CHAPTER TWO

THE RISE OF CHINA'S SOFT POWER AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITED STATES

Joseph S. Nye and Wang Jisi

THE RISE OF CHINESE POWER IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT aspects of world politics at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In fact, the "rise of China" is a misnomer. "Reemergence" would be more accurate, since by its size and through its history the Middle Kingdom has long been a major power in East Asia. Technically and economically, China was the world's leader (though without global reach) from 500 to 1500. Only in the last half millennium was it overtaken by Europe and the United States. At the beginning of the industrial age, Asia was responsible for an estimated three-fifths of world product. By 1940 this fell to one-fifth, even though the region was home to three-fifths of the world's population. Rapid economic growth has brought that back to two-fifths today, and analysts speculate that Asia could return to its historical levels by 2030 or 2040. The term *Asia,* of course, includes Japan, India, Korea, and other countries, but China may eventually play the largest role. Its high annual growth rates of 8 to 10 percent led to a remarkable increase of its gross national product in the past three decades. This pragmatic economic performance, along with its traditional culture featured by Confucianism, enhanced China's "soft power" in the region and around the world.

Soft Power

Power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes you want. One can affect behavior in three main ways: through threats of coercion

("sticks"), through inducements or payments ("carrots"), or by attraction, which makes others want what you want. A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries want to follow it, admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness. In this sense, it is also important to set the agenda and attract others in world politics, and not only to force them to change through the threat or use of military or economic weapons. This "soft power"—getting others to want the outcomes that you want—co-opts people rather than coerces them.[1]

Soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. It is the possession neither of any one country nor only of countries. At the personal level, we all know the power of attraction and seduction. Political leaders have long understood the power that comes from setting the agenda and determining the framework of a debate. Soft power is a staple of daily leadership and politics.[2] The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as an attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority. If I can get you to want to do what I want, then I do not have to force you to do what you do *not* want.

Soft power is not merely the same as influence, though it is one source of influence. Influence can also rest on the hard power of threats or payments. And soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it. It is also the ability to entice and attract. In behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power. In terms of resources, soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction. Some resources can produce both hard and soft power. For example, a strong economy can produce important carrots for paying others, as well as a model of success that attracts others. Whether a particular asset is a soft power resource that produces attraction can be measured by asking people through polls or focus groups. Whether that attraction in turn produces desired policy outcomes has to be judged in particular cases. But the gap between power measured as resources and power judged as the outcomes of behavior is not unique to soft power. It occurs with all forms of power. Before the

fall of France in 1940, for example, Britain and France had more tanks than Germany, but that advantage in military power resources did not accurately predict the outcome of the battle.

In international politics, the resources that produce soft power arise in large part from the values an organization or country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others. Governments sometime find it difficult to control and employ soft power, but that does not diminish its importance. It was a former French foreign minister who observed that Americans are powerful because they can "inspire the dreams and desires of others, thanks to the mastery of global images through film and television and because, for these same reasons, large numbers of students from other countries come to the United States to finish their studies."[3] Soft power is an important reality. Neorealists like Kenneth Waltz who focus on the structure of power measured by physical resources and deny the importance of soft power are like people who do not understand the power of seduction. They succumb to the "concrete fallacy" that something is not a power resource unless you can drop it on a city or on your foot.[4] Classical realists like Hans Morgenthau (or, earlier, Nicolo Machiavelli) did not make the mistake of ignoring the power of ideas.

The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: 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). The German editor Josef Joffe once argued that America's soft power was even larger than its economic and military assets. "U.S. culture, low-brow or high, radiates outward with an intensity last seen in the days of the Roman Empire—but with a novel twist. Rome's and Soviet Russia's cultural sway stopped exactly at their military borders. America's soft power, though, rules over an empire on which the sun never sets."[5] But cultural soft power can be undercut by policies that are seen as illegitimate. In recent years, particularly after the invasion of Iraq, American soft power has declined. According to many observers, America's attractive or soft power has been declining while that of China has increased. In a recent

BBC poll of twenty-two countries, nearly half the respondents saw China's influence as positive compared to 38 percent who said the same for the U.S.[6] While polls are snapshots, and it would be a mistake to read too much into such opinions, they do indicate an interesting trend.

