

The Cultural Soft Power of China: A Tool for Dualistic National Security

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Abstract: Research on the soft power of China has proliferated to the point where little coherence can be detected. This paper attempts to bring together the various forms of analyses in both international and Chinese literature. A division in the non-Chinese research is drawn between those who recognize the international and domestic dimension in the Chinese soft power discourse and those who do not. It is concluded that Chinese academia envisages cultural soft power as a tool for tackling the challenges of modernization for the PRC state in search of itself in a dualistic manner using both the international and domestic arenas. In essence, the soft power discourse of China has long since outgrown the narrow definition used in the West more in the direction of national security.

Introduction

In recent years, Chinese academia adopted the concept of soft power and has radically localized it to the Chinese intellectual environment. For analyzing this Chinese vision, the Western understanding of soft power theory is insufficient. Thus far, only a narrow body of literature has formulated a localized perspective by depicting the soft power rhetoric of China as both domestic and international (Wuthnow, 2008; Li, 2008; Hunter, 2009). Improving on previous research, this article shows cultural soft power (*wenhua ruan shili*, 文化软实力) in the Chinese discourse, offering an answer to the dualistic dilemma of the present PRC government: legitimization in domestic politics and assurance of peaceful and responsible reputation of China on the international scene. Ultimately, in expressing cultural critique, Chinese analysts are seeking national salvation through a social management system based on cultural soft power.

This paper coins the terms “Dualist” (those who recognize dualism in the soft power of China) and “Monotist” (those who do not recognize it) and, by making such a distinction, emphasizes the variation in the understanding of soft power in international literature. Chinese academic publications for a Chinese audience, on the other hand, are considered as empirical

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material. This has two main bodies: a conference publication from the first Chinese soft power meeting in 2011¹, and more recent relevant Chinese academic publications in Mandarin.²

In decrypting the academic soft power discourse of China, this article outlines a model for Chinese cultural modernization that lies at the interplay between domestic and international, self-reflection and outward image projection. It is argued that the soft power rhetoric of China should not be perceived only as a willingness to generate genuine attraction, but also as a policy tool. In the Chinese discourse, cultural soft power tackles the challenges of modernization by placing emphasis on cultural safety amid globalization in national image construction through exemplarity. This is an answer for the nation in search of itself, still struggling with a sense of inadequacy stemming from historical Western dominance.

This paper first draws on the modernization of China from the rhetoric of Chinese historians. Then applying the theory of exemplarity by Børge Bakken, parallels between modernization and soft power thinking are drawn. A literary review tackles international studies and a discourse analysis looks at Chinese publications on the soft power of China. Finally, the paper turns to the arguments of the necessities to produce a cultural safety system around the principle of ruling soft power, before constructing a two-level model for the dynamics of the Chinese cultural soft power discourse.

A History of Self-Reflection and the Challenges of Modernization

Wang (1997)³ raised the issue of the two competing perspectives on the study of Chinese society: the internal and external causes. The latter implying that during the modern era Chinese society remained stagnant before the Western interaction that brought along a positive influence towards modernization. The former implying that the domestic factors of China were mostly responsible for drastic changes. A central question has been: Which approach to follow in conducting research on China? By taking account of both extremes, Wang concludes that in most cases the external and internal intermingle and interact.

In building his argument, Wang clarifies the differences between Japan and China in responding to Western influence and modernization. His view is that, while Japan was eager to assimilate foreign culture and methods, China maintained a negative disposition towards all things foreign. Wang continues that the foreign-oriented mental state of Japan has been repeated multiple times in history, in contrast to China. During the nineteenth century while Japan

underwent the Meiji restoration, China, following defeat in the Opium Wars, put forward the slogan “Chinese learning for essential principles, western learning for practical applications” (zhong ti xi yong, 中体西用).⁴ The Chinese were left without other options: the technological advancement of the Western powers was so profound that the officials of the military brought forward the practical adaption of the Western techniques. As Fairbank (1942) and Qin (2009) indicate, this realization in itself broke the genealogy of Chinese intellectual culture. By the late nineteenth century, however, this road to modernization turned into a failure. The difficulties in merging ti, 体 (Chinese essentials) and yong, 用 (Western practicality) were clear from the offset to many elite Chinese. The contradictory goals and methods were not mutually compatible and thus destined to fail (Wang, 1997; Qin, 2009).

Generally, the period between 1840-1940 has been described as a “Century of Great Transformation” for China (Luo, 1997). During that time, China came into contact not only with the Western powers but also with itself. The relationship, on the one hand, between China and the international community and, on the other, the resultant self-awareness of China is central to this paper. This state of national mentality has been described by Chinese historians as “self-examination” (Luo, 1997), “self-consciousness” (Chen, 1995) and “self-reflection” (Qin, 2009). The first period of self-awareness deals with the aftermath of the above-mentioned Opium War, the second with the reforms between 1898 and the revolution of 1911, and the third with the New Culture Movement in 1919 crystallizing in the May Fourth Movement. Common for all three is a sense of inadequacy towards the international community. After the Opium War defeat, self-reflection dealt merely with technology, between 1898 and 1911 a political dimension was added and, lastly, the sense of inadequacy also spread to the cultural sphere with the New Culture Movement (Qin, 2009: 37-38). On the other hand, the Sinification of Marxism, the failure of communism as an economic ideology followed by the reforms could also be interpreted as periods of “self-reflection” – even though Chinese historians seem disinclined to do so. In any case, the recent relative success of China in the international arena is seen inside China as signifying an ending to the “Century of National Humiliation”, as for instance analyzed by Callahan (2010).

