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Like Water: An Inquiry into China's Soft Power Strategy in Africa

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Introduction

Since Joseph Nye first coined the term “soft power” in the 1990s, there has been an attempt to better understand how a soft power strategy can be implemented by nations to secure their strategic interests. Soft power, as opposed to hard military and economic power, revolves around the notion of using a nation’s culture, political values, and/or foreign policy to co-op the actions of other nations.¹ The use of soft power can be understood as an indirect means of using “the attractiveness of one’s culture and values” to influence others into acting a certain way.² In this way, by using a soft power approach, a nation can theoretically secure its strategic interests through cooperation, rather than confrontation, with other nations. Due to soft power’s potential benefits, there has been a distinct interest in better understanding how a soft power strategy can be implement by nations to secure their strategic interests.

While the concept of soft power has been adopted as a topic of interest for Western politicians and scholars, the practice of using soft power has been fully embraced by the

¹ Joseph Nye, *Soft Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), p. 11.

² Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 7.

People's Republic of China.³ Although the term “soft power has become one of the most frequently used phrases among political leaders, leading academics, and journalists” in China, the nation has long been familiar with the practical use of soft power.⁴

In particular, China's relationship with the nations of the African continent have been characterized by an adept use of soft power to secure China's strategic interests. China's long-standing use of soft power in Africa has provided the nation with innumerable benefits in regards to bolstering its power within the world. By utilizing appealing foreign policy that incorporated China's political and cultural values, China has historically proven be highly successful at securing its strategic objectives in Africa. Consequently, if one wishes to better understand how a soft power strategy can be implemented in practice, then China's relationship with Africa serves as the perfect case-study.

In this paper, I will examine the development of Sino-African relations with a specific focus on how China has implemented a soft power approach to courting the nations of Africa. To accomplish this task, it will first prove necessary to highlight why recognizing the extent of China's relationships with Africa is critical as Chinese power continues to grow on the world stage. I will then provide an analysis of the concept of soft power in order to illustrate how the Chinese conception of soft power differs from that of the West. In particular, I will highlight why the accusations by some theorists that China is utilizing sharp power, rather than soft power, are the result of an ethnocentrically Western understanding of the concept of soft power. Following this analysis, I will explain the historical development of Sino-African relations. This historical analysis will highlight how China's soft power strategy has shifted over time as its strategic interests in Africa have shifted. Understanding the development of Sino-African relations will allow me to analyze why the Chinese soft power strategy in Africa has historically been, and will continue to be, successful.

³ “China” henceforth. For the purposes of this paper, “China” will refer exclusively to the People's Republic of China from 1949 to the present.

⁴ Mingjiang Li, “Soft Power: Nurture Not Nature” in *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics*, Edited by Mingjiang Li (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), p. 1.

A Rising Power

The art of war teaches us to rely not on the likelihood of the enemy's not coming, but on our own readiness to receive him; not on the chance of his not attacking us, but rather on the fact that we have made our position unassailable.

Sun Tzu (Chapter 8.11)

Within the last few decades, China has emerged as one of the most powerful nations in the world, and has even begun to challenge the geopolitical power of the United States. As such, there has been an intense interest in better understanding the sources of China's immense power. In this section I will detail how the sources of China's formidable military and economic power are being further bolstered by the benefits of a shrewd foreign policy aimed at establishing diplomatic ties with nations in the developing world. In particular, I will highlight how Sino-African relations are of increasing strategic importance for the further cultivation of China's global power. This analysis will highlight why it is critical to understand the historical and current benefits of China's relationship with Africa if one hopes to hypothesize about China's future geopolitical power.

China's Military and Economic Hard Power

In terms of military power, China currently boasts the world's largest standing army, possesses nuclear capabilities, and is engaged in a large-scale modernization effort to develop weapon systems capable of countering the military assets of the United States.⁵ China also seems to be more than willing to flex its military might, as evidenced by the deployment of Chinese navy and other military assets to control China's disputed territorial claims in the South China Sea.

Furthermore, while China's defense spending still lags behind that of the United States, China has increased its defense spending by nearly 120% from 2007 to 2016.⁶ To put this into perspective, during the same period US defense spending actually decreased by nearly 5%. However, in order to maintain such a high degree of military strength, it is estimated that China

⁵ Jonathan Marcus, "The 'globalisation of China's military power,'" *BBC News*, last modified 13 February 2018, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-43036302>.

⁶ Marcus, "The 'globalisation of China's military power.'"

spent approximately \$215 billion⁷ in 2016 on its defense budget.⁸ Consequently, while China's significant military capabilities alone make it a leader in terms of geopolitical power, this level of military spending is only made possible by the fundamental source of China's power: the Chinese economy.

In terms of economic power, China's economy is the world's fastest growing and its GDP ranks only behind that of the United States.⁹ The success of the Chinese economy is the result of both domestic factors and the use of a pragmatic foreign policy. From a domestic perspective, there are many features that have led to the development of the Chinese economy, such as its access to vast manpower reserves. However, the presence of these factors alone is insufficient to explain the levels of economic success that China has achieved. To illustrate this point, consider the fact that although the population sizes of India and China were roughly comparable in 2017, the scale of their economies was not. In 2017, the International Monetary Fund estimated that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of India would be approximately \$2,439 billion while China's GDP was estimated at \$11,937 billion.¹⁰ While it could be the case that other domestic factors could explain the stark difference in the size of these two economies, a more accessible explanation can be found by examining the foreign relations policies that China designed to meet its economic goals.

Since Mao Zedong's successful revolution in 1949, China has been continually governed by the Communist Party of China.¹¹ This stable political environment has allowed the CCP to implement successive sets of five year plans that set specific goals for the Chinese economy. These economic goals entail that Chinese foreign policy has been tailored to help achieve the Party's economic objectives. This tailoring of a shrewd foreign policy can be clearly seen in China's ability to establish itself as a key player in the global trade marketplace.

Trade is an essential source of China's geopolitical power. While Chinese trade with the Global North is mutually beneficial to both parties, the markets in the Global North have become increasingly dependent upon Chinese consumer goods. For instance, in 2017 the value of Chinese imports into the United States superseded the value of US exports by over \$375

⁷ All monetary figures are given in US dollars.

⁸ Aude Fleurant, Nan Tian, Pieter D. Wezeman and Siemon T. Wezeman, "Trends in Military Expenditures, 2016," (*Stockholm International Research Institute*, accessed 4 February 2018, <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/Trends-world-military-expenditure-2016.pdf>), p. 2.

