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## SOFT POWER WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS THE ONGOING DEBATE

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### Summary Points

- International observers have raised concerns about the expansion of China's soft-power influence around the world and its implications for the United States. However, Chinese thinking about soft power and its role in Chinese foreign policy have been largely neglected in the formulation of these assessments.
- Soft power is currently a hot topic in China. The mainstream intellectual view is that culture is the core resource of a state's power. This view has been embraced by China's leadership, resulting in expanded funding for the development of China's cultural soft-power resources at home and its expansion abroad.
- Despite intense interest at the highest circles, China has yet to develop a comprehensive, coherent national soft-power strategy, although there are disparate policies toward this end. China's soft-power policy remains largely ad hoc and primarily reactive, aiming to counter the China-threat theory and improve China's image abroad.
- As China expands its national power and assumes a bigger role on the international stage, it is possible that Beijing will promote Chinese socialist values as an alternative to Western values and seek to assertively promote the China development model. At present, however, China's top leaders are seeking to avoid competition and confrontation with the West, and especially with the United States.

China's emerging power and its future impact on international stability are among the most intensely debated topics in international relations. Much attention has been paid to analyzing China's "hard power," which refers to the ability to use military and economic means to coerce or induce another nation to carry out a policy or course of action. In recent years, China's "soft power"—the ability to get what a country wants through attraction rather than coercion or payments<sup>1</sup>—has also become the focus of considerable research. Concerns have been raised regarding the expansion of China's soft-power influence around the world and its implications for the United

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1. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

States.<sup>2</sup> The view that China’s “charm offensive” is part of a grand strategy aimed at challenging the world’s remaining superpower has resonated with many.<sup>3</sup>

Those who espouse this view attempted to examine Chinese influence in various parts of the world, but they neglected to investigate Chinese thinking about soft power and its role in Chinese foreign policy. In recent months, some scholars have begun to fill this gap in the literature by examining China’s internal discourse on soft power.<sup>4</sup> This paper seeks to contribute to this intellectual effort by offering insight into the evolution of the debate on soft power in China, particularly why the Chinese leadership has embraced the mainstream intellectual view that culture is the “core” resource of a state’s soft power. We also examine how Chinese scholars have moved beyond Joseph Nye’s original theoretical framework to develop what can be termed “soft power with Chinese characteristics,” notably considering the domestic and foreign policy aspects of soft-power development as an organic whole. The paper concludes that, despite intense intellectual debate and leadership interest, China has yet to develop a comprehensive, coherent, national soft-power strategy although there are disparate policies toward this end.

China’s soft-power policy emphasizes culture and is largely ad hoc and primarily reactive, aiming to combat the perception internationally that China poses a threat. As China expands its national power and assumes a bigger role on the international stage, it is possible that Beijing will promote Chinese socialist values as an alternative to Western values and seek to promote the China development model assertively. Today, however, these policies are advocated by only a minority of Chinese scholars and have not been embraced by the Chinese leadership, which remains largely cautious and risk averse.

## Two Waves of Intellectual Debate

In the 1990s, following publication of Harvard professor Joseph Nye’s book, *Bound to Lead*, the discussion of soft power remained largely theoretical and confined to academic circles in China. Scholars focused on the question of what soft power was and how it should be defined in the Chinese context. They disagreed on the best translation of the foreign term “soft power,”<sup>5</sup> but Nye’s basic hypothesis regarding a state’s capacity to exercise both hard and soft power found a receptive audience in China.

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2. Joseph S. Nye, “The Rise of China’s Soft Power,” *Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 2005; Jean A. Garison “China’s Prudent Cultivation of ‘Soft Power’ and Implications for U.S. Policy in East Asia,” *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 32, no. 1 (2005): pp. 25–30.

3. See, for example, Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China’s Soft Power Is Transforming the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

4. See Young Nam Cho and Jong Ho Jeong, “China’s Soft Power: Discussions, Resources, and Prospects,” *Asian Survey* 48, no. 3 (May–June 2008); Joel Wuthnow, “The Concept of Soft Power in China’s Strategic Discourse,” *Issues & Studies* 44, no. 2 (June 2008); Hongying Wang and Yeh-Chung Lu, “The Conception of Soft Power and Its Policy Implications: A Comparative Study of China and Taiwan,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 17, no. 56 (August 2008); and Li Mingjiang, “Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity and Prospects,” Working paper no. 165 (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies [RSIS], Nanyang Technological University, September 2008).

5. Three different Chinese phrases are used for soft power—*ruan shili*, *ruan quanli*, and *ruan liliang*. In Hu Jintao’s political report delivered to the 17th Party Congress, he used the term *ruan shili*. Nevertheless, scholars and even officials continue to debate the appropriateness of the term.

The Chinese scholar credited with publishing China's first article on soft power is Wang Huning, who was handpicked by former president Jiang Zemin to serve as deputy director of the Policy Research Office of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) and under Hu Jintao was promoted to head the office and also appointed to the powerful Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee. Writing in the journal of Fudan University where he was a professor, Wang evaluated Nye's theory regarding the resources of soft power: culture, political values and ideas, and foreign policies. It is noteworthy—given the central role subsequently accorded to culture in the exercise of China's soft power—that back in 1993 Wang focused on culture as the main source of a state's soft power: “if a country has an admirable culture and ideological system, other countries will tend to follow it. . . . It does not have to use its hard power which is expensive and less efficient.”<sup>6</sup>

Discussions about soft power really took off in China in the mid-2000s. As the issue moved beyond academic explorations of Nye's theory and Chinese theorists expanded upon Nye's original conceptual framework to formulate “soft power with Chinese characteristics,” it captured the attention of China's leadership as well as the general public.<sup>7</sup> Soft power is currently a hot topic in China—a search of both academic databases and popular Web sites yields a plethora of articles, leadership speeches, polls, and blog entries on the subject. In the lively debates that have swirled around the formulation of the domestic and foreign policies necessary to build China's “comprehensive national power [*zonghe guoli*]—the combined weight of economic, diplomatic, and military power necessary to guarantee China what it terms “appropriate influence on the world stage”—soft power has featured prominently. From the reevaluation of Chinese traditional culture and search for a “socialist core value system,” to following the “scientific development concept” and establishing a harmonious society; and from the debate over “keeping a low profile” versus “getting something accomplished” [*taoguang yanghui* vs. *yousuo zuowei*], to combating the “China threat” theory and establishing a harmonious world, soft power has been a common thread.<sup>8</sup> As one think-tank expert explains: “There is consensus now, in the second wave of debate, that soft power is critical for China.”<sup>9</sup>

Given the mixed reception for Nye's theory in the United States, the question arises as to why it achieved such popularity in China. One possible explanation is that the theory resonates with traditional Chinese concepts; for example, Confucianism extols a king who relies on moral force not physical force, believing that the kingly way [*wang dao*] will triumph over the hegemon's way [*ba dao*].<sup>10</sup> Another explanation is propitious timing. Nye's theory was introduced into China as the country was undertaking an in-depth investigation into the rise and fall of great nations, seeking not only to escape the fate of the Soviet Union but to transform China into a great power.