The present Chinese dilemmas of modernization should also be understood against this historical framework: the dualism between China and the international community – internal and

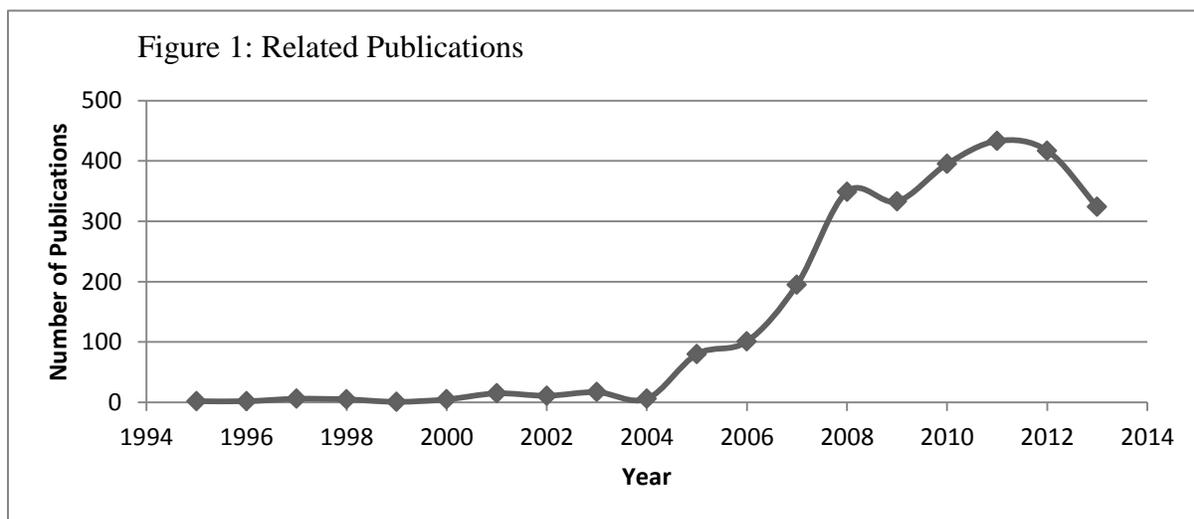
external factors. From a global perspective, the Western modernization project has identified itself with an ideological homogeneity originating from the colonial era, not accepting much relativity. Only recently have certain functional equivalents been admitted into the modern dimension due to undeniably successful economic results. One relevant case is China, which to date has been consistent in not accepting the dichotomy of Western modernization rhetoric – the self-acclaimed relationship between a successful market economy and democracy. Indeed, the discourse of modernity in the West has had a specific Euro-American touch; it is synonymous with the spreading of individual rights and a liberal capitalist market economy. But while recent modernization in China has meant economic reforms, no major political or ideological freedoms have been granted. It follows that the discourse of modernization has maintained a different angle to that in the West, namely market economy with social control through example.

Børge Bakken (2000, 2002)⁵ has argued about the specifically Chinese way of dealing with modernization. In the book *The Exemplary Society* (2000), he shows how, through exemplary norms, social order is maintained in the midst of rapid change. The 2002 article *Norms, values and Cynical Games with Party Ideology* moves from sociological to political handling in analyzing the ideological obstacles of the CCP during the market reforms. Common to both writings is the portrayal of the hardships of the PRC leadership in managing the modernization of China. The exemplary society, Bakken argues, is a society of perfect order based on human quality. It has roots in the past but a consciousness in the present to create a future utopia of harmony. This is essentially a system of control where the qualities of an individual become synonymous with state power.⁶

Similarly Bakken adduces the problems of the CCP. He claims that the loss of the “mandate of history” is not itself a major dilemma, but not connecting with the hearts and minds of the people might be problematic. This power of ideas is linked to the ethos of the society in which it operates: should the social fabric erode, so will the ideology. Bakken claims that the CCP’s links to wider Chinese society have fractured in two places: on the one hand, it is unconnected with any social movement as such and, on the other, it lacks charisma. Indeed it would seem that the Chinese elite are aware of the lack of charisma. Precisely here the problems of modernization and exemplary society connect with the idea of soft power, a connection Bakken could not make at the time. It links individual education with state charisma through positive exemplarity.

The modernization theory seems to indicate that political institutionalization will have been stimulated by economic development and social modernization. This leads to the conclusion that the institutionalization of China was hampered by the revolutionary founders and their Long March comrades (Shirk, 2002: 310). In general terms, the experiences of Communist political systems would predict that major post-revolutionary institutional changes do not occur as long as the first generation charismatic revolutionary leaders are in charge (alive). This is the reality in present-day Cuba; it would seem that reforms will only take place after the Castros. In Cuba, people adopted unofficial everyday strategies to survive, similar to the China of Bakken. The leadership after the Castros will have to have appeal and charisma to bring back the activities within the state sanctions. The present PRC leaders, on the other hand, as Bakken argues, have not only lost the mandate of heaven and the legitimization of Marxism, but they are also lacking revolutionary charisma. For this purpose, the eagerness of China towards soft power thinking produces a useful perspective for analysis. It would bring back the behavior of individuals within institutionalized state norms.

