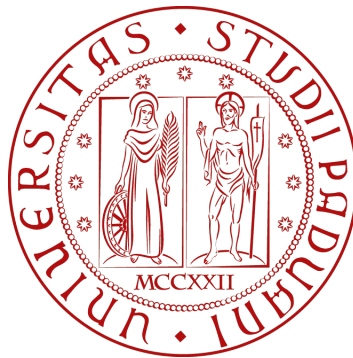


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A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS OF CHINA'S SOFT POWER IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHEAST ASIA

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“Power is also like love, easier to experience than
to define or measure, but no less real for that.”

— Joseph Samuel Nye, Jr.

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, China has undergone a remarkable transformation, emerging as a significant global player not only in terms of economic power but also in terms of growing cultural influence. Central to this transformation is China's mastery of what Joseph Samuel Nye Jr. called "soft power". This concept, which emphasizes the ability to shape priorities through attraction rather than coercion, has become a cornerstone of China's foreign policy strategy. This study embarks on a comprehensive exploration of China's soft power dynamics in contemporary East Asia. Its main objective is to shed light on China's strategic deployment of soft power tools in the region, thereby shedding light on the broader question of how states use non-coercive measures to achieve their foreign policy goals.

To begin researching this issue, it is first necessary to grasp the conceptual framework of soft power in international relations. Soft power, as defined by Nye, revolves around the ability to influence others through culture, political values, and foreign policy rather than through military or economic means. However, while soft power offers significant advantages in shaping perceptions and attracting hearts and minds, it also comes with limitations and challenges, including the need for credibility, and the possibility of backlash. Focusing on China, the study conducts a meticulous analysis of various aspects of the country's soft power strategy. This includes looking at cultural initiatives like Confucius Institutes, economic outreach through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, and public diplomacy efforts to improve the global image of this country. In addition, the study delves into China's media campaigns, which play an important role in disseminating stories and shaping public opinion both domestically and internationally.

Using a case study approach, Vietnam serves as an illustrative example to critically evaluate the effectiveness of China's soft power strategies. Vietnam, with its historical ties and geographic proximity to China, provides fertile ground to assess how China's soft power initiatives are impacting the region, and the influence perceptions as well as power dynamics of the region. Through an in-depth analysis of China's engagement with Vietnam across various soft power dimensions, this study aims to provide insights into the nuances of China's soft power strategy, and its impact on regional geopolitics.

Keywords: Soft Power, China in East Asia, Belt and Road Initiative, Southeast Asia, Vietnam.

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Introduction

Within the intricate and multifaceted landscape of East and Southeast Asia, China's soft power strategies emerge as pivotal drivers of regional dynamics. Drawing upon its rich cultural heritage, formidable economic strength, and adept diplomatic maneuvers, China endeavors to mold the narratives and foster cooperative relationships with its neighboring nations. This strategic endeavor is not merely confined to the projection of economic influence but encompasses a comprehensive effort to shape perceptions, ideologies, and even identities across the region.

Despite China's concerted efforts, the effectiveness of its soft power initiatives encounters formidable obstacles, as exemplified by the intricate case study of Vietnam. Within this historical and geopolitical context, territorial disputes and deep-seated historical animosities loom large, casting a shadow over China's endeavors to exert soft power influence. The unresolved territorial disputes in the South China Sea, for instance, serve as a persistent source of tension, complicating diplomatic relations and impeding the realization of mutual cooperation envisioned by China's soft power outreach. Moreover, the historical legacy of colonialism and regional power struggles further complicates China's soft power calculus, as perceptions of China's intentions are often colored by historical grievances and competing national narratives. The case study of Vietnam underscores the nuanced interplay between historical memory, geopolitical dynamics, and soft power projection, illustrating how deeply entrenched regional tensions can undermine even the most meticulously crafted soft power initiatives.

In seeking to unravel the complexities of soft power dynamics within East and Southeast Asia, this thesis endeavors to go beyond surface-level analyses and delve into the underlying intricacies of regional power dynamics. Through a comprehensive survey conducted to assess the impact of China's soft power initiatives, this research illuminates the challenges and limitations that China confronts in its quest for regional influence. By interrogating the interplay between historical legacies, territorial disputes, and soft power dynamics, this study provides valuable insights into the evolving contours of regional geopolitics and the intricate dance of power and influence in East and Southeast Asia.

1. Research Questions

This master's thesis aims to investigate the complex dynamics of China's soft power strategy in East and Southeast Asia, posing several important research questions to shed light on the complexity of power dynamics in regional forces, and China's role in them.

Initially, it seeks to explore the theoretical underpinnings of soft power and its operations in the field of international relations, providing a foundational understanding of the significance

and applicability of the concept with the main question "What are the theoretical underpinnings of soft power and how does it operate within the realm of international relations?". Understanding the theoretical framework is important because it provides insight into the mechanisms through which states exert influence and shape perceptions on the international stage.

How does China strategically employ soft power instruments in East and Southeast Asia to shape regional narratives and cultivate relationships with neighboring countries?

The study delves into how China strategically deploys soft power tools in the region to shape regional narratives and cultivate relationships with neighboring countries. This investigation is important for understanding China's broader foreign policy goals and its approach to regional engagement.

What are the key components of China's soft power strategy, including cultural diplomacy, economic partnerships, public diplomacy, and media campaigns?

The author examines the key components of China's soft power strategy, including cultural diplomacy, economic partnerships, public diplomacy, and media campaigns, shedding light on the diverse tactics China uses to exert influence. Understanding these components is essential to understanding the multifaceted nature of China's soft power approach and its implications for regional dynamics.

Does China face any challenges when projecting soft power in the region? Vietnam is a country very close to China geographically and culturally, China has taken full advantage of this and created profound impacts on Vietnam. Along with a rich history of diplomacy between or countries, what achievements has China made in this Southeast Asian country?

China's projection of soft power in its neighboring regions, particularly Southeast Asia, raises significant questions about the efficacy of its strategies and the challenges it encounters in doing so. Among its neighboring countries, Vietnam emerges as a particularly relevant case study due to its close geographical and cultural proximity to China. Over the years, China has leveraged these factors to exert a profound influence on Vietnam, shaping its cultural landscape and economic ties. Against the backdrop of a longstanding history of diplomatic relations between the two nations, it becomes pertinent to examine the achievements China has attained in Vietnam. By exploring these dynamics, we can gain insights into the complexities of China's soft power projection efforts in the region and the implications for both countries' bilateral relations.

2. Research Methodology

The thesis will use many different methods. The first method is the Document Research Method. This is the method mainly used in collecting and analyzing documents related to the

topic, including premise scientific works, and documents related to the theory of soft power and physical power. From there, an outline is built and serves as a basis for the next stages of research. Another very useful method for the research topic is the Analysis - Synthesis Method. This method is used to analyze, evaluate, and synthesize research results to point out the effectiveness, limitations, trends, and trends in China's deployment of soft power. Methods such as Qualitative and Quantitative will be used in in-depth interviews and surveys to examine the effectiveness of China's soft power in different regions. And last but not least, the Case Study method: Choosing Vietnam as a specific case study to more clearly illustrate the research issue "China's soft power and strategy to enhance soft power".

Quantitative methods are used to analyze the reactions and attitudes of Vietnamese people affected by China's soft power. From there, we can draw true or false conclusions about the hypothesis that China's influence is positive or negative. In this step, the focus is placed on the social media and mass media attitudes of the affected countries towards the values that China brings. Through analyzing articles and interview videos on social networks, the number of people who accept Chinese values comes to the most appropriate conclusion.

Several theories are used as the basis for the analysis. The first theory is the Rational behavior model. Based on this model, the cause of action of people and countries is that they have a desire/interest (desire/interest) and perception of how to pursue the want/interest environment in the environment through the following steps: (i) the state has a certain interest, (ii) the state perceives how that interest can be achieved in the international political environment, and (iii) the country has a policy to pursue that interest (Herbert A. Simon, 1955). The study uses the above 3-step rational behavior model as the basis to analyze soft power as an interest that China always pursues and how China deploys to achieve that benefit.

The second important theory is the Two-step flow theory. The two-step model says that most people are not directly influenced by mass media, and instead form their opinions based on opinion leaders who interpret media messages and put them into context. Opinion leaders are those initially exposed to a specific media content, and who interpret it based on their own opinion. They then begin to infiltrate these opinions through the general public who become "opinion followers" (Baran, Stanley J.; Davis, Dennis K, 2014). The study is based on the two-step flow theory in the media to analyze the effectiveness of using KOLs, and famous people in the promotion of Chinese movies.

The next theory used is the Agenda Setting Theory. This theory hypothesizes that the media can translate the contents of the news agenda into the agenda of society, and that the media not only tell the public about events but and let the public know what they think about it. This theory focuses on describing the strong influence of the media in establishing the importance of information sent to the public. The mass media may not directly generate public opinion, but it can determine the agenda-setting for public opinion. Bernard Cohen (1963) discovered

this when he wrote: the press may not always be successful at telling people what to think, but it is extremely successful at telling everyone who knows what to think about. According to this theory, communication leaders and managers need to pay special attention to the participation of experts in different fields to be able to proactively define the agenda with a system of content topics for public opinion.

Another important theory is Framing Theory. This theory suggests that the media affects public opinion/attitudes and behavior, by 'framing' people's perception of certain issues. By choosing some facts, and then making them more prominent through media coverage, gradually forming in the viewer's mind about a certain issue especially. According to the world's leading media researcher James Tankard, "framing" in communication is the intentional use of details (selection/emphasis/exclusion or construction) when presenting news, allowing viewers to decode the news the way the media wants it to (Severin, W.J, & Tankard, J. W, 2001).

To evaluate the importance of soft power strategy for China and its people, the first thing to look at is the policy coverage within mainland China itself. Can the policy be expressed in all aspects such as movies, culture, and education, or not? Is the government strong enough to invest? Will the public actively spread the policy? First, it can be identified as the basis for the application of this policy as a foreign policy.

3. Structure

Chapter 1 establishes the theoretical groundwork by elucidating the concept of soft power, discerning its interplay with hard power, and elucidating its salience within the realm of international relations. In tandem, an exploration of communication theories is undertaken to underscore the pivotal role of media and diplomacy in shaping the contours of soft power.

Chapter 2 transits toward meticulous scrutiny of China's soft power apparatus, providing an encompassing overview of its strategic initiatives across cultural, economic, and public diplomacy domains. The chapter scrutinizes media campaigns as integral components contributing to the construction and projection of China's national image. Specialized focus is afforded to the "Peaceful Rise" policy and diplomatic overtures during the COVID-19 pandemic, thereby affording nuanced insights into the evolutionary trajectories of China's soft power strategies.

Chapter 3 refines the inquiry by delving into the regional implications of China's soft power, with specific attention directed towards East Asia. Herein, China's role as a cultural influencer is explored, particularly through an examination of the impact of its cinematic productions on the cultural tapestry of East Asia. The analysis extends to a deconstruction of developmental policies underpinning China's film industry and an evaluation of the efficaciousness of Chinese films in augmenting the nation's soft power, particularly within the diverse sociocultural milieu of Asia.

Chapter 4 amplifies the research paradigm through a methodically conducted case study, centering on Vietnam as an illustrative microcosm. This affords a nuanced lens through which to discern the specific manifestations of China's soft power dynamics within a distinct East Asian milieu. Analyzing how territorial disputes and historical legacies influence the success of China's soft power efforts, as illustrated in the case study of Vietnam, provides insights valuable insights into the complexity of regional dynamics and the interaction between historical grievances and present-day geopolitics. Grasping these dynamics is critical for policymakers and scholars to navigate the complexities of regional relationships effectively.

Chapter 1: What is Soft Power? Defining a Political Concept

1. The General Theory of Soft Power

1.1 The concept of "Soft Power"

Although soft power has been widely used by countries in international relations, no researcher has previously studied it in depth to come up with the concept of soft power. It was not until 1990 that Harvard University Professor Joseph S. Nye first introduced the concept of "Soft Power" in the book *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* and in the article *Soft Power* published in *Foreign Policy Magazine*. In April 2004, a new work by Joseph Nye was released titled *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, making the world discuss heated discussions. Since then, the trend of researching and applying soft power has been increasingly widely developed worldwide.

The concept of soft power was first known in international relations in addition to the traditional concept of hard power, which changed the approach to modern international relations and brought the name of Professor Joseph Nye into history.

In the history of international relations, besides the use of "Hard Power" which is considered the main and traditional measure, countries have also known how to use "Soft Power". In particular, great powers often use "soft power" to achieve the goal of enslaving and binding other countries within their circle of influence. Today, in the context of the trend of peace, cooperation, and globalization becoming the main flow of international relations, the use of "hard power" is no longer the optimal choice for countries. "Soft power" is given more attention and emphasis, not only because it is consistent with the trend of the times, but also because of its "soft power" nature, which makes it less expensive to achieve its goals.

First of all, this is a concept in politics, first mentioned in 1973 in the book *"Power and Wealth: The Political Economy of International Power"* by scholar Klaus Knorr. Then, according to Professor Joseph S. Nye: "Soft power is the ability to get others to want what you want, so they will do it voluntarily without being coerced or bribed." (Joseph S.Nye Jr, 1990). In 1999, he introduced a more specific concept: "Soft power is the ideal result achieved through cultural and ideological appeal, not the coercive power of a country, which can make another person believe in following you, or believe in the behavioral standards or regime you have set to act according to your ideas. To a very large extent, soft power relies on the persuasiveness of information." (Joseph S.Nye Jr, 1999).

In his work *"Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics"*, he asserted: "Soft power is the ability to achieve desired things through attraction rather than coercion or bribes. created from the attractiveness of a country through its culture, political ideologies and policies. When

a country's policies are recognized by other countries as reasonable, that country's soft power is enhanced" (Joseph S. Nye Jr, 2004).

After Joseph S. Nye, many scholars have paid attention to research and introduced a number of other concepts about soft power. According to Kurlantzick: "Soft power is the ability of one country to persuade and influence another country not through threats or coercion but through the appeal of society, values, culture, and institutions of that country. This appeal can be communicated through many means, including popular culture, public and personal diplomacy, national leaders' participation in multinational organizations, and international forums, foreign economic activity, and the gravity of a strong economy" (Joshua Kurlantzick, 2005). Another definition says: "Soft power is the ability to encourage others to do what you want them to do through their own choices" (Harvard Business Essential, 2005).

Thus, simply defined, soft power is power based on invisible and indirect influences such as culture, values, and ideology. The core of soft power is attraction, anything that creates attraction for others that makes others believe and follow, creates power (Vu Duong Huan, 2010).

1.2. Soft Power and Hard Power

Within the scope of power, today people often mention two concepts that are closely related to each other, which are "hard power" and "soft power". Hard power is considered material power, including economic, financial, military, scientific and technological potential, population, etc. Soft power is immaterial power, institutional power. However, the above distinction is only relative, for example, economic power can also be soft power when attracting other countries with its prosperity without using any measures, embargo or economic sanctions.

Hard power is often used by national governments to coerce or bribe other countries, while soft power is more about persuading other countries to do their will voluntarily. According to Joseph Nye, hard power is exercised mainly by threats and bribes (which are intuitively compared to "sticks" and "carrots") while soft power is the ability to achieve what you want, through attraction and attraction to others without using force or threats. Also according to Joseph Nye, soft power includes three elements: national culture, national value system and national policy (Hoang Minh Loi, 2013). In the history of international relations, hard power has been used by national governments as a key measure and, in many cases, has brought great effectiveness. The saying "Truth belongs to the strong" partly speaks to the power of hard power. However, that does not mean that the history of international relations is only about hard power. Reality shows that many countries have used soft power very effectively, especially in foreign policy. Today the world's political and social situation has changed a lot. Countries are aiming at the goals of globalization, peace, cooperation, and development, and the trend of "dialogue" instead of the trend of "confrontation". In modern society, interdependence between countries is a prominent feature. In such a context, soft power is

increasingly utilized by governments. Even countries that are very strong in hard power such as the US, Russia, China, and Japan are also very aware of the power of soft power.

Hard power and soft power are related. They are two aspects that represent a person's ability to achieve goals by influencing the behavior of others. Hard power is an external influence on the objects of power, so the costs of using and maintaining hard power are often high and pose the potential risk of opposition. Meanwhile, soft power lies in persuasion, it affects the objects of power, causing cognitive and behavioral changes to take place from within. Persuasion to create trust and confidence is considered to create legitimacy. Therefore, hard power and soft power have an impact and have the ability to reinforce each other.

Hard power and soft power sometimes reinforce and sometimes hinder each other. A country that wants public support is often reluctant to use hard power when necessary, But a country that relies on its power without paying attention to its soft power will often encounter confrontation when using hard power. No country wants to be manipulated, even by soft power (Joseph S. Nye Jr, 2004).

1.3. Soft power in international relations

1.3.1 Characteristics of soft power in international relations

Persuasiveness

A country's soft power is partly demonstrated by its ability to persuade other countries to respect and follow its views and values. If a country can practice values that the majority of other countries accept, it will be easier for that country to gain a leadership position.

Culture has a wide influence

Culture is a unique feature of a nation, helping to distinguish one nation from another, ranging from sophisticated modern products to beliefs, customs, practices, lifestyle and labor. Cultural differences are one of the main reasons why countries approach problems and desire different benefits. The popularity and acceptance of a country's culture is therefore a key source of soft power (Dao Minh Hong - Le Hong Hiep , 2013).

When a country's culture is widely used in other countries, it unintentionally creates a certain influence on those countries thanks to similarities in society. And cultural influences, no matter how small, are soft power.

State policy is legal, ethical, and fully competent

To become a country with influential soft power, it needs to ensure two factors: being reasonable to other countries and gaining trust from the international community. These are all elements of strength that cannot be measured but are the most important. A state's policies include domestic policies applied to national management and foreign policies applied in

relations with other subjects in international relations. A policy that is legal, ethical, and competent is a very important factor in convincing and building the trust of others in the government in particular and the country in general, helping the country to be perceived by the community as trustworthy, honest, and respectful of other countries' concerns. In specific cases. The community will easily accept and support national actions that stem from a policy that has been recognized as legal, ethical, and authoritative.

The ability to create or join institutions and draft rules that regulate the behavior of actors in international relations

If a country has the ability and in fact can set the rules regulating its international activities in accordance with its society and laws, that country will have less need to change itself and its behavior. Its actions will easily appear legitimate in the eyes of other countries. Furthermore, international organizations and forums are suitable places for a country to speak up and promote its reputation. Position in an organization gives a state some degree of formal power. This position often comes with a title, a set of responsibilities, and a certain level of authority to act and control specific resources. In other words, these factors give the state a legitimate authority to act. This is important when real power comes from the authority to act and control resources that others want or need. Besides the aspect of creating authority, international institutions are also a means for countries to establish relations with other international relations subjects, thereby creating an informal power, originating from the attachment and mutual cohesion between members in the same organization.

1.3.2 The role of soft power in international relations

Firstly, soft power creates the ability to gather and gather forces, solidarity, unity, and consensus, and create national spirit because soft power itself has its own value, internal strength, and sensibility. The core values that a country's culture builds and expresses often have strong cohesion and attraction, becoming a spiritual "soil" that nurtures noble and humane values. That internal strength will create the attraction and seduction of soft power. Spiritual strength is the foundation, and catalyst, creating national cohesion and strong national internal strength.

Secondly, soft power is an element that constitutes national comprehensive power. In the document of the 17th Congress of the Communist Party of China, it was first affirmed that soft power is an important component of national comprehensive strength, as well as the country's international competitiveness. History shows that developed countries, such as the US, France, Germany, the UK, Italy, etc. in the 20th century pioneered and strongly developed diplomatic activities to enhance soft power and support for military power and economic power. Currently, many countries around the world pay more attention to deploying soft power in international relations as a basic way to enhance national synergy (Nguyen Hoa, 2023).

Moreover, soft power contributes to establishing a country's position and influence in the world. It can be seen that the measure of a country's strength is not only its national capacity but also its influence. What is the country's role and influence on the overall development of the region and the world; Does that country have the ability to attract, attract, create a spillover effect, gain recognition, win hearts, and win "people's hearts" beyond national borders or not; The ability to contribute to policies, the ability to build mechanisms and rules that contribute to international values and standards, etc. depends in no small part on the role of soft power.

Last but not least, soft power contributes to improving national competitiveness. In the context of the strong impact of the current information revolution, the "competition" in information and communication power (soft power) will contribute to the comparative balance of power between countries in the world. National and transnational mass media, and global information networks, notably television and cinema, have a strong impact on the psychology, worldview, and political views of all people around the world.

1.4. Limitations of soft power

Developing Soft Power Approaches Is Complex (Margaret Seymour, 2020)

Soft power approaches are targeted toward human beings with all their individualistic complexity. With hard power approaches, planners are provided with straightforward intermediate targets, buildings, bomb depots, and bank accounts. Concrete in Iraq is more or less the same as it is on bombing ranges in the United States and thus reacts similarly to various firing solutions. On the contrary, preferences, beliefs, and societal norms are influenced by any number of factors, meaning the residents of a village outside of Nairobi are likely to react very differently to the same messaging as suburban dwellers outside of Chicago. This dynamism necessitates a great deal of expertise, interagency coordination, and cross-disciplinary approaches.

Take the Shared Values Initiative (SVI), a soft power campaign designed to increase pro-American sentiments across the Muslim world in late 2002. Led by advertising executive Charlotte Beers, the idea was to show Muslims abroad that Islam and American culture were not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually supporting. In her development of a complex campaign aimed to "sell" the United States abroad, Undersecretary Beers failed to sell the concept to U.S. diplomats despite support from then-Secretary of State Colin Powell. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, policymakers and the public were seeking straightforward, swift solutions, not complex and time-consuming public opinion initiatives. Another part of this challenge stemmed from a culture throughout the Department of State that advertising work was both ineffective and less noble than the esteemed profession of diplomacy, often equating advertising to propaganda. "You can't sell Uncle Sam like you sell Uncle Ben's," was a common critique—a critique that alludes to the complexity of soft power campaigns while also dismissing an interdisciplinary approach that this very complexity requires.

