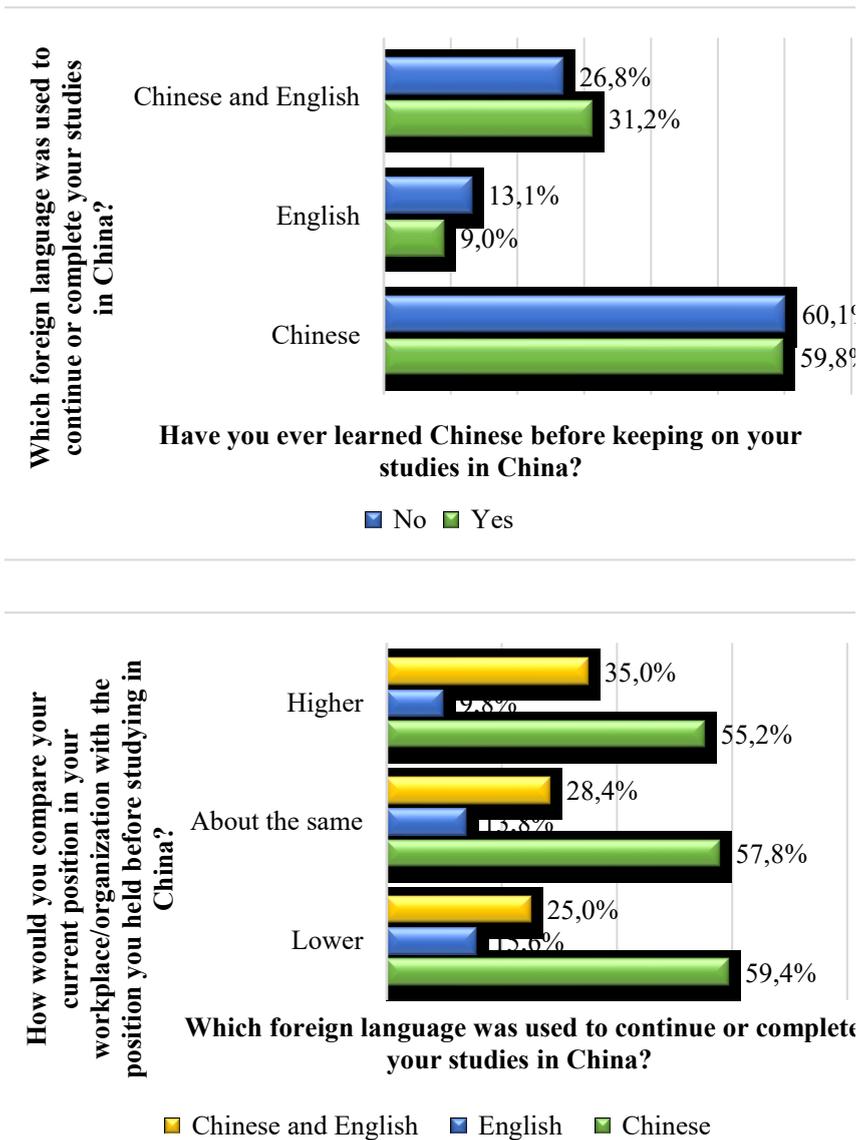


Source: Author's data

Figure 5 illustrates the correlation between the duration of studies in China and prior knowledge of the Chinese language, alongside students' intentions to con-

tinue their education in China. It shows that 50% of students who had studied in China for 1-5 years had prior Chinese language knowledge, compared to 43% of those who studied for 5-10 years. A negligible 0.5% of students with over 10 years of study experience lacked prior Chinese language skills. The figure also indicates students' desires to extend their education in China, with 80% of those studying for 1-5 years, 69% for 5-10 years, and 83% for more than 10 years expressing a preference to continue their studies. This data underscores China's significant appeal as a top educational destination globally, ranked fourth in 2020 behind the US, UK, and other countries, reflecting its strong pull among international students (Hu et al., 2019).