To this end, the soft power theory, as an external influence, was introduced in China during the 1990s. He Xiaodong (1992) and colleagues translated the book of Joseph Nye *Bound to Lead*. Wang Huning (1993) followed with an article entitled *The Culture as a National Power: Soft Power*, initiating Chinese soft power research. In spite of the good start, throughout the 1990s research on soft power remained marginal in China. Efforts were mostly dedicated to translating the writings of Nye. Only after the economic reforms and the introduction of



Source: the Journal and Newspaper Database of the Renmin University of China

“peaceful rise” in the 21st century did the trend turn towards particular research and construction of Chinese soft power.⁷ Eventually, the CCP had a major impact on promoting soft power research with General Secretary Hu Jintao’s famous report to the 17th CPC Congress in October 2007, which outlined national soft power goals and strategy. Figure 1 shows the results of a statistical search using the Journal and Newspaper Database of the Renmin University of China⁸, depicting the increase in numbers of soft power-related journal articles published in China since 1993 with a dramatic rise in 2006, no doubt related to the launch of the national soft power strategy by Hu Jintao in 2007. With this trajectory in academic interest, the idea of soft power has been transformed from an external to an internal factor within the Chinese modernization process. The next chapter continues this theme of duality by discussing the domestic and international elements in international literature.

The “Monotists” and “Dualists”

While the world remains culturally *Americana*, the end of the Cold War, global economic development and the spread of market economies have led to a more multipolar world and a relative decline of American hegemony. In this situation, the theory of soft power was developed. The father of the idea, Joseph Nye (1990a, 1990b, 1991, 2002), introduced the idea of the alluring resources of the US enabling it to set the political agenda.⁹ Nye (2004) further refined this to include Hollywood films and ideals of freedom and democracy as part of American cultural attractiveness (see also Vyas, 2011: 3). While focusing on the outward image in his discussion of soft power, Nye argued that the US should also pay attention to how it develops its soft power on the domestic front, and further, that successfully implementing it at home is even more important than abroad because other states pay attention to how it acts there (Nye, 2004).

Following the initial formulations of Nye, a body of social science literature has focused on the theory of soft power. Writers such as Mattern (2005), Heng (2010) and Vyas (2011) have contributed to the understanding of the power of attraction and how it relates to the more traditional coercive power. Typical of international literature on soft power, nonetheless, is a relatively narrow perspective. On the one hand, it has mainly dealt with Western understanding and terminology on global affairs and, on the other, it focuses solely on international relations. Following Nye, literature, although also concerned with domestic policies, sees the soft power development in them only as a platform for other nations to observe and thus in the end as

outwardly oriented. This is where the Chinese discourse differs from the Western. It clearly has a dualistic purpose - domestic and international.

Scholars who have published in western journals on the Chinese theory of soft power are increasing in numbers. Seminal works in analyzing Chinese discourse were done by Wuthnow (2008), Li (2008) and Hunter (2009). While Wuthnow (2008) and Li (2008) provided insight into the strategic understanding of Chinese analysts, Hunter (2009) was more interested in the aspects of the rise and the stated peace of China, and the commitment to it within the Chinese culture. According to these theorists, the soft power discourse in China can be roughly divided into three components: 1) The development of soft power is seen as critical in long-term strategic success and in gaining international respect, 2) China wants to become a de facto leader of the developing world using soft power, and 3) with soft power China aims to assure the international community of its peaceful rise.

Where Li (2008, 2009) made a sound argument on the use of soft power for the domestic purposes in advancing Chinese cultural competitiveness, Hunter (2008) has gone deeper into the cultural component explanation arguing that the soft power mentality has been a fundamental part of the historical military thinking of China.¹⁰ Hunter also seems to agree with Bakken (2000) on the exemplarity of moral leadership and links this with the idea of soft power. Wuthnow (2008), for his part, raises two fundamental questions regarding the Chinese discourse: how to combine the three different components of soft power of China and, regarding the competition, what are the concrete measures to counterbalance the US cultural influence? He is right in arguing that there exists a certain dualism in the three components. In gaining international respect, the marketing of China as a Confucian state is hampered by modern Western influence; and as a leader of the developing world, China associates itself with such states that are poorly marketable in the West, which does not help in creating confidence in its desire to be a responsible international player.

Following these seminal analyses, a rapidly growing body of recent Western publications has dealt with the Chinese vision of soft power. These can be divided into two: those who have come to share the findings of Li (2008, 2009) on the dualism of domestic and foreign aspects in the soft power thinking of China, and those who have not. In outlining this, the purpose is not to practice analytical criticism, but to underline the exercise of different angles, and at most, indicate lack of coherence.

In the group arguing for the sole international use of soft power belong scholars such as Li & Worm (2010), who argue for the potential of China to rise peacefully and expand the sources of soft power into six pillars: cultural attractiveness, political values, development model, international institutions, international image and economic temptation. Another study by Cho (2011) raises the issue that China, through reassurance of peaceful rise and participation in international institutions, would promote counter-norms that the study calls “China alternative”. In conceptualizing this, Cho names “defensive soft power”, meaning the policy of China to attract through assurance of peaceful rise, and “offensive soft power” to attract others to the “China alternative” through “no strings attached” deals.

Blanchard and Lu (2012), on the other hand, criticize the literature on China and soft power and argue for a more articulated approach in three aspects: the form, target and context. As it is understood here, they also call for a more precise methodology, which would also seem to neglect the dualistic basic principle of Li (2008, 2009) and fall onto the Nye platform. This is also true of Nordin (2012), who writes about the paradoxical nature of the 2010 Expo messages and interestingly draws a parallel between that and the way the rise of China can be seen as both a threat and an opportunity. Ding (2012) takes the poor human rights situation in China as a starting point and argues that it severely hampers its soft power. In doing this, however, he also follows Nye in depicting soft power as only a mediating force in international relations.

