


Chapter 14

Soft Power Diplomacy: China's Influence in Asia and the Middle East

Habib Badawi

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6452-8379>

Lebanese University, Lebanon

Karim Wattar

Lebanese American University, Lebanon

ABSTRACT

In an epoch defined by China's staggering economic ascent, the global panorama witnesses an expansive sprawl of Beijing's interests, notably in regions as diverse as the Middle East and North Africa. Central to this burgeoning influence is China's deft and strategic employment of "soft power" strategies, fostering calculated and symbiotic "strategic partnerships" with Arab states. This diplomatic approach, characterized by nuanced elements such as non-interventionism, cultural dissemination, and collaborative economic ventures, stands as a linchpin in China's diplomatic toolkit. In the face of Western portrayals casting shadows of a "Chinese menace," Beijing finds itself compelled to vehemently defend its peaceful policy objectives. Beyond mere economic gains, China's motives are laced with geopolitical and geostrategic considerations, adding layers of depth to its engagements. This meticulously orchestrated outreach encapsulates a significant facet of China's broader recalibration towards the Western sphere. This chapter undertakes a comprehensive exploration of the intricate and manifold facets of China's soft power diplomacy, offering a panoramic view of its profound influence extending across the intricate landscapes of Asia and the Middle East. Through a nuanced lens, it illuminates the mosaic of strategies, motivations, and implications that underpin China's burgeoning presence in these pivotal regions, painting a vivid tapestry of its ever-evolving global entrenchment. Various sources are used as support for the chapter. Press conferences, readings, academic journals, and scholarly articles are just some of the references found in the chapter. Additionally, expert opinions from well-renowned scholars were taken into consideration about China's growing influence in Asia and the Middle East in the fields of trade, technology, and politics. Furthermore, visual representations, such as images and graphs, are placed to facilitate selected aspects for the readers.

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I. INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW OF CHINA'S GLOBAL ASCENDANCY

Chinese global presence spans thousands of years, encompassing cultural changes, dynastic rules, and modern economic and industrial evolutions. China's global superiority stands as one of the most substantial phenomena in the 21st century, modifying the international dynamics of global trade, international relations, and military spending. Over the past fifty years, China has undergone a remarkable journey that has shifted the country from a period of seclusion to a contemporary economic powerhouse enriched with technological advancements and economic prosperity. This introduction seeks to highlight the multifaceted and complex dimensions of China's rise by examining historical events and certain contemporary developments.

Chinese history validates the scope of relations that have developed throughout different caliphates and countries on the Asian and European continents through the years. A clear example of these deep-rooted relations is China's Silk Road Initiative. To summarize, the Silk Road was a series of trade routes that connected Mainland China with Central Asia, the Arabian Peninsula, and even parts of Eastern Europe. Not only were physical goods exchanged on this economic pathway, but also cultural norms, religious ideas, and technologies were traded among the diverse cultures. Despite the deterioration of the notion in the 14th century, the foundations of Chinese relations with their Asian counterparts were laid.

Moving on from an imperial political system, China faced major social and political changes at the start of the twentieth century. China was liberated after the fall of the Japanese imperial army after World War II. After this, a civil war broke out in 1949 in Mainland China between the Chinese National Party (KMT) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The war ended with the victory of the CCP, which was led by Mao Zedong, and the banishment of the KMT to Taiwan. This incident prompted the establishment of the People's Republic of China, which followed communist ideas and was isolated from a large spectrum of Asian and Western countries.

Mao's isolationist strategy ended in the early 1970s with the formalization of U.S.-Chinese relationships. This step was a major development in China's global outreach, where it broadened its diplomatic and economic relations to include the nations of North America, South America, and Western Europe. This agreement paved the way for China's technological and economic development in the twenty-first century, whereas in 2024, China will become the second-largest economy in the world.

The main significance concerning China's economic and political growth is that it has been established with a non-combative military strategy. China's tactic for its current enhanced global influence can be traced back to a concept nicknamed "soft power." The concept was introduced by political scientist Joseph Nye in his book "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics." According to Nye (2002), China is moving on an exponential trajectory of global influence, mainly due to its subtle approach to balancing its economic and military strengths with diplomatic and positive relations with other nations. The upcoming chapter will not only comprehensively explore China's soft power strategy in Asia in its various dimensions, but it will also offer an analysis of the implications of this method in the coming decades.

The concept of 'soft power' in international relations is simply the ability to achieve a series of goals by attraction rather than force. In his 2002 book, Joseph Nye explores in depth the various sources of soft power that can propel a country to the highest levels. Based on Nye (2002), cultural values, political ideals, foreign policy, and institutions are the main resources of soft power. To elaborate, these assets can help convey a positive image of a nation's main ideas and values, which attracts nations seeking worldwide cooperation.

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