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China's 'peaceful rise': political
legitimacy as a soft power strategy

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China's 'peaceful rise': political legitimacy as a soft power strategy

Abstract:

In recent years, states' desire to become great powers and leading economies has been increasingly determined by attractiveness and influence abilities on other countries and publics. China is one of the foremost examples in public diplomacy and soft power rapid development. Seeing the Trump Administration as its main competitor, in economic and military terms, China has positioned itself first as a regional and later on, as a global power in globalization and economic integration. This research paper explores and analyses the main variables that have contributed, and still are, to Chinese 'peaceful rise' and questions whether political legitimacy can be considered as a key factor behind China's soft power strategy.

Keywords:

Public diplomacy, soft power, peaceful rise, political legitimacy, China.

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El «ascenso pacífico» de China: la legitimidad política como estrategia de poder blando

Resumen:

En los últimos años, el deseo estatal de convertirse en grandes poderes y líderes económicos se ha visto incrementado por el atractivo y la influencia ejercida en otros países y públicos. China es uno de los principales ejemplos si tenemos en cuenta el rápido desarrollo de su poder blando y diplomacia pública.

China, que ve a Estados Unidos como su principal competidor en términos económicos y militares, se ha posicionado primero como un poder regional. Más tarde, gracias a su rápida integración económica y la globalización, se ha convertido en un líder mundial. El mecanismo de Estado llevado a cabo para lograr este gran deseo de poder ha sido a base de multiplicar su atractivo y capacidad de influencia en términos de poder blando: una herramienta crucial que a su vez aumenta el impacto de la diplomacia pública en la esfera doméstica e internacional, y refuerza la legitimación política y económica a ojos de la comunidad internacional.

Este documento estudia las principales variables que han contribuido, y lo continúan haciendo, al «ascenso pacífico» chino y analiza la legitimidad política como un factor clave detrás de la estrategia de poder blando y diplomacia pública del país.

Palabras clave:

Diplomacia pública, poder blando, ascenso pacífico, legitimización política, China.

Introduction

China's rapid economic growth and its integration into the global system during the 21st century, has facilitated the development of a new strategy or path to help boost its influence and establish a peaceful and friendly environment among the international community. Under Hu Jintao's leadership and with the support of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the country gradually experienced the development of a soft power strategy based on influence and attractiveness factors which sought to strengthen 'China's peaceful rise'¹.

Public diplomacy as a concept and key factor of a country's foreign policy was first used back in 1965, by American diplomat and Dean of Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University Edmund Gullion. In this sense, the practice of this type of soft power strategy was seen as a mechanism to "deal with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies"². Taking into consideration a western understanding and adaptation of this concept into foreign politics, public diplomacy encompasses different dimensions of both traditional and modern practices of diplomacy, governmental cultivation of public opinion in other countries or the reporting of foreign affairs and its impact on foreign policy, among others.

Going back to the Chinese case, public diplomacy was not fully understood and addressed in foreign affairs policies until Hu Jintao's term of office. Public diplomacy and soft power strategies were not on the Chinese government agenda until the 16th National Congress of CCP, in 2002, where it was first expressed that:

The fundamental task and basic goal of China's diplomatic work at present and a certain period in the years to come is to maintain the important development period featured by strategic opportunities and strive for a peaceful and stable international environment, a good-neighbourly and friendly surrounding environment, and environment for equal and mutually beneficial cooperation, and an objective and friendly publicity environment so as to build a fairly well-off society in an all-round way³.

