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Change and Continuity in China's Soft Power Trajectory: From Mao Zedong's "Peaceful Co-existence" to Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream"

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China's trajectory over recent years displays a shift in its public diplomacy from traditional coercive measures under hard power toward a combination of both hard and soft power. As soft power signifies the diplomatic ability of a nation to attract others by projecting its internal values and policies, China has taken significant steps within the course of its political history to transition from an isolated authoritarian regime into a more engaged global stakeholder. In addition to analyzing China's soft power and obligations within a global context, an internal examination of China's public diplomacy is also required as the nature of the regime often serves to limit its capabilities in further attracting global actors. As China remains an authoritarian regime, activities related to public diplomacy are largely reserved for the state actors, including officials and state-owned enterprises. Although China has successfully shifted more towards practicing soft power from traditional hard power, areas of concern remain regarding its development, including a lack of attractiveness towards developed nations and limited use of civil society. China's diplomatic agenda includes identifying methods for extending its soft power towards developed and developing countries.

Keywords: China, Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, Cultural Values, China Rise

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I. INTRODUCTION

China's soft power is often analyzed within the frame of great power relations due to the fact that the theoretical concept largely originates from a Western context. Despite external circumstances, an important domestic variable that should be taken into consideration is the sustained national narrative amidst the political transition across tenures of leadership. Since his ascension to presidency in 2013, Xi Jinping has been exercising a more assertive stance to secure China's position in the shifting dynamics of the post-Cold War world order. To accompany security agendas including maritime pursuits in the South China Sea and the Silk Road Initiative, Xi has attempted to further China's soft power to secure and promote China's values overseas. This article aims to examine the changes and continuities in China's soft power under the current leadership of Xi Jinping in the context of China's earlier years of development. In doing so, it identifies continued areas of concern including a lack of attractiveness for developed nations and a limited use of civil society that the Chinese government could take into consideration for the further extension of its economic, cultural, and political soft power.

II. "SOFT POWER" AS A SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED CONCEPT

Joseph Nye first introduced "soft power" as a theoretical concept in 1990 to refer to the diplomatic ability of a nation to attract others via the promotion of its domestic values and policies. According to Nye, nations should not solely rely on their military strength for state security and the maintenance of diplomatic relations, but also strive to develop their "technology, education, and economic" aspects (Nye 1990, 179). Since the end of the Cold War, the United States and other nations have increasingly resorted to soft power as a means to secure their ideological position as well as to promote their national image and values to the international audience; through co-optation instead of coercion, nations can elicit certain types of behaviors from other states in alignment with their own national interests (Nye 2002, as discussed in Liu and Tsai 2014, 29).

As soft power encompasses a wide range of resources and behavior, it has also been subject to numerous scholarly discussions throughout the past decades. The first debate surrounding Nye's definition of soft power revolves around its attachment to the US context. Albrow (2015) argues that soft power remains an "American-centric conception of international affairs" with a heavy emphasis on liberal, free-market principles (Albrow 2015, 386). Wilson (2015) also suggests that Nye's primary motivation for introducing the soft power concept is "to maintain US hegemony in the global arena" through the dissemination of Western norms and values (Wilson 2015, 287). The second debate argues whether Nye's definition

of soft power highlights the agency of the public and civil society more than that of nation-states (Nye 2013, as discussed in Albrow 2015, 386). As soft power stresses the influence of perceptions and images over that of military assets, it is derived from both Track One Diplomacy as well as Track Two Diplomacy, which involves the private sector and other non-state actors (Roberts 2014, 17). Therefore, a country gains soft power not only by attracting and coopting other nations, but also by persuading “ordinary people in other states” (Kivimäki 2014, 428). Scholars such as Wilson (2015) claim that Nye’s application of soft power further amplifies the role of civil society, which is considered as a Western trend by nations such as Russia and China (Wilson 2015, 293).

