

# China's Soft Power: Changing Priorities

## El poder blando de China: cambiar prioridades

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#### ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this article is to identify the 'soft power' phenomenon transformation in foreign policy strategies. The systemic-functional approach is used. Criteria hindering carrying out a 'soft power' into the outside world are identified. The Celestial Empire's cultural advance is proved to lose relevance. The materials of the article can be useful for a wide range of experts dealing with China's foreign policy issues, teachers, post-graduate students and university students.

**Keywords:** PRC soft power concept, restrictions, economic and military power, Belt and Road initiative, an international attractive image

#### RESUMEN:

El propósito de este artículo es identificar la transformación del fenómeno del "poder blando" en las estrategias de política exterior. Se utiliza el enfoque sistémico-funcional. Se identifican los criterios que dificultan la realización de un "poder blando" en el mundo exterior. El avance cultural del Imperio celestial se ha demostrado que pierde relevancia. Los materiales del artículo pueden ser útiles para una amplia gama de expertos que se ocupan de los temas de política exterior de China, maestros, estudiantes de posgrado y estudiantes universitarios.

**Palabras clave:** concepto de energía blanda PRC, restricciones, potencia económica y militar, iniciativa cinturón y carretera, una imagen atractiva internacional

## 1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, the concept of 'soft power' has received a powerful development in China's foreign policy strategy. During this period of development, the Chinese leadership has done much not only to promote this strategy, but also for practical purposes. To spread 'soft power' around the world, Beijing established hundreds of Confucius institutes engaged in the popularization of the Chinese language and culture, organized and conducted hundreds of international conferences on the development of the foundations of China's foreign policy. Recently, TV and radio broadcasting in foreign languages has expanded substantially, in over

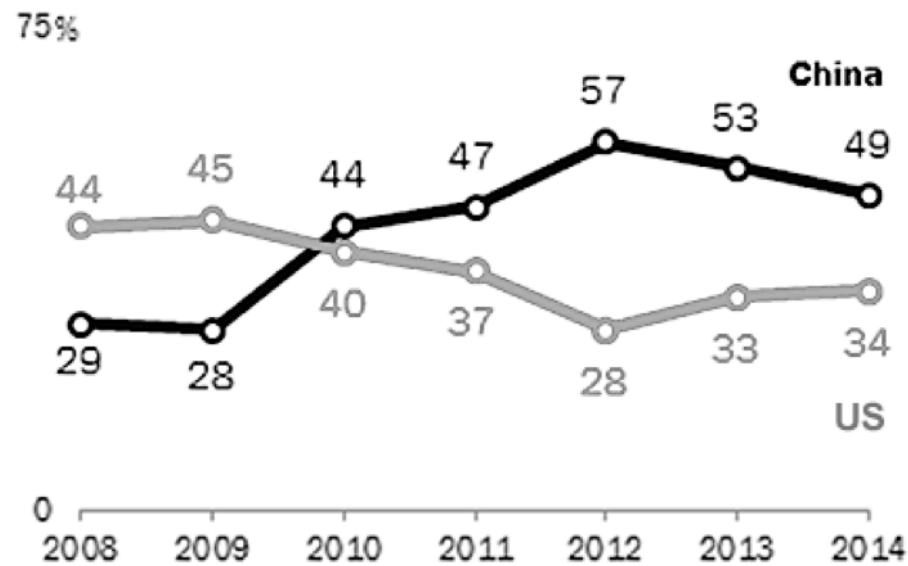
100 countries around the world, Chinese publish local-language newspapers and magazines. Billions of yuan are allocated from the PRC budget for this cultural advance called 'soft power'. Is it justified? And why is there such a sacrifice? Has the world become better and more perfect, and it can do without 'hard power'? Then why the whole world, including China, continues to arm and use hard power? Why was the world once again on the brink of war? Similar questions are increasingly raised in China and around the world. The agenda again dictates the need for power politics, and therefore the time of cultural attraction, however good it may be, has not yet come.

Accent including China as well is increasingly shifting from a 'soft' cultural power towards the development of the country's economic power. The military power of the PRC is also increasing. The data in Figure 1 show that in 2008, 44% of respondents in five European countries – France, Germany, Poland, Spain and Britain – called the US the leading economic power and only 29% considered the PRC as such country. By 2012, the percentage of respondents who consider the US as the leading economy has reduced to 28%, while 57% have changed their mind in favor of China. Sociological surveys show that the PRC retains its status as an economically strong state in the world (Global Opposition, 2014).

**Figure 1.** European countries' view of China as an economic leader

### Europe Sees China, Not U.S., as Leading Economic Power

*Median across 5 European nations (France, Germany, Poland, Spain, UK) that name each as world's leading economic power*



Note: Respondents could also name Japan or the EU.  
Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q33

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Source: Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance, 2014

## 2. Literature review

The article uses the following literature on this issue, highlighting the advantages and disadvantages of the concept of the PRC soft power. B. Gill and Y. Huang emphasize important aspects of the implementation of China's diplomacy, including level of education, a development

model and broad participation in international institutions. At the same time, the authors point to a number of problems that undermine the successful implementation of soft power, such as government corruption, mistrust of the international community, contradictions in the conduct of the foreign policy course (Gill & Huang 2006). Li Mingjiang's (2008) research addresses the problem of soft power as an instrument for achieving China's positive image vis-à-vis the external world. Russian Professor A.V. Lukin is studying the influence of tools of soft power (for example, public diplomacy) in international relations (Lukin 2015). Scholars N.A. Abramova, K.V. Grigorieva and Ye.I. Safronova (2016) mention the importance of the One-Belt, One Road initiative from the viewpoint of humanitarian relations and the role of this initiative as an instrument of China's soft power, characterizes the likely risks and difficulties that it may encounter in the course of its implementation (Safronov 2016). J. Dobbs (2016) and T. Pikkone (2016) examine challenges, contradictions and problems related to soft power, with what threats the PRC may face after D. Trump has come to power. Researchers N. L. Goretti and M. Sabiti (2016) study the problem of view of China in Africa.