SVI was canceled after its initial run and largely considered a failure by its critics. Charlotte Beers departed shortly after the campaign was canceled, citing health reasons. Champions of the policy argue it was never truly given a chance and was canceled prematurely, in part because of the second flaw of soft power.

Soft power takes a long time to take effect

Because of the above complexity, soft power needs time to calculate its moves. And influencing others through soft power alone takes a long time.

Difficulty in measuring success

Soft power is difficult to quantify and therefore difficult to measure successfully. Hard power, which focuses more on measurable resources (money, soldiers, bullets), is a simple counting game and the outcome is also win or lose. Soft power aims to change attitudes, which is difficult to measure.

Raising the issue of efficiency

Soft power is the process of exerting influence in a peaceful way, so it does not have the same power and deterrence as hard power. Furthermore, soft power does not have an imperative or mandatory nature, therefore, "whether or not one is persuaded or attracted is not entirely decided by the subject using soft power, but depends very much on the subject" much depends on the recipient (Dao Minh Hong - Le Hong Hiep, 2013). Therefore, not every country can use soft power effectively.

Affected countries may lose their own identity

Soft power is using negotiation tools, culture, national values, and policies to create impact. So the affected country will likely be influenced by other countries in terms of culture and national values. Especially in the context of globalization, communities and countries tend to learn from each other, pursuing the same outstanding things at the risk of losing their own identities and traditional identities.

2. Communication Theories

2.1. Agenda-Setting Theory

This theory hypothesizes that the media have the ability to translate the content of the news program into the social agenda and that the media not only tells the public about events but also lets the public know what they think about it. This theory focuses on describing the strong influence of the media in establishing the importance of information sent to the public. Mass media may not directly create public opinion, but it has the ability to determine the agenda for public opinion. Bernard Cohen (1963) discovered this when he wrote: the press may not always succeed in telling people what to think, but the press is extremely successful in telling people

what to think. someone who knows what to think about. According to this theory, media leaders and managers need to pay special attention to the participation of experts in different fields to proactively determine the agenda with a system of content topics for public opinion.¹

Another explanation of agenda setting is as follows: When selecting and displaying news, editors, newsroom staff, etc. play an important role in shaping opinions. Readers not only learn information but also recognize the importance of information through the impact of media such as method, duration, repetition frequency, posting location, etc.

2.2. Framing Theory

This theory suggests that the media influences public opinion/attitudes and behavior, by “framing” people's perceptions of certain issues. By choosing some facts, and then making them more prominent through media coverage, a particular issue is gradually formed in the minds of viewers. According to the world's leading communication researcher James Tankard, "framing" in communication is the intentional use of details (selection/emphasis/exclusion or construction) when presenting news, allowing viewers to decode the news the way the media wants (Severin, W.J, & Tankard, J. W, 2001).

2.3. Two Step Flow Theory

This theory is also known as the Opinion Leader Theory and Sociological Theory of Public Opinion. Step one in the theory is that the message is transmitted to an opinion leader, that is, a person who is well-informed has specialized knowledge, and has the prestige and power to influence the opinions of others, and step two is that the message is transmitted from opinion leaders to others to form public opinion (Katz, 1957). Empirical studies according to this theory show that an opinion leader is a person who is well-informed and has a social position in a certain community while other members are not well-informed and often listen to the leader's opinion. This theory also finds that leaders have a stronger influence than the media because their opinions are transmitted in personal communication in a reliable, flexible, and aimless way. Thus, according to the two-step communication theory, to create and direct public opinion, official communication, and leader communication should not compete, contradict or confront each other, but should complement each other. According to this theory, media leadership is not limited to media systems such as radio, television, newspapers, and publishing houses. Special attention should be paid to creating and attracting participation in communication to guide public opinion from public opinion "leaders" in social communities

¹ Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities, June 13, 2019, original language: Vietnamese, translated. Access: <http://vienkxhnhv.vinhuni.edu.vn/sinh-vien/seo/cac-ly-thuyet-truyen-thong-ve-du-luan-xa-hoi-and-van-dung-in-nghien-cuu-travel-luan-xa-hoi-vung-dan-toc-thieu-so-92553>, accessed on December 1, 2023.

from villages, hamlets, and residential groups to agencies, and units, from government organizations to non-governmental organizations.

Chapter 2: China's soft power

1. Overview of China's soft power

Over the past decade, China has increasingly asserted its role and position in international politics thanks to its economic and military rise. Besides hard power, which China has long focused on, soft power in recent years has been considered by China as an important tool in increasing its influence worldwide.

Since the term “soft power” appeared in the early 90s of the 20th century, Chinese scholars of international relations and China's diplomacy have conducted comprehensive research and discussion on its definition. Its meaning, origin, characteristics, elements, levels, classification, and effects, although previously Chinese leaders often did not promote what they considered "Western concepts".

Before the concept of "soft power" was published, China had already affirmed its hard power in building the country. However, when the "Tiananmen" incident occurred and the consequences it left behind, Chinese leaders had to reconsider the abuse of hard power in governing the country. Therefore, when "soft power" was introduced, in 1998, a scholar named Wang Huning first raised the question about this in China and opened the suggestion to Beijing that "if A country has an admirable culture and ideology, other countries will tend to follow it, it does not need to use expensive and ineffective hard power" (Tam An, 2020).

At the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, soft power was officially adopted as a political principle. Hu Jintao had called for a renewal of socialist cultural initiatives, stimulating the nation's cultural creativity and making culture an important element of China's soft power.

In fact, soft power has quickly served China's influence strategy, which is a dual goal. On the one hand, it is necessary to use soft power to acquire the attributes of a complete great power: “China's rise depends not only on hard power but also on soft power.”

Second, soft power can support the establishment of a “favorable set of environments” for the rise of Chinese power: an international, stable, peaceful, and cooperative environment; creating conditions for the development and expansion of influence of the Chinese Communist Party (Tam An, 2020).

In the era of globalization, the role of states in replicating world order has increased somewhat. This is because the ultimate goal of any country in the international order is the national interest, which is to ensure that the country exists in security, peace, prosperity and the ability to govern the order of international cooperation at the highest level.

As for China, in terms of geopolitics, Beijing's goals are predicted to include three steps, the short-term, medium-term, and long-term. In the short term, that goal is to reestablish at any cost an intact territory including Taiwan. In the medium term, China will achieve dominant power in East Asia. In the long term, China will participate in the world power competition with the US superpower to create a new bipolar world order. The unchangeable ideal that governs all policies through the ages of the Chinese State is to build a "universal world", but not horizontally (networked) according to Western international relations theories, but in a vertical line (pyramid) with its apex (leader) being China (Luong Van Ke, 2020).

Along with strengthening its military and economic hard power, China is also focusing on developing its soft power, most notably through international relations policies and activities of cultural diplomacy, through which China can increasingly assert its role and influence in the world.

2. Activities to increase China's soft power

For a country, soft power exists right in that country's culture, values, and policies. With its rising economic power, China wants to use its cultural influence and development support tools to build and promote an image of peaceful rise, allaying concerns about a potentially rising China's potential threat to peace and security in the world.

Following the world's major powers in the cultural soft power race, China appears to be more "pragmatic" than previous cultural powers when implementing specific activities to increase its attractiveness and appeal. pull, bind China, and change the balance of power between countries.

2.1. Cultural diplomacy activities

Domestically, China focuses on increasing the attractiveness of China's social and cultural value system. For a long time, Chinese empires sought to spread their culture to surrounding areas. Chinese culture is one of the oldest and most complex cultures in the world. Chinese culture is unique and diverse, each region has its cultural features, customs, and traditions, but all are imbued with Chinese national identity. With a history of 5,000 years, Chinese culture has gradually expanded its influence to surrounding countries such as Vietnam, Korea, and Japan. Today, the success of reform and opening up has created conditions for China to develop the cultural values of Chinese civilization. Chinese people always consider their culture to be "the culture of the world". Chinese President Hu Jintao said "Chinese culture does not belong to the Chinese people alone but to the entire world. We are willing to promote cultural exchanges with the entire world with a common effort to promote cultural development" (Nguyen Duc Tuyen, 2010).

China chose language dissemination, educational cooperation, advertising promotion, cultural and artistic exchanges, sports, and the export of cultural products, etc. as the main channels of influence to transform and attract people and persuade countries around the world.

2.1.1. Promote cultural and educational exchanges and cooperation

Educational exchange is an important element in promoting soft power, especially in the field of higher education, because, in most countries, universities are important institutions that shape the ideas and trends of society. China has consciously and intentionally promoted international exchanges and cooperation to expand its influence on a global scale.

Through the official route, China has signed government-level cultural agreements with 145 countries, signed 682 annual cultural exchange plans, and established Chinese Cultural Centers in France, Egypt, South Korea, etc. (Nguyen Thi Thu Phuong, 2016). The Year of Culture is also one of the important channels of influence that brings Chinese cultural soft power into the social life of other countries. In the early years of the 21st century, China organized many Cultural Week, Cultural Month, and Chinese Cultural Year activities in France, America, Egypt, Russia, India, Finland, etc. In addition, China also takes advantage of every opportunity to organize influential events on a global scale, typically the Shanghai Exhibition in 2010. Sports and fitness exchanges are also an impact channel that China exhibits quite flexibility in international relations. Promoting its borderless advantages in physical training and sports activities, China invested huge sums of money to organize the 2008 Beijing Olympics to demonstrate its sports spirit and promote its culture to the whole world.

After the Cold War, educational cooperation among developed countries quickly became a new, powerful mode of foreign policy. In that context, China also turns educational exchange into a channel to enhance the impact of cultural soft power on a global scale. For Japan and South Korea, two neighboring countries, having a strategic security and defense alliance with the US, the goal that Chinese cultural soft power policymakers aim for is to create a generation of Japanese and Koreans with more friendly feelings toward China. In Japan, on the basis of cultural and educational exchange agreements starting in 1980, the Chinese Government regularly awards scholarships to Japanese students. Besides, China also encourages students to go to Japan to improve their knowledge. The fact that a large number of Chinese students come to Japan to study, in addition to seeking knowledge, is also a factor in enhancing cultural exchanges and promoting the process of spreading Chinese culture to Japan. In Korea, until 2004, there were 130 Chinese universities and 120 Korean universities that signed cooperation agreements in training, research, and exchange of professors and students. In 2009, the number of Korean students in China increased to 66,800. In 2010, Chinese international students in Korea accounted for the largest number, up to 70% of international students in this country with a number of up to 53,461 people (Yonhap New Agency, 2010). This was an unprecedented phenomenon in the thousands of years of cultural exchange between the two countries. The

most obvious is the African case. China has a commitment to contribute to human resource development here. Every year China grants more than 1,500 scholarships to African students. Many universities on the continent have partnerships with schools on the mainland, through which China sends thousands of experts to organize conferences, training, and technical assistance in Africa in all fields of health, agriculture, technology, management, etc (M.T. - Đ.K., 2012). These activities improve China's image, creating support among elites, and gradually building China's influence in the local community.

In the process of spreading cultural soft power, China has considered Chinese Cultural Centers as organizations that strongly promote cultural exchanges with Japan and Korea. Along with strengthening the establishment of Chinese Cultural Centers, organizing cultural exchange events in Korea and Japan is also a channel to increase the impact of Chinese cultural soft power. It can be seen that the activities of the Chinese Cultural Center in Japan and Korea as well as cultural exchange events between China and these countries are different channels of traditional cultural diplomacy in the current Chinese system.

In some countries in Asia, a series of "Spring Fun" programs have been held in Thailand and the Philippines on traditional Chinese holidays with performances rich in this country's culture such as plays, dances of ethnic minorities, circus performances, etc. In addition, the implementation of Chinese cultural exhibition activities is also integrated by the Chinese Government in celebrations of the establishment of diplomacy with other countries. The Chinese government also does not miss the opportunity to promote educational exchange channels to expand the ability to absorb the Chinese language and culture. It is not difficult to realize that strengthening and creating favorable conditions for students from other countries to study abroad in China, with major majors such as Chinese language, Chinese culture, architecture, painting, etc. is an active cooperation channel for young people in many countries to witness, experience, explore and comprehend Chinese culture with their own eyes, thereby naturally receiving and absorbing Chinese culture.

In addition, efforts are being made to send Chinese scholars and students to universities around the world in many different ways, with a very clear goal of building China's influence. In 2017-2018 alone, the number of Chinese students studying in the US increased to a record number of 350,755 people (not including 80,000 high school students), accounting for more than a quarter of Chinese students studying abroad in the same year (Gary D. Rawnsley, 2008). Unlike in the past, the majority of these students can pay tuition and enjoy unlimited access to academic activities in the United States, including freedom of research and expression.

In the fields of cultural and educational cooperation, China demonstrates the image of a "culturally big country" through cultural sponsorships. In addition, China also uses cultural cooperation channels with localities, especially border provinces, universities, and research institutes, etc. to enhance the ability to convey the strategic goals of this country's government.

2.1.2. Strengthen Confucius Institutes' activities to spread the Chinese language, culture, and image

The establishment of Confucius Institutes helps China exploit the fundamental advantage of the fascinating cultural resource represented by "Confucianism" - the memory and symbol of Chinese culture. Just as Spain took the writer Cervantes to name its Spanish teaching institution, Germany took the cultural celebrity Goethe to name its cultural institution, China chose Confucius as the name for its institution. The official spread the Chinese language and Chinese culture to the whole world. This will make it easier for China to promote the superior values formed from a long history and the diversity of culture with the basic core of Confucian doctrine.

The Confucius Institute's mission is "to popularize the Chinese language, preserve and protect the international status of the Chinese language, spread culture and build the image of a harmonious, peaceful and friendly China". It is the main channel of influence in cultural diplomacy activities to bring Chinese cultural soft power "deeply penetrating" the cultural and educational environment of countries around the world. From 2004 to the end of 2018, there were 548 Confucius Institutes and 1,193 Confucius classes in 154 countries and regions (Zou Shuo, 2019). In Asia itself, there are 143 Confucius Institutes and Confucius classes have been established in 26 countries and territories. In Southeast Asia, there are 32 Institutes, 23 of which are located in Thailand, and the rest are scattered in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Singapore. In Africa, the number of Confucius Institutes has increased from 0 to 48 in years (Peng Xinliang, 2008). In 2004, the first Confucius Institute was established in the US. Up to now, the number of Institutes has ranked first in the world. Although it is 100 years behind Western countries in opening Cultural Academies, China is currently only behind France in the number of such academies globally (Peng Xinliang, 2008). These numbers show that in the future the number of Confucius Institutes will be replicated and increase sharply on all continents, this will be a bridge to further promote cultural exchange activities between China and the world.

Basically, Confucius Institutes are similar to the cultural promotion and language dissemination organizations of Western countries. However, Confucius Institutes are different from Western cultural and language promotion organizations in three ways: first, Confucius Institutes are agencies directly under the Chinese Ministry of Education, while Western organizations are non-governmental organizations that work in promotion, culture, and language dissemination for the government; Secondly, the Chinese Government controls the activities of the Confucius Institute through the governing body, the National Chinese Language Department under the Ministry of Education, while Western organizations operate independently in terms of expertise, but follow the unified direction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Thirdly, the Confucius Institute is headed by two co-directors (one from the host country and one appointed by the National Chinese Language Department), while Western institutes have only one executive director must be from the host country. It is the similarities

and differences between Confucius Institutes compared to Western cultural and language promotion organizations that define the common and unique characteristics in the method of increasing Chinese cultural soft power of this facility. We can see this clearly through understanding the process of using Confucius Institutes as a channel to directly impact Chinese cultural soft power.

In fact, as the world map of Confucius Institutes now numbering in the hundreds and distributed on all continents demonstrates, China's soft power spans the globe; however, it is practiced more vigorously than elsewhere in the so-called Southern countries. We can see that regions such as Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America are directly affected, as they benefit from China's increasingly visible presence.

Along with the development of the Confucius Institute network, the trend of learning Chinese also appeared widely. In addition to strengthening the establishment of Chinese Cultural Centers, organizing cultural exchange events in Korea and Japan is also a channel to increase the impact of Chinese cultural soft power. China's leaders aim to make Chinese one of the most widely used languages globally. They wanted the number of foreigners learning Chinese to quadruple, reaching 100 million before 2010. That's not an easy goal though (because there are about 600,000 foreigners living in China, from just 2- 4% of them speak Chinese fluently), but the number of people learning Chinese is increasing around the world. In the US, this number increased from 20,000 to nearly half a million people from 1990 to the present. These international students are mostly from Korea, Thailand, Pakistan, the United States, Russia and Japan (Gary D. Rawnsley, 2008).

Thus, from learning from Western cultural and language promotion organizations, the Chinese Government has created the Confucius Institute model as an international pedagogical organization, but also a propaganda channel as an important foreign policy brings the image of China as attractive, harmonious, and friendly to other countries.

2.2. Economic diplomacy activities

In the field of diplomacy, the Chinese Government also actively uses multilateral forums to build the image of a large country full of goodwill and responsibility. Pursuing a new security concept that emphasizes regional security cooperation and dialogue at different levels, China expressed its desire to have a new security order through the peaceful resolution of disputes or disagreements rather than confrontation.

For Southeast Asian countries, which have been heavily influenced by Chinese culture in the past, and where developing countries always need investment, capital, and technology from other powers, China considers "going South" as a necessary strategy to build the basic foundation for the process of expanding to lead the world in culture and values in the future through the "leverage" influence channel of sponsorship and economic cooperation.

Economic and trade relations with the world are 'tightened' by Beijing through soft power. Southeast Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America are regions directly affected by China's soft power. In addition to increasingly strong economic and trade relationships, it ensures that China has "close" partners. Free trade agreements with six ASEAN member states that took effect in January 2011 confirm this trend. In Africa, to promote economic growth, China needs abundant energy resources on this continent, while Africa needs Chinese aid to develop.

Trade exchange is the origin of the relationship between China and the Middle East; it has continuously grown in recent years. The "New Silk Road," marked by the resumption of trade and investment between the Arabian Persian Gulf and Asia, is now represented by new exchanges of capital and goods. China's energy needs are central to these exchanges, but also the "need for China" that is increasingly evident to countries in the region, regardless of the nature of their regimes and the relationships they have with other powers. Paradoxically, China's export of soft power to the Middle East has been spontaneous; it even predates Beijing's current interest in the region and any strategy to promote Chinese power (Nguyen Thu Phuong, 2013).

Africa is a "means" for China to expand its political and diplomatic influence, consolidating its power through "soft power". China's influence increases proportionally to its investments in Africa, thereby effectively serving Beijing's political interests. Financial support helps China effectively implement its strategy of building alliances with more than 50 African countries to gain an advantage in international diplomacy (M.T. - Đ.K., 2012).

Finally, Latin America has attracted Beijing in recent years, largely because of its energy and mineral reserves. The American subcontinent is also of interest to China because of its agricultural resources. Along with the United States, Brazil and Argentina are now the main exporters of agricultural products - especially meat and soybeans - to China (M.T. - Đ.K., 2012).

In the 21st century, China no longer focuses on increasing military power to expand its influence as in feudal times but uses economic power through investment and aid to expand its influence on the international stage. China affirms that the purpose of its foreign aid is to consolidate friendly relations and economic and trade cooperation with other developing countries, promote South-South cooperation, and contribute to "the common development of humanity" (M.T. - Đ.K., 2012).

President Xi Jinping has visited about 60 countries around the world, welcoming more than 110 foreign heads of state to China. These important diplomatic activities not only help strengthen the international community's understanding of China and enhance Beijing's position but also chart a course to solve many global problems. The highlight is that China constantly seeks to strengthen its "soft power" through the important tool of "yuan diplomacy".

In other words, participating in investment projects and development programs, especially in the field of infrastructure, in many countries and regions around the world, including the BRI connectivity initiative. Asia - Africa - Europe continents.

China's policy banks, specifically the China Development Bank, the Export-Import Bank of China, and the China Commercial Bank will have a central role in financing the infrastructure for this ambitious intercontinental initiative. With this mega project, from the perspective of geopolitical influence, China can gain a foothold across the strategically located "string of pearls" countries, specifically Seychelles, Chittagong (Bangladesh) in East to Hambantota (Sri Lanka), and Gwadar (Pakistan) in the West across the Indo-Pacific region (Le Hang Linh - Phuong Ho, 2018).

Along with the trend of globalization, countries trade and influence depending on each other's economies. Through aid and investment in other countries, China has become a political "bargaining tactic", constantly increasing its influence on aid-recipient countries. In 2014 alone, China's foreign direct investment (ODI) reached 102.9 billion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam, 2015). Also in 2020, China announced a fund of 46 billion USD to implement the strategic project "One Belt, One Road" and 63 maritime Silk Roads with 40 billion USD to take the initiative in global trade to compete for development aid and investment with the US (Nguyen Thi Hai Yen, 2015).

China has invested in and provided aid in all regions of the world. Within Asia, Southeast Asia is a region greatly influenced by China's economy. Southeast Asia is a fairly easy-going market, helping China consume low-quality, cheap goods, the Southeast Asian labor market is cheap and has an abundant, cheap supply of raw materials. Most of Southeast Asia has a need to attract high investment capital and advanced technology. China has become the number one investor and development aid to countries in the region such as Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar with capital amounting to many billions of dollars. In 2012, in Cambodia, FDI (foreign direct investment) from China amounted to 9.6 billion USD, and ODA capital (Aid) was 2.1 billion USD. In 3 years (2014-2016), China lent this country about 926.3 million USD. In Laos, FDI capital reached over 4 billion USD, accounting for 40% of total FDI in Laos, and ODA capital increased to billions of USD. China has agreed to give Laos 7 billion USD to build a 420 km long railway running along Laos connecting Yunnan - China to Vientiane. In Myanmar, China's direct investment amounted to over 14 billion USD (Le Kim Thoa, Ngo Hoang Long, 2014). China's total aid in Southeast Asia has exceeded that of the United States. In 2006, China's aid to the Philippines was 4 times that of the US, and to Laos, it was 3 times that of the US (Nguyen Thi Hai Yen, 2015). The conditions accompanying aid and investment may be that countries receiving investment or aid must re-import Chinese goods, thereby making it easier for goods and cultural products carrying Chinese culture to be imported easily and penetrate other countries' markets.