⁹ "World Outlook Database, October 2017," *International Monetary Fund*, 2017.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Henceforth, the "CCP".

billion dollars.¹² As this trade deficit highlights, China has been extremely successful at producing highly sought-after exports.

However, while the value of Chinese exports is undeniable, the Chinese manufacturing industry requires huge amounts of energy and raw material in order to sustain such high levels of production. As such, securing access to vast amounts of natural resources is a key strategic concern for the continued maintenance and cultivation of China's economic power.¹³ One of the ways China seeks to secure this strategic necessity is by developing close relations with the nations of the Global South, such as those on the African continent.

In recent years, China has come to recognize the immense and largely undeveloped reserves of natural resources contained within Africa.¹⁴ In particular, the Chinese government and Chinese corporations have found that many African nations can provide China with a steady supply of crude oil, natural gas, non-ferrous minerals and other natural resources, such as timber.¹⁵ Regarding Chinese access to African natural resources, author Ian Taylor states that "it might be avowed that the importance of Africa to China's continued development cannot be overstated."¹⁶

Moreover, African markets have also proven to be highly receptive to Chinese goods. Since African markets are relatively small, they have generally had only minimal Western investment.¹⁷ The small size of African markets and minimal Western investment entail that Chinese corporations can consolidate a large share of these untapped markets.¹⁸ However, it is not only Chinese corporations that have recognized the opportunities presented in Africa. It is estimated that between 750,000 to 1 million Chinese citizens have moved to various African nations with the hopes of establishing small business enterprises.¹⁹

¹² United States Census Bureau, "Trade Goods with China," *United States Census Bureau*, accessed 1 April 2018, <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5700.html>.

¹³ Ian Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2006), p. 22.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

¹⁵ Joshua Kurlantzick, "China's Soft Power in Africa," *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), p. 171; & See also, Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 22.

¹⁶ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 23.

¹⁷ Kurlantzick, "China's Soft Power in Africa," p. 171.

¹⁸ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 22.

¹⁹ Howard French, *China's Second Continent: How a Million Migrants Are Building a New Empire in Africa*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), p. 13; See also, Kurlantzick, p. 175.

Recently, Sino-African relations have proven to be economically valuable, and trade between China and Africa grew over 1100% from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$114.8 billion in 2010.²⁰ By 2014, the value of Sino-African trade was estimated to be worth over \$200 billion.²¹ While this level of growth is astonishing, the scale of Sino-African trade is incredible when one considers that the value of trade between the United States and Africa was only \$55.3 billion in 2017.²² Furthermore, when one considers that Africa's population is expected to double from roughly one billion to two billion by the mid-twenty first century, there is no reason to suspect that the value of Sino-African trade relations will decrease in the foreseeable future.²³

In addition to the recent economic dividends being produced by close Sino-African relations, China has also been able to use these relationships to project its military power beyond China's traditional regional capacity. In 2017, China established a naval base in the African nation of Djibouti.²⁴ Djibouti is in a strategically important location near the Horn of Africa, and as such, it gives China the ability to extend its naval power into the Red Sea, along the Eastern coast of Africa, and even into the Indian Ocean. Even more importantly, China's base in Djibouti marks the establishment of China's first overseas military base. This is significant because China has historically had an inability to exert its military power beyond a regional scale in Asia. Consequently, China's naval base in Djibouti has provided China with its first opportunity to flex its military might on a global scale.

While the benefits of close Sino-African relations are obvious in terms of bolstering China's economic and military power, simply assuming that Chinese interest in Africa is motivated by purely hard power calculations would be extremely short-sighted. For instance, when one considers that the value of Sino-African trade was only worth approximately \$1 billion in 1980, appeals to economic interests alone cannot seem to explain why China has been actively seeking to establish diplomatic ties with African nations since the mid-1950s.²⁵ Consequently, when attempting to understand why China has been so interested in Africa, it is

²⁰ Qing Cao, "From Revolution to Business: China's Changing Discourses on Africa," *The Morality of China in Africa*, (London: Zed Books, 2013), p. 61.

²¹ China Africa Research Initiative, "Data: China-Africa Trade," *China Africa Research Initiative and The John Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies*, accessed 1 April 2018, <http://www.sais-cari.org/data-china-africa-trade/>.

²² United States Census Bureau, "Trade in Goods with Africa."

²³ French, p. 7.

²⁴ "Djibouti: Chinese troops depart for first overseas military base", *BBC News*, last modified 12 July 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-40578106>.

²⁵ Peter Wonacott, "In Africa, U.S. Watches China's Rise; Ethiopia and Zambia are Among Fans of Continent's New Top Trade Partner; Washington Presses for Accountability," *Wall Street Journal* (Online), September 2011.

important to do as one internal Chinese document advises and “take long-range views of this problem.”²⁶

Taking a “long-range” historical approach will reveal how the recent Chinese economic and military benefits of close Sino-African relations are the dividends being paid from a long-term Chinese soft power strategy. Specifically, China’s relationship with Africa highlights how China has been able to implement an appealing foreign policy to which African nations have, and continue to be, highly receptive. This shrewd use of diplomacy to co-opt African nations is a paradigm example of how China has been able to operationalize a soft power strategy to achieve a myriad of its strategic objectives.

Chinese Soft Power

Hence to fight and conquer in all your battles is not supreme excellence; supreme excellence consists of breaking the enemy’s resistance without fighting.

Sun Tzu (Chapter 3.2)

The Chinese commitment to soft power has been expressly endorsed by President Xi Jinping who vowed “to promote China’s cultural soft power by disseminating modern Chinese values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the world”.²⁷ Despite this commitment to developing soft power, in a 2017 ranking of each nation’s soft power by the consultant company Portland and the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, China was ranked 25th, just behind 24th place Poland.²⁸ There have also recently been arguments put forth by some theorists that many aspects of China’s soft power strategy should be better understood as the being implementation of “sharp power.”²⁹

However, China’s apparently slight soft power influence and alleged use of sharp power is largely the result of a misunderstanding of the Chinese conception of soft power. In

²⁶ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 8.

²⁷ Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy, *The Soft Power 30 Report*, (Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy), p. 70.

²⁸ Portland and the USC Center on Public Diplomacy, *The Soft Power 30 Report*, p. 41.