¹ LI, X., and WORM, V. "Building China's Soft Power for a Peaceful Rise". *Journal of Political Sciences*, 2011, 16, pp. 69-89. Available on: <https://bit.ly/2NBrknK>

² CULL, N. *Public Diplomacy Before Gullion: The Evolution of a Phase*. USCPublicDiplomacy, 2006. University of Southern California. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2SWPrAP>

³ PEOPLE'S DAILY: *The tenth meeting of Chinese diplomatic envoys* [online]. People's Daily, 2004. Available on: <https://bit.ly/2RuCUm0> (Last visited on 10/01/20)

Chinese public diplomacy has been an unfamiliar yet studied topic among scholars and policy advisors. Practice of public diplomacy in the country dates from 1983, when the “open and reform” period of foreign affairs policy took place and a system of Chinese news spokesmen was created. However, scholarship studies and analysis of these practices did not appear until the early 1990s. The *gongong waijiao* concept was first described in the book *Diplomacy Abroad* and translated as “public diplomacy” from an entry reflected in the international public law encyclopaedia⁴. Moreover, the concept was profoundly analysed by professor Yi Lu in his book *The general introduction to diplomacy*, where he translated the term as *Gong Zhong Wai Jiao*, a way of referring to mass or civil diplomacy⁵ —coinciding with Gullion’s understanding of public diplomacy as a mechanism to reflect government cultivation of public opinion in other states.

Before analysing Chinese peaceful rise in terms of soft power, it is important to acknowledge a certain understanding of public diplomacy and its practices in China. In this sense, and according with Wang’s work on *Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power*, it has been previously demonstrated by the government “a limited understanding of public diplomacy, seeing it either as an external propaganda or a form of internal public affairs”⁶. Nevertheless, China is still recognised as a skilled public diplomacy player.

Chinese approximation to “public diplomacy” is linked with the term *dui wai xuan* and *wai xuan*, referring to external propaganda as a mean of promotion of Chinese achievements and culture overseas. In this sense, it is also essential to bear in mind the positive connotation associated with the term propaganda and its implementation through news release, shaping of ideology or advertisement. Propaganda development and execution are quite strong and influential in China, whereas public diplomacy practices are still quite weak. This understanding of the term somehow validates why propaganda is such a strong branch of Chinese public diplomacy and justifies the analysis of the variables that conform Chinese soft power strategy and its link with political legitimacy⁷.

⁴ ZHOU, QIPENG, and YANG. “Diplomacy abroad”. Beijing: Chinese People’s Public Security University Press, 1990.

⁵ LU, Y. “The general introduction to diplomacy”. Beijing, China: World Affairs Press, 2004.

⁶ WANG, Y. “Public Diplomacy and the Rise of Chinese Soft Power”. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2008, 616, pp. 257-273. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/38ku7de>

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 259.

In order to both comprehend and analyse China's public diplomacy strategy as a whole; Chinese soft power and soft rise must be addressed. In this regard and going back to Hu Jintao's words back in 2002, during the last twenty years of this century, China has been gradually increasing its presence on the economic and political influence sphere, and not only by its national development policy. Soft power has been both a key charm and tool used in order to ease the country's integration in global markets and international organizations.

It has been studied among scholars a potential Chinese 'peaceful or soft rise'. This term, coined by numerous researchers and policy makers, has also helped to develop, and put into practice a strategy. Furthermore, it is usual among scholars to compare China and the U.S. due to a possible competition in the rise of a global hegemony. In fact, China's peaceful rise is considered to be the most important characteristic of its road of development⁸. The country's way of proving another system to rise on the world stage is mainly by participation in economic globalisation, competition with others in the world market and recognition of a world system that is mutually beneficial to all. This sums up the meaning of "peace" in China's rise⁹.

The first Chinese article that acknowledged the term *soft power* was published in 1993 by Wang¹⁰. Back in 2005, soft power expertise and creator of the term Joseph Nye studied the implications and effects of these strategies on both countries, predicting a decline of American soft power and the rise of Chinese soft power¹¹. Also, the debate around the Beijing Consensus replacing the Washington Consensus and the so-called China Model flourished.

