

FROM SOFT TO SHARP – A CASE STUDY ON CHINA’S AUTHORITARIAN
INFLUENCE

Presented to Professor Gilles Breton

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Tables</i>	3
<i>List of Acronyms & Abbreviations</i>	3
<i>Abstract</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Research Question, Hypothesis and Methodology</i>	9
<i>Chapter 1: Understanding Soft Power</i>	10
1.1 <i>What is Soft Power?</i>	10
1.2 <i>Measuring Soft Power: Portland Soft Power 30 Index</i>	13
<i>Chapter 2: Soft Power and Authoritarian Regimes</i>	17
2.1 <i>The Attractiveness of Authoritarian Regimes</i>	17
2.2 <i>What is ‘Sharp Power’?</i>	19
2.3 <i>Measuring Sharp Power</i>	23
<i>Chapter 3: China’s Shift from ‘Soft’ to ‘Sharp’</i>	27
3.1 <i>Culture</i>	27
3.2 <i>Education</i>	32
3.3 <i>Engagement</i>	34
3.4 <i>Enterprise</i>	40
3.5 <i>Digital</i>	45
3.6 <i>Government</i>	49
<i>Chapter 4: China Too Big to Ignore</i>	55
4.1 <i>Challenge for Democracies</i>	55
4.2 <i>How to Overcome these Challenge</i>	59
<i>Conclusion</i>	61
<i>Bibliography</i>	62

Tables

Table 1. Spectrum of Behaviors and Resources of Power from Hard to Soft	20
Table 2. Comparison of the Soft Power Concept with China	29
Table 3. Comparison of China’s Soft Power and Sharp Power	57

List of Acronyms & Abbreviations

BRI: Belt and Road Initiative

CCP: Chinese Communist Party

CCTV: China Central Television

ICT: Information and Communications Technology

MRP: Major Research Paper

PRC: People’s Republic of China

SAR: Special Administrative Region

SARS: Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome

SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organization

US: United States

UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UN: United Nations

WHO: World Health Organization

Abstract

In recent years, China's influence in the world has taken a more assertive and authoritarian stance. We have argued that Portland's *Soft Power 30 Index*, one of the most recognized tools to evaluate and measure soft power, is distorted by Western interpretation of the concept and is affecting China's performance as well as authoritarian regimes' possible attractiveness and influence. Reducing China's public diplomacy successes by its soft power, scholars and practitioners neglect to value the growing influence the consolidation of soft power and sharp power resources are yielding for the PCC. Through an examination of Beijing's recent uses of soft power resources into sharp power including cultural, educational, enterprises, engagement, digital, and governmental initiatives, this major research paper (MRP) presents a case study on China's authoritarian influence and an analysis on China's recent shift of foreign policy to a sharper approach. By providing a deeper understanding of the literature on soft power and identifying sharp power as a complementary influence tool, this research has helped demystify China's authoritarian influence and has conclude it is possible to observe a shift in China's outward facing policy and increase in authoritarian influence.

Keywords: Sharp Power, Soft Power, Authoritarian Regimes, China

Introduction

As the outbreak of the pandemic challenged the world's social welfare net and created an unprecedented health care crisis, most countries have turned inward and left countries such as Italy and Spain on their own against the deadly COVID-19 virus. While Washington was closing its borders and opted for protectionist measures, its leadership faded away and has left a void for China to fill. Beijing was sending advisors and material by flight to Italy, Iran, and Spain. In March 2020, images were traveling worldwide showing the Chinese team of experts and medical staff arriving in Rome with more than 30 tonnes of medical supplies, masks, and respirators.¹ At the same time, the Chinese flag appeared on a notice board in Belgrade Serbia to thank Beijing for providing help and material in this time of crisis.² In the process of providing humanitarian help to westerner countries, China's cases were decreasing, and the country was building new hospitals in a matter of days.

This is only the latest of the multiple opportunities China has taken following the power vacuum left by the United States after shaking up in the face of its international commitments and its role as a hegemonic power. The People's Republic of China (PRC) has been standing out due to its status as the world's leading economic power, to its involvement and its development assistance abroad, as well as for its multilateral collaboration with countries from all over the world.³ For these reasons, in recent years the

¹ Al Jazeera News Agencies, "China sends essential coronavirus supplies to Italy", Al Jazeera News | Coronavirus pandemic, March 13, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/3/13/china-sends-essential-coronavirus-supplies-to-italy>

² Brousseau François, "La pandémie, une occasion historique pour la Chine », Radio-Canada, March 25, 2020, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1686426/pandemie-occasion-historique-chine-analyse-brousseau?fromApp=appInfoIOS&partageApp=appInfoIOS&accesVia=partage&fbclid=IwAR0wnB6MsE4m8EzD7YNT9fAHLcprPDvGnuNbiPs6Ihs7eE7Td7XrrC9GZUs>,

³ Shambaugh David, "China and the Liberal World Order", (Washington DC, 2017), 147.

suggestion of a new world order has been one of the prevailing topics in international relations literature.⁴ According to Graham Allison's Thucydides Trap and power transition theories, it is undeniable that China is the current rising power to hegemony and that the US-China tariff war was only a subset of a more fundamental rivalry between the two powers, which positions China as the pacing threat against the US when measuring itself in terms of global influence. Furthermore, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has shown its ability to gain influence and establish economic relationships with most countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, North America, South America, Oceania, and Europe.⁵ Certain markets, still fragile and relatively fertile, such as Africa and Latin America represented an opportunity of influence for Beijing.⁶ Due to its significant economic power, it is natural for China to seek a stronger presence and influence on the international scene, but it becomes problematic when Beijing also seeks to make the international system more authoritarian.

That being said, most of the literature agrees that it would be unlikely for Western countries to consider China's authoritarian leadership in the perspective of its rise and transition to be the next hegemon. For now, "its autocratic political system, its civil society suffocated by censorship, surveillance and repression are drying up the creativity of

⁴ Badie B., *Nous ne sommes plus seuls au Monde Un autre regard sur l'« ordre international »*, (La Découverte, Paris 2016); Lempen Blaise, *Le nouveau désordre mondial. De la chute du communisme à la montée des populismes*, (Georg Editeur 2014); Mcfate Sean, *The New Rules of War: Victory in the Age of Durable Disorder*, (Harper Collins Publishers 2019); O'Sullivan Michael, *The Levelling: What's Next After Globalization*, (PublicAffairs 2019); Shambaugh, "China and the Liberal World Order", (Washington DC, 2017).

⁵ English Translation of Boisseau du Rocher S. Dubois de Risque E., *La Chine e(s)t le Monde Essai sur la sino-mondialisation*, (Odile Jacob Paris, 2019); Frachon Alain, *La Chine s'installe au Moyen-Orient*, *Le Monde actualité*, 23 septembre 2020.

⁶ Boisseau du Rocher, *La Chine e(s)t*, 10; Barr M. "Mythe et réalité du soft power de la Chine", *Études internationales*, 41 (4), 2010, 508; Zhang Yiwu, "China goes global: Why China's global cultural strategy needs flexibility", (Portland 2018), 73.

Chinese culture and hardly instigating the admiration of foreign populations” – in other words, it worries more than it attracts.⁷ Based on lack of hegemonic affinities, distribution of identity, and its overall weak soft power, it will be hard for the CCP to replace the US as an international leader unless it convinces the world’s elites and masses that authoritarian rule is to be preferred to democracy.⁸

As revealed in the past decade, the idea that China’s prosperity will one day lead to political liberalization and to democracy is only wishful thinking. It is only recently the West realized it got China wrong in this respect and that engaging patiently with authoritarian states could only provide them the tools necessary to challenge democracies.⁹

To the same degree, the West has understood power dynamics based on theories such as Joseph Nye’s hard power and soft power concepts, which were mainly focused on the changing nature of American power since the 90s.¹⁰ This Liberal democratic bias of soft power and influence analysis is identifying China’s attractiveness and soft power as “weak” and is failing to understand how it is creating attraction by offering and promoting alternative non-liberal values and by using sharp power.¹¹

⁷ Boisseau du Rocher, *La Chine e(s)t*, 243.

⁸ Portland Communication, *The Soft Power 30*, (2019), <https://softpower30.com>; Vucetic Srdjan, API6365: *Contemporary Security Studies*, Course on War & Peace, Lecture given in Fall Semester Week 6, University of Ottawa 2020.

⁹ *The Economist*, “How the West got China Wrong” (March 1, 2018) <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2018/03/01/how-the-west-got-china-wrong>; The Boston Globe, “How the United States Always Got China Wrong” (April 2018), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/opinion/2018/04/12/how-united-states-always-gets-china-wrong/ianuhEbqtbheIII75Sa2IK/story.html>; New York Times, “What the West Got Wrong about China” (December 2018); Walker Christopher, “What Is ‘Sharp Power’?” (*Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3 2018).

¹⁰ Nye Joseph S., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, (Basic Books 1991).

¹¹ Keating, V.C., Kaczmaraska, K. “Conservative soft power: liberal soft power bias and the ‘hidden’ attraction of Russia”, (*J Int Relat Dev* 22, 2019); Nye, Joseph S. “Countering the Authoritarian Challenge”, (*Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, N.15 (2020), The Populism Issue.

Scholars have mentioned the fragility of such a narrow conception of power and the importance of better adapting the US defense strategy to the changing reality of the components of war. One of the main arguments is built on the “new rules of war” which are based on the premise that conventional wars are obsolete, non-state actors will have an increasing role in future wars, and new powers will emerge from this structural reconstruction of actors.¹² In the short term, the author of this theory insists on the need for the West to adapt to what he describes as “shadow war”, a type of war in which there would be no more time of war or of peace well defined, but rather a coexistence of these two realities also known by scholars as the “gray zone”.¹³ More precisely, “these new wars [won’t be] won by missiles and bombs, but by those able to shape the story lines that frame our understanding.”¹⁴ Also known as information warfare, these types of wars aren’t a new phenomenon, since they have been conducted in the 18th and 19th centuries by intelligence gatherings, military deception, and military information support operations.¹⁵ However, technology has now changed the nature of the challenge and has provided various cheaper and faster channels to do so.

Based on this new reality and considering China’s attractiveness and soft power characteristics doesn’t allow it to tempt the rest of the world in its governance model, it is relevant to question the way in which it could succeed in positioning itself at the center of the international order and pave the way for a Sino-globalization through these means.

¹² Mcfate, *The New Rules of War*, (Harper Collins Publishers 2019).

¹³ Morris, J. Lyle, Micheal J.M, Jeffrey W.H, Pezard S. *Gaining Competitive Advantage in the Gray Zone. Response Options for Coercive Aggression Below the Threshold of Major War*, RAND Corporation, 2019.

¹⁴ Singer and Emerson T. *Brooking “LikeWar: The Weaponization of Social Media”*, (Mariner Books 2018).

¹⁵ Nathaniel D. Bastian, “Information Warfare and Its 18th and 19th Century Roots”, (2019), 31.

Research Question, Hypothesis and Methodology

The goal of this research is to evaluate China's international authoritarian influence and attractiveness through a different lens, by analysing in terms of sharp power and answer the following question: How can the concept of sharp power help us understand the way China has adapted its outward facing policies in order to wield influence and attraction? By carrying out this case study, the following aims at evaluating the extend of China's sharp power and its most recent shift of foreign policy. I will argue that Portland's *Soft Power 30 Index*, one of the most recognized tools to evaluate and measure soft power, is distorted by Western interpretation of the concept and is affecting China's performance, as well as authoritarian regimes' possible attractiveness and influence.¹⁶ By reducing China's public diplomacy success by its soft power, scholars and practitioners neglect to value the growing influence that the consolidation of soft power and sharp power is yielding for the PCC. In order to answer our research question, this paper will be divided into several parts.

In the first chapter will define the concept of soft power and its evolution, from Joseph Nye Jr.'s initial theory to the *Portland's Soft Power 30 Index* definition and methodology, as well as offering a perspective of some of the critics regarding the concept.

