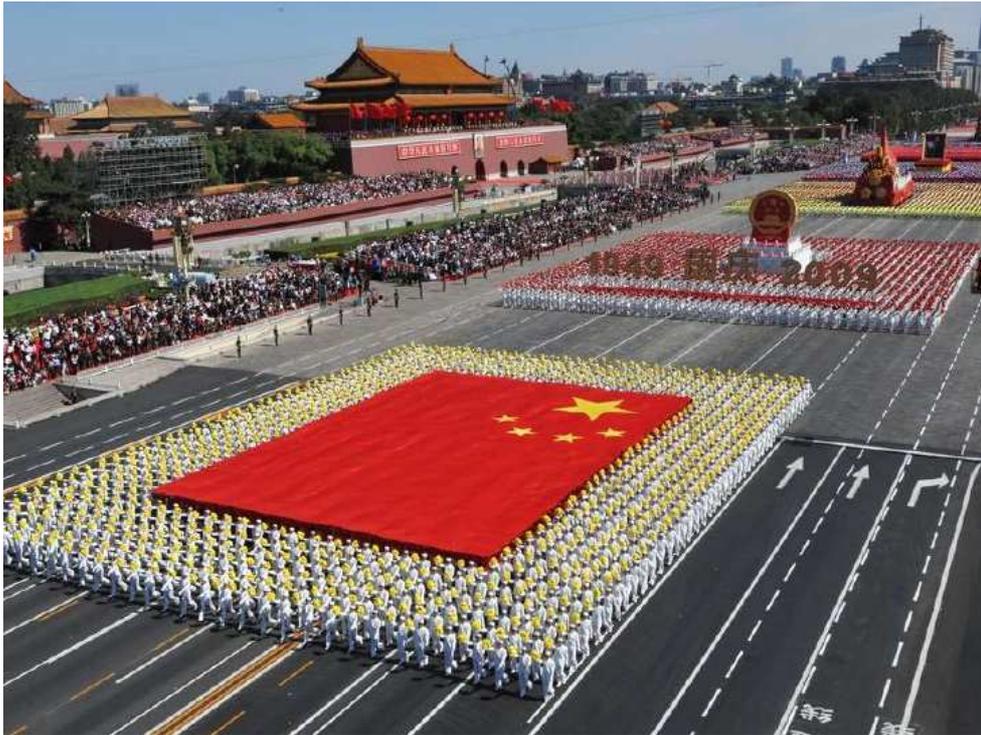


## **Has China's Use of Soft Power Been Effective?**

Kenneth A. Fox, President  
The Soundings Group, LLC  
Charleston, South Carolina, USA



Soft power is a concept used in foreign policy development. The term was first used by Harvard Professor Dr. Charles Nye in 1990. The former dean at Harvard University Kennedy School of Government, Dr. Nye defined "power" as the ability to affect others to get the desired results or outcomes. Soft Power is defined as the capacity to persuade others to do what one wants by utilizing intangible resources such as: culture, ideology, institutions and political values. Another interpretation defines soft power "as the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion.

In contrast, "hard" power is based on more coercive means like military intervention, coercive diplomacy and economic sanctions--it relies on tangible power resources such as armed forces or economic means, such as an embargo. Nye felt successful states (or countries) need both soft and hard power--the ability to coerce others as well as the ability to shape their long term attitudes and preferences.

Soft power may take longer. Hard power evokes compelled action, while soft power induces voluntary action. Many believe soft power is the more effective and efficient concept in contemporary politics because of its endurance and sustainability.

China uses soft power regularly. Experts believe Beijing is trying to convince the world of its peaceful intentions, secure the resources it needs to continue economic growth and isolate Taiwan. Some efforts have been more successful than others. Initiatives are under way to show the global influence of China.

The following six examples show how China uses soft paper. These examples illustrate the depth and range of known efforts of China using soft power to influence diplomacy and help achieve its intended goals.