China's Soft Power

China has always had an attractive traditional culture, but now it is entering the realm of global popular culture as well. The Chinese film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* became the highest grossing non-English film of all time. Yao Ming, the Chinese star of the National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets, could become another Michael Jordan, and China hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics. The enrollment of foreign students in China has tripled from 36,000 to 110,000 over the past decade, growing 20 percent annually.[7] The number of foreign tourists in China has also increased dramatically, with 23 million visiting between January and November 2007.[8] By July 2007, China had created and funded over 170 Confucius Institutes in some fifty countries around the world to teach its language and culture.[9] While the Voice of America was cutting its Chinese broadcasts from nineteen to fourteen hours a day, China Radio International was increasing its broadcasts in English to twenty-four hours a day.[10]

In terms of political values, the era of Mao's revolution is long past. Although China remains a one-party polity, the success of its political economy in tripling gross domestic product over the past three decades has made it attractive to many developing countries. In parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the so-called Beijing Consensus on a tightly controlled political system plus a market economy has become more popular than the previously dominant Washington Consensus of market economics with Western-style democratic government.[11] China has reinforced this attraction by increasing its foreign economic aid and facilitating access to its growing markets.

China has also adjusted its diplomacy. Two decades ago, it had great reservations about multilateral arrangements and was at cross purposes

with many of its neighbors. Subsequently it has joined the World Trade Organization, upheld multilateral diplomacy in solving international disputes, contributed more than 9,000 troops to serve in UN peacekeeping operations,[12] become more helpful on nonproliferation diplomacy (including hosting the Six-Party Talks on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula), settled territorial disputes with neighbors, and joined a variety of regional organizations of which the East Asian Summit is only the latest example. In recent years, rather than playing up its rhetoric against "American hegemonism," Beijing is rigorously promoting the idea of international cooperation for building up a "harmonious world," and trying to reassure the outside world that it is committed to a "peaceful path of development." This new diplomacy helped to alleviate fears and has reduced the likelihood of other countries allying to balance a rising power.[13]

But just as China's economic and military power does not yet match that of the United States, China's soft power still has a long way to go.[14] China does not have cultural industries like Hollywood, and its universities are not yet the equal of America's. Unlike America's soft power, which is largely generated by its civil society, China's soft power depends heavily on its government work. A major part of potentialities in Chinese society, including burgeoning nongovernmental organizations, remains untapped.

Whereas America's image has been damaged since its invasion of Iraq, China's image suffers from its domestic deficiencies, such as official corruption, social inequality, and environmental degradation. The Western world continues to criticize China for a lack of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. Although the Beijing Consensus may be appealing to some developing countries that reject Western-type democracy, the applicability and sustainability of the Chinese model of development have yet to be tested. On the one hand, China's new diplomacy has enhanced its attractiveness to its neighbors in Asia. On the other hand, its impressive military buildup without much transparency has also aroused security concerns in the region, especially in Japan, which may reduce the effectiveness of Chinese diplomacy. China has not succeeded in persuading the European Union to lift its

arms embargo, apparently because of Beijing's "belligerent" stance toward Taiwan. Despite all these problems that China must still overcome, however, its soft power will definitely keep pace with its hard power growth.

The Soft Power Discourse in China

There is no lack of Chinese interest in the idea of "soft power." Since the early 1990s, dozens, or maybe hundreds, of essays and scholarly articles have been published in the People's Republic of China on soft power. And there has even been a new Chinese journal entitled *Soft Power,* with its first issue published in late 2006, although the contents of the journal are mostly related to the business world.[15]

"Soft power" has also entered China's official language. In his keynote speech to the Seventeenth National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) on October 15, 2007, Hu Jintao stated that the CPC must "enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests." Hu recognized in that speech that "culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength."[16]

There does not seem to be any official effort in China to define the term *soft power,* and Chinese scholars continue to debate its scope, definition, and application. Moreover, they do not agree with one another as to how that phrase in English should be better translated into Chinese, since at least three Chinese words—*shili*, *quanli*, and *liliang*—carry meanings similar to *power.* Different translations thus reflect nuanced interpretations of the term *soft power.*