To address such scholarly debates, Nye has continuously refined the concept of soft power to highlight the importance of “perception” in analyzing a nation’s soft power (Wilson 2015, 289). However, problems in measuring the soft power capacity of a nation persist due to its conceptual ambiguity and flexibility. Although many still consider culture as a “measurable entity,” it is difficult to identify a global standard for soft power and test the different cultural capacity of individual states (Callahan 2015, 216).

Regardless of the existing debates and ambiguities, the general consensus is that soft power is socially constructed and dependent on the cultural and political context of the nation in question. For example, Ang, Isar and Mar (2015) contend that soft power is a “polysemic term” which harbors varying “representational purposes and assumptions” for different nations (Ang, Isar and Mar 2015, as discussed in Albrow 2015, 383). An increasing number of comparative studies on soft power have also shed light onto how national narratives shape and alter diplomatic policies for nations such as US and China (see Albrow 2015; Roberts 2014). Therefore, in order to analyze soft power from the view of China, its distinctive culture, history and values have to be revisited.

III. CONCEPTUALIZING CHINA’S SOFT POWER

China has taken various steps within the course of its political history to transition from an isolated authoritarian regime into a more engaged global stakeholder. Some of the events that demonstrate China’s diplomatic transition include its accession into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001 and its provision of economic assistance to developing states in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Throughout the proceedings, Beijing has utilized soft power strategies to increase its national appeal to the global audience.

Despite such achievements, many Anglo-American scholars, including Shambaugh, Ikenberry and Nye, believe that China has failed to complete its development of soft power (Creemers 2015, 306; Kivimäki 2014, 421). They claim that although China has attempted to disseminate its domestic values and

promote a benevolent image abroad, “its soft power never translated into foreign-policy power,” and China’s soft power did not heighten awareness of global governance (Gill and Huang 2006, as discussed in Kivimäki 2014, 422).

However, as Rozman (2014) emphasizes, China is an authoritarian state “of a specialized sub-category” with a strong attachment to the communism that underlies its national behavior (Rozman 2014, as discussed in Wilson 2015, 287). Therefore, to judge China’s soft power with the “American yardstick” would contribute to a flawed analysis (Kivimäki 2014, 421–422). Callahan (2015) adds to the discussion by arguing that China has incorporated soft power aspects into its domestic policy more than into its foreign affairs (Callahan 2015, 217). Kivimäki (2014) also differentiates China’s soft power policies from those of the US by stating that China does not aim to “attract other powers to the Chinese way of doing things or to the Chinese system” (Kivimäki 2014, 422) as in the case of other Western nations who desire to advance their culture into “universally desirable values” (Callahan 2015, 219).

Provided with its own political context and based on communist ideals, China pursues a unique soft power narrative. Although liberal-democratic nations such as the US may utilize soft power to promote its ideological interests and establish certain global norms, this is not necessarily the case with China (Kivimäki 2014, 428). Kivimäki (2014) interprets China’s applications of soft power to be primarily rooted in its domestic security interests; the maintenance of a positive image is an imperative for developing relations with other nations and for continuing economic growth under its distinct political system (Kivimäki 2014, 430). Callahan (2015) also notes that some goals that have been identified under China’s soft power policies are to “fight those who see China as a threat, and cultivate those who see it as an opportunity” (Callahan 2015, 218). Overall, China’s perception of soft power tends to prioritize different interests from those of Nye’s original concept (Edney 2012, 899).

From a domestic perspective, China’s development of soft power may be more pertinent to resolving its own identity dilemma rather than finding ways to fit into pre-existing international institutions (Callahan 2015, 219). The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) uses soft power not only to “legitimize (its) political rule” to those within and outside of the country (Chou 2015, 105), but also to help answer the public’s question of “What is China?” especially following economic reform and opening up (Qin 2006, as discussed in Callahan 2015, 219). Instead of pressuring other nations to adopt Chinese values and its political system, China uses soft power to increase international tolerance of its own domestic goals and to consolidate its citizens under a unified identity and agenda (Callahan 2015, 433). Therefore, a domestic analysis with a focus on China’s past and present leaderships—as well as their respective political narratives—would contribute to presenting a better insight of the changes and continuities in China’s soft power policies.