Research methods: The main method to study this issue is the systemic-functional approach that reveals the transition in the decision-making process of the Chinese government from a soft cultural power towards the development of the country's economic might with its greater military power and increase in the military budget.

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### **3. Methodology**

The article uses the leading method – systemic-functional – to review the foreign policy course of the PRC government in the instrumental process of implementing soft power, to identify the transformation of the phenomenon of soft power in foreign policy strategies, the reasons for the decrease in the Chinese government's interest in this concept and its change in socio-cultural aspect. *The method of peer review* was also applied, due to which through the percentage, the view of China and the attitude to it of people in Europe, the United States, Latin America, Africa and South-East Asia was demonstrated.

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### **4. Results**

Economic power is the main factor in the PRC development. Despite the slowdown in industrial production growth rate to 6.5% per year, the session of the National People's Congress in March 2017 took extraordinary measures to raise the Chinese economy.

China's economic advance began with the participation of Chinese leader Xi Jinping in the working session of the World Economic Forum in Davos in January 2017. Against the backdrop of the global economic depression, de-globalization and the volatile world situation, Chairman Xi Jinping outlined the Chinese position to improve the global economy. Xi Jinping urged the world to act actively, to regulate in proportion he needs, to make full use of the positive results of economic globalization, to adapt to the general situation and the basic realities of countries, to choose the right path and the appropriate pace of joining to globalization, and to share the benefits of economic globalization (Kotova 2013, 2014).

Xi Jinping pointed to three major contradictions in the global economy: the lack of a driving force in the economic development, the inefficiency of economic management and the imbalance in the development space. In this regard, he proposed to create a growth model in which innovation will be a driver, a model of open and mutually beneficial cooperation, a model of fair and rational management, as well as a development model oriented to balance and common preferences, which will allow to resolve contradictions and get out of a predicament. Xi Jinping simultaneously called for promoting free trade and strengthening interconnectedness, promoting the renewal of the concept of development, political methods and ways of growth (Foreign Minister of China, 2017).

Xi Jinping informed the participants of the forum in Davos of a special Chinese way of development, stressing that China not only benefits from the globalization of the world

economy, but also contributes to this process. Xi Jinping also expressed his commitment to the policy of reform and openness, urging enterprises of different countries to long-term development in China.

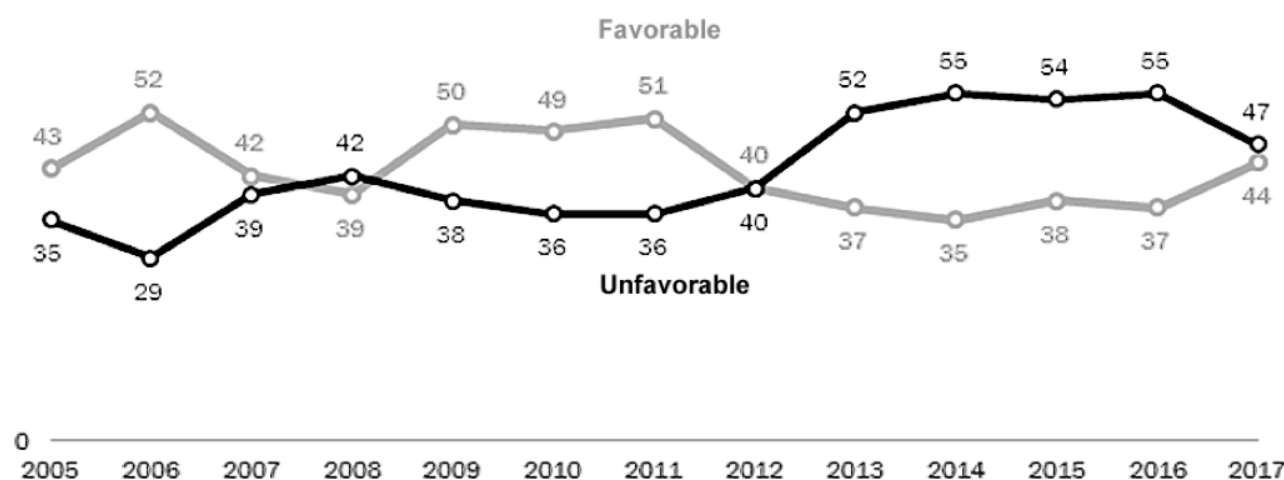
It should be noted that during the meeting of US President D. Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping in the spring of 2017 in Florida, many complicated and topical issues were raised on the agenda, such as trade, territorial disputes between China and its neighbors and the possible solution of the situation in North Korea. These issues are also in the minds of many Americans, especially the issue of China's growing economic influence on the United States. However, the concern of Americans over US loans, job losses and trade deficit is generally weakening. And over the past year, the attitude of Americans towards China has softened a bit, the number of Americans sympathetic to China has increased by 8% compared to 2016 (Wike 2017).

**Figure 2.** Views of China by Americans will change

**Americans are now divided in their views of China**

*U.S. views of China*

80%



Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey, Q12c.

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Source: Wike, 2017

The Chinese leader summed up the advance and progress in the joint implementation of the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative and the Silk Road of the Sea in the 19th century (the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese chang yi 倡议). According to him, the "circle of friends" of the Belt and Road is constantly expanding. The initiative put forward by China, he believes, benefits the whole world. The forum for international cooperation held in Beijing in May 2017 within the framework of the One Belt and One Road in Beijing has spurred the implementation of this concept (Wike 2017). It was supported by many countries, including Russia.