The second chapter will include a more in dept research on the existing literature regarding the hidden attractiveness of authoritarian regimes such as China and how we can understand better their unique application of soft power, followed by a concept definition of sharp power, in contrast with the initial soft power theory. In this same chapter, our adapted version of the sharp power methodology will be presented. To do so the elements analysed are the six subindex categories used in Portland's report methodology which

¹⁶ Portland, The Soft Power 30, (2019).

include: 1) culture, 2) education, 3) engagement, 4) enterprise, 5) digital infrastructure and diplomacy, and 6) government and political institutions.¹⁷ The methodology will allow us to differentiate sharp power from soft power and evaluate our subindices accordingly in the next chapter.

Chapter three will consist of a case study analysis of China’s attractiveness and influence based on the *Soft Power 30 Index* introduced in chapter one, adapted and reformulated to suit the concept of sharp power, as presented in chapter 2. Despite soft power and sharp power being two distinct concepts, this will help us understand the shift in China’s foreign policy and the role of sharp power in the PRC’s growing role and influence in the world.

Lastly, based on the analysis on China’s transition from soft to sharp power, I offer a brief review on the challenges it poses for democracies, followed by recommendations on how to overcome them.

Chapter 1: Understanding Soft Power

1.1 What is Soft Power?

The realist theory of power, first conceptualized in 1957 by Robert A. Dahl, focuses on the “‘power over’ (in which A compels B to do what B would not otherwise have done)” also known as a coercive or hard power.¹⁸ This type of power relies on a more traditional understanding of the exercise of influence and is conveyed through military intervention,

¹⁷ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2019), 27.

¹⁸ Dahl Robert A. “The Concept of Power”, (1957), 203; Solomon, S., “Review: Power and the Politics of Global Governance”, (*International Studies Review*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2006), 327.

coercive diplomacy, inducements of payment, and economic sanctions.¹⁹ Over the decades the concept has been recategorized and redefined time and again, as the tools for power and influence in international politics have changed. Realists have emphasized on offensive conventional wars focusing on the use of armed force, however contemporary authors seem to agree on the fragility and even the ineffectiveness of such a strategy.²⁰ Indeed, a modern-day Machiavelli would no longer express the art of waging war only in the form of military capacity and fear, but also in terms of the ability to exercise power in the form of influence and attraction, now known as soft power.

This conception of power was first yield by Harvard Professor Joseph Nye Jr. in the early 1990s, in his essay *Bound to Lead*.²¹ Since then, Nye's theory of hard and soft power is still one of the most preeminent approach in the field of international relations. Based on the premise that the strategy of hard power exclusively is not adapted to the changing nature of conflicts, he rather proposes an approach in which protagonists develop a capacity to seduce and influence other parties. In more recent publications, Nye redefines soft power as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments [which] arises from the attractiveness of a country” and based on three pillars of influence: 1) political values, 2) culture, and 3) foreign policies.²²

By avoiding the traditional foreign policy tools of carrot and stick, soft power convenes influence by building networks, communicating compelling narratives, establishing international rules, and drawing on the resources that make a country naturally

¹⁹ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2015*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2015), 8.

²⁰ David Charles-Phillippe, *La guerre et la paix – Approches et enjeux de la sécurité et de la stratégie*, (SciencesPo. Les presses 2013); Mcfate, *The New Rules of War*, (Harper Collins Publishers 2019).

²¹ Nye Joseph S., *Bound to Lead*, (Basic Books 1991).

²² Nye Joseph S., *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*, (2004).

attractive to the world.²³ One of the most common example is the United States, who during the Cold War have successfully established its soft power influence by inspiring others through global images, Hollywood film and television, multinational corporations, and technologies. Over the years, American cinema, music, and sports have helped create a sentiment of familiarity for people around the globe who have never even been to the country.²⁴

Although such geopolitical strategy has been used for centuries, the study of the concept remains relatively new. It is only in recent decades that the term is found in academic writings, in the media, as well as in foreign policy strategies and political speeches.²⁵ Moreover, the concept itself contains important limitations and critiques, as mentioned in the literature. Very few academics have succeeded in establishing an effective methodology to better understand and measure the concept of soft power. This can be explained by the catch-all nature of the concept which makes it difficult to identify the elements for analysis, along with the complexity of measuring the aggregate objective and subjective data.²⁶

The main critiques relate precisely to the lack of tools to measure performance variables and to identify real motives of states when adopting policies that are favorable to another state, combined with ambiguity related to the entity (states and other actors) in

²³ Portland Communication, The Soft Power 30, (2019), <https://softpower30.com>.

²⁴ Portland, The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2016, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2016), 38.

²⁵ Portland, The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2015, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2015), 8.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 8; Zhang Guozuo, Research Outline for China's Cultural Soft Power, Springer Social Sciences Academic Press (Beijing 2017), 12.

possession of this said power.²⁷ As an example, the United States soft power is mostly produced by its population and used by the government while in authoritarian countries soft power is almost entirely created and controlled by governments, which makes it harder to compare.²⁸ Finally, some argue that Nye's approach is restrictive and ambiguous in several areas such as economic and military power, recognized as being strictly hard powers. Yet, without abuse, military force and economic power can be excellent displays and vectors of soft power.²⁹

In order to overcome some of these lapses in the literacy, in 2015 Jonathan McClory and the Portland team in partnership with the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy (CPD) designed the first *Soft Power Index* composed of categorized objective and subjective data.

1.2 Measuring Soft Power: Portland Soft Power 30 Index

The *Soft Power 30 Index* is one of the prevailing and exhaustive sources in terms of soft power and since the first edition (2015) many contributors, including Joseph Nye himself, have joined the team in order to adjust and evaluate its analytical framework. Their approach is based on Nye's theory and the three pillars of soft power, namely: 1) political values, 2) culture, and 3) foreign policies. The methodology to measure the subjective variables was inspired by the *Monocle Soft Power Index*, in which Monocle Magazine have been conducting annual soft power surveys since 2009.³⁰ This new analytical framework

²⁷ Yukaruc Umut, "A Critical Approach to Soft Power", (Eren University Institute of Social Sciences 2017), 493. *In the most recent Soft Power 30 index, they also mention the rising influence of non-state actors as a megatrend to consider in the future.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Zhang, Research Outline, (Springer Beijing 2017), 14.

³⁰ Portland, The Soft Power 30, (Portland 2015), 20.

refines and updates the concept of soft power, allowing us to better quantify it and understand the resources necessary for its application. This is why this index was chosen and will be elaborated in the context of this research.

The first constituent of the methodology counts for 35% of the total analysis and is based on the evaluation of subjective data from an international poll across 25 countries. The survey questionnaire includes countries' cuisine, welcoming to tourists, technology products, luxury goods, trust to do the right thing in global affairs, appeal as a place to visit, work or study, as well as the contribution to global culture.³¹ This poll provides an overview of the perception of the inhabitants from various countries on the soft power of each state evaluated. The second methodology component weights 65% of the total analysis and is based on the evaluation of objective data (from third-party sources), which consist of six subindices. These are based on the following: 1) global reach and appeal of a nation's cultural outputs (pop-culture and high-culture), 2) level of human capital in a country, contribution to scholarship, and attractiveness to international students, 3) strength of a country's diplomatic network and its contribution to global engagement and development, 4) attractiveness of a country's economic model, business friendliness, and innovation, 5) digital infrastructure and capabilities in digital diplomacy, and 6) government commitment to freedom, human rights, democracy, and the quality of political institutions.³² In order to understand and use these tools efficiently in our research, here is how each of them are evaluated.

³¹ Portland Communication, The Soft Power 30, (2019), <https://softpower30.com>

³² Portland, The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2019), 27.

The first subindex is composed by a variety of criteria to assess the attraction created by the culture of a country and based on its ability to promote universal values that other nations can easily identify with. It also includes the capacity of countries to attract tourism and produce quality cultural elements easy to export, such as art, cinema, music, and sports.³³ Culture is one of the most important sources of power and central to the theory, as it is used by states to convey their narratives and the values associated with them.

The education subindex is evaluated according to the capacity of a state to promote student exchange programs, to attract foreign students and to contribute to academic research. The authors of the report emphasize on the “ripple effect” phenomenon amid foreign student return to their home countries as “third-party advocates for their host country of study” and has direct ramification on its soft power.³⁴ Objectively, the analysis of this criteria is based on the number of international students in the country, the number of universities, and the academic output of higher education institutions.³⁵

The engagement subindex is measured by the country’s diplomatic resources, global footprints, as well as its contribution and involvement within the international community. More specifically, the metrics include the number of embassies and high commissions in other countries, membership within multilateral organizations, as well as the commitment through overseas development aid and contributions. This methodology allows the authors to assess countries’ capacities to foster collaboration and shape global outcomes.³⁶

³³ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2019), 27.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

The enterprise subindex “[...] aims to capture the relative attractiveness of a country’s economic model in terms of its competitiveness, capacity for innovation, and ability to foster enterprise and commerce”.³⁷ Some elements such as the ease of doing business, the corruption level in the country, and the capacity to innovate can affect the economic relations of a country and its soft power.

The digital subindex aims to evaluate the country’s level of adaptation to technology and its use of digital diplomacy through social media platforms.³⁸ The characteristics of this subindex appear to be gaining greater influence in foreign policy, considering the increased use of social media by the world’s political leaders.

Finally, the government subindex assesses the soft power emanating from state public institutions, the political values they award, and the outcomes of their public policies. Moreover, the index measures underlying characteristics of good governance such as individual freedoms, human development, crime rate, and general effectiveness of the government. It is one of the most important components since it affects in one way or another the five previous subindices.³⁹

These six subcategories provide a narrower analysis of the key components of soft power and more detailed than Nye’s three initial pillars. In the context of this research, China’s analysis of influence and appeal, from soft to sharp, will be based on these subindices.

³⁷ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2019), 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Portland, *The Soft Power 30*, (Portland 2015), 21.

Chapter 2: Soft Power and Authoritarian Regimes

2.1 The Attractiveness of Authoritarian Regimes

In the context of the Cold War, the concept of soft power initially aimed at understanding the shift in American power and US foreign policy. Over the years, despite the inclusion and consideration of non-democratic countries in the *Soft Power 30* report, the subjective and objective data remain strongly based on the characteristics established by Joseph Nye, shaped by Western societies' values and attributes. Therefore, by having American standards as a benchmark, the key elements of a successful soft power are based on the effectiveness of a country's government, respect for human rights, foreign policy, and international collaboration. This explains why "the study of soft power in international relations suffer from a liberal democratic bias [and] led scholars to underestimate authoritarian states soft power by seeing it purely as the effect of government-sponsored programmes, and by focusing primarily on the cultural pillar of soft power".⁴⁰ This is particularly problematic when analyzing countries with divergent vision, political system, culture, values, and foreign policy strategies.

Authoritarian regimes have increasingly been trying their hands at attraction and incorporated the concept of soft power in their foreign policy strategies, however based upon Joseph Nye and Portland's Index definition of soft power, countries such as Russia and China would have absolutely no attraction to the rest of the world. In fact, in an article Nye wrote for the Foreign Policy magazine in 2013 he argues that Beijing and Moscow's efforts to harness the power of attraction was failing miserably.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Keating, "Conservative soft power", (*J Int Relat Dev* 22, 2019), 1.

⁴¹ Joseph Nye. "What China and Russia Don't Get About Soft Power", (Foreign Policy, 2013) <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/29/what-china-and-russia-dont-get-about-soft-power/>

Yet, some scholars argue there is in fact a certain appeal to conservative values and authoritarianism and it is too often neglected in the literature.⁴² When most people talk about fascists, authoritarian, and totalitarian governance, they neglect to consider what is so seductive about them and what has drawn millions of people to follow regime leaders such as Hitler, Stalin, and Mao.⁴³ By omitting soft power can be based on conservative values, not only are we misunderstanding China's foreign policy potential, but also the ability of non-Western states to challenge successfully the Western liberal order.⁴⁴ Although non-liberal governments lack in providing "universal" enviable values, they still represent a strong leadership alternative to countries and regions alienated by American imperialism.

By sharing these anti-America and anti-interventionist narratives, leading authoritarian regimes are providing groundwork for countries such as Turkey, Hungary, and the Philippines who have been showing regression in their democratic prospects and even reversion toward autocratic leaderships.⁴⁵ These narratives also find potential supporters in growing populist and conservative countries.