According to the rough literary divide proposed here, there are those who see dualism in the nature of Chinese soft power talk, and those who have adopted other forms. The examples of the former begin here with Cao (2011), who dwells on the formalities of discourse and draws socio-political meanings from the Chinese media while recognizing the difference between the instrumental formulation of Nye and Chinese domestic nation-building. He also makes a distinction in the latter between two components: Marxist-socialism and traditional culture, although maintaining that Marxism will one day be displaced by a broad-based popular indigenous value system. Barr (2012) approaches Chinese soft power rhetoric through branding. He explicitly argues that Chinese soft power deployment is as critical at home as it is abroad. Barr also brings up the agenda of Beijing for nation-building and legitimatization. Edney (2012), for his part, is interested in the Chinese propaganda system and the interaction between domestic and international politics. This is both his starting point and conclusion in regard to soft power. Liu (2012) would seem to argue that, due to the calls for soft power use in China, an ideological

crisis is emerging. No doubt he is right in asserting that the revolutionary culture is increasingly at odds with the economic developments, but he fundamentally differs in seeing the direction of the crises emerging from the soft power discourse. In any case, the domestic dimension of soft power is also for him unquestionable. Finally, no literary review dealing with the domestic dimension of the soft power of China would be complete without stressing the important contributions by Callahan (2010) and Callahan & Barabantseva ed. (2011). For Callahan, cultural identity and security intermingle with the importance of history in constructing the modern Chinese soft power idea.

In recent years, analysts in China have indeed come to adopt the concept of soft power and radically localized it to the Chinese intellectual environment. Soft power theory with “Chinese characteristics” has evolved into a concrete policy ambition for the CCP for both international and domestic purposes. The next chapter proposes a synthesis of the most recent elements in the Chinese academic soft power discourse. The development of soft power with Chinese characteristics is formulated based on a sentiment of rising cultural crises and a need for cultural security against a Western cultural threat through the soft power of culture.

The Necessity of a Cultural Safety System

An understanding of the multifaceted nature of the Chinese soft power rhetoric requires a brief look into the landscape of local terminology. The term soft power has been translated in various ways in Mandarin. The term “ruan shi-li, 软实力” is usually used to describe “soft power”, whereas “ruan quan-li, 软权力” translates into “soft authority”, “ruan li-liang, 软力量” into “soft strength”, and “ruan guo-li, 软国力” into “national soft power”. These different translations are variedly used in Chinese literature. However, ruan shi-li, 软实力 is more used in the context of cultural construction or strategy and has a more domestic angle. Ruan quan-li, 软权力, on the other hand, would seem to be used in an international power perspective, more in the spirit of the original theory of Nye. Different from this, and also relevant here, are the extended concepts “wen-hua ruan-shi-li, 文化软实力” which translates into “cultural soft power” and “guo-jia wen-hua ruan shi-li, 国家文化软实力” which is “national cultural soft power”.¹¹

As becomes clear through the linguistic complexes, it is indeed difficult to find any consensus in the rhetoric; it is scattered and multiple variations exist. Soft power has been extended to areas of regional society (Wang & Qin, 2011), business management (Sui, Guo & Sun, 2011), urban construction (Zhang, 2011), education (Jiang & Song, 2011) and many others. The scope of research has moved from translating the ideas of Nye towards analyzing, theorizing and constructing a Chinese soft power vision. The only common denominator for all Chinese visionaries remains a demand for a concept of soft power with Chinese characteristics. Guo (2012), for instance, recognizes the difference between national and international soft power in her article “From national to international soft power” (Cong guojia ruan shili dao guoji ruan quanli, 从国家软实力到国际软权力) where “ruan shi-li, 软实力” indicates the domestic and “ruan quan-li, 软权力” the international. Zhao, Li & Cai (2011), in particular, see the necessity in differentiating the soft power theory originating from the “American discourse”, and in enhancing the soft power of China by developing a theory with local traditions. They refer Liu (2006):

There might be a serious ambiguity and misunderstanding, if we continue to use Nye’s soft power definition and connotation as a value base on analysis of China’s power construction. Presently the theoretical point of China’s soft power construction is neither the traditional view of comprehensive national power, nor the western-style soft power theory but the soft power theory with Chinese characteristics. (Zhao, Li & Cai, 2011: 41. See also Liu, 2006)

The early stages of soft power research in China thus reveal two interconnected phases: firstly, a move towards Chinese formulations from the original idea of Nye and, secondly, a comparison between the soft power of the US and China. Regarding the latter, the views of Chinese scholars also differ significantly. Liu (2001), for instance, claims that soft power provides a new angle in researching the nature of American hegemony. According to him, the rapid expansion of US soft power after the Cold War promotes “Americanization” within the processes of globalization, changes the dynamics of power competition and raises historical challenges not only for developing countries but also for major Western nations. Wang (2007), on the other hand, argues that the major source of US soft power is its hard power, which is the strongest in the world. By combining these two, Wang claims, the US can fully exploit its resources to have the maximum

effect on other countries. American popular culture has had an enormous impact on the development of other cultures since the 20th century, and would thus be a major source of US soft power. Therefore, Wang concludes, the global expansion of American soft power is an important part of the contemporary soft power theory.

Wang (2013) also sees traditional Chinese culture being threatened by globalization and Western forces. He argues for more protective and proliferating measures for the national culture of China in the film and television industries, as it is “under attack by foreign cultures” (zhongguo chuantong wenhua zai wailai wenhua chongji xia, 中国传统文化在外来文化冲击下). Using the notion of “cultural imperialism” (wenhua diguo zhuyi, 文化帝国主义) he fears that through Hollywood, the Chinese may start to turn towards “American values” (meiguo de jiazhi guannian, 美国的价值观念). In conclusion Wang notes that the Chinese television and film industry has a long way to go to protect and proliferate the national Chinese culture. Zhao, Li & Cai (2012) summarize the opinion of Chinese scholars on US soft power by criticizing “American cultural hegemony” and proposing measures to respond in defense of “Chinese cultural security” (wenhua anquan, 文化安全). They also recognize a strategic need to strengthen the soft power of China (Zhao, Li & Cai, 2011: 39).