The entire four-day visit of Xi Jinping to Switzerland, his participation in multilateral meetings with leaders of several countries and with representatives of business circles, attracted the attention of the world community, the world business elite and was praised for the successes of China's economic development, the effectiveness of its public administration and the great contribution to development and strengthening of the global economy.

WEF President Klaus Schwab and representatives of the relevant parties positively assessed the important and positive message given by Chairman Xi Jinping to the whole world, calling the "historic" speech of the Chinese leader timely. They stressed China's concern for the future of mankind, thanked him for creating a global community having a single destiny (Foreign Minister of China, 2017).

In all aspects and directions, China's military power is also growing; the PLA and the Navy are rapidly upgrading; the space program is developing.

And what about the cultural advance of the Celestial Empire, as the main direction of soft power, so widely advertised by Beijing? Has it lost its relevance and is "stuck"? In fact, analysts have noticed a fading interest in soft power in China, and this is taking place at all levels.

This problem is increasingly being discussed in the PRC expert communities. The very term 'soft power' disappears from the official documents of the CCP and the government.

In the new concepts of the PRC on foreign policy, published in 2014 (the Press Office of the State Council of the PRC issue), the term 'soft power' is mentioned only once on page 196 (Lukin 2015).

The book "Modern Chinese Diplomacy" (Beijing 2015) does not mention the category of 'soft power' at all. Finally, in none of the recent speeches and documents signed by Xi Jinping and the leadership of Switzerland, including new agreements on cooperation in the field of culture, there is not a hint as to the concept of 'soft power'.

Is this simply by coincidence or a conscious departure from China's cultural expansion. The question requires an analysis of the causes and factors contributing to this withdrawal.

First, the change in priorities in China's foreign policy is not accidental. Today, for the development and recovery of the country, it is more important and effective for Beijing to use "hard power". It should be noted that all leaders understand that a strong state is respected in the world, it is afraid of, it is regarded with. So it was in times of power of the USSR. So why should China, which claims to be a world leader, lag behind them? The development model of the PRC will be more attractive if it becomes strong and effective. Peace in the whole world can only be provided by a powerful and advanced state, primarily economically.

Secondly, many analysts believe the advance in the field of 'soft power' has a limited success.

The well-known Russian sinologist and political scientist A.V. Lukin writes about this as follows: "In China, the following was not taken into account: the definition of soft power clearly implies first of all the existence of values, a high level of well-being and openness, as well as an attractive example that everyone wants to follow, and only then the ability to favorably present it to the foreign public. In the field of welfare and attractiveness in China, there are certain achievements, but they are rather limited" (Lukin 2015) So far, China has no real civil society, a multi-party system. Instead of democracy, they offer "good governance" and powerful economic development, which certainly attracts other, especially developing countries, but this is probably not enough for general appeal. As long as civil society in China does not work – and the citizens themselves ... do not begin to sincerely and positively estimate the country's policy instead of the ever-happy state officials, the Chinese development model is unlikely to become particularly attractive for the whole world (Lukin 2015).

Chinese society still has little influence on establishing cultural ties with other countries. In addition, hieroglyphic writing and complex Chinese are often rejected by many non-Asian peoples. Culturologists are convinced that the carriers of the unique and specific culture of the Celestial Empire can only be Chinese, and the artificial planting of it to other peoples will not only bring success, but, on the contrary, will cause its rejection. All this undermines China's claims to world cultural domination. In addition, at present, China is experiencing Western pressure in all its aspects and directions, covering all spheres of activity – society, politics, economics and the spiritual life of the Chinese people. After Donald Trump came to power, this pressure has intensified, especially in the economic and military sphere.

According to Chinese military theorists, the US will aggressively oppose China, as it is becoming a superpower. The official authority of the Ministry of Defense of the People's Republic of China, the Jiefangjun Bao newspaper, even claims that "the West is nurturing plans for weakening China. Hostile Western forces strengthened their strategy aimed at subordinating China to Western influence and splitting it up (Shlyndov 2013).

There is another important factor limiting China's ability to successfully pursue soft power. This is a factor of the "new Chinese nationalism" within the framework of domestic and foreign

policy, which is perceived cautiously abroad.

“The new Chinese nationalism” is the result of the process of strengthening the military and economic power of China, greatly accelerated in recent years. According to analysts, there is a danger that the development of Chinese nationalism may get out of control and, in the end, it can turn into a destructive influence factor that can destabilize the situation in China and beyond.

The Chinese political leadership now faces a difficult dilemma: whether Chinese nationalism can serve the goal of preserving the country’s integrity, its development, and whether it will fall into the direction of radicalism and its expansionist aspirations related to it.

A vivid example of nationalism in Beijing’s foreign policy may be the conflict in the South China Sea, which provokes an aggressive reaction from neighboring countries (Japan, the Philippines, etc.). “The South China Sea”, as the Japanese press emphasizes, not without alarm, “is the main strategic water body that China regards as its internal lake”, thus enraging its neighbors ... (Tharoor 2013).

What kind of soft power of China can there be when a developing undemocratic superpower defends its positions on the international arena, defying the concept of Pax Americana? – the Time writes.

In addition, China’s leader Xi Jinping has repeatedly stated that he “will not make any compromises with respect to the territories claimed by the rest ...” (Tharoor 2013).