This tendency to dismiss conservative values and non-liberal governance's possible attraction also explains the disconnection between the concept of soft power as we know it and its application by authoritarian states. Authoritarian regimes' soft power goes beyond the elementary Western theory and therefore far beyond the index with which the Portland Index rates countries in their report. It has been redefined as a "not so soft" soft power, and

⁴² Keating, "Conservative soft power", (*J Int Relat Dev* 22, 2019), 1; Michael Barr, Valentina Feklyunina, and Sabrina Theys: Introduction: The Soft Power of Hard States, *Politics* VOL35, (Political Studies Association 2015), 213.

⁴³ Nye, Joseph S. (2011). *The Future of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs. P.81

⁴⁴ Keating, "Conservative soft power", (*J Int Relat Dev* 22, 2019), 1.

⁴⁵ Walker Christopher, "What Is 'Sharp Power'?" (*Journal of Democracy* 2018), 10.

more recently recognized in the literature as sharp power, in comparison with a power which pierces, penetrates, and perforates the political and informational environment of targeted countries.⁴⁶

The worldwide spread of technology and social media has given authoritarian regimes the apparatus to shape public perceptions and opinions overseas, as well as integrate democratic societies in ways it could not have done so 20 years ago. Indeed, regimes in Moscow and Beijing have influencing techniques that have gained pace and traction in recent years – while these are not hard in the openly coercive sense, they are not really soft either.⁴⁷ Strongly debated in the literature, this type of influence projected by authoritarian states have been accepted as soft power by some scholars, but most have discarded Nye’s theory arguing that it goes far beyond a charm offensive.⁴⁸ Since the two types of powers can’t be described the same way, it is relevant to ask ourselves, what is the authoritarian soft power, also known as sharp power, and how does it influence?

2.2 What is ‘Sharp Power’?

In one of Joseph Nye’s most influential writing, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in the World Politics*, he proposes a shorthand reference to hard and soft power resources, based on general association between the types of behavior and certain resources.⁴⁹ As presented in the spectrum from Table 1, the category of soft power has become an umbrella term for behavior that are not coercive. By reducing the forms of influence through this

⁴⁶ Lincot Emmanuel. “La Chine et sa politique étrangère : le sharp power face à l’incertitude ?”, (Revue internationale et stratégique vol. 115, 2019), 41.

⁴⁷ Cardenal Pablo, Juan et Al., Sharp Power – Rising Authoritarian Influence, (National Endowment for Democracy 2017).

⁴⁸ Callahan WA. Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream. *Politics*. 2015;35(3-4):216-229. doi:[10.1111/1467-9256.12088](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12088)

⁴⁹ Nye Joseph, *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics*, (2004), 8.

binary concept, everything that isn't "hard" in the term of military and economic forces falls into soft power, which is problematic. As influence strategies have become subtle and are not hard or soft in the openly coercive sense and as initial scholars defined it respectively, the conceptual vocabulary of soft and hard power is still relevant but not exclusive.⁵⁰ The more common strategy is rather a phenomenon that combines most of the resources presented below in order to command and co-opt simultaneously.

Table 1. Spectrum of Behaviors and Resources of Power from Hard to Soft

	Hard	Soft
Spectrum of Behaviors	Command ← coercion inducement	agenda setting attraction → Co-opt
Most Likely Resources	force payments sanctions bribes	institutions values culture policies

Cardenal and Walker's conceptualization is filling the void and need for a new vocabulary to describe this phenomenon, by relabeling authoritarian regimes' soft power as sharp power. Relatively new, the term was first conceptualised by researchers at the International Forum for Democratic Studies in 2017, as an alternative use of power between soft and hard, mostly wielded by authoritarian regimes to "pierce, penetrate, or

⁵⁰ Cardenal, Sharp Power, (National Endowment for Democracy 2017), 13.

perforate the information environments in the targeted countries [and] seeking to manage their target audiences by manipulating or poisoning the information that reaches them”.⁵¹

More precisely, the concept can be best understood by a definition amidst Nye, Cardinal, and Walker’s writings as initiatives in the spheres of media, culture, think tanks, and academia that “is neither a ‘charm offensive’ nor an effort to ‘win heart and minds’” – it is rather enforced by distraction, conscious distortion of facts, and manipulation to a degree so deceptive that it destroys the voluntary agency of the subject.⁵² Just like soft power, by influencing domains of influence such as other countries’ culture, academia, media, and publishing, they are influencing the way democratic society citizens understand the world around them and their relations with one another.⁵³

In addition to asserting their interest abroad, authoritarian sharp power thrives by spreading misinformation and discrediting democratic governments – a faster and less costly way of shaping foreign discourses. This allows them to take advantage and exploit glaring asymmetry in our globalized world and to have hindrance in political and cultural influences at home, while simultaneously taking advantage of the openness of democratic societies by harming them.⁵⁴ It is used by authoritarian regimes in the form of manipulation, distraction, and censorship which allows countries such as Russia and China to freely, without limit, express and distort political environments in democracies abroad while staying below the threshold of war and exploiting the “grey zone”.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Cardenal, *Sharp Power*, (National Endowment for Democracy 2017), 13.

⁵² *Ibid.*; Nye Joseph S, “Democracy’s Dilemma” (Boston Review 2019)
<http://bostonreview.net/forum/democracys-dilemma/joseph-s-nye-jr-sharp-power-not-soft-power-should-be-target>

⁵³ Walker Christopher, Shanthi Kalathil, Jessica Ludwig. “The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power”, (Journal of Democracy, 2020), 126.

⁵⁴ Cardenal, *Sharp Power*, (National Endowment for Democracy 2017), 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

Moscow and Beijing are without a doubt the leading players in this game, however Gulf States and other leading authoritarian powers in the Balkans are similarly developing “[...] outward-facing policies and practices that are corroding democratic standards”.⁵⁶ These have growing consequences on democracy, freedom, and international institutions. The most commonly known since the 2016 elections is the ability of “outsiders” to shape public conversation with disinformation via the weaponization of social medias and algorithms, which has led to sharpening tensions and divisions within and between democracies.⁵⁷

By the tendency of influencing public opinion and behavior around the world in ways that are both open and hidden, centralized and spread out, their actions were harder to distinguish. In the past few years, the West has been catching up on the phenomenon and there is now an increasing number of news outlet addressing the challenges sharp power poses to democratic societies.⁵⁸ It is now better understood both soft and sharp power work in very different ways but can appear similar due to their use of intangible resources as well as by the way they frame information. Both concepts are distinct within this framing of information, since as Nye explains “when [it] shades into deception which limits the subject’s voluntary choices, it crosses the line into coercion.”⁵⁹ Sharp power entrenches the political and information environments of others, while soft power harnesses the allure of culture and values through information to enhance a country’s strength.

⁵⁶ Walker, “The Cutting Edge”, (Journal of Democracy, 2020), 126.

⁵⁷ Walker Christopher, “What Is ‘Sharp Power’?” (Journal of Democracy 2018), 13.

⁵⁸Figaro, “La nouvelle diplomatie d’influence de la Chine”, 2017; Financial Times, “Russian and Chinese sharp power puts democracies in peril”, 2018; The Economist “How China’s ‘sharp power’ is muting criticism abroad”, 2017; The Washington Post, “China and Russia’s game of distortion”, 2017.

⁵⁹ Nye, Joseph S., “Countering the Authoritarian Challenge”, (Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development, 2020), N.15, The Populism Issue, 105-106.

One of the main problems with sharp power is that it is allowing authoritarian regimes such as China to take advantage of the open information environment of democracies which makes their efforts more difficult to detect, meaning they benefit from a lag time before the targeted democracies realize the breadth of their actions, until the problem is ineluctable. For these reasons, understanding and differentiating sharp power from soft is more important than ever.

2.3 Measuring Sharp Power

Since the first edition of the *Portland Soft Power 30 Annual Report* in 2015, China has narrowly qualified each year at the bottom of the world's ranking of the thirty best performing countries in terms of soft power. Since the report's detailed analysis was covering only the ten most influential countries in the ranking and China consistently found itself in last position, the characteristics of its soft power were not detailed. In addition, several other Asian countries such as Japan, India, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and the Philippines were under-represented by this typology.

However, in order to adapt their analysis to the new geopolitical reality, strongly marked by the rise of Asian countries, the authors included the "Asia Soft Power 10" ranking in the 2018 annual report.⁶⁰ In their evaluation of China's soft power since then, the big picture seems to focus on the geopolitical challenges the country faces, as well as the bad reputation of its government. By doing so, the governance sub-index appears to

⁶⁰ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2018*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2018), 38.

affect the overall performance of the countries' soft power and negate the impact of other important variables.

More recently, several events have played against Beijing's image on the international stage, thus affecting its performance in the polls. The authors mention the effect of the trade war with the United States, the Huawei scandal, tensions in the South China Sea, Xinjiang Uighur detention camps, and the crackdown on pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong, among others.⁶¹ This is where most of the discrepancies between the initial concept and its interpretation lies, since the PRC's diplomatic strategy seems to have mutated to make way for much more ardent policies locally and abroad. Thereby, this research provides a deeper comprehension of this lack in unraveling China's soft power, but also to go a step further by identifying its use of sharp power as a complementary influence tool.

In this way, Portland's *Soft Power 30 Index* was designed to provide a new analytical framework to the concept of soft power, how to better quantify it, and understand the resources necessary for its application. In the same way, the subindices provided in their framework can help us understand the shift in China's international authoritarian policies from soft to sharp. As mentioned previously, the distinction between both concepts lie in the degree of manipulation, which become so coercive that it spoils the voluntary agency of the subject.⁶² Distinguished by the "openness and limits on deliberate deception", the line is very fine between both concepts, but China's increasing coercive approach to foreign policy and interventions abroad is allowing us to better differentiate it.⁶³ In order

⁶¹ Portland Communication, The Soft Power 30, (2019), <https://softpower30.com>

⁶² Nye Joseph S, "Democracy's Dilemma" (Boston Review 2019), <http://bostonreview.net/forum/democracys-dilemma/joseph-s-nye-jr-sharp-power-not-soft-power-should-be-target>

⁶³ Nye Joseph S, "Democracy's Dilemma" (Boston Review 2019), <http://bostonreview.net/forum/democracys-dilemma/joseph-s-nye-jr-sharp-power-not-soft-power-should-be-target>

to adequately conceptualize sharp power and the outcomes it produces, the following paragraphs will provide characteristics on how each index can be differentiated from soft to sharp power tools.

The cultural soft power index is evaluated based on global reach and appeal of a nation's cultural outputs, including properly labeled advertising in the media and openly broadcasting in other countries. The same cultural initiatives would cross the line into sharp power in the case of authoritarian states covertly supporting radio stations in other countries, promoting disinformation of social media or influencing through espionage.⁶⁴

The education soft power subindex is evaluated according to the level of human capital in a country, contribution to scholarship, and attractiveness to international students which can be labeled as 'soft' when it promotes student exchange programs, attract foreign students, and contribute to academic research. It crosses the line into sharp power when these institutes try to undermine academic freedom, proliferate disinformation, and extends to censorship, by taking advantage of the openness of institutions in democratic countries.

The engagement soft power subindex is based on the strength of a country's diplomatic network and its contribution to global engagement and development – it includes membership within multilateral organizations as well as the commitment through overseas development aid and contributions.⁶⁵ Once again, it crosses the line when an authoritarian country exploits and repurposes multilateral institutions, create new norms, and seek to assert jurisdiction over their critics abroad.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Nye Joseph S, "Democracy's Dilemma" (Boston Review 2019), <http://bostonreview.net/forum/democracys-dilemma/joseph-s-nye-jr-sharp-power-not-soft-power-should-be-target>

⁶⁵ Portland, The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2019), 28.

⁶⁶ Ginsburg Tom, "How Authoritarians Use International Law", Journal of Democracy Volume 31, issue 4, (October 2020), 44.

The enterprise soft power subindex is based on the attractiveness of a country's economic model, business friendliness, and innovation. It develops into sharp power when the "ease of doing business" with the country is coupled with conditions of censorship from foreign companies and debt-trap diplomacy, allowing it to force ransoms for further geopolitical goals.

