

# Soft Power & The CCP

How China uses Soft Power to influence the world, and a look into future Sinofication.



*Figuur 1 - Liberian children hold Chinese flags before the arrival of China's President Hu Jintao in Monrovia February 1, 2007. REUTERS/Christopher Herwi*

**Author:** Gjalt van Werkhoven

**Date:** 31/01/2021

**Supervisor:** Dr. Paschalis Pechlivanis

**Student Number:** 6261574

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## Abstract

This thesis goes into the growing influence of China in media and on the global stage since the 1990s. It looks at these developments through the lens of ‘soft power’. By going into detail on several occasions where China has influenced events or reporting by using its soft power in the last two decades, it finally concludes that we are on the precipice of a time of sinofication, where significant parts of the world will shift towards Chinese values, as opposed to the Americanization which happened in the past century.

## Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, warfare is no longer a viable method of conquest for the world's superpowers. These days the main reason large nations deploy military force is for peacekeeping and humanitarian missions. A reason for this is the 'nuclear umbrella' and the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).<sup>1</sup> However, this does not mean that large countries do not spend resources trying to influence each other. This paper will look at how the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP), does this influencing. China saw its economic power rise sharply since the 80s, with a massive boom and constant increasing growth from 1991 till 2007.<sup>2</sup> China then used this increased economic power to carve out its own spot on the international stage. China makes heavy use of its 'soft power', a term coined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. in a 1990 journal.<sup>3</sup> Nye writes:

*"Traditionally the test of a great power was its strength in war. Today, however, the definition of power is losing its emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. The factors of technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more significant in international power, while geography, population, and raw materials are becoming somewhat less important."*

As this paper will show, China has proven itself a master in using this soft power to influence international politics and foreign businesses. A recent example where China got what it wanted through soft power was the conflict between China and the NBA (National Basketball Association). The NBA is an American competition and company, but basketball is hugely popular in China. As a result of this, there is a lot of money that the NBA earns in China, which pays large sums of money for (season opening) games to be played on the Chinese mainland. On October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2019, one of the teams General Managers tweeted an image supporting the anti-China protests in Hong Kong. After this tweet, all Chinese TV and streaming services cut ties with the NBA and merchandise of the GM's team was removed from shops all throughout China by Nike, another western company.<sup>4</sup> The NBA, following these events, released a statement to Chinese media apologizing for the General Manager 'deeply offending many of our friends and fans in China.' This was ill received in American politics, with statements such as "... the #NBA, which (correctly) has no problem with players/employees criticizing our govt, is now apologizing for criticizing the Chinese gov't," from Democratic Representative Tom Malinowski. He followed this up by stating that: "[t]his is shameful and cannot stand."<sup>5</sup>

China derives a large amount of power from its massive economy. It represents both a place for cheap and skilled production for many western companies, as well as a massive market with its population of around 1.4 billion. It also has a clear strategy in mind to use this soft power to tell 'the real story of China' to the world.<sup>6</sup> This paper will attempt to show how this strategy evolved over the past few decades and how China uses its soft power to achieve its international goals. This will mainly be done

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<sup>1</sup> Alan J. Parrington, "Mutually Assured Destruction Revisited. Strategic Doctrine in Question," *Air and Space Power Journal*, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> "China's Economic Rise: History, Trends, Challenges, and Implications for the United States," accessed November 25, 2020, <https://www.everycrsreport.com/reports/RL33534.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr, "Soft Power," *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990): 153–71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1148580>.

<sup>4</sup> Ryan Woo Stanway David, "Houston Rockets Nike Merchandise Disappears from China Stores," *Reuters*, October 11, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-basketball-nba-nike-idUSKBN1WP109>.

<sup>5</sup> "China and the NBA are coming to blows over a pro-Hong Kong tweet. Here's why.," *Business Insider Nederland*, October 23, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.nl/nba-china-feud-timeline-daryl-morey-tweet-hong-kong-protests-2019-10/>.

<sup>6</sup> David Bandurski, "The Fable of the Master Storyteller," *China Media Project* (blog), September 29, 2017, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2017/09/29/the-fable-of-the-master-storyteller/>.

using official reports from (international) governmental organizations on this issue, both from China and other countries such as the US.

## Thesis Outline

For this thesis, the research question is ‘*How does the Chinese government use soft power to influence international media change from 1990 till now?*’ To answer this question, this paper will ask two sub-questions:

1. What is ‘soft power’, and how has can it be used?
2. How does China use its soft power since the 1990s, focussing on Africa in particular?