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6. Wang Huning, “Culture as National Soft Power: Soft Power,” *Journal of Fudan University* (March 1993).

7. A popular CCTV series, *DaGuo Jueqi* [The rise of great nations], reportedly commissioned by China's leadership, ran in 2006; the focus on the importance of soft power in the rise of great nations sparked a major debate both inside and outside of academia.

8. *Taoguang yanghui* is sometimes translated as hiding one's capabilities and biding one's time, and it is portrayed as a strategy that seeks to secretly build up Chinese power. See, for example, Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2008* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2008), [http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/China\\_Military\\_Report\\_08.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/China_Military_Report_08.pdf).

9. Expert affiliated with a Chinese think tank, interview with authors, September 2008.

10. Expert affiliated with a Chinese think tank, interview with authors, October 2008; see also Shaohua Hu, “Confucianism and Contemporary Chinese Politics,” *Politics & Policy* 35, no. 1 (2007).

Scholars like Shen Jiru from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), concluded that the Soviet Union, which was equal to the United States for a time, “lost the whole game due to a flaw in its soft power.”<sup>11</sup> Chinese intellectuals and the party leadership were persuaded that in order to achieve—or indeed recover—great-power status, China needed to build both hard and soft power.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the value of hard power, particularly military strength, as an effective means of securing national interests was judged to be on the decline, while the value of soft power was on the rise.<sup>13</sup>

There is general agreement that while China has made strides in enhancing its hard power, it is lagging dramatically in soft power. The soft-power discussion among Chinese experts asks whether China’s soft power should remain reactive—aimed largely at improving the country’s image—or become proactive. In particular, a debate is unfolding about whether the so-called China model of development could or should be exported. There also continues to be disagreement on what the main source of China’s soft power is; how to build it; how to promote it; and to what ends to use it.

## The China Soft-Power Debate: Two Main Schools of Thought

Against the wider background of the debates on China’s foreign and domestic policies, two main schools of thought have emerged around which the discourse on China’s soft power is centered. The mainstream view, held by China’s leading sociologists and philosophers, is that “the core of soft power is culture,”<sup>14</sup> echoing the opinion first expressed by Wang Huning in the 1990s. The minority view, held by some international relations experts, does not deny the importance of culture but focuses instead on how soft-power resources are used, concluding that political power is the core of soft power. The culture school has had the greatest impact on policymaking: the central role of culture in the exercise of soft power has been embraced by China’s leadership and will be discussed in more detail below.

For the leading proponent of the culture school, Yu Xintian, soft power includes thoughts, ideas, and principles as well as institutions and policies, all of which operate within the context of, and cannot be separated from, a nation’s culture. Yu, director emeritus of the Shanghai Institute of International Studies (SIIS), believes “the more fashionable the ideology, the more people will accept it and the greater the possibility to build the country’s soft power.”<sup>15</sup> China’s ancient history and traditional culture are viewed by most scholars as a valuable source of soft power for attracting not only East Asian neighbors with whom China shares a Confucian heritage but also the wider international community.<sup>16</sup> One leading analyst believes that China’s modern-day emphasis

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11. Shen Jiru, “Do Not Ignore the Importance of Soft Power,” *Liaowang*, no. 41 (October 1999).

12. A number of Chinese scholars point out that prior to the nineteenth century China was a world superpower. In 1820, China accounted for 30 percent of world GDP. They “believe China’s decline to be a historical mistake which they should correct.” See Yan Xuetong, “The Rise of China in Chinese Eyes,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, no. 26 (2001).

13. Shi Yinhong, “China’s Soft Power and Peaceful Rise,” *Zhongguo Pinglun*, no. 118 (October 2007).

14. Leading Chinese intellectual, interview with authors, October 2008.

15. Yu Xintian, “The Role of Soft Power in China’s Foreign Strategy,” *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu*, March 13, 2008.

16. Cheng Yugang, “Build China’s Soft Power within the Context of Globalization,” *Guoji Guangcha*, February 2007.

on development, stability, and harmony has universal appeal and could supplement, though not replace, U.S. values.<sup>17</sup> Other scholars go even further and hold that traditional Chinese values such as giving priority to human beings [*yi ren wei ben*], harmony between humankind and nature [*tian ren he yi*], and harmony but difference [*he er butong*]<sup>18</sup>—repackaged by the CPC as the concepts of harmonious society and harmonious world<sup>18</sup>—could provide an alternative to Western values. Global problems such as poverty, environmental degradation, and regional conflict might be better addressed by the adoption of a Chinese rather than Western approach, some Chinese maintain.<sup>19</sup>

The view that culture is the core soft-power resource has been bolstered by China's observation of U.S. soft power. The Chinese note that even as the George W. Bush administration's pursuit of a unilateral foreign policy, attempt to export democratic ideals, and the recent financial crisis have undermined America's other soft-power resources, U.S. cultural soft power nevertheless remains strong. Even critics of U.S. foreign policy or political values watch U.S. movies, drink Coke, and eat at McDonald's. People's University professor Fang Changping points out: "The key reason for the decline of American soft power is due to 'what America does,' while 'what America is' still holds powerful attraction—one of the reasons that the United States still wields an edge in the domain of soft power."<sup>20</sup>

With this in mind, some scholars, including Hu Jian, deputy director of the Center for Russian Studies at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), warn of the deficit in China's "cultural trade" with the West;<sup>21</sup> and others emphasize the importance of using cultural media to promote China's image and raise its profile on the international stage.<sup>22</sup> In so doing, China can resist the image and values imposed on it by the West and assert its own discourse rights.<sup>23</sup> Anger over Western media coverage of protests in Tibet and the Olympic torch relay in the spring of 2008 revived longstanding suspicions that U.S. "cultural hegemony" was being used to weaken and destabilize China and led to calls for Beijing to combat this challenge.<sup>24</sup> The view of Shanghai Jiaotong University professor Li Haijuan that "the competition of cultural power is the core of soft power contention" is shared by many Chinese.<sup>25</sup>

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17. Leading Chinese scholar, interview with authors, October 2008.