IV. CHINA'S SOFT POWER TRAJECTORY

When soft power was first introduced to China in the 1990s, it attracted much political and public attention. Wang (1993), a Chinese intellectual, published works based on Nye's soft power concept which then became the basis for Beijing's domestic and foreign policies in the 2000s (Wang 1993, as discussed in Callahan 2015, 218; Li and Worm 2010, 71). Since Wang, many Chinese and foreign intellectuals have researched China's soft power, resulting in the establishment of a number of institutions and think tanks such as the China Institute for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) and the Strategic Studies Institute of the Central Party School (Callahan 2015, 218). The Central Foreign Propaganda Group (1980-1987) was also revived into the Leading Group for Propaganda and Ideology Work in 1990 (Creemers 2015, 308) to establish the State Council Information Office (SCIO) in 1991 in order to "tell China's story to the world; provide a Chinese perspective; counter hostile foreign propaganda; counter support for Taiwanese independence; and propagate Chinese foreign policy" (Shambaugh 2007, as discussed in Creemers 2015, 308).

Despite such contemporary applications of Nye's concept of soft power in China's public diplomacy (Nye and Wang 2009, as discussed in Callahan 2015, 218), mutual respect, tolerance and non-interference have been inherent to Beijing's diplomatic practices since the earlier days of its development and could be observed throughout its political trajectory. Furthermore, China's efforts for increasing its international appeal have continued since the 1950s under the leadership of Mao Zedong (see Cheng 2016, 236). With Mao's "peaceful coexistence" as the basis for China's past and current diplomatic practices, the next sections aim to elucidate continued goals and strategies of Beijing's public diplomacy under the recent Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping administrations, and identify common misconceptions shared by the international society regarding its soft power practices.

V. MAO'S "PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE" (1953-1954): FOUNDATIONS OF CHINESE SOFT POWER

China's founding principles on public diplomacy and international relations date back to the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence that were introduced by Chairman Mao Zedong and Premier Zhou Enlai in 1953-1954 (Cheng 2016, 236). The Five Principles, which include "mutual respect for territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's international affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence," were first declared by Zhou Enlai at a meeting with the Indian delegation in 1943 (Zhang 2011). The principles were then adopted into the *Agreement on Trade and Intercourse Between the Tibet Region of China and India* in 1943, as well as the final communiqué of the Asian-

African (Bundang) Conference in 1955 (Zhang 2011). In the mid-1960s, Zhou Enlai toured Asia, Africa and Europe to promote the principles and increase economic cooperation and trust among nations with different social systems (Zhang 2011).

Although the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence were declared shortly after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, China's adherence to such principles carry similar domestic implications as the soft power policies of the current day, one of which is the procurement of economic growth. For example, in June 1953, Zhou Enlai stressed that China "advocate all resolving international disputes through peaceful negotiations... (and) practice peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition among all different systems" (CCP 2000, as discussed in Zhang 2007, 511). In October 1954, Mao also reiterated the peaceful coexistence agenda by stating, "We do not want to fight. It would be very nice if such an environment could be created. We would cooperate with anyone who is in favor of this objective" (Mao 1994, 168, as discussed in Xiao 2016, 334-335). The promotion of a benevolent image enabled Beijing to continue its domestic economic development by forming trade relations with other nations, including capitalist countries such as Britain, France, Germany and Japan that had been suffering from the detriments of World War II (Zhang 2007, 512).