The digital soft power subindex is evaluated on digital infrastructure and capabilities in digital diplomacy. These initiatives and tools convert into sharp power when they are used to spread misinformation, shape public perceptions and opinions of populations abroad, impose censorship outside of its borders, develop surveillance technologies to export abroad, and hack/infiltrate foreign companies.

The government soft power subindex is based on its commitment to freedom, human rights, democracy, and the quality of political institutions. This source of soft power becomes sharp when the country's government favor undermining other democracies abroad, producing propaganda denying human right abuses and/or misconducts rather than promoting and improving its own political institutions.

Ultimately, "transparency and proper disclosure is necessary to preserve the principle of voluntarism that is essential to soft power", and this is why some authoritarian regimes' initiatives abroad should rather be labelled as sharp.⁶⁷ It crosses the line when the country's strategy is not to engage in public diplomacy anymore but outwardly directed censorship and information control by distraction and manipulation.⁶⁸ To fully appreciate

⁶⁷ Nye Joseph S," Democracy's Dilemma" (Boston Review 2019)
<http://bostonreview.net/forum/democracys-dilemma/joseph-s-nye-jr-sharp-power-not-soft-power-should-be-target>

⁶⁸ Cardenal Pablo, Juan et Al., Sharp Power – Rising Authoritarian Influence, (National Endowment for Democracy 2017).

the qualitative distinctions between both uses of power, the next chapter will review the array of international authoritarian influence techniques developed by China based on the aforementioned subindices.

Chapter 3: China's Shift from 'Soft' to 'Sharp'

3.1 Culture

As per Nye's pillars of soft power, culture is one of the main sources of power at the heart of the theory since it allows states to transmit their narrative and the values associated with it.⁶⁹ Despite existing convergences in China's perception and use of the soft power concept, Beijing has appropriated some elements that are part of the Western definition of the term and is reflected by the country's spending on soft power dedicated to culture and education. Beijing has emphasized these elements to strengthen the attractiveness of the country at the national and international level. An analysis presented in the 2018 and 2019 *Soft Power 30 Report* demonstrate the breadth of the CCP's cultural strategy called "Go Global", which intends on "building a Community of Common Destiny for all Mankind", increase global attraction and acceptance toward Chinese culture and values, as well as complement the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

As a continuation to the historic Silk Road Initiative, the BRI aims to promote the connectivity of Asian, European, and African continents and their adjacent seas which include non-negligible emerging markets in Asia, Eastern Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East "[to] establish and strengthen partnerships among the countries along the Belt and Road, set up all-dimensional, multi-tiered and composite connectivity networks, and

⁶⁹ Zhang Guozuo, *Research Outline for China's Cultural Soft Power*, Beijing, (Springer Social Sciences Academic Press 2017), 51.

realize diversified, independent, balanced and sustainable development in these countries.”⁷⁰ As we will see in the next subindices, these umbrella definitions and goals will allow Beijing to attach any other cultural, educational, political, and economic projects by merging surrounding countries to this ‘connectivity network’.

In addition to “Go Global”, Portland’s team indicates China’s increase in cultural soft power is attributable to its position as the country with the highest number of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, the second highest number of Olympic medals, and the upcoming host of the Beijing Winter Olympics 2022.⁷¹ Yet, the production of cultural outputs is not everything – another element necessary to cultural soft power efficiency is the transfer and propagation of values.⁷² In this regard China’s soft power is being transferred and reproduced through the Chinese diaspora, Chinese embassies, international broadcasting networks available in more than 60 languages, and through the China Central Television (CCTV) available internationally.⁷³ Based on the criteria of global reach and appeal of a nation’s cultural outputs, advertising, and broadcasting in other countries, Chinese cultural initiatives abroad seemed promising and allowed it to hold a ranking between 8 and 9 since the first *Soft Power 30 Index* of 2015.⁷⁴ However, these “successes” are limited, and most scholars underline the need for China to show greater flexibility in communication and presentation of its values internationally in order to make it more accessible. It is also

⁷⁰ Ibold Sebastian, The Belt and Road Initiative, <https://www.beltroad-initiative.com/belt-and-road/>

⁷¹ Portland Communication, The Soft Power 30, 2019, <https://softpower30.com>

⁷² Portland, The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2018, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2018), 70.

⁷³ Portland, The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2017, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2017), 70.

⁷⁴ Portland Communication, The Soft Power 30, 2019, <https://softpower30.com>

widely recommended that China develop its own "pop" culture while maintaining the spread of Chinese "high" culture.⁷⁵

It has been argued that China's soft power strategy is to dissociate itself through its culture rather than allow it to be assimilated by the cultural standards of the West.⁷⁶ Showing a greater flexibility in the presentation of its values internationally would in fact weaken China's strong cultural identity. As presented in Table 2 below, a brief comparison between Nye's original theory, objectives, resources of soft power, and China's soft power showcases important discrepancy in almost every aspect.⁷⁷ While the US thrive on pop culture and exporting Hollywood movies, Mainland China has put its focus strengthening cultural identity and promoting its language, heritage, history, and nationalism.

Table 2. Comparison of the Soft Power Concept with China's Soft Power

	<i>Nye's Soft Power</i>	<i>Chinese Soft Power</i>
<i>Origin of the concept</i>	How the United States should (smartly) lead the world	(Using "morality" to) govern own state, bring justice and virtue to the world.
<i>Objectives</i>	To shape the preferences of other countries through appeal and attraction To foster America's leading role in world politics	To strengthen China's cultural identity To improve China's international image (by offering China's voice) To promote China's culture and the Chinese model To be part of the (multipolar) global governance
<i>Resources of the concept</i>	Culture (pop culture especially) Political values (freedom, democracy, human rights...) Foreign policy	Culture (language, heritage, history, nationalism) China's moral values (socialist core values) Foreign policy (bonded with trade agreements/economic cooperation)

⁷⁵ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2018*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2018), 70.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Zhang Zhan, "The Dilemma of China's Soft Power in Europe", *Soft Power With Chinese Characteristics, China's Campaign for Heart and Minds*, (Routledge 2020), 154.

This strategy of dissociation from the US also helps Beijing construct its narrative of distinction from democratic leaders and societies when it comes to cultural soft power. In this regard, democratic leaders are now starting to see the real motivations behind some of these initiatives based on China's recent foreign policy shift from attraction-based soft power to the authoritarian influence that is sharp power. The former was enthusiastically welcomed by Western countries, but Beijing's growing pressure on democratic institutions and its establishments are now perceived as security threats.

The PRC's cultural initiatives have transitioned into sharp power by spreading disinformation and shaping Western societies discourses. Since Xi Jinping came to power, control and manipulation of cultural content has grown considerably locally and internationally.⁷⁸ China's access to democratic countries' media outlets, educational and cultural initiatives, think-tank, and policy outreach programs has helped to shape the public conversation and disrupt discourses.⁷⁹ For instance, it is possible to observe this shift from soft to sharp in one of the most well know "soft power" cultural initiative, the Confucius Institutes.

In the 21st century, inspired by Mao's initial influence's strategy, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have strengthen his vision through institutions and education programs. In 2004, these changes have resulted in the establishment of more than 700 Confucius Institutes and Confucius classrooms around the world, supported by the Office of Chinese Language

⁷⁸ Portland, The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2018, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2018), 70.

⁷⁹ Walker, Christopher. "China's Foreign Influence and Sharp Power Strategy to Shape and Influence Democratic Institutions", Testimony before the U.S. House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence <https://www.ned.org/chinas-foreign-influence-and-sharp-power-strategyto-shape-and-influence-democratic-institutions/>

Council International (Hanban).⁸⁰ At first these institutes were created to promote Chinese language and culture abroad, while creating a global cultural network. Over the years, these same institutes have become an important source of sharp power for Beijing which created a lot of controversy.

In 2017, the National Association of Scholars recommended closing all Confucius programs in the US following a disturbing report in regard to the lack of transparency in their financial transactions with host universities, censorship and lack of intellectual freedom, as well as ‘off the record stories’ suggesting covert activities and espionage on the behalf of the Chinese government.⁸¹ Through these manipulation and coercive means, these initial “soft” institutions became sharper than ever. More recently, they have also been involved in other concerning activities which showcases the increase of China’s sharp power.

Under the name of “cultural initiatives”, State-funded research centers, media outlets, people-to people exchange programs, and the network of Confucius Institutes have been introduced in democratic countries to mimic civil society initiatives. These sharp cultural initiatives have allowed Beijing to closely control social groups, local partners, media, and political discourses in various countries leaving local governments unaware of these internal authoritarian interferences.⁸² Due to their lack of transparency which takes away the principle of voluntarism, these programs and initiatives often cross the boundaries

⁸⁰ Lincot, Emmanuel. À l'étranger – Un « Rêve Chinois » savamment diffusé!, Éditions de l'Attribut « Nectar », 2018, p.85-86; Hartig Falk, Confucius Institutes and the Rise of China, *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 17(1), 2011, 71.

⁸¹ Williamson Kelly, Nothing Soft About China’s Sharp Power, *Canadian Forces College National Defense Canada* 2018, 9-10.

⁸² Walker, Christopher. “What Is ‘Sharp Power’?”, *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3, 2018.

from ‘influence seeking’ soft power to manipulation of discourses, propaganda, espionage, and overall sharp power.⁸³

3.2 Education

Despite being introduced as “educational institutions”, the Confucius Institutes are far from being the CCP’s most valuable influencing tools in term of education and soft power. In fact, Beijing has been focusing increasingly on the interest of foreign students in its higher education institutions by improving their accessibility, offering scholarships, and by renovating the country's universities. In 2017, the Education Commission in Beijing showed that an endowment of 7.75 million yens would be granted to the municipal level establishments through a scholarship program called "New Silk Roads", for students in countries located along the BRI initiative’s route mentioned previously.⁸⁴ That same year, China welcomed more than 400,000 international students to its universities, which positioned it among one of the main host countries for foreign students.⁸⁵

This study-abroad hotspot has been hosting more than 81 thousand African students in 2018, mainly due to its scholarship programs, the affordability, the quality, and the flexibility in providing student visas to this targeted continent.⁸⁶ Student exchanges incoming to China has helped it to increase and promote the countries education system and overall soft power. From the same charm offensive strategy, Beijing has also been

⁸³ June Teufel Dreyer, Roundtable on Sharp Power, Soft Power, and the Challenge of Democracy: A Report from 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Association for Chinese Studies, American Journal of Chinese Studies, Vol.25, No.2, 147.

⁸⁴ Lincot, Emmanuel. À l'étranger – Un « Rêve Chinois » savamment diffusé!, Éditions de l'Attribut « Nectar », 2018, 86.

⁸⁵ Davidson, Martin. “*China’s soft power: A comparative failure or secret success?*” Portland: 2017, 70.

⁸⁶ Mulvey Benjamin, International Higher Education and Public Diplomacy: A Case Study of Ugandan Graduates from Chinese Universities, (Higher Education Policy, December 2019, <https://www.studyinternational.com/news/african-students-china-alienated/>)

welcoming journalists from emerging countries, described as seminars and trainings, which helps shaping the way “influencers” in developing countries think and talk about China.⁸⁷

Through these initiatives, China has elevated the education subindex ranked at 17th in the Soft Power 30 Index of 2019, by contributing to scholarship, promoting student exchange programs, attracting foreign student, and contributing to academic research.⁸⁸ Instructed by the education ministry, Chinese diplomats in various countries have also started to “build a multidimensional contact network linking the homeland and abroad – the motherland, embassies and consulates, overseas student groups, and the broad number of students abroad”, similar to the cultural strategy introduced in the cultural subindex.⁸⁹

However, more recently there has been a shift from soft to sharp power influence through these same initiatives, which has eroded their substantial soft power efforts. Hence, for many years Beijing has been using the Chinese student diaspora to act as political agents to serve the government interests in foreign countries and shape the discourse toward topics deemed “offensive” for the CCP.⁹⁰ These students acting as political agents have been putting increasing pressures on foreign academia such as the University of Sydney and Newcastle, who have been publicly shamed after some of their lecturer listed Hong Kong, Taiwan and other disputed territories as separate entities. Following these lectures, professors have been condemned and publicly shamed on social media and pressured by the Chinese consulate.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Alviani, Cédric. “China’s Pursuit of a New World Media Order” RSF East Asia Bureau, Reporters without borders, 2018, 52.