This strategic vision to safeguard domestic culture does not indeed identify the US as a sole threat. For some Chinese analysts, globalization, proliferation of market economy and modernization are perceived as belonging to, in general, western terminology. They see that in the West “modern” is “good” and “traditional” “bad”. Wu (2011) interprets “cultural homogenization” (wenhua shang de tong-zhi-hua, 文化上的同质化) followed by globalization causing “blurring of national cultural identity” (minzu de wenhua shenfen ye bian de mohu, 民族的文化身份也变得模糊) leading to “anxiety and crises” (jiaolu yu weiji, 焦虑与危机) for non-Western cultures, especially China. He sees globalization as bringing with it “foreign cultural hegemony” (wailai wenhua baquan, 外来文化霸权), “cultural colonialism” (wenhua zhimin, 文化殖民) and “general public westernization” (shehui dazhong xifang hua, 社会大众西方化). Looking back, the idea of cultural security stems from two seminal articles by Lin Hongyu (1999) and Rong Zhuchuan (1999). Following that, in a 2004 volume entitled *National Security Studies*, Liu Yuejin devoted a chapter to cultural security. Pan (2005) then dealt with the

relationship between present-day national security (*dangqian guojia anquan*, 当前国家安全) and culture. According to him, cultural security mainly refers to “political cultural security” (*zhengzhi wenhua anquan*, 政治文化安全) including “political values” (*zhengzhi jiazhi*, 政治价值) and “social management system” (*shehui guanli zhi*, 社会管理制). He also stressed that culture is not only a subdomain (*zi-yu*, 子域) of security, but an essential part of it; this threat may come from inside or outside a nation in the form of an “open challenge to government legitimacy” (*zhengfu hefa xing quanwei de gongkai tiaozhan*, 政府合法性权威的公开挑战), other “social conflict” (*shehui chongtu*, 社会冲突) or “civil war” (*neizhan*, 内战). These early writings recognize the need for cultural safety but do not provide any larger perspective. This task has been taken over by Shen, Liu & Ni (2011) in analyzing cultural safety by linking it with the idea of soft power. To them, cultural safety means security through national cohesion (*minzu ningjuli*, 民族凝聚力) while maintaining an intact ideology. They claim that the prosperity and decline of a nation would be dependent upon the rise and fall of the respective culture.¹²

National culture, they further argue, is the historic accumulation of national ethos as a specific “survival guide” of the nation. National culture is also the symbol and basis of national identity, and more, it is a source of strength for ethnic affinity and cohesion. Should there be no national culture, a country can lose its cultural soft power in competition with other countries. Again, if the character of national culture is not preserved in the pressures of globalization, a cultural crisis of a nation-state is inevitable. Therefore, upholding and defending cultural traditions should lead to more reliable national security. In this sense, they argue, cultural safety is factually tantamount to national sovereignty, and a sound cultural safety system or national cultural security (*minzu wenhua anquan*, 民族文化安全) should effectively guard the cultural soft power of a nation in the midst of globalization (Shen, Liu & Ni, 2011: 32-33).

It is also important for China, according to Shen, Liu & Ni (2011), to develop creative industries to uphold the “national character of culture”. The goal of this is to become a “source of strength” for cultural safety. Maintaining the national character of culture is seen as a basic condition for the culture development of a nation, and also the intrinsic motivation of “national survival”. Thus, they add, the Chinese must carry forward the “outstanding achievements of national culture”, and construct a “shared spiritual home” for the Chinese (Shen, Liu and Ni,

2011: 35-36). According to them, it is of highest importance for China to constantly adjust the structure of its cultural industry and form cultural industry groups.¹³

With this in mind, Li & Shi (2011) look at the inwards soft power projection of the ruling class, calling it domestic social management or soft power of the ruling class – “ruling soft power”. This means that, after gaining a ruling position, a class exposes members of society by mandatory means to dominant ideology, public opinion or cultural education to maintain the ruling status; to ensure status quo and the stable development of society. Li & Shi name three principles of the ruling soft power:

- 1) Only the ruling body can possess ruling soft power, no other individual, social organization, etc.
- 2) Ruling soft power is a humane social management repertoire, which is realized through such flexible methods as dominant ideology, cultural education or public opinion, while maintaining people orientation, in other words, people dependency.
- 3) The goal of ruling soft power is to advance the position of the ruling body by attracting members of society and obtaining widespread support.

(Li & Shi, 2011: 201)

The need for a “ruling soft power system” might stem from the need to create legitimacy for the current establishment of China. However, the perceived threat of cultural globalization and the recent ideological turnaround in economic thinking could also be seen as reasons why there exist concerns over developing social anomie or, as Wu (2011) calls it, a “national sense of apathy” (minzu yishi danmo, 民族意识淡漠). Lee (2011), for instance, is worried about the mental state of the Chinese people. He argues that, due to the transition of society, the mentality of some people is “getting gradually out of balance” (jian shiheng, 渐失衡), “the moral sense confusing” (daode yishi chuxian-mimang, 道德意识出现迷茫) and their “values distorted” (jiazhi quxiang fasheng niuqu, 价值取向发生扭曲). Shen, Liu & Ni (2011) also argue for a crisis in the Chinese “cultural identity” (renting jiaolu, 认同焦虑). They claim that cultural identity is an important basis for the Chinese nation state to maintain the “legitimacy” (hefa xing, 合法性) of its existence. If cultural identity is threatened, so is the existence of the country (Shen, Liu and Ni,

2012: 35). They also recognize two manifestations of this: 1) Some groups and people in China doubt traditional cultural values and the mainstream solutions offered to them by the CCP, 2) Western moral values constantly account for cultural markets in developing countries including China (Shen, Liu and Ni, 2012: 35).