Zhang (2007) argues that China's unstable post-Cold War relations with the US were what primarily induced Beijing to promote the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence and to "isolate America and restrict and defeat its plan to expand hegemony globally" (CCP 1989, as discussed in Zhang 2007, 518). Yet despite the various factors contributing to Beijing's shifting diplomatic position during the initial period of its establishment, it is generally agreed upon that the mid-1900s was an economically unstable time for China. Rather than competing with the US ideologically to persuade other nations to adopt and follow its political system, China used the peaceful coexistence narrative to gain international recognition and pursue domestic economic development via the establishment of global trade networks. Although its economy has grown immensely over the past decades, the main objective of its soft power policies remains focused on China's domestic security.

VI. HU JINTAO'S "HARMONIOUS WORLD" (2002-2012) CHINA'S REACHING OUT TO THE WORLD

China has followed the principles of good neighborly relations even after reform and opening-up in the late 1970s and 1980s by "creating a good peripheral environment for its domestic economic development" (Zhang 2011, 83). In addition, its economic development has contributed to the overall growth of its national power and global appeal as "China's rise"¹ is now considered to be an established phenomenon among scholars (Shin 2006, 403). Yet along with its

diplomatic and economic progress, China's struggles to "reduce the perception of the 'China threat' (have also) become more challenging" (Cheng 2016, 236). In addition, many nations now hold higher expectations for Beijing to perform its role as a global advocate and benefactor (Chung 2006; Kim 2005, as discussed in Shin 2006).

In response to increasing perceptions of the "China threat," China has continuously stressed the principles of good neighborly relations at subsequent Party Congresses (Liu and Tsai 2014, 34).² The need for a peaceful environment also carries specific domestic motives of "building a well-off society of a higher standard in an all-round way to the benefit of well over one billion people (of China)" (Xinhua 2002). Beijing has promoted various political slogans to promote its diplomatic stance including the phrase, "peaceful rise (*heping jueqi*)," which was introduced in 2003, and the concept of "harmonious world," which was mentioned in the 2005 Asia-Africa Summit in Jakarta (Liu and Tsai 2014, 31-32).

In alignment with the concept of a "harmonious world," Hu Jintao emphasized that Asian and African nations "promote friendship, equal dialogue, prosperity among civilizations and jointly establish a harmonious world" (Xinhua 2005, as discussed in Liu and Tsai 2014, 32). For example, Hu Jintao distinguished China's interactions with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as highly "profitable" (Lee 2013, 50) and further developed free trade agreements with the ASEAN via the Framework Agreement on Comprehensive Economic Cooperation (ACFTA) —which had originally been signed by Premier Zhu Rongji in 2002—to lead the relations toward a "high point in the new century" (Liu and Tsai 2014, 36). In addition, he continued the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) —which was first held in Beijing in 2000—to discuss trade relations and Chinese provision of economic aid to African nations (Corkin 2014, 59). Overall, Hu Jintao is regarded to have pursued a more "global" policy compared to his predecessor, Jiang Zemin (Shambaugh 2011, as discussed in Byun 2016, 501).

In addition to promoting economic relations with developing nations, Beijing has utilized the realm of culture to neutralize the growing international fear of rising China. For example, the concept of soft power was first explicitly mentioned in Hu Jintao's address to the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 2007 as he claimed, "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" (Xinhua 2007).

Although Hu Jintao's cultural diplomacy emphasizes the need for a "harmonious society" and a "peaceful rise" of China, one of the perceived goals under CCP's soft power agenda is to stabilize "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (Hu 2012, as discussed in Albrow 2015, 389). Therefore, in addition to "national cohesion" via "cultural security" (Keane 2010, as discussed in Albrow 2015, 389) and the promotion

of a more positive international image, soft power remains closely intertwined with the protection of China's own "traditional national cultural values" (Albro 2015, 389). As a result, rather than focusing on modern popular culture, China tends to place more emphasis on "traditional culture" and socialism (Li 2008, as discussed in Edney 2012, 909). Cultural soft power enables Beijing to propagate, and reshape the international perception of China's traditional and political values without the use of direct military means.