²⁹ Joseph Nye, “How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power: The Right and Wrong Ways to Respond to Authoritarian Rule,” *Foreign Affairs* (online), last modified 24 January 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-01-24/how-sharp-power-threatens-soft-power>.

order to remedy this situation, I will first explain how soft power was originally conceived of by Joseph Nye. This will provide a basis by which to illustrate how the Western understanding of soft power differs greatly from the Chinese conception of soft power. Once these differences are made clear, it will become evident how many groups have significantly underestimated the efficacy of China's soft power, and why China's alleged use of sharp power results from a misunderstanding of how soft power can be applied.

Hard Power and Soft Power

When attempting to understand the global balance of power, there is a tendency by both politicians and scholars to focus on a nation's military assets and economic influence. This focus on a nation's hard power, in the form of its military and economic might, produces a black and white picture of the geopolitical landscape. Those nations that possess numerically large and technologically advanced militaries are viewed as being more powerful than nations that do not. The same logic holds true in terms of economic strength, as a nation's economic power is seen as being directly related to a nation's geopolitical power. In this way, by being able to compare and evaluate the relative strengths of nations' military and economic power, it is generally assumed that one can gain a clear understanding how much power a nation wields in the international community.

However, what is often ignored in such evaluations is the fact that the operationalization of a nation's hard power is a direct means used to achieve its strategic objectives. While a direct approach can certainly be an expedient way to achieve a nation's strategic interests, it is also generally characterized by a very high entry cost and a substantial degree of risk. To illustrate this point, suppose that a nation decides to annex a portion of its neighbour's territory. In order to consider this strategy, the aggressor nation must first possess the manpower and the military equipment to make such an annexation possible. These military assets will invariably carry with them a substantial monetary cost.

Furthermore, even if the aggressor nation can bear the burden of the necessary military expenditures, warfare is an activity that is inherently fraught with risk. As every student of military history intimately understands, "the outcome corresponds less to expectations in war than in any other case whatsoever."³⁰ Adding to this inherent difficulty in attempting to predict

³⁰ Alternatively, "in nothing less than in war do events correspond (with men's calculations)." Livius, Titus, *The History of Rome: Books Twenty-Seven to Thirty-Six*. Trans. Cyrus Edmonds, (Project Gutenberg: 2004), Book XXX, sec. 30.

the consequences of a military action is the issue of trying to calculate the potential political backlash from the international community. Although a nation may be able to use overwhelming military force to secure its immediate strategic objectives, the international repercussions of utilizing military force may outweigh any benefits the military campaign would provide.

Additionally, the inclusion of nuclear weapons in the arsenals of the world's top militaries is yet another factor that must be taken into consideration when gauging the risks associated with military operations. In particular, the deterrence effect of nuclear weapons has so far proven to be significant enough to prevent nuclear armed nations from engaging in direct hostilities. Thus, while nuclear weapons can deter aggressive military actions from a hostile nation, the same logic of deterrence applies if the hostile nation also possesses its own nuclear weapons. Since nuclear weapon capabilities are generally considered to be part and parcel with having significant military power, the world's top militaries have been reluctant to operationalize this power against each other. Because of the perceived threat of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD), many of the most capable militaries in the world hesitate to use their military might against one another.

As such, while the use of military hard power can certainly be an expedient means of achieving a nation's strategic objectives, military power is also inherently expensive and risky to operationalize. The risk involved with operationalizing military power is further exacerbated by the potential political backlash from the international community and the threat posed by nuclear armed adversaries. Even if a nation tries to mitigate the risk of using its hard power by attempting to coerce other nations into acting in certain ways by threatening the use of military force, there is no guarantee that these threats will have the desired effect. Therefore, despite hard power being used as a common measure of a nation's geopolitical power, such evaluations often ignore the costs and risks involved with using hard power as a means of securing a nation's strategic objectives.

However, hard power is not the only type of power that nations can wield when trying to achieve their strategic objectives. In addition to a nation's military and economic power, nations also possess soft power resources. According to Nye, a nation derives its soft power from three resources, namely, "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)."³¹ In this way, soft power gains its efficacy from an "ability to shape the preferences of others" when a nation has a culture, political values, and

³¹ Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 11.

foreign policy that are attractive to other nations.³² Therefore, unlike hard power which relies on coercion and other direct means for achieving certain outcomes, soft power is an indirect means of convincing “others to want the outcomes you want.”³³

For example, suppose that nation A is both militarily and economically powerful, but has limited access to natural resources domestically, while a neighbouring nation B has vast reserves of natural resources that far outstrip the nation’s need and usage. In this situation, nation A could choose to mobilize its military forces in order to secure the natural resources of nation B by force. While this would be a direct means of securing nation A’s strategic interests, such actions are inherently risky and could result in the ire of the international community, thereby weakening nation A’s overall geopolitical power. However, nation A could also secure access to nation B’s natural resources through diplomatic means. For instance, suppose that nation A and nation B are in close proximity to each other, they share a similar cultural and political values, and ~~thus~~ they have developed a long-standing and cordial relationship. ~~As such,~~ In this case, nation A could utilize its soft power resources in order to secure the natural resources it needs from nation B through diplomatic means, such as forming a mutually beneficial trade agreement. In this way, by using a soft power approach, nation A can secure its strategic interests through cooperation rather than through coercion or the use of force.

As this example illustrates, the risks involved in operationalizing a soft power approach are much less significant than those involved with utilizing a hard power approach. While offers of friendship and cooperation can be rebuked by other nations, such offers are rarely met with outright hostility. Furthermore, even if a nation’s culture and political values are largely unattractive to other nations, so long as that nation has an amicable foreign policy it runs little risk of being ostracized by the global community. This is especially pertinent when one considers that the overwhelming majority of nations in the world are members of the United Nations. As such, they are bound to the UN Charter which mandates “non-interference in the internal affairs of States.”³⁴

In this way, any nation can theoretically implement an effective soft power strategy by adopting a foreign relations policy that promotes the “values and interests [that] others share.”³⁵ By adopting such values, a nation can “increase the probability of obtaining desired outcomes

³² Ibid., p. 5.

³³ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁴ United Nations Conference on International Organization, *Charter of the United Nations and Statute of the International Court of Justice*, accessed 1 April 2018, (San Francisco, 1945), <http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/>.

