

# ON CHINA'S SOFT POWER

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This paper is an attempt to define what exactly constitutes China's soft power. This becomes essential as the nation continues to grow and, hence, the question emerges on whether China would receive the same level of global acceptability, as, to some extent, that of the United States of America, through its soft power. The fundamental rationale of the paper is based on the presumption that the unrivalled economic success that China's economy has been able to achieve over the last three decades has enabled it [China] to gain massive appeal at home and abroad. However, it could be argued that as China's economic growth flattens, the idea of an alternative economic growth—which Beijing has been selling globally—arouses scepticism not only about its model of growth but also its systemic weaknesses, thus, hurting the soft power gains that China has been able to achieve so far, and also impairing its rise.

## DEFINING THE CONCEPT

According to Joseph S Nye, who coined the term “soft power”, a country derives its soft power primarily from three sources: its culture (in places that find it appealing), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad) and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)<sup>1</sup>. According to Nye, hard power can rest on inducements (carrots) or threats (sticks). But sometimes “...you can get the outcomes you

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1 Joseph S Nye, “The Limits of Chinese Soft Power”, Belfer Centre for Science and International Affairs, July 10, 2015, [http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/25543/limits\\_of\\_chinese\\_soft\\_power.html](http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/25543/limits_of_chinese_soft_power.html). Accessed on June 12, 2016.

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*want without tangible threats or payoffs.... The indirect way to get what you want has sometimes been called the second face of power...."* A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries – admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it. This soft power of getting others to want the outcomes that you want coopts people rather than coerces them. Further, soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others. It must be realised that

soft power is not merely the same as influence; after all, influence can also rest on the hard power of threats and payments. Thus, soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument; it is the ability to attract, and attraction, according to Nye, is what often leads to acquiescence. Simply put, in behavioural terms, soft power is attractive power and in terms of resources, soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction.<sup>2</sup>

Joseph Nye also elaborates on the sources of soft power that include, apart from many other things, culture and government policies at home and abroad. Culture, according to him, is a set of values and practices that create meaning for a society. When a country's culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes because of the relationships of attraction it creates. Government policies are another potential source of soft power since they reinforce a country's soft power. Domestic or foreign policies that appear to be hypercritical, arrogant, indifferent to the opinion of others, or based on a narrow approach to national interests can undermine soft power. The values a government champions in its behaviour at home, for example, democracy in international institutions (working with others)

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2. Joseph S Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt Ltd, 2012), pp. 5-7.

and in foreign policy (promoting peace and human rights) strongly affect the preferences of others.<sup>3</sup>

Others, such as Joshua Kurlantzick, define soft power as a kind of attractiveness to a nation's brand, and it can be conveyed through various means, including a country's popular and elite culture, its public diplomacy<sup>4</sup> (government-funded programmes intended to influence public opinion abroad), the action of its businesses abroad, the international perception of its government's policies and the gravitational pull of its economic strength, among other factors. The author further adds that in the context of China, soft power has a broader

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## EVOLUTION OF CHINA'S SOFT POWER

In the 1950s, as the Chinese government saw the world being divided into the socialist and capitalist camps. China, adopting the Marxist and Leninist theories which equated capitalism with imperialism and war, realised that

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3. Ibid., pp. 11-14.

4. Public diplomacy is defined as the process by which direct relations with people in a country are pursued to advance the interests and extend the values of those being represented. This new definition of public diplomacy goes beyond the more traditional interpretations that describe public diplomacy as a state-centred process of communication with a foreign audience. This new public is part of the view that in the world of post-modern transnational relations, the roles and responsibilities of actors in international relations are no longer clearly delineated and most actors are not nearly as much in control as they would like to be. For details, see Ingrid D'Hooghe, "The Expansion of China's Public Diplomacy System", in Jian Wang, ed., *Soft Power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 20.

5. Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 5-6.

world peace could be achieved through the triumph of socialism over capitalism and the curtailment of any kind of colonialism. The Chinese government laid out the five principles for relations amongst countries with different political systems that included respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference, equality and peaceful coexistence. From the 1960s to the late 1970s, Mao's "three worlds" theory guided China's world view. The First World constituted the two superpowers, the US and the Soviet Union; the Second World comprised the other developed countries and socialist regimes in Europe; and the developing countries constituted the Third World.<sup>6</sup>

After Mao's death, Deng Xiaoping realised how Maoism had alienated China's neighbours, created instability on China's borders, and impoverished China itself. He realised that in order to overcome these issues and for China to become a strong nation, there was a need for a massive inflow of foreign investments and technology, along with a peaceful external environment. Acknowledging that China was not strong enough, Deng propagated that China should keep a low profile and not expose itself by trying to take a lead on global issues. By initiating economic reforms, 25 years of unparalleled economic growth followed, which changed China enormously. These drastic changes in China itself set the stage for the country to exert soft power around the world.<sup>7</sup>

The economic reform which started in the late 1970s led to growing economic dynamism within China, thereby bringing about a change in the perception of the world about the Chinese leadership. China realised the importance of the various international regimes as mechanisms to promote its interests. Therefore, during the 1980s, China began engaging with, and also integrating into, the various multilateral regimes. Through this, China abandoned its revolutionary rhetoric and increasingly spoke about the virtues of a peaceful international environment. Thereafter, China's foreign policy discourse focussed on peace and development and military alliances. It also continued to favour the principles of greater equality amongst nations,

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6. Hongying Wang, "China's Image Projection and its Impact", in Wang, ed., n. 4, p. 40.

7. Kurlantzick, n.5, p. 15.

national independence, a new international economic order, and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).<sup>8</sup>

Since the end of the Cold War, Chinese-style soft power has been a key component of its foreign policy. The need for positive recognition as an international actor became particularly acute after the Tiananmen incident in 1989. In line with Deng Xiaoping's "low profile" policy, the Chinese leadership opted to focus on domestic development while pursuing a generally conservative, non-confrontational approach abroad. Ever since the beginning of the new century, the People's Republic of China (PRC) has more consciously pursued soft power. The various refrains in its diplomatic language throughout the past 20-odd years, by engaging in various multilateral regimes, invariably reflect a softer, gentler foreign policy approach to facilitate the overall Chinese goal of joining the global mainstream, to pave its own path abroad, and to define responsibilities on its own terms.<sup>9</sup>

A new dimension in China's foreign policy has evolved over the last decade with the Chinese government becoming more vocal in criticising certain aspects of the existing international system and suggesting various reforms and an alternative vision of the world order called, "harmonious world". The phrase "harmonious world" first officially appeared in a joint declaration issued by China and Russia in October 2004. During his speech at the United Nations' sixtieth anniversary celebrated in September 2005, President Hu Jintao emphasised that China would "strive to establish a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity". This was later reiterated and elaborated in a Chinese government White Paper on China's Passage of Peaceful Development<sup>10</sup>, issued in December 2005.<sup>11</sup>

Chinese leaders today are vigorously pursuing the country's soft power, which they believe should match its growing hard power, by developing and promoting its cultural soft power. This was reiterated by President Hu Jintao in 2007 at the Seventeenth National Congress of the Chinese Communist

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8. Wang, n.6, pp. 40-41.

9. Yong Deng, "The New Hard Realities: Soft Power and China in Transition", in Mingjiang Li, ed., *Soft Power: China's Emerging Strategy in International Politics* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), pp. 68-69.

10. For details see, Wang, n. 6, pp. 41-42.

11. Ibid., p. 41.

Party (CCP), while delivering his work report to the Congress. He stated, *"...enhancing cultural soft power is a basic requirement for realising scientific development and social harmony. It is necessary for satisfying rising demands for spiritual culture and national development strategy...."*<sup>12</sup> According to President Hu Jintao, since the Chinese usage of soft power is applied to international relations as well as to domestic policies, the need arises for unifying domestic and international considerations into an organic whole. Internationally, the overall goals, as outlined by Hu, were to make the country more influential politically, more competitive economically, more appealing in its image, and more inspiring morally. At the practical level, President Hu Jintao emphasised on the "go abroad" approach in order to promote Chinese arts, culture, media and entertainment.<sup>13</sup>