The establishment of Confucius Institutes is a representative example of Hu Jintao's cultural diplomacy encompassing Chinese characteristics (Albro 2015). Confucius Institutes, which were first founded in 2004, now have 500 facilities worldwide in 140 countries and regions (Confucius Institutes Headquarters 2014), even "surpass(ing) China's (initial) projections" (Ren 2010 and Yang 2010, as discussed in Lo and Pan 2016, 520). The operation of the Confucius Institutes are either based on partnerships with universities of host nations or are individually licensed by Beijing headquarters (the Office of Chinese Language Council International [*Hanban*]), where the institutions aim to teach Chinese culture and language to the students who are enrolled. Partnerships with foreign institutions and monetary subsidies from the Chinese government have enabled for a "rapid expansion" of the institutes, increasing their overall appeal and "global branding" (Starr 2009, as discussed in Lo and Pan 2016, 516).

In China's perspective, Confucius Institutes successfully promote the nation's soft power by demonstrating its "spectacular rise" (Albro 2015, 390), and construct a cultural narrative around China with an "essentialized and exoticized but depoliticized and palatable past" (Hubbert 2014, as discussed in Albro 2015, 390). Yet some nations including the US, Australia and Europe have criticized the CCP for limiting intercultural dialogue; as the institutes remain tied to government subsidies, they are subject to government censorship, a lack of academic freedom, and are also believed to be used as a platform for spreading political propaganda (Lueck et al. 2014, 325).

The criticism that Confucius Institutes have received reflect the larger concerns critics have over China's soft power strategies. According to Albro (2015), China's establishment of Confucius Institutes "appears primarily to have provoked boundary-patrolling behavior in the US public sphere" as opposed to increasing mutual understanding (Albro 2015, 392). Nye (2013) also contends that "China has earned a limited return on its investment" on Confucius Institutes as they have largely failed to increase China's foreign policy capacity and awareness of global governance (Nye 2013, as discussed in Albro 2015, 391; Kivimäki 2014). Similarly, the Obama administration's "pivot to Asia" is often attributed as one of the prime factors which have induced the development of China's soft power under the Hu Jintao administration (Lee 2013, 50).

Despite the overarching tendency to analyze China's soft power bilaterally

with respect to growing tensions between the US and China (Liu and Tsai 2014, 37), China's cultural diplomacy remains focused on certain domestic goals. Liu Yandong, the chair of the council of the Confucius Institutes, indicated in his speech at the 10th anniversary celebration in 2014 that the goal of the Confucius Institutes is to "help foreigners understand China" (Liu 2014, as discussed in Hartig 2015, 250). His statement indicates a premise that foreigners tend to have certain—and often negative—misunderstandings of China that the government must counter and correct (Hartig 2015, 250-251). Therefore, through a more active foreign and cultural diplomacy, China desires to win more "hearts and minds" (Kurlantzick 2008, as discussed in Lahtinen 2015, 207) of the international audience, to whom it can educate its "outstanding traditional culture" —an essential part of their "socialist core values" (Ministry of Education 2004, as discussed in Lahtinen 2015, 207). Therefore, the principal goal of China's soft power remains grounded in projecting and conveying its traditional socialist values to a larger audience via global cultural and economic exchange networks, as opposed to competing with the US.

VII. XI JINPING'S "CHINESE DREAM" (2013-): CHINA STRETCH FOR ITS GREAT POWER DREAM

In comparison to past leaders such as Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, who had been in charge of China's "important period of strategic opportunity" (Li and Worm 2011, 69-70), Xi Jinping ascended to the presidency at a time when China was considerably more stable as the largest economy in Asia and the second largest economy in the world.³ Following the 18th Communist Party Congress in November 2012, Xi was named the next chairman of the Central Military Commission, and took office in March of the following year.

Critics have debated as to whether Xi Jinping will lead China more towards reform over stability, especially in relation to the past leaders (Huang 2013). Many international analysts held high hopes that Xi Jinping—the son of a revolutionary leader—would continue China's reform and opening-up. Although economic development remains the primary policy agenda, Xi Jinping's main political slogan has been the "Chinese dream,"⁴ which was announced following the 18th Communist Party Congress. According to Xi, the "Chinese dream" refers to "the Chinese people's recognition and pursuit of values, the building of China into a well-off society in an all-round way and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" (Xinhua 2014).