³⁵ Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 11.

because of the relationships of attraction... it creates."³⁶ If the use of hard power is understood as a direct means of achieving certain strategic objectives, then the use of soft power should be understood as an indirect means of achieving strategic objectives by utilizing diplomacy to cultivate mutually beneficial relationships between nations.³⁷ A closer study of China's foreign policy initiatives in Africa will reveal how China has historically been successful in using soft power.

Sharp Power and China

While the potential benefits of using a soft power approach in the increasingly interconnected global community are obvious, there has been some debate surrounding China's implementation of a soft power strategy. In particular, theorists such as Nye argue that while China does have "aims that require the soft power of attraction", China has been more than willing to employ "the coercive sharp power of disruption and censorship" to achieve its strategic objectives.³⁸

However, China's alleged use of sharp power largely results from the concept of soft power being understood from a Western viewpoint. In order to remedy this situation it will prove necessary to clearly explain how theorists have conceptualized of sharp power as being a threat to traditional soft power. Once this is complete, I can then illustrate how Western assumptions about soft power and its cultivation have led to a misinterpretation of China's soft power strategy.

Sharp Power as a Means of Cultivating Soft Power

Within Western academic and political circles there has been a growing concern that the "sharp power" utilized by authoritarian nations poses a distinct threat to the soft power employed by liberal democratic states. According to Nye, sharp power is a form of hard power utilized by authoritarian nations when they manipulate information to "compel behaviour at home and manipulate opinion abroad."³⁹ While liberal democracies rely upon the passive

³⁶ Ibid., p. 11.

³⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

³⁸ Nye, "How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power."

³⁹ Joseph Nye, "China's Soft and Sharp Power," *Project Syndicate*, last modified 4 January 2018, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/china-soft-and-sharp-power-by-joseph-s--nye-2018-01>.

attraction of their cultural and political values to bolster their soft power influence, it is claimed that China has taken an active role in shaping how its cultural and political values are interpreted at home and abroad. As such, proponents of a Chinese sharp power argument assert that China's use of public diplomacy designed to actively cultivate its soft power resources is actually a type of hard power in the form of coercive propaganda.⁴⁰

In particular, Nye argues that China's use of public diplomacy presents an idealized image of China's cultural and political values whilst spreading disinformation about the cultural and political values other nations, such as the United States.⁴¹ This has supposedly had the effect of bolstering China's soft power resources, whilst simultaneously diminishing the attractiveness of other nations' soft power. However, while it may be the case that China is utilizing "sharp power" to "control the discussion of sensitive topics" in order to portray China to targeted nations in the best possible light, this does not entail that China is not utilizing a soft power strategy.⁴²

Rather, the characterization of the Chinese soft power strategy as being sharp power originates largely from unfounded assumptions about the nature of soft power and how soft power can be cultivated. Although the application of soft power is generally understood as an indirect means of utilizing "the attractiveness of one's culture and values [to]... manipulate the agenda of political choices" available to other nations, this does not entail that soft power resources cannot be actively cultivated.⁴³

There seems to be an assumption by theorists that a nation's soft power resources produce a sort of passive attraction to which all other nations and peoples are helpless to resist, like the proverbial moth to a flame. For instance, Nye states that "soft power harnesses the allure of culture and values to augment a country's strength" whereas sharp power actively manipulates public opinion about a nation's culture and political values.⁴⁴ However, it is simply a baseless assumption that soft power must produce attraction in a passive manner in order for it to remain soft power. This is because attraction can and should be actively cultivated if one wishes to "shape the preferences of others."⁴⁵ Furthermore, if a nation's soft power resources are not viewed as being appealing by others, as was the initial case with China's soft power

⁴⁰ Nye, "China's Soft and Sharp Power."

⁴¹ Nye, "How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power."

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Nye, "China's Soft and Sharp Power."

⁴⁵ Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 5.

resources, then that nation has no choice but to actively undertake initiatives to boost other nations' perception of its culture and political values.

As such, it cannot be the case that China's proactive approach to bolstering its soft power resources somehow constitutes a coercive use of sharp power. Rather, China has recognized the fact that its soft power resources have not produced the same level of attraction as other nations' soft power resources. In order to remedy this situation, China has taken an active role in trying to improve the way its cultural and political values are perceived. This in itself does not entail that China is utilizing coercive propaganda. Consequently, claims by theorists that China is utilizing sharp power cannot be grounded in the fact that China has taken proactive measures to improve the attractiveness of its soft power resources. Therefore, the coercive characteristics of China's alleged sharp power use must lie in the way that China is attempting to cultivate its soft power.

However, even if we are to assume that China is indeed presenting an idealized image of its own cultural and political values and is also spreading disinformation about the values of its rivals, this does not entail that any form of coercion was involved in this activity. Coercion, which is a key feature of hard power, is the act of persuading an agent to act in a specific manner by using force or threatening the use of force. Presenting an idealized image of a nation's cultural and political values is certainly not an act of coercion. If it were, virtually every government in the world would be guilty of utilizing such coercive measures on its own citizens. Neither is it coercion to spread disinformation about another nation's soft power resources because this activity does not involve the use or threat of force to persuade others about the truth of this information. Additionally, the concept of disinformation about a nation's culture and political values is a highly subjective topic. For instance, while the West condemns China's socialist values and authoritarian governmental system, China similarly condemns the Western capitalist system for exploiting the developing world. In this way, while each group may view the other's culture and political values as being detrimental to the world, the dissemination of these views is not disinformation. As such, China cannot be condemned for spreading disinformation while the West is commended for "educating" the masses about the threat of authoritarian regimes. Consequently, it seems that it cannot be the case that the actual method that China has utilized to bolster its soft power involves the use of coercive means.

As a result, even if China is utilizing the sharp power methods that theorists claim, this sharp power is only a different degree of soft power, rather than a different type of power entirely. In this way, China's alleged use of sharp power merely highlights how the Chinese conception of soft power differs from the Western conception of soft power. Specifically, "[t]o

many Chinese officials, soft power is... the soft use of power--- using power judiciously, wisely, prudently, and engaging and accommodating other nations."⁴⁶

From China's point of view, "a better approach to soft power is how the resources of power are used rather than associating sources of power as soft or hard."⁴⁷ The precise theoretical distinction between hard and soft power quickly blurs when trying to differentiate between the two types of power in the real world, as evidenced by theorists mistakenly asserting that China is utilizing sharp power. However, because a clear distinction between hard and soft power can be extremely difficult to determine in practice, Chinese soft power should be best understood as all non-military forms of power.⁴⁸ Anything short of a direct military engagement would fall under China's conception of soft power.