In the first chapter, the term soft power is examined in depth based on the previously mentioned article by Joseph S. Nye Jr., combined with both his other publications on the subject, as well as writings by other historians. How did this term take on different meanings throughout time, as described by Nye, Ferguson and Vuving in their respective articles on power and soft power?<sup>7</sup> The goal of this first chapter is to clearly outline the concept of soft power, its requirements and how countries might use it. It will also touch on China’s past struggles in applying soft power, which will allow for a look into how China has changed this.<sup>8</sup>

The second chapter will focus on the Chinese strategy to influence other countries through soft power, how they acquired this soft power and how foreign powers such as the US respond to this. For this chapter I will use some translated sources and reports on Chinese government mainly accessed through the China Media Project, which publishes on China’s usage of media, the statements released by the CCP and more.<sup>9</sup> In the last decade, China has moved to strengthen its position in media and cyberspace, on which several organisations and researchers have already reported.<sup>10</sup> China went from propaganda focussed on internal policies, to propaganda focussed on international affairs.<sup>11</sup> Combining these sources provides an answer to the question of how China changed its older

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<sup>7</sup> Niall Ferguson, “Think Again: Power,” *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed November 25, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/11/03/think-again-power/>; Nye Jr, “Soft Power”; Alexander Vuving, “How Soft Power Works,” *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 2009, <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1466220>.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr, “Why China Is Weak on Soft Power,” *The New York Times*, January 17, 2012, <http://ringmar.net/mycourses/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Why-China-Is-Weak-on-Soft-Power-NYTimes.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> “China Media Project,” *China Media Project* (blog), accessed January 31, 2021, <https://chinamediaproject.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> Mikko Raud, “China and Cyber : Attitudes, Strategies, Organisation,” NATO CCD COE Series on National Organisational Models for Ensuring Cyber Security. (Tallinn: NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, 2016), [https://ccdcoe.org/uploads/2018/10/CS\\_organisation\\_CHINA\\_092016\\_FINAL.pdf](https://ccdcoe.org/uploads/2018/10/CS_organisation_CHINA_092016_FINAL.pdf); Larry Jay Diamond, Orville Schell, and Hoover Institution on War, Revolution, and Peace, eds., *China’s Influence & American Interests: Promoting Constructive Vigilance: Report of the Working Group on Chinese Influence Activities in the United States*, Revised edition, Hoover Institution Press Publication, no. 702 (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 2019); Ying Jiang, *Cyber-Nationalism in China: Challenging Western Media Portrayals of Internet Censorship in China* (Adelaide: University of Adelaide Press, 2012), <http://www.doabooks.org/doab?func=browse&language=&queryField=Cyber-nationalism+in+China&x=0&y=0>; James A Lewis, “China’s Cyberpower: International and Domestic Priorities,” n.d., 24.

<sup>11</sup> Kingsley Edney, “Propaganda in Chinese Domestic Politics,” in *The Globalization of Chinese Propaganda: International Power and Domestic Political Cohesion*, ed. Kingsley Edney, Asia Today (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2014), 43–72, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137382153\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137382153_3); Lewis, “China’s Cyberpower: International and Domestic Priorities”; Vanessa Molter and Renee DiResta, “Pandemics & Propaganda: How Chinese State Media Creates and Propagates CCP Coronavirus Narratives,” *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review* 1, no. 3 (June 8, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-025>.

propaganda methods to the way it now influences international media and affairs. To sufficiently place it in time, this paper will focus on what happens in China since the 1990s. This timeframe is chosen as it coincides with China's policy to slowly start open their markets, yet more importantly it is also around the fall of the Soviet Union, which leaves a vacuum where a new global power could arise in.

The second chapter will also include a case study, focussed on direct Chinese influence on foreign news agencies in Africa. China has a multitude of news networks that focus on broadcasting internationally, examples of which are CGTN (China Global Television Network) and the international branch of the Xinhua News Agency. They broadcast or publish news in many countries around the world, even though they have been marked as 'mouthpieces' of the Chinese government by many western countries.<sup>12</sup> This paper will touch upon how this came to be, and if effects of this influence can be seen or measured.

### Method & Sources

This paper will be a literature-based research. By looking first at theoretical books regarding soft power, and then combining news articles from the last two decades, as well as previous writings and research done on how China acquired and uses said soft power, this paper answers the research questions through combining all the available sources.