In terms of economic cooperation, China hopes that by improving its ability to export cultural products, it can compete in the ability to absorb and spread Chinese culture to countries around the world. Focusing on investment in cultural trade cooperation aims to both ensure strategic economic benefits and increase China's ability to attract, bind and dominate in culture and politics. Aid is the "big carrot" China wants to give to countries it wants to influence.

2.3. Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy emphasizes promoting China's achievements and projecting the nation's image abroad. Rise requires China to think in terms of soft power, so the Chinese government is increasingly paying more attention to public diplomacy.

Regarding foreign affairs, the Chinese people understand better than anyone else the tricks that influence the hearts and minds of other people. When studying Chinese strategy, one realizes that China's war masters always attach great importance to psychological warfare, to bribing, luring, and "enlightening" the enemy. Try to follow the motto "Don't fight and win".

The "One Belt, One Road" initiative is described by leaders as a tool to exercise soft power. This initiative connects the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Maritime Silk Road, through a vast network of rail, road, port, and telecommunications infrastructure, from China to throughout Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe (Le Quang, 2017).

China uses the ideological card: training political theorists and leaders, exchanging high-level theoretical ideas; and creating the political, legal, cultural, and economic framework for "democratization" and "rule of law" initiatives in the name of protecting democracy and the socialist state (Chinese style). The ideological "card" was deployed strongly and extensively by China very early on towards the entire world national liberation movement and the non-aligned movement, right from the time the Communist Party first took power. The fierce struggle between the communist parties of the Soviet Union and China is essentially just a geopolitical competition, a struggle for influence over the whole world. The ideological myth that Mao Zedong intentionally created was that the Soviet Union belonged to the European-American camp but was the "Second World", different from the West (First World). Both of those worlds are rich, imperialistic, and specialize in oppression and invasion; and China belongs to the "Third World", the world of poor and backward peoples, exploited by imperialist oppression. So the destiny of China and the rest of the peoples on the planet is unified. But in the Third World, China is a great nation, willing to tolerate and take on the responsibility of leading the movement. This declaration, from the birth of the People's Republic of China until now, is still a giant banner on Tiananmen Square in Beijing. This helps us explain why China, with all its mental defects, still has great influence throughout Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

As part of its strategy to implement great power diplomacy, China has made efforts to make its country and national culture attractive at the highest level to the world, especially its Southeast

Asian neighbors. During visits abroad, Chinese officials do not shy away from promoting the benefits of the country's political-economic model. In many Southeast Asian countries, local policymakers seem convinced that if they learned from China, they could be twice as successful as China in promoting innovation, development and declare war on poverty. In Vietnam, for example, young policymakers study the "China development model," which slowly opens the economy while maintaining control of the political system.

The efforts of the Chinese people's diplomacy also aim to strengthen the concept of peaceful development. Beijing also creates a Chinese image of Youth Volunteer Organizations working in other countries (Peace Corps) in long-term volunteer projects in developing countries around the world.

China also created the myth of a "common home" called New Chinese Regionalism: the purpose is to prevent the involvement of powers outside of East Asia (mainly the United States) in regional integration to protect China's pivotal and leading position, maintaining an asymmetric geopolitical relationship with neighboring countries. Ten years of America being mired in the global war on terrorism, centered on the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have been a golden opportunity for China to deploy flexible foreign policies based on currency towards foreign countries' poverty-stricken underdeveloped areas of the world, especially neighboring countries in Asia and developing countries poor in money but with abundant corruption and natural resources in Africa.

In recent years, China has increasingly recognized the power of public diplomacy in demonstrating the nation's soft power to the world. China's public diplomacy objective is to fulfill two roles – one is the function of wise strategic thinking and defensive reasoning, and the other is the urgent task of creating favorable conditions for increasing soft power. China is seeking a path of peaceful development. It is necessary to change the international perspective towards China, overcome the so-called China threat, and make the world accept China's rise. China's foreign policy has gone beyond the traditional diplomatic model that focuses on government-to-government interactions. The Chinese government also needs to initiate public diplomacy to engage with overseas civil society (Yiwei Wang, 2008). The Chinese government also actively uses multilateral forums to build the image of China as a large country full of goodwill and responsibility. Pursuing a new security concept that emphasizes regional security cooperation and dialogue at different levels, China expressed its desire to have a new security order through the peaceful resolution of disputes, disagreement rather than confrontation. Hosting major international events, such as the Olympic Games in Beijing or the World Expo in Shanghai, is also part of China's public diplomacy policy.

2.4. Media activities promote national image

In 2003, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Central Military Commission officially announced the application of the doctrine of "Three types of warfare" (

三战), including psychological warfare (心理战), public opinion warfare (舆论战), legal warfare (法律战) work to protect China's interests. Among these three strategies, "public opinion warfare" is a way to influence and steer international public opinion in a direction that supports China, while at the same time denying opponents' ideological currents that are detrimental to China (Timothy A. Walton, 2012). In general, the main impact channels of this strategy used in the field of increasing cultural soft power include traditional media and new media (electronic newspapers, radio, television, and Internet). In addition, Chinese strategists also exploit third-party, or even enemy, media to create public opinion (Wu Huaitang, Zuo Junzhan, 2006). Although it was born a long time ago, the "public opinion tactic" is still a method used by China to this day.

2.4.1. Newspapers, television

Based on media cooperation, China has used mass media channels to enhance the promotion of the image of a country with peaceful development, friendly people, and a diverse culture rich in identity. China Radio International has built broadcasting stations in Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, etc. China Central Television's international news channel in Chinese and English is present in many countries worldwide. Chinese television programs exported to 10 Southeast Asian countries account for half of China's total media products exported abroad (Hongying Wang, 2011). In addition to using media channels to convey official messages of the Chinese Government, movies are also one of the cultural products used to promote the image of China's country, people and culture.

In the process of using media as a channel to increase the impact of cultural soft power; On the one hand, China wants to assert its correlation and more prominent position in relationships with other countries; On the other hand, China hopes to attract and lead developing countries in the form of peaceful cooperation. China is stepping up its "public opinion strategy" by taking advantage of media channels to promote the image of the country, people, and culture of China. The Chinese government continuously proposes information cooperation programs with countries around the world, aiming to bring the Chinese media wave into the regions.

To enhance its influence or promote its soft power, China has focused on investing in Chinese Communist Party news agencies such as China Central Television (CCTV) and Xinhua News Agency. China Central Television (CCTV) or China Central Television is China's state television station and the mouthpiece of the Communist Party of China, it first broadcast in 1958. CCTV currently has a network of 50 programming channels and reaches more than a billion viewers in several major languages such as Chinese, English and Spanish (David Barboza, 2008).

CCTV has two main purposes: “showing China's voice globally and joining channels such as Al Jazeera, BBC, and CNN in shaping the global news agenda.” (John Jirik ,2016). From the beginning, the Chinese Party and Government have asserted that CCTV News exists to promote China's image abroad and influence the expansion of China's position on the international stage (Timothy A. Walton, 2012). CCTV News operates a central system to serve a 24/7 global broadcast. In mid-2015, Beijing-based CCTV broadcast 117 hours (70%) of programming per week, the Washington, DC, (USA CCTV) center broadcast 36.5 hours (22%) of programming, and the Nairobi Center (CCTV Africa), broadcasted 14.5 hours (9%). Of these, 123.5 hours (74%) consisted of live news or first runs prepared for broadcast, and 44.5 hours (26%) consisted of repeat broadcasts (John Jirik ,2016). CCTV operates with a wide network of reporters around the world to attract national readers. CCTV news coverage is considered a professional and obvious choice because of the presence of reporters from Al Jazeera, BBC, CNN... and other personnel among the CCTV News staff. Along with that, CCTV News also cooperates closely with editorial offices and newspapers of other countries such as the Associated Press (AP) or Reuters to jointly provide information on online platforms. In contrast, AP and Reuters also provided materials to CCTV News.

Under President Xi Jinping, Beijing is increasingly eager to be heard on the international stage. Mr. Xi, who has repeatedly asked state media to "tell good stories about China," pledged to build a system of Chinese propaganda organs abroad, turning it into one of the leading voices influencing world affairs. Therefore, China wants to take control of information by opening up many communication tools aimed at the foreign public. In particular, China has spent up to 45 billion yuan (6.54 billion USD) to demonstrate a positive and friendly image of China (Hoang Duy Long, 2019).

Xinhua News Agency is the official news agency of the Chinese government and the largest information gathering center and largest mouthpiece of the Chinese state. Like most news media in China, it operates under government control and its releases reflect official policies and promote Chinese state programs. Xinhua News Agency has evolved from just a propaganda tool into a multi-dimensional, multi-purpose media conglomerate that reflects China's global influence strategy (Zhuqing Cheng, 2015). As a state-controlled news platform, Xinhua News Agency can dominate both the public relations platform and the news media platform. Up to 1/3 of the information about China on Google is news provided by Xinhua News Agency (Vietnam News Agency, 2007). To do this, Xinhua News Agency has focused on modernizing its information processing and transmission system. Xinhua News Agency has 10 computerized news processing systems and a network of communication satellites. Thanks to that, the company can transmit 400,000 words a day in 7 languages (Chinese, English, French, Spanish, Russian, Portuguese and Japanese) to foreign partners.

In addition to investing in news agencies, China influences or controls Chinese media channels overseas. In 2001, the Jamestown Foundation published an article titled “How the Chinese

government is trying to control Chinese-language media in the United States.” This article mentions four methods: a) Direct control of newspapers, television and radio stations through full ownership or becoming a major shareholder; b) Influencing independent media channels through business interests; c) Buying broadcast time or advertising; and d) Installing Chinese Communist Party agents working in independent media channels for espionage and sabotage purposes, aiming to bring the interests of the Chinese Communist Party into overseas media channels (Chung Thanh, 2019). A study by Reuters news agency found that the Communist Party's China Radio International CRI had interfered in at least 33 radio stations in 14 countries. Phoenix TV, for example, is the second-largest Chinese TV show in the United States. With a 10% stake held by CCTV, Phoenix Television now speaks as a media channel of the Chinese Communist Party (Chung Thanh, 2019).

China censors overseas media in a variety of ways, including direct control through financial interests or pressure, and indirectly through advertising, online attacks, and personal attacks. For foreign media channels operating in China, the Chinese Communist Party threatened not to issue visas to reporters or other employees. Outside China, it puts pressure on senior editors to delete articles critical of the Chinese Communist Party, or threatens to sever relationships and end business deals.

2.4.2. Chinese cinema

Similar to Japan and South Korea, China soon realized the impact of using the cultural front to promote "soft power". However, instead of choosing a soft, gentle way of spreading, even taking a long time to build a Korean-style "Hallyu wave", China quickly took advantage of ranking second in the film market in the world, just behind North America, and is even predicted to surpass North America within the next few years (Le Phan, 2018). On the one hand, the Chinese Government tries to block television programs and movies from the above two Asian countries, including Hollywood, on the grounds of protecting the domestic film and television industry. On the other hand, they have gradually created changes in the way of cultural management, creating a push for domestic cinema. Nowadays, more and more private Chinese film studios are making propaganda films that are still highly entertaining and earn hundreds of millions of dollars. “Sky Hunter”, “Red Sea Spy” (562 million USD), “Wolf Warrior 2” (874 million USD), “Golden Triangle Spy” (earning more than 1 billion yuan), etc. are all films that display the military power of the Chinese army dressed as entertainment but with a warning: "Anyone who dares to challenge China will be destroyed, no matter how far the target is." (Le Phan, 2018).

China's influence is increasingly deepening in the world's film capitals, especially Hollywood. That is strong financial potential with a market of 1 billion 300 million people. Recently, China's voice has gained more and more weight as a series of giant Chinese corporations such as Van Dat, Alibaba, and Tencent have poured billions of dollars into buying shares in

Hollywood empires. China has increased its influence in Hollywood by increasing funding for top films. Of the 100 highest-grossing films worldwide each year from 1997 to 2013, China sponsored 12 films. But five years later, China has financed 41 of the highest-grossing Hollywood films (Phuong Vu, 2019). With a lucrative market like China, filmmakers in the American cinema capital in recent years have had to immediately think about script elements and choose actors who are Chinese stars to attract customers to movie theaters in China. A series of beauties such as Fan Bingbing, Ly Bingbing, Zhang Ziyi, etc. have appeared in many American blockbusters, sometimes only in supporting roles. To realize their ambition to become the world's cinema capital, many Chinese corporations also invest billions of dollars to build the world's leading studios such as the Oriental Cinema Capital of Van Dat Group in Qingdao, or invest in thousands of hectares of film studios in Chongqing. Recently, when corporations are facing difficulties, the Chinese government has used stimulus capital to provide low-interest loans to support or cooperate in implementing large projects.

Thus, by purchasing film studios, making financial investments in Hollywood blockbusters, and introducing many regulations that benefit domestic businesses, China has forced Hollywood to change the way it makes films in a more beneficial way to China in terms of cultural, political, and social values. This is also a goal in the strategy of enhancing soft power and popularizing Chinese culture in the world.

2.4.3. Overseas Chinese Network

China is a country with a large immigration flow in the world and is constantly increasing. Chinese communities around the world contribute to spreading Chinese culture abroad. China's new wave of migration is not just free migration but a national strategy to increase China's soft power.

The overseas Chinese community is estimated to number about 60 million people. This number is continuing to increase as many Chinese people are researching and studying abroad. The overseas Chinese network has contributed to spreading Chinese culture around the world, most notably Chinatowns appearing all over the world. These neighborhoods are not only places where Chinese and Asian people gather to do business, trade, and live but also become tourist destinations for tourists who want to experience Chinese culture. They rely on cultural connections and ancestral origins to protect themselves against political risks. They are also directly involved in shaping debates on reform: overseas Chinese businessmen directly hold positions in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the National People's Congress, and they even built relationships with Deng Xiaoping (Chau Thi Hai, 2001).

Table: Number and distribution of Chinese and overseas Chinese in the continents in 2008²

(Unit: Person)

Area	Number of people/% *	New immigrants/% **
Total	45.430.000/100,00	10.300.000/22,60
Asia	35.480.000/78,10	4.000.000/11,27
America	6.300.000/13,90	3.500.000/56,00
Europe	2150.000/4,70	1.700.000/79,00
Australia	950.000/2,10	600.000/63,00
Africa	550.000/1,20	500.000/90,00

* Accounts for % of the total number of Chinese and overseas Chinese people worldwide

** Accounts for % of the total number of Chinese and overseas Chinese

In Asia, specifically in Southeast Asia, the migration focus of the Chinese community is Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia due to geographical proximity and China also invests heavily in these countries. In these countries, Chinese people spend money, and speak Chinese, and Chinese cuisine restaurants are springing up like mushrooms to serve them. They immigrated to get married and have children, bring relatives to live, and establish Chinese villages and areas to popularize customs, languages, and festivals into local culture. China does not ignore the type of political lobbying that has long been the way of Europe and America. Of course, it is still the use of European politicians friendly to China and through the overseas Chinese community that is growing in both population and economic and political power in Europe.

Simultaneously, the Chinese government continues to strengthen its control over the overseas Chinese community around the world. Specifically, the Chinese United Front Work Department has attracted thousands of organizations to collect intelligence, encourage technology transfer, and support Beijing's other goals. In particular, this unit focuses on implementing activities to influence the overseas Chinese community and elite people abroad. The United Front Work Department has been used by Beijing for decades and was recently

² Dr. Duong Van Huy (2016), Policies of Southeast Asian countries towards Chinese, overseas Chinese and new Chinese immigrants before the rise of China, http://vepr.org.vn/upload/533/fck/files/VCES_Tai%20lieu%20Seminar%2014.pdf, accessed November 30, 2023.

given a new mission by President Xi Jinping, with the ambition to turn the country into a global superpower. Over the years, it has increased its control of overseas Chinese-language media, funding prominent research institutes and using the messaging platform WeChat and other social media to moderate, monitor, and shape policy discussions.

3. The "Peaceful Rise" policy

One of the policies proposed by China to emphasize national soft power is the "Peaceful rise" policy. It is the foreign policy approach of the People's Republic of China in the 21st century. It seeks to portray China as a responsible world leader, emphasizing soft power and promises that China is committed to handling internal problems and improving the welfare of its people before intervening in world affairs. This term suggests that China seeks to avoid unnecessary international confrontation. The main principle of the "Peaceful rise" theory, which a year later was changed to "peaceful development" is: that China does not seek a hegemonic role; Economic and military rise will not cause threats to peace and stability in the region and the world; Countries will benefit from China's rise in power and influence. To realize this vision, Beijing attaches great importance to the role of soft power and recognizes that promoting good relations with neighboring countries will contribute to enhancing comprehensive national power (Nguyen Chien, 2014).

The concept of "peaceful rise" has been used by Chinese think tanks since the 90s of the last century. However, the first official use of this term was in the Boao Forum for Asia in 2003 by Vice Principal of China's Party School, Mr. Zheng Tatjian. Then, on the occasion of the 110th anniversary of Mao Zedong's birth in December 2003, Chinese President Hu Jintao emphasized that loyalty to the path of Socialism with Chinese characteristics is loyalty to "the path of peaceful development". From then on, this term was repeated many times by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during ASEAN Conferences and visits to the US. Mr. Wen Jiabao tried to justify China's rise and reassure the world when he said that "the path of development China has experienced is different from that experienced by other major powers and the path of development of China is the path to peaceful rise." Later, the term "peaceful rise" was changed to "peaceful development" when the country published a white paper titled "China's peaceful development" in 2006. In their domestic speeches, Chinese leaders always express the view that the country strives to build a "harmonious society" that brings happiness to the people. At the same time, China's leadership always tries to convince and reassure the world that this country does not follow the path of "strong countries will inevitably dominate" or "righteousness belongs to the strong".

In the past, China was relatively weak in terms of economy and defense. Now, in the face of the relative weakening of the position of the US and Europe, China on the one hand uses diplomatic rhetoric to "lull" the international community, especially countries that have "allied" relations with Beijing and China implementing the policy of "economic diplomacy" or "money

diplomacy"; and China increasingly develops the "Beijing consensus" model or "China model" to attract many countries to its side. For example, in the region, China tries to popularize the "Beijing consensus" model for Cambodia, Laos, formerly Myanmar, etc. to compete with the "Washington consensus". Especially in the context of the world being affected by the economic crisis, the US and the West, which were considered the economic centers of the world in the 19th and 20th centuries, are now struggling with economic and social challenges, meanwhile, despite the storm of financial crisis, China's economy still stands strong and continues to grow at high numbers which is the dream of many countries. In addition, in his speech commemorating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Chinese People's Association for Foreign Friendship (CPAFFC), Chinese President Xi Jinping said: "The Chinese people will not accept the logic of "strong country" will inevitably lead to hegemony", wants to live together in peace, develop in harmony, seek peace together, protect peace together, enjoy peace together" and "China will persevere in following the path of peaceful development.", and will also encourage countries to persevere in peaceful development. China will continue to handle conflicts and disputes through fair consultation; Persevere in dialogue to resolve disagreements with the greatest sincerity and patience."

However, on the same day, Chief of the General Staff of the Chinese Army, Senior Lieutenant General Fang Fenghui, in a speech in Washington DC on May 15, 2014, regarding the issue of the East Sea and the East China Sea, he emphasized that: "We do not cause trouble, but we are not afraid of being caused trouble, we resolutely protect our sovereignty and territorial integrity" and "we will not give up the land left by our ancestors." This is a commitment that China will continue oil and gas exploration activities in the South China Sea, despite Vietnam's strong opposition from Phong Phong Huy's diplomatic perspective is completely different from Xi Jinping's. On the surface, Mr. Xi Jinping spoke at a meeting to celebrate "friendship with foreign countries", of course, he would emphasize China's will for peace. Meanwhile, General Fang Fenghui, as a Chinese military leader abroad, is responsible for defending China's policies while directly facing questions from reporters. These different contexts clearly produce different policy emphases (Thoidai, 2014). Therefore, "peaceful rise" is a controversial policy because China's subsequent actions in the South China Sea with neighboring countries are nothing like "peace". Other countries call this Chinese policy a "threat to peace".

4. The COVID-19 Diplomacy

4.1. Context

The Covid-19 pandemic began at the end of December 2019 in Wuhan, China and has since greatly affected the country's provinces and cities, and caused concern globally. This is one of the largest pandemics worldwide; is a serious crisis for the whole world and a difficult challenge, seriously threatening human life and health.

Against this backdrop, China's leadership quickly realized the importance of soft power in projecting the image of a benign rising power, to the point that it is now a deliberate component of China's policies and actions. The Guardian newspaper said that China has placed itself in a leadership role in the fight against COVID-19, becoming a "benefactor" in public health. The aim is to build the kind of soft power they need at a time of increasing competition between the US and China, as well as doubts about Beijing's influence around the world. China is trying to turn the health crisis into a geopolitical opportunity. The country is launching a soft power building campaign aimed at filling the void left by the US," said Yu Jie - China researcher at the Chatham Institute, UK. China's humanitarian aid campaign is not only aimed at reassuring domestic people but also towards the international community. It sends a message to the people that China has overcome the crisis and can now help other countries. This can repair the image that was seriously affected by the initial failures in epidemic response," expert Barkin emphasized (Hong Anh, 2020).

4.2. Activities to increase soft power were implemented by China during the COVID-19 pandemic

An ambitious great power like China would certainly not miss the opportunity to create its image, promote soft power and take on a leading role in the world when the COVID-19 pandemic was occurring. Before the pandemic, China had positioned itself as a leader in global affairs. Covid-19 may have provided a new opportunity for China to realize these ambitions. Does China intend to set an agenda to direct public opinion to forget the source of the pandemic?

Indeed, this country has made great efforts and is somewhat "generous" towards Europe by introducing a series of policies to build the image of a responsible and trustworthy country. However, China's rush and impatience have had the opposite effect, making European countries feel pressured, thereby becoming increasingly suspicious and wary of China.

4.2.1. Online foreign affairs, international cooperation

Despite receiving a lot of international criticism for the delay in initial epidemic prevention work, in the White Paper, China affirmed that the country has supported global virus prevention and control by promptly share information and experiences with the international community.