In this way, Chinese soft power is best understood as a soft use of any non-military form of power aimed at producing attraction and influence over others. From this definition, it becomes clear how the Chinese conception of soft power differs from Nye's original understanding. This difference has led to the mistaken belief that the Chinese use of soft power is a coercive form of sharp power. As such, unless sharp power is defined as a soft use of any non-military form of power, it is not appropriate in terms of describing China's implementation of its soft power strategy.

The Historical Development of Sino-African Relations

All men can see these tactics whereby I conquer, but what none can see is the strategy out of which victory evolved.

Sun Tzu (Chapter 6.27)

China has had a long-standing interest in developing relations with the nations of the African continent. By utilizing a soft power strategy based upon mutual benefit and non-interference, China has historically been successful in developing, maintaining, and strengthening its ties with African nations. These ties have yielded China many benefits in terms of China's ability to secure its strategic interests.

⁴⁶ Kurlantzick, p. 167.

⁴⁷ Li, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Kurlantzick, p. 167.

In this section I will detail how Chinese interest in Africa has shifted over time in response to China's changing geopolitical position in the world. This will allow me to illustrate how China has been able to effectively implement an increasingly sophisticated soft power approach in order to achieve specific strategic objectives through the development of its Sino-African relations. Additionally, understanding the historical developments of Sino-African relations will also highlight how China's contemporary soft power initiatives are based upon earlier Chinese soft power methods that proved to be successful.

Post-Revolution: The Early Years

China's early interest in Africa can only be understood if one first has a knowledge of the historical geopolitical position that China occupied in the years following Mao Zedong's successful Communist Revolution in 1949. Although the communist victory in the Chinese civil war fostered the development of close relations between China and the Soviet Union, it also had the effect of isolating China from much of the capitalist Western world. Furthermore, China found itself without many regional allies within Asia due to strained relations from past conflicts, such as with Japan and Taiwan, and its active involvement in the Korean War. Owing to these situations, China found itself to be more or less precluded from any positive relationships with other Asian nations or the nations of the Western world.

This left China in a precarious geopolitical position, as it had few friends and many potential adversaries. Furthermore, after Stalin's death in 1953, Mao did not believe that the new Soviet leadership was committed to the ideals of a worldwide communist revolution, and as such, Sino-Soviet relations began to suffer.⁴⁹ However, Mao was still firmly committed to the ideals of socialism, and he viewed the perceived weakening of Soviet strength as an opportunity for Mao himself to become the principal communist leader in the world.⁵⁰

It was during this period that China initially became interested in opening diplomatic relations with the newly independent African nations. For China, establishing diplomatic relations with the nations of the African continent was viewed as being strategically important for two main reasons. Firstly, recognition from and diplomatic ties with other states within the international community would serve to legitimize the recently victorious People's Republic of China (PRC). At this time, Chinese Nationalist Forces (ROC) in Taiwan were being supported by Western nations, particularly the United States, and the ROC was given a permanent seat on

⁴⁹ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

the United Nations Security Council, whereas the PRC which was not even recognized by the UN.⁵¹

Secondly, Mao had an “obsession with continuous revolution and his self-conceived mission of helping out peoples ‘oppressed by western colonialists.’”⁵² As such, China’s strategic interest in Africa was also driven by Mao’s Three Worlds Theory. Under this theory, Mao viewed African nations as being developing nations that occupied the “third zone” between the two superpowers and their allies.⁵³ Under this view, Mao believed that China could portray itself as a leader of the developing world by appealing to a shared history of victimization at the hands of Western colonial powers.⁵⁴ In this way, the recently emancipated and developing nations of Africa offered an opportunity for China to maneuver between the two superpowers and their allies, in order for China to establish its own sphere of influence.

In order for China to secure these strategic aims, it embarked upon a soft power strategy of using a foreign policy designed to open diplomatic relationships with as many African nations as possible. The attractiveness of this foreign policy strategy was further bolstered by what has become a staple of China’s official policy: the 1954 declaration of the Five Principles of Mutual Coexistence. This official statement of foreign policy promotes: mutual respect for each other’s territorial integrity; non-aggression; non-interference in each other’s internal affairs; equality and mutual benefit; and peaceful coexistence.⁵⁵

China’s soft power strategy, which utilized the Five Principles of Mutual Coexistence, was on full display at the Asian-African Bandung Conference in Indonesia in 1955, where Chinese diplomats sought out African delegates to offer friendship and propose the establishment of diplomatic ties.⁵⁶ These initial uses of China’s soft power strategy proved quite effective in terms of developing Sino-African relations as China was able to establish official diplomatic relations with Egypt, Morocco, Algeria, Sudan and Guinea by the end of the 1950s.⁵⁷

After seeing the success of these initial efforts, China made a concerted effort to develop the attractiveness of its soft power in Africa by sending increasingly numerous diplomatic

⁵¹ Edwin Moise, “United Nations,” *Encyclopedia of Chinese-America Relations* (online), edited by Yuwu Song, (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009).

⁵² Hongyi Lai, *The Domestic Sources of China’s Foreign Policy*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2010), p. 11.

⁵³ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Cao, p. 65.

⁵⁵ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Kurlantzick, p. 168.

⁵⁷ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 9.

delegations to visit African nations.⁵⁸ This resulted in China being able to establish a further fourteen official diplomatic relationships with African nations in the 1960s.⁵⁹ The paradigm example of China's increasingly sophisticated soft power strategy for the development of Sino-African relations during this period was China's relationship with the nation of Tanzania.

Tanzania: The Framework of China's Soft Power Strategy

As Sino-Soviet relations further deteriorated in the 1960s and 1970s, China began to view Africa with increasing interest due to its increasing need for political allies. Through a shrewd soft power strategy, China was not only able to secure Tanzania as a close political ally, but it was also able to outmaneuver Soviet efforts to establish Soviet-African relationships.⁶⁰ As such, China's relationship with Tanzania highlights both the growing sophistication of China's implementation of a soft power approach and the basic blueprint for the cultivation of soft power that China would utilize in its future interactions with African nations.