The sources for this paper will exist of mostly theoretical books and articles for the first chapter, as it is more theoretical in nature. The first chapter on soft power will mostly be drawing from the theories of Joseph Nye, who coined the term 'soft power', of which multiple books are used. However, several other authors have written on the subject as well, and where applicable these articles are used. The critique on soft power comes mostly from Yukaruç, who cites multiple other authors that add or have voiced similar points.

The second chapter mostly uses reporting by independent news- agencies and papers, combined with books and research published on China's growing power. However, most of these sources were published by western companies, or by groups that actively try to move against Chinese propaganda efforts. As such, it shows only one side of the case.

Most of the primary sources used in this paper are government reports or indexes. They are used mostly to back up statements made about growth. For this paper there is one translated speech used that was linked by the Chinese Media Project. That speech was fully Chinese, so was translated using a digital translator.

### About the Conclusion

This paper will conclude that China has made massive strides in cementing itself as a global power and has done so through usage of their soft power augmented by their massive investments in media, both domestic and foreign. It also gives some new possible angles for research that can further the knowledge into Chinese influence over African and western media.

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Wong, "U.S. Designates Four More Chinese News Organizations as Foreign Missions," *The New York Times*, June 22, 2020, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/22/us/politics/us-china-news-organizations.html>.

## Chapter 1 – Soft Power

This chapter aims to answer the question of what soft power is and how it can be used. It does this by going into the literature around the subject, as well as the criticism and debates on the topic. It will not just focus on Nye, but also on other authors that gave their opinions on the topic of soft power. However, Nye is an interesting case, as his viewpoint on soft power and power in general shifts over time. This will be discussed more in the debate section of this chapter.

Joseph Nye first coined the term ‘soft power’ at the end of the Cold War. He gave it the following definition: *‘[t]his second aspect of power -which occurs when one country gets other countries to want what it wants- might be called co-optive or soft power in contrast with the hard or command power of ordering others to do what it wants.’*<sup>13</sup> It is often an indirect and long(er)-term process where one country tries to push for their goals. Soft power is directly opposed to hard power, which is the direct usage of military or economic forces on another country with smaller military or economy. Other ways of acquiring and using soft power can be found in a nation’s culture and history. ‘Americanization’ is a familiar concept in world culture, and it is what makes up a large part of American soft power. In a 2003 opinion piece Nye wrote the following:

‘Soft power grows out of both U.S. culture and U.S. policies. From Hollywood to higher education, civil society does far more to present the United States to other peoples than the government does. Hollywood often portrays consumerism, sex and violence, but it also promotes values of individualism, upward mobility and freedom (including for women). These values make America attractive to many people overseas, but some fundamentalists see them as a threat. Contrasting views often exist side by side in the same country. For example, Iranian officials excoriate America as a "great satan" while teenagers secretly watch smuggled Hollywood videos.’<sup>14</sup>

This quote gives a view of where much of the USA’s soft power comes from. Their country is seen as impressive, economically strong, forward thinking and overall a good place to live. To many western countries, the USA was -up till the Trump-presidency- seen as a staunch ally in both military matters and international politics. Aside from that the USA is an important trading partner with whom many western countries share similar cultural values and a deeply interlinked history.

At the end of the 1980s, with the Soviet Union in rapid decline, many in the USA were looking at their changing place in the world. Without a clear opponent to measure themselves against, many Americans believed their own country to be in decline. Nye writes in the opening lines of ‘Soft Power’ that the ingrained response of those people would be to favour protectionism and withdraw from international commitments. This, so Nye argues, would not stave off the envisioned decline. If anything, it would bring it closer. In a world where every country has grown ever more dependent on other countries and international relations, when ‘the most powerful country fails to lead’, international stability would be greatly damaged.

### Economy & Soft Power

Economically, the USA was in a much stronger spot than the Soviet Union, easily able to outspend them in the ongoing arms race. This, combined with the economic flaws in the Soviet Communist systems, led to inevitable bankruptcy for the 2<sup>nd</sup> greatest force in the world.

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<sup>13</sup> Nye Jr, “Soft Power,” 166.

<sup>14</sup> Joseph S. Nye Jr, “Propaganda Isn’t the Way: Soft Power,” Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, accessed December 9, 2020, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/propaganda-isnt-way-soft-power>.

