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Comparing Chinese and EU Soft Power: The Credibility Factor

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents arguments to evaluate soft power as perceived by the European Union (EU) and by China. Since the presentation of Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, it has become apparent that notions of audience and message reception are important. We will further argue for the relevance of the psychological idea of dissonance. We will compare and contrast soft power discourses for their alignment with reality, and assess them for discrepancy. Ultimately, we will conclude that such contradictions exist and create a "dissonance" or disjunction, which we will explore in relation to the concept of credibility. In the second section, an analysis of China's soft power serves to highlight the effects of the implementation by a "hard" state, in a centralized and controlled manner, of a soft power policy. We will examine tables in an effort to extend our comparison beyond the discourses perpetuated and promoted by both China and the EU. We will challenge these discourses using indices, including the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, the Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International, as well as The Good Country Index, The Soft Power 30, and the World Justice Index, each representing a component of soft power as proposed by Nye, i.e., culture, political values and foreign policy. Additionally, we will closely examine social questions to better develop our understanding of soft power policy. Results indicate that while credibility appears more important to China than to the EU, it is, nonetheless, a central tenet for both parties. The third section takes a comparative approach to its discussion of the normative power of European and Chinese soft power. It reveals contradictions within the policies of both political bodies, and simultaneously draws two conclusions. First, that a "cultural fool" does not exist, i.e., individuals are able to decipher and understand messages. Secondly, that individuals attribute credibility or unreliability to policy messages framed by a state, an organization, or the media.

Keywords: China; communication; credibility; dissonance; European Union; image; normative power; perception; soft power.

1. THE CONCEPT OF SOFT POWER: DIMENSIONS AND LIMITS

Soft power is defined as the capacity to convince others to adhere to the norms, values and institutions that shape comprehensive behaviour (Nye 2004). We may argue that the soft power concept has been extrapolated to non-American contexts and could be expanded to be more inclusive, and historicized, to take into account the role of other countries. We see this outlined by several Chinese scholars: Yan Xuetong¹ represents the political, while Yu (2007) details the cultural school. Yu argues that “soft power with Chinese characteristics should include values and principles represented by the state, national and international institutions and political decisions driven by the state” (Yu 2007). Wang (2013a, 97), in a similar vein, draws on culture, Confucius’s writing, and an historical perspective to expand on China’s model of public diplomacy in order to explain the focus of the Chinese approach.

1.1. *From a political to a communicative dimension*

Nye (2011, 84) proposes three resources for soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policies. He argues that, “with soft power, what the target thinks is particularly important, and the target matters as much as the agents. Attraction and persuasion are socially constructed. Soft power is a dance that requires partners”. This argument shifts from relying on international relations to a more psychological stance. This shift is the challenge of this paper.

Nye goes beyond his general framework by examining soft power behaviour: agenda setting, attraction, and persuasion. Attraction is composed of three elements: benignity, competence, and beauty (*charisma*). This framework is important from a theoretical point of view and for our discussion in comparing soft power manifestations in the EU and China.

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According to Alexander Vuving (cited in Nye 2011, 92), “Benignity is an aspect of how an agent relates to others. Being perceived as benign tends to generate sympathy, trust, credibility, and acquiescence. ‘Brilliance’ or ‘competence’ refers to how an agent does things and it produces admiration, respect, and emulation. ‘Beauty’ or ‘charisma’ is an aspect of an agent’s relation to ideals, values, and vision, and it tends to produce inspiration and adherence”.

Research shows that soft power should extend past the agent-based model, emitting attractive messages that “automatically” reach a foreign audience. Lee and Melissen (2011, 252) note that Nye’s “agent-focused approach to soft power overlooks critical evaluation of something that is basic in marketing public diplomacy work: the socialisation process that constitutes the necessary link between soft power and the mechanism of persuasion”.

Lee and Melissen (2011, 15) consider three other aspects when evaluating soft power resources: “The cognitive dimension refers to how other nations evaluate a state’s image and standing in international affairs. The affective dimension relates to whether other nations like or dislike a state despite its political, economic, and military strengths or weaknesses. The normative dimension reveals whether or not other countries regard a state policy and international role as legitimate and justifiable”.