Figure 6. Foreign Language and Current Position of Respondents



Source: Author's data

Figure 6 demonstrates the impact of prior Chinese language experience on students' educational and career outcomes in China. The data reveals consistent levels of prior Chinese language study among students before commencing their degree programs, with 60% of these students planning to continue their education after completing a preparatory year in Chinese language studies. The analysis shows minimal differences in academic progress between students enrolled in bilingual programs versus those in Chinese-only programs, suggesting that initial language proficiency does not significantly affect academic performance. The figure further indicates that being bilingual, rather than proficient in only one language, is associated with better career opportunities, highlighting the advantage of multilingual skills in career advancement.

Checking Reliability of the Instruments

Cronbach's alpha assesses variable consistency within a questionnaire, aiming to reflect the target population accurately. A value of 0.7 or higher denotes a reliable sample and questionnaire. The analysis of 63 questionnaires, using factor and individual item analysis, yielded alpha values over 0.7, indicating adequate representation for further study. Table 3 presents eight factors, their variables, loadings, and Cronbach's alpha coefficients, all exceeding 0.9, affirming their suitability for additional analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) coefficient, assessing sample adequacy for factor analysis, suggests a value above 0.6 as sufficient. Bartlett's test evaluates if the factor analysis variables measure a single dimension, with results below 0.05 confirming the likelihood of representing at least one factor.

Table 3. *Bartlett's Test of Sphericity*

KMO=.923 Bartlett's Test of Sphericity=13145.933(p=.000)								
Cronbach alpha	0.968	0.946	0.918	0.932	0.897	0.923	0.881	0.884
N of items	15	10	9	7	6	5	6	5

Source: Author's data

The survey's factor analysis, detailed in Table 3, revealed a KMO measure of 0.923, indicating high sampling adequacy for factor analysis, with a significant level at 0.000, affirming data suitability. All variable loadings exceeded 0.5, except for 3.3.2 at 0.464, still considered significant. Bartlett's test showed a strong variables relationship (Chi-Square=13145.933, p=.000). The analysis delineated eight factors: Personal, Educational, Economic, and Social Improvement; Educational Comparison; Academic Help; Scholarship & Expenses; and Students' Satisfaction, each evaluated through specific questions.

Checking Validity of the Instruments

Validity refers to the capability of an instrument to accurately measure the construct it is intended to measure.

- Convergent validity

This is a type of construct validity indicated by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

Table 4. Convergent validity

Construct	number of items	AVEs
Personal Improvement	6	0.6
Educational Improvement	5	0.6
Economic Improvement	5	0.4
Social Improvement	10	0.5
Educational Comparison	6	0.4
Academic Help	7	0.5
Scholarship & Expenses	9	0.5
Students' Satisfaction	15	0.6

Source: Author's data

Table 4 indicates that six factors have AVEs greater than 0.50, demonstrating strong convergent validity. However, the AVEs for two factors – Economic Improvement and Educational Comparison – are below 0.5, indicating weaker convergent validity for these factors.

- Discriminant Validity

The results from testing the measurement model reveal that the factors within the model are interrelated, yet all factor loadings surpass the threshold of 0.5. Additionally, all fit indices exceed the acceptable limits that were established, supporting the discriminant validity of the instrument.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity

Indices	Chi-square	Degree of freedom	P	CMIN/DF	CFI	RMSEA
acceptable thresholds	>>	>0	≤0.05	≤3	>0.9	≤0.08
Values	4957.937	1863	.000	2.661	1.000	0.061

Source: Author's data

As seen from Table 5 the values of CFI, CMIN/DF and RMSEA are very close to the threshold values, thus representing an acceptable model fit.

Research hypothesis

H1: For personal improvement (Factor 1), there is a significant difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

H2: For educational improvement (Factor 2), there is a significant difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

H3: For economic improvement (Factor 3), there is a significant difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

H4: For social improvement (Factor 4), there is a significant difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

H5: For educational comparison (Factor 5), there is a significant difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

H6: For academic help (Factor 6), there is a significant difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

H7: For scholarship and expenses (Factor 7), there is a significant difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

H8: For student satisfaction (Factor 8), there is a significant difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

The research hypothesis suggests that students and alumni have benefited from obtaining higher education degrees from Chinese universities, achieving higher positions after completing their studies.