A country's economy lies somewhere in the middle between hard and soft power. During the Cold War, the USA used its economy as a force of hard power. They invested money into everything that could hinder the USSR, from rebel groups in Afghanistan to direct spending on massive weapon projects that the Soviet Union would be forced to answer in kind by massive spending of their own. Here, the economy was used as a bedrock for military power or to directly hurt the other party. Economic sanctions are also a form of hard power, as threatening or applying them is a very direct way to force another party to do your bidding. However, when a country uses the power of their economy to attract other parties, it is much more on the side of soft power. So, while economy plays a large role with both sorts of power, its exact usage differs. With hard power, economic usage might be in the placing (or lifting) of sanctions to control trade relationships. In soft power, economy is used mostly by representation of one's market. When you represent a large market as a country, other countries and companies will be willing to make concessions to gain access to this market.

Turkish historian Yukarıç writes on the importance of media to soft power.<sup>15</sup> Media is in essence the magnifying glass that can be used to bundle and project a state's soft power onto another party. Without media to expose others to their soft power, states would be hard fought to influence others. Examples of this are the sharing of values -as discussed earlier- or by showing the (alleged) superiority of one's culture and using this as a bargaining tool to gain others on your side. In the western world, state governed media is rare, and the task to broadcast the aforementioned values instead lies with the major news agencies. This achieves a similar goal, as they will still report on national and international issues using most of -if not all- of the government's values. Countries that go lower on the scale of press freedom and have more or larger state-controlled media will have less issues spreading their values, or the values they want others to see of them, to the world.<sup>16</sup>

### Critiquing the Concept of Soft Power

The concept of soft power is not without its critiques or attempts to change it. In 2008, Ernest J. Wilson writes that the debate on hard versus soft power is flawed, on both sides.<sup>17</sup> Soft power advocates, according to Wilson, tend to frame their arguments poorly. They are often 'politically naïve and institutionally weak'. On the other side of the debate, advocates for hard power, which has many strong institutions in place already, and has always been active in the political world, often do not realise that there are other elements of power that could stand in the way of hard power or cannot be solved with it. When looking at a modern problem such as terrorism for example, using only hard power is not enough to root out terrorism. The USA has tried to do so and failed to subjugate many of the terrorist organisations. However, soft power alone could not solve this issue either, as much as proponents of soft power would like to believe this. Both types of power must be used together to solve many of the modern problems in international politics.

Yukarıç writes on some of the other problems that can be attributed to soft power.<sup>18</sup> First of all, soft power is tough to measure. When making policy involving soft power, this becomes a big problem. After all, how can one justify spending large amounts of budgets on building up soft power when the exact effects of this will differ on a case-by-case basis and cannot easily be measured. The second problem Yukarıç points out is the 'ambiguity about the agent/structure of the concept'. There is, according to him, no difference to be made between soft and hard power regarding their aims. Both

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<sup>15</sup> Umut Yukarıç, "A Critical Approach to Soft Power," *Journal of Bitlis Eren University Institute of Social Sciences* 6, no. 2 (December 2017): 491–502. 494-496.

<sup>16</sup> "2020 World Press Freedom Index," RSF, accessed January 29, 2021, [https://rsf.org/en/ranking\\_table](https://rsf.org/en/ranking_table).

<sup>17</sup> Ernest J. Wilson, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 110–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312618>.

<sup>18</sup> Yukarıç, "A Critical Approach to Soft Power." 496-500.

try to influence another party/state to do their bidding. It also is unclear whether states are the only actors that (can) use soft power, or if it could also be applied to NGO's and individuals.

As for the measuring of soft power, Yukaruç points to International Relations theories first and cites Kenneth Waltz's *Theory of International Politics*.<sup>19</sup> Waltz states that "power is a means and not an end". Realists see power and the international system as the only ways that could change a state's behaviour. Yet in this they focus almost exclusively on military power. This does create a new question – which will not be answered in this paper- that if power is a *zero-sum game*, comparative to security, does this then also apply to soft power? Is there a point where if one state gains more soft power in a region, does this then immediately mean another state must lose soft power?

The impact of soft power is hard to measure, especially in direct numbers or values, yet it can often clearly be seen when studying a country's government or population. In *Civilization V* (Firaxis Games, 2010), a cultural domination over other players was met with the line 'My people are now buying your blue jeans and listening to your pop music', and this sentence does a surprisingly good job of summing up a so called 'end-goal' of soft power: to have states or people regard your country highly and act how you want them to act without being forced to do so through coercion. However, unlike in video games, the impact of one's culture and values that make up the soft power cannot be read and tinkered with at will.

On this same subject, the term and concept 'Americanisation' has been in use since the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and shows clearly what the soft power of a country can achieve.<sup>20</sup> This can get to a certain point where, even though a country is not nominally ruling over another, their culture could be so dominant that they might as well be an invading force or would even be welcomed as one. Countries that share very similar cultures and values would also be far more likely to provide support in international (military) issues.