In the White Paper released in June, China stated: "In an open, transparent, responsible and in accordance with the law, China has promptly informed the international community about the of a new coronavirus, and shares his experience in preventing the spread of the virus and treating those infected. China has great sympathy for victims around the world and has done all it can to provide humanitarian aid to support the international community's efforts to contain the pandemic.

China had made efforts to provide information on the entire coronavirus genome sequence and specific clues for virus detection to WHO, relevant countries and regional organizations, and had regularly updated it.

Specifically:

On December 31, 2019, the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission revealed a cluster of pneumonia cases of unknown cause. The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) sent experts to Wuhan to support investigation and control efforts (Zhonghua liu, 2020).

On January 3, 2020, the first genome sequence of the new coronavirus of the β genus, now known as SARS-CoV-2, was determined by scientists of the Institute for Viral Disease Control and Prevention Country (Wenjie T., Xiang Z., Xuejun M., 2020). China notified the WHO. By January 10, 2020, the entire genome sequence of SARS-CoV-2 was shared with WHO. Several rapid and sensitive detection tests had been developed by the Chinese CDC.

In addition, the country had conducted more than 70 exchanges with international and regional organizations including ASEAN, the European Union, the African Union (AU), APEC, the Caribbean Community and the United Nations. Shanghai Cooperation (SCO), as well as South Korea, Japan, Russia, the United States, Germany and other countries. The National Health Commission (NHC) had developed solutions for diagnosis, treatment, prevention and control, and translated them into 3 languages and shared them with more than 180 countries and more than 10 international organizations and the region.³ Together with WHO, this organization held a press conference at the Presidential Palace in Beijing (February 24, 2020): Press Conference of WHO-China Joint Mission on COVID-19 with the participation of Major international information channels such as BBC News, CNN, CCTV, Sky News, Singapore Lianhe Zaobao, etc. then published the report on February 28, 2020 on the official website of the WTO. The Information Office of the State Council held two special press conferences in English in Wuhan, inviting experts and frontline medical staff to talk about China's experiences and practices.

³ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. 2020. White Paper: Fighting Covid-19 China in Action.



Estonian officials and health experts attended a video conference with Chinese officials and health experts and their counterparts from Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. (Xinhua News/Zhang Xiuzhi)



Representatives of medical institutes, hospitals and Serbian government representatives attended an online conference with Chinese officials and medical experts in Belgrade, Serbia (Xinhua News/Shi Zhongyu)

It is worth noting that the first online conference on 13 March 2020 was set up with the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries - including non-EU member states - that make up the forum — 17 + 1, with the interesting addition of Malta. This conference takes place a week before the conference with other European partners. One theory behind this scheduling is that Beijing sought to provide CEE countries with tangible delivery capabilities of the 17+1 format which, for many participating governments, is losing its appeal (“Covid-19 and Europe-China Relations: A Country-level Analysis.,” 2020). Groups such as 17 + 1 clearly emerged from China's intention to create institutional tools to amplify its message and increase its national influence.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences released the 2019 Coronavirus Resource database and built the Novel Coronavirus National Science and Technology Resource Service System and Covid-19 Scientific Document Sharing Platform. As of May 31, 2020, these three platforms had provided nearly 48 million download, browsing and retrieval services to more than 370,000 users worldwide. China had established an international expert group and has cooperated with other countries in vaccine and drug research and development.⁴ It had encouraged the International Union of Scientific Organizations within the framework of the Rim Initiative Belt and Road to promote cooperation among members in COVID-19 treatment and research. China's scientists, medical organizations and disease control centers had published dozens of well-researched articles in some of the world's leading academic journals such as *The Lancet*, *Science*, *Nature* and *The New England Journal of Medicine*, published timely results of tests on patients, including clinical features of the virus, risk of person-to-person transmission, China's experience with centers interim treatment, medical research and development, and results of animal vaccine testing.

CGTN Channel - an international English-language news channel headquartered in Beijing owned by China Central Television produces and broadcasts the documentary —Covid-19 Frontline and the documentary series —Together Against Covid-19. The film Covid-19 Frontline recreates the first two months of the Covid-19 outbreak in Wuhan, when the situation threatened to go out of control. The people, the city and the country did not give up. How did 9 million people in Wuhan live and survive? How did the city separate sick people from healthy people? All are shown in 2 episodes, each 45 minutes long. The documentary series —Together Against Covid-19 consists of 6 episodes, evaluating China's efforts in building a resolute defense against this pandemic.

⁴ The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China. 2020. White Paper: Fighting Covid-19 China in Action. Page 60.



To build a platform for exchange between countries, China created the Fighting Covid-19 the Chinese Way section of China Daily. The column not only shared official information about the epidemic but also provides China's knowledge and experience to prevent and control this dangerous virus.



4.2.2. “Mask Diplomacy” and Humanitarian Assistance

Even while under immense pressure to control the coronavirus, in 2020, China had been quick to provide all possible support to the international community.⁵ The country had provided two rounds of cash assistance totaling 50 million US dollars to WHO, supporting the organization in purchasing personal protective equipment and establishing stockpiling centers in China, helping the Covid-19 Solidarity Response Fund raise funds in China, and participating in

⁵ The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China. 2020. White Paper: Fighting Covid-19 China in Action. Page 59.

WHO's —Access to Covid-19 Tools (act) Accelerator initiative, aimed to speed up the development, production and equitable distribution of new tools.

China has actively provided medical aid to other countries. As of May 31, 2020, China has sent 29 medical expert delegations to 27 countries, and offered support to 150 countries and 4 international organizations. It had instructed its medical teams to be stationed in 56 countries to support the local fight, and provide health and consultation information to locals and overseas Chinese. To date, they had organized more than 400 online and offline training sessions on this issue. Local governments, businesses, NGOs and individuals in China had donated materials to more than 150 countries and regions, and international organizations through various channels. The Chinese government had always attached great importance to the lives and health of foreigners in China, and they had provided indiscriminate and timely treatment to those infected with the disease.

China had made arrangements for the orderly export of protective materials. While ensuring domestic demand, China had tried in every possible way to provide support to all countries in purchasing protective materials. It had smoothed the channels connecting supply and demand, organized logistics, transportation, and supply of goods, and accelerated the export customs clearance process. Effective measures had been taken to control product quality, regulate export procedures, issue guidelines on foreign market access, and strengthen market supervision and export quality to provide Other countries with goods of the highest quality. From March 1 to May 31, China exported protective materials to 200 countries and regions, including more than 70.6 billion masks, 340 million protective suits, 115 million pairs of protective glasses households, 96,700 ventilators, 225 million test kits, and 40.29 million infrared rays and thermometers.

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread rapidly, making Europe the epicenter of the global outbreak, China made great efforts to help European countries and their people. Medical supplies such as masks, protective clothing, and respirators were being shipped to Europe, and teams of Chinese medical experts who had just emerged victorious from the front lines in China were heading to Europe immediately.

Photos and television reports of the aid deliveries appeared in European media and on China's main television channel CCTV-1. China's anti-COVID medical aid policy and media coverage were called Mask Diplomacy by the French newspaper Figaro. Italy was the first country in Europe to be heavily affected by COVID-19, especially Lombardy, which had received medical aid from Beijing many times. Groups of Chinese doctors who worked in Wuhan were also sent to Lombardy to share experiences on Covid-19 treatment and prevention. In a statement, Chinese President Xi Jinping told former Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte: "China is ready to join hands with Italy to contribute to international cooperation on efforts to fight the pandemic as well as building the Health Silk Road" (Sylvain Kahn, Estelle Prin, 2020).

In 2020, medical equipment shipments were sent from China to Europe at market price or free as donations, first to the most affected countries and then to Serbia, Ireland, and Hungary. Mask diplomacy included donations sent by the Chinese government but also flights sponsored by large companies such as Huawei or Alibaba. For example, Jack Ma - founder of Alibaba Group donated 500,000 masks to Spain in mid-March. On March 12, 2020, a Chinese cargo plane carrying donations from the Chinese Red Cross arrived in Italy, receiving widespread media coverage. The event was also live-streamed by former Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio, who said that this was the result of the special solidarity between the two countries. At the same time, Italy ordered a total of EUR 209.5 million of medical supplies from China. In Serbia, President Aleksandar Vučić called for medical assistance from China because Serbia was not allowed to import medical equipment from EU countries. President Xi Jinping responded: —China and Serbia are strategic partners. The friendship between the two countries and two peoples is forever lasting. China then sent medical and protective equipment to Belgrade and helped Serbia search for Chinese companies that could provide more medical equipment. The Serbian President received assurances that China would send a team of medical experts, like the teams sent to Italy and Spain (Sylvain Kahn, Estelle Prin, 2020).

China's media strategy emphasizing its role as both a global funder and medical equipment supplier had achieved mixed results and even exacting responses at that time. Jean-Pierre Cabestan, Professor of Political Science at Hong Kong Baptist University, said that "mask diplomacy" had returned to China because it is too aggressive and unruly, and denies its responsibility "with messages mixed with too much propaganda generosity at a time when democracies are facing a health crisis." (Dastakian, A., 2020)

4.2.3. “Wolf Warrior Diplomacy”

To repair its image during the COVID-19 pandemic, China was not only "generous" in aid work and sharing experiences but also launched a massive propaganda campaign, the purpose of which was to protect its image. and counter all accusations of Chinese responsibility. According to expert John Seaman - French Institute of International Relations, mistakes in the initial steps of epidemic prevention by the US and Europe gave Beijing a convenient excuse to "go to war" (Phuc Long, 2020).

During the Covid-19 pandemic, the websites of Chinese embassies abroad published a series of articles, some of which compared Beijing's success in containing the epidemic with its efforts in dealing with pandemics in Western countries. While the gap in anti-pandemic effectiveness was becoming more and more obvious [that China is more successful], on the contrary, China's [achievements] had not been fully affirmed - sometimes even smeared. Therefore, it was not surprising that Chinese diplomats made hawkish and straightforward statements. On the contrary, they quickly caused a counterattack from countries that were

powerless to fight the epidemic, represented by the United States, and they were labeled "wolf warrior diplomacy". Specifically:

At that time, The Embassy of the People's Republic of China in France played an unprecedented role in the media, actively promoting Beijing's narrative on social networks, on its website and in French media. First, the embassy had been very active on Twitter. The party opened its Twitter account in August 2019, when the new Ambassador, Lu Shaye, took office. However, it only became operational on February 4, 2020, retweeted WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. Since then, it had been tweeting multiple times a day, mainly about Covid-19-related issues. The embassy's activities raised concerns in March when it spread rumors and conspiracy theories implying that COVID-19 originated in the United States and was introduced to China by the US military - a story that other diplomats support, including Zhao Lijian, China's official spokesman (Sylvain Kahn, Estelle Prin, 2020).

The Chinese embassy also published several anonymous, magazine-like articles on its website, titled —Observations of a Chinese diplomat in Paris. Five of these articles were published between March 22 and April 26, 2020. It's all aimed at "restoring distorted truths" presented by Western "media, politicians and experts" to slander China. These articles combined factual truths with false or baseless assertions, denigrating the crisis management of Western democracies and promoting the PRC's official success story. For example, an article published on April 12, 2020, promoted (again) the theory that the virus might have come from the US, accusing French parliamentarians of supporting Trump's racist comments. Taiwanese authorities towards Mr. Tedros and blamed European retirees for —abandoning their posts overnight, mass desertion, and leaving their residents to die of starvation and disease (Sylvain Kahn, Estelle Prin, 2020).

However, instead of helping to improve China's international image and appeasing those who blamed the country for the pandemic, their actions further undermined China's reputation and made other countries look worse, and distanced themselves from China even though they should be doing the opposite.

5. Evaluating China's Soft Power Strategies

To analyze how these strategies worked, I conducted an interview. This survey aims to delve into the perceptions and experiences of individuals regarding China's soft power strategies, particularly focusing on cultural initiatives, including movies, and their impact on national pride. Four individuals have graciously agreed to participate in this qualitative analysis, offering diverse perspectives. Among them are three Chinese participants who will provide insight into the local sentiment, and one European resident who has called China home for the past 15 years, offering a unique perspective on the effectiveness of these strategies from an outsider's viewpoint. The qualitative nature of this survey allows for in-depth exploration,

capturing nuanced opinions and personal experiences. The responses gathered will contribute to a comprehensive understanding of how China's leadership policies, particularly in cultural soft power, shape perceptions both within the nation and abroad. Through the narratives of our interviewees, this study aims to shed light on the multifaceted dynamics of China's soft power and its role in fostering a sense of national pride.

The questionnaire was well prepared with five open questions. They are:

- a. How do you perceive the role of Chinese leadership in shaping the narrative of national pride through cultural initiatives, such as movies and other forms of media?
- b. Can you share specific examples or instances where you feel the government has effectively used soft power strategies to enhance the image of China internationally, especially through cultural expressions like movies?
- c. In your opinion, how has the promotion of Chinese cultural products, both domestically and internationally, influenced your sense of national identity and pride?
- d. Considering the global impact of Chinese films and cultural exports, how do you think these efforts contribute to shaping a positive international perception of China and its leadership?
- e. To what extent do you believe the government's emphasis on cultural soft power has affected the way Chinese citizens view their own identity and the values associated with being Chinese?

There are three volunteers in total. I tried to conclude three different backgrounds and perspectives. The first one is a Chinese Male, 30, a Chinese student who studied media in China and is now studying political science abroad. The second interviewee is a Chinese female, 55 years old, who has been living in China for life. The last person is an Italian female, who has been living in China for 15 years since 2008.

Evaluating China's Soft Power Strategies via Question 1

Chinese leadership plays a central role in shaping a narrative of national pride through diverse cultural initiatives, particularly evident in the domain of movies and media. Interviewee 1 underscores the leadership's active promotion of nationalistic themes in films, encompassing historical dramas and contemporary narratives that celebrate China's development and global stature. The strict control exerted by the Chinese government over the media industry, including film and television, is highlighted, with censorship mechanisms in place to ensure alignment with state policies and the portrayal of a positive national image. This controlled narrative extends globally, as China leverages its media to project soft power on an international scale, employing digital platforms and influencers to disseminate its cultural values and influence global perceptions.

The strategy of targeting the younger generation is evident in cultural initiatives such as educational programs, youth-oriented movies, and the infusion of patriotic themes in various

forms of content. Interviewee 1 notes that this approach aims to instill a sense of national pride from an early age, with media employed to frame global events in a manner that reinforces this sentiment. Additionally, personal reflections from Interviewee 2 and Interviewee 3 provide valuable insights into the manifestation of national spirit among middle-aged individuals in China, emphasizing linguistic and cultural identity both domestically and abroad.

The prevalence of censorship and control mechanisms in China's media landscape is exemplified in the case of "Dying to Survive" (2018), a film navigating sensitive topics while carefully avoiding direct criticism of the government. This illustrates the delicate balance filmmakers must strike to address societal issues within the confines of government-approved narratives. Simultaneously, the global influence of China in the entertainment industry is underscored by examples such as Tencent Pictures' involvement in the co-production of the Hollywood blockbuster "Warcraft" (2016). This exemplifies China's strategic expansion into international markets, contributing to the shaping of global perceptions through the dissemination of its cultural products.

In conclusion, the analysis of interview responses illuminates the multifaceted role of Chinese leadership in shaping the narrative of national pride through cultural initiatives, particularly in movies and media. The active promotion of nationalistic themes, strict control mechanisms, and global projection of soft power collectively contribute to a narrative that reinforces a positive image of China both domestically and internationally. The strategic targeting of the younger generation and personal reflections from citizens further emphasize the societal impact of these initiatives, fostering a sense of national identity and pride. The nuanced approach to censorship, as demonstrated in specific film examples, highlights the complexities inherent in navigating the intersection of cultural expression and state control. Ultimately, China's expanding influence in the global entertainment industry signifies a deliberate effort to participate in and shape international perceptions, contributing significantly to the nation's soft power strategy.

Evaluating China's Soft Power Strategies via Question 2

The responses from the interviewees shed light on the nuanced strategies employed by the Chinese government to leverage soft power, particularly through cultural expressions like movies. According to Interviewee 1, international co-productions in film and television stand out as a notable soft power approach. By collaborating with Hollywood and other countries, China strategically integrates its stories and perspectives into mainstream cinema, featuring Chinese actors and cultural elements. This deliberate effort aims to foster a positive global perception of China and enhance its cultural influence on the international stage.

Additionally, the establishment of Confucius Institutes is identified as a significant cultural diplomacy initiative. These institutes, dispersed across numerous countries, serve as cultural ambassadors by promoting the Chinese language and culture. The celebration of cultural

festivals such as the Spring Festival overseas further contributes to projecting a positive image of China and its rich heritage. The intentional promotion of Chinese cultural elements on the global stage illustrates a well-thought-out soft power strategy.

The influence of China in international media, exemplified by networks like CGTN, is acknowledged by Interviewee 1. This strategic broadcasting of a Chinese perspective on global news is viewed as an influential soft power tool, shaping international public opinion positively towards China. Commercial enterprises such as Alibaba and TikTok are recognized not only for their economic impact but also for contributing to a modern and dynamic international image, reflecting positively on China's innovation and technological prowess.

Furthermore, the interviewee highlights China's investment in educational scholarships, exchange programs, and hosting international sports events as additional soft power strategies. These initiatives are designed to attract international students, spread Chinese culture globally, and position China as a global player in sports and entertainment. The Belt and Road Initiative is identified as having a cultural component that promotes people-to-people bonds through cultural exchange, fostering a positive view of China's global role.

In contrast, Interviewee 2 provides a more anecdotal perspective, noting the influx of foreigners to China for various purposes. While not explicitly detailing specific soft power strategies, this observation implies a positive impact on public perception and a growing interest in China.

Interviewee 3 introduces examples that emphasize the cultural impact of China's soft power strategies. Hosting the Beijing 2008 Summer Olympics is recognized as a pivotal moment for showcasing China's economic development, cultural heritage, and organizational capabilities on the global stage. The Winter Olympics in 2022 is positioned as another opportunity for China to demonstrate its global leadership and organizational prowess, contributing to the country's soft power through the promotion of Chinese culture, technology, and hospitality.

Moreover, Interviewee 3 underscores the practice of "Panda Diplomacy," where China gifts giant pandas to other countries as a symbol of friendship and goodwill. This symbolic gesture is noted for fostering positive relations and generating goodwill, contributing to a favorable perception of China. The analysis also delves into the positive international reception of Chinese cinematic achievements, citing examples such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" and "Hero," which showcase Chinese culture, philosophy, and martial arts on the global stage.

The collaboration with Hollywood filmmakers, exemplified by the co-production of "The Great Wall," serves as an illustration of China's efforts to engage with the international film industry. The success of Chinese films at major international film festivals and the global expansion of Chinese streaming platforms, such as iQiyi and Tencent Video, are identified as contributing to shaping perceptions of China's cultural output and creativity.

Lastly, Interviewee 3 highlights the use of cultural symbols, specifically the giant panda, in animated films like "Kung Fu Panda." These co-produced films showcase elements of Chinese culture and philosophy, contributing to a favorable portrayal of China in mainstream Western entertainment.

In short, the analysis of interview responses reveals a multifaceted and strategic approach by the Chinese government to enhance its international image through cultural expressions, particularly in the realm of movies. The deliberate integration of Chinese stories into international co-productions, the establishment of Confucius Institutes for cultural diplomacy, the influence in international media, investment in education and sports, and symbolic practices like "Panda Diplomacy" collectively contribute to a comprehensive soft power strategy. The examples provided underscore the diversity and effectiveness of China's initiatives, showcasing a concerted effort to positively influence global perceptions and assert cultural influence on the international stage.

Evaluating China's Soft Power Strategies via Question 3

The responses from the three interviewees offer valuable insights into the impact of China's leadership in promoting its cultural products on the sense of national identity and pride. Interviewee 1 elucidates the integral role played by cultural products in shaping a collective national identity. The diverse mediums, ranging from movies to literature and art, contribute to a profound sense of pride among Chinese citizens. The global recognition and celebration of Chinese culture enhance feelings of national identity, with an added emphasis on the preservation of traditional Chinese culture as a means of passing down essential heritage to younger generations. This approach fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of history, ultimately contributing to a more rooted and interconnected national identity.

Furthermore, Interviewee 1 highlights the international dimension of cultural promotion as a form of soft power diplomacy. The global dissemination of Chinese culture not only influences global perceptions but also creates a positive image of China on the world stage. This global impact reinforces national pride among Chinese citizens, with economic success in global markets serving as an additional source of pride and confidence. The promotion of Chinese culture internationally is seen as facilitating cultural exchange, fostering a sense of global community while preserving a distinct cultural identity.

Interviewee 2 provides a succinct yet powerful perspective, emphasizing that the promotion of Chinese culture instills a great national spirit among the Chinese people, with the concept of a "great China" serving as a source of pride. This sentiment echoes the collective pride associated with the assertion of cultural identity, highlighting the emotional and symbolic significance attached to cultural promotion.

Interviewee 3 delves into the domestic impact of promoting Chinese cultural products, underscoring their role in cultural rediscovery and renewed appreciation. The success of

specific cultural products, such as the animated film "Ne Zha," is cited as an example of sparking conversations about traditional elements and contributing to a sense of rediscovery and pride in China's storytelling traditions. Additionally, the discussion of positive national narratives in cultural products, exemplified by the historical drama series "The Longest Day in Chang'an," further emphasizes the role of cultural expression in fostering a collective sense of pride and identity.

Moreover, Interviewee 3 notes the international recognition and respect garnered by successful Chinese cultural products, showcasing how these achievements contribute to the global reputation of Chinese creativity, innovation, and cultural contributions. The intentional use of cultural soft power, exemplified by investments in the global entertainment industry and collaborations with Hollywood, becomes a strategic tool in shaping international perceptions and projecting China's influence globally.

To sum up, the analysis of the interview responses underscores the multifaceted impact of China's leadership in promoting its cultural products on the sense of national identity and pride. The domestic and international dimensions of this effort contribute to a profound understanding of heritage and history among Chinese citizens. The global recognition and celebration of Chinese culture not only enhance national identity but also serve as a form of soft power diplomacy, influencing global perceptions of China. The emotional and symbolic significance attached to cultural promotion is evident in the expressions of national spirit and pride articulated by the interviewees. The nuanced examples provided, spanning diverse cultural products and their impact at both domestic and international levels, collectively highlight the pivotal role of cultural promotion in shaping a cohesive and prideful national identity among the Chinese populace.