Hypothesis 1 (H1) and its related factors are statistically significant, demonstrating a difference in the comparison between students' current and previous positions.

H2 posits that the dimensions of China's soft power policy impacting students and alumni include Personal Improvement, Educational Improvement, Economic Improvement, Social Improvement, Educational Comparison, Student Satisfaction, Academic Help, and Scholarship and Expenses.

H3 suggests that China's soft power policy significantly affects the satisfaction levels of students and alumni. The data show that the R-square coefficient of determination explains 53% of the variance in student satisfaction, indicating a substantial impact of predictor variables on satisfaction levels. The model's statistical significance was confirmed through ANOVA testing, with a p-value of .000, demonstrating that this independent variable significantly correlates with satisfaction in distance learning.

Table 6. *Correlations between factors*

		fac1	fac2	fac3	fac4	fac5	fac6	fac7	fac8
Personal Improvement	Pearson Correlation	1	.468**	.453**	.507**	.455**	.469**	.298**	.461**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Educational Improvement	Pearson Correlation		1	.584**	.578**	.466**	.400**	.320**	.395**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Economic Improvement	Pearson Correlation			1	.571**	.417**	.368**	.345**	.351**
	Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Social Improvement	Pearson Correlation				1	.588**	.501**	.329**	.475**
	Sig. (2-tailed)					.000	.000	.000	.000
Educational Comparison	Pearson Correlation					1	.607**	.362**	.612**
	Sig. (2-tailed)						.000	.000	.000
Academic Help	Pearson Correlation						1	.424**	.680**
	Sig. (2-tailed)							.000	.000
Scholarship & Expenses	Pearson Correlation							1	.408**
	Sig. (2-tailed)								.000
Students' Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation								1
	Sig. (2-tailed)								

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Source: Author's data

At the 0.01 significance level, all factors show a positive correlation with a Sig. of 0.000 (2-tailed), indicating strong interrelationships. Table 6 demonstrates moderate correlations among factors: Personal and Social Improvement have coefficients between 0.3 and 0.507; Educational and Economic Improvement range from 0.3 to 0.584; Social Improvement and Educational Comparison from 0.3 to 0.588; while Educational Comparison and Academic Help, and Academic Help and Student Satisfaction, show moderate positive correlations, with coefficients up to 0.680. These correlations suggest that educational investments through China's soft power policy are valued for the improvements they bring in students' and alumni's perceptions.

Linear Regression

Table 7. Regression Analysis of Student Satisfaction as an independent Variable

Model	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig.	R ²
(Constant)	0.295	0.109		2.716	0.007	0.536
Personal Improvement	0.129	0.027	0.120	4.870	0.000	
Educational Improvement	0.011	0.029	0.011	0.392	0.695	
Economic Improvement	-0.018	0.033	-0.016	-0.538	0.591	
Social Improvement	0.092	0.033	0.079	2.789	0.005	
Educational Comparison	0.249	0.030	0.222	8.245	0.000	
Academic Help	0.425	0.027	0.414	15.864	0.000	
Scholarship & Expenses	0.079	0.022	0.079	3.649	0.000	

Note: Dependent Variable – Student Satisfaction

Source: Author's data

Table 7 indicates that the coefficient B illustrates the amount of change in the dependent variable (satisfaction) for a one-unit change in the predictor variables. This analysis reveals that Academic Help is moderately correlated with student satisfaction. Specifically, a one-unit increase in Academic Help results in a 0.425 unit increase in satisfaction.

II. a. Qualitative Data Analysis for Interview

The interviews involved 5 general and 7 specific questions across 23 participants. Researchers employed qualitative data analysis methods, using coding to interpret and summarize the interviews. A 3-cycle coding process was applied: the first cycle involved detailed coding of mentioned content without duplication; the second combined and coded content from the first; and the third analyzed combined content from the second cycle individually. The analysis also calculated individual response percentages, accounting for duplicates, to detail survey participants' general information.