The exact agents of soft power, according to both Yukaruç and Nye, also often remain unclear, both according to him and Nye. Examples of companies using soft power can be found in for Hollywood, or certain comedians or artists that garner international fame, to name a few. These actors can spread the values of their country and culture, but rarely do so at the behest of their own state or government. Instead, because they adhere to the same values as the state that they are based in, they do so automatically. So, sometimes a state can make a conscious decision to use their soft power, by promoting their country through a state-sponsored tourism campaign for example. However, a similar campaign could be done by an independent travel agency, just looking to sell vacations to a specific country or region, while achieving the same result: making the country look good in the eyes of foreigners. In this case, who is the agent, or are both actors using soft power?

### Soft Power and Gramsci

The concept of soft power has certain similarities with Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. According to Gramsci, the reason that the great communist revolution of the working classes had not taken place in part due to the large amount of control that the ruling classes had on what was the dominant ideology in a country. They achieved this through controlling education, religion, and a nation's cultural values, and as such the ruling bourgeoisie could control how people thought about ongoing events, thus preventing a global rise of the working classes as Marx had predicted. A cultural hegemony, to have one's culture completely dominate every aspect of life is the pinnacle of soft power and can only be achieved through said soft power. It means that people will think the

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<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Neal Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reissued (Long Grove, Ill: Waveland Press, 2010).

<sup>20</sup> Samuel Erasmus Moffett, *The Americanization of Canada* (Columbia University, 1907).



way you want them to think, subscribe to the values you want them to follow and, as Gramsci saw it, make them easy to control. If there really was a cultural hegemony that stopped the communist revolution, it was spread through and entirely existing of soft power.

## Chapter 2 – The True Story of China

### China's Rise to Power

During the entirety of the Cold War, there was one clear enemy to the western powers. The Soviet Union was the second world power, ideologically opposed to the United States and the only other country in the world capable of standing up to them in any significant way. During the four and a half decades since the capitulation of the Axis powers, almost every country of note was forced to pick a side. The lines in Europe were mostly drawn based on where both armies ended up after capitulating Nazi Germany, but where any country liberated by the combined American, British and Commonwealth forces was officially left to their own devices after the war, to the eastern side of the Iron Curtain all liberated countries had puppet governments installed and joined the Soviet Union. That is not to say that the west did not form any blocs themselves. Through the Marshall plans and the many economic connections, as well as an easily portrayed new common enemy in the USSR, western countries signed up with NATO to close ranks against a new threat.

Then, at the start of the 90s, the Soviet Union collapsed. The Cold War had remained cold but had now thawed without heating up into a third world war. With the collapse of the USSR, the USA now stood unopposed. Yet, as the world connected ever tighter, a new power started to emerge. China rose to the top of the global stage as the main factory of the world, using its massive population to be the first place in the world where western companies could use the extremely cheap labor to make 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> tier products.<sup>21</sup> From here, as the Chinese economy started to grow exponentially, China gradually shifted into making 1<sup>st</sup> tier products, until they had the technological knowledge to also start producing end-products themselves. At the same time, this massive economic growth was paired with a constantly growing part of the Chinese population having more money and moving into the 'middle-class' segment. Where at first, China was only growing because they had the ability to provide a cheap workforce, now their internal market started to grow massively as well.<sup>22</sup>

China is under the governance of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in a 1-party system. The CCP holds absolute and uncontested control within its own borders, and the internal economy falls under its control as well. Any business that wants to tap into the massive Chinese market must abide with Chinese market rules or work through Chinese companies, which are either officially state-owned or will listen to anything the government tells them to do in order to not run afoul of them, making them as good as state-owned. So, through this, the Chinese government keeps total control over their markets, and can force foreign countries that wish to sell on this market.

This chapter will look at the question of how China used its soft power to grow its influence since the 1990s, and what this means for the rest of the world.

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<sup>21</sup> "What Is a Tier 1 Company or Supplier?," Insight Solutions Global, December 18, 2018, <https://insightsolutionsglobal.com/what-is-a-tier-1-company-or-supplier/>.

<sup>22</sup> "China's Economic Rise."