Such a position of the leadership of the PRC does not at all mean that China relies only on its military and economic power, soft power is still in the arsenal of the Celestial Empire’s external strategy. Although it is not so attractive to foreign countries, but with it, Beijing distracts the attention of other countries from its growing military and economic power, hoping through its culture, universal traditional values and exceptional foreign policy ideals to attract other, especially developing countries.

It is no coincidence that in expert circles, and not only in the West, the question is increasingly being discussed that in China there is actually no genuine soft power in its key understanding. What China uses as a soft power is actually a “discrepancy” in the definition and does not resemble the original classical concept of J. Nye and its elements. In the Chinese version, there was a fundamental deviation in the inclusion and exclusion of economic resources, as components of soft power. The concept of J. Nye is known to exclude military and economic resources, while the Chinese adaptation of this concept and its practical application is limited only with respect to military force.

The implementation of soft power in China includes, first of all, the economy, it is the most fundamental, lasting and influential component. Therefore, it can be argued that the Chinese soft power largely depends on its economic strength, and the implementation of the foreign policy course and political values that follow the Chinese culture and civilization are the least developed aspects of the Chinese soft power (Qazi 2016).

The wide-ranging debate around China’s soft power that has unfolded in recent years is multifaceted, and only one aspect has been considered here with the aim of revealing the complexities and problems that undermine the Chinese soft power on the ground of its non-military base. The interrelated nature of the soft and hard powers, the role of systemic forces and effective maneuvering of China in real conditions contributed to the strengthening of China’s influence and its even greater development in the near future. If the concept of soft power is fundamentally connected with the “non-coercive” nature of the influence of a state, then China undoubtedly has a soft power and successfully models the behavior of states without making them feel threatened. The advance through charm helps China get what it wants. In addition, culture, ideas and foreign policy values are not a goal and means. As long as the force or threat of the use of force (coercion) remain in the equation of soft power, the means used to achieve the ultimate goal are of less importance. If China can achieve its goal by using various means and without harming anyone, then weakly formulated demands or claims

against the authenticity of the PRC soft power remain groundless and inconspicuous.

But let us ask ourselves whether China's soft power is effective today. Has it achieved its goals? What does China look like in the global rating of soft power?

According to the research, China lags behind the West in the rating of soft power. Beijing annually spends on soft power resources from \$ 10 billion up to \$ 666 million that speaks about its limited influence in the West. In 2016, the rating of the soft power of the Celestial Empire, according to research conducted by the Facebook social media network, the ComRes research company and the Portland Communications, the Asian colossus took only 28th place in the world. Hungary, which has a population of less than 1% of the population of China, has achieved 26th rank (Dobbs 2016).

Today, China is facing other serious problems in the implementation of soft power. The problem that aggravates the human rights issue remains unresolved.

Dalai Lama meeting with world leaders, despite Beijing's protest, causes concern in the Chinese leadership, and the situation in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region remains unstable. The events that took place there – the severe suppression of separatism, terrorism and extremism in this territory by the Chinese government – undermine China's positive image in the world.

An increasing problem for the PRC is cybersecurity, which arose in the sphere of public relations. In February 2017, the National People's Congress adopted the Cybersecurity Act. This law includes the protection of personal information, which has become a matter of paramount importance, and also regulates some new requirements on this issue, such as the creation, operation, maintenance and use of networks, as well as the supervision and administration of cybersecurity procedures in the PRC territory (Rogozhin 2017).

Chinese military experts are very effective in preparing for large-scale operations defensive and offensive in nature in cyberspace. China notes the importance of gaining dominance in the electromagnetic environment, beginning with the early stages of the development of the military conflict, and consider this to be the main condition for achieving victory. In addition, in the structure of the armed forces of China, special cyber-formations are created, responsible for conducting operations in cyberspace, led by a department of one of the directorates of the PLA General Staff (Shlyndov 2013).

There is also the problem of the behavior of Chinese tourists abroad. After a sensational incident with a Chinese teenager who caused damage to the ancient Egyptian temple, it is no coincidence that the CPC Central Committee issued an official guide to etiquette and behavior for Chinese tourists abroad.

Another set of problems is associated with the increasing difficulty in applying soft power in order to satisfy the interests of the population living in China and abroad. As the pace of economic development slows down, the government increasingly resorts to nationalist propaganda at home, which undermines efforts to use soft power in the international arena.