Finally, visible in Chinese analysts' understanding of contemporary modernization is also a yearning for Marxism. Xiao (2013), for instance, depicts the events after Marxism as "drastic change" (su dong jubian, 苏东剧变) and adds that "people's thoughts were shocked" (ren de sixiang chansheng dongyao, 人的思想产生动摇) and "feelings for the future confused" (dui weilai de fa-zhan gandaο mimang, 对未来的发展感到迷茫). He believes that an understanding of Marxism has practical significance in order to keep a clear head and that the "strengthening of faith in communism is of crucial importance" (jianding gongchan zhuyi de xinnian youzhe zhi guan zhongyao de yiyi, 坚定共产主义的信念有着至关重要的意义) (Xiao, 2013: 1-2). This form of popularized Marxism is also present in one of the two models that are constructed in the final chapter of this paper. It will consist of the dynamics of the current self-reflection of modernization, placing cultural soft power at the center of the analysis.

A Soft Power Self-Reflection: the Dynamics

In explaining the circumstances of present-day Chinese soft power understanding, two models are created in this paper. Before constructing these, the arguments are summed up: 1) Chinese academics are localizing the originally Western idea of soft power both to domestic and foreign policy; 2) The localizing of soft power idea must be placed in a historical context of self-reflection, which explains the duality of Chinese socio-political change: the foreign and domestic influences; 3) The interplay between "western practicality" (yong, 用) and "Chinese essentials" (ti, 体) could not function because of contradictory goals and principles; 4) A peaceful international environment and stable domestic scene are necessities in relation to one another. Should one fail so will the other, which is the nature of the most recent stage of modernization of China and interplay with international society; 5) Cultural soft power (wenhua ruan shili, 文化软实力) is seen as a tool and filter to counter the differences between the Western influences towards China and Chinese influences towards international society.

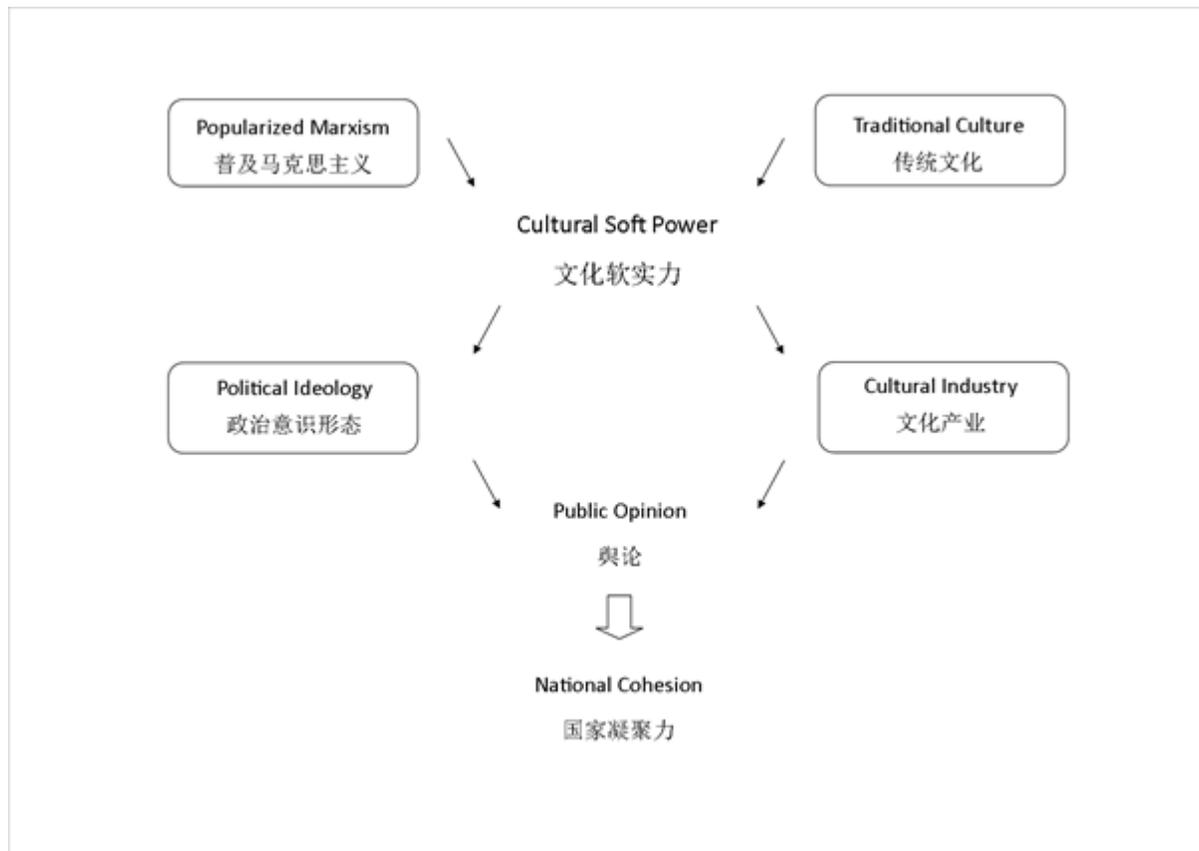


Figure 2: Cultural Soft Power in the Domestic Scene

Cultural soft power would seem to have two functions in the domestic scene of China as shown in Figure 2. Firstly, it shapes the cultural industry, whose primary function is also twofold: to produce cultural products and to produce profit. Cultural soft power would also seem to determine the political ideology of the PRC. Both the cultural industry and political ideology are being fed by images of traditional China. Figure 1 also explains the politico-cultural modernization of China in a single argumentation synthesis. In the model, the end result “national cohesion” is synonymous with stable domestic society and especially the legitimacy of the Communist Party. Feeding images of the traditional culture of China and popularized Marxism through a cultural soft power “filter”, the Party would seem to mold modern political ideology, influence cultural industry and generate positive public opinion. These then bring forth legitimacy for the Party and stability for the nation. Regarding the domestic scene, the popularized and mainstream twists of old Chinese thinking may or may not replace the need for civil society, democracy and human rights. To “influence with virtue” does, however, sound