⁸⁸ Portland Communication, The Soft Power 30, 2019, <https://softpower30.com>

⁸⁹ Walker, Christopher. “What Is ‘Sharp Power’?”, *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3, 2018, 14.

⁹⁰ Williamson Kelly, Nothing Soft About China’s Sharp Power, Canadian Forces College National Defense Canada 2018, 9-10.

⁹¹ Lesh Matthew, “Australia’s universities are failing to protect free speech”, ABC News, Last modified 2017, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-10-03/australias-universities-are-failing-to-protect-free-speech/9007346>

The CCP has also attempted, and in some cases succeeded, in undermining academic freedom, transparency, proliferating disinformation, and extending its censorship by taking advantage of the openness of institutions in democratic countries. As an example, in January 2020, the chairman of Harvard’s chemistry department Dr. Charles Lieber was charged with lying about funds received from the Chinese government.⁹² A few weeks later, the U.S. Department of Education launched an investigation into foreign gifts reporting at Ivy League Universities following the uncovering of more than \$6 billion in unreported foreign gifts from countries including China, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. The 2019 Senate Report found that,

“[f]rom January 2012 to June 2018, 15 U.S. schools reported receiving \$15,472,725 directly from Hanban, a propaganda arm of the Chinese government. To get a more comprehensive understanding of Hanban’s spending in the United States, the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations requested financial records from 100 U.S. schools and found Hanban directly contributed \$113,428,509 to U.S. schools—more than seven times the amount U.S. schools actually reported.”⁹³

This highlights the array of sharp influence Beijing has over the academic sector around the world including professors, scientists and/or students from every field – this is mainly due to the naiveté on the part of the academic sector as well as the PRC’s facility to exploit and take advantage of the open research and development environment in democratic countries.⁹⁴ Once again due to the lack of proper disclosure and transparency,

⁹² The United States Department of Justice, Harvard University Professor and Two Chinese Nationals Charged in Three Separate China Related Cases, (January 28, 2020) Department of Justice, Office of Public Affairs <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/harvard-university-professor-and-two-chinese-nationals-charged-three-separate-china-related>

⁹³ United States Senate, Staff Report – China’s Impact on the U.S. Education System, Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, p.70 U.S. Department of Education, U.S Department of Education Launches Investigation into Foreign Gifts Reporting at Ivy League Universities, February 12, 2020. <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/test-0>

⁹⁴ Senate Intelligence Committee hearing in February 2018, Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Christopher Wray FROM → June Teufel Dreyer, Roundtable on Sharp Power, Soft Power, and the

the principle of voluntarism isn't being preserved and these façade initiatives can't be considered as soft power anymore.

3.3 Engagement

Based on the strength of a country's diplomatic network and its contribution to global development, the engagement soft power subindex includes membership within multilateral organizations as well as the commitment through overseas development aid and contributions.⁹⁵ In that regard, Beijing political leaders have recognized and incorporated the concept into their strategies for national development and initiatives abroad since the early 21st century and has allowed it to be ranked in the top 10 of the 30th most influential countries in terms of soft power and engagement.⁹⁶

Since 2016 the damages made by the Trump administration in terms of global engagement, such as the withdrawal from the Paris Accord, the Trans-Pacific Partnership, and the Iran nuclear deal, has favored China by giving it the opportunity to portray itself as a world leader on various multilateral issues and shape its narrative accordingly.⁹⁷ In response, China had invested a hefty amount toward international institutions and on issues including climate change, anticorruption, and global health, situating them as the second largest contributing member of UN states.⁹⁸ The PRC's increasing participation in the UN Environment Program and the Sustainable Development Goals has also allowed it

Challenge of Democracy: A Report from 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Association for Chinese Studies, *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, Vol.25, No.2, p.147

⁹⁵ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2019), 28.

⁹⁶ Portland Communication, *The Soft Power 30*, 2019, <https://softpower30.com>

⁹⁷ Andrea E. Pia, Ivan Franceschini et al., *Made in China Yearbook 2017*, 10.

⁹⁸ Ginsburg Tom, "How Authoritarians Use International Law", (*Journal of Democracy* October 2020) Vol.31, Issue 4, 47.

to promote openly and increase the legitimacy of the BRI initiatives, which is an important aspect of China's economic, politic, cultural, and governmental soft power strategy.⁹⁹

In this regard, China's soft power strategy has been relatively successful given its ability to utilize its attractiveness and agenda-setting capacities to shape the outcomes of some specific global issues and influence the policies of many developing countries and international organizations.¹⁰⁰ However, over the past years Beijing has done more than contribute to global engagement in the form of soft power. It has shift into a sharper strategy by exploiting and repurposing multilateral institutions, creating new norms, and asserting jurisdiction over its critics abroad.¹⁰¹

Although China is well integrated in the international system, economy, and international institution, it has not become more transparent and accountable. Instead, the CCP has striven to reshape the global landscape in a manner that advances its geopolitical interests.¹⁰² Hence, it is noted that the CCP has been manipulating the gray areas of international law to its advantage on numerous occasions and its integration to most international institutions has enabled it to introduce characteristics specific to its vision and ratify texts it does not implement.¹⁰³

As an example, through its participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a Eurasian political, economic, and security alliance between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, India, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan, Beijing has been

⁹⁹ Ginsburg Tom, "How Authoritarians Use International Law", (Journal of Democracy October 2020) Vol.31, Issue 4, 47.

¹⁰⁰ Ding, Sheng, "The Dragon's Hidden Wings: How China Rises with Its Soft Power", Vol.83 No.2, Lexington Books, 2008.

¹⁰¹ Ginsburg Tom, "How Authoritarians Use International Law", (Journal of Democracy October 2020) Vol.31, Issue 4, 47.

¹⁰² Walker, Christopher. "What Is 'Sharp Power'?", *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3, 2018.

¹⁰³ Boisseau du Rocher, *La Chine e(s)t*, 154.

repurposing international law for authoritarian purposes.¹⁰⁴ As one of the top priorities of the organization, the SCO identified terrorism, extremism, and separatism also known as the “three evils”. Based on existing global infrastructure and international law on antiterrorism the cooperation between the countries targets for cross-border and repressions.¹⁰⁵ More recently, the separatism concept has been convenient for Beijing’s situation with Hong Kong,

“the Law on Safeguarding National Security in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, passed in Beijing in June 2020, criminalizes secessionist acts, whether or not they involve force (Article 20). It also introduces a new, vaguely defined crime of subversion and establishes punishment for terrorism (Article 27), as well as for vague concepts such as promoting hatred (Article 29). Notably, its provisions establishing crimes apply to individuals and organizations outside the territory of China and Hong Kong, including to those who are neither Chinese citizens nor permanent residents of Hong Kong (Articles 37 and 38).”¹⁰⁶

By doing so, it set precedents for China extraterritorial jurisdiction, who could be extraditing suspects from wherever in the world and make criminal complaints against foreign actors – a step forward for this new phase of increasing authoritarian influence in international law.¹⁰⁷

Beijing’s implication in the recent health crisis and its participation within the global health governance also highlights this shift in its outward facing policies. As one of the world’s biggest economy, it is undeniable that China could have an economic compulsory power over international institutions such as the World Health Organization (WHO), however China’s influence isn’t due to its financial contribution but rather its size.

¹⁰⁴ The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Website, About SCO, http://eng.sectsc.org/about_sco/

¹⁰⁵ Ginsburg Tom, “How Authoritarians Use International Law”, (Journal of Democracy October 2020) Vol.31, Issue 4, 52.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

In the first months of the pandemic, reports and news outlets have exposed Beijing's late response to the COVID-19 outbreak, by manipulating data and undercounting cases.¹⁰⁸

By doing so, it has put the international community at risk and reduced the ability of the WHO and other countries to prepare for the crisis accordingly. This tendency of hiding numbers and manipulating data has been costly in Chinese lives during the Great Chinese Famine of the late 50s early 60s and during previous outbreaks such as SARS. However, unlike the 2003 SARS outbreak, the WHO Director General has praised China for its response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has sparked a lot of criticism from the international community.

This attempt from the WHO to balance health imperatives and economic/politic imperatives show the PRC's population size as a threat for international institutions. The country represents one-fifth of the world's population, contains one-seventh of the world's disease burden, and an important origin site for a number of international infectious disease pandemics.¹⁰⁹ Hence, the WHO can't afford to risk the PRC to withdraw from the organization and bring greater vulnerability to the global health by losing access to the data, reporting, and tracking of the most populated country in the world.¹¹⁰ In other words, it is better to have China on the inside, to incorporate them, and have them contributing to the global health governance than on the outside. This unique position allows China to shape the thinking and action of other actors in the global health governance and the WHO itself.

¹⁰⁸ CNN, "The Wuhan Files Leaked documents reveal China's mishandling of the early stages of Covid-19." November 30, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/30/asia/wuhan-china-covid-intl/index.html>

¹⁰⁹ Youde, Jeremy. "China, International Society, and Global Health Governance." Oxford University Press 2018, 133. DOI: 10.1093/oso/9780198813057.001.0001

¹¹⁰ Youde, Jeremy (Guest) and Bonnie S. Glaser (Host). (2020, April 21). Examining China's Influence in the World Health Organization. Podcast China Power, CSIS. [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <https://chinapower.csis.org/podcasts/examining-chinas-influence-in-the-world-health-organization/>

This can be considered as sharp power in the sense that China's authoritarian influence over the WHO and other UN bodies allows them to repurpose multilateral institutions and create new norms. This influence is striking when observing Taiwan's relationship with the UN's agency, which is representative of Beijing's own relationship and interactions with Taiwan.¹¹¹ When it comes to global health governance, Taipei is fully dependent upon Beijing, is not part of the organization, and has only an observers' status as "Chinese Taipei" at the World Health Assembly annual gathering.¹¹² The same is true when it comes to China's growing influence over multilateral forums and institutions "to secure the endorsement of its infrastructure financing practices, weaken human rights protections and shape new, antidemocratic norms regarding issues such as cybersecurity and internet freedom", which encourages democratic lapsing.¹¹³

Overall, the COVID-19 health crisis has affected China's image and soft power abroad showcased mainly by the increase in anti-Asian racism and xenophobic hate crimes worldwide.¹¹⁴ On the flip side, it has significantly helped increase the PRC's sharp power and authoritarian influence by using its diplomatic power over multilateral institutions.

¹¹¹ Youde, Jeremy (Guest) and Bonnie S. Glaser (Host). (2020, April 21). Examining China's Influence in the World Health Organization. Podcast China Power, CSIS. [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <https://chinapower.csis.org/podcasts/examining-chinas-influence-in-the-world-health-organization/> ; Tubilewicz, Czeslaw. "Friends, Enemies or Frenemies? China-Taiwan Discord in the World Health Organization and Its Significance" Pacific Affairs, December 2012, Vol.85, No.4, 2012.

¹¹² Youde, Jeremy (Guest) and Bonnie S. Glaser (Host). (2020, April 21). Examining China's Influence in the World Health Organization. Podcast China Power, CSIS. [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <https://chinapower.csis.org/podcasts/examining-chinas-influence-in-the-world-health-organization/>

¹¹³ Shullman David, Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy: An assessment of Chinese interference in Thirteen Key countries, (International Republican Institute 2019), 7.

¹¹⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Covid-19 Fueling Anti-Asian Racism and Xenophobia Worldwide", Last modified May 12, 2020. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/05/12/covid-19-fueling-anti-asian-racism-and-xenophobia-worldwide>

3.4 Enterprise

When it comes to economic power, the lines between soft, sharp, and hard can be blurred since payments, foreign financial aid, and positive sanctions can be as attractive as they are coercive.¹¹⁵ This is mainly why the term of enterprise is more adapted to the soft power component, yet with China's state-owned businesses and absence of independence in terms of innovation both terms are hardly dissociable. In the context of this research, this type of power can be identified as soft when it is based on the attractiveness of a country's innovation, economic model, and business friendliness.