President Xi Jinping, like his predecessor Hu Jintao in 2014, repeated the same message on the need to increase China's soft power. The Chinese leaders are aware that for a country like China, with growing economic and military power, there is a risk of scaring its neighbours into forming counter-balancing coalitions, hence, a smarter strategy would include an effort to appear less frightening to them. According to David Shambaugh, it could be estimated that China spends roughly US \$ 10 billion a year in "external propaganda"; in comparison, the US spent only US \$ 666 million on public diplomacy in 2014.<sup>14</sup>

### CHINA'S SOFT POWER PUSH

China is very concerned about its global image because today the entire world has its eyes on China as it rises in global prominence. China's developmental strategy is to promote "security and shape a secure, economic, and political environment". To achieve this, China has to overcome two pressing and interrelated challenges of maintaining both internal and external stability in the international order to ensure its continued growth. There remains a consensus within China that even though it has been able to achieve

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12. Wang, n.4, pp. 8-9.

13. Ibid.

14. Nye, n.1.

impressive economic growth over the last few decades, which has enhanced its hard power, it lacks the kind of soft power that will support and sustain its development strategy. Thus, in an effort to enhance its soft power, China has ramped up its “external communication” and public diplomacy in order to create a more desirable international opinion environment for its policies and actions.<sup>15</sup>

The last three decades have witnessed a steady rise of China’s soft power, especially amongst the developing countries. China, in fact made conscious efforts in this direction by providing these countries cash grants, aid projects, low-interest loans, economic collaboration agreements, direct investments, and through cultural exchanges. The Chinese government’s push to open government-funded cultural centres in schools and universities abroad has been intended to boost China’s soft power; for instance, the Confucius programme established in universities and schools is for the promotion of the Chinese language.<sup>16</sup>

On the diplomatic front, China has proposed a value free concept of a “world of harmony” — the peaceful coexistence of diverse countries. China has attempted to put forward the idea of the concept of peaceful development to build a harmonious society. These ideas are very inspiring to the international community as they help in mellowing doubts and fears about China’s rapid growth. This concept talks about respect and tolerance for different ideologies and social systems. It also emphasises consultation amongst all the countries involved, and not through unilateralism. In the light of the concept of a world of harmony, China has advocated non-intervention in the affairs of other countries and is careful not to make its

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15. Wang, n. 4, p. 2.

16. Soft Power Confucius Says”, *The Economist*, September 13, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/china/21616988-decade-ago-china-began-opening-centres-abroad-promote-its-culture-some-people-are-pushing>. Accessed on June 12, 2016.

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trade investment and other aspects of its foreign relations conditional on how well its counterparts live up to political, environmental, or labour standards. In an interview, Joseph Nye also acknowledged China's increasing attractiveness to other countries when he said, *"...I think it is a wise policy for China to increase its soft power. China's successful economy makes it attractive, and Chinese traditional culture is attractive. And China has pursued a series of policies which have been attractive to other countries...."*<sup>17</sup>

While the American liberal model of development has had admirers in many Third World countries, China's rapid economic growth has made it an alternative model of development for many developing countries. Furthermore, China has been especially successful in cultivating soft power in the developing countries that the West has failed to penetrate, such as Iran, Zimbabwe and Venezuela. China's diplomacy has also been successful in the Asia-Pacific region, especially after it abandoned its fixation with the Communist ideology as the guide to its interactions, and developed friendly relations with neighbouring countries regardless of their ideological tendencies and political systems. China adopts the principle of "non-interference" in the internal matters of other countries and insists on letting them make their decisions on their internal affairs. This non-interference principle stands in sharp contrast to the practices of Western countries, which often bundle economic aid with political demands. This makes China's approach more acceptable to these nations.<sup>18</sup>

China's foreign policy has attempted to reassure other countries of its non-threatening intent in order to enhance its acceptability in the international community, and attain a favourable image. It is with these goals in mind that the instruments of soft power have been conceived

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17. Suisheng Zhao, "The Prospect of China's Soft Power: How Sustainable?", in Li, ed., n.9., p. 249-250.

