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List of abbreviations

CCP: Chinese Communist Party
PRC: People’s Republic of China
UK: United Kingdom
UN: United Nations
US: United States
Give me a hundred million dollars and a thousand dedicated people, and I will guarantee to generate such a wave of democratic unrest among the masses—yes, even among the soldiers—of Stalin's own empire, that all his problems for a long period of time to come will be internal.

Sidney Hook\(^1\), 1949

**Introduction and review of literature**

2008 was supposed to be a great year for China, host for the first time of the world’s leading international sporting and media bonanza, the Olympic Games. Suddenly, all Chinese people, and all those foreigners who have grown to love China, were horrified by the earthquake that devastated its western provinces on 12 May 2008, leaving perhaps 100,000 dead and five millions displaced. A spring that had started with such high hopes turned to tragedy. This event followed closely on another natural disaster, the cyclone that hit Burma on 2 May.

Yet while the cyclone relief operation in Burma was also an unmitigated disaster, global TV screens were soon filled with generally positive reporting from China: it was apparent, probably even to traditional China-bashers, that the nation was united in its response to the earthquake, that the military was committed to the relief operation, that many experts were rapidly deployed to the region, and that the central political establishment mobilised as many resources as possible to support the victims. These events and various other China-related news stories showed how China had become an integrated part of the world’s media as well as of the global economy and international politics. For example, the UK hosted China Now, the largest ever Chinese cultural festival in Europe, in summer 2008; but a few months earlier, in April, the Chinese Olympic PR machine had been totally out-manoeuvred by pro-Tibetan protesters.

This integration and media exposure raises the question of ‘soft power’. How is China perceived by the non-Chinese world? Does China generate goodwill, or antipathy? Does the Chinese leadership consciously generate soft power, or is it a more spontaneous outcome of economic and artistic activity?

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\(^1\) Sidney Hook completed an interesting transition from ultra-radical intellectual in the 1930s to CIA front-man in the 1950s. His efforts for the agency were rewarded by the Presidential Medal of Freedom from Ronald Reagan in 1985. For the citation above, see [http://www.bilderberg.org/ccf.htm](http://www.bilderberg.org/ccf.htm)
Like other great nations, China has its own traditions of international relations. In the period from the 1950s to the late 1970s, usually characterized as ‘Maoist’, many of its international security preoccupations were directly related to two struggles. First was that between the Soviet bloc and the West. Second, rivalry between China and the Soviet Union took the form both of territorial disputes in border regions, and competition for hegemony over international communist movements specifically, and developing countries more generally. There was a radical shift of policy after 1978, when reformers established the principle of sustaining a peaceful international environment for several generations while China transformed into a modern industrialized power. By the 1990s, this guideline had translated into a strategy of a cautious partnership with the USA, and a major commitment to improved multi-lateral ties, especially in Asia but also on other continents.

Developments in the international environment had not derailed this strategy by 2008, but they had instigated new scenarios. One of the most obvious was an intensive worldwide search for raw materials – hydrocarbons and metals especially – to fuel China’s continuing economic boom. At the same time, of course, all other industrial countries were facing similar challenges. The potential for conflict with traditional customers for the same goods became an issue that needed careful management by all parties. Another development was the ever-growing expenditure on arms, and the perceived need, in Asia as elsewhere, for nations to maintain credible deterrence against other regional powers.

This paper considers a further dimension of international relations, namely ‘soft power’. I do not propose to make a detailed critique of the ‘soft power’ concept, but rather to use it as a basis for evaluating aspects of China's current rise and stated commitment to peace. It is a relatively new field of study; perhaps partly because China’s rise is itself relatively recent, and partly due to lack of sinological expertise among commentators who might be interested. A fully-fledged literature review is therefore not possible at this stage, but I would like to draw readers’ attention to a handful of relevant publications.