1.2. *Credibility and dissonance*²

Nye (2011) introduces the concept of the receiver, a key element in the context of soft power and in communication theories – a notion briefly introduced in Lee and Melissen (2011). Nye (2011, 101) explores the question of credibility: “To be credible in a century where power is diffusing from state to non-state actors, government efforts to project soft power will have to accept that power is less hierarchical in an information age and that social networks have become more important”. In addition to social sciences, communication studies are developing research on public space, and exploring how individual, political or social identities are framed and portrayed in discourses. There are two noteworthy approaches. One is the theorization of the discourse itself (through content analysis);

² “Dissonance: unsuitable in combination; clashing” (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2008). Dissonance can relate to music and harmony, and to psychology.

the other uses the discourse to reveal the functionality of sociopolitical entities and identities. This is the approach we will focus on.

We ask why Nye does not introduce more reflections on ideas such as place, identity and the role of the receiver from communication theories (Wolton 2009). The importance of framing during the socialisation process should also be taken into consideration. The choices made by the authors of the messages spread by the media influence the perception of events and communication (Goffman 1967; Winkin 2001). In the interaction process, the credibility of each actor involved in the national diplomatic system (Hocking and Melissen 2016) is important; it is another element that contributes to the reception and decoding process. Introducing the receiver and the socialisation process shows that “there is an acknowledgment that soft power and the new public diplomacy have a distinctly introspective dimension and that they are related to a nation’s self-perceptions and confidence in its own institutions” (Lee and Melissen 2011, 252). The question of dissonance is psychological and can be seen from an individual’s perspective. That is, “Dissonance is a discomfort caused by holding conflicting cognitions simultaneously (e.g., ideas, beliefs, values, emotional reactions)” (Thefacts101 2016, n.p.). In a state of dissonance, people may feel surprise, dread, guilt, anger or embarrassment.

A culture becomes more powerful when people imagine themselves transformed and improved by adopting several new cultural values; such is the case for immigrants trying to integrate into a new society or for young men and women adopting fashions from Paris, Milan or London. When a society considers itself unique because of its political system or its lifestyle (for example, the US view of entrepreneurship or South Korea’s musical phenomenon “K-pop”), it exerts soft power as people increasingly participate in and subscribe to the system. Similarly, the migrants attracted by and to Europe positively perceive countries on the Continent.

Such emotions lead to controversial perceptions and opinions about certain countries, since a person’s interpretation of messages and/or facts can raise questions about the credibility of a broadcaster in an effort to minimize internalised dissonance. The cumulative impact of affective, cognitive and normative dimensions heightens the challenge of credibility.

2. COMPARING CHINESE AND EU SOFT POWER: THE CREDIBILITY FACTOR

2.1. *Challenges to a credible Chinese soft power*

We will examine the key factor(s) leading to China's lack of credibility and the creation of cognitive dissonance. We will then comparatively examine the EU's soft power. Both examinations will strive to highlight factors of credibility or non-credibility.

A survey of the historical discourses on China's diplomacy from 1949 to the present emphasizes the importance of pacific coexistence (Martin-Necker 2006). The intent of this position is to present China as a responsible power (Wang 2013a).

Another angle integral to our understanding of the decisions of Chinese leaders after 1989 is the emergence of cultural relativism. Facing criticism on human rights, freedom of expression, and rules of law from activists and, on occasion, Western governments, China argued that societal development should be considered through the lens of those cultural, social and economic conditions pertinent to individual civilizations. In the new millennium, traditional Chinese values have broadened to include peaceful and harmonious coexistence, a quality that has benefited both China and the larger world (Balme 2004; Billeter 2006). The concept of the harmonious society promoted by Chinese officials includes societal stability and openness and relies on a traditional understanding of Confucius's moral order. Accordingly, the ruling government should take care of the people by implementing a patriarchal attitude (Wang 2013b). Applied more widely, the theory of a harmonious world colours China's foreign policy by promoting it as a stable, reliable and responsible partner, as well as a power that can be trusted rather than feared (Huchet 2007; d'Hooghe 2014).

Following the debates before and during the 2008 Beijing Olympics, the Chinese government has begun to realize that the country should foster positive interactions based on culture and influence (Courmont 2012; Callahan 2015). This makes China integral to defining and cementing concepts and theories of soft power beyond the framework developed by Western scholars.

China has an organised policy devoted to influencing public opinion through public diplomacy. This serves four goals. First, to be seen as a country that strives to build a harmonious society. Second, to be a reliable economic partner with a dynamic market economy – an argument

that appears to encourage reliance on Chinese state policy³. The third goal is to be an active and responsible player in international affairs; and, fourth, to be a country that celebrates its ancient culture and traditions. The rapid spread of Confucius Institutes around the world, CGTN and CCTV channels, the National Chinese Network, and the development of Xinhua News Agency, which is devoted to transmitting official Chinese views of the world, are all well known to, and have been examined by, scholars. The ingredients of soft power, present here, work to counter reports of China made by European media, which are perceived as incorrectly understanding Chinese policy.