undeniably fitting in the field of social management. In any case, when battling, and mostly losing, the censorship war against the free transference of knowledge, the PRC would seem to try to influence information in the direction of cohesion and national dignity.

It is argued here that to understand contemporary Chinese soft power rhetoric is to understand its past relation with itself vis-à-vis international society. The present vision of Chinese analysts is then modeled in Figure 3. To be able to create a stable domestic scene, China needs to modernize its economy and society through knowhow from the international community, but to achieve this it needs a conflict-free international scene that accepts Chinese domestic governance. Cultural soft power is then brought to “filter” the flow of information in

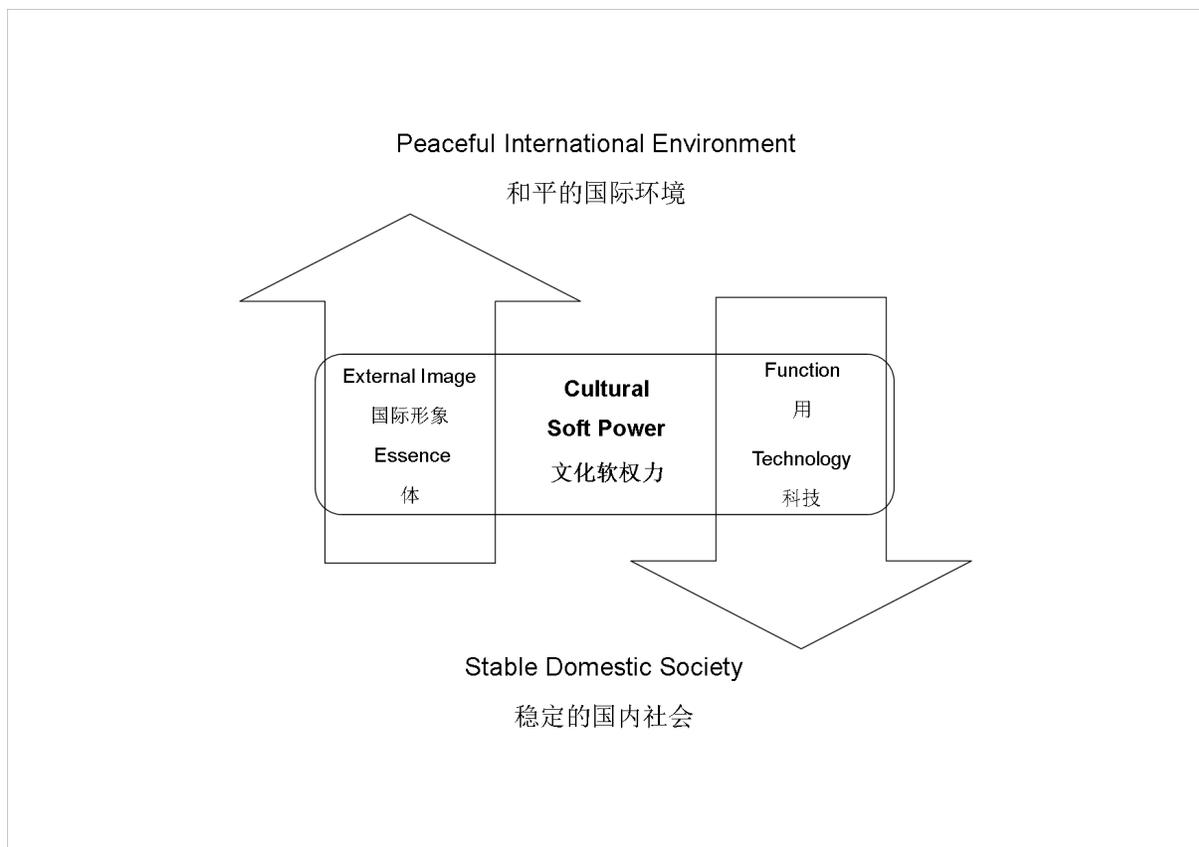


Figure 3: Cultural Soft Power in the International Scene

both directions using images of traditional China to offer an answer to the dualistic dilemma of present PRC government: legitimization in domestic politics and assurance of China’s peaceful and responsible reputation on the international scene.

Considering the cause and effect in this model, which is interpretive in nature, we can say that C1 (stable domestic society) through external image projection has the effect E1 (peaceful international environment), so $C1 \rightarrow E1$. Similarly C2 (peaceful international environment) has, through modernization, the effect E2 (stable domestic society), where $C2 \rightarrow E2$. In this way $C1 = E2$ and $C2 = E1$, making them interdependent. A necessary condition for $C1 = E2$, $C2 = E1$ is the cultural soft power intermediate that filters the flow of information. Without conceptualizing the domestic ruling of China, the crucial cooperation for modernization with the rest of the world cannot be understood.