18. "Harmonious society" is the end goal of the "scientific development concept," a policy program that seeks to balance China's pursuit of economic growth with paying equal attention to solving social welfare issues and putting the "people first." See "CPC Central Committee Decision on Enhancing Ability to Govern," Xinhua, September 26, 2004. The "harmonious world" concept, unveiled by Hu Jintao at the Asia-Africa summit in April 2005, calls for the establishment of a new international political and economic order based on multilateralism, mutually beneficial cooperation, and the spirit of inclusiveness. See "Hu Calls for Harmonious World at Summit," *China Daily*, September 16, 2005.

19. Chinese scholars from leading think tanks and universities, interviews with authors, October 2008; see also Li Mingjiang, "Soft Power in Chinese Discourse," p. 6.

20. Fang Changping, "Comparison of Chinese and U.S. Soft Power and Its Implications for China," *Shijie Jingji Yu Zhengzhi*, July 1, 2007.

21. Hu Jian, "China's Responsibilities and the Road of Peaceful Development," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, July 20, 2007.

22. Li Geqin, "The Growth of a Great Power and China's Image Building," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, no. 10 (2008).

23. Expert affiliated with a Chinese think tank, interview with authors, September 2008.

24. Qiao Liang, "The New Soft Power Competition," *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, no. 5 (2008).

25. Li Haijuan, "Soft Power Competition and Cultural Strategy," *Mao Zedong Deng Xiaoping Lilun Yangjiu*, Issue 12 (2004): pp. 49–54, quoted in Li, "Soft Power in Chinese Discourse," p. 17.

## Chinese Leadership Embraces Culture as Core of Soft Power

The Chinese leadership has needed little convincing about the core value of culture in soft power. Culture is viewed as a fulcrum of international competition by the CPC: “To speak plainly some powerful foreign nations wish to use culture as a weapon against other nations, and for this reason we must work hard to raise our country’s ‘soft power.’”<sup>26</sup> The CPC has frequently charged the West with pursuing a policy of “peaceful evolution”—a surreptitious attempt to undermine the party’s legitimacy through the infiltration of Western culture and political values. Since reform and opening up began in 1978, campaigns against “bourgeois liberalization” and “spiritual pollution” have been launched. President Hu Jintao declared in a 2006 speech: “The one who takes commanding point on the battlefield of cultural development will gain the upper hand in fierce international competition.”<sup>27</sup> The discourse on soft power reinforced the notion that the party had to get culture right.

In the past two decades a vibrant debate has accompanied the search for a unifying ideology—or socialist core value system—to replace the now defunct Maoism-Marxism and to offer an alternative to Western values. Although no consensus has yet been reached, interim steps have included the rehabilitation of once vilified traditional schools of thought—Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism.<sup>28</sup> There also has been recognition that, in addition to building China’s economic or “material civilization” (hard power), the nation needs to build a “spiritual civilization” (soft power). The then president Jiang Zemin announced the decision on building socialist “spiritual civilization” at the 15th CPC Congress in 1998. An “Outline on National Morality,” combining Chinese traditional values and socialist core values, was issued in 2001.<sup>29</sup>

At the 16th CPC Congress in 2002, China’s cultural system reform (CSR) was launched. Although not explicitly employing the term soft power, propaganda chief Liu Yunshan noted that “the strategic position of the building of culture in the documents of the Party’s guiding principles” underscored the “extreme importance of building culture.”<sup>30</sup> Liu added that “the power of culture” is “becoming an important component in integrating national power and international competitiveness.” With an eye on soft power, CSR was aimed at making “socialist culture with Chinese characteristics a powerful attraction and inspiration not only to the Chinese people, but to the people throughout the world.”<sup>31</sup>

In an internal speech to the party’s powerful Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group [*zhongyang waishi gongzuo lingdao xiaozu*] in January 2006, President Hu Jintao said that “the enhancement of China’s international status and international influence must be reflected both in hard power including the economy, science and technology, and national defense power and in soft power

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26. “Soft Power: China Takes Measures to Bolster Its Global Cultural Prowess,” China Media Project Online, December 19, 2007, <http://cmp.hku.hk/2007/12/19/797>. Not surprisingly, the works of Samuel Huntington are very popular in China.

27. “Hu Jintao Speech to Literary and Art Circles,” *Renmin Ribao*, November 12, 2006.

28. For an in-depth discussion of this period, see Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics, and Ideology in Deng’s China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

29. The building of a socialist “spiritual civilization” is an ongoing process. President Hu Jintao’s theoretical contribution is the moral guidance of “the eight honors and eight disgraces” [*ba rong ba chi*]; See “Commentator on Socialist Concept of Honor, Disgrace,” *Renmin Ribao*, March 18, 2006.

30. Liu Yunshan, “Hold High the Banner of Advanced Culture,” *Renmin Ribao*, December 11, 2002.

31. *Ibid.*

such as culture.”<sup>32</sup> The leadership’s official sanction of soft power and the core role of culture were clinched when the term was included in Hu Jintao’s work report to the 17th CPC Congress in October 2007.<sup>33</sup> Hu said: “Culture has increasingly become an important source of national cohesion and creativity and an important factor in the competition of overall national strength,” and he added that China must “enhance the country’s cultural soft power [*wenhua ruanshili*].”<sup>34</sup>

In sum, the Chinese leadership has recognized the importance of soft power in achieving comprehensive national power, and has accepted the mainstream academic view that the core of soft power is culture. For the CPC, it has reinforced the importance of building a socialist core value system that can strengthen “the cohesiveness of the Chinese nation.” It is based upon this “unifying guiding ideology” that China can expand its cultural soft power overseas.<sup>35</sup> According to one leading scholar, “officially and unofficially, the development of the nation’s soft power has been regarded as a pressing task and is near the top of China’s list of priorities.”<sup>36</sup>

On a practical level, this has meant increased government funding for the development of China’s cultural soft-power resources at home and its expansion abroad. In 2004, the State Council set up a leading small group to oversee the establishment of Confucius Institutes (CIs), which are tasked with disseminating China’s culture and language to the world. The first institute in the United States was set up at the University of Maryland in 2004; there are now more than 40 CIs across the United States, and there are 260 in 75 other countries worldwide. Funds were also made available for a series of high-profile cultural events and international exchanges, including the China Year in France in 2003, China Year in Russia in 2007, major exhibitions in the United States and United Kingdom, as well as the Beijing Olympics in 2008 and the Shanghai Expo in 2010.<sup>37</sup> It was reported that the central budget for cultural undertakings in 2006 had risen 23.9 percent compared with 2005, reaching 12.3 billion yuan. The budget for diplomatic spending on soft-power activities in 2007 was set to rise 37.3 percent to 23 billion yuan.<sup>38</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is also considering setting up an office to coordinate public diplomacy, emulating the U.S. State Department’s Office of Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs.<sup>39</sup>