1. Regarding the financial resources of the respondents studying in China, the majority of students (70.8%) and alumni rely on China's Government Scholarship, while other individuals (16.6%) depend on the Confucius Scholarship. A minority of them rely on self-funding (4.2%), and the remaining interviewees (4.2%) count on other sources of funding.
2. Considering their professional fields, 58.3% were in education, 8.3% in medicine, 4.2% in agriculture, 4.2% in construction and engineering, and 25% in other fields.
3. Regarding the academic degrees they are currently pursuing or have completed, 33.3% reported having a doctorate, 41.7% had a master's degree, and 25% had a bachelor's degree.
4. In terms of the location of their study city, 62.5% are in Changchun, 12.5% in Wuhan, 12.5% in Beijing, 4.2% in Dalian, and 4.2% in Chongqing.
5. When considering the period of education of the participants in China,

8.3% started in 2022, 25% between 2020-2023, 29.1% between 2017-2020, 12.5% between 2014-2017, and 25% selected other periods.

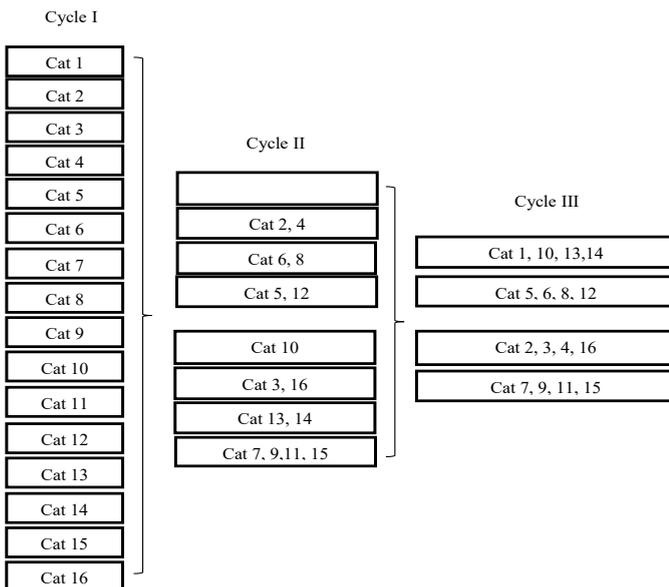
The majority of Qatari youths studying in China have financed their studies through government scholarships and are currently enrolled in academic programs. Many have pursued or completed degrees in education, predominantly at the master's and doctoral levels. Among the study participants, there is a significant proportion of young people who have studied in Shandong, China, or have completed their studies there, particularly between 2014 and 2020.

1. What five things are most important to you when choosing China to study in?

Within the framework of the above question, 16 categories were sorted and coded into the first cycle, 8 categories in the second cycle, and 4 categories in the third cycle. The respondents rated the most important reasons and factors for studying in China as follows.

1. Learning Chinese history, culture, language, traveling, and expanding one's social circle (Cat 1, 10, 13, 14).
2. Reasonable cost of living, favorable condition of weather and climate, student friendly environment and safety (Cat 5, 6, 8, 12).
3. The quality of education system, highly valued ranking and reputation of universities, and improvement of individual knowledge, advance one's educational level, and promote in one's future career (Cat 2, 3, 4, 16).
4. Active engagement of Chinese Embassy, variety of encouragement for studying opportunities, attraction to development experience and scholarship availability of more quotes for applicants (Cat 7, 9, 11, 15) are main reason of choosing China as their study destination.

Figure 7. Text Coding of the First Question



Source: Author's data

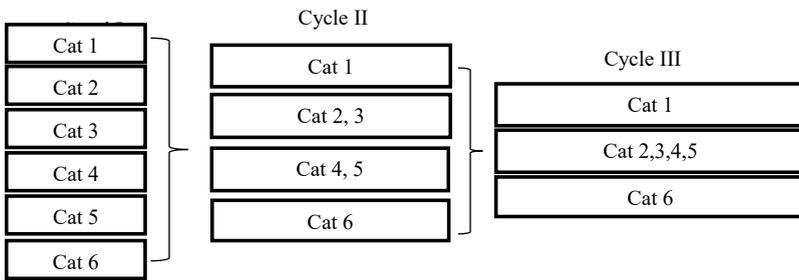
Important factors and reasons of studying in China were defined as the followings including learning culture and language, reasonable cost of living, favourable condition of weather and climate, the quality of education system, highly valued ranking and reputation of universities, Active engagement of Chinese Embassy, and scholarship availability of more quotes for applicants.