## ‘The true story of China’

In the introduction, some examples of the amount of control that China has were given. The NBA getting threatened with bans led to immediate backpedaling by NBA officials, and statements that disavowed the actions of the team manager that spoke up in support for protesters in Hongkong against rapidly growing Chinese authority in the city state. Another pivotal and large player in influencing the western markets is the Chinese company Tencent. This company owns a huge swath of all digital services and companies in China and the rest of the world and has often been the subject of controversies regarding censorship, privacy concerns and its very close connections to the Chinese government.<sup>23</sup> Still, it is hard to argue that it is not successful. The CCP can, either directly or through their companies, flex its muscles and force foreign companies to adhere to their wishes if these companies wish to maintain access to the Chinese multi-billion market. Speaking out against Chinese policy can easily get companies banned from using the market, leading to potential losses of profit running in the billions, until official apologies have been made and companies are adhering to the Chinese narrative once more. In the recent past, many companies have done exactly that. Removing scenes from Hollywood movies or ‘offensive’ clothing from stores.<sup>24</sup>

Companies are forced to act in accordance with Chinese wishes so that the Chinese narrative can be maintained. This Chinese narrative is what in the last decade has started to take center piece, and China will do everything in its power to make sure it stays according to how they wish everyone to see it, even if this means censoring foreign companies and spending billions to spread their narrative. Since 2013 it has been part of official CCP policy.

The Chinese Media Project links to a speech by Xi Jinping at his first national meeting on propaganda and ideology in August 2013.<sup>25</sup> In the article discussing his speech, Xi Jinping is praised for the angles he takes when telling the stories, focussing on the great feats performed by people from the country where he is speaking, almost as if to say that they are great because they do something for China. ‘Tell the Chinese story well.’ In essence, Xi Jinping is calling for the twisting of the truth to make sure China looks better to the global community.

Reporting on international news can be altered with small touches or with certain word choice to make China look better, or to twist the entire narrative by (not) reporting certain angles of news.<sup>26</sup> In the last two decades, China has grown to be a juggernaut on the international stage as well. In poor African countries, Chinese investors set up Chinese companies under the cover of ‘building up infrastructure’, yet they use these companies to feed the ever-growing need China has for raw resources, simultaneously building up good relationships with the governments of these countries, which could provide support on international issues in the UN. China attempts to convince the governments of these countries through the massive influx of funds coming into their country from China. China hopes that this will mean these countries speak up in support of China in repayment for these massive investments.

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<sup>23</sup> Michael Caster, “UN-Tencent Partnership Raises Questions of Censorship and Surveillance,” *Nikkei Asia*, April 15, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/UN-Tencent-partnership-raises-questions-of-censorship-and-surveillance>.

<sup>24</sup> Clare Baldwin and Kristina Cooke, “How Sony Sanitized the New Adam Sandler Movie ‘Pixels’ to Please China,” *Reuters*, July 24, 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/china-film/>.

<sup>25</sup> Bandurski, “The Fable of the Master Storyteller”; “习近平讲述‘中国故事’ 诠释官方外交语言新‘温度,’” accessed November 9, 2020, <http://www.caixin.com/2015-04-23/100802893.html>.

<sup>26</sup> David Bandurski, “Propaganda Soars Into Orbit,” *China Media Project* (blog), January 29, 2021, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2021/01/29/propaganda-soars-into-orbit/>.

Closer to Europe, after the possibly staged coup-attempt in Turkey, Turkey drifted further away from its western connections in the EU and the USA. China then swooped in to fill the gap and work on close political ties with the country.<sup>27</sup> This means that Turkey has now drifted much closer, if not already within the Chinese sphere of influence. A recent but ongoing example of this is the changing stance Turkey holds on the Turkish Uyghurs being oppressed and 're-educated' within China's borders.<sup>28</sup>

### China goes global.

These are very clear examples of the influence China has been accumulating over the last decades, now the next part of this chapter will look at how exactly China accumulated their soft power that is at the basis of this growing influence they have. China scholar David Shambaugh begins in his book *'China goes global: The partial power'* with his account of attending the 2009 military parade Tiananmen Square, where during one hour columns upon columns of military personnel with modern equipment march by in perfect unison, together with trucks towing massive ballistic missiles.<sup>29</sup> This is then directly followed by another hour of colorful floats with singing choirs, propaganda slogans, dancers and groups of happy ethnical minorities, all to show the soft side of China. Shambaugh notes that this two-faced parade is very representative of the two faces that China had back then, and this did not change much over the years. Although China started encouraging her companies to 'go out' and 'go global' as early as the early 1990s, this movement, this movement only really started in earnest in the mid-2000s. In his book, Shambaugh writes:

*"Despite these attributes, this book argues and demonstrates that China lacks real global power. I argue that China is a global actor without (yet) being a true global power—the distinction being that true powers influence other nations and events. They do not "lead from behind." Merely having a global presence does not equal having global power unless a nation influences events in a particular region or realm. Shaping the desired outcome of a situation is the essence of influence and exercise of power."*<sup>30</sup>

The prior passage was written in 2013, and if one looks at this statement and follows Shambaugh's definition of when a country becomes a global power as opposed to a global actor, one could conclude that China has by now become a true global power. Shambaugh also states that China is still weak in the soft power part, a statement which is mirrored by Nye.<sup>31</sup> This too has changed massively over the last decade. In a world that constantly grows evermore connected, China took a new approach under Xi Jinping. Aside from being the 'Chairman of Everything', he is also called 'Storyteller-in-Chief', two titles that together show the level of control Xi has, and how he leverages this to 'tell the story of China, and to tell it well.'<sup>32</sup>

This storytelling is done mostly through media, bordering on propaganda, and sometimes twisting much of the truth. In China, the CCP can enforce its preferred story by arresting dissidents or nay-

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<sup>27</sup> Yang Chen, "Developments in China–Turkey Relations: A View From China," *Critical Sociology* 46, no. 4–5 (July 1, 2020): 777–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0896920519885001>.

<sup>28</sup> Turkish Minute, "Turkish TV Stations Cut off Broadcast after Uighur Woman Takes the Podium at Party Meeting," accessed January 30, 2021, <https://www.turkishminute.com/2021/01/27/turkish-tv-stations-cut-off-broadcast-after-uighur-woman-takes-the-podium-at-party-meeting/>.

<sup>29</sup> David L. Shambaugh, *China Goes Global: The Partial Power* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1–4.

<sup>30</sup> Shambaugh, 6–7.

<sup>31</sup> Nye Jr, "Why China Is Weak on Soft Power."

<sup>32</sup> "Chairman of Everything," *The Economist*, April 2, 2016, <http://www.economist.com/china/2016/04/02/chairman-of-everything>; Bandurski, "The Fable of the Master Storyteller."

sayers, as well as people who tell or show stories that paint China or its government in a bad light. Outside of its borders, China needs a different approach to change the public perception. The total amount of Chinese people living in foreign countries differs heavily based on which organization's research is followed. However, according to a census by the US Department of Commerce done in 2019, where they bundled different censuses done by different organizations, there are at least 45million 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> generation Chinese immigrants in foreign countries.<sup>33</sup> These people often still identify as Chinese and are susceptible to 'the Chinese story.' It seems that, in an age of massive digital (social) media, China has changed its approach to using media as well. In an article published by The Guardian in late 2018, this change in approach is highlighted clearly.<sup>34</sup> For decades the CCP focused their attention inwards. Content produced by foreign media was censored, with foreign news broadcasts going black when discussing sensitive Chinese affairs. As such, the 'most visible manifestation of these efforts was the disappearance of content.' However, over the last decade, this strategy shifted to be more sophisticated and aimed at an international audience. By spending massive sums of money on advertorials and media coverage by Chinese-sponsored journalists, China has attempted to reform how people look at their country. All of this is done to preempt decisions made that would go against the CCP. *'For China, the media has become both the battlefield on which this "global information war" is being waged, and the weapon of attack.'*<sup>35</sup>

Africa has, according to The Guardian, been used as a testing ground for many of the media strategies China has since rolled out over the world. In 2009, after the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China responded to a wave of critical reporting in foreign media with a massive program of 6.6 billion, aimed to strengthen its presence in global media. The focus of this was Africa, where new news agencies were set up that offered almost double salaries and strong job security to active journalists in African countries.<sup>36</sup> The Guardian writes on Nigerian journalist Dayo Aiyetan who, after publishing an article on how Chinese businesses were adding to the illegal deforestation of Africa, got an offer to work at the Chinese state-run broadcasting network for a sharp increase in salary.<sup>37</sup> Dayo refused, but many took the offer to 'tell the story of Africa without bowing down to western narratives.'

## Impact

This massive effort and spending most definitely made a large impact on news reporting in Africa, ranging from obvious propaganda pieces to more subtle inserts. According to Westminster researcher Vivien March, during the 2014 Ebola outbreak in western Africa, 17% of the stories published praised China specifically for providing doctors and medicine, while the project was handled by the UN and WHO, of which China was a part, but not the only actor.<sup>38</sup> However, how much influence in the region this gains China, in either short or long term is hard to measure. There are also sources doubting the

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Goodkind, "The Chinese Diaspora: Historical Legacies and Contemporary Trends," August 2019, [https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2019/demo/Chinese\\_Diaspora.pdf](https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2019/demo/Chinese_Diaspora.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> Louisa Lim and Julia Bergin, "Inside China's Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign," *The Guardian*, December 7, 2018, sec. News, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/dec/07/china-plan-for-global-media-dominance-propaganda-xi-jinping>.