The discourse surrounding traditional culture promoted by China relies on a five-thousand-year heritage and includes approaches to medicine, cooking, martial arts, calligraphy, etc. If cooking, martial arts, medicine, Taoism and Buddhism are prevalent among European citizens, such cultural elements do not require involvement from the Chinese government. For example, as a practitioner of Qi Gong and Tai Chi Chuan between 1994 and 2014 in four European cities, we have seen three phases of its integration into non-Chinese communities. Initially, teachers came from China, or had experience of China. The next generation of teachers went to China to learn the basics at a time when the government recognised such practice as part of the country's cultural heritage. The final period saw the structuration of teaching and clubs through a national federation and the opening of hundreds of courses in small villages or health clubs. These practices evolved indirectly from official teaching systems in China. While such practices may be components of China's soft power in its traditional aspect, independent practitioners may perceive them as components of modern life. Nevertheless, they serve as a "channel" to Chinese culture.

Contemporary Chinese culture also bears examination. While products with "Made in China" labels appear to be everywhere, China is still no match for the US in cultural attractiveness. If Chinese companies such as Huawei, Xiaomi and Alibaba are famous, few cultural icons, movies or artists have yet become part of a wider cultural consciousness. For instance, few Western citizens are able to name Chinese contemporary writers, film-makers, rock singers, bands or football players. According to Martel (2010), China has produced no mainstream artists on the world stage, in spite of the rapid evolution of the cultural sphere.

³ Pr. Gao Fei, IEE Seminar: *Mutual Trust in International Relations*, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 2013.

The Great Wall, a 2016 movie by Zhang Yimou, is an interesting example of this phenomenon. The movie was presented as a possible blockbuster, and accordingly featured a co-production between a Chinese film corporation and an American producer, with a screenplay to satisfy audiences. Not being experts on the film industry, we direct the reader to IMDb, a specialised website, for more detailed examination of the film's successes. Critically, these are not many, and reviews are seldom positive⁴.

Nobel Prizes are also worth mentioning here; Gao Xingjian was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2000, but he has held French citizenship since 1998. In 2010, Liu Xiaobo received the Nobel Peace Prize, but he died in prison. In 2012, Mo Yan received the Nobel Prize for Literature, but he was identified as a supporter of the Chinese régime. Jirik (2016) draws similar conclusions about CCTV, arguing that its English representation should be indistinguishable from its competitors, in order to sustain credibility.

Consequently, China and its cultural values face a double bind. On the one hand, the country seeks to promote the idea that "China is attractive because its economy is successful". This primarily emphasizes China's economic dynamism. On the other hand, values promoted by the PRC face internal and external challenges. In other words, it becomes necessary for us to ask which narrative China presents to the rest of the world. If it is a harmonious society, Europeans will compare it against their own set of values and the reality in their country. If it is creativity from citizens, local actors, or civil society, the examples of the Confucius Institutes affiliated to the PRC Ministry of Education, the Tai Chi Chuan practices and the example of Ai Weiwei will be insufficient to convince well-informed citizens of the merits of Chinese values.

2.2. *The normative power of Europe: a mirror of Chinese soft power*

We will now examine the soft power of the European Union. We have chosen the European perspective for two reasons. First, the size of the two regions is similar and therefore lends itself to a more meaningful comparison. Second, the practice in Brussels is to support the research of both parties. Manners (2002) defined Europe as a normative power that promotes nine principles: "sustainable peace, freedom, democracy, human rights, rule of law, equality, social solidarity, sustainable devel-

⁴ https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2034800/criticreviews?ref_=tt_ov_rt [16/10/2018].

opment, and good governance”. In Laïdi (2008b), Manners added that the EU disseminates in six ways: contagion, informational diffusion, procedural diffusion, transference, overt diffusion, and cultural filters. The procedure, sometimes called “Magnet Europa”, perceives “Europe as a normative power” (Laïdi 2008a). This author has identified the EU’s capacity for attraction through a normative process, as analysed in *Norms over Force: The Enigma of European Power* (Laïdi 2008a).

Applying a pragmatic approach, Rupnik (2014) examines the attractiveness of the EU by exploring the efforts of neighbouring countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldavia, the Balkans, Turkey, Ukraine) to implement European standards while pro-European parties are in power. Three angles are identified: conditionality (between the EU and the individual country), motivation of actors, and candidates’ interests. The criteria are “governance more than democracy, rule of law implementation through adhesion process (towards the EU), with adoption of norms and institutions, independent justice, non-partisan public administration, decentralisation, fight against corruption” (29-30)⁵.