In 1990, Joseph Nye published a book which first popularised the term “soft power”, referring primarily to ways in which a nation’s cultural resources constitute a form of power that can enhance or even substitute for military and economic strength. In simplistic terms, Nye explained: “The basic concept of power is the ability to
influence others to get them to do what you want. There are three major ways to do that: one is to threaten them with sticks; the second is to pay them with carrots; the third is to attract them or co-opt them, so that they want what you want. If you can get others to be attracted, to want what you want, it costs you much less in carrots and sticks.” Examples of soft power often cited are the attraction of normative values, media, business practices, education, and language.

Nye later published an influential paper and then book, providing an accessible overview of the field of study. Nye provides a simple expansion of the basic concept as follows: there is a spectrum of behaviour differentiating hard power, at one extreme; and soft power at the other. The spectrum runs from command and coercion, through inducements, agenda-setting and attraction, to end with a successful deployment of soft power: co-optation. When the latter takes place, the ‘target’ of soft power does not merely feel threatened or persuaded into supporting an agenda, he actually identifies with it. He effectively becomes a long-term, close ally and supporter of the exponent of soft power because he feels a sense of shared values, goals, and way of life. He would be really pleased if his country would emulate the projector of soft power.

In parallel, a nation may deploy a variety of other resources to achieve these goals. Hard power is achieved mainly by military force or at least credible threat of it; less ‘hard’ techniques may include payments, even bribes, or institutional pressures; and soft power is developed by promoting cultural values and sympathy. Examples of United States soft power given by Nye include: global brands, films and TV programmes, universities, book and music sales, internet sites, reputation for science, technology, and wealth creation. He also notes, a point we return to later, that America’s reputation and hence soft power has taken a severe battering in recent years, partly because of the invasion of Iraq. His book continues with detailed analysis of the role of soft power in US diplomacy and public life; and moreover contains some limited but useful observations on soft power in Europe and Asia, for the latter focusing mainly on Japan.

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The theme of soft power in Asia is not extensively researched by Western scholars, although a few publications have appeared online and in print in the past few years. A recent paper by Gill and Huang highlights a number of important aspects of China’s recent diplomacy, in the wider sense, including its education, developmental model, and increased participation in international institutions. The authors argue that despite its many successes, China’s soft power project is undermined by factors such as perceived widespread corruption; lack of international credibility; and foreign policy inconsistency. I also found two useful conference papers available on the internet, but not yet for citation, by Italian sinologist Barbara Onnis on China and by Tsuneo Akaha on Japanese soft power respectively. Meanwhile McCormick argues in *The European Superpower* that soft power has been a key resource in Europe’s efforts to position itself in relation to the US: projecting the image of a more cultured and peaceable continent than North America. Chinese researchers are starting to address the issue, with a major publication from Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences in 2006.

Kurlantzick’s *Charm offensive: how China's soft power is transforming the world* is the main English-language study to appear so far. This book is a major achievement in being the first systematic attempt at mapping Chinese attempts, especially in the past decade, at winning allies and influence around the world by a variety of classic soft power techniques such as education and cultural exports. Kurlantzick views China’s relative success in the soft-power game as directly related to the US’s spectacular failures in recent years: China’s rise mirrors US decline, as the Bush administration in particular alienated millions of people around the world by its unilateralism and military aggression. Moreover, internal events like the response to Hurricane Katrina led many to perceive the US as inherently racist, polarized, and careless of the welfare of its own people. We cannot be sure to what extent Chinese leaders are aware of this squandering of the US’s former soft-power ‘capital’, but they do seem committed to extending China’s.