How Chinese View Their Soft Power

Notably, in recent years there have been numerous Chinese publications on China's own soft power, and their views are divergent. Few observers deny the importance of soft power to China, but some stress that only a rapid growth of hard power can provide China with the bases on which

to enhance its soft power, implying that priority should be given to the increase in hard power rather than soft power. Yan Xuetong, a renowned international relations scholar, has criticized Joseph Nye for not dividing soft power into political power and cultural power (though that seems to be a misreading of the concept). Yan contends that the wielding of political power, for example, showing China's credibility and determination in strengthening military power and deterring Taiwan independence by force, is more important than spreading cultural influences.[17]

Most other observers, however, do pay more attention to culture as a necessary ingredient, even a core element, of soft power. Many try to portray China's soft power today by analyzing both its strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, to many people in the world China's performance is strikingly admirable in sustaining a high rate of economic growth over the past three decades, which has helped some Chinese get out of poverty. The economic and social progress would not have been possible if China's political institutions were not strong and resilient. Whether China's performance has provided a development model (the so-called Beijing Consensus) for other countries to follow is subject to debate, but the accumulated economic power and social capital have certainly boosted China's confidence, pride, and capacity to project its political power and cultural influences abroad.

Chinese analysts tend to attribute China's recent achievements to its cultural merits and traits. They also tend to believe that along with its increased hard power Chinese culture should be more attractive to other peoples. Some also point to ethnic Chinese outside of China as a great asset that can contribute to its soft power. In addition, China's foreign policy has been highly successful, with (arguably in the eyes of others) its high moral principles and increasingly adroit diplomatic skills.

Meanwhile, a number of Chinese publications admit the limits and constraints to China's soft power, especially when they compare it with America's influence in the world. Some subtly point to the lack of transparency in government work and rampant official corruption that damages China's image. Others refer to the "brain drain" China is still suffering from, which reflects insufficiencies in China's educational (and possibly

political) system. Still others suggest that the Chinese government should do better in its public relations work internationally.

Soft Power Interactions Between China and the United States

Just as the national interests of China and the United States are partly congruent and partly conflicting, their soft powers are reinforcing each other in some issue areas and contradicting each other in other issue areas. This is not something unique to soft power. In general, power relationships can be zero or positive-sum, depending on the objectives of the actors. For example, if two countries both desire stability, a balance of military power in which neither side fears attack by the other can be a positive-sum relationship.

Undeniably, the polities of these two countries represent different value systems and ideologies. In the eyes of China's political elites, the United States is attempting to remake the whole world in its image, and China, as a socialist country led by the Communist Party, is without any doubt a main obstacle to achieving America's strategic goals. Chinese officials are always sensitive to and alerted by such American schemes as what Condoleezza Rice called "transformational diplomacy" that are aimed at spreading out American influences deeply into other countries' domestic spheres. The Chinese also watched closely and worryingly the "color revolutions" in Eastern Europe and elsewhere, which were seen as staged or encouraged by Americans to undermine existing governments. To this extent, the expansion and wielding of America's soft power as part of a "smart" combination of culture, political values, and foreign policy will not be welcomed by China.

To the American general public and elites alike, China under the Communist Party leadership is a political symbol that they find difficult to accept and comprehend. In general, Americans are favorably impressed with China's great achievements in the past three decades. However, if they were asked whether these achievements have been made "because of" or "despite" the Communist Party leadership in China,

most would probably be perplexed. They harbor mixed feelings in seeing China's soft power rise in world affairs, as reflected in a number of American publications, including a recent book entitled *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World.*[18] Most of these works assume a zero-sum perspective and cast a more negative rather than positive light on China's soft power growth.

In their respective foreign policy pronouncements, Americans and Chinese often have opposite views and goals. While Americans want to maintain their leading position in global affairs, Chinese are opposing "hegemonism," a code word for American ambitions to dominate the world, and promoting "multipolarity," apparently based on a decline in American power. Nonetheless, the seemingly opposite goals belie some very fundamental realities, according to which the soft power interaction between the United States and China is far from a zero-sum game.