18. Lu Tang and Hongmei Li, "Chinese Corporate Diplomacy: Huawei's CSR Discourse in Africa", in Wang, ed., n.4, pp. 96-97.



and are being pursued. Despite the internal debate over its foreign policy since the end of the Cold War, China has largely stuck to the line of “peace and development”. This has paid off in its diplomacy, not least in terms of ensuring decades of stable growth on the domestic front. As the economy grows, its trade, investment, and aid have cemented ties with the rest of the world while strengthening its leverage in foreign relations. In practice, China’s foreign policy has been geared toward adapting to the imperatives of deepening economic globalisation, cultivating acceptance abroad, and bringing about change in the regional and international status quo in order to ensure that the ways and means by which China conducts its domestic and international affairs are not being judged by the global community. Therefore, it can be said that the most remarkable change in China’s foreign policy has been the country’s embrace of multilateral diplomacy. China’s accession to various multilateral regimes since the 1980s and its entry into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at the onset of the 21st century represented landmark events in its path to joining the global world economy and the global order as a responsible nation.<sup>19</sup>

The major steps taken by China towards furthering its soft power could be summarised as follows:

- Promoting its traditional culture to the world through various programmes.
- Selling its model of economic growth as a better alternative to the Western liberal models.
- Promoting its idea of a benign nation which seeks global development through peace and harmony through its diplomatic channel and public diplomacy.
- Playing a more active and responsible role in international affairs by showing commitment towards development through its economic engagements based on the principle of non-interference and non-imposition of any obligations.

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19. Yong Deng, “The New Hard Realities: Soft Power and China in Transition”, in Li, ed., n.9, p. 71.

**BEIJING CONSENSUS: CHINA'S SOFT POWER**

One of the major enablers for China's growing soft power has been its unprecedented economic growth since the late 1970s. In order to study China's soft power, it is crucial to discuss its economic development since it has been a major driving force in China, and the resultant meteoric economic transformation that has awed the world. The story of Chinese economic achievements in itself is an important source of its soft power, with the developing countries being inspired by its economic development and wanting to learn about the Chinese experience and its development model.<sup>20</sup>

This upward trajectory helped increase China's external image and, thus, its soft power image took a leap as many of the developing countries began to get attracted to the Chinese alternative means of economic growth, with a high percentage of the public worldwide starting to believe that economic power has shifted from the United States to China. In line with China's economic success, the attention of both foreigners and Chinese began to propagate the so-called China model of development – termed as the Beijing Consensus.<sup>21</sup>

The Beijing Consensus is used to describe the model of development that has allowed China to achieve a high level of economic growth without undermining the authority of the Communist Party. The term was coined by a former *Time* foreign editor, Joshua Cooper Ramo. According to Ramo, in the Beijing Consensus, growth comes from the state, directing development to some degree, thus, avoiding the kind of chaos that comes from rapid economic opening, thereby allowing a nation to build its economic strength. This model stands in direct contrast to democratic liberalism, the economic and political model emphasising individual rights and civil liberties that has underpinned the societies of the West, and of its democratic allies in Asia. China has been openly advertising the benefits of China's socio-economic model, as it has enjoyed striking success of decades of economic growth and poverty reduction.<sup>22</sup>

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20. Zhongying Pang, "China's Soft Power Dilemma: The Beijing Consensus Revisited", in Li, ed., n.9, p. 125.

21. Hongyi Lai, "The Soft Power Concept and a Rising China" in Hongyi Lai and Yiyi Lu, eds., *China's Soft Power and International Relations* (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 12-13.

22. Kurlantzick, n.5, pp. 56-57.

The emergence of the Beijing Consensus as a better alternative could also be attributed to a decline in the attractiveness for the Washington Consensus<sup>23</sup> since the mid-1990s. In an era when it was found that the American interventionists have become more influential in US foreign policy-making—both American liberal moralists who argue for humanitarian intervention and the neo-conservatives who support the act of intervention to preemptively halt threats to American national security – China, unlike the US which used sanctions as a weapon to derive outcomes, reiterated its policy of non-intervention. This enabled China to not only fuel, but also advance its soft power globally.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore, the good reputation that China harvested from its economic rise was also in sharp contrast to the reduced influence of the Washington Consensus, which is based on the Western liberal political economy. This idea has received a setback in the past few years from many of the developing nations. While a growing number of developing countries simply want to learn about the Chinese experience, they also believe that the Chinese model of economic development may be an alternative to the Western prescription.<sup>25</sup>