Going back to Nye's conceptualization of soft power, he defines three sources: culture, political values, and foreign policies¹². Concerning this, Chinese scholars have taken this concept and broaden its meaning and application not only to nations but also regions, organizations and individuals and have also aggregated more factors into the

⁸ BIJIAN, Z. "China's peaceful rise and new role of Asia". *Foundation pour L'innovation Politique*, 2005, p. 6. Available on: <https://bit.ly/3ayqySC>

⁹ MONOD, J., AND CHATTERJI, M. "Opportunities and challenges faced by China's peaceful rise". *Foundation pour L'innovation Politique*, 2005, p. 8. Available on: <https://bit.ly/3ayqySC>

¹⁰ WANG, H. "Culture as national power: Soft power". *Fudan Journal (Social Sciences Edition)*, 1993, p. 3.

¹¹ NYE, J. S. *The rise of China's soft power* [online]. Wall Street Journal Asia, 2005. Available on: <https://on.wsj.com/2txq5pD> (Last visited 10/01/20)

¹² NYE, J. S. "Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics". New York: PublicAffairs, 2004.

mix. Men also add another two sources – economic development model and international image¹³. This conception also coincides with Nye's adaptation of the concept of smart power, adding both hard and soft power variables. For Chinese soft power, Gao still thinks that culture is a core source of power¹⁴, while Yan insists on political value being the key point factor¹⁵.

Defining Chinese soft power has been a challenging task for both scholars and policy makers. According to Li and Worm, Chinese soft power and peaceful rise must be studied and analysed through different sources: cultural attractiveness, political values, development model, international institutions, international image, and economic temptation¹⁶. Moreover, Kejin explores the possibility of legitimacy as a motivation behind China's public diplomacy strategy and soft rise¹⁷.

Nevertheless, Chinese understanding of public diplomacy and propaganda objectives have shaped what it is considered to be its soft power vision. Apart from pursuing rational and national interests, its consolidation and acknowledgement in the international community and a future governance of the world, China's strategy includes the legitimacy variable, widely demonstrated throughout its own cultural and political history¹⁸.

Soft power with Chinese characteristics

In accordance, China's soft power nourishes from six pillars: cultural attractiveness, media expansion, political values, development model, international institutions and economic temptation.

¹³ MEN, H. "Assessment report on China's soft power: part one". *International Watch*, 2007, 2, pp. 15-26.

¹⁴ GAO, Z. "Cultural power". Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2007.

¹⁵ YAN, X. "China's soft power needs to be improved". *Current World Environment*, 2006, 2(1).

¹⁶ LI, X., AND WORM, V. "Building China's Soft Power..." Ref. p. 75.

¹⁷ KEJIN, Z. "The Motivation Behind China's Public Diplomacy". *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, 2015, pp. 167-196. Available on: <https://bit.ly/30IHx05>

¹⁸ WANG, Y. "The dimensions of China's peaceful rise". *Asia Times*, 2004.

Cultural attractiveness

China can be considered as an enormous competitive country in terms of cultural resources. In this sense, the country owns many unique and attractive sources of culture such as the language (characters and calligraphy), philosophy, music, movies, arts, architecture, food, medicine, martial arts and China towns all over the world.

China's main source of cultural power is focused on its promotion overseas, that is, the establishment of Confucius Institutes (CIs) in countries and regions gathered all over the globe. The aim of these institutions is to promote learning of Chinese language and culture to the world. Since their founding back in 2004¹⁹, CIs have gained momentum and expanded rapidly. By 2008, China had established 326 centres in 81 countries and regions²⁰, and by the end of 2014, Chinese party leaders and government officials had participated in the activities hundreds of times and members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau had stopped by CIs more than 80 times and guided the work there²¹.

Effectiveness of Confucius Institutes in terms of soft power and its utility in promoting Chinese culture have been studied as well among scholars. In this regard, Zhou and Luk's research on the real purpose of CIs states that "what China promotes through [CIs] stays away from soft power", using these institutions to pursue national interests²²²³. In the same lines, Li and Worm detect two major reasons for China's underdevelopment in terms of cultural soft power: lack of strategy, especially for traditional culture represented by Confucianism; and lack of international competitiveness due to the low efficiency of the existing cultural supervisory system and the difficulties for exporting China-specific cultural products²⁴.