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9 Shanghai shehui kexue yuan, Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi yanjiuyuan. *Guoji tixi yu Zhongguode ruan liliang* [International system and China's soft power]. (Beijing Shi, Shishi chubanshe, 2006).
10 Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm offensive: how China's soft power is transforming the world* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007).
Kurlantzick correctly notes that the success of the Chinese development and poverty-reduction model has had a very positive resonance in much of the developing world:

China seems to have enjoyed striking success and poverty reduction other developing countries can’t help but notice. At the same time, the Washington Consensus has failed many developing nations. During the late 1980s and 1990s, many African and Latin American nations opened their economies, slashed their tariffs and undertook other painful economic reforms, yet few nations in either Latin America or Africa saw their economies take off.11

During the course of his analysis, Kurlantzick builds on an important observation that he had made in an earlier publication:

When Joseph Nye coined the term soft power, he originally used a more limited definition, excluding investment and aid and formal diplomacy—more traditional, harder forms of influence. In the context of Asia today, both China and its neighbours enunciate a broader idea of soft power, the idea that soft power implies all elements outside of the security realm, including investment and aid.12

He also notes that soft power can be directed more towards elites or towards the general public, requiring somewhat different pressures.

Compared with Western research, Chinese scholars have been more productive. Recent Chinese-language publications include an overview of research by Liu and Wang13; and an interesting policy analysis by Yan.14 Many of their outputs are analysed in an excellent paper by Joel Wuthnow.15 Chinese debate has recently centred on three main areas. First, that soft power may be a critical factor in achieving long-term strategic success in a world where overwhelming military power is held by the USA. In this policy area, soft power is seen as a necessary adjunct to hard power, a point that has been argued since around 2000 in the context of the

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11 Ibid. p. 57.
14 Yan Xuetong, ‘Zhongguo ruan shili youdai tigao’ [The path for China to increase its soft power], Zhongguo yu shijie guancha [China and World Affairs], 2007, no. 2:2.
'comprehensive national power' (zonghe guoli) analyses. Second, soft power should enhance China’s aspiration to become a natural leader of the developing world. Two approaches in this area would be to advertise the stunning success of the ‘Chinese development model’ as a superior achievement to anything currently offered by the US and its allies; and also to engage in ‘economic diplomacy’ using aid, investment, and other instruments. Third, Chinese leaders understand the need to constantly promote an image of China as reasonable, peace-loving, responsible and non-expansionist, to counter fears that might naturally arise, especially in neighbouring Asian counties, of the new superpower.

Yan raises a fascinating point in his article, namely that China’s global reputation depends to a large extent on international perceptions of its domestic politics. Therefore, positive moves towards social justice, democratization, stability, sustainable growth, environmental improvements, etc., form a a kind of ‘internal soft power’ which not only feeds into the current leadership’s vision of a harmonious society, but also directly into prestige and leadership internationally.

The ‘new’ theory of soft power and Chinese traditional thought.

Nye’s studies cited earlier refer to practices which pre-date his coining of the term: for example the propaganda values of the Roman Empire could make a fine case-study. Obvious attempts at soft power in an earlier generation were Soviet and US competitive attempts to win ‘hearts and minds’, both in Europe and in developing countries. A prime example of US activity in the Cold War was the now infamous Congress for Cultural Freedom which the CIA subsidized from 1950 to 1967; a recent ploy is to provide scholarships to allow Iranian young people to study in the US. I am undecided whether one should welcome such initiatives; one could perhaps argue that they are certainly better than military spending, and unlikely to do as much harm, even if little good. If power-blocs are driven to compete, cultural competition is surely less destructive than military.

I would like to argue here that in China the concept of ‘soft power’ has been a fundamental part of military thinking for over two thousand years. Generations of Chinese leaders have adopted stratagems and long-term planning which are elegantly stated in
Sunzi’s *Binfa* [Art of War], possibly fourth century BCE. These stratagems did not remain in an ivory-tower of military theory, but formed an key element of statecraft: a carefully crafted strategy to confuse putative rivals, throw them off balance, and hopefully to ‘win victories without striking a blow’. Indeed so popular are many of the strategies that they became part of Chinese folk heritage, passed down in story-cycles and novels like the *Tales of the Three Kingdoms*, now popular films and TV shows.