Evaluating China's Soft Power Strategies via Question 4

Interviewee 1 articulates a comprehensive understanding of the role of Chinese films and cultural exports in shaping a positive international perception of China and its leadership. The mention of a nuanced and favorable image through showcasing culture, history, and values underscores the integral role these efforts play in China's soft power strategy. The use of cultural diplomacy as a non-confrontational engagement tool highlights the intent to foster mutual understanding and respect, ultimately improving perceptions of Chinese leadership. The international success of Chinese cultural products is strategically linked to portraying China's economic and technological prowess, reinforcing an image of effective and forward-looking leadership. Moreover, the emphasis on quality improvement to meet international standards positions China as a nation dedicated to excellence, positively reflecting on its leadership. Addressing universal themes contributes to the perception of China as a responsible global actor, showcasing a leadership actively engaged in addressing international challenges.

Interviewee 2, in contrast, expresses uncertainty and an inability to specify the effects of Chinese films and cultural exports. The absence of a detailed response suggests a potential lack of awareness or clarity regarding the specific impact of these cultural initiatives on shaping international perceptions of China and its leadership. Interviewee 3 provides a thorough analysis, emphasizing several ways in which Chinese films and cultural exports contribute to a positive international image. Cultural diplomacy is identified as a powerful tool that fosters cultural exchange, breaking down stereotypes and promoting understanding. The mention of soft power projection highlights the strategic use of cultural exports to enhance global influence, with specific examples of successful films contributing to a perception of China as a culturally rich and dynamic nation. The globalization of Chinese brands and entertainment platforms, including TikTok, is noted for contributing to a positive image of China as a hub of innovation and creativity. The promotion of Chinese values and the portrayal of technological advancements align with the government's goals, shaping international views of China as a global leader in technology. The creation of shared cultural experiences through cultural products is highlighted as a means of building people-to-people connections, humanizing the Chinese people, and contributing to a positive perception of China's diverse cultural tapestry.

The synthesis of responses highlights the multifaceted impact of China's leadership in spreading soft power through films and cultural exports. Interviewee 1 underscores the strategic use of cultural promotion in presenting a nuanced and favorable image, employing cultural diplomacy, and showcasing economic prowess. Interviewee 2's uncertainty suggests a potential gap in understanding or awareness of the specific effects of cultural initiatives. Interviewee 3 provides a comprehensive analysis, emphasizing cultural diplomacy, soft power projection, brand globalization, promotion of values, technological showcase, and the creation of people-to-people connections. Collectively, these insights suggest that while China's cultural exports contribute significantly to shaping a positive international perception, the effectiveness of these efforts may be subject to individual experiences, cultural contexts, and broader geopolitical considerations.

Evaluating China's Soft Power Strategies via Question 5

Interviewee 1 presents a nuanced analysis of how the government's emphasis on cultural soft power shapes Chinese citizens' views of their own identity and associated values. The promotion of Chinese culture and history is identified as a key factor in strengthening national identity. By highlighting traditional values and cultural uniqueness, the government fosters a heightened sense of pride in cultural heritage among citizens. The incorporation of modern, global influences is acknowledged as a dynamic strategy that shapes views on contemporary Chinese identity. However, the potential overshadowing of regional and ethnic diversities is noted, suggesting a need for a balanced approach to inclusivity. The alignment of the government's narrative with values such as national unity, economic progress, and social

harmony is identified as contributing to shaping the collective identity and values of the Chinese people.

Interviewee 2 expresses a sense of pride in the global attraction to China, attributing it not only to economic advancements but also to the allure of a 5,000-year-old culture. This perspective reflects an awareness of the positive impact of cultural soft power in attracting individuals from around the world. The emphasis on cultural advantage adds a layer to the understanding of Chinese identity, suggesting that cultural richness contributes significantly to the pride associated with being Chinese.

Interviewee 3 provides a comprehensive examination of the influence of cultural soft power on Chinese citizens' identity and associated values. The analysis covers multiple dimensions, including national pride and identity, the revival of traditional values, shaping social norms, a sense of global identity, influence on youth, censorship, and themes of patriotism and unity. Specific examples, such as the film "The Founding of a Republic" and television dramas like "A Love for Separation," are cited to illustrate the government's impact on shaping narratives and values. The acknowledgment of the influence on the younger generation and the modern identity they adopt adds depth to the understanding of how cultural soft power affects different segments of the population.

The analysis of the interview responses reveals that the government's emphasis on cultural soft power has had a profound impact on how Chinese citizens perceive their own identity and the associated values. The promotion of Chinese culture, history, and values has strengthened the sense of national identity and pride among citizens. The dynamic strategy of blending traditional elements with global influences contributes to shaping contemporary views on Chinese identity. However, the potential challenges of overshadowing regional and ethnic diversities are acknowledged, calling for a balanced approach. The government's alignment of narratives with values such as national unity and economic progress, as well as the use of censorship to control cultural narratives, is identified as influential in shaping collective identity and values. Overall, the responses suggest a multifaceted impact, with cultural soft power playing a pivotal role in shaping a cohesive national identity and influencing the values associated with being Chinese.

Conclusion

The evaluation of responses from the interviewees collectively reveals the profound influence of China's soft power initiatives in shaping both internal perspectives and global perceptions. Evident in cultural domains like film, media, and cultural exports, Chinese soft power strategically contributes to reinforcing national pride and nurturing a shared identity among its citizens. The spotlight on traditional values, historical accomplishments, and cultural uniqueness emerges as a foundational element, fostering an elevated sense of pride in cultural heritage within the domestic context. Concurrently, the expansive reach of Chinese soft power

strategies, exemplified through successful collaborations in the international entertainment industry, participation in global film projects, and the widespread impact of Chinese brands and platforms, collectively crafts a positive international image of China as a culturally rich, innovative, and influential global player.

Moreover, the significance of cultural diplomacy is underscored through initiatives such as Confucius Institutes, cultural festivals, and the global success of Chinese cultural products, acting as pivotal instruments in establishing global connections and dispelling preconceived notions. The controlled narrative orchestrated by the Chinese government, inclusive of mechanisms like censorship, profoundly shapes the perception of national identity among its citizens by reinforcing values like national unity, economic progress, and social harmony. Finally, the deliberate targeting of the younger generation through popular culture, entertainment, and online platforms epitomizes a dynamic soft power approach, molding modern identity among Chinese youth and projecting a contemporary and dynamic image of China on the global stage. In essence, the multifaceted deployment of soft power initiatives reflects a comprehensive strategy implemented by the Chinese government to not only enhance domestic cohesion but also project a positive and influential global image.

Chapter 3: China's soft power in East-Southeast Asia

This chapter extensively explores China's influence in the region, focusing especially on the soft power dynamics expressed through its rich film and television productions. These cultural exports not only impact the region's socio-cultural landscape but also significantly impact China's economic and geopolitical position globally. By closely examining the narrative and thematic aspects of Chinese films and television series, this chapter aims to explore the complex ways in which these cultural creations shape perceptions, motivate cross-cultural connections, and contribute to the global discourse on China's economic and political power. This analysis goes beyond mere entertainment value, highlighting the deliberate use of soft power as a sophisticated and multifaceted tool tied to China's broader global influence. The nuanced relationship between cultural expression and its socio-political consequences thus offers valuable insights into the far-reaching ramifications of China's soft power strategy in the international arena.

1. General introduction to Chinese films

Chinese cinema or Chinese retail films is the second largest cinema in the world, second only to North America. During the 20th century, Chinese cinema had a period of stagnation and slow development due to constant wars. However, today, with the economy developing rapidly like a new phenomenon, Chinese cinema is also blooming and exploding strongly, becoming the number one cinema in Asia and the second in the world.

Television dramas, especially historical dramas, are considered the "golden eggs" for the film industry in particular and the Chinese economy in general. If the movies are successful, they will bring huge profits to the producers. Not counting the revenue from advertising of brands, the mere sale of copyrights to radio stations and broadcasting channels has brought in trillions of billions in revenue for filmmakers. The list of copyright fees for a number of television series from 2015-2019 was revealed, attracting great debate from the audience as most of them were several hundred or billions of yuan (equivalent to thousands of billions of dong). At the top of this list, with the highest copyright fee is the movie *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*, reaching 1.305 billion yuan, the price of each episode is 14.5 million yuan (Nhu Ho, 2019).

2. Policies and measures for film development in China

2.1. Policy to focus on expanding cinemas

Over the past decade, the number of Chinese movie theaters has increased rapidly, becoming the country with the largest number of movie theaters in the world, with nearly 70,000 theaters.

Number of movie theaters in China from 2012 to 2019

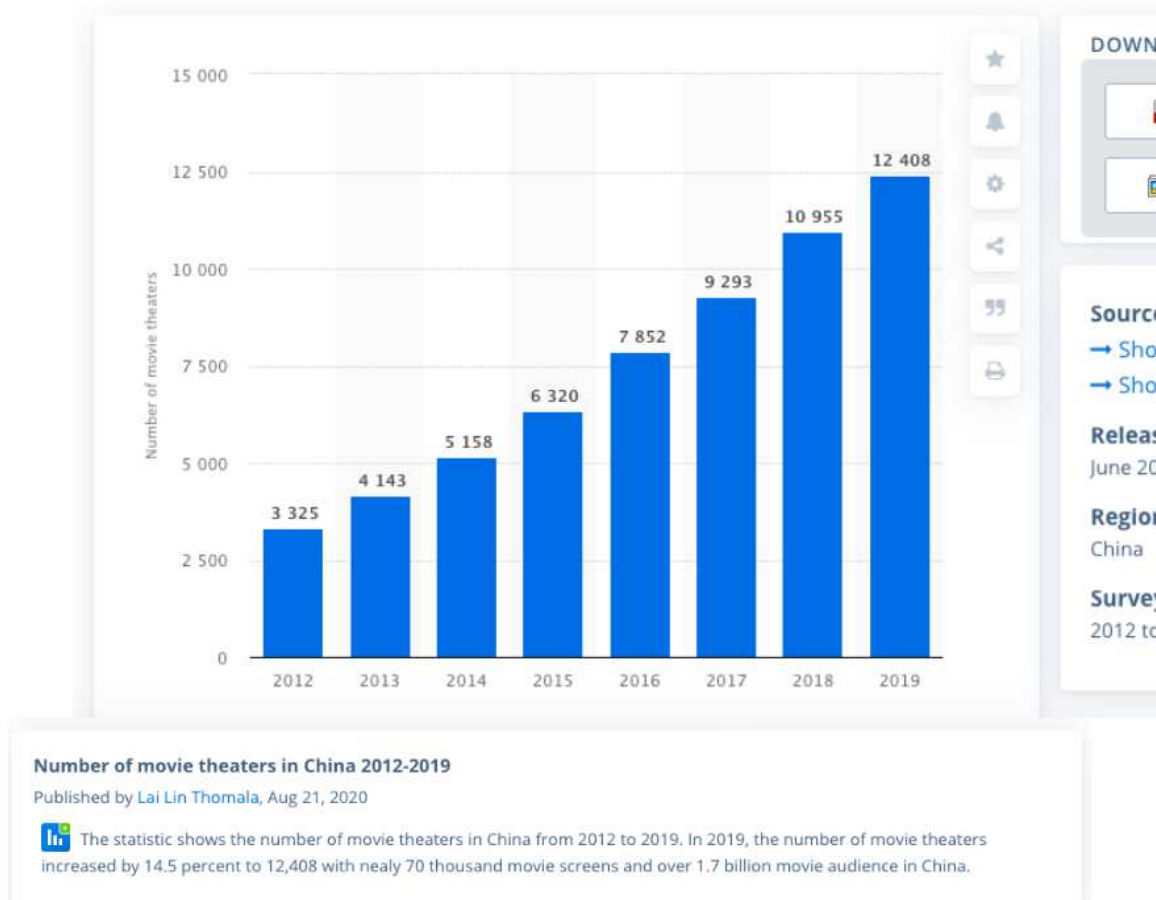


Figure 1: Number of movie theaters in China from 2012 to 2019 (Lai Lin Thomala, 2020)

The chart above shows that the number of movie theaters in China from 2012 to 2019 increased from 3,325 to 12,408, with nearly 70,000 theaters nationwide.

Many large film studios have been invested in such as Wuxi, Hengdian, Dunhuang, etc. Typically, the Qingdao Oriental Movie Metropolis (QOMM) complex is owned by the Dalian Wanda Group with the largest area in the world, more than 1.6 million meters square (Hong Nhu, 2019).

2.2. The constant increase in the Chinese Government's investment in movies

China wanted to become a film power by 2035. The specific goal set by the government is to improve film quality, with 100 works earning over 100 million yuan (about 15 million USD). To do this, China was still applying strict policies with foreign film quotas, while creating all conditions for domestic films to grow and expand their markets (Rebecca Davis, 2019).

Due to the recent increase in scandals involving famous actors leading to the cancellation of film releases, the Chinese government also announced that China will establish a "National Film Industry Ethics Committee".

2.3. Billionaires acquire foreign film studios, making China's image popular in Western movies

In Asia, Western movies, specifically Hollywood products, are one of China's main "rivals". The number of audiences who love, follow, and are influenced by Western films from romance, and fiction to action is huge. To regain market share of more than 4 billion people, a series of Chinese billionaires have poured money into acquiring famous Hollywood studios, since then the appearance of Chinese scenes and Chinese main actors has become more and more frequent. This is an indirect way for China to promote its culture in addition to developing "branded" Chinese products.

Specifically, Wang Jian Lin of real estate and entertainment group Dalian Wanda Group in turn bought the giant cinema systems AMC Entertainment, Carmike Cinema, and American company Legendary Entertainment (producer of Jurassic World, The Dark Night, etc.), Dick Clark Productions - producer of the Golden Globes program and live television events, under agreement with Sony Pictures. Jack Ma (Alibaba) bought a minority stake in Amblin Partners owned by director Steven Spielberg. Tony Xia (Recon Group) buys a majority stake in Millennium (producer of action films Rambo, The Expendables, London Has Fallen and its —library of 300 films). Li Cui Qiang spent money to cooperate with Warner Bros (Le Phan, 2018).

Table 1: Chinese government intervention in the development of the film industry⁶

Competitiveness Factors	Government's policy	Firms' response
Agility	Importing Hollywood blockbusters for reviving of the film market Main melody films and protectionist regulations against imported films	Seeking commercial films but avoiding controversial subjects
Benchmarking	Allowing investment from foreign firms	Learning cinematic techniques through global alliances, for

⁶ Hwy-Chang Moon Wenyan Yin, 08 July 2020. How Chinese Filmmakers Effectively Respond to Chinese Government Policy for Enhancing Their Competitiveness. Online: Wiley Online Library. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12824>. [Accessed 21 November 2023].

	Establishing official co-production agreements to promote the film industry	example from Hong Kong or Hollywood Active overseas investment through international M&As
Convergence	Corporate structural reform to create synergy within the film sector Deregulation for private sector investment and cross-industry synergy	Mega-media conglomerates to support big-budget films Industrial integration for sustainable development
Dedication	The government's conceptual changes toward commercialization Allowing more diversity to attract global audiences	Changing the role of directors toward entrepreneurs Adopting various commercialization strategies for higher commercial value

2.4. Political messages through the screen

Chinese government communicators used “Framing theory” instead of just “Agenda-setting theory” when they focused on key messages through film channels, specifically on the big screen and the small screen. The national filmmaking trend in the last years has been to promote patriotic films in the communist country to strengthen China's soft power and value domestic voices more than international public opinion.

In 2016, the release of the film *Operation Mekong*, based on China's anti-drug operation following the massacre that left 13 Chinese sailors dead on the Mekong River, marked the beginning of a heroic film patriotism in China. The film's slogan, "You live a good life because someone [referring to Chinese soldiers and police] takes on the trouble for you", was frequently mentioned on social media.

In 2017, *Wolf Warrior 2* grossed over 874 million USD and broke the all-time Chinese box office record, followed by *Red Sea Campaign*, the highest-grossing film of 2018 in China and

ninth in the world. world, according to Beijing-based film research company EntGroup (Dongyao Nie, 2018). Also in 2018, *Amazing China*, a documentary showcasing China's economic, technological, and welfare development achievements since when President Xi Jinping came to power, became the most famous Chinese documentary in history.



Movie Wolf Warrior. Photo source: China Film Inside

Although most films are set abroad in regions such as Africa and Southeast Asia, the film's protagonists are often members of the Chinese military and police, representing the Chinese government. By showing China's successful operations abroad, a key point is being emphasized: China has the strength and determination to protect its citizens anywhere in the world.

For example, in *Operation Red Sea*, adapted from the true story of the evacuation of Chinese citizens during the 2015 Yemeni Civil War, the Chinese People's Liberation Army called in elite special forces and used top-notch weapons and a naval fleet to bring 130 Chinese citizens home. The United States is compared to China in *Wolf Warrior 2*: while the Chinese Embassy is sheltering Chinese and foreign citizens during the war, the US Embassy is closed and does not accept its own citizens' return.



Movie: Red Sea Campaign. Photo source: VNExpress

In addition, these films suggest that China is determined to defeat any invasion of its territory, catering to the deep-seated nationalistic sentiments of most Chinese people. This stems from two centuries of modern Chinese history when China was colonized by foreign powers such as Britain and Japan.

But perhaps the most effective in increasing China's soft power through television dramas was the way filmmakers propagate China's maritime sovereignty. For many years, China had inserted the image of the "cow tongue line" and false details asserting sovereignty into movies, paintings, etc. Some television works were copyrighted and shown abroad. There were also these deviations. A typical example of this case was the movie "In the name of a family member - a "national" movie of China in 2020 and has an extremely strong influence throughout Asia and was also purchased with broadcast rights on FPT Play Vietnam. Specifically, in a scene in episode 18, the image of the "cow tongue line" map appeared on a billboard in the elevator. Immediately, the film caused controversy and opposition from many television viewers in Vietnam. However, despite incorporating false information about sovereignty over islands and islands, the film is still well received by many Vietnamese audiences - those who watch the film with the mindset of "as long as the film is good", this is acceptable. This is clearly shown by the fact that the film's fanpage in Vietnam has nearly 300,000 followers.



The image of the Chinese map said to have a 'cow tongue line' in episode 1 'Lying in the name of family' is being protested by netizens

Not only that, the fact that actors have a large number of international fans but still share controversial views on island sovereignty and spread inaccurate information also deeply affects awareness and thoughts of today's young fans.

2.5. Protection to domestic cinema

China is stronger in protecting intellectual property (IP) rights. Draft provisions to strengthen the country's copyright laws, China's ratification of the Beijing Treaty on Audiovisual Performances in 2014 and the upcoming Motion Picture Industry Promotion Law signal the government's commitment to copyright protection in the film industry in China. But while lawyers have suggested that film producers could use Chinese law to deal with copyright infringement, damages remain low. "The compensation level is not as high as in the US and Europe," said Chen Jihong of Zhong Lun law firm. "If actual damages to copyright owners and actual illegal profits cannot be calculated, the current compensation ceiling is 500,000 yuan (\$75,000), making the film very limited." In addition, the government also made a tough decision to set a ceiling on the number of foreign films shown in the country's cinemas. Although unpopular with foreign studio bosses, the quota policy has given China's domestic industry time and space to develop. Regulations that prevent foreign companies from making their films in China have created joint venture and co-production deals, giving Chinese filmmakers greater access to foreign know-how and Foreign companies entering the Chinese market (Emma Barraclough, 2016).

2.6. Cinema stimulus policy after the COVID-19 pandemic (Dorcas Wong, 2020)

Tax reduction

In May, the Ministry of Finance and the State Department of Taxation announced that taxpayers in the film industry will be exempt from value-added tax (VAT) on income from providing movie screening services. This will apply retroactively from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020.

Film companies' losses can now be carried forward over an eight-year period, up from five years ago, and any taxes and fees levied for this year can be deducted or refunded in the following months.

Free culture building

Along with the tax reduction, the Ministry of Finance and the China Film Administration have announced that businesses in the film industry are exempt from paying normal cultural construction fees.

This will apply to businesses in Hubei from January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020, while other provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities will enjoy this exemption for until August 31, 2020.

Support activities of local authorities are deployed

The Beijing Municipal Film Bureau also promoted the launch of two support funds for the Beijing Cultural Guidance and Propaganda Fund (film) and the 2020 Municipal Film Special

Fund and offered monetary subsidies for rent up to 30 to qualified cinema businesses, to support small and medium-sized cinemas that are struggling due to the impact of COVID-19.

Similarly, Shanghai and Zhejiang are among other regions that have adopted measures to strengthen financial support, increase credit supply and reduce corporate hiring costs to promote the creation and resumption of production in the film industry before and after the pandemic.

Further south, the Guangdong Film Bureau announced that it will allocate about 50 million yuan (\$14 million) in special film funds to more than 1,000 theaters affected by the outbreak in Guangdong, with the fund from 10,000 yuan (1,414 USD) to several hundred thousand yuan.

2.7. Policy of prioritizing drama films

One of the film genres that had the greatest influence on the country and people of the mainland is historical drama films. These were films about Chinese history, that invested heavily in every aspect, from script writing to writing production. The main content was mostly about famous Emperors in Chinese history, the power struggles that made a big mark in history. The Chinese government attached great importance to these historical films because it contributed to conveying and promoting the image and history of the Chinese nation in the easiest way to everyone and were less boring than reading a history book. These films were always shown at "prime time" of central channels. And every time there was a cultural exchange occasion, this movie genre was introduced and given away the most.