The government has also backed the study of topics related to soft power and tasked China’s leading think tanks with conducting research.<sup>40</sup> Following a lecture given to China’s 25-member

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32. Ma Lisi, “Primary Thoughts on Soft Power Development in China,” *Literature of the Chinese Communist Party*, no. 5 (2007). The Leading Group reportedly includes Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping, Liu Yunshan, Liang Guanglie, Meng Jianzhu, Dai Bingguo, Liao Hui, Yang Jiechi, Qiao Zonghuai, Wang Jiarui, Wang Chen, Geng Huichang, Chen Deming, Li Haifang, and Ma Xiaotian. See Alice Miller, “The CCP Central Committee’s Leading Small Groups,” *China Leadership Monitor*, no. 26 (Winter 2008).

33. The inclusion of soft power, a foreign theory, in a CPC official document is highly unusual, according to a leading Chinese intellectual, in an interview with authors, October 2008.

34. “Full Text of Hu Jintao’s Report to the 17th Party Congress,” Xinhua, October 24, 2007.

35. “17th Party Congress Demands Boosting Cultural Creativity ‘Soft Power,’” Xinhua, December 28, 2007.

36. Pang Zhongying, “The Beijing Olympics and China’s Soft Power,” Brookings Institution, September 4, 2008, [http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0904\\_olympics\\_pang.aspx?p=1](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0904_olympics_pang.aspx?p=1).

37. A great deal was written about the Beijing Olympics in the promotion of China’s soft power. For example, see Pang, “The Beijing Olympics and China’s Soft Power.”

38. “Soft Power, A New Focus at China’s Two Sessions,” Xinhua, March 14, 2007.

39. Senior expert affiliated with a Chinese think tank, interview with the authors, November 2008.

40. Think tank and university experts, interviews with authors, July–October 2008. Following publication in March 2004 of the “CPCCC Opinion on Developing Social Sciences and Philosophy,” funds were made available through the National Social Sciences Fund for research into topics related to soft power. The

Politburo, CASS scholar Li Chongfu noted that, since taking office, “Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao have attached greater importance on the study of social sciences from a strategic vantage point, looking at it as an important component part of the country’s ‘soft power’” and “further sounding the bugle call for the reviving China’s soft power.”<sup>41</sup>

In 2006, the leadership issued a Five-Year Plan for Cultural Development. The plan devotes an entire chapter to the “go global” strategy for Chinese culture, encouraging the media and culture-related enterprises to “expand Chinese culture’s coverage and international impact.”<sup>42</sup> Noting that a country’s cultural soft power depends not only on its attractiveness but also “whether it possesses strong propaganda methods and strong propaganda capabilities,” China aims to “form public opinion powers commensurate with China’s international status.”<sup>43</sup> In January 2007, the prestigious Fudan University hosted a high-level meeting to discuss a public relations strategy to promote China’s soft power.<sup>44</sup> According to the *South China Morning Post*, the government has earmarked 45 billion yuan to make over its media. The 24-hour international television channel, CCTV 9, which already has English, Spanish, and French services, is planning new services in Russian and Arabic. The state-run news agency Xinhua is also planning to open more bureaus overseas.<sup>45</sup>

## Culture versus Politics

Although the culture school has apparently won the support of China’s leadership, not all scholars agree that it is the core of soft power. The minority view does not deny the importance of culture but focuses instead on how soft-power resources are used, and concludes that a state’s political power and power of manipulation, not its culture or attractiveness, are the essence of soft power.<sup>46</sup> The leading proponent of this school, Qinghua University professor Yan Xuetong, argues that “to reinforce the soft power of China, the critical issue is to strengthen political power. Starting with politics is not the same thing as starting with culture.”<sup>47</sup> For Yan and his colleague, Xu Jin, soft power consists of international attractiveness, international mobilization capability, and domestic mobilization capability.<sup>48</sup> Yan and Xu are so far the only scholars to attempt to quantify China’s soft power, concluding that it is currently one-third that of the United States.<sup>49</sup> To catch up, the

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China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, Central Party School, SIIS, and SASS are among the institutions that in the past carried out or currently are engaged in such studies.

41. “Central Leadership Attaches Importance to ‘Soft Power,’” *Wen Wei Po*, October 4, 2006.

42. “Apparent Text of the ‘Outline of the State Cultural Development Program for the 11th Five-Year Period,’” Xinhua, September 13, 2006.

43. “17th Party Congress Demands Boosting Cultural Creativity ‘Soft Power,’” Xinhua, December 28, 2007.

44. Meng Jian and Qian Haihong, “A Public Relations Vision for China’s Soft Power Construction,” *Journalism Quarterly* (February 2007).

45. “China Plans Global Media Expansion,” Agence France-Presse, January 14, 2009.

46. Leading Chinese intellectual, interview with authors, October 2008.

47. Yan Xuetong, “Political Application of Cultural Resources,” *Huanqiu Shibao*, August 2, 2007.

48. According to Yan and Jin, international attractiveness comes from two sources: the national development model and cultural attractiveness. International mobilization refers to the influence exerted by a country without the use of coercive force, mainly through its strategic relations. Domestic mobilization refers to the domestic political support of a country gained without the use of coercive force, mainly domestic support from elites and ordinary people for the government. See Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin, “A Soft Power Comparison between China and the United States,” *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi*, January 20, 2008.