Xi's "Chinese dream" has been interpreted both globally "in context of a peaceful rise" as well as domestically in relation to "China's (own) problems" (Huang 2013, 27). Yet, the explicit reference to China in the political slogan and the emphasis on its "great rejuvenation" suggest a continued domestic focus for

Beijing's soft power policies under the Xi administration. For example, in response to the 12th collective study on the nation's cultural soft power in December 2013, Xi Jinping announced that "improving China's national cultural soft power is a matter related to the realization of the 'bicentennial' goals and China's great rejuvenation—the China Dream" (Xinhua 2013). Reiterating the earlier political slogans as placed forth by his predecessors, Xi also added that "(China) should strive to spread the values of contemporary China, the values of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and strive to increase China's international discourse power" (Xinhua 2013).

With a continued domestic focus in developing the nation's soft power, what differentiates Xi Jinping's cultural policies from those of Hu Jintao is his sense of "activism" (Fenby 2015, 25). For example, Xi clearly stressed that the Chinese soft power resources must place in the effort to "protect (China's) territory" in addition to enhancing the people's understanding of China and the Chinese characteristics inherent to its culture (Wang 2013, 454). With the Party's interests dictating the overall national policy agenda, Xi Jinping further developed China's soft power policies to protect domestic security and re-claim China's title as a "great power" (Corkin 2014, 58).

An important ideological development under Xi Jinping's soft power agenda has been the proposal of the "new model of great power relations (*xinxing daguo guanxi*)."⁵ Xi first mentioned the ideology during his visit to the US in February 2012 while serving as the Vice President to Hu Jintao. In 2013, he met President Barack Obama in California during an informal summit to pursue the "new model of great power relations" based on "mutual respect, cooperation, and win-win results for the benefit of the people of the two countries and the world" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC 2013, as discussed in Cheng 2016, 227).

Despite the lack of scholarly consensus in defining "great power relations" and identifying which nations qualify as "great powers," it has been argued that China desires multipolarity over unipolarity (Cheng 2016, 231). In addition, instead of limiting "great power" engagements to China and the US, the report of the 18th People's Congress also suggested that China develop relations with all G20 nations including Russia and the EU (Pang 2013, as discussed in Hao 2015, 352). Overall, Xi Jinping's great power relations narrative promotes a heightened interaction with not only the great powers, but also with the rising powers.

As a result, China has increased relations with emerging powers such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and other developing nations in Asia and Africa.⁶ Unlike his predecessors who had been more "reactive" and "passive" in conducting China's foreign affairs, Xi Jinping has been noted to be "unusually active" in seeking for diplomatic interaction (Zhang 2015, 7). For example, he formally visited Latin America in the initial months of his presidency and proposed the establishment of a "China-Latin America Community

of Common Destiny (CELAC)” Forum in 2013 (Yu 2015, 1048). China has also continued to hold the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation (FOCAC) and has increased its economic aid to African nations such as Kenya and South Africa in order to promote a mutually beneficial “win-win” economic network. The establishment of cooperative frameworks and increased provision of economic aid have helped to raise China as a “brand” in the developing regions.

However, increased soft power emphasis on “national security” has also elicited more assertive behavior, especially in Asia. Despite China’s longstanding diplomatic and economic engagement with the ASEAN⁷ Beijing’s recent provocations in the South China Sea are considered to have disrupted the flow of trade in the surrounding areas, even contributing to increased negative public opinion of China. In analyzing China’s shifting diplomatic behavior, many critics look toward external factors such as the 2009 Asian financial crisis (Liu and Tsai 2014, 37) and US President Barack Obama’s “pivot to Asia” (Lee 2013).