Concluding Remarks

Chinese scholars appear to be divided into two camps on the issue of what constitutes the core of soft power. On the one hand, it is argued that cultural power is the core element and, on the other, it is asserted that the core would be political power. Based on this, a myriad of analyses have appeared. In fact, to understand the main driving force behind the scholarly ambition of China on soft power is to see it through localization; in the context of and based on Chinese reality.

This paper suggests that the practice of soft power has become a central interest for the Chinese analysts to tackle image problems internationally and cultural anaemia domestically. In contrast to the “monotists” in literature, this article verifies the dualistic findings of Wuthnow (2008), Li (2008) and Hunter (2009). Additionally the notion of cultural soft power is conceptualized through the need for cultural security in the Chinese discourse against the perceived cultural threat from the West. It would be simplistic to label the formulations of Chinese academia as “nonsense”, “naïve rhetoric” or indeed “propaganda”, but an understanding of the historical developments in international relations, Anglo-American cultural hegemony and the recent past of China will place them in a more analytical context.

A discourse for modernization was present in China from the Opium Wars to the May Fourth Movement. The current soft power enthusiasm could be seen as a legacy of this continuum, as another period of “self-reflection” – after the Chinese understanding of history. It takes form in the exemplarity of the state vis-à-vis the individual, as partly suggested by Bakken (2000, 2002), thus retaining the feudal submission to the central state. In declaring a crisis for present Chinese culture amid globalization, the discourse of cultural soft power also seeks

national salvation through cultural security. This, as noted by the “dualists” in literature, is best seen by the Chinese to be possible in a peaceful international environment.

While Chinese leaders remain selective in accepting liberal western ideas, Chinese analysts are also accepting no western academic theories at nominal value. They would seem to be utilizing a history-aware national mentality - of inadequacy. For China, it appears, history comes in the form of Western hegemony. As far as China is concerned, the end of the Second World War and the downfall of the Soviet Union both had a similar effect on international dynamics: the US emerged as the dominant power. The rectification of China, however, would seem not only to be geopolitical and indeed military, but also cultural.

Therefore typical to the intellectual soft power efforts of the Chinese scholars is the juxtaposition of China and the US. From the need to theoretically differentiate from the original, to the not-so-underlying contempt of the hypocritical attitudes of the West, Chinese elite thinkers could be seen as showing feelings of uncertainty in the face of present and looming competition. The US involvement in the Pacific and the containment of China are the geo-political side of the coin. The difference between the soft power of the US and China, in the end is that, where the former is based on attraction that was thought to represent an original motivation of the people, the latter is more a calculated plan developed to function as a policy tool. This is not to say that the cultural soft power of China would not be based on original motivation of the people, and that the soft power theories of the US are not aimed at policy planning. In any case, Chinese soft power should be best viewed as a security issue. Future research should focus on the policy implications of cultural soft power both in PRC domestic and foreign politics – not forgetting that the outward soft power projection of any nation is symbolic and abstract in nature and includes a conscious or unconscious self-reflection.

Notes

¹ 1st International Conference of National Soft Power 2011 (ICNSP), Soft Power Innovation and Development in Today's China, Jinan, China, 22-25 October 2011. The presenters in the conference represented more than twenty universities and research institutes in China. The conference publication was edited by Konglai Zhu and Henry Zhang and published in the English language by the Aussino Academic Publishing House. Although the conference was dubbed “international” and published in English, here it is considered as belonging to the Chinese discourse.

² Although this sample data can be considered as representative of the current academic discourse in China, the influence of the discourse participants in the actual foreign policy decisions remains ambiguous. A similar disclaimer can be found in Joel Wuthnow (2008) “The Concept of Soft Power in China’s Strategic Discourse”.

³ Wang Xi acted at the time as Professor of History and Economics at the Fudan University, China.

⁴ In Mandarin 体 consists of two elements, from a feudal, totalitarian political system and that part of Confucian philosophy that serves such a system. 用 on the other hand, here refers to western science and technology. 体 was the goal and 用 the method to serve 体. At the time, amid Western influence, this slogan served a compromise purpose. The advocates of traditional China could live with it because it maintained 体, and the ones for modernization could accept it because it acknowledged western techniques (Wang, 1997: 13).

⁵ Børge Bakken acted at the time as Senior Researcher at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS).

⁶ Important in his analysis, however, is the notion of individual action superseding cultural systems of control. Culture should be understood as a “repertoire of possibilities” or “setting the agenda” of the socialized agency. Individuals have “a feel for the game” and create “strategies” to overcome the forces of culture.

⁷ See Zhao, Li & Cai (2012) for a review on the history of soft power research in China.

⁸ Zhongguo renmin daxue fuying baokan ziliao shujuku.

⁹ He acted at the time as dean for the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and the Assistant Secretary of State in the Clinton administration. As a formidable political figure in the US, and the American interests in mind, he obviously directed the idea for the US.

¹⁰ Hunter refers to the Art of War by Sunzi (Hunter, 2008: 378).

¹¹ Additionally in Chinese literature there are also such extensions as “political soft power” (zheng-zhi ruan shi-li, 政治软实力), “military soft power” (jun-shi ruan shi-li, 军事软实力), “soft power of thinking” (si-wei ruan shi-li, 思维软实力) and “meal soft power” (zhong-can ye shi ruan shi-li, 中餐也是软实力).

¹² As an analog, they mention the Jewish ideology of returning home to Israel after times of hardship and exile. The Zionist power would stem from the Jewish national spirit and culture, the Bible functioning as a cultural carrier.

¹³ Recent years have seen some development: in 2010, the State Council decided to accelerate the integration of radio, television and internet to break down barriers in the media industry (Shen, Liu & Ni, 2012: 35).

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