¹⁹ ZHOU, Y., and LUK, S. "Establishing Confucius Institutes: a tool for promoting China's soft power?" *Journal of Contemporary China*, 2016, 25(100), pp. 628-642. Available on: <https://bit.ly/38mx397>

²⁰ LAI, H. "China's cultural diplomacy: going for soft power". *EAI Background Brief*, 2006, 308, East Asian Institute, Singapore: National University of Singapore. Available on: <https://nus.edu/2TyiF9E>

²¹ LAI, H. "China's cultural diplomacy: going for soft power". *EAI Background Brief*, 2006, 308, East Asian Institute, Singapore: National University of Singapore. Available on: <https://nus.edu/2TyiF9E>

²² ZHOU, Y., and LUK, S. "Establishing Confucius Institutes: a tool for promoting China's soft power..." Ref. p. 642.

²³ Debates around China using CIs as espionage centers have flourished among scholars and mass media.

²⁴ LI, X., AND WORM, V. "Building China's Soft Power..." Ref. p. 76.

Media expansion

Mass media conform an important space within China's national and foreign policies. In this sense, this variable must be considered as well in order to analyse soft power and public diplomacy practices. Media policy is strongly linked with propaganda in the Chinese case.

Back in 2008, in celebration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of China Central Television (CCTV), Li Changchun, the propaganda chief of the Communist Party of China between 2002 and 2012, stated that

With China's rapid economic and social development, our status in the international community has become more prominent. However, our capacity to communicate to the international community is lagging. To strengthen our communication capacity is a matter of urgency. It concerns the international standing of China; it concerns the growth of China's cultural soft power; and it concerns the place and function of Chinese media in the international community of public opinion. Our first and foremost mission from now on is to strengthen our communication capacity inside and outside China. Everyone should be aware of this responsibility and mission²⁵.

As it has been mentioned, "propaganda" is not a derogatory term in China. In fact, since Li's speech the country has opened to the world with more sophisticated efforts to maintain its grip on information. The institutional organization which controls information inside and outside of China is the State Council Information Office (SCIO). Apart from that, the SCIO acts as a messenger in its own right and it employs spokespeople, holds press conferences, publishes magazines and books, and produces films. The SCIO's principal responsibility is to define ideas propagated overseas and to keep Chinese institutions on message²⁶.

Moreover, these efforts made by China in order to expand its media presence abroad can be also reflected on Xinhua News Agency, the country's official state news agency. Xinhua's role is both domestic and international. In this regard, it reports news and

²⁵ Li's speech made on December 2008. Translation of the speech by Wanning Sun. SUN, W. "Mission Impossible? Soft Power, Communication Capacity and the Globalization of Chinese Media". *International Journal of Communication*, 2010, 4, p. 59. Available on: <https://bit.ly/2NHdCzR>

²⁶ SHAMBAUGH, D. "China's Soft-Power Push". *Foreign Affairs*, 2005, 94(4), pp. 99-107. Available on: <https://bit.ly/37a7yaH>

disseminates Communist Party propaganda. Furthermore, China's premier state television channel, also known as CCT, has gone global and the country is also stepping up its penetration of foreign radio waves through China Radio International: a former propaganda tool founded back in 1941 against Japan. Nowadays, it has a far greater reach and broadcasts 392 hours of programming per day in 38 languages and maintains 27 overseas bureaus²⁷.

Political values

Regarding Chinese political values, international and domestic performance will be taken into consideration. In this sense, China's international political values hold onto the principles and policies related with when dealing with other nations and international affairs.

Going back to Hu Jintao's words on soft power, it is accurate to revive his vision on a "good-neighbourly and friendly surrounding environment"²⁸ in terms of international political values. China still follows the principles of peaceful coexistence and non-interference in other nation's domestic affairs, with the aim of projecting a friendly and peaceful image of the country abroad. For the country, peace and development are the two main themes of contemporary world and development should be the priority of developing nations²⁹.