<sup>35</sup> Lim and Bergin.

<sup>36</sup> "China Is Broadening Its Efforts to Win over African Audiences," *The Economist*, October 18, 2018, <http://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/10/20/china-is-broadening-its-efforts-to-win-over-african-audiences>.

<sup>37</sup> Dayo Aiyetan, "How China Fuels Deforestation In Nigeria, West Africa," *International Centre for Investigative Reporting* (blog), January 18, 2016, <https://www.icirnigeria.org/how-china-fuels-deforestation-in-nigeria-west-africa/>.

<sup>38</sup> Lim and Bergin, "Inside China's Audacious Global Propaganda Campaign"; Vivien Marsh, "Mixed Messages, Partial Pictures? Discourses under Construction in CCTV's *Africa Live* Compared with the BBC," *Chinese Journal of Communication* 9, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 56–70, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2015.1105269>.

extend of influence that China has on Africa and its governments. This doubt comes in part from the previously discussed problem that is measuring the impact of soft power. Professor Herman Wasserman shares the same sentiment as Yukarıç, yet he offers a potential solution to this problem. According to him, there should be more focus on audience studies in Africa, to gauge how the average consumer of news thinks about China, and how this might shift.<sup>39</sup> He also argues that these countries most definitely have their opinion shaped by the colonial past of western control over Africa. This might shift countries to be more distrustful of any foreign influence, or the opposite, where they see China as non-western, and thus as positive.<sup>40</sup>

## Conclusion

### Chinese Media Usage

For its main question, this thesis asks how the Chinese government uses soft power to influence international media change from 1990 till now. China gains most of its soft power through its large economy and domestic market, which many companies are eager to tap into. At the same time, through massive investments in foreign news agencies and by setting up new foreign headquarters for Chinese news agencies, China has made massive strides to influence public perception and make it favour the Chinese perspective. This large amount of Chinese influence leads to censorship in non-Chinese media, in order not to run afoul of the country that is spending massive amounts of money paying the journalists' wages. The scope of this was first mostly on Africa, but by 2018 it has a massive reach in all western countries too. As such, millions of people outside of China are exposed to Chinese propaganda every day.

### Sinofication

Americanization as a concept has long since been established and has since World War II changed into westernization. There is a large foundation of shared values and culture, which gives certain amounts of soft power towards the other countries that share these similarities. Now however, we are seeing the rise of Sinofication, with a growing amount of influence for a country that holds significantly different values on politics as the currently dominant 'western world.' These values are slowly being pushed upon the world as the dominant values. It is not that we *will* wear their blue jeans in the future, but that is mostly because we already *are* wearing them. China has used -and continues to use- its status as the central factory of our global economy, combined with the power of its massive domestic market, to slowly strengthen its position as a global power.

### Further Research

To finish this paper, there are some subjects that could use further research. The question this paper already asked is one of them. Do IR-theories regarding the balance of power, specifically the realist theory of power as a zero-sum game, also apply to soft power? If this is the case, is this then a valid way for western countries to combat the growing dominance that China is building? And, if these theories do not apply, is then the usage of the word 'power' in soft power flawed?

This paper scratches the surface of what China is doing to influence the world's media. It is written from a western perspective, and the African perspective is mostly left out of the picture, while the

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<sup>39</sup> Herman Wasserman, "Chinese Soft Power in Africa: Findings, Perspectives, and More Questions," in *China's Media and Soft Power in Africa*, ed. Xiaoling Zhang, Herman Wasserman, and Winston Mano (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2016), 196–201, [https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539670\\_14](https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137539670_14).

<sup>40</sup> Wasserman, 199–201.

Chinese perspective in this paper can only be seen through secondary sources. These perspectives could be studied as well, and they might provide interesting results, yet require either direct studies of African governance and/or popular opinion.

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## Images

Figure 1 - Liberian children hold Chinese flags before the arrival of China's President Hu Jintao in Monrovia February 1, 2007. REUTERS/Christopher Herwi – <https://www.businessinsider.com/chinas-investment-in-africa-suffered-instability-lack-of-knowledge-2016-8?international=true&r=US&IR=T> – Accessed January 31, 2021.