Sunzi argues that military action should be only one element, and not the most important one, of an integrated approach to security. More crucial than mere fighting should be diplomatic alliances; an emphasis on stratagems that include deceiving enemies and undermining their home fronts; secret logistical preparations; winning over enemy civilians, soldiers, and leaders; avoiding defeats and casualties; maximizing victories; and predicting the aftermath of war before engagement. Many of Sunzi’s phrases have passed into daily language, for example *bing yi zha li* (war is based on deception); *yiruo kegang* (use gentle means to overcome the hard and strong); *bishi jixu* (avoid the enemy’s strengths and strike at his weak point). After decades of guerrilla warfare, the Chinese Communist Party top leadership were certainly familiar with all such ruses. One writer on military affairs, Lai, contrasts this approach with a Western emphasis on overwhelming speed, confrontational force and technological superiority.17

Another component of ‘soft power’ is moral leadership by exemplar. Even if the claims to morality have little basis in fact, then at least they can be promoted by propaganda, as in the Cold War rhetorical assertions that the US was a bastion of freedom and democracy; or the Soviet Union a paradise of equality and public goods. Again, this concept resonates in Chinese tradition. A main paradigm of Chinese governance is Confucianism, which although hierarchical, is ideally reciprocal and ethics-based. The ruler is supposed to demonstrate moral excellence, taking wise decisions on behalf of his subjects, to keep the state secure and prosperous. As long as he continues to do so, he will hold a “heavenly mandate” and should be supported by all. If he deviates significantly from moral norms, sooner or later he will lose the mandate, there will be widespread and justified popular opposition, and there will be a change of rulers. Even at much lower levels of Chinese institutional life, one often finds a strong sense of

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obligation on the part of the seniors to respect the interest of their junior staff, towards whom they are expected to act fairly and generously; in response, they can expect loyalty and hard work.

**Strategic reasons for China’s ‘peaceful rising’**

There is consensus among economists that China will become the second largest economy in the world within the next five years or so, if there are no major international upheavals. It is already a serious competitor with the US and other advanced economies in the acquisition of oil, minerals, and infrastructure contracts in Iran, Saudi, Brazil and elsewhere. Its political influence has increased dramatically in the past five years, in Asia and in Africa especially. There are more differentiated analyses of its military strength, but as far as I have seen no serious commentator believes China is vulnerable to conventional military attack, except from the USA. Any global shift of power of this magnitude signals potential danger of international armed conflict. China’s dramatic domestic economic growth, although on the whole very positive for the majority of the population, has also inevitably given rise to social tensions. They could also occasion mass protests: the two main flashpoints are likely to be against land-grabs and environmental destruction; and against extreme inequalities of wealth. Whether the latter could achieve positive outcomes, or lead to violence and greater poverty, depends on many factors. The Chinese government thus faces serious international and domestic pressures of various kinds.¹⁸

In conventional international relations or security studies, China would be seen as having two over-riding concerns. The first is how to handle the relationship with the US: the reason for maximum attention is that the US is the only power in the world that by itself is overwhelmingly superior to China in military terms; China perceives it as an aggressive and unpredictable super-power; and China is probably the main threat to the US economy. The second possible enemy is Japan, a nation which rivals it in industrial and military power, with which is has an exceptionally bad history, which is closely allied to the US and Taiwan; and which is a rival for massive undersea oil reserves.