China's economic soft power has been marked by the opening of the country's economy in the 1980, followed by outstanding economic success and stability which have been used as a charm offensive ever since. This has led Westerners experts to have viewed the PRC through an economic-development lens for too long.¹¹⁶ Hence, this strategy has led China to become one of the largest economies in the world, soon to overtake the US' first position. In terms of innovation, China's soft power is growing due to some initiatives such as the "Made in China 2025" plan, which aims to make China competitive in high-tech industrial sectors, such as ICT and sustainable energy.¹¹⁷ This innovation program is also supporting one of the main economic initiatives implemented by the CCP, the BRI. Thanks to this project, China's economic strategy is, and will continue to be, one of the determining assets of Chinese diplomacy and its soft power.

¹¹⁵ Nye, Joseph, *The Future of Power*, New York, PublicAffairs, 2011, 76.

¹¹⁶ Walker Christopher, Shanthi Kalathil, Jessica Ludwig. "The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power", *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 31, N.1, 2020, 126.

¹¹⁷ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2019*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2019).

The BRI is allowing Beijing to transform the geography of trade in the world, to solidify the communication network of the Eurasian continent, and to place itself at the center of a new reorganization of the world system. In this regard, China possesses the necessary resources for the implementation of such a reform through its financial capacity, its industrial development, its abundant workforce, and its selective integration into world flows.¹¹⁸ Hence, the world is increasingly dependent on the Chinese economy due to its geostrategic presence and its tendency to monopolize the resources of many countries, amid its weak soft power. As we have seen in some regions, China's economic power successfully reduces the importance that societies give to soft power and the country's values. That can be explained by one of Nye's works in which he revisits Adam Smith's theory of moral feelings and the tendency of societies to corrupt their moral feelings through attraction and admiration for the wealth and greatness of others. According to this theory, populations would therefore be instinctively attracted to the most powerful state regardless of their values.¹¹⁹

In short, it is possible for businesses and countries to have interests in China's economic success and in the benefit of cooperation without fully adhering to the Party's ideology. It is on this aspect that, for the moment, China's influence is triumphing by exploiting interests rather than trying to conform its values to those of Westerners.

Beijing has pushed this narrative further by turning to an anti-US rhetoric, also described as a 'negative soft power' strategy, by presenting itself in opposition to the west and promoting Chinese characteristics.¹²⁰ These characteristics mainly prone non-

¹¹⁸ Boisseau du Rocher, *La Chine e(s)t*, 2019, 253.

¹¹⁹ Nye, Joseph. *The Powers to Lead*, Oxford University Press, 2008, 39-40.

¹²⁰ Callahan WA. Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream. *Politics*. 2015;35(3-4). doi:[10.1111/1467-9256.12088](https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.12088); Cardenal, Juan Pablo, Jacek Kucharczyk, Grigorij

interference in domestic affairs of other countries and providing “easy terms” for its foreign investments. By taking on this role, China has been offering an alternative to non-liberal rulers around the globe, and more prominently in Latin America. Indeed, “Chinese commerce and loans have provided a lifeline to illiberal rulers such as Chavez and now Nicolas Maduro by reducing their vulnerability to U.S. and Western pressure.”¹²¹ Providing help to countries who can’t secure international financing due to poor governance and corruption has been advantageous for China over the years. It has largely helped to pull the region into its ambit and to become the largest trading partner in most South American richest countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru.¹²² This brings us back to the reality that, even if China’s soft power isn’t effective in democratic countries such as Canada, Australia, or the US, it is effective for more fragile democracies with developing economies.

Described rather as negative soft power, this approach isn’t quite sharp power material yet. The enterprise subindex has developed into sharp power when the “ease of doing business” with China started being coupled with debt-trap diplomacy or sticky power toward developing countries and conditions of censorship from foreign companies, allowing the authoritarian country to force ransoms to further geopolitical aims and promote disinformation. In that respect, the western narrow perspective on China’s role in the global economy has allowed it to take advantage of some grey zones and increase its sharp power in terms of economic leverage. Chinese officials and enterprises have been

Mesežnikov and Gabriela Pleschová, *Sharp Power – Rising Authoritarian Influence*, National Endowment for Democracy, *forum* International Forum for Democratic Studies, 2017.

¹²¹ Cardenal, Juan Pablo, Jacek Kucharczyk, Grigorij Mesežnikov and Gabriela Pleschová, *Sharp Power – Rising Authoritarian Influence*, National Endowment for Democracy, *forum* International Forum for Democratic Studies, 2017, 26.

¹²² *Ibid.*

shown to take a more aggressive stance in countries where democracy, governance, transparency, and the rule of law are weaker.¹²³

The massive port in Hambantota, a Southern province in Sri Lanka, is the epitome example of these type of practices. This port, mainly financed and built by the Chinese, once finalized didn't draw the traffic they expected and resulted in Sri Lanka unable to repay its debt. It was later on lease back to China for 99 years at a controlling equity stake.¹²⁴ This has raised serious concerns toward China's intentions of transforming it into a Chinese naval facility. Hence, the presence of China in several more disadvantaged countries dependent on external aid allows it a tighter control of the territories and above all, of their resources. In these situations, China's growing economic engagement and influence becomes harmful to developing countries.¹²⁵ The lack of alternatives increase some countries dependency and reliance on China to finance debts as a result of this vicious cycle of dependency.¹²⁶ This "opportunity" also allows Beijing to benefit from geopolitical advantages by bribing countries in exchange for diplomatic recognition or silence in regard to topics such as Taiwan.¹²⁷ The situation in South America isn't unique. Some researchers have shown the way in which China is buying political influence in the African continent, by increasing its foreign investment. However, admits Beijing's investment increase in the

¹²³ Shullman, David. Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy, International Republican Institute, Washington DC, 2019, 9.

¹²⁴ Hillman Jonathan, Game of Loans How China Bought Hambantota, (March 2018) Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), 4p.

¹²⁵ Shullman, David. Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy, International Republican Institute, Washington DC, 2019, 3.

¹²⁶ Golpaldas Ronak <https://issafrica.org/amp/iss-today/lessons-from-sri-lanka-on-chinas-debt-trap-diplomacy>

¹²⁷ Shullman, David. Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy, International Republican Institute, Washington DC, 2019, 9.

21st century, “United Nations General Assembly voting records on key resolutions do not indicate a strong correlation between investment and voting allegiances”.¹²⁸

In addition, the BRI projects has been shown to be used more as a sharp tool rather than a soft power/public diplomacy economic tool. Some of the feature of the initiative has been criticized and described as opaque, and an opportunity for massive corruption in dispersed countries around the globe such as Malaysia, Cambodia, and Ecuador.¹²⁹

In the meantime, China’s sharp power through enterprises have been detected increasingly in democratic countries in form of censorship and has revealed this “blind spot” in Beijing’s economic leverage.¹³⁰ As mentioned previously, both engagement and enterprise are intertwined in the case of China’s soft and sharp power strategies, since the CCP is interacting through state-controlled/owned enterprises and “private” enterprises.

To name only a few incidents, the Human Rights Watch reported in January 2018, “a US-based Marriott International [had to] apologized for listing Taiwan and Tibet as separate countries on its website after authorities shut down the website and app in China for a week”¹³¹. That same year, the company fired an employee for liking a pro-Tiber tweet, which was deemed offensive by the CCP. Following these events, Beijing started pursuing international airlines to begin referring to Taiwan as part of the PRC on their online platforms, or else they would ban them from operating in China.¹³² Cathay Pacific Airline

¹²⁸ Neuberger Kaitlyn, “What is the Cost of a Vote? Does Increased Foreign Investment Really Buy Political Influence in Africa”, The Fletcher School Tufts University, 2016.

¹²⁹ Shullman David, Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy: An assessment of Chinese interference in Thirteen Key countries, (International Republican Institute 2019), 7.

¹³⁰ Walker Christopher, Shanthi Kalathil, Jessica Ludwig. “The Cutting Edge of Sharp Power”, 124-137, Journal of Democracy, Volume 31, N.1, 2020.

¹³¹ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2019: China, Last consulted February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/china-and-tibet#>

¹³² Human Rights Watch, World Report 2019: China, Last consulted February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/china-and-tibet#>

employees have also been the target of Beijing's increasing sharp power in the Special Administrative Regions (SARs) and got fired for being in disagreement with the Chinese government by supporting Hong Kong protests. The PRC has also been threatening to ban some diverse international brands from their market, because they or their employees offended Chinese peoples, such as H&M, Apple, Facebook, and more recently the NBA.¹³³

These are only a few of the most investigated scandals, but the Chinese government has been known for pressuring foreign companies to adhere to disputed terms and policies for years.¹³⁴ By using its economic leverage and forcing censorship to foreign companies, Beijing's soft power strategy has shifted to a more assertive stance and with sharper edges.

3.5 Digital

Often described as an information warfare, the digital component has been increasingly important for soft power and sharp power influence since "cyberspace is perhaps the terrain on which the contemporary battle between democracies and autocracies is playing out most starkly".¹³⁵ In addition, the digital dimension is closely linked with governance in the study of soft power since it is used as a tool by governments, and more notably in China's governance locally and abroad. It has been increasingly important for States to integrate this aspect, due to the interconnectivity created by globalization, ICTs, and the increased use and influence of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc. Based on the level of adaptation to technology and its use of digital

¹³³ Perper Rosie, "China and the NBA are coming to blows over over a Hong Kong tweet. Here's why." Business Insider, Last modified October 22, 2019. <https://www.businessinsider.com/nba-china-feud-timeline-daryl-morey-tweet-hong-kong-protests-2019-10>

¹³⁴ Human Rights Watch, World Report 2019: China, Last consulted February 2021, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/china-and-tibet#>

¹³⁵ Ginsburg Tom, "How Authoritarians Use International Law", (Journal of Democracy October 2020) Vol.31, Issue 4, 53.

diplomacy through social platforms, China still performs poorly in terms of soft power in this category, ranked every year in last place in the *Soft Power 30*. This ranking is mainly due to the censorship it exerts on its population when it comes to digital communications and access to the digital community.

Yet, in some areas, the advantages of soft power do not outweigh the advantages and stability provided by the CCP's authoritarian strategy. This is the case in the area of the digital since according to the western definition of soft power, an attractive digital performance would promote official online presence of Chinese citizens. However, it is because of its autocratic political system, its civil society suffocated by censorship, surveillance, and repression that China maintains its power locally and abroad.¹³⁶ It is this same censorship that allows the CCP to ensure strict control over its population and to prevent outside corruption from compromising the "truth" of the party and its ideology.¹³⁷

It is important to note the ambiguity of the digital component's role in Chinese society since besides restriction imposed on the population by media control, the country has its own alternatives to the GAFAM (Google, Amazon, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft) including Wechat, Sina Weibo, Alibaba, and others. The PRC is also a fierce competitor in technological innovation (5G, 6G, Huawei, Smartphones, etc.), as well as e-commerce.¹³⁸

One of the things that should not be overlooked in terms of adapting to technology is how the CCP has managed to use technology to its advantage in order to strengthen its

¹³⁶ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2015*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2015), 21.

¹³⁷ Zhang Guozuo, *Research Outline for China's Cultural Soft Power*, Springer Social Sciences Academic Press China, Beijing, 2017, 60; Boisseau du Rocher, *La Chine e(s)t*, 2019, 118.

¹³⁸ Boisseau du Rocher, *La Chine e(s)t*, 2019, 158.

control domestically. Since 2020, China has been setting up a social credit system, a kind of 'invisible hand' of the Party, as well as a global CCTV coverage called 'Project Dazzling Snow' which aims to cover the smallest villages in China with cameras to achieve full geographic coverage, full connectivity, and full operational control.¹³⁹ It is certainly not a source of soft power that the rest of the world envies, but Beijing's adaptability to technology is undeniable and is certainly a source of power by restricting other influences to enter its online frontiers.