In terms of domestic values, and in relation with the development model variable, China is still seen as an authoritarian regime among scholars³⁰. Many problems like corruption, censorship, unequal opportunities, privileged class, lack of transparency and so on made China a vulnerable soft power advocate. In addition, it should also be considered how some scholars link Chinese domestic political values with lack of democracy, violating human rights and suppression of freedom³¹. This questions itself the definition of Chinese soft power and its mere existence.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, pp. 101.

²⁸ PEOPLE'S DAILY: *The tenth meeting of Chinese diplomatic envoys* [online]...Ref. Last visited on 12/01/20.

²⁹ LI, X., and WORM, V. "Building China's Soft Power..." Ref. p. 78.

³⁰ NATHAN, A. "Authoritarian resilience". *Journal of Democracy*, 2003, 14(1), pp. 6. Available on: <https://bit.ly/2NHxXoC>

³¹ HUANG, Y., and DING, S. "Dragon's underbelly: An analysis of China's soft power". *East Asia*, 2006, 23(4), p. 38. Available on: <https://bit.ly/38mxKPQ>

Development model

China's rapid economic progress and growth has been one of the most impressive sources of soft power³². However, its political system and mercantilist business practices have amounted numerous critics. In order to improve perceptions and global presence, Beijing has been used as a publicity and public relations blitz. Even though it was stated back in 2007 under Hu Jintao's leadership, during President Xi Jinping mandate it was intensified.

In 2011, during the 17th Central Committee of the CCP Li Changchun opened the debate on cultural reform and promotion of development of socialist culture and it was stated that it was a national goal to build the country into a socialist cultural superpower³³. Under Jinping's leadership, in 2014, it was announced that Chinese soft power would increase by giving a good narrative and an improved communication of China's messages to the world. Indeed, the world instantly was bombarded with new and powerful initiatives such as the Chinese dream, the Asia-Pacific dream, the Silk Road Economic Belt, the Twenty-First-Century Maritime Silk Road, mayor-country relations, among others³⁴.

According to Li and Worm, China's huge success in economic development since 1979, in comparison with other developing countries still struggling to figure out the right approach, can be linked with the Beijing Consensus or so-called Chinese model³⁵. Following these patterns, Li, Brodsgaard and Jacobsen have redefined the Beijing Consensus with ten principles that perfectly fit with Chinese economic performance over the years. These are: localization of best practices borrowed; combination of market and plan; gradualism; policy rights; stable political environment – taking into consideration political legitimacy and a Sino-centric vision of the world and global system –; self-reliance and openness to foreign markets; upgrading industries; indigenous innovation; prudent financial liberalization; and economic growth for social

³² WANG, H., and LU, Y. "The conception of soft power and its policy implications: a comparative study of China and Taiwan". *Journal of contemporary China*, 2008, 17(56), pp. 426-447. Available on: <https://bit.ly/2TGM3uj>

³³ PEOPLE'S DAILY: *Fifth Plenary Session of 17th CPC Central Committee* [online]. People's Daily. Available on: <https://bit.ly/30KAy6R> (Last visited on 12/01/20)

³⁴ SHAMBAUGH, D. "China's Soft-Power Push..." Ref. p. 99.

³⁵ LI, X., and WORM, V. "Building China's Soft Power..." Ref. p. 80.

harmony³⁶.

Nye's approach of nation's soft power contemplates a strong democracy factor that is still yet to be seen in Chinese political system. In this sense, Barker wonders to what extent democracy must be a mandatory characteristic in a nation's soft power. He senses that while the American model looks less and less appealing, China continues to grow and also transmits a paradigm of stability and prosperity. According to Barker, "China's success is of course not guaranteed, but in a world of economic uncertainty, the China model increasingly looks more attractive than Pax Americana"³⁷.

Political institutions

According to Huang and Ding, there has been an important increase of China's participation in international institutions and organizations after the post-Mao era³⁸. In this sense, China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001³⁹ marked a milestone in China's policy toward international organizations and global governance. Later, in 2002, China voluntarily ratified the Kyoto Protocol even though it was not a signatory country of this treaty.