China's Three World's Theory caused its initial overtures in Tanzania to be warmly received. Following the decolonization of Tanzania and Zanzibar in the 1960s "Tanzania and China shared a political language of anti-colonialism and self-reliance."⁶¹ In fact, the appeal of China's soft power was such that many of Mao's policies and belief systems were adopted by Tanzanian leaders as they established themselves as an independent country following colonial rule. Given the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in the 1960s, "Chinese involvement in Tanzania initially took on the character of a competition between Beijing and Moscow."⁶² Because the outcome of this 'competition' would hinge on the level of financial aid each side was able to provide, it is not surprising to learn that China devoted nearly half of the money it had earmarked for Africa in 1964 to Tanzania.⁶³ This \$45.5 million in support was distributed in a variety of ways to a variety of industries, including media, healthcare, and infrastructure. In this way, China used monetary aid as a means of exerting soft power with the goal of gaining a foothold in the south of Africa.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 12

⁶¹ Priya Lal, "Maoism in Tanzania," *Mao's Little Red Book: A Global History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 99.

⁶² Ian Taylor, *China and Africa: Engagement and Compromise*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2006), p. 27.

⁶³ Lal, "Maoism," p. 101.

Once China had established a presence in this newly independent African country, it began to entrench itself by committing to longer term deals and aid obligations. In 1965, China and Tanzania signed a “ten-year friendship treaty [to] solidify Tanzania’s status as the largest African recipient of Chinese economic assistance, and China’s as the most significant donor to Tanzania.”⁶⁴ While this agreement resigned China to a decade of monetary expenditures in this foreign country, it also precluded any other nation from upsetting China’s position as chief benefactor. This granted China ten years in which it could cultivate its influence and power in Tanzania.

The year 1965 was an especially significant year in terms of Sino-Tanzanian relations because it was in this year that “[p]reliminary discussions of Chinese financing of the proposed TAZARA railway began.”⁶⁵ This project would provide a much-desired link between Zambia’s copper-rich mines and Tanzania’s ports. While Tanzania initially approached the World Bank for funding, and following its rejection there, Western countries, it finally found financial and physical support from its new ally, China.⁶⁶ Not only did China provide the necessary funds for undertaking this grand infrastructure project, it also sent over general labourers, technicians, and engineers to aid in the venture.⁶⁷ It followed quite naturally for China and Tanzania to develop a shipping company that would link their two nations and foster trade in 1966.⁶⁸ This example highlights how China’s soft power approach that was aimed at cultivating diplomatic relationships could prove beneficial in terms of securing Chinese access to African resources and markets. This is a key characteristic of the contemporary development of Sino-African relationships.

Having established a precedence for sending Chinese specialists to Tanzania, China was able to deploy military personnel to train the Tanzanian army in the 1970s.⁶⁹ In this way, China was able to diversify its portfolio of soft power initiatives. Additionally, “[d]iplomatic and cultural exchanges between the two countries demonstrated that this relationship was more than one of mere financial dependence.”⁷⁰ As a direct result of these numerous soft power endeavours, it is estimated that over 20,000 Chinese nationals were in Tanzania by the middle

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 105.

⁶⁶ Sarah Raine, *China’s African Challenges*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2009), p. 56.

⁶⁷ Lal, p. 105.

⁶⁸ Taylor, *China and Africa*, p. 27.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 27.

⁷⁰ Lal, “Maoism,” p. 101.

of 1971.⁷¹ As Nye states, “personal contacts, visits, and exchanges” are a key way to transmit and enhance the attractiveness of a nation’s culture and thereby develop a nation’s soft power.⁷²

By the end of the 1970s, China was the undisputed patron of Tanzania. Through its unassuming use of soft power instruments including monetary aid, interest-free loans, infrastructure development, and cultural exchanges, it was able to more or less monopolize Tanzania’s aid relationships. Altogether, “through the utilization of economic and military aid China was able to ‘win’ Tanzania.”⁷³

Inclusion into the United Nations

Following an increasingly active approach to cultivating soft power, the 1970s saw a continuation of Chinese success in developing Sino-African relations with a further 25 African nations opening official diplomatic relations with China.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the 1970s were also characterized by one of the most important successes of China’s soft power strategy in Africa, namely, the recognition of the PRC by the United Nations.

In 1971, at the 26th UN General Assembly, the PRC was able to achieve one of its longest standing and most important strategic objectives: being recognized by the United Nations. Not only was the PRC finally recognized by the UN, but it also replaced the ROC as a member of the permanent five on the United Nations Security Council.⁷⁵ This was a monumental victory in terms of the PRC’s ongoing struggle with the ROC, concerning which group should to be recognized as the official representative of China within the international community. Furthermore, avid Western support of the ROC had put the PRC and the West into a directly antagonistic relationship. Consequently, the PRC’s inclusion into the United Nations was significant for several reasons. Firstly, the PRC gained the international recognition that it had been striving for since 1949. Secondly, the PRC improved its geopolitical position at the expense of its rival the ROC. Thirdly, the PRC’s inclusion into the United Nations marked a détente in terms of China’s relationships with Western nations, particularly the United States.⁷⁶ Considering the significance of this event, it is essential to acknowledge that China’s recognition

⁷¹ Taylor, *China and Africa*, p. 41.

⁷² Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 13.

⁷³ Taylor, *China and Africa*, p. 28.

⁷⁴ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Raine, *China’s African Challenge*, p. 19.

⁷⁶ Jean Kachiga, *China in Africa: Articulating China’s Africa Policy*. (Trenton: African World Press, 2013), p. 35.

as a UN member state was largely made possible due to its concerted efforts of developing close Sino-African relations.

Among the UN member states that voted to recognize “the PRC as the ‘only lawful representative of China to the United Nations,’” twenty-six African nations supported the motion.⁷⁷ In fact, support from these African nations constituted over a third of the pro-PRC vote amongst the UN member states. Furthermore, of “the 23 co-sponsors of the [pro-PRC] resolution, 11 were from Africa.”⁷⁸ In this way, China’s use of soft power to establish close relationships with various African nations proved to be instrumental for its inclusion into the United Nations. From this example, it becomes clear that China’s soft power approach in Africa has resulted in tangible benefits in terms of both China’s geopolitical power and China’s ability to accomplish long-term strategic objectives.

The Lost Decade and Tiananmen Square

While the 1970s were characterized by the proliferation and solidification of Sino-African relations, the 1980s were characterized by a diminishing Chinese interest in those same Sino-African relationships. This diminished interest resulted from a reevaluation of China’s strategic aims under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping.⁷⁹ Specifically, Deng Xiaoping was committed to reforming and modernizing China domestically in an effort to increase China’s economic power.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the 1980s saw the normalization of Sino-Soviet relations as well as closer Chinese-US relations. Consequently, with China’s new focus on domestic and economic initiatives and its stable geopolitical position, close relations with the developing nations of Africa were not seen to be a strategic priority.