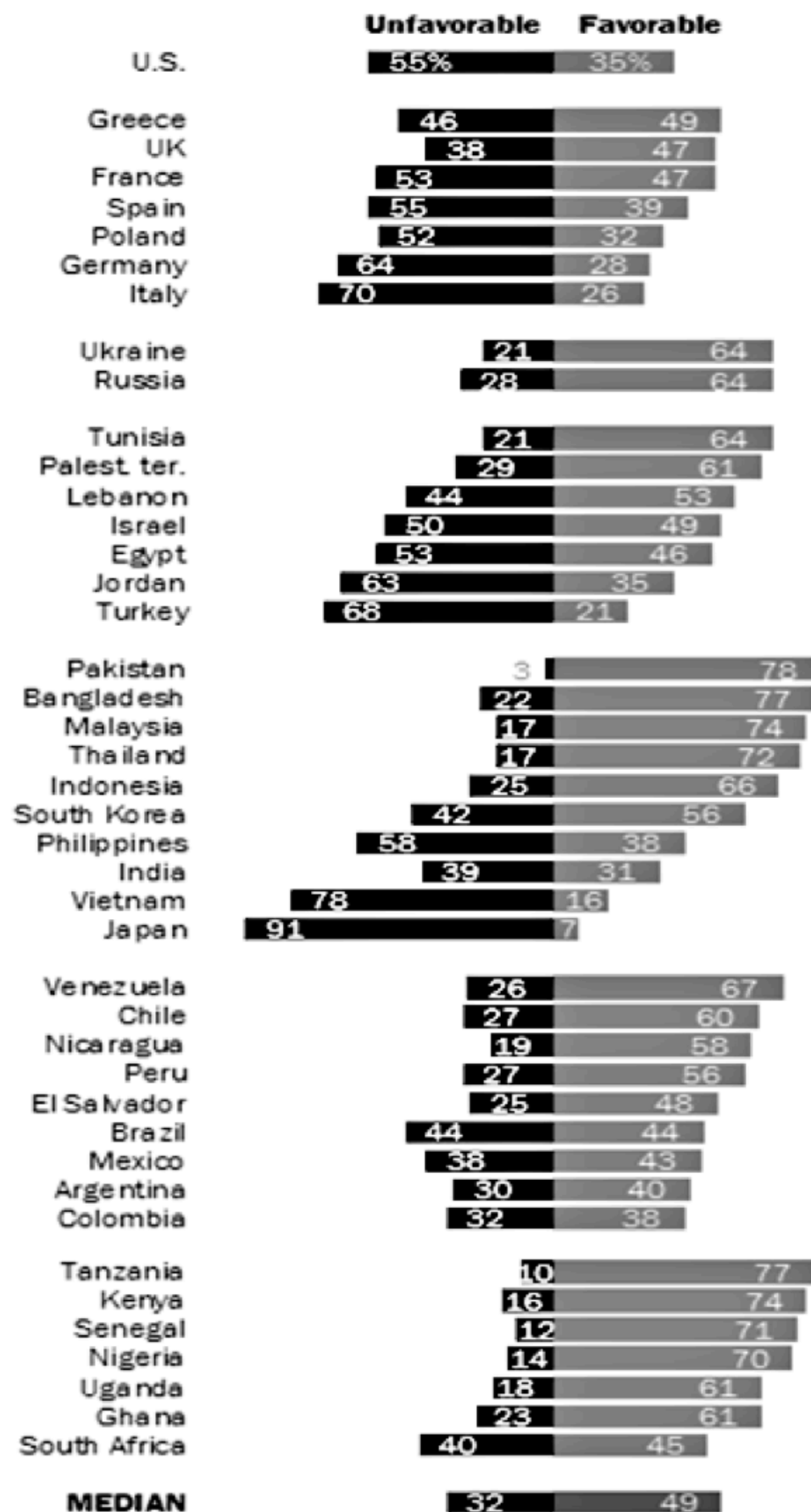
The global survey in 2014, conducted by GlobeScan for the BBC World Service, showed alarming results for China. According to a survey of 24,542 respondents in 24 countries around the world, China's overall image has become more negative than positive. GlobeScan research also showed that between 2005 and 2014, when China was particularly active in implementing a soft advance strategy, China's positive estimates dropped from 48% to 35%, and negative estimates rose from 32% to almost 50% (Dobbs 2016).

In Figure 3, orange indicates the percentages of respondents who spoke negatively about China, and green – their positive perception of the PRC in 2014. The most negative perception is shown by the Japanese, the survey showed 91%, the second place is occupied by Vietnamese – 78%, the third place is occupied by Italians – 70% respectively. The most favored country to China is Pakistan, where the PRC is positively received by 78% of the respondents. Bangladesh is on the second place and Malaysia takes the third position.

**Figure 3.** Favorable attitudes towards China

# Ratings for China Generally Favorable

*Views of China*



Source: Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey. Q15b.

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Source: Pew Research Center, Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance, 2014

China's efforts to use soft power are especially unattractive in Western countries. According to a Pew Global Attitudes survey in 2015, Europeans and North Americans are among the most skeptical nations against China. Of the eight Western countries, six showed an unfavorable