A simple analysis of military spending and review of high-technology military goods reveals at once that China is at a massive disadvantage compared to the US and Japan. The US military budget is probably more than ten times that of the PRC; and the US and its closest allies, the UK and Japan, account for at least two-thirds of global military expenditure. Incidentally, excellent reports on China's military capabilities from the US perspective are freely available from the US Department of Defense website.19 Moreover, the US is far ahead of any conceivable competition in military technology. Chomsky summarizes many fields in which the US can deploy offensive armaments against which other nations have no defensive or counter-attack options: US weaponry includes ballistic missiles, space-based weapons systems, hypersonic missiles, IT surveillance systems, and bio-weapons.20

Thus, on the one hand, there is a very simple equation which Chinese leaders have assuredly learned: namely that a major military confrontation that pulled in the US and/or Japan would be an unmitigated disaster for China. On the other hand, many other countries either feel threatened by the US, or would at least like a good relationship with the world’s number two or number three power, i.e. China. Therefore quite apart from any ideological or humanitarian considerations, it makes perfect sense for China to devise its strategy along two main lines: to avoid military conflicts, but most especially with the US and its closest allies; and to work hard at bi-lateral and multi-lateral alliances with as wide a range of political and trade partners as possible. Several scholarly books published in the last two years contribute to an analysis of China’s ‘peaceful rising’, for example those edited by Hunter and Guo in English in 2006; and by Yan and Jin in Chinese.21

International competition for resources

The key issue that all major powers now face is competition to secure resources. As the largest in population among all developing countries, and with the fastest-growing manufacturing base, China’s need for natural resources is truly enormous. An analyst recently

19 <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/>
Centre for Peace and Reconciliation Studies

showed that among ten countries with populations over 100 million, in terms of natural resources China was second from the bottom: only Japan is worse off. Population growth would put even further pressure on resources. Without effective political handling of resource issues, shortages could become a great risk to the future of the country. So protecting the stability of resource supplies is a crucial factor to determine whether or not China can continue its development trajectory in the 21st century.22

The West now fears competition from China for access to global resources, particularly oil and gas.23 Henry Kissinger mooted that competition over hydrocarbon resources will be the most likely cause of international conflict in coming years;24 Beijing leaders are also well aware of the issue, as Hu Jintao showed at an Asian summit in 2005. Hu stated that a Chinese priority is to achieve balanced and orderly growth by handling the energy issue well: China would focus on energy conservation and effective use of resources, as well as new exploration and imports. Nevertheless, China has to explore many different options, on every continent, to satisfy its demand for oil and other resources.25 In 2002, the government announced a new policy to encourage its three major national oil corporations to ‘go out’ (zouchuqu) to ensure secure energy supplies from overseas, through direct purchases, exploring and drilling programmes, constructing refineries, and building pipelines.26 Chinese oil demand grew by almost 90% between 1993 and 2002, now reaching about six million barrels per day, of which some 40% has to come from imports. Conversely, about 40% of oil demand growth worldwide from 2000 to 2004 was attributable to China.27

In November 2004 Chinese President Hu signed 39 commercial agreements with Latin American countries; investments in Argentina

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23 Jan Kalicki and David Goldwyn, Energy Security, provide an excellent overview.


alone mounted to US $ 20 billion. This visit was followed by another in 2005 by Vice-President Zeng who signed a key agreement with Venezuela’s Hugo Chavez for oil and gas explorations; China also announced credits to Cuba. By 2005, China had offered more than US $ 50 billion of investment to countries within the US ‘backyard’. China has been pursuing a similar strategy in sub-Saharan African countries. Chinese businesses are active many projects including major infrastructure development, while corporations invest heavily in oil production, notably in the Sudan, Angola and Nigeria. A report in December 2005 evidenced the fierce competition between China and the US for African ‘black gold’.28

China’s potential competition with the US in West Asia and North Africa could be even more sensitive than in Latin America and East Asia. “The potentially explosive combination of a China less willing to passively accept US leadership and the prospect of competition between China and other states for control over vital energy resources poses particularly critical challenges to U.S. interests in the Middle East.” Economic ties are backed up by frequent high-level exchange visits between Beijing and West Asian leaders. Altogether, reflecting the title of a recent study, China is a future hegemon, and its rise inevitably engenders new trans-national dynamics. We have therefore explored China’s need to avoid military conflict, its massive economic development, and its need to secure resources, as important contexts for Chinese soft power in the 21st century.30 I believe a further factor which will become much more urgent and prominent in the immediate future is climate change.