49. *Ibid.*

scholars believe China must rebalance its domestic development and establish a harmonious society—social equality and justice—as the political basis for soft-power construction. Yan and Xu also proffer the controversial idea that China should “rethink its nonaligned policy” and make “increasing the number of strategic allies the main aim of soft power construction.”<sup>50</sup>

Among Chinese international relations and policy experts who emphasize the importance of politics over culture, there is growing interest in foreign policy and institutions in soft power. According to Su Changhe, a professor at the School of International and Diplomatic Affairs, Shanghai International Studies University, soft power is evident in a state’s ability in international institution building, agenda setting, mobilization of coalitions, and its ability to fulfill commitments.<sup>51</sup> Other scholars stress the importance of China’s participation in multilateral diplomacy, overseas assistance programs, and peacekeeping operations.<sup>52</sup> To develop soft power, Jiaotong University professor Guo Shuyong urges China to become fully integrated and more active in the international system, and he even proposes that China send troops under UN auspices in the event of what he terms a “just war.”<sup>53</sup> Having recognized that the country lacks many of the tools of soft power, China is attempting to catch up. The Ministry of Education and Communist Youth League, for example, have set up a Chinese version of the U.S. Peace Corps and they encourage university students to spend time volunteering overseas, especially in Africa.<sup>54</sup>

Returning to Nye’s original conceptual framework, some scholars believe China’s foreign policy is also a key source of soft power. China’s long-standing opposition to the use of force, its preservation of state sovereignty and territorial integrity, its noninterference in other countries’ internal affairs, and its opposition to economic sanctions as well as its latest concept of building a harmonious world resonate with many nations. Thus, China has achieved some success: according to a recent study of UN voting behavior, the balance of power has shifted from the United States and European Union to “China and Russia, which defend national sovereignty and non-intervention in sovereign countries. . . . Over the past decade support for Chinese and Russian stances on human rights issues has soared from less than 50% to 74% in the UN general assembly.”<sup>55</sup>

## Soft Power and the Debate on China’s Guiding Foreign Policy Theory

There continues to be a strong link between the discourse in China on soft power and the broader debate on China’s foreign policy. In recent years, Chinese scholars have increasingly questioned the wisdom of continuing to adhere to Deng Xiaoping’s dictum that China should keep a low profile in international affairs; many ask whether it is time for China to assume a more proactive posture commensurate with its rising status as an international power. This is known as the *taoguang yanghui* vs. *yousuo zuowei* debate.<sup>56</sup> At the same time that this debate has intensified,

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50. Ibid.

51. Su Changhe, “The International System and China’s Soft Power,” *Guoji GuanCha*, February 2007.

52. Chinese scholars from think tanks and universities, interviews with authors, China, October 2008.

53. Guo Shuyong, “New Internationalism and Soft Power Diplomacy of China,” *Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe*, December 2007; Guo Shuyong, “Just War and China’s Rise,” *Shishi Chubanshe*, July 2006.

54. Danna Harman, “Young Chinese Idealists Vie to Join Their ‘Peace Corp’ in Africa,” *Christian Science Monitor*, June 27, 2007.

55. “Hemorrhaging of Western Influence at UN Wrecks Attempts to Push Human Rights Agenda,” *The Guardian*, September 18, 2008.

56. In the fall of 1989, in the wake of the Tiananmen incident and the upheaval in Eastern Europe, Deng Xiaoping allegedly made a statement that advised caution in foreign policy. Many people claim that

concerns about China's rise, especially the expansion of its influence in regions such as Africa, Latin America, and Southeast Asia, have fueled the China-threat theory. The criticism of China in the press has undermined China's attempts to expand its soft power and has put the goal of building a positive image of China around the world at risk.<sup>57</sup>

To combat an increasingly negative image of China in the developing world, a white paper was issued in 2005 on "China's Path to Peaceful Development."<sup>58</sup> Then in August 2006 an unprecedented foreign affairs work conference was convened in Beijing that gathered together members of the Politburo, provincial governments, and foreign policy and military leaders as well as heads of China's major state-owned conglomerates. The guiding theme of the conference was that internal and external environments are inextricably linked. The key objective was to ensure that Beijing's external activities support, rather than undermine, China's domestic development priorities.<sup>59</sup> The decisions issued at the conclusion of the conference not only reflected this overall priority but also reaffirmed the guiding theory of Deng's *taoguang yanghui* in the conduct of China's foreign affairs and officially recognized the importance of culture in foreign policy and the promotion of soft power.<sup>60</sup> In his speech to the conference, Premier Wen Jiabao said: "We should expand cultural exchanges with other countries. Cultural exchanges are a bridge connecting the hearts and minds of people . . . an important way to project a country's image." Wen also called "to promote Chinese culture and its appeal overseas."<sup>61</sup>

In the ongoing discourse on soft power, some scholars view China's traditional foreign policy as an obstacle to soft-power promotion. The principle of noninterference, for example, has subjected China to criticism for not being more proactive in helping to solve problems in Sudan and Myanmar.<sup>62</sup> Other Chinese scholars argue that soft power has little to do with the source of power but is instead about whether the international community accepts a nation's policies and strategic choices as well as to what extent those choices accord with most nations' interests.<sup>63</sup> For others, hard power and soft power are complementary and not separable.<sup>64</sup> SASS deputy director Huang

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he used the phrase *taoguang yanghui* as part of a longer 24- or 28-character slogan. However, there is no evidence that Deng actually uttered the slogan; it may have been attributed to him by others. The gist appears to come from a September 1989 meeting of the Central Committee when Deng stated, "In short, my views about the international situation can be summed up in three sentences. First, we should observe the situation coolly. Second, we should hold our ground. Third, we should act calmly. Don't be impatient; it is no good to be impatient. We should be calm, calm and again calm, and quietly immerse ourselves in practical work to accomplish something—something for China." *Deng Xiaoping Wenxuan* [Selected works of Deng Xiaoping], vol. 3, p. 321, <http://web.peopledaily.com.cn/english/dengxp/vol3/text/d1020.html>.

57. The Pew Global Attitudes Survey project, among others, reported a sharp increase in concerns about China's rise after 2004; see <http://pewglobal.org>.

58. For a discussion of the peaceful rise-peaceful development debate, see Bonnie S. Glaser and Evan S. Medeiros, "The Changing Ecology of Foreign-Policy Making in China: The Ascension and Demise of the Theory of 'Peaceful Rise,'" *China Quarterly* 190 (2007): pp. 291-310.

59. See Bonnie S. Glaser, "Ensuring the 'Go Abroad' Policy Serves China's Domestic Priorities," *China Brief* (Jamestown Foundation) 7, no. 5 (March 8, 2007).

60. Experts in China's foreign policy, interviews with authors, January 2007, in China.

61. Wen Jiabao, "Our Historical Tasks at the Primary Stage of Socialism and Several Issues Concerning China's Foreign Policy," *Renmin Ribao*, March 7, 2007. According to several Chinese sources, this article was the speech that Wen Jiabao delivered at the August 2006 foreign affairs work conference.