For present purposes, a comparative approach is now required. Following the methodology of Jullien (1996), we start by examining the philosophical aspects of Chinese and European cultures. Such notions may be regarded as markers or characteristics of each society. Detailed in the table below is an example of a comparative approach. It is not, however, without limitations. Perhaps most notably, it is always possible for the level of representation to be contested. That is, it is difficult to assess at what level we should consider a certain generalisation as representative of the whole. The other important consideration in tabulating such an approach is a tendency towards amalgamating identical categories in order to create representative ones, and, therefore, a more acceptable analysis. Finally, one must be aware of the author’s culture and bias; even if he cannot abstract himself from them, he should retain awareness of them in line with anthropological research methods (Garfinkel 1967) (*Table 1*).

⁵ “La gouvernance plus que la démocratie, la construction d’État de droit à travers le processus d’adhésion centré sur l’adoption de normes et d’institutions, justice indépendante, administration publique non partisane, décentralisation, lutte contre la corruption” (Rupnik 2014, 29-30; our translation).

Table 1. – Comparing European and Chinese philosophical conceptions in order to introduce the comparative methodology for the next section.

IN EUROPE	IN CHINA
To oppose a “No” in order to identify its individuality, its personality	To reach wisdom by understanding the essence of the facts
Beliefs (in religion, in technologies)	Experiences
The goal	The path, the way
An absolute truth	A relative truth
A Creator	A cosmic energy (the Qi)
Man as a measure	Man as a part of the whole
Individual happiness	Social order

By using this approach to soft power and perceptions, we establish a comparison between the social markers of Europe (Läidi 2008b) and those of China. Simultaneously, we raise questions concerning credibility and dissonance. There are many rankings focusing on perceptions, image, reputation or global norms, such as the Best Countries Index, Human Development Index, Reputation Trak, Pew Research Center, Soft Power 3.0, World Justice Project, Reporters Without Borders, Soft Power Today, and the World Happiness Index. All of these use mixed methodology, and combine polls, media surveys and analysis based on a list of established criteria. The methodology of each index can be found on its respective website. They mostly combine items derived from the aggregation of data issued by international institutions (IMF, World Bank, UNESCO, etc.). Polls or correspondents in each country provide the qualitative aspects of the analysis. Each index could be contested, but that is not the purpose of this paper. We have selected five indices to illustrate the perception of countries with regard to specialised issues, and to highlight their behaviour on a global scale. In other words, these indices are a means of denoting soft power policy, and are: the World Press Freedom Index, Transparency Corruption Index, Good Country Index (i.e., how a country contributes to the common good), Soft Power 30 and the World Justice Project (*Table 2*).

Table 2. – Indices for evaluating the attractiveness of the European Union and China.

DATA OF 2017 INDEX AND NUMBER OF COUNTRIES	EU MEMBER STATES AMONG 10 FIRST PLACES IN EACH INDEX	CHINA
World Press Freedom, 180	SE, FI, DK, NL, BE, AU	176
Corruption Perception, 180	DK, FI, SE, LU, NL	77
Good Country Index, 163	NL, DK, FI, DE, SE, IR, UK, AU	64
Soft Power 30, 160	FR, UK, DE, SE, NL	25
World Justice Project, 113	FI, SE, DK, DE, AU, NL	75

The normative dimension, suggested by Lee (2011), depicts an acceptable framework to challenge credibility. The purpose of such a comparison is to reveal differences between EU member states and China. In other words, the indices may reveal elements of dissonance on both sides. Several European countries rank highly in the five indices, with a few included in the top ten. These countries adhere closely to European values and Europe's commitment to implementing press freedom, rule of law, good governance, and respecting their international commitments. European soft power is illustrated by, and in accordance with, such behaviours. By comparison, China is systematically ranked unfavourably. Could it be a sign of dissonance between discourse and reality, reflecting the perception, and, furthermore, the credibility of its soft power? This could also explain why Chinese scholars and officials emphasize discourses related to promoting another framework. It must, however, be conceded that the methodology behind the Good Country Index requires improvement, and that the World Press Freedom Index aligns closely with Western values. We, however, argue that the convergence of similar rankings is a reflection on the attractiveness of China.