### **1. The Confucius Institutes**



At Rutgers University in New Jersey, USA



This is a public, non-profit organization started in China and affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education. It is overseen by an organization called Hanban, which signs agreements with colleges and universities around the world to host a Confucius Institute. The purpose of each institute is to promote Chinese language and culture. They offer classes in Chinese, history, calligraphy, Tai Chi, and promote the observance of Chinese holidays and traditions. They also offer grants to study or travel in China. The first Confucius Institute opened on November 2004 in Seoul, Korea. There are currently over 480 Confucius Institutes globally, with over 100 in the U.S.

However, some campuses have closed their Confucius Institutes for various reasons: discriminating against the Dalai Lama, or praising Chinese rule of his region (Tibet), denying the Tiananmen Square massacre, discriminating against the Falun Gong and the promotion of the Chinese Communist Party ideology. The Council of Foreign Relations in 2006 issued a report titled China Soft Power Initiative, stating in part:

*The Confucius Institute is a primary means for exerting soft power but no matter how strong its charm offensive grows, China remains an authoritarian society that jails dissidents and puts down revolutions by its own people.*

There have been accusations the institutes "self-censor" when it comes to sensitive subjects. The universities or colleges that have closed their Confucius Institutes, include: Penn State, University of Chicago (2014), McMaster University, Ontario, Canada (2013)

and Stockholm University. These universities cited a lack of transparency and academic freedom as major reasons. Hanban controls agreements between the university or college and the Chinese government and employs the teachers or staff of each institute. As a result, the American Association of University Professors and the Canadian Association for University Teachers have suggested Confucius institutes should be "reformed or eliminated outright."

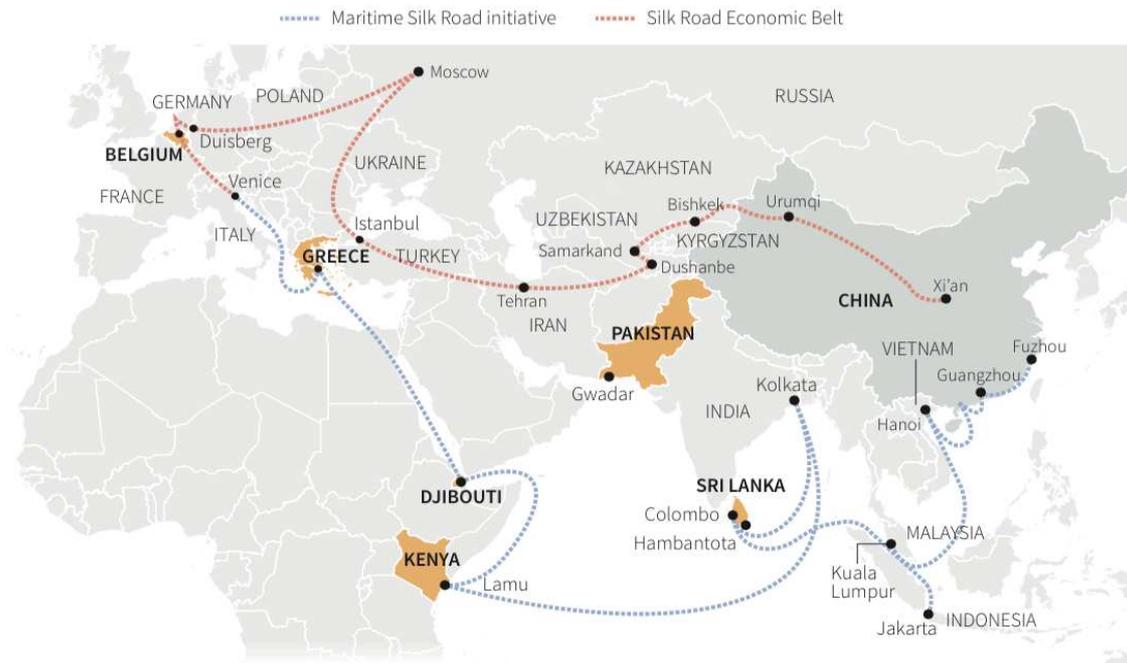
Other colleges and universities seem to have benefitted from the Confucius Institutes and Hanban affiliation. This includes access to specific talented teachers, affiliations or partnerships with Chinese Universities and cost savings and access to Chinese language textbooks and other Chinese learning materials.