62. Leading Chinese scholar, interview with authors, July 2008.

63. Zhu Feng, "China Should Give Priority to the Rise of Soft Power," *Huanqiu Shibao*, April 30, 2007.

64. Guo, "New Internationalism and Soft Power Diplomacy of China."

Renwei argues that “if hard power is a constant value, soft power should be a variable or multiplier, which could magnify comprehensive power or significantly weaken it.”<sup>65</sup>

## Other Features of the Debate: Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics

Although most Chinese scholars work within the parameters set by Nye’s original soft-power theory, others have expanded beyond his conceptual framework. CPC Central Party School professor Meng Honghua believes that, when analyzing China’s soft power, the theory needs to be enriched with Chinese practice.<sup>66</sup> What also differentiates China’s soft power debate is that—in contrast with Nye, who viewed soft power primarily as a means of improving the international standing of the United States—the Chinese approach to soft power is holistic: the domestic and foreign policy aspects of soft-power development are conceived as an organic whole. For example, the idea of “establishing a ‘harmonious society’ domestically and establishing a ‘harmonious world’ internationally” is seen as providing a “comprehensive framework for the ongoing development of China’s soft power.”<sup>67</sup> Most Chinese scholars agree that soft power must be developed not only internationally through the promotion of Chinese culture overseas, public diplomacy, and pursuit of peaceful development but also at home through making China’s culture, as well as economic and political values, attractive to both a Chinese and an international audience.<sup>68</sup>

During the past decade, the downsides of China’s emphasis on economic growth—income inequality, regional disparities, environmental degradation, corruption—and the social unrest it has engendered have become increasingly apparent and sparked a major debate on China’s development strategy.<sup>69</sup> A number of scholars argue that this focus on economic hard power has also been to the detriment of soft power. The implied risk to the overarching goal of building China’s comprehensive national power has bolstered calls from inside and outside the party for the leadership to undertake wider political and socioeconomic reform.<sup>70</sup> In the opinion of Shi Yinhong, for China to be an inspiration to the world, China first needs to be an inspiration to its own people. He questions what value China offers the world beyond economic growth when it “still has a long way to go to realize basic freedoms or rights.”<sup>71</sup>

Many scholars therefore welcomed the decision to rebalance China’s development strategy, which was officially adopted by the party at the 17th CPC Congress in October 2007. The so-called scientific development concept (SDC), the end goal of which is to establish a harmonious society, is a policy program that seeks to balance China’s pursuit of economic growth with paying equal

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65. Huang Renwei, “Soft Power and National Security,” *Xuexi Yuekan*, January 2003.

66. Meng Honghua, “An Evaluation of China’s Soft Power and Promotion Strategy,” in *China’s Soft Power Strategy*, ed. Meng Honghua (Zhejiang: Zhejiang Renmin Chubanshe, 2007).

67. Fang, “Comparison of Chinese and U.S. Soft Power and Its Implications for China.”

68. Scholars from leading think tanks and universities, interviews with the authors, July–October 2008; see also *Ibid.*

69. For a discussion of this debate, see Melissa Murphy, “Decoding Chinese Politics: Intellectual Debates and Why They Matter,” Report of the Freeman Chair in China Studies (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, January 2008), [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/080129\\_murphydecoding.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/080129_murphydecoding.pdf).

70. Scholars of political science and diplomacy, interviews with authors, July, September, and October 2008; see also “PRC Scholar Discusses Need for China to Develop ‘Soft Power,’” *Liaowang*, November 7, 2005.

71. Shi, “China’s Soft Power and Peaceful Rise.”

attention to solving social welfare issues and putting the “people first.” The program also promises political reform in the form of “democracy with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>72</sup> According to Pang Zhongying, the SDC represents a major “transformation in the thinking, strategy and policy about developments in China, and it will contribute to the growth of China’s ‘soft power.’”<sup>73</sup> Hu Angang, a professor at Qinghua University and an adviser to the Chinese government, opined that China’s harmonious-society undertaking is “more influential and alluring than American democracy and human rights. What is soft power? This is China’s greatest soft power.”<sup>74</sup>

Fudan University professor Chen Yugang, however, holds that further discussion of China’s political system reform, particularly improving China’s good governance and combating corruption, is necessary.<sup>75</sup> According to Beijing University professor Qian Chengdan, the lack of institution building, especially failure to instill the rule of law, continues to impede the development of China’s soft power.<sup>76</sup> Still other scholars are far more pessimistic about the party’s commitment to political and socioeconomic reform, and they doubt the future prospects for China’s soft power.<sup>77</sup>

While ostensibly related to China’s international standing, the soft-power discourse continues to influence and be influenced by the debate about domestic reform. A number of scholars, noting the important role nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) play in the exercise of soft power, are boldly calling for the development of China’s civil society.<sup>78</sup> Fang Changping argues that China must “recognize the unique role played by NGOs in cultural diffusion and exchanges.”<sup>79</sup> Another scholar points out that, although China has good government-to-government relations with many countries, the lack of people-to-people interaction is undermining its soft power; the scholar proposes a bigger role for independent, not government-backed, NGOs.<sup>80</sup> Yu Xintian also believes that to improve its soft power and image, China must learn to work with foreign media and international NGOs through the development of domestic NGOs, which are currently in “a fledgling state.”<sup>81</sup> Of course, this presents a dilemma for the Chinese government, which recognizes it cannot do the work of NGOs, while it remains wary of allowing such organizations to operate outside of its control.<sup>82</sup>

In short, there appears to be consensus among Chinese intellectuals and the leadership on the imperative to build China’s soft power, which begs the question: To what ends? For those who believe that soft power is something that can be deliberately cultivated, its development is seen

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72. The concept, which is identified with the Hu-Wen administration, was first proposed during the 4th Plenum of the 16th CPC Party Congress in 2004. It has sparked a major debate inside and outside the party; see Murphy, “Decoding Chinese Politics.”

73. “PRC Scholar Discusses Need for China to Develop ‘Soft Power.’”

74. “Hu Angang: Harmony Is Also the Last Word; It Has Become China’s Greatest Soft Power,” *Zhongguo Xinwen She*, October 12, 2006.

75. Chen Yugang, “Build China’s Soft Power within the Context of Globalization,” *Guoji Guangcha*, February 2007.

76. Qian Chengdan, “Institution Building to Support Soft Power,” *Liaowang* 11 (March 12, 2007).

77. Leading Chinese intellectual, interview with authors, October 2008.

78. Wang Yizhou, “Who Is Afraid of NGOs?” *Dongfang Zaobao*, July 24, 2008. While the Chinese government remains highly suspicious of NGOs, it is interesting to note that one of the authors was recently asked to speak to a delegation of mid-level Chinese government officials to Washington, D.C.; the subject was the role of U.S. civil society and soft power.