China’s new focus on economic prosperity also significantly impacted the way China utilized and cultivated its soft power resources. Under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, China’s foreign policy aims shifted away from the ideological commitments of worldwide socialism toward more pragmatic concerns over the development of the Chinese economy.⁸¹ As such, China’s use of soft power in Africa was predicated on first calculating the immediate potential

⁷⁷ Raine, *China’s African Challenge*, p. 19.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁹ Kachiga, p. 36.

⁸⁰ Kachiga, p. 36; See also, Kurlantzick, p. 168.

⁸¹ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 3.

benefits that Chinese involvement would provide. In this way, Chinese aid would only be distributed to African nations if there was some foreseeable benefit for China as well.⁸²⁸³

Consequently, while there were some developments in Sino-African relations during the 1980s, China was only minimally involved in the African continent. It is for this reason that the 1980s came to be known as the “lost decade” in terms of Sino-African relations. However, following the violence at Tiananmen Square in 1989, China began to renew its interest in Africa. Although the Chinese handling of the events at Tiananmen Square prompted scorn and sanctions from Western nations, this was not the general response from African nations.⁸⁴ In fact, some African nations were openly supportive of China, as evidenced by Namibia’s first president, Sam Nujoma, sending “a telegram of congratulations to the Chinese army” following Tiananmen Square.⁸⁵

This unexpected support from Africa caused China to reevaluate its relationships with the nations of the developing world. In particular, China had a renewed interest in establishing firm political allies against the perceived threat from Western nations. As such, establishing ties with the nations of the developing world once again became a cornerstone of China’s foreign policy as it had been during the time of Mao’s leadership. Because of this, China renewed its commitment to a non-interventionist soft power approach by officially reaffirming the Five Principles of Mutual Cooperation.⁸⁶ China also renewed many of its previous soft power initiatives, such as providing aid for African development, in order rebuild close Sino-African relations.⁸⁷ However, China’s soft power initiatives would now be undertaken using Deng Xiaoping’s policy of mutually beneficial aid arrangements.

For instance, in the 1990s China resumed its relationship with Tanzania, though in a somewhat different manner. China was still more than willing to get involved in construction and development projects in Tanzania, but it was less willing to do so without reaping a tangible benefit. As though it was calling in some of its dues, the 1990s saw China direct Tanzanian labour at “industrial production, resource extraction, and infrastructure construction” in a way that conformed to Chinese interests.⁸⁸ Regardless of this fact, the

⁸² Kachiga, p. 38.

⁸³ More recently, China has started to refer to these relations as “win-win (*shuang ying*) relations” (Kurlantzick, p. 170).

⁸⁴ Ian Taylor, *China’s New Role in Africa*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2009), p. 13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁷ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 21.

⁸⁸ Lal, “Maoism,” p. 114.

lingering memory of China's brotherly attention in earlier decades acted to pacify groups of dissenters.⁸⁹ As such, even with China's new focus on economically beneficial partnerships, it proved highly successful in re-cultivating its once close Sino-African relationships.

From the Dissolution of the Soviet Union to the Present

The reestablishment of close Sino-African relations would prove to be increasingly important after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. During the Cold War, the United States and the Soviet Union kept a loose order of checks and balances on one another which ensured that neither nation was able to secure a hegemony over the international community. However, after the disbandment of the Soviet Union, it appeared as if the United States and its allies had emerged as the unchallenged victors of the Cold War.

Although a key aspect of China's foreign policy has been to maintain a stable relationship with the United States, China has also been unwilling to let US power grow unchallenged.⁹⁰ Consequently, after the straining of Chinese-Western relations following Tiananmen Square and the power vacuum caused by the fall of the Soviet Union, China perceived both a potential threat from a US-led Western hegemony and an opportunity to occupy a preeminent geopolitical position opposite the United States. In order for China to counter the potential threat posed by the United States and to grow its own geopolitical power, China's strategic objectives have been focused upon bolstering its hard power resources to compete with those of the United States and to further expand its sphere of influence into the developing world.⁹¹

China has been able to secure both of these strategic objectives by maintaining and expanding upon its soft power initiatives in Africa. China has recognized that the 53 developing nations of the African continent present an opportunity to secure firm political allies, thereby expanding China's sphere of influence. These close Sino-African ties are also proving to be beneficial in terms of evening out the balance of power in supranational governing bodies, such as in the UN General Assembly, and in China's ongoing battles with the UN Commission on Human Rights.⁹²

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 114.

⁹⁰ Taylor, *China's New Role in Africa*, p. 15.

⁹¹ Kurlantzick, p. 170.

⁹² Raine, p. 49.

Although Chinese soft power initiatives in Africa have increased in number and scope, the actual methods that China has employed throughout the 1990s and 2000s are simply a rehashing of China's previous soft power strategies. In particular, China has portrayed itself as an "all-weather friend (*quan tianhou pengyou*)" for the developing world against the "neo-colonialism" of the West in the same manner that it did during the 1960s and 1970s.⁹³ This non-interventionist foreign policy has proven to be as attractive to African nations in modern times as it has been historically.

Furthermore, China has exponentially increased its monetary aid allocated to African nations. For instance, from 2000-2015, "China's Export-Import Bank made \$63 billion in loans to Africa, while the US Export-Import Bank made just \$1.7 billion in loans to Africa over the same period."⁹⁴ The World Bank estimates that China is now the largest lender to Africa.⁹⁵ Additionally, China has adopted a no-strings attached aid policy and tends to give aid indiscriminately, unlike the West which will not extend aid to regimes that do not conform to Western liberal democratic ideals.⁹⁶ As such, Chinese aid to Africa is not only greater in quantity, but it is also more readily received by African nations who are fearful of Western intervention.

China has also undertaken initiatives to boost the appeal of its soft power resources by opening forty eight Confucius Institutes⁹⁷ in Africa and facilitating academic and professional exchanges between China and Africa.⁹⁸ While these Chinese soft power initiatives are aimed at cultivating power amongst the scholarly and political elite, China has also embarked upon "people-to-people" projects, such as rural school development and health care clinics, aimed at boosting China's soft power image amongst the general populace.⁹⁹ Although these examples constitute only a fraction of China's soft power enterprises within African nations, they highlight how China has diversified its soft power strategies in order to cultivate positive relationships amongst various groups in African societies.