These actions show China's desire to join international institutions in order to create a peaceful and conducive external environment and to partake in the design of the international order⁴⁰. More examples of this active engagement can be also seen through regional multilateralism in ASEAN-China dialogues⁴¹, ASEAN Plus Three, ASEAN Regional Forum, APEC (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation)⁴², among others⁴³.

³⁶ LI, X. BRODSGAARD, K. E., AND JACOBSEN, M. "Redefining Beijing Consensus: Ten economic principles". *China Economic Journal*, 2009, 2(3), pp. 297-311. Available on: <https://bit.ly/2G0JGdM>

³⁷ BARKER, T. *The Real Source of China's Soft Power* [online]. The Diplomat, 2017. Available on: <https://bit.ly/37betRg> (Last visited 12/01/20)

³⁸ HUANG, Y., and DING, S. "Dragon's underbelly: An analysis of China's soft power..." Ref. p. 30.

³⁹ WTO (WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION): *China and the WTO. Member information* [online]. WTO. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/38j4MQK> (Last visited 13/01/20)

⁴⁰ YU, Y. "G-20 and China: A Chinese Perspective". *China & World Economy*, 2005, 13(1), pp. 1-23. Available on: <https://bit.ly/38wsN7d>

⁴¹ ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations): *ASEAN Member states* [online]. Available on: <https://bit.ly/368x9j8> (Last visited 13/01/20)

⁴² APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation): *Member economies. People's Republic of China* [online]. Available on: <https://bit.ly/369l8c5> (Last visited 13/01/20)

⁴³ LI, X., and WORM, V. "Building China's Soft Power..." Ref. p. 82.

Finally, China is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council with veto power, giving the country a strong position in international security and soft power perception⁴⁴. In fact, and according to governmental reports, back in 2009 China was the largest contributor of peace-keeping personnel among the five permanent members of the Security Council⁴⁵.

Economic temptation

China is a magnet when it comes to trade and investment potential. In fact, for Sachs, the four BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China) together could be larger than the G6 (US, Japan, UK, Germany, France and Italy) in less than 40 years. He also foresees that China will become the largest economy in the world by 2041, with the country being a good investment outlet for world's excess capitals⁴⁶.

In this regard, Li and Worm sense a change in the global economic structure with the development of communicational technology, the decrease of transportations costs and a big wave of international industrial relocations – China being a prime example of these factors⁴⁷. China is seen as the world's factory due to its cheap labour, wide market, preferential tax policies and manufacturing activities.

However, during the last years, China has lost its cost competitiveness to lower-wage countries. Therefore, many foreign investors have relocated their investment from Chinese to other economies. In order to keep them and to attract more FDI, Li and Worm suggest exploring different dimensions, in which public diplomacy plays a strategical role. In this sense, both scholars' sense that the development of economic diplomacy will help both economy and global influence in terms of soft power⁴⁸.

⁴⁴ UN SECURITY COUNCIL: *Current members* [online]. UN Security Council. Available on: <https://bit.ly/38pCAeT> (Last visited on 13/01/20)

⁴⁵ CENTRAL GOVERNMENT PORTAL: *China is currently the country with the largest number of peacekeepers among the permanent members of the Security Council* [online]. Central Government Portal, 2009. Available on: <https://bit.ly/2TEru1M> (Last visited 13/01/20)

⁴⁶ SACHS, G. "Dreaming with BRICs: The path to 2050". *Goldman Sachs Economic Paper*, 2003, 99, pp. 1-24. Available on: <https://bit.ly/2NDob7e>

⁴⁷ LI, X., AND WORM, V. "Building China's Soft Power..." Ref. p. 86.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 87-88.