The most important factors of continuing their studies in China reveals that higher education institutions play a vital role in pride of the nation, development of technology, growth of economy for Chinese. Thus, government of China implement policy concerning diplomacy of education by spreading Chinese language, culture and state narratives.

2. In general, how environmentally-friendly do you think universities are?

Within the framework of the above questions, 6 categories were sorted and coded in the first cycle, 4 categories in the second cycle, and 3 categories in the third cycle (Figure 8).

Figure 8. *Text Coding of the Second Question*



Source: Author's data

Figure 8 reveals that interview participants described their universities' commitment to environmental friendliness as follows:

- The campus is beautifully maintained with an abundance of flowers and trees.
- Mopeds and electric bikes are readily available for rent, contributing to a quieter campus environment where everyone prefers riding electric bikes or mini-mopeds.
- A mini-bus service operates within the campus at a cost of 2 yuan, emphasizing regulated and accessible transportation.
- The campus is clean and abundant with trees, underlining a strong commitment to green spaces.
- Initiatives to plant a variety of trees are encouraged, reflecting active engagement in enhancing biodiversity.
- Waste management practices are commendable, with all garbage being sorted, showcasing a commitment to environmental sustainability.

- Efforts have been made to create a student-friendly environment conducive to studying, with significant strides in reducing air pollution in recent years.
- Markets have been relocated to nearby areas, ensuring convenience and reducing the carbon footprint associated with travel.

Participants highlighted that the campus and its surroundings are organized in environmentally friendly ways, fostering a conducive learning environment for student development. However, a minority of participants noted the generation of chemical waste related to their field of study, indicating an area for environmental improvement.

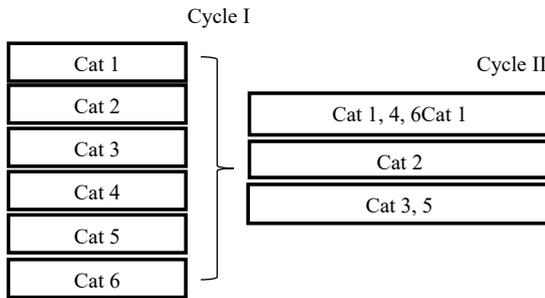
3. Do you expect to return to your home country after completing your course?

In the context of the above questions, the interviewees fully expressed their willingness to contribute to the development of their country by using the academic knowledge they have learned from the Chinese people. For example, they have been contributing to spread their experience in linguistics and higher education.

4. What are their most important priorities when choosing a university?

Within the framework of the above question, 6 categories were sorted and coded into 6 categories in the first cycle and 3 categories in the second cycle (Figure 3).

Figure 9. Text Coding of the Fourth Question



Source: Author's data

In the context of the fourth question, how and by what criteria enabled the participants to choose their universities was coded and summarized as shown in Figure 9.

- High-ranking universities recognized both domestically and internationally, a reputable education system, quality teaching, competitive lecturers, and research institutions (Cat 1, 4, 6).
- A supportive economic location, favourable climate, student-friendly studying environment, safety on university campuses, and metropolitan areas hosting universities (Cat 2).
-