2.8. Tightening policy on historical films

Historical films have always been considered a specialty of Chinese cinema for many years, with investment in staging and being the main source of revenue for the country's film industry. However, with the renewal of historical film content as well as historical characters to follow market trends, Chinese films have lost the majesty they deserve. In pursuit of profits, filmmakers tend to compensate for quality with quantity, thereby producing a series of historical films that greatly or even completely distort the events. Chinese history, or films with temporary, absurd content, not suitable for mainland customs, traditions, lifestyle, culture, or people. Historical films are developing too quickly and are gradually becoming more difficult to control. Because of the suppression of historical figures causing misunderstandings about these cultural film products, since 2017, the Chinese government has expressed dissatisfaction with historical films, and since then policies have been tightened for this film genre.

Referring to this issue, Mr. You Xiaogang, the representative of the China Television Film Association, said: "We watch movies and must understand that movies are not only entertainment but also include cultural ideology. Young people watching the movie must see the vitality of youth and the spirit of struggle. But today's movies do not have this value, are

unrealistic, useless". That's why in the period 2018 - 2019, policies, restrictions, and even bans on historical films were issued. All types of historical films from martial arts, fantasy, space travel, palace fighting, historical, and mythological if not yet broadcast, will not be shown or advertised. Movies that have already aired must be removed from the front page. After this ban, many historical films about to air were suddenly postponed (Tuyet Nhung, 2019). And this is also the time to tighten the need for producers to be really careful in choosing the script and also how to present the story in their films. It seems like this is a policy to "kill" the Chinese historical film industry, but since the policy to tighten this film genre was issued, the films have been invested more carefully in terms of content and image. Images and meanings are more strictly censored. This is considered a process of "healthification" of the film industry. Therefore, when released, whether on television or online movie platforms, historical films are also licensed and are all extremely high-quality and meaningful films, far superior to other films. The movie was screened sporadically before. The General Department of Cinema's tightening of regulations on making historical films is only beneficial, not harmful at all. Basically, China produces a lot of dramas, the number can reach hundreds of movies including web dramas and television shows. People who love Chinese movies absolutely cannot watch them all. Furthermore, imposing regulations will reduce the increasing amount of "garbage" in the web drama industry today. Raise the issue of improving quality, delving deeper into actors' acting to create popular works. In 2018 alone, there were only two most typical historical films, Story of Yanxi Palace and Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace, that were remembered by the audience, among hundreds of films broadcast. Compared to "scolding" the General Department, audiences can have more expectations for the quality of Chinese films, especially costume dramas, which will improve in the future (JC, 2019). This policy has contributed to cleaning up the Chinese historical film market, allowing the image and culture of Chinese people to be presented to the world most perfectly.

2.9. Communication and Media Strategies

Establishment of media agencies

On March 21, 2018, Xinhua News Agency announced plans to establish a new propaganda agency, Voice of China, based on the merger of Central Television, China Radio International and National Radio. This would be one of the largest media agencies in the world with a total number of officers, reporters, and editors of about 15,000 people (Quang Huy, 2018).

Along with expanding the coverage of propaganda films, the Chinese government also increased supervision of film, radio, and television activities by assigning the Central Propaganda Department to take over the General Administration of Radio, Film and Television of China (SARFT) to be in charge of the fields of journalism, publishing, and cinema.

The purpose of this "super agency" is to "guide hot social issues, strengthen and improve public opinion, promote multimedia integration, strengthen international media, and tell good stories

about China". The power of the Central Ministry of Propaganda is now expanded - directly managing media agencies.

In addition, the Chinese Government continuously proposes information cooperation programs with ASEAN countries, aiming to bring the Chinese media wave into the region. In Southeast Asia, based on media cooperation, China has used mass media channels to promote the image of a country with peaceful development, friendly people, and a diverse culture rich in identity with the public in the area. China Radio International has built broadcasting stations in Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, etc. China Central Television's international news channel in Chinese and English is present in all 10 Southeast Asian countries. Chinese television programs exported to 10 Southeast Asian countries account for half of China's total media products exported abroad (Pham Hong Thai, Nguyen Thi Thu Phuong, 2015).

The influence of celebrities

It can be seen that Chinese government communicators have effectively applied the "Two-Step Flow Theory" in promoting their country's films. In this era of rapidly developing information technology, one thing that cannot be denied is the great influence of famous people. Chinese people mainly use the social network Weibo and celebrities such as Yang Mi, Huang Xiaoming, Zhao Wei, etc. have hundreds of millions of followers. Chinese celebrities all have a great influence on the public. The products they use, every event they attend, or every movie they participate in has become the hottest topic on the Internet, not only in China but also receiving attention throughout Asia.

Gorgeous red carpet outfits

With the heat of Cbiz's powerful cast, the red carpet has been always the most well-received event. Every time there is an event, the media's focus on female celebrities' outfits is huge.





Actor Fan Bingbing at the Cannes Film Festival (Photo: Pinterest)

Press conference and movie premieres

Organizing press conferences is one of the important tasks to help propagate and promote films closer to the audience. Press conferences are often held as the film begins to premiere. There will be many reporters from influential newspapers and social media users coming to report on the film. A press conference does not just stop at announcing information about the film being shown, but is also an opportunity for the audience to better understand the meaning and values of that film and is an opportunity for the actors to create a mark for the audience. During these events, Chinese actors often had intimate interactions and reenacted emotional scenes in movies such as "hugging and kissing" with each other, which helped attract attention from fans and moviegoers, contributing to making the actors' names more widely known.

3. The success of movies in increasing China's soft power

The Chinese government views the entertainment industry as a tool to enhance the country's global image, encourage nationalism, and promote mainstream values it sees fit. One of the leading slogans under President Xi Jinping is to tell China's story to the world only in a positive light, without mentioning global threats (Hong Nhu, 2019). In fact, in Asia, overall, China's strategy of increasing soft power through movies has been successful.

3.1. Asian public reaction to Chinese films

In Asia, Chinese television dramas are well-received and have broadcast rights purchased in many countries. Chinese films with topics suitable to their tastes and new and attractive content have become indispensable spiritual food for many Asian people.

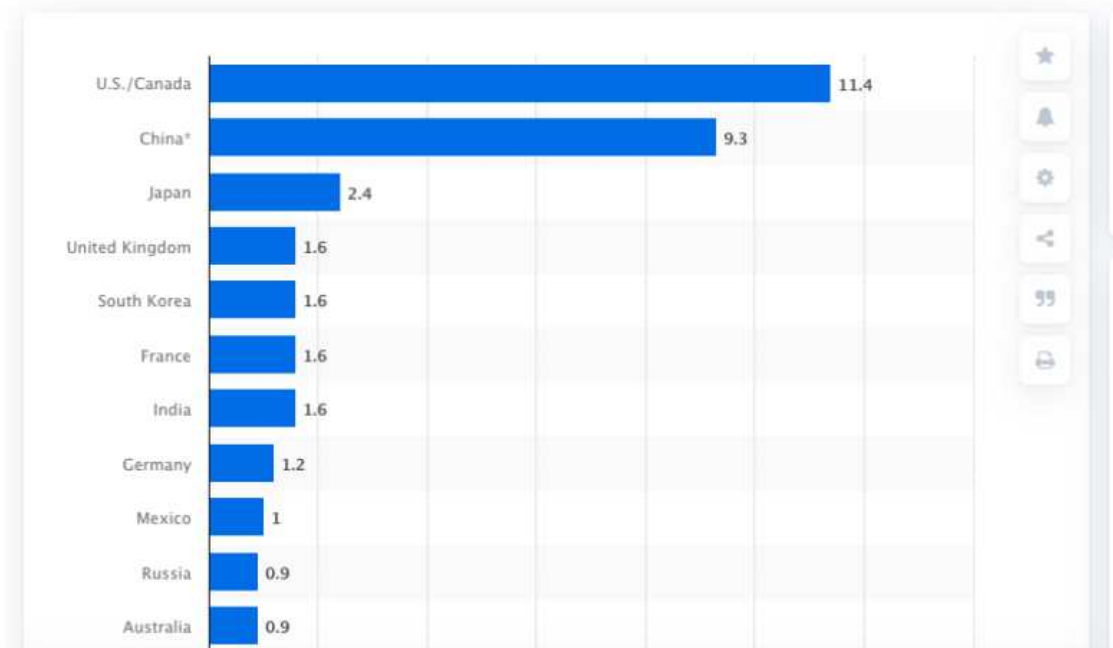
In Southeast Asian countries, among exported media products, television dramas, especially historical dramas, are considered channels that can effectively introduce the country's history, people, and culture of China into the area. Dramas also create a craze for young people's fashion styles. Most prominent is the trend of wearing Hanfu which has blossomed and developed in nearly a decade. Since the historical film series achieved success and a certain position in the entertainment industry, the elements surrounding this film series such as history, costumes, and cuisine have become extremely attractive. The movement to wear Hanfu began nearly two decades ago when Japanese Cosplay culture began to be introduced to China. However, in just the last 4-5 years, when the historical film genre developed dramatically, the movement of wearing Hanfu also followed suit and became a leading fashion trend not only for young people in China but also for young people across Asia. They wear Han clothes when walking around, shopping, eating, and even when going to school. "To some extent, the revival of Hanfu is the revival of culture from the Han Dynasty, and the revival of culture from the Han Dynasty is also the revival of Chinese culture", said Mr. Chen Zhenbing, president of the Chinese Hanfu Association (Thien Hoa, 2019).

In addition, television series also contribute to increasing the image of the country, people, and culture of China, creating opportunities to promote tourism. Historical films contribute to national tourism by promoting famous destinations such as: the Great Wall of China, Forbidden City, Hangzhou, ancient town (Suzhou), etc. Film studios or famous places such as Huangdian, Wuxi, and Dunhuang are also destinations for many tourists. The keyword "visiting Chinese film studios" produces more than 100 million results in just 0.59 seconds on Google, which shows the appeal and popularity of this form of tourism in China.

Regarding movies, in 2018, China's cinema revenue increased by 9% to 8.9 billion USD in revenue - second only to North America's 11.38 billion USD. Unlike Hollywood, which cannot rely solely on the American movie-going public, the Chinese film market excels at catering to domestic audiences. Chinese and Hollywood films both shared the top 10 box office hits in 2018, but domestic films (*Operation Red Sea*, *Detective Chinatown 2*, *Dying to Survive*, *Hello Mr. Billionaire*) were the first four places (Liz Shackleton, 2019).

Figure 2: Top box office markets worldwide in 2019, by revenue (in billions of US dollars)⁷

Leading box office markets worldwide in 2019, by revenue (in billion U.S. dollars)



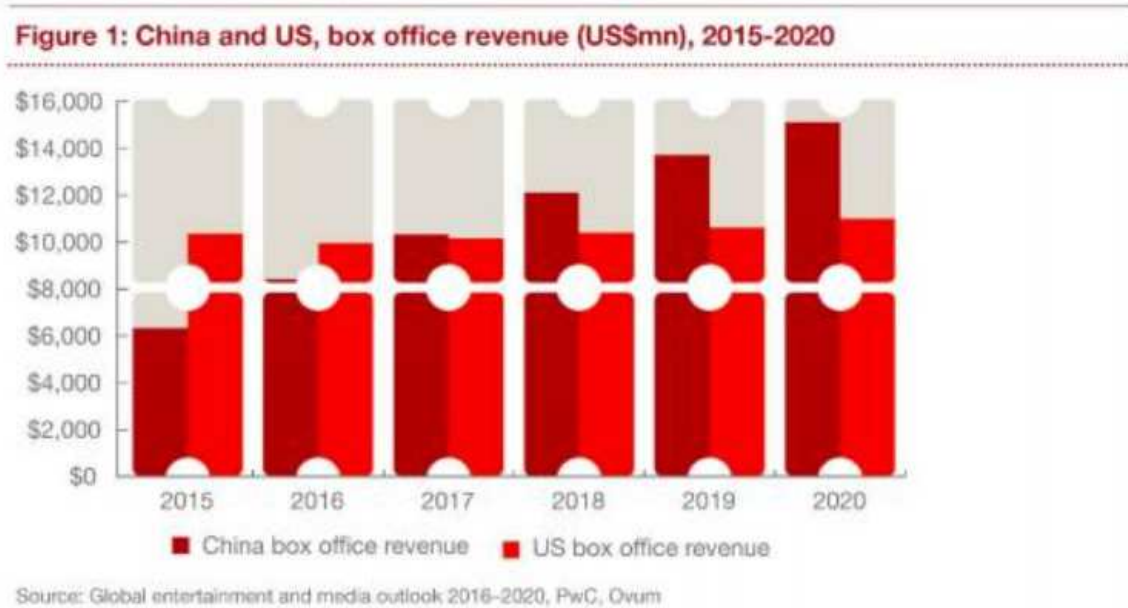
Leading box office markets worldwide in 2019, by revenue

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In the film industry, in the first six months of 2019, although domestic film production decreased, many films left a big mark. The science fiction film *The Wandering Earth* achieved revenue of 691 million USD when it was released, ranking second on the cinema revenue chart in China. After 9 days of release, *Nezha* became the fastest-grossing animated film in the country, with an estimated revenue of about 510 million USD.

⁷ Amy Watson, 2020. Leading Box Office Markets Worldwide By Revenue 2019 | Statista. [online] Statista. Available at: <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/243180/leading-box-office-markets-workdwide-by-revenue/>> [Accessed 22 Dec 2023].

Figure 3: Box office growth rate of the US and China⁸



3.2. Chinese films in international discussion and research

In English academic circles, the Chinese film industry is considered a serious subject of study that has seen remarkable development. There have been scholarly discussions of Chinese films and film festivals (Berry, Chris and Robinson, Luke 2017) and the development of the film industry such as Kokas Ayane's 2017 study "Hollywood Made in China" at the University of California Press and Wendy Su in 2016 with the study "China's Encounter with Global Hollywood: Cultural Policy and the Film Industry 1994-2013" in Lexington, Kentucky: House published University of Kentucky (Wing-Fai Leung, Sangjoon Lee, 2019).

It can be seen that, throughout its social and economic development, Chinese films have shown their important position in helping the country propagate and promote the cultural and human beauty of Chinese people. This also makes an important contribution to increasing the soft power of the People's Republic of China in the field of cultural and economic diplomacy to the world, especially in creating cultural imprints in East-Southeast Asian countries. Overall, China has successfully increased its soft power in the region thanks to this factor.

⁸ Global Entertainment & Media Outlook. 2020. China Challenges The US For Global Box Office Leadership – In A Multi-Speed Global Market Where Globalisation And Localisation Coexist And Interact. [online] Available at: <<https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/entertainment-media/pdf/outlook-cinema-article-2016.pdf>> [Accessed 22 Dec 2023].

4. Keys to Chinese Film Success in East-Southeast Asia

The ascendancy of Chinese films in the Asian milieu can be comprehensively expounded by delving into a confluence of interrelated factors, prominently underscored by the extraordinary strides witnessed in China's film industry during the tenure of President Xi Jinping. This transformative era has witnessed a palpable renaissance in cinematic prowess, propelled by two seminal drivers: the innate allure of Chinese culture seamlessly interwoven into cinematic tapestries and the sagacious commitment of the government towards the holistic development and strategic investment in the burgeoning film industry.

The intrinsic appeal of Chinese culture, vividly portrayed in cinematic creations, has served as an indomitable force behind the burgeoning popularity of Chinese films across Asia. Evidence supporting this assertion can be gleaned from the international acclaim garnered by films such as "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," "Hero," and "Raise the Red Lantern." These cinematic masterpieces not only mesmerized global audiences with their storytelling finesse but also encapsulated the rich tapestry of Chinese traditions, fostering a cross-cultural appreciation that resonated far beyond national borders. Equally pivotal in this cinematic renaissance is the government's astute and forward-looking commitment to the film industry. Tangible evidence lies in the multifaceted nature of China's film development policies, characterized by a long-term perspective that extends well into the future. For instance, the Five-Year Plans for the Cultural Industries, formulated by the government, articulate a comprehensive vision encompassing film production, distribution, and international collaborations. The Chinese Film Industry Promotion Law of 2016 (Rebecca Xiaomeng Zhang, 2017) further exemplifies the government's dedication to fostering the industry, offering incentives, and addressing challenges to ensure sustained growth.

A granular examination of China's film development strategies reveals an orchestrated and collaborative approach, enlisting the active participation of diverse stakeholders. Government agencies, media entities, investors, and influential personalities converge in a concerted effort to elevate Chinese cinema to unprecedented heights. Notable instances include collaborations between Chinese production companies and international studios, exemplified by the co-production of blockbuster films like "The Great Wall" with Hollywood's Legendary Entertainment. Moreover, films have transcended their traditional role as mere entertainment to become potent tools in the realm of soft power. A case in point is the global success of the film "Wolf Warrior 2," which not only became the highest-grossing Chinese film but also showcased China's burgeoning capabilities in the action genre. The film's success is indicative of how cinematic narratives when strategically crafted, can wield influence, shape perceptions, and contribute substantively to a nation's soft power dynamics.

In short, the flourishing success of Chinese films in Asia can be attributed to the synergy between the inherent allure of Chinese culture, visionary government policies, and

collaborative industry efforts. As evidenced by acclaimed films and legislative frameworks, this dynamic ecosystem has not only propelled Chinese cinema to international acclaim but has also positioned it as a formidable player in the global cultural and soft power landscape. The fusion of cultural richness, strategic planning, and collaborative endeavors ensures that Chinese films continue to captivate audiences and augment China's influence on the global stage.

Chapter 4: Case Study: Vietnam

In Vietnam, since the normalization of relations between the two countries (1991), China has used cultural and educational exchange cooperation activities as a channel to promote the spread of culture. In 1992, through the official route, China signed many cultural cooperation agreements with Vietnam. On that basis, the two countries have signed many cultural cooperation plans and programs. Exhibitions and fairs are also considered a channel to bring Chinese cultural appeal to Vietnam. Every year, China brings art troupes to perform on the occasion of Vietnam's National Day. In addition, each year there are often dozens of troupes visiting and performing in localities in Vietnam. Regarding traditional theater, based on the similar advantages of Vietnamese opera and Chinese opera, between Vietnamese Cai Luong and Chinese opera, this country has coordinated with Vietnam to organize many performances. Scientific seminars and performances aimed at affirming the level of reception of Chinese art in Vietnam. Exhibitions and fairs are also strongly exploited by China to promote this country's culture to Vietnam.

1. Explanation of why Vietnam is chosen as a case study

Vietnam is chosen as a case study of China's soft power for its historical, strategic, economic, cultural, and geopolitical significance. China's soft power exerts a profound influence in Vietnam, rooted in a historical tapestry woven with centuries of cultural exchange, economic interdependence, diplomatic relations, and territorial disputes. Throughout history, Vietnam has been shaped by the ebb and flow of Chinese cultural influence, reflected in shared linguistic roots, philosophical traditions, and historical narratives. This historical connection has imbued Vietnamese society with a degree of receptivity to Chinese soft power initiatives, facilitating the dissemination of Chinese values, norms, and narratives within Vietnam.

Moreover, China's position as Vietnam's largest trading partner and a significant source of investment underscores its economic sway over the country. The deepening economic ties between China and Vietnam not only contribute to Vietnam's economic development but also afford China considerable leverage in shaping Vietnam's economic policies, trade relations, and development strategies. This economic interdependence amplifies China's soft power, as Vietnam becomes increasingly reliant on Chinese markets, investments, and economic assistance.

In addition to cultural and economic dimensions, China's soft power in Vietnam extends to the realm of diplomacy. China employs diplomatic initiatives, such as bilateral agreements, high-level visits, and regional cooperation mechanisms, to foster closer ties with Vietnam and promote mutual understanding. These diplomatic efforts not only serve to enhance China's

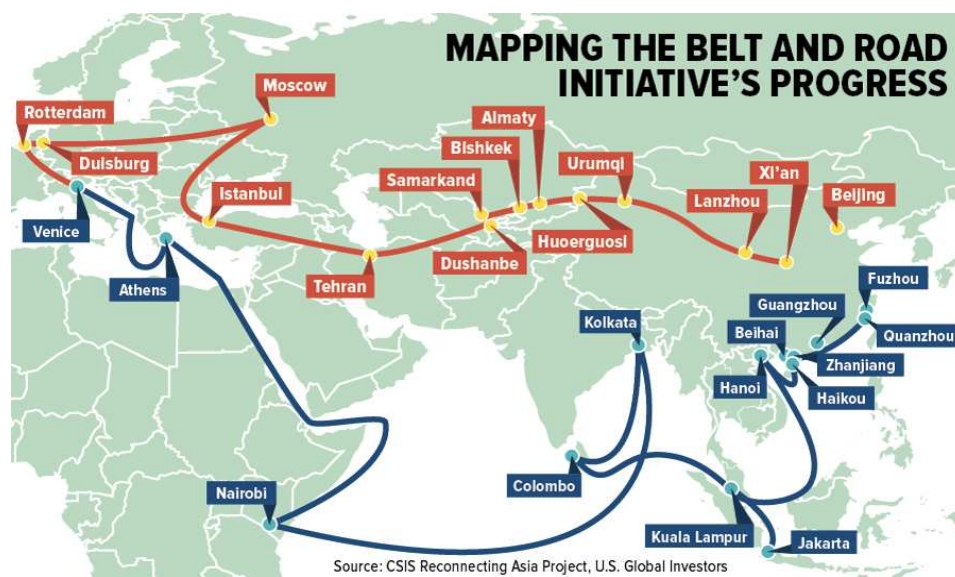
image as a responsible regional actor but also influence Vietnam's foreign policy decisions and strategic alignments.

However, tensions surrounding territorial disputes in the South China Sea pose a significant challenge to China's soft power in Vietnam. The disputed maritime territories, claimed by both China and Vietnam, have been a source of contention, leading to periodic escalations and strained bilateral relations. China's assertive actions in the South China Sea, including island-building activities and maritime patrols, have exacerbated tensions and fueled anti-Chinese sentiments in Vietnam. Consequently, these territorial disputes undermine China's soft power efforts in Vietnam, as they sow distrust, breed resentment, and impede efforts at bilateral cooperation and reconciliation.