**Chinese soft power projection**

So, given a historical and cultural background in ‘soft-power’ and ‘moral leadership’; given the intense but hopefully non-military competition with the US and other states; perhaps it is logical to expect that China will increasingly project itself on the world stage by peaceful means, for example by culture, education, media

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presence and other strategies. There are already a number of areas where Chinese soft power can be observed, namely:

The Chinese Diaspora
Chinese cultural/political presence in Southeast Asia and Africa
Chinese universities
Mandarin as lingua franca
Chinese media influence in Asia-Pacific
Tourism and sport
Chinese religion and traditional culture

The Chinese Diaspora
Statistics are not totally reliable, but some estimate a Chinese Diaspora of around 35 millions at the end of the twentieth century, which has since grown rapidly, up from perhaps 20 million in the mid-1980s. The majority of them are working people, business entrepreneurs, economic migrants of varying levels of skill and resources. They are now a presence in more or less every country of the world, including in some like North Korea which are difficult to access by other nationalities. There are substantial Chinese communities across most of South America and in many African countries, where they work as merchants or operate restaurants, factories, shops or farms. Chinese companies also own and/or manage mines, infrastructure projects or industrial complexes.31

Apart from regulated migration, there is also the phenomenon of illegal population flow: it is estimated that in South Korea alone there are about one million irregular Chinese migrants. Invisible and uncountable, there must be many more millions in the Japan, the EU, the USA and elsewhere. The great majority of these migrants are poorly paid, often working in construction, clothing sweatshops, or the sex industry. A certain number of them are also in organized crime. Chinese gangs operate in the murky waters of international drugs, arms, and people-trafficking, competing with outfits from Russia, Korea, Pakistan, Latin America and elsewhere. Some analysts have conjectured that these gangs are also permeated by their respective – or rival – countries’ security forces, forming a

31 Academic studies range from those of an earlier generation, e.g. Stephen Fitzgerald, China and the Overseas Chinese (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), to several significant works in the past decade by Gregor Benton at Cardiff University, UK. Numerous stories about Chinese migration and influence appear almost daily on Internet news services.
huge underworld of illegal, deniable transactions and deals worth thousands of billions of dollars.\footnote{For analysis of the global criminal economy see books by Loretta Napoleoni, for example \textit{Modern Jihad: Tracing the Dollars Behind the Terror Networks} (London: Pluto Press, 2003).}

\textbf{Chinese cultural/political presence in Southeast Asia and Africa}

For many centuries, mainland Chinese have been migrating into Southeast Asia. Singapore’s population is mostly ethnically Chinese, and Chinese form significant minorities in Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand and elsewhere. Irrespective of migration, Chinese culture has been a defining influence on the cultures of many Asian countries including Korea and Vietnam. After 1949, relations between the PRC and its Asian neighbours were, on the whole, tense and unproductive. In the 1960s and 1970s, when Asia Pacific politics was dominated by US military priorities, the PRC was regarded as a ‘communist threat’, if not ‘terrorist threat’. Overseas Chinese, who probably for the most part were anti-communists themselves, were placed in an extremely vulnerable position as they were suspected of being communist sympathisers or infiltrators. The most tragic outcome of this period was the massacre of Indonesian Chinese by Suharto in 1965-66, with an estimated half a million victims. Some Chinese intellectuals drew parallels between their community’s life in the 1960s, and that of Jews in 1940s Europe; although fortunately, no further large-scale massacres took place. The situation improved rapidly throughout the 1990s, as Asian nations generally seem to have regarded China as an economic rival but reasonable neighbour, and also as an investment opportunity. At first, Asian companies invested heavily in Chinese manufacturing, tourism and other sectors; following China’s economic boom, there was a reverse trend, as Chinese entrepreneurs and state-owned corporates invested heavily in other Asian countries.