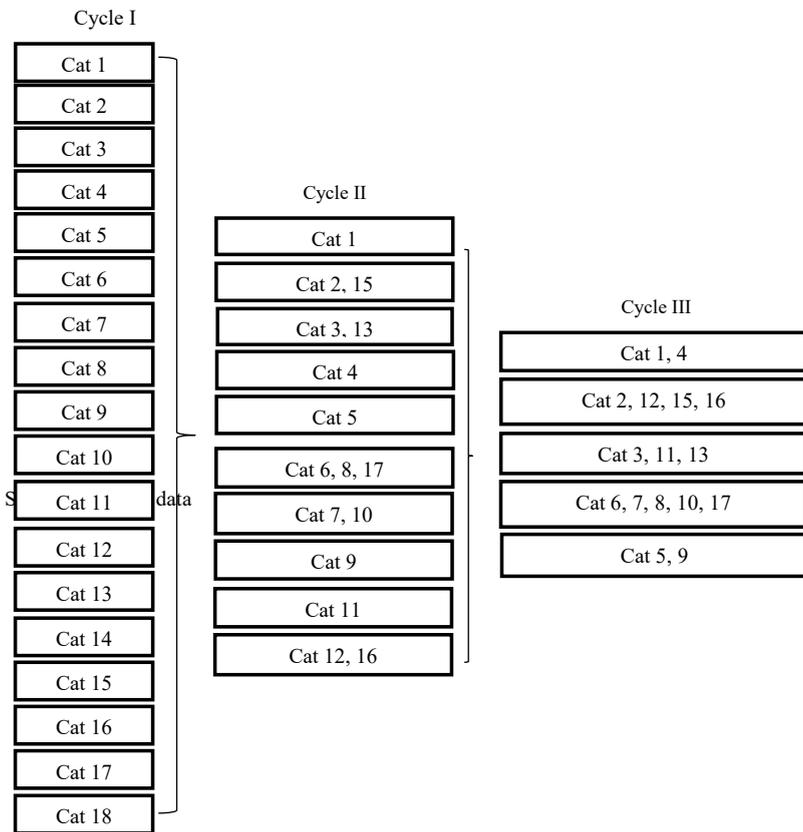
- Interviewees noted excellent academic experiences, international student exchanges, transnational cultural and communication programs, encouragement of cooperation with other nations, and sharing experiences with international representatives as significant benefits (Cat 3, 5).

The result reveals that scholarship opportunity allows youths to benefit from competitive universities in international and domestic level, domestically and globally accepted high ranking universities, respectable reputation of higher education, favourable location and weather, broad range of foreign relation, great experience of cooperation, and sharing experience with representatives from different nations to pursue their academic degree in China.

5. Which of the following are most useful to you when making decisions about your studies?

Within the framework of the above question, 18 categories were sorted and coded in the first cycle, 10 categories in the second cycle, and 5 categories in the third cycle (Figure 4).

Figure 10. *Text Coding of the Fifth Question*



Source: Author's data

According to Figure 10, interviewees highlighted several advantages of studying in China, including:

- Universities boast qualified professors due to rigorous selection, offering unique opportunities for guest lecturers from abroad, enhancing academic dialogue. Scholarships incentivize study across various disciplines, with a satisfactory quota for China's Government scholarships (Categories 1, 4).
- The interaction with international students enriches experiences, promoting global competitiveness, affordable academic degrees, and career growth (Categories 2, 12, 15, 16).
- Learning Chinese within a native context enhances language skills and access to extensive research resources, facilitating engagement with Chinese academic materials (Categories 3, 11, 13).
- Cultural immersion, a simple lifestyle, understanding of China's growth, exploration, affordable living costs, welcoming atmosphere, safety, and peaceful environment are valued aspects of studying in China (Categories 6, 7, 8, 10, 17).
- The strategic relationship with Qatar, collaborative opportunities in various sectors, and reasonable living costs are beneficial (Categories 5, 9).

Interviewees identified several strengths of studying in China, including the effectiveness of the Chinese government's policies for international applicants, the ample availability of scholarships for candidates, the motivation to share experiences with global youth, the promotion of individual competitiveness, and the support for research resources and materials for their studies in China. Additionally, the nurturing of cultural knowledge, the opportunity to experience the development of a powerful nation, the ability to travel around China, the reasonable cost of living, and the assurance of student safety and a peaceful environment were highlighted. These aspects underscore the importance placed on strategic multifaceted relations with Qatar.

The decision to study in China demonstrates how educational investment allows China to reap mutual benefits by leveraging soft power as a host country.

6. Thinking about your parents, how important do you think they would consider each of the following aspects of your international study to be?

Based on interview responses, when studying in China, the health-related concerns of their families and friends include health service insurance, well-being, access to healthy food, weather conditions, academic pursuits, and safe travel.

7. What worries you most about studying in a different country?

Analysing the interview notes, students and alumni tend to face difficulties, which were summarized and ranked as follows: While there are no barriers such as language or others, they do encounter challenges like adjusting to spicy and junk food, restrictions on student work hours, homesickness, the absence of central heating systems in winter, limited Wi-Fi access for students, and differences due to culture and mindset. It can be concluded that China's soft power has been making significant inroads in Qatar, with its influence being observed in both the economy and culture.