China's authoritarian influence have most recently started to leak into the international community and have converted into sharp power when they started being used to spread disinformation, shape discourses, impose censorship abroad, develop surveillance technologies to diminish the value of democracy, and hack/infiltrate foreign companies. The CCP has been using the digital world as a vehicle to reconstruct its narrative abroad, which is facilitated by the recent increasing dependency of the world on digital platform and tools.

Following lockdowns all around the world due to COVID-19, citizens of the world have changed the ways they interact with each other and technologies have become intertwined with every other aspect of our everyday lives. Confined at home, culture is now shared through social media platforms, face-to-face education has been reduced to zoom calls, and businesses and diplomatic engagements are now done remotely via phone calls and video-conferencing apps. For these reasons, protecting online interaction from authoritarian influences should be a priority for democracies. Authoritarian countries have been known to be agile in using cyber tools offensively to undermine democratic

¹³⁹ *Idem.* 192-212.

countries.¹⁴⁰ In this regard, the 2016 election has sensitized the population due to Russian interference and propagation of disinformation on social platforms. On the flip side, too little is being mentioned or known about the extent of China's interference on these same online networks. China's 'Little Pinks' army is one of the most well known in the online community, for promoting disinformation, promoting the regime, verbally abusing users, and using intimidation tactics on social media platforms.¹⁴¹

In one of its most recent publications, Walker explains the subtleties in which Beijing is using algorithms and open platforms to censor and provide disinformation.¹⁴² More precisely, he explains how the PRC has been using the openness of pages such as Wikipedia, which relies on its participants cooperation and transparency, to disseminate its content. As of 2016, the platform had 27 million registered users across the globe and was getting an average of 18 billion page views per month.¹⁴³ He states a BBC report from 2019, where they found more “than a thousand ‘tendentious edits’ [...] across two-dozen sensitive articles relating to China [including] the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre [renamed] as ‘the June 4th incident’ to ‘quell the counterrevolutionary riots’”, as well as on Taiwan's page, which was changed from “a state in East Asia” to “a province in the People's Republic of China”.¹⁴⁴ Instead of promoting its narrative through transparent means and its soft power, this shift intends to shape and control the narrative accordingly with the party's interest. Moreover, the PRC's “great firewall” of censorship does not allow

¹⁴⁰ Ginsburg Tom, “How Authoritarians Use International Law”, (Journal of Democracy October 2020) Vol.31, Issue 4, 53.

¹⁴¹ <https://international.thenewslens.com/article/114620>

¹⁴² Walker, “The Cutting Edge”, (Journal of Democracy, 2020), 124.

¹⁴³ Anderson Monica, et Al., Wikipedia at 15: Millions of readers in scores of languages, Pew research 2016. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/14/wikipedia-at-15/>

¹⁴⁴ Walker, “The Cutting Edge”, (Journal of Democracy, 2020), 126.

browsers and platforms such as Wikipedia in the country, which highlights the outward facing shift in the countries policies and the extension of its authoritarian influence abroad.

In addition, in June 2020, Zoom Videos Communications Inc. was asked by the Chinese authorities to terminate public US-based and Hong Kong SAR Zoom commemoration meetings for the June Fourth Tiananmen Square massacre of 1989, considered to be illegal in Mainland China. They censored and terminated these meetings host account to prevent “subsequent illegal meeting from occurring”.¹⁴⁵ Following this censorship scandal, the company has released a new Transparency Report and stated that they would not allow requests from the Chinese government to impact anyone outside of mainland China.¹⁴⁶ This is one of the many digital companies on which Beijing has become more assertive in its censorship abroad through digital engagement, increasing its authoritarian influence over other countries.

3.6 Government

The term of soft power is largely accepted by China’s officials, in its government papers and in the media, even though the consensus of its effectiveness is still up for debate. Authoritarian states such as the PRC have no interest in advancing any of the components of commitment to freedom, human rights, democracy, and the quality of its political institutions to improve its governance soft power, which kept it stagnant at the 30th place in the *Soft Power 30* ranking for five years in a row.¹⁴⁷ Similarly to the digital component, the advantages of the CCP’s shift toward a better governance soft power do not outweigh

¹⁴⁵ Zoom, “Company News, Improving Our Policies as We Continue to Enable Global Collaboration”, Last modified June 11, 2020, <https://blog.zoom.us/improving-our-policies-as-we-continue-to-enable-global-collaboration/>

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Portland Communication, The Soft Power 30, 2019, <https://softpower30.com>

the advantages and stability provided by its autocratic political system, its civil society suffocated by censorship, and repression.¹⁴⁸ Despite evolving trends in Chinese society towards greater liberalization, the determination of the current president to prevent reforms and policy changes smothers any possible social rising.¹⁴⁹ The fact that Beijing hasn't significantly moved toward any kind of political reform or advancement in the defense of human rights showcases the artificiality in which soft power is used when it comes to this subindex.

In some ways, China's governance does get considerable support from some authoritarian leaders in non-democratic countries, but not enough for Beijing to gain global appeal nor to satisfy its geopolitical ambitions. As mentioned earlier, one of the CCP's most known rhetoric abroad is its insistence on non-interventionism and non-interference in other countries domestic affairs, in comparison to Western powers. This narrative, also known as negative power, is powerful for countries alienated by the restrictions and interferences imposed by the Americans, but it is also powerful domestically. In 2017, *World Warrior 2* has become the biggest box office hit to date in the People's Republic which tells the story of a Chinese vigilante fighting against wicked Western mercenaries in Africa.¹⁵⁰ The infatuation for this movie demonstrates the way Beijing has successfully tied back and restructured the same narrative it is exporting in countries with developing economies and conveyed it to the Chinese people. This box office hit in the PRC also inspired the 'wolf warrior' title for China's diplomats abroad, who have been propagating

¹⁴⁸ Portland, *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power 2015*, USC Center on Public Diplomacy, (Portland 2015), 21.

¹⁴⁹ Lincot, Emmanuel. *À l'étranger – Un « Rêve Chinois » savamment diffusé!*, Éditions de l'Attribut « Nectar », 2018, 84.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

conspiracy theories, converting trolling campaigns online, and directly accuses democratic countries through shaming diplomacy strategies.¹⁵¹ In that regard, it is safe to say that the CCP's sources of governance soft power are already initially on the brink of coercion. However, Beijing domestic repression and propaganda isn't considered sharp power, but only unattractive governance.

Conversely, it is China's most recent authoritarian leadership that have trickled into the international community as being problematic and considered as sharp power. Beijing has been trying to undermine democracies abroad by producing propaganda material and denying its human right abuses, rather than promoting and improving its own political institutions. In the meantime, the Party is aware of how the world sees and talks about China and directly impacts the regime's domestic stability and influence abroad. This is mostly why sharp power is so important to the CCP, since its soft power resources are too vulnerable to negate foreign criticism over human rights abuses and illiberal values.

To address these challenges, Beijing political leaders have been interacting with actors from the international community the same way it is interacting at home, in an increasingly assertive and repressive manner. Some argue that it would be naïve to think the CCP would treat the world any differently, when its censorship and repression are effective domestically. In other words, why change a winning strategy when it comes to outward policies?¹⁵² Thus, the intensification of its authoritarian domestic policies was, and still is, a litmus test on how far it can apply sharp power before exporting it.

¹⁵¹ Brandt Jessica, Bret Schafer. How China's 'wolf warrior' diplomats use and abuse Twitter, (The Brookings Institution, 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/techstream/how-chinas-wolf-warrior-diplomats-use-and-abuse-twitter/>)

¹⁵² Cardenal, Juan Pablo, et Al. Sharp Power – Rising Authoritarian Influence, National Endowment for Democracy, *forum* International Forum for Democratic Studies, 2017.

The Hong Kong protests is one of the most prominent examples in which the CCP has been testing its gradual shift into sharper outward policies and to see how far it can go before repercussion and intervention from the international community. When some countries did start to call out China about human rights violations following the protests, Chinese ambassadors such as Liu Ziaoming has ‘warned’ countries over what they call as ‘interference’ in China’s internal affairs – this is consistent with Beijing’s initial narrative of non-intervention.¹⁵³

In that regard, we can observe the clear transition in Beijing’s approach. At first when pressured, the CCP was opting for a hard/economic stance by threatening other actors to withhold trade and investments, using economic tools to pressure countries that defies the regime and speak out against its human-rights violations. Furthermore, Beijing is using shaming diplomacy to reinforce its message and its narrative abroad and promote disinformation in other countries.

These shaming diplomacy and propaganda have been used more actively since March 2020. After increasing critics regarding China’s response to the Corona virus outbreak, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian suggested on his twitter that the U.S. army brought the epidemic to Wuhan and was to blame for the COVID-19 outbreak.¹⁵⁴ To quote his verified Twitter account, “[it] might be the US army who brought the epidemic to Wuhan. Be transparent! Make public your data! US owe us an explanation!”¹⁵⁵ As

¹⁵³ BBC News. “Chinese ambassador Liu Ziaoming warn UK over Hong Kong ‘Interference’”. Last modified July 6, 2020. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-53307327>

¹⁵⁴ Austin, Henry and Alexander Smith. “Coronavirus: Chinese official suggests U.S. Army to blame for outbreak”. NBC News, Last modified March 12, 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/coronavirus-chinese-official-suggests-u-s-army-blame-outbreak-n1157826>

¹⁵⁵ Lijian Zhao (China government account), Last modified March 12, 2020, Tweet: https://twitter.com/zlj517/status/1238111898828066823?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwtterm%5E1238111898828066823%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fw

showcased, this strategy isn't about improving China's image abroad by offering China's voice as showcased in Table 2, it is about producing propaganda and disinformation, and justifying poor governance.

Moreover, following increasing critics over human rights violation in Mainland China, in November 2020, Zhao Lijian showcased Beijing's increasing sharp power by posting an illustration of “[a]n Australian soldier [who] appears to hold an Afghan child's head against a backdrop of their two national flags, threatening to slit the youngster's throat with a bloody knife” on his verified Twitter account.¹⁵⁶ This incident was only the latest in the ongoing tensions between the two countries, but is also aimed at reinforcing its shaming diplomacy strategy by reminding the world of the atrocities US allies committed during the war.

These incidents are only the latest of Beijing's long campaign to distract the international community from its own human rights abuses and to reinforce his narrative as a non-interventionist power. More specifically following the allegations against the Chinese government for the mass imprisonment and re-education of Uyghur Muslim minorities in the region of Xinjiang, adding to the lack of transparency of the CCP. Some would argue that these diplomatic meso-aggressions and China's economic influence would explain partly the passivity of the Arab-Islamic countries of the world toward the fate of Muslim minorities in Northwest China.¹⁵⁷

www.nbcnews.com/2Fnews%2Fworld%2Fcoronavirus-chinese-official-suggests-u-s-army-blame-outbreak-n1157826

¹⁵⁶ Scott, Ben. “China's slur on Australian soldiers is just the latest step in a long campaign by Beijing”. CNN, Last modified December 1, 2020. <https://www.cnn.com/2020/12/01/asia/china-australia-afghanistan-us-intl-hnk/index.html>

¹⁵⁷ Frachon, Alain. “La Chine s'installe au Moyen-Orient”, Le Monde actualité 23 septembre 2020

These previous examples of China increasing assertiveness doesn't fully undermine the principle of voluntarism that is usually affected in sharp power strategy, since it is done more publicly. However, inter-connected with the cultural, educational, digital, and engagement subindices, Beijing does have sharp power initiatives abroad that lack transparency and proper disclosure, corroding other democracies to increase its governance image.

In Switzerland, recent studies have found and traced some of the personal and institutional networks used by the CCP to influence society's economic and political circles in efforts to address issues sensitive to the party, such as Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang.¹⁵⁸ These initiatives also aimed at shaping the image of China in the country which reveals the area of grey zones that these tactics of influence, and sometimes interference, are conducted toward targeted actors and citizens in democratic society. The key elements of their research identified the Chinese embassy and consulate to be apparent "nodes of coordination and communication in the effort to silence critical voices and normalize China as a legitimate source of normativity in the global arena despite continuing and even increasing ideological divides".¹⁵⁹ The events and tendencies mentioned in this research are not isolated – they are part of an increasing authoritarian influence and sharp power, aiming at academic freedom, politics, education, and free speech.