2. **The One Belt, One Road Initiative** was announced in October 2013 by Chinese President Xi Jinping. This massive initiative involves major infrastructure goals connecting China to Europe via roads and economic ties affecting 68 countries. China has concurrently announced a Maritime Silk Road Initiative. These two major announcements are meant to change the world order and promote China as a world leader and great nation. The program is estimated to cost \$5 trillion.

The implementation of these programs has many benefits, but incur high risks and high costs. It is intended to unite land locked Chinese provinces, help domestic (Chinese) businesses, tap into European consumer markets, create free trade zones and new jobs, enhance telecommunications and cooperation. It will accelerate and leverage Chinese expertise in infrastructure building and provide needed partnerships and funding opportunities along the way. It will bring Chinese goods and resources to countries where they are currently not present, especially new markets for products like cement, steel and other metals and high speed railways. It will create gas and oil pipelines through Turkmenistan and Myanmar, and road and port development in Sri Lanka as well as a \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which involves highways, pipelines, and coal based electricity generation.

The Maritime Road will better connect China to Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and Africa. This initiative represents tremendous challenges, including agreements that can be broken by changes in government leadership. However, China is already committed to spending or investing \$150 billion a year.

Continued.....



### 3. Hosting Olympic Games

China held the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, the 2010 Shanghai Expo and plans to host the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing. These venues expose the global media, athletes and others to China. It allows China to be showcased and is a way to instill patriotism and domestic pride. Sponsoring Olympic games is a component of what has been termed Nation Branding.

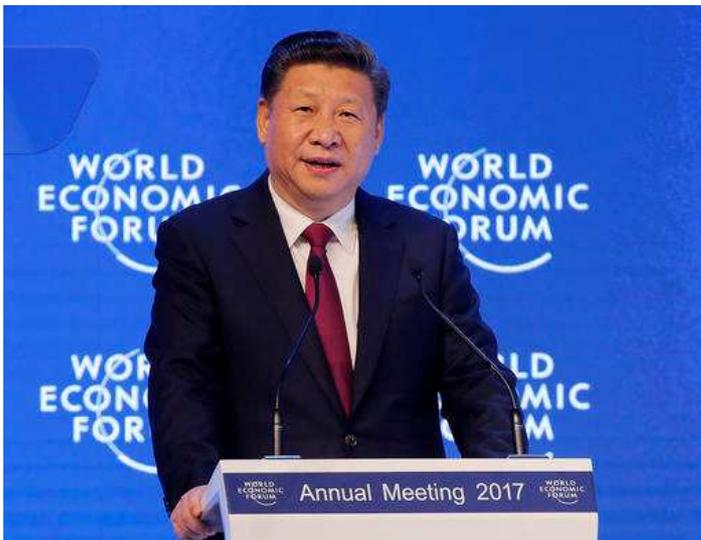
Nations can be branded and promoted like a packaged good to increase awareness and generate a positive image. Some national branding campaigns seek to improve the competitiveness of a nation's exports by linking them to positive perceptions of a country.



#### 4. **Promoting Foreign Trade Leadership**

With the U.S. pulling out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership or TPP, China has a new initiative for a regional trade deal of its own, called the Regional Comprehensive Economic Program or RCEP. Concurrently, China is also seeking separate bilateral deals with countries that were once set to join the TPP. One does not replace the other.

Consistent with this push for global leadership, President Xi Jinping became the first Chinese leader to present at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, calling for the continuation of expanding global trade.



5. **The Creation of new Chinese Think Tanks.** On May 4, 2017, nine Chinese ministries jointly issued an "Opinion on the Healthy Development of Social Think Tanks." The key priorities of these Think Tanks include serving the Party, promoting government policies and strengthening the Party's leadership. The government will support these "social" or non-governmental think tanks in five ways:

1. Allow social think tanks to participate in government consultations
2. Develop pipelines for interactions between the government and social think tanks
3. Broaden financial channels for social think tanks
4. Recruit talents with international backgrounds and ensure their benefits
5. Support social think tanks to carry out international exchanges

Furthermore, the government clarifies its goals for international exchanges (#5 above) as follows:

*Encourage and support qualified social think tanks...to participate in public diplomacy and global governance, to tell good Chinese stories, to spread a good Chinese voice, to enhance national soft power, and to help China have a strong international say.*

**Continued.....**

## **6. Implement Chinese Brands Day**



Chinese Brands Day was held this year for the first time and will be observed in the future every May 10th. It reflects President Xi Jinping's China Dream. It is not an event or festival but more of a message to companies that the government wants Chinese companies to focus on branding. It's an effort to improve the quality of domestic brands, and to promote "Made in China" brands. This is another step in China trying to build its influence internationally. The desire is to have admired and well recognized brand names to help change or upgrade the perceptions and image of the term, Made in China.