II. b. Qualitative Data Analysis of SWOT and TOWS

The SWOT analysis, evaluating Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, is a strategic tool for organizational assessment and planning, applied here to assess the impact of China's soft power through educational investments on the youth.

Three alumni cases illustrate China's soft power in education:

1. Undergraduate: A Chinese language teacher graduate from Zhejiang Normal University (2016-2020) benefited from a Confucius Scholarship, completed her degree amid COVID-19 by following quarantine protocols, and participated in competitions.
2. Master: A Master of Arts in Chinese graduate from Tsinghua University (2017-2019) who excelled in English, German, and Chinese, took part in editing, volunteering, and teaching activities.
3. Ph.D.: An Education Ph.D. graduate from Shanghai Jiao Tong University (2017-2021) pursued her degree in English after a Chinese preparatory course, completing her studies with an online dissertation defence due to the pandemic.

Figure 11. *SWOT Analysis*

Strength	Weakness
<p>Undergraduate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Studied Chinese in a private school from elementary school -Completed her studies with the Confucius Scholarship for academic achievement -No Chinese language barriers -Gained her experience in Chinese culture -Satisfied with the same quality of education as Chinese students -Participated actively in variety of activities and competitions for undergraduates 	<p>Undergraduate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Language barriers in English to communicate with international students -Occasional misunderstandings with foreign students due to diversity of culture

<p>Master:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Studied Chinese in Qatar at the undergraduate level -Acquisition of English allowed her to join the editorial team of university magazine and volunteer in Chinese language club -Monthly allowance enabled her to focus on her studies -Exchanged experience from representatives of various nations -Joined a voluntary organization and participated in several activities 	<p>Master:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Distance relationship with family; undergraduate students tend to commit violations such as drinking alcohol -It is believed that the results of the master's level education quality is much lower than those of Chinese students studying the same field
<p>Ph.D.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Academic program in English enabled her to exchange experience with representatives of various countries -Satisfied with attending lectures and workshop of experienced scholars from overseas -A year of Chinese preparation course enabled her to learn from international students -A year course of Chinese enabled her to make contact in Chinese for daily communication 	<p>Ph.D.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Occasional communication barrier in English -Advanced Chinese is required to participate in regular research discussion with students of supervisor (once a week)
Opportunities	Threats
<p>Undergraduate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To continue the studies and working is acceptable -To participate in various activities of culture, and competitions -To welcome foreigners to participate in trade fairs and business meetings -To improve trade relations at the international level 	<p>Undergraduate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Internship opportunities are limited for foreign students -Self-discipline is important
<p>Master:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To continue studies for Ph.D. -To work is acceptable after graduating 	<p>Master:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Working is prohibited for scholarship students -To be lack of internship same as Chinese students in same profession
<p>Ph.D.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To concentrate only on research work because of the favourable learning environment -To download and using research papers from sites like CNK 	<p>Ph.D.:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To prefer to continue their studies with scholarship opportunities

Source: Author's data

The analysis highlights that alumni benefit from their ability to exchange experiences internationally and understand Chinese culture, aided by their academic backgrounds for studying in Chinese without language barriers. They are active in diverse activities but face challenges in fluency, impacting communication. Opportunities in further education or careers for those skilled in Chinese are noted, despite restrictions on employment during studies and limited internships in China. The SWOT analysis shows China's commitment to improving education quality through Projects 211 and 985, targeting the development of elite institutions to attract top students globally.

TOWS ANALYSIS

This analysis is conducted following the SWOT analysis to determine the next steps based on insights from the SWOT analysis. Here is a brief overview of how to proceed:

1. Strength – Opportunity: Leverage strengths to maximize opportunities.
2. Strength – Threat: Use strengths to minimize threats.
3. Weakness – Opportunity: Address weaknesses by capitalizing on opportunities.
4. Weakness – Threat: Reduce weaknesses to mitigate potential threats.

As indicated above, the soft power of China in education can be assessed by analyzing opportunities and threats for academic studies to enhance the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of alumni.