Yet an analysis of other accompanying strategies also suggests that China’s focus for promoting soft power rests primarily on domestic concerns. For example, Yoon (2015) relates the maritime issues to Xi Jinping’s “Chinese dream” rhetoric by stating that such assertive behavior reflects China’s original mission to grow as a “true maritime power” and its desire to “embolden China’s political, ideological, and economic philosophy in conjunction with other military, economic, and national-security goals” (Yoon 2015, 41). China’s hopes of “projecting a vision of future national greatness” had also been introduced during the Hu Jintao administration (Yoon 2015, 41).

Xi Jinping’s other agendas also reiterate the Chinese goal of transitioning into a “great power.” For example, he announced the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative—a program to construct a central transportation network connecting China to its neighbors in Indochina, South Asia, Southwest Asia and Europe—in 2013 during his visit to Central Asia (Arase 2015, 25). In addition to promoting trade between China and its neighbors, the Silk Road Economic Belt is expected to “sustain China’s (own) economic growth and strengthen China’s political leverage for decades to come” (Arase 2015, 25).

Despite the distinctive leadership style of Xi Jinping, his soft power agenda towards the “Chinese Dream” recapitulates the domestic emphasis of China’s foreign diplomacy strategies. If Mao Zedong laid the foundation and framework for China’s soft power, and if Hi Jintao enabled its development by reaching out to the world, Xi Jinping is now placing such goals into action. Although the way in which Xi Jinping has adopted and pursued soft power is distinguishable from those of his predecessors, his main agenda remains stabilizing the Chinese economy and creating a more prosperous and “harmonious world” that would perceive China as a “great power” with certain “Chinese characteristics” that must be respected and correctly understood.

VIII. POLICY IMPLICATIONS: GLOBAL PERCEPTION OF CHINA'S SOFT POWER

Throughout the leadership of Mao Zedong, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping, China's soft power has grown considerably in its scale and scope. Despite the fact that the concept "soft power" was introduced in the 1990s, China's cultural and economic diplomacy under Hu Jintao's "harmonious world" and Xi Jinping's "Chinese dream" agendas reflect Mao Zedong's "principles of co-existence" from the 1950s. Therefore, although Xi Jinping's diplomacy may be regarded as more assertive and active compared to that of Hu Jintao, his policy implications continue to be domestically driven and primarily focused on national economic growth and a global understanding of Chinese traditional socialist values.

The diverse perceptions surrounding the concept of "soft power" and "great powers" and their wide-ranging interpretations depend on the respective social context. Hence, a specific policy analysis of China is required at a domestic level. As discussed in the earlier sections, the Chinese interpretation of "soft power" and "great powers" is distinguishable in its manner. Although the Western context recognizes the strong need for global governance and the fostering of universally shared values, China's soft power gears towards securing its own progress and culture. For example, Beijing utilizes soft power in order to sustain "a peaceful and stable global environment" which are both used as "a stabilizing force for continued development" (Liu and Tsai 2014) and for "China's domestic reform and (its) development and restoration" (Zhang 2015, 8).

China's view on the relations between the "great powers" is also different from previous interpretations. The "new great power relations model" as introduced by Xi Jinping not only excludes the need for other nations to adopt and follow its socialist political system (Edney 2015, 262), but also extends diplomatic engagement to the rising powers in addition to the developed nations. As a result, much of China's foreign economic aid and trade relations have extended to developing regions.

Yet within a wider framework, the growth in China's soft power and economic stakes within Asia, Africa, and Latin America also pushes states to reconsider the "balance of soft power" in such regions (Nye 2005). Though China has made noteworthy achievements in attracting and funding developing nations, its growing influence within such areas also suggests that the West must acknowledge China as a large soft power "making its own way" (Nye 2005), leading many developed nations to still identify China as a threat rather than as a cooperative partner.