Since the Washington Consensus calls for rapid market reforms, it also needs a push towards rapid political liberalisation, which many of the emerging nations aren't able to undertake — especially the developing nations that have authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes. Thus, the Chinese model proved to be a better alternative since the regimes had time to coopt the new business people and other elites they needed to keep on their side to remain in power.<sup>26</sup> These impressive economic changes and rapidly growing economic powers enabled China to have an expanding and large amount of resources at its disposal, to develop and expand its soft power through various programmes and initiatives. Culture and diplomacy, for instance, are some of the tools utilised by China for furthering its soft power. China's

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23 The Washington Consensus demands a free market system going hand-in-hand with liberal democratic reforms.

24. Kurlantzick, n.5, pp. 44-45.

25. Pang, n. 20, p. 127.

26. Kurlantzick, n. 5, p. 58.

cultural promotion is part of a broader effort at public diplomacy, cultivated by the government to mould public opinion abroad in order to effectively pursue its national interests. China's growing economic might allowed Beijing to deploy these tools, since it cost money to hold events such as cultural summits or even sending language teachers to other nations.<sup>27</sup>

### LIMITS OF CHINA'S SOFT POWER

Despite the gains made by China in terms of its global acceptability, there remain serious questions on its efficacy to truly become a great power. This doubt arises from the fact that China today finds itself engulfed in numerous conflicts within and outside its homeland. This raises concerns amongst the global community that tends to see beyond China's economic growth and its humanitarian outreach. According to Joseph S Nye, China's soft power is limited by the legitimacy of the rule of the Communist Party that is based not only on a high rate of economic growth, but also on appeals of nationalism. The other limit is China's reluctance to show more tolerance towards greater freedom in its civil society. The Chinese Communist Party has not opened itself to the idea that soft power comes from the civil society; rather, it has remained fixated on the idea that the state is the source of all soft power. The US, by contrast, derives much of its soft power not from the government, but from civil society. According to Nye, China's aid programmes are successful and constructive, its economy is strong, and its traditional culture is widely admired. But if the country is to realise its enormous soft power potential, it will have to rethink its policies both at home and abroad, limiting its claims upon its neighbours and learning to accept criticism in order to unleash the full talents of its civil society. Thus, according to Nye, as long as China fans the flames of nationalism and holds tight the reins of Party control, its soft power will always remain limited.<sup>28</sup>

In spite of its initial success, China's exercise of its soft power in the current form is seriously flawed. One study points to the absence of Chinese

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27. Ibid., p. 61.

28. Nye, n.1, [http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/25543/limits\\_of\\_chinese\\_soft\\_power.html](http://belfercenter.ksg.harvard.edu/publication/25543/limits_of_chinese_soft_power.html).

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) on the international stage, which deprives China of a crucial soft power tool, hampers its public diplomacy, weakens the credibility of the message it seeks to send out, and reduces the amount of feedback. Another study suggests that two major factors have constrained Beijing's ability to project its soft power. One is the gap between its engaging foreign policy whilst there continues to exist a closed and rigid domestic political system. The other is the constant tension between its multiple foreign policy objectives and the still nascent soft power resources.<sup>29</sup>

But China's international vision is in itself somewhat contradictory. While, on the one hand, China continues to champion world peace, advocating a comprehensive nuclear test ban and the destruction of all nuclear weapons, on the other hand, the Chinese government shying away from addressing the ethnic genocides occurring in various nations, pulls down its image globally.<sup>30</sup> Despite China's growing national power, the Chinese leadership perceives an imbalance between its hard power and soft power. The consensus seems to be that China may have acquired greater economic and military strength since the reforms began in the late 1970s, but has remained weak in its symbolic power. This lack of "soft power" is a result of the apprehension that prevails amongst the global community towards China. While it could be argued that there is a genuine lack of understanding on China amongst the foreign public, it could also be argued that China has so far failed to do an effective job in describing and explaining itself to the outside world. Others point to the more fundamental structural and systemic problems of domestic control of information and the lack of transparency by the Chinese bureaucrats as the root cause of China's poor performance in external communication.<sup>31</sup>

China's soft power gets further constrained due to the very growth that in the past helped it to become a more globally integrated and acceptable nation. Unfortunately, today, as China has been able to reach a level of prominence in the various international organisations, a sense of unease has also set in amongst the global community. This unease amongst the various

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293 Suisheng Zhao, "The Prospect of China's Soft Power: How Sustainable?", in Li, ed., n.9, pp. 251-252.