First, there is little evidence that the increase in China's soft power is aimed at counterweighing America's soft power, or that the "color revolutions," regardless of their connection to U.S. strategic objectives, are intended against China's influence in the countries where they occurred. The tainted American image in Europe and the Islamic world has little to do with Chinese diplomacy there and would not directly result in any boosting of China's cultural and political influences. Just as Yao Ming is not in America at the expense of Michael Jordan, Hollywood movies and TV series like *Desperate Housewives*, which are easily available in China, would do no harm to the quality of Chinese movies. Although some people in China may blame the popularity of American cultural products for reducing the attractiveness of Chinese products, a counterargument can be made that such competitions are needed and healthy. Similar cases can be found in China-U.S. educational exchanges, in which each side benefits from better students and teachers.

Second, the perception that the Chinese model of combining market economy with one-party rule will challenge the Western model (market, democracy, and rule of law must be together) and values is dubious. More research should be done to illustrate how many, and to what extent, other developing countries are actually able to learn from the Chinese model.

For all we know, Americans would be pleased should North Korea or Burma (Myanmar) now begin to move toward the Chinese-style market economy.

Third, China is using its soft power in diplomacy that may help the United States protect its interests in certain countries and regions. To be sure, China's actions are taken first of all to serve its own interests, but its quiet efforts to persuade the North Koreans to terminate their nuclear weapon programs and to embark on economic reform do facilitate U.S. policy objectives on the Korean Peninsula. Likewise, Beijing's quiet diplomacy to persuade the Burmese government to modify its behavior at home may pave the way for stabilizing the situation in that country. What is more, China has successfully convinced Khartoum to accept a UN presence in Sudan, which was originally rejected under Western pressures.

Fourth, Chinese guardedness against American soft power is essentially defensive, especially in China's domestic affairs. Despite their suspicions of American intentions and their doubts about the relevance of American experiences to China's own path to modernity, Chinese political elites share the basic values of democracy, human rights, and rule of law, as well as market economy. Increasingly, President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao, among other Chinese leaders, are emphasizing the necessity of building up democratic institutions in China.[19] Although democracy in China is referred more often to "deliberative democracy" than universal suffrage, elective politics is seriously studied and increasingly practiced at various levels of Chinese government. This trend contrasts sharply with some countries and communities where radical ideas are prevailing. As an American analyst observed a few weeks after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, "We used to emphasize that China and the United States hold different values. But if we compare the gap between American values and the values held by the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, differences between China and the United States are negligible!"[20]

Finally, in reality Chinese are borrowing many skills and practices that construct America's soft power. A great number of Chinese government

officials, military officers, judges, and lawyers, among other professionals, have been trained in the United States, and they have made contributions to America's knowledge as well. In the field of foreign policy, many Chinese think tanks have emerged in the past decade or so, and the examples they refer to are their counterparts in the United States rather than those in Japan, Russia, or Germany.

Conclusions

It is not surprising to see Chinese leaders and academics referring explicitly to China's soft power and adopting policies to promote it. In a sense, this reflects a sophisticated realist strategy for a country with rising hard power. To the extent it is able to combine its hard power resources with soft power resources, it is less likely to frighten its neighbors and others and thus less likely to stimulate balancing coalitions. Successful strategies often involve a combination of hard and soft power that is called "smart power." For example, in nineteenth-century Europe, after defeating Denmark, Austria, and France with Prussian hard military power, German chancellor Otto von Bismarck developed a soft-power strategy of making Berlin the attractive diplomatic capital of Europe. During the Cold War, the United States used both hard and soft power against the Soviet Union. Thus it is not surprising to see China following a smart-power strategy. Whether this will be a problem for other countries depends on the way the power is used. If China sought to manipulate the politics of Asia and exclude the United States, its strategy could be counterproductive, but to the extent that China adopts the attitude of a rising "responsible stakeholder" in international affairs, its combination of hard and soft power can make a positive contribution. In return, much will depend upon the willingness of the United States to include China as an important player in the web of formal and informal international institutional arrangements.

China is far from America's or Europe's equal in soft power at this point, but it would be foolish to ignore the important gains it is making. Fortunately, these gains can be good for China and also good for the rest

of the world. Soft power is not a zero-sum game in which one country's gain is necessarily another country's loss. If China and the United States, for example, both become more attractive in each other's eyes, the prospects of damaging conflicts will be reduced. If the rise of China's soft power reduces the likelihood of conflict, it can be part of a positive-sum relationship.