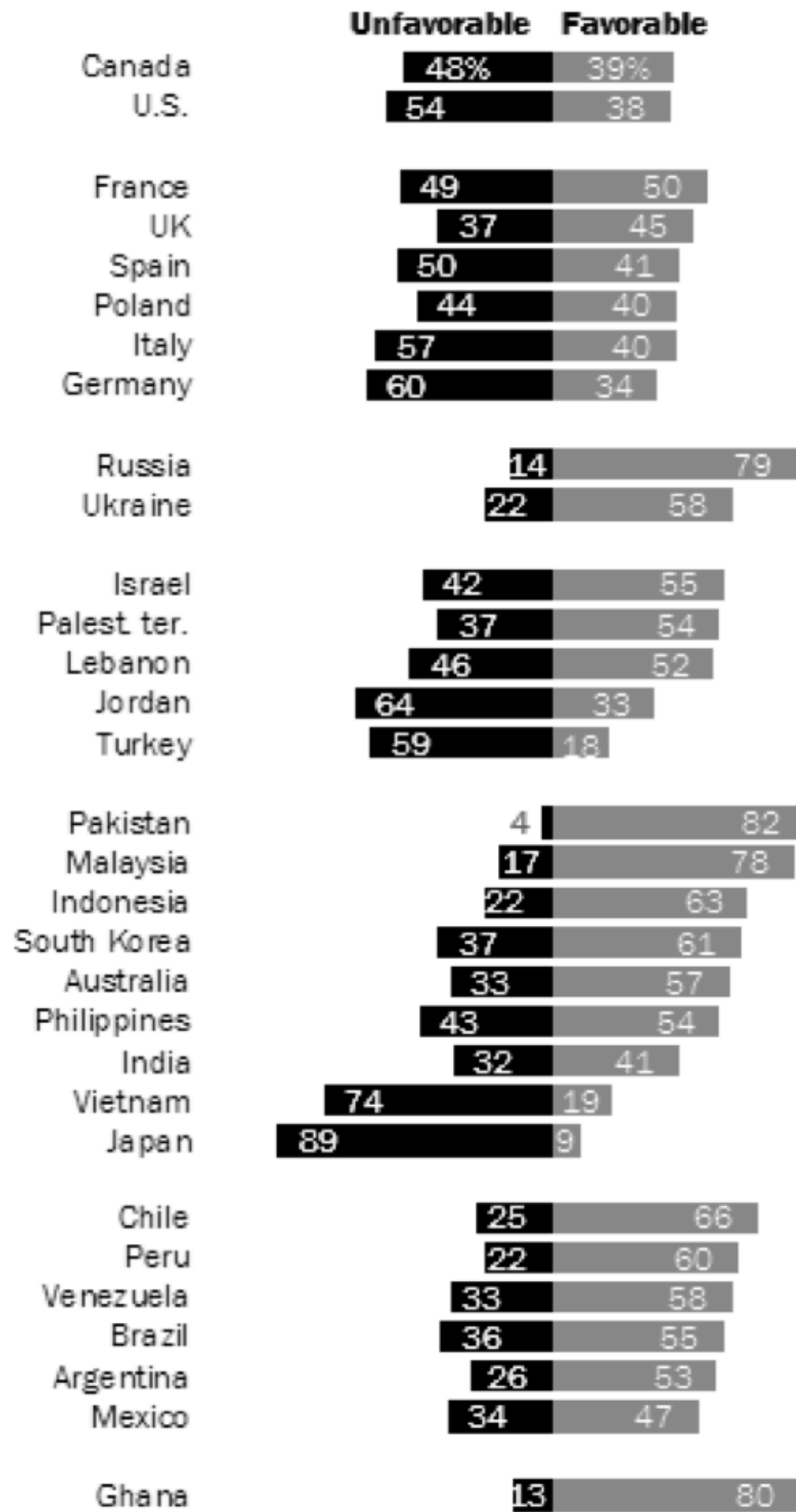
attitude toward the Middle Kingdom, only respondents in France and the UK were more or less favorable toward China (Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance, 2014).

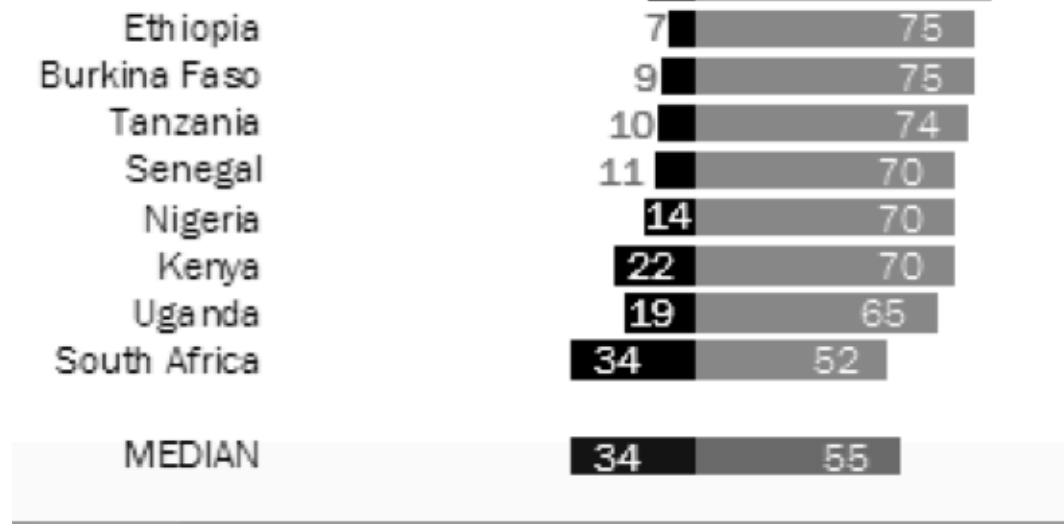
The perception of China has become more favorable across the 35 countries surveyed in 2015-2016 ys. According to Pew (International opinion increasingly favorable to China: Survey, 2015), there was 54 %, however, negative views fell from 38 % to 34 %. The figure illustrates that Japan (89 %) and Vietnam (78 %) sustainably show steadily negative and unfavourable view.

