

# Chapter 14

## China's Cultural Diplomacy Through BRI and Its Implications for West Asia

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter explores how China is using its soft power to increase its regional and global influence. China has established some initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, Global Civilization, Global Development, and Confucius Institutes to boost cultural exchanges with the globe including West Asia. West Asia is a crucial region for Chinese regional and foreign policy. China has tried to influence this region and expand its relations with the region's countries under BRI and in the framework of political, economic, and cultural diplomacy.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In the new century and the age of globalization the new global powers, including China, have paid special attention to gaining international credibility, influencing the minds and public opinion, and showing a positive image of themselves in the outside world, beyond the established Western countries, to soft power, both in terms of cultural and economic aspects in their foreign policy. For China, soft

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power is a critical component of its strategy to achieve great power status in the globe. Culture is one of the most visible aspects of China's soft power projection, a strategy endorsed by former President Hu Jintao in a 2005 speech in which he mentioned “soft power” while emphasizing the importance of promoting Chinese culture. This was also emphasized by President Xi Jinping, who stated in a speech, “We should increase China's soft power, provide a good Chinese narrative, and better communicate China's message to the world.”

China's culture has been and is committed to historical principles. The Chinese system is based on the principles of Confucianism. They have a strong historical memory and ancient foundations. This adherence to tradition is also seen in Chinese cultural policy. Cultural exchanges with other countries are an integral part of China's relations with the outside world. Since the introduction of the Reform and Open Door Policy in 1979, cultural exchange has increased to the point that by 1995, China had signed agreements with 133 countries.

The term 'cultural exchange' encompasses communication in a variety of fields, including culture, art, traditions, custom, music, food, education, sports, science, public health, journalism, publications, archaeology, religion, and distribution, as well as the exchange of books between museums and the participation of young people.

With China's rapid economic growth and its rise to power in the international system, Beijing has increased its focus on the role of soft power in its global strategy. To implement their strategy and build a positive international reputation, China's leaders have sought to provide the world's public with a clear picture of their intentions as well as their engagement and cooperation, in the form of special projects such as the New Silk Road, other initiatives, using soft power resources and tools.

Among the regions that China historically and currently has paid special attention to is West Asia due to its geopolitical, geoeconomical, and geocultural position. Much has been written about China's relations with the West Asian region. However, most studies focus on economics and politics, with little emphasis on the cultural aspects of these relationships. When discussing the role and function of China's Belt and Road Initiative in the region, the focus has primarily been on finance, the economy, and investments. This chapter aims to fill this gap by discussing the implementation of China's cultural diplomacy in West Asia within the context of the BRI.

The chapter aims to examine the dynamics of China's soft power and cultural diplomacy in West Asia. By way of doing so, China has moved away from its early focus on energy and trade relations to the cultivation of bilateral and multilateral relations with West Asian states through the Belt and Road Initiative that offers inter alia new energy, investment, and multilateral strategic cooperation.

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