30. Wang, n. 6, p. 40.

31. Jian Wang, "China's Search of Soft Power", in Ibid., pp. 5-7.

**Its ongoing and non-legitimate claims over the disputed reefs in the East and South China Seas, along with its military build-up in the region, have generated discomfort amongst the Southeast Asian nations adjacent to the South China Sea.**

states is somewhat justified as China, with its emergence has become more assertive with its neighbours, not forgetting very fact that it continues to have an authoritarian regime that pays little attention towards providing universal human freedom. There was hope in the West that as China became economically stronger and continued to get integrated into the various multilateral regimes, there would emerge a more liberal China which was not only acceptable globally but more predictable in its behaviour. However, this has not happened, as today, we find a China using its economic gains to build

a military which would service its interest beyond its continental landmass, causing unease amongst its neighbours and the globe at large. Its ongoing and non-legitimate claims over the disputed reefs in the East and South China Seas, along with its military build-up in the region, have generated discomfort amongst the Southeast Asian nations adjacent to the South China Sea. There was also an almost war-like situation with Japan in 2013 when China declared the establishment of an Air Defence Identification Zone over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. These actions, along with the internal systemic structure that prevails in China, in some way or the other, undermine China's soft power, thereby limiting its global acceptability.

### **BEIJING CONSENSUS RUNNING OUT OF STEAM? : FROM A MODEL TO A PHASE**

While China's values of non-interference, respect for other nation's internal affairs, economic gradualism directed by the state can, however, enjoy some appeal, they do not have universal appeal and are restricted only to specific groups and nations such as Venezuela or Iran. These nations share a strong resentment towards the American model as they see it as being interventionist. Despite this, China cannot offer average people a comprehensive, inspiring vision of how to build a free, rights-oriented

political system and economy, a vision that remains popular in many parts of the world. The global apprehension against China remains as it continues to exploit its labour and environment along with its persisting authoritarian system of governance which alienates the average people in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Further, China's support for autocratic rulers in countries like Zimbabwe and Sudan also angers the international civil society as they expect a more responsible emerging global power. The non-interventionist policy of China has led to Beijing turning a deaf ear to the various ongoing atrocities, i.e. the genocides in Africa; making one question the very basis of China's claims for a peaceful and a harmonious society. This is coupled with the authoritarian regime that continues in China and which, in recent times, has somehow become less tolerant towards freedom of domestic civil society compared to the time of Jiang Zemin.<sup>32</sup>

Just as China's economic and military power is far from matching that of the United States, China's soft power is still not equal to that of the United States, particularly in terms of political values and moral appeal. The current Beijing Consensus is only a transitional model of development. It may go from a "value-free" to a "value-added" model involving the sequencing of economic growth, legal reforms, democratisation, and constitutionalism, with different aspects of development being emphasised at different times. This has been demonstrated by the evolution of several East Asian newly industrialised economies such as South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and Hong Kong, which, after achieving high levels of economic growth, eventually implemented the rule of law and eventually democratised in order to protect the full range of human rights by initiating some form of constitutionalism.<sup>33</sup>

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32. Kurlantzick, n.5, pp. 216 and 229.