**Figure 4.** Global ratings for China.

## Global Ratings for China

### *Views of China*

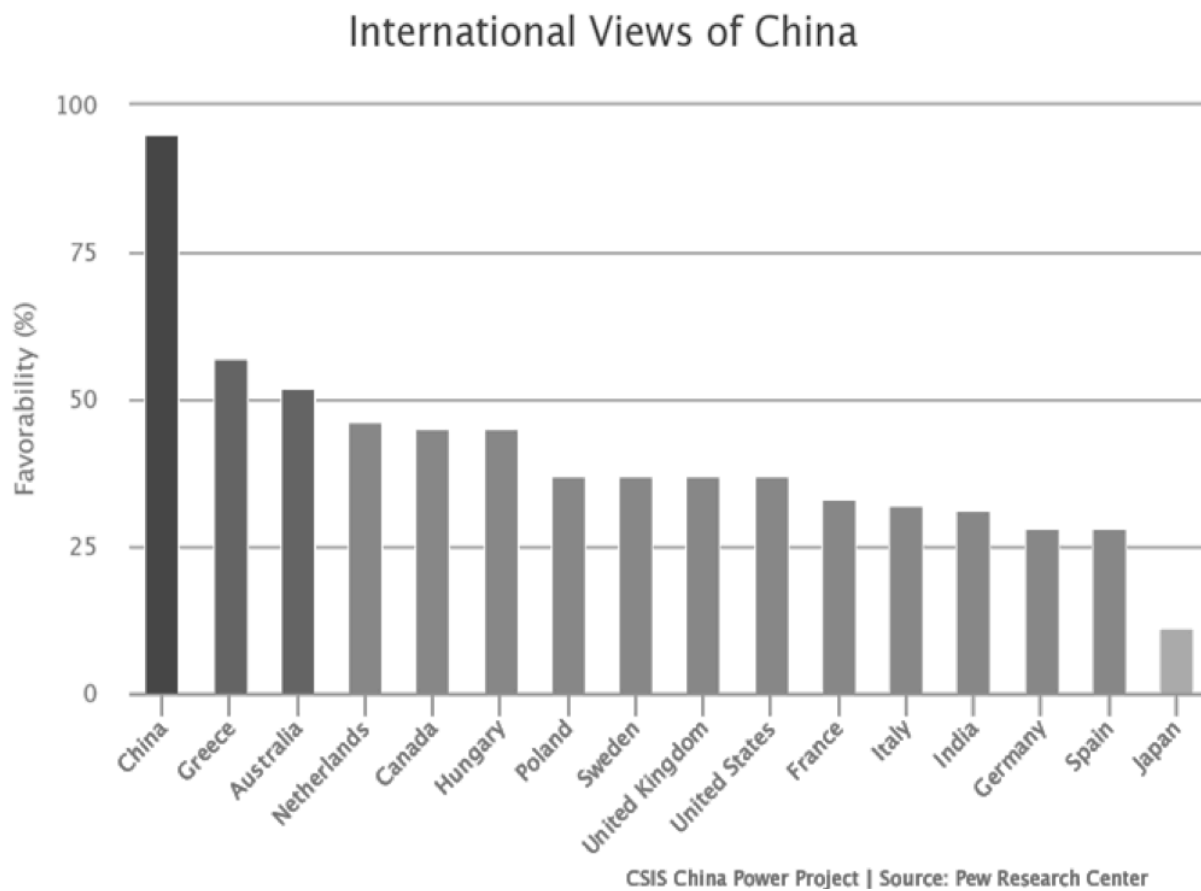




Source: International Opinion Increasingly Favorable To China: Survey, 2015

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**Figure 5.** International views of China in 2016.



Source: Center for Strategic & International Studies, How are global views on China trending, 2016

The figure shows that in 2016 Australia and Greece reveal positive and favourable view. European countries demonstrate approximately 28%—37% of non-positive perception of China (How are global views on China trending, 2016).

However, in the UK recently, the positive image of China is declining. The PRC does much to restore a positive image in England. The Chinese government hopes that Britain will become the first Western power that is ready to invest Chinese investments in critical infrastructure facilities, for example, nuclear power. However, in July 2016, the newly appointed British Prime Minister Theresa May postponed the signing of a large-scale nuclear project, as there was a potential security threat created by China. Although later the project was finally approved, there are still a number of serious technological and financial problems.

Interest in the Chinese soft power is also declining in developing countries, although in Latin America there is room for its maneuvers. The population of six countries in this region, as the Pew Global Attitudes survey (Pew Research Center) showed in 2015, expressed a favorable

attitude towards China. This allowed Beijing to sign contracts for the supply of weapons, access to natural resources, construction of large infrastructure facilities such as the navigable canal through Nicaragua, which will compete with Panama Canal. In 2015, the report to the US Department of Defense noted that the soft power of the PRC is being strengthened through programs for training the Chinese army for officers "in virtually all countries of Latin America and the Caribbean" (Dobbs 2016).

At the same time, experts note that economic growth in Latin America, caused by a reduction in China's demand for primary commodities, is coming to an end, and the issue of China's debt obligations to Latin American countries may spoil their relations with the Asian emerging superpower. In addition, the PRC and Latin American countries are deepening military partnership and cooperation in the space domain, increasing sales of aircraft and weapons (from \$ 500 to 10 million) (Piccone 2016).

The continent, where China's soft power is being realized more or less successfully is Africa. Studies of Western and Japanese scientists demonstrate that local ideas about China in many African countries are mostly neutral and positive, and not negative (Nassanga & Makara 2016). Nine African countries, according to a survey of Pew Global Attitudes, showed a favorable attitude toward the PRC. The population of six countries positively estimated the image of China – above 70%, which is more than in any other region. This is the most pro-Chinese part of the world, where 46 Confucius Institutes are established and several more are planned to be opened. In South Africa, Uganda and Zimbabwe the Chinese language is embedded in their national school curriculum, and Kenyan universities continue to research China academic programs.

The most likely scenario for continuing the implementation of the soft power of China in Africa can be considered the promotion of its political values. However, many African leaders would like the financial, technical, personnel and cultural assistance from Beijing not to be accompanied by political conditions. One of the major problems for Beijing in Africa is a way to minimize the impact of its large-scale infrastructure and resource projects on local communities. Solidifying in Africa, the Chinese government is also concerned about the negative consequences of the growing influence of the Celestial Empire and the possible loss of reputation in the countries of the Black Continent.

A review of the literature on general perception of China by the West revealed a predominantly negative image depicting China as a new neocolonial capitalist system in Africa, which characterizes China's relations with Africa as "exploitative" (Nassanga & Makara 2016). Most respondents believe that Africa has benefited from cooperation with China, but despite the perception of China as a benevolent nation, a high percentage of those who were surveyed underlined China's lack of transparency in procurement processes, marginalization of local companies and poor food quality (Nassanga & Makara 2016).