79. Fang, “Comparison of Chinese and U.S. Soft Power and Its Implications for China.”

80. Leading Chinese scholar, interview with authors, October 2008.

81. Yu, “The Role of Soft Power in China’s Foreign Strategy.”

82. Senior expert affiliated with a Chinese think tank, interview with authors, November 2008.

as necessary to build China's comprehensive national power, to rebalance China's growing hard power, and to refute the China-threat theory. They believe soft power can secure a stable and peaceful international environment and facilitate the acceptance of China's rise internationally. It can also defend and advance Chinese interests: "China has to substantially increase its soft power in order to play an active role in international competition."<sup>83</sup> The debate on soft power in China now revolves around the question of what comes next: After China determines its core socialist value system, should China actively promote its values as an alternative to Western values? Can socialism with Chinese characteristics combined with capitalism serve as a development model for developing nations? There is also interest around the world in the relationship between U.S. and Chinese soft power: Is the relationship zero-sum, so that an expected increase of U.S. soft power under President Barack Obama will result in a decline in Chinese soft-power appeal?

## Reactive versus Proactive Soft Power: The China Model

The discourse on soft power has overlapped with the wider domestic debate on China's development strategy and the foreign policy debate of *taoguang yanghui* vs. *yousuo zuowei*. Where all three intersect is in the latest discussion on the so-called China development model: whether it could or should be exported; whether China should deliberately use its soft power to promote its influence; and how these efforts would affect U.S.-China relations.

In 2004, Joshua Cooper Ramo published an article entitled "The Beijing Consensus," which put forward the theory that China's model of development offered developing countries an alternative to the Washington Consensus.<sup>84</sup> The theory remains contentious among both Chinese and Western scholars; some dismiss the idea that such a development model even exists.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, Chinese officials eschew the phrase altogether because it implies a challenge to U.S. values and could therefore result in an unwanted confrontation with the United States.<sup>86</sup> However, the idea of a uniquely Chinese model of development has captured the imagination of many Chinese scholars as well as the general public.<sup>87</sup> The success ascribed to the model flies in the face of Western criticism of China's gradual economic and political reform and offers the possibility of China competing as an equal on the international stage and provider of an alternative to Western political and socioeconomic development. Certainly much has been written about the China model, and it has attracted the interest of countries from Latin America, Africa, South Asia, and the former Soviet republics, making it already a major source of China's soft power. Chinese scholars and officials remain divided, however, on whether the model could or should be deliberately exported.

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83. "Commentary: Upgrading National Cultural Soft Power," *Renmin Ribao*, December 29, 2007.

84. Joshua Cooper Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus* (London: Foreign Policy Centre, 2004), <http://fpc.org.uk/fsblob/244.pdf>. The Washington Consensus, a term coined by economist John Williamson in 1989, is a 10-point strategy for economic and political development that has formed the cornerstone of U.S.-led multi-lateral institutions.

85. For example, see Scott Kennedy, "The Myth of the Beijing Consensus" (paper prepared for conference, "Washington Consensus vs. Beijing Consensus," National Taiwan University Center for China, May 30, 2008), <http://www.indiana.edu/~rccpb/Myth%20Paper%20May%2008.pdf>.

86. Leading Chinese scholar, interview with authors, in China, October 2008.

87. See Yu Keping, "China's Model: Experience and Lessons," in *The Chinese Model and Beijing Consensus*, ed. Yu Keping (Beijing: Social Sciences Press, 2006).

A number of scholars, including Meng Honghua, point out the deficiencies in the China model and warn about the high price China has paid for its economic development.<sup>88</sup> Shi Yin-hong is “doubtful that the model of seriously imbalanced development could be of such extreme importance . . . developing countries did not and should not take it as a model.”<sup>89</sup> Another scholar also believes China cannot export the model because development is an ongoing process; it has not yet been perfected and it is not possible to know whether the model is sustainable in the long run. Even if it proves successful, this scholar commented, it should supplement, not replace, the Western model.<sup>90</sup> Some have the view that the model is based on China’s unique development experience led by the CPC and can succeed only if the importing country adopts a communist political system. One outspoken scholar contends that no country should aspire to follow a model in which there is no real harmony or justice, and that a model based on a one-party state has little soft-power value as it will never appeal to developed countries.<sup>91</sup>

Mainstream scholars also continue to hold the view that China’s development model should not be propagated abroad because doing so would fuel further fears about China’s rise. According to one leading intellectual, “Our economic model has provided soft power but the government hesitates to use it out of concern that it will increase the China-threat theory.”<sup>92</sup> Following the guidance of *taoguang yanghui*, these experts argue that China’s soft power should remain defensive and reactive—primarily aimed at allaying fears about China’s rise, improving China’s image, and clearing up misunderstandings about its intentions.<sup>93</sup> Chinese officials in particular seek to avoid being seen as challenging the United States by setting up an alternative set of values to guide international society. According to one senior official, “China has never been expansionist and has not pushed a development model on others. This is a very important point. China will never try to export a development model.”<sup>94</sup>

A minority view asserts that the China model can and should be exported. University of International Relations professor Zhang Mingqian argues that China’s experience provides “a successful ‘development model’ of socialist market economy for the international community, thereby making China an alternative ‘model’ for others to choose or follow.”<sup>95</sup> Fang Changping believes that in order to achieve its soft-power objectives, China should push for international acceptance of its development model.<sup>96</sup> According to one scholar, “today people feel more confident and feel they can discuss Chinese power, both hard and soft. What can China contribute to the world, people ask?”<sup>97</sup> In the wake of the financial crisis, scholars are also beginning to question the infallibility of the U.S. model and believe that the China model has something to offer.<sup>98</sup> These views support a more proactive soft-power policy.

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88. Meng, “An Evaluation of China’s Soft Power and Promotion Strategy,” in *China’s Soft Power Strategy*.

89. Shi, “China’s Soft Power and Peaceful Rise.”

90. Chinese scholar, interview with authors, October 2008.

91. Leading Chinese intellectual, interview with authors, October 2008.

92. Leading Chinese intellectual, interview with authors, October 2008.

93. Chinese think-tank scholars and university intellectuals, interviews with authors, July–November 2008.

94. Senior Chinese official, interview with authors, November 2008.

95. Zhang Mingqian, “Sustainable Influence and Big Power Mentality,” *Xiandai Guoji Guangxi*, September 20, 2008.

96. Fang, “Comparison of Chinese and U.S. Soft Power and Its Implications for China.”

97. Chinese scholar, interview with authors, September 2008.

98. Senior expert in a Chinese think tank, interview with authors, November 2008.

According to Yang Jiemian, director of SIIS, in the process of reshaping values in the international system:

China faces challenges in promoting its cultural legacy, adapting to the trends of history, and occupying a high moral ground. Along with the transition of the international system, various nations are attempting to inject their own concepts into the values of the international system. Western nations are now actively promoting so-called “democratic values foreign diplomacy,” stressing so-called Western-style concepts of democracy and human rights, causing principles and values to become a new and key area of competition. Although China’s hard power has improved exponentially, its organizational resources within the international system are inadequate; its soft power lags behind, and in the competition of values and international opinion, it is dealt a lower hand. The questions of how to develop a conclusive set of values with Chinese characteristics, inject certain Chinese elements into the international system, and increase the appeal of the Chinese model to developing nations are among the issues to be resolved in China’s future foreign diplomacy.<sup>99</sup>

## Does China Have a Soft-Power Strategy?

Joseph Nye’s theory on soft power has captured the imagination of Chinese scholars and the general public and stimulated a lively debate on how to increase and employ China’s soft power. Importantly, the Chinese leadership has been keenly interested in and has sanctioned the debate since its inception. For the CPC, the discourse on soft power reinforces the importance of culture in building comprehensive national power—a goal that is deemed essential to protect and advance China’s national interests. China’s unrelenting pursuit of comprehensive national power combined with the country’s opaqueness regarding its intentions as an emerging global actor has, however, set off alarm bells around the world. In addition to long-standing concerns about the purposes to which China may put its growing sources of hard power, including its expanding military capabilities and burgeoning economic might, worries are increasing about the objectives of China’s quest for soft-power influence.

The Chinese have attached priority to the aggrandizement of soft power, with a focus on culture. Domestic policy has focused on building a spiritual civilization and socialist core value system as well as the goal of establishing a harmonious society that will make China an attractive model not only for its own people but also for others around the world. Soft power in foreign policy has centered on cultural diplomacy: establishing Confucius Institutes and cultural exchanges with other countries and expanding Chinese media and other cultural enterprises overseas. China has also promoted the concept of a harmonious world in part as its contribution as a “responsible stakeholder” in the international system.

From the Chinese perspective, the primary purpose of building up the country’s soft power has been defensive, not offensive.<sup>100</sup> The popularity of the China-threat theory and calls to contain or curb China’s rise have threatened to scuttle the goal of amassing greater comprehensive national power, which is essential if China is to reclaim what it believes to be its rightful place as a major

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99. Yang Jiemian, “Chinese Diplomacy and Theoretical Innovations of 30 Years of Reform and Opening Up,” *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu*, November 13, 2008.

100. Chinese think-tank scholars and university intellectuals, interviews with the authors, July–November 2008.

global player. In tandem with propagating the peaceful-development policy, the imperative of China's soft-power promotion has therefore been to improve China's image abroad. According to a senior Chinese official, "China is using soft power with the objective of creating an international environment that is favorable to China's development."<sup>101</sup> In line with the foreign policy guideline to keep a low profile and eschew being a leader, China continues to assiduously avoid being perceived as challenging the United States, either through the use of hard power or soft power.

Despite intense intellectual debate and leadership interest, China has yet to develop a comprehensive, coherent, national soft-power strategy, although there are disparate policies toward this end.<sup>102</sup> There has been no coordination among ministries or agencies that would carry out a soft-power policy, and no central leading group or leader has been assigned to oversee soft-power promotion. The proposal to include soft power in the 17th CPC Congress work report was made not by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but by the Ministry of Culture.<sup>103</sup> The Ministry of Education continues to oversee the Confucius Institutes with no apparent coordination with embassies overseas.<sup>104</sup> Meanwhile, the CPC's Central Propaganda Department is promising to "increase the cultural soft power" of China through intensifying "efforts to 'export' cultural products and services, and strengthen the international influence of Chinese culture."<sup>105</sup> To date, however, there has not been any effort to establish benchmarks for assessing progress in promoting culture as the core of soft power.

In the short run, China's soft-power policy will likely remain largely ad hoc and primarily reactive, aimed at combating the China-threat theory and focused on promoting cultural soft power. The leadership will likely continue to proscribe official discussion of the Beijing Consensus as part of a deliberate effort to avoid the appearance of challenging the United States. Over the long term, however, the picture is less certain. There are already calls for China to "formulate a comprehensive strategy for building the nation's soft power"<sup>106</sup> and to place greater emphasis on politics, foreign policy, and institutions in the promotion of China's soft power. As China enlarges its comprehensive national power and assumes a leading role on the international stage, the domestic debate will heat up over whether Chinese socialist values should be promoted as an alternative to Western values and whether the China development model should be exported. It is noteworthy that the debate among intellectuals over *taoguang yanghui* vs. *yousuo zuowei* continues despite leadership efforts in August 2006 to signal that it is premature to adopt a proactive foreign policy. In time, a more proactive Chinese soft-power policy is possible.

It remains to be seen, however, whether China's soft power—culture, political values, foreign policy—will present a challenge to the soft power of the United States. In a 2008 Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey on soft power in Asia, where China's historical and cultural links are the strongest and would presumably have the greatest impact, China's cultural soft power rated only as "middling" and continues to trail behind not only the United States but also Japan and South

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101. Senior Chinese official, interview with authors, November 2008.

102. Chinese think-tank scholars and university intellectuals, interviews with the authors, July–November 2008.

103. Chinese official, interview with authors, November 2008.

104. Senior official with the embassy of the People's Republic of China, interview with authors, October 2008.

105. "Li Changchun Spoke at National Propaganda, Ideological Work Conference," Xinhua, January 23, 2008.

106. Ambassador Shen Guofang, "The Theory of Harmonious World and China's New Diplomacy" (speech reported in *Shijie Zhishi*, July 1, 2007).

Korea.<sup>107</sup> Certainly, some on both sides of the Pacific view soft power in zero-sum terms. However, as long as there is a willingness on both sides to seek cooperation rather than confrontation, there is no reason why both sides cannot work together in the area of soft power. China is increasingly recognizing that the challenges facing the world require global solutions, and China is willing to learn from and work with the United States in this endeavor. In contravention of its long-standing policy of noninterference in other countries' internal affairs, for example, Beijing has applied limited pressure on the leaders of Sudan, North Korea, and Burma to persuade them to modify their objectionable policies. In addition, China is currently reviewing its overseas development aid program in response to criticism that its aid policies are undermining the objectives of the United States, the European Union, and other sources of assistance to the developing world. As China continues to build its soft power and debates what ends it should serve, the United States and other countries should continue through engagement to help shape the choices that China makes. By so doing, we can increase the possibility that China will act as a responsible and stabilizing influence in international affairs.

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107. Christopher B. Whitney, project director, "Soft Power in Asia: Results of a 2008 Multinational Survey of Public Opinion" (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs and the East Asia Institute, 2008).