In the past few years, there has been a sea-change in Asian perceptions of the PRC. Obviously China has completely dropped its revolutionary ideology, at least in dealings with the outside world, stressing instead shared development goals. It invests finance and technology in oil and gas industries in Myanmar, Indonesia and Malaysia, and provides skilled and unskilled labour to enterprises throughout the region. Equally importantly, China is now seen as a massive market for consumer goods, food, and other products. Since the US reputation is in serious decline after the invasion of Iraq, China is successfully presenting itself in Asia as a ‘friendly elephant’ in the words of Prime Minster Wen Jiabao at a recent conference.

China is also enjoying an unprecedented reputation in Africa. In fact, Chinese have been doing aid work in that continent from the 1960s on, but for ideological or political reasons, they often backed
leaders who proved to be renegades: Savimbi in Angola, Mugabe in Zimbabwe for example. There are now several strands to Chinese influence in Africa. One is technical and medical assistance. It is not widely recognised in the West, for example, that since 1963, some 15,000 Chinese doctors have worked in 47 African states treating nearly 180 million cases of HIV/AIDS. As another example, China has provided most of the expertise for the development of the young Sudanese oil industry.

African leaders appreciate the long-standing Chinese convention in foreign affairs, that it will not interfere with other countries’ internal politics. China is now a leading trade partner for many African countries. Especially Chinese demand for raw materials allows African sellers a lot more room for negotiation, if nothing else, when dealing with Western or Japanese buyers. This influence in Africa has also given rise to controversies: for example, some Western critics accuse the Chinese government of tacitly approving the Sudanese government’s crimes against humanity in Darfur.

Incidentally the research of African affairs has been a growth area in Chinese academia in recent years, with centres in Beijing, Jinhua and elsewhere. And Africa has become much better known to the Chinese public, for example through a 2003 TV series ‘A Passage to Africa’. This series was a joint mainland-Hong Kong production, presented by celebrities, which offered far more positive images of Africa than seen before on Chinese TV, and led to a growth in Chinese tourism to Africa.

**Chinese Universities**

African students had already benefited from a large number of scholarships for university programmes: typically they go to China to study Chinese language for two years, followed by specialist education in technology, medicine, or engineering. Increasing numbers of self-financing Asian students – from Thailand, Vietnam, Korea and elsewhere – are also attracted to under- or post-graduate study in China. On the other hand, Chinese students now constitute a significant proportion of all university students internationally, and they form the largest or second largest proportion of foreign students in Japan, the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada. This movement of young people signals a growing intellectual and social bonding of social elites that will increasingly include Chinese students, and where Mandarin will become an important international business language, especially in Asia. According to research cited by Wuthnow, already by 2006 there were 140,000 foreign students studying in mainland China, about 75% of whom were from East Asia. The Chinese government was also rapidly
increasing the number of scholarships on offer to students from Africa.33

Educational upgrading is also a top national priority at the elite edge of university life. China has announced that it wants its universities to rival the best in the world within a decade, and it is investing billions of dollars to that end. One part of the strategy is to invest in hardware, so Chinese universities are starting to have research facilities equivalent to anything in the West, and another aspect is to recruit leading academics to China. Many of the latter are ethnic Chinese – either from the PRC or other parts of the Chinese world – who have had illustrious careers in the USA or Europe, and who are now offered very attractive packages to bring them to China: a recent example being Andrew Chi-chih Yao, one of the USA’s top computer scientists, recruited in 2004 from Princeton to a Beijing university.

Promotion of Mandarin
Apart from university student and staff movement, the PRC is investing in promotion of Mandarin as a leading language in Asia. Many overseas Chinese already speak a Chinese dialect, usually Hakka or Cantonese, although they may not read the script or speak Mandarin. It is relatively easy for them to upgrade their language skills so they can use Mandarin as a working language; the PRC also hopes that many speakers of smaller Asian languages, Thai and Cambodian for example, will start to use Mandarin as a lingua franca for Asian business transactions. In the past few years, they have opened or subsidised many language schools to teach Chinese, including a network of ‘Confucius Institutes’ that are a kind of Chinese equivalent to the British Council or Alliance Francaise.