There remains some need to implement China's soft power in East Asia. However, it is in this region among the neighbors that China, in spite of the efforts made, can lose. The escalation of the conflict with the Philippines and Vietnam limits two vectors of China's policy when the PRC simultaneously tries to apply soft power and take part in aggressive actions in the South China Sea. The US attempts to benefit of this situation; it is augmenting its naval forces in the area, forcing China to respond by strengthening its presence in the South China Sea.

In China, there are restrictions on the use of the Internet created by the Chinese government to further promote soft power. There remain structural and cultural problems that pose a difficulty for the use of soft power via the Internet. China has planned a strategy of increasing soft power for several decades, but the lack of effective media products for future generations undermines all the government's efforts.

For "cultural advance", China is trying to use various media channels and mechanisms for their distribution, including Western ones. For this purpose, Western media consultants are widely involved; they are paid high fees.

Despite these efforts, Chinese Internet companies inside China do not yet have a chance of a global impact on Facebook, Google or even Twitter. First, the language barrier is a real problem; the Confucius institutes have trained and taught the Chinese language millions of people on all continents, but this is a very costly campaign that will take decades. Outside of China, many more people are able to read and speak English than Chinese.

Secondly, the limitation of soft power is presented by a civil society, which is censored in China. As the Economist notes, the Communist Party of China has not brought the advantages of cooperation between individuals, the private sector and civil society to the idea of soft power. Instead, there is an opinion that the government is the main source of soft power, promoting ancient cultural values that can be global in nature, often implemented through propaganda tools.

Within the modern Chinese information space, there is an abundance of information. However, there is not enough attention, which depends on the public trust in the state, and government propaganda is not always trustworthy. Xinhua News Agency and China Central Television act as competitors to the CNN and BBC news channels.

The United States, on the contrary, realizes most of its soft power not from government orders and actions, but from civil society – from universities and foundations to Hollywood and pop culture. China does not yet have a global culture industry like in Hollywood or universities that can compete with American ones. Even more importantly, China lacks some NGOs that exist in the US and implement most of the soft power in the United States.

In addition to forming a reputation and promoting the country's image abroad, non-governmental sources of soft power can sometimes compensate for the government's unpopular policy – like the US invasion of Iraq.

The attraction of the soft power of the PRC during the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 was ruined by the repression of human rights activists' protests. And the benefits of the Expo in Shanghai in 2009 was quickly translated into imprisonment of Liu Xiaobo, the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. Foreign marketing experts called this "attack on your own mission" (Nye 2015).

Analysts say that today China's economy is stronger than ever and its traditional culture is widely admired. But if the country wants to realize its huge potential of soft power, it will have to adjust its policies at home and abroad (Nye 2015), limiting its territorial claims and taking criticism in order to fully (Nye 2015) reveal the potential of its civil society. As long as China exacerbates the flame of nationalism and maintains strict party and state control, its soft power will always remain limited. China, with its dictatorship of the Communist Party, has no large scale development, many analysts believe. In addition, China, having become one of the leaders in goods production, seriously lags behind even the industrial countries in the production of knowledge and technology. Meanwhile China is engaged in copying existing technologies and creates very few of its own. And according to the citation index, the PRC cannot yet compete with the US and with Western Europe.

And what about China's moral leadership in the world? And here everything is not all right. The West, especially the United States, lost their moral leadership, and the PRC has not yet reached it. An interesting comment was made by the independent analyst, deputy director of the Institute of Asia and Africa, Professor Karneyev: "Sometimes China is perceived from the outside as a powerful colossus, but a glance from within shows that the political system and the value system are very fragile ... China is difficult to adapt with its value system to an open world, to globalization..." (Economic forum in Davos, 2017).

China's soft strategy is also hampered by the centralized nature of the state. The PRC government plays a major role in the accumulation and promotion of soft power, but its actions are limited without the support of a network of non-governmental organizations, private companies and influential citizens. In the future, without their active participation in the implementation of soft power, the Chinese development model is unlikely to become particularly

attractive for the whole world. It should be noted that the Belt and the Road initiative is still an obscure and indistinctly written and mapped instrument of the soft power of the PRC, focused not on questions of a worldview so painful for perception, but on generally accepted humanistic principles. If China gives the role of the target ideological set-up to soft power, it will complicate its partnership in many vectors (Safronov 2016).

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## 5. Discussion

The study proved that the cultural advance of the Celestial Empire, as the main and most painless direction of the soft power, so widely advertised by Beijing at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries, is losing its relevance. The global image of China is formed by a complex, contradictory and different criteria. The international image and soft power as part of the “comprehensive power” strategy of the Chinese state have declined in recent years even in favorable territories such as Africa and Latin America. Even here, there is concern about the presence of China, especially in such fields and areas as business, energy and mining.

This is a natural reaction to the emergence of China as a global power, so it was and is with the US. This cannot but disturb the political leadership of China, make it search for new tools and forms of influence on the world, partially rejecting those directions of the external strategy that effect the formation of the image of the PRC abroad, including investing in problems of external propaganda and cultural exchange.

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## 6. Conclusion

Thus, on the one hand, China continues efforts to implement the soft power strategy of the PRC, its propaganda is aimed at increasing the attractiveness of China abroad, but on the other hand, there is a number of serious problems and contradictions in the implementation of this concept. At the same time, China’s military and economic power is being strengthened in the implementation of the global Belt and Road initiative, where soft power is pushed to the background. Consequently, the cultural advance of the Celestial Empire, as the main and most painless direction of the soft power, so widely advertised by Beijing at the turn of the 20th – 21st centuries, is losing its relevance. The extinction of interest in the soft power of China occurs at all levels and directions. The current agenda dictates Beijing the need for a global power policy, which means that the time for cultural attraction, no matter how good it is, has not yet come.

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