2. China's soft power initiatives in Vietnam

China's reform and opening-up (since 1978) has achieved many successes with the model of "socialism with Chinese characteristics", rising to become the second largest economy in the world, controlling the third strongest military in the world, and a giant technology country, playing an important role in the global value chain. The goal Chinese leaders aim for is building a moderately prosperous society by 2021 on the occasion of the Communist Party of China's 100th anniversary of its founding; move toward building China into a modern, prosperous, democratic, civilized, and harmonious socialist country by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

To achieve the above goal, immediately after being elected General Secretary of the Communist Party of China (November 2012) and then President of the People's Republic of China (March 2013), Xi Jinping introduced big ideas that attract the attention of international public opinion such as the "China Dream" and most notably the "Belt and Road Initiative" - BRI.



Vietnam lies within the geographical scope of China's "Belt and Road" Initiative and has a great need for infrastructure investment, which can benefit from this Initiative. Many experts believe that, through BRI, Vietnam can receive more capital for infrastructure and transportation development, increase service capacity and economic development, at the same time, take advantage of this opportunity to increase trade and investment exchanges and links with Southeast Asian countries. Joining the BRI could also bring greater tourism potential to Vietnam and China. However, the benefits and challenges Vietnam may face once participating in the BRI still need to be carefully considered.

During Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Hanoi in November 2017, the two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to promote the connection of the "Two Corridors, One Belt" framework with the "Belt and Road" Initiative. Accordingly, the two sides committed to cooperate and connect in 5 areas including policy connection, investment cooperation and infrastructure connection, trade connection, financial connection, and human connection. In August 2022, at the 14th meeting of the China-Vietnam Steering Committee to establish bilateral cooperation in Nanning, capital of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the two sides agreed to strengthen development strategy and acceleration of cooperation through BRI and the "Two Corridors and One Economic Circle" plan. Recently, during Vietnam Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh's visit to China at the end of July 2023 (Nguyen Long, 2023), Vietnam and China reached a consensus on promoting strategic connectivity and cooperation in building the high-quality "Belt and Road" to strengthen road and rail connections on the border areas, build a multi-modal, highly efficient and durable logistics system.

Along with ever-expanding economic success, China's military has increased steadily over the years, and by 2013, the controversial budget was projected at \$ around 140 billion (Stewart, 2014; Xinhua, 2014). China's neighbors, especially Vietnam were skeptical of China when it decided to forcefully control parts of the Paracel Islands in 1974. Given this situation, the PRC has been perceived as a threat to Hanoi's government ever since. Hence, in order to counterbalance this "misperception", Beijing formulated two important policies – "Peaceful Rise/Development", and "Good Neighbor" policies to improve the image of China (Hang, V. 2014).

3. China's Soft Power Expression in Vietnam: Media, Education, and Cultural Exchanges

More than 70 years after the two countries officially established diplomatic relations on January 18, 1950, Vietnam-China relations have maintained development momentum with the main flow being friendship and cooperation. The friendship painstakingly cultivated by President

Ho Chi Minh and Mao Zedong and generations of leaders of the two countries has become a valuable common asset of the two peoples, contributing to maintaining a stable development between Vietnam and China, bringing practical benefits to the people of the two countries.

In 2008, Vietnam and China established a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership, opening a new chapter in bilateral relations. With the joint efforts of both, Vietnam - China relations in recent years have continued to have important developments in all fields, based on the motto "friendly neighbors, comprehensive cooperation, long-term stability", "looking to the future" and the spirit of "good neighbors, good friends, good comrades, good partners". In recent years, under the direct direction and direction of the two General Secretary comrades, especially after the historic official visit to China by Vietnam General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong in 2022, relations between the two countries have maintained a development trend with positive results.

China's increase in soft power is generally effective in cultural fields close to the masses such as music, cinema, and social networks. Chinese values themselves are very diverse and long-standing, skillfully expressed through music and cinema, making them even more familiar and easy to absorb. Considering the mass audience, they are more interested in what values they receive from Chinese culture, be it spiritual or material values instead of focusing on how to advertise. China's influence or the hidden dangers behind it. Therefore, the more China focuses on promoting its unique values to the public, the more its image will be known. China's robust development of its entertainment industry has not only elevated its cultural influence but also resonated strongly with neighboring countries. Vietnam, in particular, has emerged as a prominent consumer of Chinese entertainment. The pervasive popularity of Chinese films showcased on Vietnam's national television channels and fan pages boasting millions of visits on Facebook underscores the extent to which Chinese entertainment has captured the hearts and minds of audiences in this Southeast Asian nation.

In Vietnam, since the normalization of relations, the media, especially radio, and television, have become an influence channel thoroughly used by China to conduct cultural dissemination activities that bring political color into the country's cultural life. Through signing cooperation agreements with Vietnamese Radio and Television Stations, the Chinese Ministry of Radio-Television and Film has created conditions for television series and movies to enter cultural Vietnameseization. Actual data shows that the number of Chinese television series shown on television stations in Vietnam has skyrocketed in recent years. According to incomplete statistics, in 2011, there were 369 Chinese films broadcast with the earliest broadcast time being 1:15 a.m. and the latest being 11 p.m. on 15 local TV channels. In the last 6 months of 2012, there were 41 Chinese films shown on VTV1, VTV2, VTV3, VTV4, VTV6, and VTV9 channels of Vietnam Television.⁹ The density of Chinese films appearing on Vietnamese

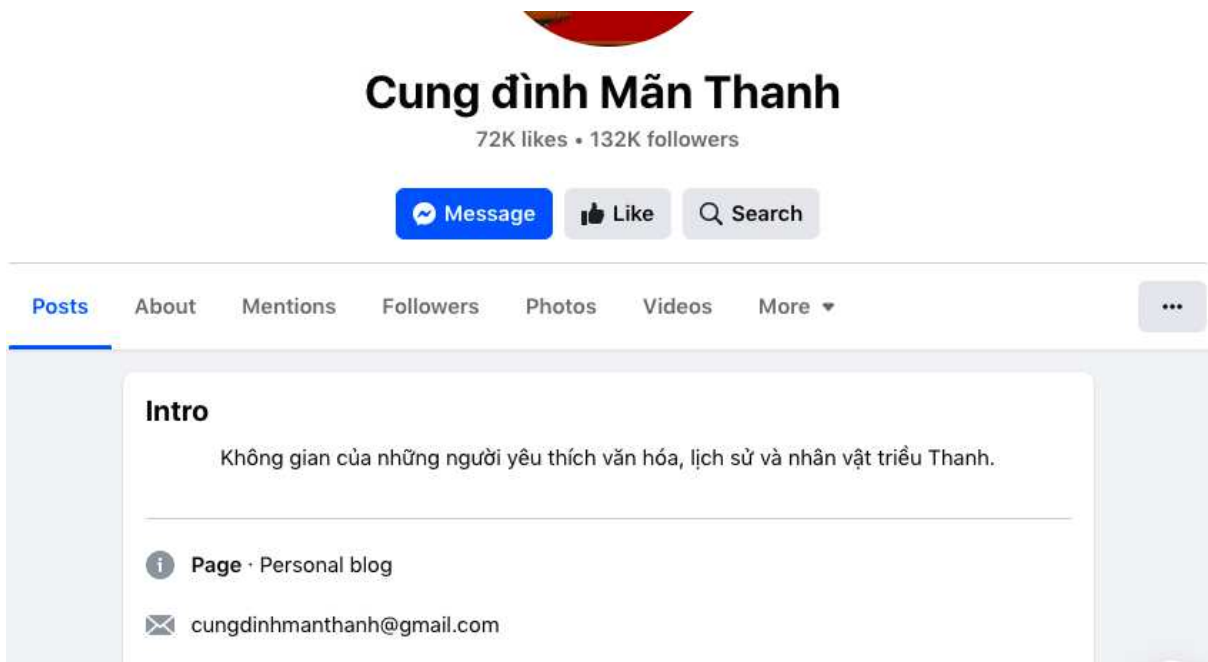
⁹ Statistics are based on broadcasts of Vietnam Television posted on Television Magazine.

television is quite dense. In April 2014 (before China placed the HD 981 oil rig in Vietnam's exclusive economic zone), there were a total of 182 Chinese television dramas broadcast on 65 television stations across the country. central to local levels in Vietnam (Pham Hong Thai, Nguyen Thi Thu Phuong, 2015). Chinese films in all different genres have shown that Chinese television was once considered a channel that highlighted the image of the great country China in audiovisual culture in Vietnam.

For instance, in movies, audiences love Chinese movies because the topics suit their tastes, the content is new and attractive, and gradually, it has become an indispensable spiritual food for many Vietnamese. Through historical dramas such as Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace, Empresses In The Palace, etc. Vietnamese audiences know and are more interested in history, kings, queens, and the beauty of Chinese culture. Fans began to create fan pages to express their love for that movie. Specifically in Vietnam, Fanpage Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace has more than 200 thousand followers with huge interactions, from 5 to 10 thousand interactions per post. In particular, Vietnamese fans also showed their love for Chinese history and culture by establishing the Man Thanh Palace Fanpage, which specializes in posting and updating knowledge about dynasties and Chinese royal history and has attracted nearly 130 thousand followers.

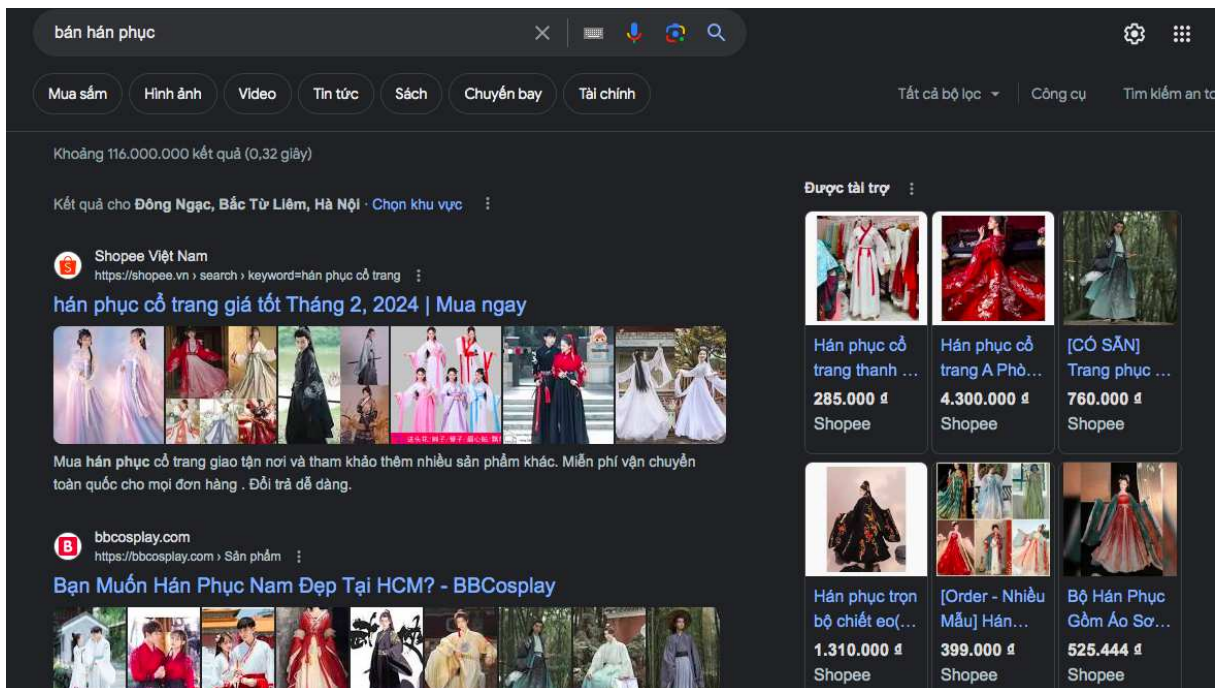


The image shows a screenshot of a Facebook fan page for the Vietnamese fan page 'Hậu cung Như Ý truyện 后宫如懿传'. The page features a circular profile picture of two characters in traditional Chinese attire. The page name is 'Hậu cung Như Ý truyện 后宫如懿传' with 166K likes and 217K followers. Navigation buttons for 'Message', 'Like', and 'Search' are visible. Below the navigation bar, there are tabs for 'Posts', 'About', 'Mentions', 'Reviews', 'Followers', 'Photos', and 'More'. The 'Intro' section shows the page is an 'Interest' page with a 4.9 rating from 515 reviews. The 'Featured' section displays two featured posts: one from July 16, 2023, titled '[Góc bàn luận - chia sẻ] - Về mối quan' and another from March 28, 2022, titled 'Tổng hợp các bài pos'.

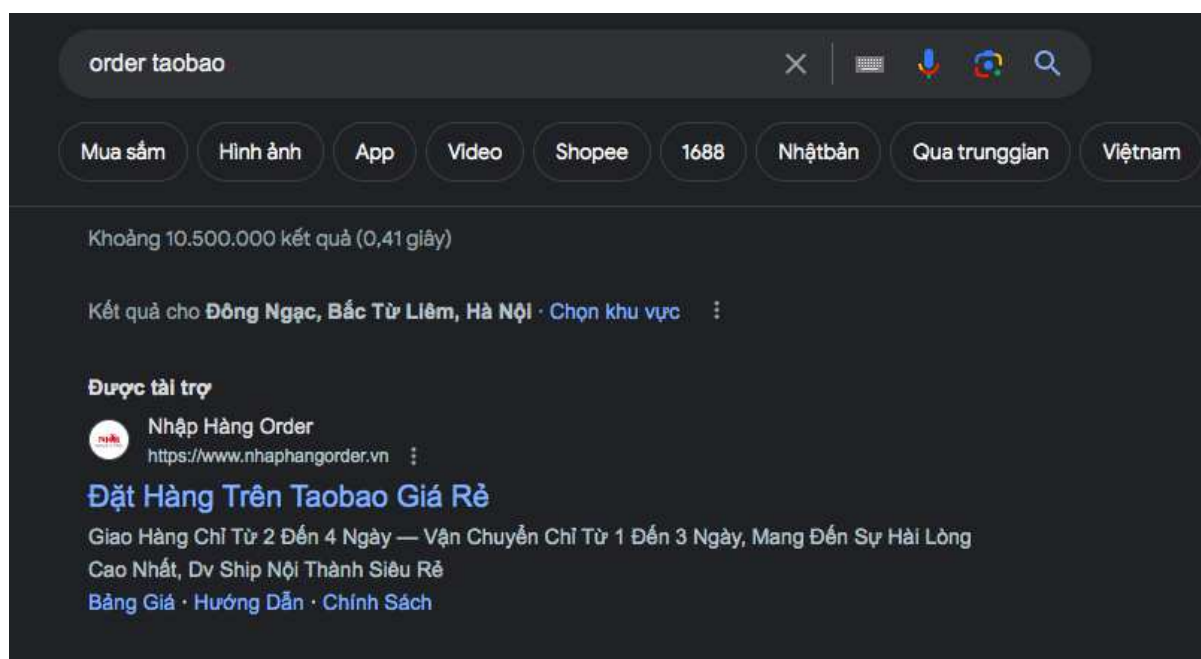


The page of Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace and the page of the Qing dynasty have a large number of followers on Facebook Vietnam

Chinese fashion style is very popular among young people internationally. This is shown through the trend of wearing Hanfu blooming and developing in Vietnam. Han costumes, court costumes, and jewelry are sought after by many young people. Many people even disregard the high cost and order copies of brooches and paper fans that appeared in the movie. The image of young Vietnamese people appearing in Han clothes is no longer strange. When searching for the keyword "selling Hanfu" on Google, in just 0.32 seconds, more than 100 million search results were produced.



Not only Hanfu, but other fashion products such as Chinese clothes, shoes, and handbags are also very popular in Vietnam in particular and Southeast Asian countries in general. The reason why Chinese fashion products are increasingly popular and sought after in the Vietnamese market is that they meet basic and necessary criteria such as being cheap - beautiful and quality. In particular, when searching for the keyword "order taobao", Google gives more than 10 million results in just 0.41 seconds about units specializing in shipping, buying, and selling goods from China and shipping to Vietnam. More and more such service companies are being established, showing the appeal of Chinese products to the shopping and consumption needs of Vietnamese people.



In addition to movies and fashion, Chinese cuisine with its unique marks has become the favorite dish of many people and is becoming more and more popular, even influencing many other cuisines around the world. Many people love Chinese food because of its diversity, ease of eating, and unique flavor. Therefore, when Chinese cuisine is promoted by the Chinese community, restaurants in Vietnam are very welcome.

Another proof that Chinese cultural subjects are very well received is the social networking platform TikTok. Many users say that for them Tik TikTok is both an entertainment tool and a money-making tool. This short video-sharing application platform has wide coverage in many Asian and European countries and creating waves in the Americas. TikTok especially received an enthusiastic reception from countries such as Cambodia, Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam. In Vietnam, the TikTok Vietnam fan page has more than 20 million followers, a huge number for a video streaming application. In addition to TikTok's official fan page in Vietnam, there are also other Facebook pages and fan pages that continuously update

new clips on TikTok every day and attract thousands of views and followers. It is not difficult to see young people sitting for hours just watching these clips.

4. Discussion of the impact of territorial disputes on China's soft power in Vietnam

Uma (2010) argues that India's soft power investments could be undermined by unresolved disputes with neighboring nations. In a similar vein, both India and China face a common challenge. China's failure to resolve territorial conflicts with Vietnam in the South China Sea poses a substantial threat to China's soft power efforts, both in the short and long term. Beijing has repeatedly reiterated that China would not back down on vaguely defined "core interests" - state sovereignty, national security, territorial integrity, and national reunification. "We will neither compromise on, concede or trade on territory and sovereignty nor tolerate them...even a little bit," said Chang Wanquan, the PRC's Defense Minister (Hang, V., 2014).

Between China and Vietnam, the bitter history and territorial disputes breed tension, and deepen "mistrust" and "suspicion" between the two countries (O'Flaherty, 2011). As fueled by the nationalistic sentiment from both the Vietnamese and Chinese public, the oddity between the two regarding the territorial disputes has not headed toward a sign of cessation, but the continuation of escalation, if not properly managed (BBC, 2014). In 2014, the Sino-Vietnam relations were at an all-time low when Beijing decided to install an oil rig in the disputed areas. Shortly after that, thousands of nationalistic Vietnamese staged a bloody anti-China riot to target Chinese-owned factories in Vietnam, leaving many people dead and injured (Whiteman, 2014)¹⁰.

Despite the huge influence of Chinese culture and entertainment, Vietnam seems quite cautious with BRI-related loans because of many challenges such as "debt traps", economic efficiency, and environmental issues. Furthermore, Chinese loans to Vietnam are less preferential than other loan sources. Some projects that Vietnam cooperates with China leave many negative impacts such as overcapitalization and slow progress, typically the Cat Linh - Ha Dong railway project and Ninh Binh Fertilizer Plant project. In the coming time, Vietnam may encourage domestic private investors to borrow loans within the BRI framework through AIIB Bank to build infrastructure projects under the BOT model to minimize political impact and potential concerns about national security and sovereignty, especially in the context of China's increasingly tough moves to assert its so-called "sovereignty claims" in the South China Sea.

¹⁰ A serious armed incident between Beijing and Vietnam was when Beijing's assertive policy to forcefully occupy Paracels in 1974 resulting in three Vietnamese vessels sunk, and seventy-four dead on the Johnson Reef in the Spratlys (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.; Manicom, 2014). Another incident happened in 2011 when the Chinese fishing vessels was possibly orchestrated by state to cut a Vietnamese oil exploration cable, causing further strains on the relations between from Beijing and Hanoi (Leng, 2014).

In order to gauge the efficacy of China's soft power in Vietnam, I administered a brief survey comprising 10 questions to young Vietnamese residents residing in Vietnam. The survey primarily consisted of yes/no inquiries and level assessments. Its objective is to evaluate the extent of soft power influence and ascertain any correlations between the South China Sea disputes and the effectiveness of soft power deployment in Vietnam.

The questionnaire includes 10 multiple-choice questions:

1. Do you consume Chinese media (TV shows, movies, music, etc.)?

Yes/No

2. Have you visited Chinese cultural events or exhibitions in Vietnam?

Yes/No

3. Do you think Chinese cuisine is popular in Vietnam?

Yes/No

4. Are Chinese language classes popular in Vietnamese schools or institutions?

Yes/No

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you admire Chinese cultural heritage (such as traditions, history, art, etc.)?

1 (Not at all)/2/3/4/5 (Very much)

6. Do you think the territorial disputes between China and Vietnam affect your perception of Chinese cultural influence?

Yes/No

7. Overall, do you think Chinese soft power has a significant influence on Vietnamese society?

Yes/No

8. Do you feel that China's actions in the South China Sea have negatively impacted Vietnam's interests?

Yes/No

9. Do you think the majority of Vietnamese people have a negative view of China and its politics?

Yes/No

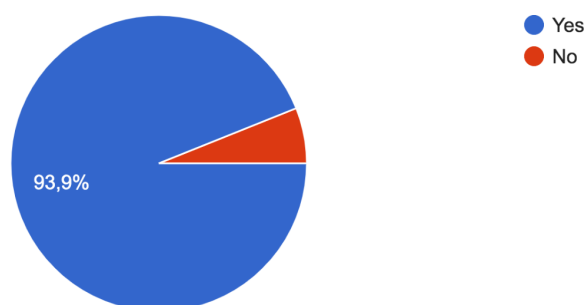
10. Overall, do you think Chinese culture and entertainment have a significant influence on Vietnamese society?

Yes/No

The survey received 132 responses in total and is summarized with charts that clearly show the rates. Below is an analysis of each question and a chart.

1. Do you consume Chinese media (TV shows, movies, music, etc.)?

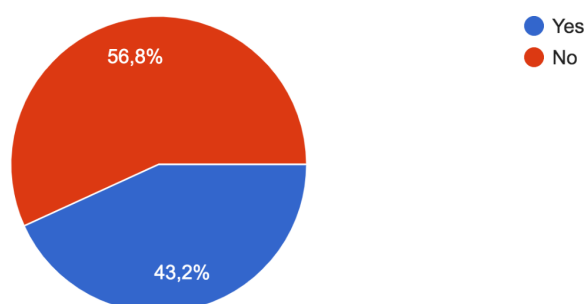
132 câu trả lời



Question 1 creates a pie graph illustrating the percentage of Vietnamese respondents who consume Chinese media products, with 93.9% indicating consumption and 6.1% reporting no consumption. This overwhelming majority suggests a substantial influence of Chinese cultural products in Vietnam, possibly driven by factors such as the popularity and accessibility of Chinese entertainment content, cultural affinity, and socio-economic dynamics. Overall, the graph underscores the significant presence of Chinese media in Vietnam's media landscape, indicating a strong interest or engagement among Vietnamese consumers.