33. Deng, n. 19, pp. 261-261.

Asia and Latin America. This model meant a market economy/ capitalism combined with political authoritarianism and repression. However, just as China's economy today is running out of steam, the very concept of the Beijing Consensus is also undergoing a revision, with many beginning to call it a "Chinese Experience" rather than the "Beijing Consensus". This subtle distinction is meant to convey that China has still not successfully produced a new developmental model; rather, it has just provided many lessons of both success and failure. China has failed to realise that soft power cannot be ascribed by following Deng's developmental doctrine which stated that; *"...development is the most important means to solve China's problems...."* Soft power in its truism is achieved through a nation's internal as well as external behaviour that makes it attractive to outsiders. Therefore, despite the major harm caused to China in the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen incident, throughout the 1990s, China continued to focus on its "economic development". The Party and its state tried to solve China's social problems and overcome political challenges by focussing on economic development rather than seeking further reform of the system, with the Party reiterating to its countrymen that all the country's problems could be easily solved as long as there was more development.<sup>34</sup>

According to Joseph Nye, the Beijing Consensus is attractive to authoritarian and semi-authoritarian developing countries; it undercuts China's soft power in the West because China suffers from corruption, inequality and a lack of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In addition to its authoritarian nature, the Beijing Consensus has not been effective in dealing with many important dimensions of human development at home and abroad. The Chinese economic growth, while undeniably impressive, is widely associated in the West with pollution, cheap labour and a threat to domestic jobs.<sup>35</sup>

China's economy is also showing signs of fatigue, especially after the 2008 global financial crisis, as a result of not only the external factors but on account of various internal policy lapses as well. This economic slowdown is also

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34. Pang, no. 20, p. 126.

35. Deng, n.33, p. 260.



leading to a more serious concern, that of the rise in China's bad debt which has risen from 150 percent to 260 percent of China's total debt-to-GDP ratio in less than a decade. This may well cause another financial crisis, as the debt continues to mount every fiscal; all as a result of China's economic slowdown that has led to loans being taken to pay off interest rather than being used for productive activities. Therefore, the current emerging economic trend, along with the added incapacity to address the various impending social and political issues, renders the entire concept of the Beijing Consensus obsolete, thereby qualifying it as a phase rather than a model.

## CONCLUSION

China's rise has included both building its tangible economic-military power and intangible political-cultural influence. The Chinese government has become aware of the distinction between the two components of power and the need to develop soft power to increase its legitimacy as an emerging great power.<sup>36</sup> China may never achieve global acceptability and become a soft power in its true sense; on the contrary, the same could also be said for the US. However, if we make a comparison, there lies a great distinction between the two and that comes from the universal values of freedom, justice, and equality, which, unfortunately, comprise China's biggest shortcoming. The Tiananmen incident showed the prevalence of a high level of state intolerance towards the principle of freedom, and the grave state of China's human rights continues to impact its soft power image. There is also the issue of crony capitalism arising out of its authoritative capitalistic regime being imposed on the people and causing a lot of resentment against the authority along with the growing intolerance of the state on the civil society's basic freedom.

Over the past decade, we also find a more assertive China, especially when we consider its activities in the South and East China Seas. The ruling of an international tribunal at The Hague in July 2016 disqualified China's historical claim on the South China Sea based on its nine-dash line, due to

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36. Ibid., p. 260.

lack of hard evidence. China, by boycotting the ruling and stating that it is non-binding, does not paint a good picture for itself, especially for a rising global power with global aspirations. This reaction of China to the ruling of the arbitration not only sets a bad precedence on the legality of future judgements but also affects China's global credibility. This is a major cause of concern as it hampers China's soft power image that it has been trying to build and which has remained one of China's major agendas since the last three decades.

And, finally, the economy of China, which, over the last few years, has somehow seemed to have flattened, would also play a spoiler towards its soft power push. There is hope amongst Chinese policy-makers that the new model of economic growth termed as the "new normal" will somehow push the economy into the double digit growth that it once achieved; this, however, seems to be too optimistic given the current state of affairs of the global economy and the West tending towards protectionism. Through its grand economic corridor initiative defined as 'One Belt One Road', China seeks to integrate its road and sea links in order to ensure not that only its manufacturing sector gets quick access to its resources in Central Asia and reduces the transit time of its exports to Europe, but it also seeks to attain new markets in South Asia. However, this Chinese initiative is also causing a great deal of apprehension amongst various states since they are not comfortable with the idea of an expanding China getting close to their backyard. These attributes, along with China's own inaction internally and its aggression militarily, put its entire soft power push in jeopardy.