Political legitimacy: a new soft power pillar

In order to analyse how political legitimacy is considered to be a Chinese soft power characteristic it is necessary to go back to Nye's definition of soft power. In this sense, it is true that public diplomacy is not the equivalent of soft power, instead one of its dimensions in order to achieve global presence and influence. However, soft power is still seen as a forward concept and mechanism when referring to the public diplomacy strategy that goes behind it.

Legitimacy has a dual character in Chinese politics and image perception. First of all, legitimacy is considered to be the popular acceptance of an authority. Therefore, political legitimacy is a basic condition of governance⁴⁹. However, and contrary to what Kejin suggests about political legitimacy and soft power⁵⁰, legitimacy must be a factor to consider among soft power strategies, especially in China's.

In this regard, and in relation with some of the pillars analysed in the previous section, political legitimacy is used as a soft power strategy. The same way Nye uses liberal democracy practices as a legitimate form of soft power, Chinese government uses its economic and political power among the region, in order to send a clear message of consolidated and strong influence in the international community.

Taking soft power as a representative branch of public diplomacy, it is accurate to consider Kejin's evaluation of the strategic motivation behind China's Public Diplomacy. He identifies four indicators related with both China's public diplomacy strategy and soft power pillars: high-level leaders —for instance, visits to CIs activities—; the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), in charge of the development and implementation of Chinese public diplomacy strategy and political values; the Ministry of Commerce (MOC), heavily linked with China's economic temptations and economic diplomacy; and the Ministry of Education (MOE), which coordinates both cultural and media approaches of soft power⁵¹.

⁴⁹ DAHL, R. "Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition". New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971.

⁵⁰ KEJIN, Z. "The Motivation Behind China's Public Diplomacy...". Ref. p. 179.

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 183.

Observing China's core institutions input in its public diplomacy strategy and the linkages with soft power pillars, clearly defines political legitimacy as an influencing factor in China's peaceful rise. Going back to Barker's analysis of China's development model and political values, is also important to consider the lens used in order to interpret political legitimacy as a determinant variable. China is a very attractive model to leaders and politicians in Southeast Asia. It provides a model already used in illiberal and authoritarian-leaning political leaders and regimes like Malaysia or Singapore, where legitimacy is reflected in the ability of their leaders to control the economy and respond to citizen's demands⁵².

Conclusions

This paper explores Chinese public diplomacy and its 'peaceful rise' in terms of soft power. Moreover, it tries to illustrate common soft power pillars studied among scholars and adds the political legitimacy variable as another key factor in China's soft power strategy. Moreover, the reader is constantly reminded of the need to explore this field with a Sino-centric vision of the world. Most of the literature focused on Chinese rise is made through western lens, leaving aside the most important characteristics: China's culture and values.

On the other hand, it is also important to consider analysis about soft power and political systems. While it is true that Nye's initial approach of the concept was strongly linked with liberal democracy political values, China's performance during the last years has demonstrated that the linkage between soft power and democracy is not at all mandatory.

China's challenges and problems regarding its influence and international image relate to its public diplomacy strategy. The main pillars studied among scholars which contribute to China's soft power rise show a linkage with political legitimacy. Political values and the Chinese development model play an important role by connecting both national image and political cohesion towards the international community, also boosted by cultural and mass media mechanisms.

⁵² BARKER, T. "The Real Source of China's Soft Power..." Ref. Last visited on 12/01/20.

China's 'peaceful rise' has been demonstrated to be strongly linked with public diplomacy strategies. Its role and reputation among the international community has been widely criticised, as well as compared to the American liberal model of soft power. However, Chinese leadership is expected to grow more than the latter. The reason of it relies indeed on its soft power strategy, where a strong political discourse and legitimacy is being used in order to swipe both Chinese society and the international community.

To summarize, China uses political legitimacy as a way to shape its soft power strategy. Political and economic differences from other hegemonies and acceptance by the international community are soft power as well. This "unattractiveness" that numerous scholars tend to criticise is what actually makes China attractive. In fact, everybody talks about China for better or for worse. That is soft power at its finest. And they have definitively achieved it by using power, influence and political legitimacy.

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