

# Chapter 11

## China's Soft Power in the Middle East: Dimensions, Structure, and Characteristics

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### **ABSTRACT**

*China's soft power is mainly used as a tool for defensive rather than offensive purposes, including Beijing's emphasis on stability and peace with all countries; promoting a better image of China; Correcting foreign perceptions, and refuting the “China threat thesis”; Ensuring energy security for the continuation of economic development to cooperate more with developing countries; creating a network of allies; And trying to compete based on soft power with big powers is considered long-term. This chapter begins with an analysis of the concept of soft power and its foundations in international relations and continues to examine the components of China's soft power in the Middle East. So, the question is what are the main dimensions and structures of Beijing's soft power in the Middle East? In response, the Chapter hypothesizes that China's sources of soft power are based on the three elements of soft power, namely, culture, political values, and the nature and style of foreign policy as defined by Joseph Nye.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

After Deng Xiaoping took office, China's foreign policy faced major changes, one of the most important of which was changing China's view of the world and also changing the world's view of China. This change occurred when China's leaders

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correctly realized that in the post-Cold War era, countries could not create wealth and win competition with other countries by relying only on hard power such as military force. Since China had a wide gap in hard power with developed countries, to reduce this gap, it needed to urgently develop soft power; Because parallel to the rapid and stable growth of China's economy, the hard power of that country was also growing rapidly, and this increased the pessimism of the world and created an unfavorable environment for that country; An environment that should have been softened by the application of soft power. Socialist China, which had a large population on the one hand and few resources on the other hand, had to make great efforts to be well accepted by its neighbors and on a wider level by the world. Such a substantive change in diplomacy and the performance of China's foreign policy decision-makers indicates that term power has become one of the most important aspects of China's foreign strategy. From the point of view of Chinese leaders, the purpose of soft power was to shape a better perception of China by the world and reject the "China threat" theory, facilitate a better understanding of China's domestic socio-economic reality, and convince the world to accept and support China's rise (Li, 2009, p.31).

The main concern of this group includes China's powerful display in three main areas: military, economic, and ideological. In the military aspect, the increase in China's military spending over the past years has been alarming from the point of view of many countries (O'Rourke, 2007). In a poll conducted in 2005 in this regard, "31 percent of the interviewees believed that China will soon dominate the world... and 54 percent believed that the rise of China, as A superpower is considered a threat to world peace (Ipsos-Reid, 2005,p.41). Another survey conducted in 2007 by the Pew Research Center showed that "most of the interviewees are concerned about the increase in China's military power, but they are optimistic about its economic growth." Of course, there is a belief in several countries that China's economic growth is also an emerging threat" (Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2007, p.41).

In the economic aspect, there is this belief combined with concern that China, due to the trade imbalance with other countries and by using unequal trade procedures, such as government protection and subsidy payments to local industries, is the main beneficiary of the current flows. It is considered the world's economy. There is also the belief that China can use this trade surplus to buy other countries' industries. On the other hand, to continue economic and industrial growth, China has turned to improving its relations with countries with energy resources; On the one hand, this issue is considered a promising sign, and on the other hand, it is considered to be the basis for an energy war between China and other industrialized countries, especially the United States.

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