Figure 12. TOWS analysis

1. Strength – Opportunity: Maximizing opportunity based on strength	2. Strength – Threat: Minimizing threats based on strength
Undergraduate:	Undergraduate:
Fluency of Chinese enables international applicant to benefit same quality of education as domestic students.	As a disciplined learner of private school under Chinese education system alumni tend to be out of immature behaviour.
Master:	Master:
Fluency of English and Chinese makes alumni competitive in labour market of China.	Foreign language knowledge could work as an instrument to devote for cooperate with international organizations rather than domestic internship opportunity.
Ph.D.:	Ph.D.:
Academic studies inspired alumni to concentrate on the studies and research in China.	Collaborative learning is acceptable for both international and domestic students with English communication.
3. Weakness – Opportunity: Improving weakness based on opportunity	4. Weakness – Threat: Minimizing weakness to avoid possible threat
Undergraduate:	Undergraduate:
Gaining experience due to cooperation with domestic and international partners based on improvement of English.	To encourage building collaboration with foreigners with effort for English fluency.
Master:	Master: To submit request to exchange experience with domestic students including same internship opportunities.
Applying a job requires foreign language and same education degree as domestic applicants in different field.	
Ph.D.: Work on research work requires English.	Ph.D.: To encourage them to exchange experience with domestic students in academic field.

Source: Author's data

The TOWS analysis reveals that alumni capitalize on academic experiences in China, gaining discipline and language fluency, which facilitates collaborations at various academic levels due to their maturity. It also shows that post-degree employment in China is achievable for alumni, who can leverage their bilingual skills for global career opportunities. Thus, the analysis suggests that higher education, a key aspect of soft power, can foster a globally interconnected community.

DISCUSSION

The influence of the nation is manifested through the use of non-coercive instruments, such as the educational development of individuals at the higher education level. Joseph Nye highlighted that soft power perfectly aligns with education, based on the consent of target nations rather than coercion. Research findings from a mixed methodology study indicate that students and alumni benefit from higher education institutions in China through the country's investment in education as a host nation. Notably, a majority of respondents are undergraduate representatives, which suggests they are drawn to scholarship opportunities with sufficient quotas, as opposed to the limited scholarship opportunities available from third countries.

The research findings suggest that higher education, as an essential component of foreign policy, is expanding from a domestic to a global level through educational investment. However, there is a need to promote fair competition for young people wishing to continue their studies abroad by enhancing their competencies in various skills, including the acquisition of foreign languages, both hard and soft skills, communication abilities, and academic achievement.

CONCLUSION

Various nations regard their domestic higher education institutions as pivotal, leveraging them as a foundation of soft power towards target countries because the realm of international higher education acts as a dynamic force for globalization, serving foreign policy objectives. This research aimed to explore the interplay between education and soft power, drawing on the findings from both quantitative and qualitative data analyses.

The correlation analysis result (.680) indicates that current students and alumni's satisfaction correlates more strongly with academic help than with their other areas of improvement. Meanwhile, China's efforts to cultivate competitive universities are effectively supported through soft power. Furthermore, a strong correlation (.588) between social improvement and educational comparison suggests that China's educational ranking is favourably viewed in terms of its global reputation. Thus, respondents prioritized improvements in education and the economy (.584) while also focusing on their social and personal development (.507).

Linear regression analysis shows that the level of satisfaction changes with academic support, suggesting that student satisfaction is contingent upon the

academic assistance provided by the host country, which underscores the effectiveness of China's soft power through education. The research hypothesis was confirmed by findings that students and alumni have benefited from obtaining higher education degrees from Chinese universities, achieving higher positions post-graduation. Interview results indicate that a sufficient quota of scholarships allows them to enrol in globally recognized Chinese higher education institutions with support from the Chinese government. Results from SWOT and TOWS analyses reveal that China is enhancing its soft power by attracting competitive applicants through investments in their education. Given China's significant investment compared to other nations, it is crucial to further investigate how soft power through education benefits target countries that receive educational support. Further studies should include a broader sample, incorporating more respondents from other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to explore the educational returns of overseas representatives beyond China.

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