Chinese media in the Asia Pacific
Under the hard-line communist regime prior to 1978, Chinese international media were restricted to crude propaganda: translations of the Little Red Book, the Pravda-like Beijing Review, and two rather bizarre English-language illustrated propaganda monthlies. Again, the situation is totally different now. In Chinese-language media, China is starting to dominate the Asia Pacific, with recent successes in major movies, the popular music industry, and overall news coverage. Even in English, China is becoming a good news provider on the internet for anyone interested in researching official news and views about Chinese issues. China is also planning a major upgrade of its English-language broadcasting, and aims to

contribute as a major player to broadcasting content in the Asia Pacific region, in both entertainment and news.

Tourism and sport
The phenomenon of positive cultural interaction between China and its neighbours is reinforced by the growing number of tourists, both foreigners visiting China, and Chinese tourists going overseas. In 2005 more than 23 million Chinese took trips outside of China for personal reasons, overtaking Western tourism in a number of countries like Thailand and Singapore. Chinese tourism into the EU is also set to rise dramatically, since most EU countries have now lifted restrictions on tourist visas for Chinese citizens. According to Chinese statistics, about 26 million foreigners visited China in 2007, with the largest contingents from Japan, Korea and Malaysia in Asia; and many from North America and various EU countries.34

The issue of sport hardly needs mentioning, with China taking away numerous gold medals in all kinds of athletic events, and sportsmen and women starting to enter into high-profile Western games like soccer and basketball. The 2008 Beijing Olympic games is assuredly a pivotal event: I believe it could be the final international status marker in the transition to global power. Because of its military might, the US will not become a second-rate power in the foreseeable future, but the world will know, if it does not already, that China is the other superpower on the block.

Religion and traditional culture
Finally, the PRC is keen to promote itself as the homeland of traditional Chinese culture – which of course it is. Arts and crafts like music, dance, embroidery, acupuncture, herbal medicine, martial arts, feng shui are all booming within China, and they are now part of the popular cultural scene in most countries of the world: The Eiffel Tower, for example, symbol of European culture, sported a lot of Chinese décor around the time of Chinese New Year in 2005. China also liberalized its laws on religion in 1978, since when several religions, especially Buddhism and Christianity, have flourished. Perhaps surprisingly, Chinese are now active in various international Christian ministries, and in Buddhist groups networking across Asia.

An important example took place in spring 2006, when Beijing hosted the World Buddhist Forum, a kind of Buddhistic Olympic

games. Buddhism is either a national religion, a majority religion, or at least the religion of a significant minority in at least a dozen Asian countries including of course Japan: in fact, part of the (limited) good will that exists towards China in Japan is precisely because many schools of Japanese Buddhism trace their origins to China, where ‘home’ monasteries still exist. Chinese Buddhists are justifiably proud that despite decades of repression earlier in the century, they have renovated hundreds of large, historically important monasteries, and they take their place among pre-eminent Buddhist nations of the world for the future.

I have suggested in this article that several areas of soft power now demand much closer analysis: including relative international strengths and weaknesses; the boundary markers of legitimate soft power; its adjustment to different audiences. I see no reason why China should not have a bright future in the ‘soft power olympics’. Moreover, I think the EU, India and other places should have a bright future too. Fortunately, this is not a zero-sum game, nor are there many parallels with military confrontations. In this game, countries are encouraged to make positive contributions to world culture. I conclude with a quotation attributed to former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, cited in a recent paper: “Soft power is achieved only when other nations admire and want to emulate aspects of that nation’s civilization.”35

35 Lee Kuan Yew cited in Gill and Huang, “Sources and Limits”, p. 17.
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