

Chapter 15

Stirring Up Soft Power: The Role of Chinese Cuisine in China's Cultural Diplomacy

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses how Chinese food fits into China's overall soft power strategy. How Chinese food has been employed in cultural exchange programs, diplomatic initiatives, and as a tourist attraction are some of the topics covered. The chapter then goes on to offer ways in which China might make its culinary soft power strategy more effective and long-lasting by analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of employing Chinese cuisine as a soft power tool. Policymakers, cultural diplomats, and business leaders in China should consider the implications of the findings, which emphasize the importance of Chinese food in China's soft power strategy. China's cultural and historical traditions can be shared with the world through the promotion of Chinese food, which also has the added benefits of boosting the economy and fostering cross-cultural understanding.

I. INTRODUCTION

China's efforts to increase its influence and boost its international reputation through the use of soft power have gained prominence in recent years (Barker, 2017). Instead of relying simply on military or economic might, a country with strong soft power can attract and influence people by its culture, values, and policies (Nye, 2008). To strengthen its influence and credibility in the international community, China employs a strategy known as "soft power," which entails spreading the country's culture, values, and political ideology.

China's soft power strategy relies heavily on cultural exports like food and entertainment. There are numerous distinct forms of art, traditions, and rituals that have developed over the course of thousands of years in China (Zonggui, 2015). Many people find common ground with the Chinese cultural principles of harmony, collectivism, and social stability (Krys et al., 2022).

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Stirring Up Soft Power

An integral part of China's soft power strategy is the country's food. With a rich history and a wide range of regional variants, Chinese food is widely recognized as one of the world's most popular and influential cuisines. In addition to its fresh ingredients and health benefits, Chinese cuisine is renowned for its depth of taste. Promoting Chinese cuisine can be considered as a method to highlight China's cultural richness and diversity (Wu & Cheung, 2014). Chinese cuisine has become an integral part of Chinese culture and identity.

China has established a number of programs to spread awareness of Chinese culture and food around the world because of the role it may play in boosting the country's "soft power." To spread Mandarin and Chinese culture abroad, the Chinese government funded the creation of Confucius Institutes (Zreik, 2021a). To further foster mutual understanding and cooperation between China and African countries, China has also hosted numerous cultural exchange programs, such as the China-Africa Cultural Exchange Program (Le Pere, 2015).

China's use of food as a soft power tool is an issue of great relevance in the modern world. As the world grows more interconnected, countries are working to increase their soft power to better influence others and win over foreign audiences. With an increasing emphasis on cultural diplomacy and the promotion of its culture, especially its food, China has been one of the most active and successful nations in this area.

Chinese food has been enjoyed by people all over the world for thousands of years and is now one of the world's most revered culinary traditions. China has been able to promote its image and win over foreign audiences by using its cuisine as a soft power tool, capitalizing on the country's rich cultural legacy. There have been substantial economic gains as well as positive effects on China's cultural identity and soft power as a result of this. Increased interest in Chinese food has, for instance, opened up new business prospects in the country's restaurant and lodging industries (Hazarika & Mishra, 2016).

Understanding the changing nature of cultural diplomacy and the significance of culture in international relations may be gained by studying China's use of gastronomy as a soft power tool. China's approach to cultural diplomacy is distinctive because it departs from more conventional methods by emphasizing the promotion of Chinese culture through food. Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend how this method affects cultural interaction, mutual comprehension, and economic growth.

There are deeper ramifications for international relations and global governance stemming from China's use of food as a soft power tactic. Ding and Saunders (2006) argue that a more peaceful and prosperous world can be achieved through increased international understanding and cooperation through the sharing of Chinese cuisine and culture. Conversely, it might be interpreted as a type of cultural imperialism in which China attempts to impose its own way of life on other countries (Rawnsley, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial for policymakers, cultural diplomats, and business leaders to understand the nuances and repercussions of China's use of cuisine as a soft power tool.

This chapter of a book is dedicated to discussing how Chinese food fits into China's overall strategy of "soft power." The study's overarching goal is to examine the ways in which China's soft power has been advanced through culinary diplomacy, food tourism, and cultural exchange initiatives. This chapter aims to do two other things: analyze the pros and cons of using Chinese cuisine as a soft power tool, and offer suggestions for making China's culinary soft power strategy more effective and long-lasting.

The goal of this chapter is to present an all-encompassing analysis of the research on China's use of food as a diplomatic tool and a soft power strategy. Documents pertaining to China's soft power strategy will be analyzed as well, so that the policy framework for China's use of food as a soft power tool may

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