While there are some leading Chinese brands such as Lenovo, Huawei, Alibaba, Haier and Tencent, many Chinese companies, especially state owned enterprises (SOE), have lagged in their brand equity building. Now, the government is pushing companies to build their own brands so they will be more competitive and better able to compete against other global brands.

Historically, Chinese companies have acquired other companies to build their brands such as Lenovo buying IBM's PC business or Haier buying GE's appliance business.

Chinese Brands Day will publicize brands owned independently by Chinese companies, tell brand stories and raise brand recognition, according to Wang Dong, a senior official with the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

## **COMMENTARY**

Based on the above, China's effectiveness in using "soft power" is mixed. However, some initiatives such as the Confucius Institutes, hosting Olympic games and President Xi Jinping's increased presence at world forums have benefited China. The Confucius Institutes appear to exemplify Nye's definition of soft power for its endurance and sustainability.

Some experts believe the U.S. is losing its "soft power" or ability to gain influence through non-coercive means. However, assessing soft power seems subjective. There are many unknowns. For example, we do not know what transpires during meetings between President Xi Jinping and President Trump regarding issues involving the controversies in the South China Seas, help with neutralizing North Korea's military efforts or if China can use its soft power to help reduce U.S. tariffs on select Chinese goods exported to the U.S.

China has also been using its influence to:

1. Invest and forge alliances with African nations
2. Ease travel restrictions for Chinese citizens to visit overseas
3. Support Chinese company acquisitions of North American and European assets

Given the above, it should be clear everyone is listening and paying attention to China. Xi Jinping, like Narendra Modi of India, is traveling around the world to spread good will about his country. The One Belt, One Road initiative, if successful, will create an unprecedented presence for China, literally around the world. China's strategies are long term, and issues like the South China Seas and taking over Taiwan will remain on the table for the world to see how China uses its soft power influence to successfully meet its goals. The world is watching.

### **Resources**

1. "Chinese Brands Day" set to nurture independently owned Brands, China Daily, May 9, 2017.
2. Chinese Brands Day Set To Promote Made in China Products, Retail in Asia, by Vinny Halo, date unknown.
3. China's Confucius Institutes and the Soft War, David Volodzko, The Diplomat, July 18, 2015.
4. China's New Silk Road is Getting Muddy, Joshua Eisenman, Devin T. Stewart, Foreign Policy, January 9, 2017.
5. Closer to China: The Belt and Road Initiative 1-How It works, You Tube, CGTN, January 1, 2017.
6. More than Just a Game: The Soft Power Politics of Sports and the 2018 Olympic Games, Jennifer Chan, The McGill International Review, May 25, 2017.
7. Nation building Explained, Council of Foreign Affairs, November 9, 2007.
8. One Belt, One Road, Your Guide to Understanding OBOR, China's New Silk Road Plan, Zheping Huang, Quartz, May 15, 2017.

9. Report on Confucius Institutes finds no Smoking Guns, but Enough Concerns to Recommend Closure, Inside Higher ED, Elizabeth Redden, April 26, 2017.
10. The Obstacles to China's Bid for Soft Power, John Ford, The Diplomat, January 28, 2017.
11. What is China's Belt and Road Initiative? The Economist, May 15, 2017.
12. What Kind of Think Tanks Does China Want to Establish? DD Wu, The Diplomat, May 5, 2017.
13. Will the 'China Dream' Lift Chinese Brands? Tom Doctoroff, Prophet, May 15, 2017.
14. Why Beijing Proclaimed Today Chinese Brands Day, Angela Doland, Advertising Age, May 10, 2017.