⁹³ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 22.

⁹⁴ Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy, p. 23.

⁹⁵ Kurlantzick, p. 172.

⁹⁶ Shogo Suzuki, "Chinese soft power, insecurity studies, myopia and fantasy," *China and Africa Development Relations*, (Milton Park: Routledge, 2011), p. 71.

⁹⁷ The Confucius Institutes are created by the Chinese government to "promote the study of Chinese language and culture" (Raine, p. 85).

⁹⁸ Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy, p. 23.

⁹⁹ Kurlantzick, p. 172.

Analysis of China's Soft Power Strategy in Africa

What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy

Sun Tzu (Chapter 3)

Through China's decades-long commitment to soft power initiatives in the African continent, it is clear that Chinese efforts have proven to be extremely effective as a means of securing its strategic objectives in the ever-changing geopolitical environment. China has recognized these successes and has allocated an estimated \$10 billion a year to maintaining its current--and cultivating future--soft power directives.¹⁰⁰ To put this figure into perspective, Chinese expenditure on the cultivation of its soft power resources is more than the combined government spending of the US, UK, France, Germany and Japan.¹⁰¹

However, despite this level of spending and China's successful soft power strategy in Africa, theorists, such as Nye, have claimed that China "has gotten [a] minimal return on its investment."¹⁰² Moreover, there has been a view amongst strategists that "China is still not sophisticated in incorporating soft power into its strategic planning."¹⁰³ However, these views are incomprehensible when one considers Nye's previous assertion that the effectiveness of a nation's soft power in producing "desired policy outcomes has to be judged in particular cases."¹⁰⁴

Presented with these contrasting claims it is clear that many Western theorists have not recognized their own biases when evaluating China's soft power influence. To illustrate this point, consider Nye's assertion that "[w]hen a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction and duty that it creates."¹⁰⁵ As Nye's assertion illustrates, it is assumed that there is some set of "universal" cultural values that produce equal attraction across all nations and peoples.

However, these universally attractive cultural values are also assumed to be synonymous with Western liberal democratic values as evidenced by *The Soft Power 30 Report's* undervaluing of China's soft power. *The Soft Power 30 Report* states that "China has fallen in our

¹⁰⁰ Nye, "How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power."

¹⁰¹ Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy, p. 70.

¹⁰² Nye, "How Sharp Power Threatens Soft Power."

¹⁰³ Li, p. 2.

¹⁰⁴ Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 11.

Government sub-index” which purportedly “gauges the extent to which a country has an attractive model of governance and whether it can deliver broadly positive outcomes for citizens.”¹⁰⁶ However, the metrics that *The Soft Power 30 Report* utilizes to analyze the attractiveness of a nation’s government are “political values like freedom, human rights, democracy, and equality.”¹⁰⁷ These purportedly “universal” values highlight how the attractiveness of a nation’s soft power is viewed exclusively in terms of the value system of Western liberal democracies. Consequently, simply because China’s cultural and political values are not the same as those in Western nations, it is concluded that Chinese soft power is not as attractive or influential as the soft power of its Western counterparts. This is simply an ethnocentrically based error.

Although Western theorists may not recognize the attractiveness of China’s soft power, “nearly all the African nations surveyed by Pew [Research Center] had favourable images of China, with some overwhelmingly favourable.”¹⁰⁸ As Nye states, the attractiveness of a particular soft power resource “can be measured by asking people through polls or focus groups.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, if the attractiveness of a nation’s soft power can be gleaned through polling, then it seems that China’s soft power is highly attractive and influential within Africa.

As such, the appeal of China’s soft power in Africa highlights why it is a misguided assumption that liberal democratic values are somehow universally attractive. Although China may have different cultural and political values than the West, this does not entail that Chinese soft power is somehow ineffectual at producing attraction and influence. In fact, it is precisely because China’s cultural and political values differ from those of the West that it has been so readily received by nations in the developing world.¹¹⁰ The case study of China’s soft power strategy in Africa highlights this fact.

For instance, a cornerstone of China’s soft power approach in Africa has been to remind African nations that China has also been exploited by Western colonial powers in the past.¹¹¹ Due to this shared history of exploitation, Chinese soft power resources are inherently more attractive to many African nations than those of the West. China further cultivates this appealing image by adopting a non-interventionist foreign policy in which China provides aid and support to African nations in a no-strings attached manner. This stands in stark contrast to

¹⁰⁶ Portland and USC Center on Public Diplomacy, p. 49 & p. 30.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁰⁸ Kurlantzick, p. 176.

¹⁰⁹ Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 6.

¹¹⁰ Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 25.

¹¹¹ Cao, p. 65.

the requirements that often accompany Western aid programs that are often interpreted by many African nations as a form of neo-colonialism.¹¹²

In summary, although many Western theorists would like to conceive of soft power from a liberal democratic viewpoint, not all nations find these values to be attractive. This is why China, while not adhering to Western values, has found a niche market in the developing world for its particular brand of soft power. So while the West may not formally recognize the effectiveness of China's soft power initiatives, it does not entail that they are not indeed successful. As such, Chinese soft power will continue to find a receptive audience within the nations of the developing world whether the West is willing to acknowledge this fact or not.

Conclusion

Utilizing soft power to exert power and influence offers nations a new way of securing their strategic objectives in the increasingly globalized international community. While there has been interest in employing soft power by Western nations, China has been able to develop a sophisticated and proactive approach to cultivating its soft power resources. By employing a foreign policy predicated on mutually beneficial cooperation and non-intervention, China's soft power resources have proven extremely attractive to the nations of the developing world. However, China has not been content with simply letting its soft power passively shape the preferences of other nations. Rather, a cornerstone of China's soft power strategy has been to actively cultivate the attractiveness of its soft power through foreign developmental aid, cultural exchanges, and a myriad of other initiatives.

The effectiveness of China's soft power approach can be clearly seen in its effort to develop close relationships with the nations of the African continent. The development of close Sino-African relations has allowed China to secure many of its strategic objectives over the lifetime of these relationships. Today, Sino-African relations are proving to be an increasingly important key for the continued maintenance and development of China's geopolitical power. As such, recognizing how China has been able to secure its strategic interests in Africa using a soft power approach is imperative for those who wish to better understand the nature and implementation of soft power, as well as for those concerned with China's future geopolitical position.

¹¹² Taylor, *The Forum on China-Africa Cooperation*, p. 25.

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