¹⁵⁸ Weber Ralph (2020) Unified message, rhizomatic delivery A preliminary analysis of PRC/CCP influence and the united front in Switzerland, Sinopsis China in Context and Perspective, 1.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

Chapter 4: China Too Big to Ignore

4.1 China Foreign Policy Shift/Addition

Per its definition, sharp power is attributed to authoritarian regimes since it aims at exploiting the grey zone and ambiguities of international law, taking advantage and exploiting democracies' asymmetric vulnerability resulting from their openness.¹⁶⁰ However, to offer a more nuance understanding of the concept and not fall into Sinophobia, it is to be noted that democracies and Western leaders have also been using to their benefit asymmetries with authoritarian regimes and democratic countries as well as by taking advantage of the “grey zone”. This research presents only occurrences including China since it is a case study on China’s authoritarian influence abroad as a shift/addition to its soft power to highlights the Party’s interference in other countries. The concept of sharp power itself helps revisit the conceptual vocabulary of soft and hard power and gives a new meaning to behaviors and resources of power that are neither soft nor hard.

It is still too early to comprehend the long-term repercussions of this shift in China’s foreign policy. However, the fact that democratic leaders are struggling to address these sharp power aggressions reflects the changing international landscape and the need for a new ‘China strategy’. On the one hand, some of China’s recent pressure tactics, such as hostage diplomacy, is still considered as hard power. China’s assertive/coercive diplomacy has been having increasing negative effects on middle powers such as Canada, for instance in the turmoil surrounding the arrest of the top Huawei executive Meng Wanzhou followed

¹⁶⁰ Cardenal, Juan Pablo, et Al. Sharp Power – Rising Authoritarian Influence, National Endowment for Democracy, *forum* International Forum for Democratic Studies, 2017, 9.

by the arrest of the two Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor almost immediately after, who have been arbitrarily detained in China for more than two years now.

On the other hand, Beijing's attempt at exporting the Chinese model, increasing its ideological supervision, and censorship is better classified as sharp power rather than soft power. As we have identified in our research, the key word and difference to find these same initiatives as sharp is mainly based on the lack of transparency and proper disclosure which compromises the principle of voluntarism. This distinction is also fundamental when analyzing Beijing's cultural and educational initiatives, and engagement within international organizations which are usually classified as soft power. In some instance, soft power and sharp power initiatives can easily be mistaken because of their use of similar resources and vessels. However, as showcased in Table 3, the soft power approach crosses the line into sharp power when the country's strategy is not to engage in public diplomacy anymore but outwardly direct censorship and information control by distraction and manipulation.¹⁶¹

¹⁶¹ Table 3 is inspired by Table 2 and modified with findings from this research. Source: Zhang Zhan, "The Dilemma of China's Soft Power in Europe", *Soft Power With Chinese Characteristics, China's Campaign for Heart and Minds*, (Routledge 2020), 154.

Table 3. Comparison of China’s Soft Power and Sharp Power

	<i>China’s Soft Power</i>	<i>China’s Sharp Power</i>
<i>Origin of the concept</i>	(Using “morality” to) govern own state, bring justice and virtue to the world.	Using censorship and shaping discourses to govern own state and extend authoritarian influence into the world.
<i>Objectives</i>	To strengthen China’s cultural identity. To improve China’s international image (by offering China’s voice) To promote China’s culture and the Chinese model. To be part of the (multipolar) global governance.	To strengthen the Party’s narrative locally and abroad. To control and censor public opinions locally and abroad. To promote authoritarian governance and enterprises in the world. To infiltrate democratic societies and international institutions through engagement to repurpose institutions and “soft power” initiatives.
<i>Resources of the concept</i>	Culture (language, heritage, history, nationalism). China’s moral values (socialist core values). Foreign policy (bonded with trade agreements/economic cooperation).	Culture (Confucius institutes, mimicking cultural initiatives). Education (extend censorship, undermining academic freedom). Engagement (repurpose international organizations). Enterprise (impose censorship to foreign companies, debt-trap diplomacy). Digital (extend censorship, develop surveillance technologies, infiltrate foreign companies). Governance (undermining democracy, denying human right abuses, shaming diplomacy)

Sharp power hasn’t fully replaced China’s soft power strategy, but it can be best understood as a complement to its international influence strategy and can help us understand the way China has adapted its outward facing policies in order to wield influence and attraction. As illustrated in Table 3, both concepts are aiming at different purposes and their objectives are disparate. Nonetheless, the resources of both concepts have been intertwined and use simultaneously in various occasions. As shown above in Table 3, culture has been a strong element of China’s soft and sharp power through Confucius institutes, which underlines the dual use of some of the CCP’s global soft power initiative as sharp.

When it comes to each subindex, they are all intertwined and seem to lead back to the governance subindices which amalgamate close to no soft power, but a whole lot of

sharp power. As argued in this research, through cultural, educational, engagement, enterprises, digital, and governmental initiatives, initially under the name of soft power, Beijing's influence is corroding and infiltrating governances and open discourses favoring democratic backsliding. The way Beijing promotes and manages the image of the country isn't soft in most cases and this is mainly why these initiatives shouldn't automatically be identified as soft power – it is rather sharp power initiatives disguised under the soft power umbrella. In addition, because soft power and sharp power are “similar” in some respects, this allows government entities such as the CCP and other authoritarian regimes to deny their authoritarian influence and sharp power strategies abroad.¹⁶²

It is still hard to pinpoint when exactly Beijing has been planning on shifting its outward facing policies into sharp power and if the Communist Party ever even utilized soft power the way western countries define it. One thing is certain, “in an era of globalization coupled with authoritarian resurgence, the institutions of a growing number of democracies are straining to comprehend and to deal with the projection of authoritarian influence through more diverse channels than ever before”.¹⁶³ Being aware of this new reality is crucial for political leaders, since their response to China's authoritarian influence will shape the future of democracy.

¹⁶² June Teufel Dreyer, Roundtable on Sharp Power, Soft Power, and the Challenge of Democracy: A Report from 2018 Annual Meeting of the American Association for Chinese Studies, *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, Vol.25, No.2, 147.

¹⁶³ Walker, Christopher. “What Is ‘Sharp Power’?” 9–23, *Journal of Democracy* 29, no. 3, 2018.

4.2 How to Respond to China's Authoritarian Influence

China's authoritarian sharp power is truly a challenge for democracies, but it also represents a great opportunity to unify them. Scholars in the field have emphasized the importance for global leaders to simultaneously promote greater coordination and integration among like-minded countries.¹⁶⁴ Western leaders and scholars when observing China's attractiveness are fast to criticize the censorship, the propaganda, the authoritarian stability maintenance, and its poor human rights records. However, they are not "oblivious mistakes" or "mismanagement" from the Communist Party, they are calculated, logical, necessary actions that strengthen the regime locally and abroad. In addition, scholars and leaders from the democratic world need to stop underestimating authoritarians' influence, since being aware of the attractiveness of such governance can help future societies not to repeat the same mistakes. With that in mind, China's actions are more easily understood as a shift in foreign policy strategy and a logical continuation to the country's growing ambitions. Indeed, in an era of great competition the PRC's soft power won't be sufficient.

China's sharp cultural and educational initiatives affect and reaches every levels of civil society. This is why it is necessary for democratic leaders to conscientize private enterprises, academia, government, political parties, independent media, and civil society initiative organizations of Beijing's tactics.¹⁶⁵ In addition, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of complete transparency when it comes to China's investments in other

¹⁶⁴ Shullman, David. *Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy*, International Republican Institute, Washington DC, 2019, 10.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

countries and transparency in advertisements as well. Without rejecting completely Confucius Institutes, they should closely be monitored to distinguish influence and interference.¹⁶⁶

To better tackle China's sharp enterprises and engagements initiatives abroad, most scholars recommend shoring up the resilience of vulnerable countries targeted by Beijing by providing alternatives to Chinese investment and financing in developing countries.¹⁶⁷ In addition, the international community needs to demand more transparency from its member states and report any censorship attempt.

Finally, the best approach for China's sharp digital diplomacy, censorship, and authoritarian governance abroad is to develop "[p]rograms that educate citizens about the media, helping them to detect disinformation campaigns and obtain their information from pluralistic and independent journalistic sources", whether is it to prevent far right movements, terrorist groups recruiters, Russian interference, or China's shaping of discourses.¹⁶⁸ There is also a need to be persistent, strengthen institutions, and have robust independent media to prevent Chinese interference in the future. Scholars also recommend speaking strongly against Chinese repression and against China's diplomats that engage in intimidation of dissidents or other overseas critics against the regime.¹⁶⁹ In addition, citizens and leaders from democratic countries have the obligation to speak honestly about the CCP gradual micro-aggressions and its human rights violations. It is necessary to raise awareness to these issues without wilting to intimidation.

¹⁶⁶ Shullman, David. *Chinese Malign Influence and the Corrosion of Democracy*, International Republican Institute, Washington DC, 2019, 49.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

This research has sought to evaluate China's international authoritarian influence and attractiveness through the concepts of soft and sharp power by asking the following: how can the concept of sharp power help us understand the way China has adapted its outward facing policies in order to wield influence and attraction? While reviewing Nye's initial concept of soft power and its evolution through the *Soft Power 30 Index*, we identified significant flaws to the concept by its inability to see non-liberal political values as potentially attractive to some countries. These flaws have led to an underestimation of authoritarian governments' influence abroad, as well as an underestimation of the mutation of their outward facing policies. Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that the concept of sharp power can help us identify China's array of influence abroad as sharp rather than as 'ineffective soft power'. In that regard, China's soft power alone cannot be reduced to its charm offensive attempts exclusively.

As we have identified, in China's case, there has been a growing appeal for the concept of soft power in its local policies and initiatives abroad. However, recently most of these initiatives have uncovered sharper tools and initiatives, corrosive for democracies. In this paper we have established that in essence, the distinction between soft and sharp power can be distinguished by the transparency and proper disclosure of the public diplomacy initiative in order to preserve the principle of voluntarism, essential to soft power.¹⁷⁰ This research has provided qualitative distinctions between both uses of power and the array of the international authoritarian influence techniques developed by China

¹⁷⁰ Nye Joseph S, "Democracy Dilemma", Boston Review, Last modified May 16, 2019. <http://bostonreview.net/forum/democracys-dilemma/joseph-s-nye-jr-sharp-power-not-soft-power-should-be-target>

based on our six sub-indices. One of the remaining questions is whether Beijing has truly ever intended on developing its soft power and foreign diplomacy or if we were duped into thinking the PRC wanted to be attractive to the West, just like we thought its prosperity was going to lead to political liberalization and democratization.

As China's authoritarian sharp power is increasing, it is undermining its soft power abroad, which it really needs as a rising power.¹⁷¹ With China's authoritarian influence and assertiveness in the region, in the South China Sea, over Hong Kong, Tibet, and Taiwan territories, very little of its neighbouring countries are finding reassurance in its rise as a superpower.¹⁷² In addition, its assertiveness over international institutions and enterprises abroad are increasing the international community's distrust and awareness toward its sharp power initiatives. This is mainly why, for the moment, sharp power and soft power seem to be part of China's strategy, but in the long term its sharp power will inevitably annihilate any charm offensive efforts – in the long run both can't be combined successfully. With that in mind, soft power being one of democracy's strongest assets, Western leaders must not undercut and reduce its charm offensive strategy to competition against authoritarian's sharp power, but rather solidify democratic institutions and unify.¹⁷³

¹⁷¹ Nye Joseph S, "Democracy Dilemma", Boston Review, Last modified May 16, 2019.

<http://bostonreview.net/forum/democracys-dilemma/joseph-s-nye-jr-sharp-power-not-soft-power-should-be-target>

¹⁷² The Economist, "In its rivalry with China, America should not make Asians pick sides", January 30th 2021 edition, <https://www.economist.com/leaders/2021/01/30/in-its-rivalry-with-china-america-should-not-make-asians-pick-sides>

¹⁷³ Nye Joseph S, "Democracy Dilemma", Boston Review, Last modified May 16, 2019.

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