Although the growth of Chinese soft power may not be directly influenced by external motivations including the rising bilateral competition with the US, such observation also does not necessarily infer China's lack of acknowledgement of its Western neighbor. In fact, Xi Jinping and other Chinese officials have often

engaged in “a series of actions against the kind of Western influences and ideas that he and other leaders view as a threat to the survival of the Communist Party” (Gewirtz 2017, 102). Because soft power pertains to attracting a wider international audience, China must identify methods for extending its soft power towards developed countries in addition to the developing regions of the world.

An internal examination of China’s public diplomacy also sheds light on how the nature of the regime often limits its ability to attract and utilize domestic citizens. While a perceived goal for China’s soft power is to unify its citizens under a common agenda, activities related to public diplomacy are largely reserved for the state actors including officials and state-owned enterprises. The civil society’s limited access to public diplomacy—along with the government’s restrictions on the media—are therefore considered as great limitations to China’s overall soft power capacities both at home and abroad. As a result, even Chinese citizens remain uncertain about the realm of “traditional”⁸ Chinese culture that they are to uphold (Fenby 2015; Wang 2013), as well as the policy implications of the “China Dream” (Beech et al. 2013).

Overall, despite shifts in leadership, China has maintained its basic rhetoric of defending its national security along the lines of “peaceful co-existence,” “harmonious world,” and the “China dream” through its soft power policies. The question is not whether China has evolved to be more “offensive” rather than “defensive” throughout the political transitions; the nation will continue to strive towards domestic stability and protection of its values regardless of different leaderships. However, China’s soft power raises questions regarding whether it is willing to accept more widely encompassing agents, including the civil societies of developed nations. Until Beijing realizes the domestic benefits invested in such agents, it will be difficult for China’s soft power to embrace and reach out to a larger global audience.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹ The concept of "China's rise" was first used by Yan Xuetong in his book, *International Environment of China's Rise*, after which the CCP under Jiang Zemin prohibited the word, "rise (jueqi)" from being used in official documents (Guo 2006, as discussed in Li and Worm 2011, 70).
- ² In his address to the 15th Party Congress, President Jiang Zemin stated, "affirming to a policy of good neighborliness has been the stance of (China) for a long time and it will not change... regarding issues of conflict between China and its neighbors, we should make an effort towards maintaining peace, stabilizing the overall situation and seeking resolution through friendly negotiations. If the issue cannot be resolved at once, it will temporarily be put aside... search for common ground and save differences." The working report of the 16th Party Congress also emphasized that China "continue to affirm to the principles of good relations and companionship, regional cooperation and consolidation of exchange and cooperation with neighboring countries" (Liu and Tsai 2014, 34).
- ³ China was officially ranked as the second largest economy in the world in 2010 (Cheng 2016, 230).
- ⁴ Huang (2013) notes that the "Chinese Dream" is also a title of a 1987 play which portrays "a Chinese couple dreaming of success in the United States" (Huang 2013, 27). This article focuses solely on Xi Jinping's "Chinese Dream" agenda by analyzing soft power policies that have been implemented under his administration.
- ⁵ The idea of "new type of great power relations" was first mentioned during the China-US Strategic and Economic Dialogue in May 2010, during which State Councillor Dai Bingguo suggested that the two nations "initiate an era of globalization with the new type of great power relations of mutual respect, harmonious existence, and win-win by states of different social systems, cultural traditions, and levels of development" (China News 2010, as discussed in Hao 2015, 350).
- ⁶ China began to increase its diplomatic ties with the developing countries "as the basis of all its external relations" (*fazhanzhong guojia shi jichu*) in 2009, but such relations have been further developed under Xi Jinping (Yu 2015, 1047).
- ⁷ Liu and Tsai (2014) organize China-ASEAN relations into the following periods: (1) Period of cautious participation (1991-1996); (2) Period of active participation (1997-2000); (3) Period of voluntary initiative (2001-2008); (Period of competing leadership (with the US) (2009 -) (Liu and Tsai 2014, 35-36).
- ⁸ Fenby (2015) contends that Chinese traditional culture was destructed during the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949 (Fenby 2015, 29).