2. Have you visited Chinese cultural events or exhibitions in Vietnam?

132 câu trả lời

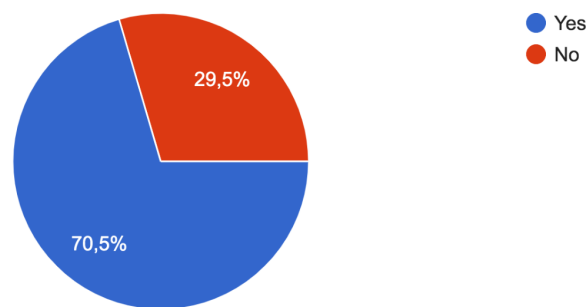


The pie graph illustrates the percentage of Vietnamese respondents who have visited Chinese cultural events or exhibitions in Vietnam, with 43.2% indicating visitation and 56.8% reporting no visitation. This suggests a relatively lower level of engagement with Chinese cultural events among the Vietnamese population compared to other forms of cultural consumption. Factors

that may influence this lower access rate include limited attraction, Vietnamese people's ideological barriers to China, competing interests, or the scale of these activities.

3. Do you think Chinese cuisine is popular in Vietnam?

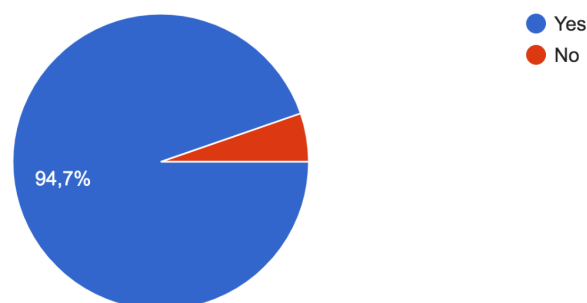
132 câu trả lời



The pie graph portrays the percentage of Vietnamese respondents' opinions on the popularity of Chinese cuisine in Vietnam, with 70.5% believing it to be popular and 29.5% holding the contrary view. The overwhelming majority perceiving Chinese cuisine as popular suggests a widespread acceptance and preference for it within Vietnamese culinary culture, possibly influenced by historical ties, culinary diversity, the presence of Chinese restaurants, and the availability of Chinese food products. Additionally, immigration patterns and cultural exchanges between China and Vietnam may contribute to the familiarity and appreciation of Chinese cuisine among the Vietnamese populace. Conversely, the minority opinion indicating a lack of popularity may stem from varying tastes, regional differences such as northern Vietnamese are not familiar with Chinese food but in the south, there is a big Chinese community so Chinese food seems more popular, or individual preferences.

4. Are Chinese language classes popular in Vietnamese schools or institutions?

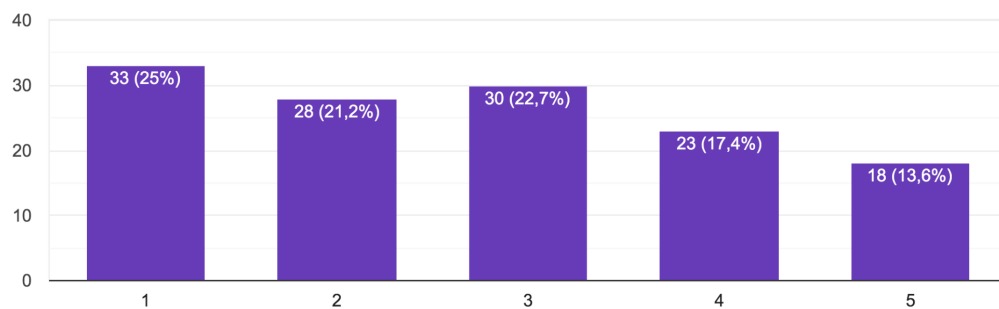
132 câu trả lời



Among 132 answers, 94.7% indicate they are popular and 5.3% suggest otherwise. This overwhelming majority viewpoint suggests a substantial demand for and interest in learning the Chinese language among Vietnamese students. Potential reasons for this popularity could include the economic significance of China, expanding educational opportunities, career prospects, cultural exchange initiatives, and the strengthening of diplomatic ties between Vietnam and China. The minority opinion indicating a lack of popularity may stem from limited access to language education resources, preferences for other languages, or cultural attitudes toward language learning.

5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how much do you admire Chinese cultural heritage (such as traditions, history, art, etc.)?

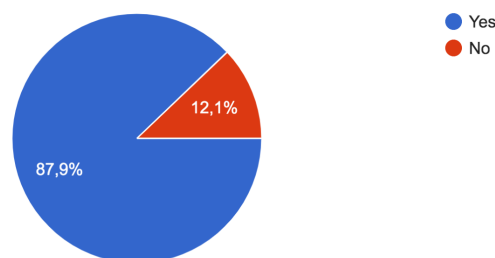
132 câu trả lời



The bar chart illustrates respondents' varying levels of admiration for Chinese cultural heritage on a scale of 1 to 5, with 25% expressing no admiration at all, followed by declining percentages for higher levels of admiration. This diversity of attitudes suggests a complex relationship between Vietnam and China, with historical conflicts, cultural differences, and geopolitical tensions likely influencing individual perceptions. Politically, the result underscores the importance of cultural diplomacy and dialogue in addressing bilateral relations, as attitudes toward cultural heritage can impact broader diplomatic ties.

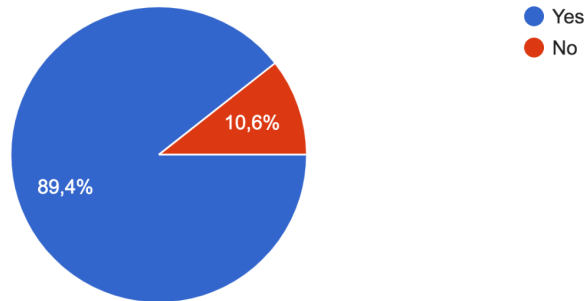
6. Do you think the territorial disputes between China and Vietnam affect your perception of Chinese cultural influence?

132 câu trả lời



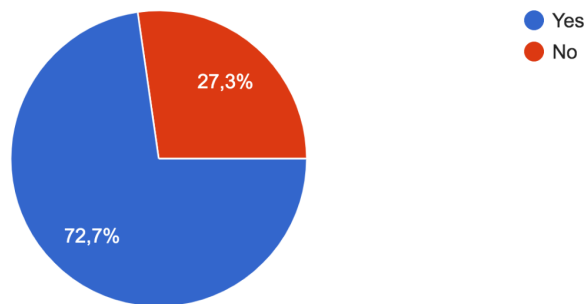
7. Do you feel that China's actions in the South China Sea have negatively impacted Vietnam's interests?

132 câu trả lời



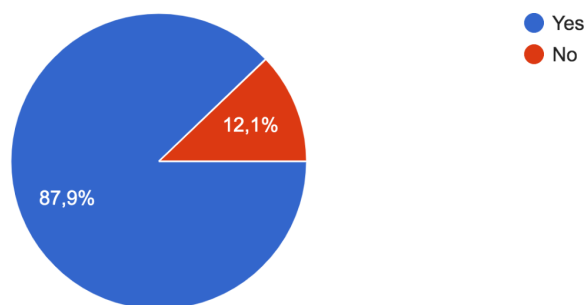
8. Have you boycotted Chinese products or services due to political reasons or companies and celebrities that promotes "Nine-dash line" ?

132 câu trả lời



9. Do you think the majority of Vietnamese people have a negative view of China and its politics?

132 câu trả lời

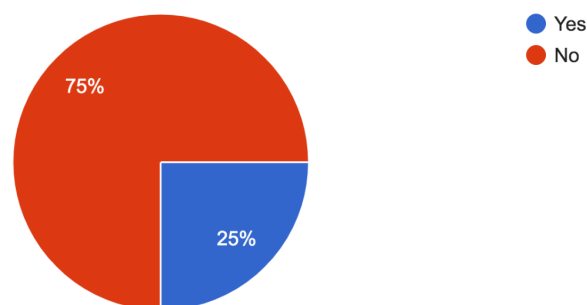


The above questions all received the vast majority of "YES" answers. This shows the significant influence (negative influence) of political disputes on the effectiveness of China's soft power in Vietnam. The overwhelming majority of respondents perceived a connection

between territorial disputes, particularly concerning the contentious South China Sea (known as the East Sea in Vietnam) and Chinese cultural influence, suggesting that geopolitical tensions significantly shape perceptions of cultural relations between Vietnam and China. One of the central issues contributing to these tensions is China's assertion of its historical claims through the nine-dash line, which overlaps with Vietnam's sovereign territory, leading to maritime disputes and heightened geopolitical friction. These territorial disputes have deep historical roots, with Vietnam contesting China's claims and asserting its sovereignty over the disputed territories. Moreover, media narratives and nationalist sentiments in both countries are often inflamed by territorial disputes, contributing to a more cautious or critical view of Chinese cultural influence among Vietnamese individuals. Politically, the result underscores the intricate interplay between geopolitics and cultural perceptions, highlighting how territorial disputes can influence public sentiment and attitudes toward cultural exchanges. It underscores the complexity of diplomatic relations between Vietnam and China, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches to bridge cultural divides and promote peaceful coexistence despite geopolitical challenges. Given the significance of cultural exchanges in fostering mutual understanding and cooperation, efforts to mitigate tensions and promote dialogue between the two countries are crucial for maintaining regional stability and prosperity in Southeast Asia.

10. Overall, do you think Chinese culture and entertainment have a significant influence on Vietnamese society?

132 câu trả lời



The last graph depicting respondents' perceptions on the overall influence of Chinese culture and entertainment on Vietnamese society reveals a clear majority, comprising 75%, who do not believe Chinese cultural elements hold significant sway over Vietnamese society, while 25% perceive such influence to be significant. This division of opinion has political implications, signaling a nuanced relationship between Vietnam and China, where cultural influence is perceived with skepticism by a majority of respondents. Politically, it suggests a recognition of the importance of preserving Vietnamese cultural identity amidst ongoing cultural exchanges and economic ties with China.

The thorough examination of the survey data unveils a nuanced understanding of the relationship between Vietnamese society and Chinese culture and entertainment. Despite the widespread appeal of various aspects of Chinese culture, including cuisine, fashion, language, and media consumption, particularly among the younger generation in Vietnam, the unresolved territorial conflict in the South China Sea significantly shapes Vietnamese perceptions of China. While a majority of respondents acknowledge their consumption of Chinese media products and express interest in certain facets of Chinese culture, there persists a prevailing negative sentiment towards Chinese politics, accompanied by a limited acknowledgment of the broader significance of Chinese culture and entertainment within Vietnamese society. This disparity underscores the intricate interplay between cultural influences, geopolitical tensions, and national identity. It implies that while individual Vietnamese may hold an affinity for specific aspects of Chinese culture on a personal level, they maintain a critical stance towards China as a political entity, owing to historical grievances and ongoing territorial disputes. Consequently, diplomatic endeavors aimed at addressing these underlying tensions and fostering cultural exchange in a mutually respectful manner are imperative for cultivating deeper understanding and cooperation between Vietnam and China.

Over the past decade, China has strategically employed a soft power approach, which diverges somewhat from Joseph Nye's theoretical framework. This strategy, characterized by pragmatism, has seen China exert its influence across the globe through various economic measures such as aid, investment, cooperation, cultural exchanges, educational initiatives, and advancements in science and technology. Despite these concerted efforts, China's soft power remains a vulnerable aspect of its national comprehensive power. Examining the persistent challenges facing China's soft power, it becomes apparent that sovereignty disputes with neighboring ASEAN countries have significantly undermined China's ability to persuade and influence within the region and beyond. While China's soft power has made strides, it remains constrained in many dimensions, yet its burgeoning "transforming power" is poised to impact countries like Vietnam profoundly. The positive effects of China's soft power on Vietnam are undeniable; however, they come with accompanying negative repercussions across various sectors, including the economy, culture, national security, and defense. These drawbacks manifest in phenomena such as resource exploitation, economic dependency, and cultural assimilation.

Reflecting on the extensive history of diplomatic ties between China and Vietnam reveals a longstanding reception of Chinese culture, which began early in Vietnam's developmental stages. However, this reception has always been marked by proactive and selective adoption. For instance, Vietnamese feudal dynasties embraced elements of China's political regime, transforming the state's values to establish centralized governance based on a "patriotic loyalty" ethos. Despite China's consistent rhetoric of fostering mutual survival and building comprehensive cooperation, its actions regarding territorial disputes in the South China Sea

have reignited memories of historical tensions among the Vietnamese populace. These actions have prompted concerns regarding the persistent threat posed by China, directly impacting the reception of its soft power influences within Vietnam. Despite China's diplomatic efforts, the unresolved territorial disputes and historical tensions cast a shadow over its soft power endeavors, highlighting the complex dynamics at play in the region.

Conclusion

The notion of soft power emerged in the field of international relations alongside the established concept of hard power, altering the dynamics of contemporary global affairs and elevating Professor Joseph Nye's prominence. In his book "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics," Nye posited that soft power entails achieving objectives through allure rather than coercion or incentives, stemming from a nation's cultural appeal, political ideologies, and policies. When a nation's policies garner recognition as rational by other countries, its soft power is fortified.

In the context of China, the government's utilization of soft power extends beyond international relations to encompass domestic spheres. This expansion and application of soft power strategies within the country's borders are notable. As outlined in the analysis provided in Chapter 2, Chinese policymakers have deployed a diverse array of soft power tactics aimed not only at bolstering the state's prestige among its populace but also at fostering a sense of national pride. This signifies a significant breakthrough in the strategic implementation of soft power. The orchestrated narrative crafted by the Chinese government often facilitated through mechanisms such as censorship, plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals' perceptions of national identity. By consistently reinforcing values such as unity, progress, and social harmony, this controlled narrative deeply influences the collective consciousness of the Chinese people. Moreover, it serves as a mechanism through which the government endeavors to maintain stability and cohesion within the society. Furthermore, the deliberate targeting of the younger generation through various mediums including mass media, entertainment, and online platforms represents a dynamic approach to soft power. By engaging with the youth demographic on platforms they frequent, such as social media and streaming services, China aims to shape their perceptions and values in alignment with the national agenda. This strategic investment in shaping the attitudes and beliefs of the younger generation underscores the importance placed on molding the future trajectory of the country.

In terms of diplomacy, it is clear that China has resonated with its clear modern cultural influence on neighboring countries. Not only that, this country's aid and assistance to other continents is also effective as negative impressions of this country have tended to decrease. The inherent allure of Chinese culture, vividly depicted in cinematic works, has emerged as a formidable driving force behind the surging popularity of Chinese films across Asia. This assertion finds ample support in the international acclaim garnered by cinematic gems like "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon," "Hero", and "Raise the Red Lantern." These cinematic marvels not only captivated global audiences with their storytelling prowess but also encapsulated the rich tapestry of Chinese traditions, fostering a cross-cultural appreciation that transcended national boundaries. Equally instrumental in this cinematic renaissance is the government's astute and forward-thinking commitment to the film industry. Tangible evidence of this commitment can be observed in the multifaceted nature of China's film development

policies, which are characterized by a long-term perspective that extends well into the future. For instance, the Five-Year Plans for the Cultural Industries, crafted by the government, outline a comprehensive vision encompassing various aspects of film production, distribution, and international collaborations.

Vietnam, a nation sharing a border with southern China, stands out as one of the countries most significantly impacted by China's soft power endeavors. The deep interdependence of culture and economy with China serves as unmistakable evidence of this influence. The undeniable popularity of the Chinese entertainment industry in Vietnam is evident, reflected in the presence of numerous Chinese businesses across the country's expansive shopping areas, influenced by trends in fashion and culture. Furthermore, with the widespread adoption of the TikTok platform, Chinese values are permeating Vietnamese society more than ever. Videos inspired by Chinese culture frequently surface, and advertising campaigns promoting domestic Chinese products are gaining significant traction. It can be observed that a considerable proportion of Vietnamese youth actively engage with and consume Chinese media products. However, the findings from the survey conducted in Chapter 4 have presented unexpected results. Territorial disputes between China and Vietnam in the South China Sea appear to shape the perceptions of young Vietnamese towards China. Nearly 94% of participants acknowledged using Chinese media and cultural products. However, a significant majority, up to 88%, expressed negative views of China due to tensions in the South China Sea, and 75% believe that Chinese cultural values have little impact on Vietnamese society. This suggests that despite the widespread consumption of Chinese entertainment and culture in Vietnam, young Vietnamese maintain a nuanced understanding of ethnic conflicts and do not fully embrace Chinese values. This outcome underscores the limitations of China's soft power application in neighboring countries.

China's way of increasing soft power through activities with foreign governments has not been effective, and countries are increasingly wary of this country's activities. When the Xi Jinping government leads the country, with strategies to develop soft power that affects the whole world, relations between China and countries in the region and internationally are increasingly tense. "Don't listen to what China says, look at what China does" has shown the wariness of other countries before the "peaceful development" statements that this country makes. While the US, Australia, and Japan are countries that have expressed strong opposition to China's expansion, the same thing is now happening to Europe and other countries in the region. Mr. Xi's ambitious Belt and Road program also makes European politicians hungry for billions of dollars in infrastructure investment from China. However, that excitement is gradually waning as Europe has to confront a rising China as a superpower and find ways to shape a completely new world order. Volker Perthes, Director of the German Institute for World and Security Affairs, an advisory body to the German government and Parliament, said: "China is trying to export its governance model to Europe. Europe is becoming more awakened in its relationship

with China. We now see China not only as a huge customer, market, and manufacturing factory but also as a geopolitical, and geoeconomic player, and is a competitor that challenges our values." European policymakers eventually agreed to classify China as "a rival propagating different styles of governance". French President Macron has emphasized greater "strategic autonomy" for Europe and proposed renewing relations with Russia to counter China's influence.(Tuan Anh, 2020).

In neighboring Asia - where President Xi Jinping has focused on deploying soft power since the first years of his term, countries from the initial neutral and welcoming response have gradually shown caution in the face of China's expansion, especially in the maritime Southeast Asian countries also expressed dissatisfaction with China's behavior in the South China Sea when it continuously made military moves and indulged in "painting the image of the Nine-dash Line". In early November 2019, the Philippines stamped a visa with a map and the country's exclusive economic zone at sea on Chinese passports. This is the Philippines' move to deal with Chinese passports printing maps with the "Nine-dash Line" - Beijing's unjustified and rejected sovereignty claim in the South China Sea. The Philippines also withdrew the movie Abominable (co-produced by American DreamWorks and Pearl Studio from China) after discovering the image of the "Nine-dash Line" in a scene (Jan Robert R Go, 2019). In 2023, Vietnam banned Warner Bros' highly anticipated film "Barbie" from domestic distribution over a scene featuring a map that shows China's unilaterally claimed territory in the South China Sea. In 2019, the Vietnamese government pulled DreamWorks' animated film "Abominable," and last year it banned Sony's action movie "Uncharted" for the same reason. Netflix also removed an Australian spy drama, "Pine Gap," in 2021 (Kanupriya Kapoor, 2023).



China's Nine-Dash Line map image is internationally protested. Photo source: China-US Focus

Beijing's assertive activities go against the image of softness, generosity, and willingness to share common difficulties that the country has been trying to create since the COVID-19 pandemic. At this rate, it is difficult to say when relations between China and other countries will improve.

Through the comments and evaluation of the effectiveness of the above soft power deployment strategy, the author finds that China has begun implementing a strategy to change the power structure of the international system, a process that is widely recognized by researchers. International research calls it "The Rise of China". China Dream – The renaissance that China announced publicly in 2013 is a strategy to change the power structure of the international system and China's status in that system. China has made calculations in its strategy of increasing soft power when trying to frame the public's perception of Chinese values as well as the country's strong rise without posing a threat to international relations as well as regional and global development and security. In cultural diplomacy activities, China has taken advantage of the role of the media, setting agendas focusing on music, movies, and social networks to increase the popularity of culture. Chinese culture, while also focusing the public's attention on culture instead of the purpose behind promoting culture. However, China's setting of agendas and framing of public perception is not always successful, in the context that China is creating many concerns about its "peaceful rise" rather than an optimistic scenario, as China still abuses hard power to gain influence.

Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has ended the period of "hiding" to reach out to the world. Since realizing the importance and role of soft power, China has continuously utilized it as a tool to strengthen its national image and increase its influence outside. Not only limited to Asia, China is increasingly increasing its influence in Africa, Europe, and South America, challenging The USA's position as the world's number one superpower. For a country, soft power exists right in that country's culture, values, and policies. From that basis, China has exploited all resources, from its rising economic strength to the oldest and most diverse culture in the world. The government constantly introduces a series of policies covering all fields, both domestic and foreign. On the one hand, China focuses on strengthening domestic trust and support for the Party's leadership, value systems, and national ideology; on the other hand, it promotes the spread of those values externally, increasing the dependence of other countries through cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, economic diplomacy, media promoting national image, etc.

It can be seen that, in order to achieve the goal of increasing soft power without being attached to expansionist ambitions, China has built a methodical strategy with a long-term vision and achieved results at the highest level. For the masses, those who pay attention and appreciate the nature of Chinese values expressed through language, movies, cuisine, ideology, and, lifestyle, etc. the image of China appears as a country full of vitality, cultural diversity, and influence. The values of Chinese characteristics are transmitted naturally, and widely,

penetrating deeply into the daily, and social lives of the public around the world. However, on a broader scale, international relations are undergoing many changes to respond to the risk of China's "peaceful rise". The country is facing unprecedented opposition to its policies. Many countries believe that what China does is not consistent with what it claims, demonstrating China's hegemonic ambitions behind its assertions of peaceful development, which can cause harm to peace, stability, and development of countries in the region and the world. This reality shows that the way China increases its soft power is having a two-way impact: it is successful in asserting its national image and position but is making the country increasingly alone in the international political arena.

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