As regards the EU, it is evident that coherence and the impact of norm diffusion are undermined by its limited influence. For example, a gap exists between the EU's human rights policy and the expectations of civil society or those of the European Parliament(s). Realistically, the EU dialogue on human rights should increase our understanding of those rights. Thus, contradictions exist both inside member states and in the EU as a whole. The migration crisis of 2015-2016 and the reaction to it by EU member states is a concrete example of such a discrepancy.

China considers that economic rights are crucial to the debate. This is dynamically different from the fundamental position on human rights emphasized by Europe (Balme, cited in Laidi 2008b, 172).

2.3. Limitations and discussion

Nye has been criticised for his focus on the American image, because it has developed into a Western framework that hinges on concepts of power and culture. As noted in the Introduction, while soft power with Chinese characteristics can be discussed, the framework remains the same as that for Europe's soft power. For optimistic Chinese scholars and diplomats, it is possible for harmony, a notion integral to Chinese culture, to become a universally recognised value and thus gain a higher reputation and persuasive capability in the public lens. Traditional cultural values, with their prioritising of human perceptions, can serve to overcome the default Western focus on consumption and competition. The discourse of Chinese officials and media promotes economic growth, stability and harmony, in order to institutionalise these values.

Using culture to propose a vibrant soft power is not easy when there is inconsistency in the domestic reality, as noted by several scholars (d'Hooghe 2010; Nye 2011; Barr 2012). The development of soft power should not be a zero-sum game; ideas should circulate, draw from many sources, and include talents and members of civil society.

In conclusion, we propose two levels of analysis. The first stands at a micro or individual level, and emphasizes citizens' abilities. Wolton (2009) and Garfinkel (1967) consider that there is no "cultural fool" in the communication process. This means that each person, engaged in a digital world with a certain degree of media literacy, is able to decode messages and communication strategies. According to interactionism sociology (Ogien and Laugier 2014, 173), an individual has four attributes: "He has a pertinent vision of the world where he lives, and the universe in which he wants to engage; he evaluates in a reasonable manner the form and the progress in which collective action should function; he can adjust his behaviour to the circumstances of the action, and he can give a correct description of the reasons which motivate him". In other words, citizens, the general public and audiences are used to making distinctions between messages, their broadcasters and reality.

At a macro level, i.e., the national image, the problems remain the same. Li and Chitty (2009, 8) distinguish between "perceived images and projected media images of other nations". The perceived image is cognitive and connected to the mental constructions of the people. The projected image is the result of the framing undertaken by the author of a communication, and then by the methods of journalists and media (Neveu 2009). Private and public frames determine the cognitive image

held by the audience. Issuing more information will not automatically lead to a better understanding of China's reality by Europeans or vice versa.

On close examination of the affective, cognitive and normative dimensions, a soft power strategy emerges. This is predominantly integrated into the public diplomacy policy, and is not without difficulties. As communication theories make clear, there is always a difference between what a nation believes itself to be and what other nations perceive it to be. Polls and surveys are both considered reliable tools for highlighting such discrepancies. As regards the difference between the perceptions and outcomes of China's soft power actions, China argues that the Western media inaccurately depict the Chinese reality. Consequently, the government supports the Xinhua News Agency's portrayal and broadcast of China's image to diverse audiences⁶.

A comparison of available polls and analyses of China's online presence is necessary to further explore the concept of dissonance. Moreover, the combination of the cognitive and the framing approach together work to form a robust and comprehensive analytic framework (*Table 3*).

Table 3. – Conclusive results.

	EUROPEAN UNION	CHINA
Culture	Mainstream artists, acknowledged directors, sports players, etc.	Chinese contemporary culture has problems in publicizing names known in cinema, music, sports, and fine arts, etc. on a global scale.
Political values	Asserted values are inconsistently visible inside and outside the EU.	Asserted values are relatively visible.
Foreign policy	The migration crisis of Autumn 2015 demonstrates the dissonance between values and actions of member states and the European Commission.	Dissonance between peace as a value, and conflict in the South China Sea.

Examining China's soft power policy and accordance with global norms through indices reveals an indeterminate identity. China's policy focuses primarily on influence by news management, devoted to shaping a posi-

⁶ On that topic, see Anne Soetemont, *J'ai travaillé pour la propagande chinoise*, Paris: Éditions du Moment, 2001.

tive national image. Additionally, as a cultural dimension, the Confucius Institute network focuses predominantly on language teaching and on traditional culture, even though many authors believe that China's language promotion includes a political agenda (Hartig 2014). This conclusion is reached in view of the importing of books used by the CI from China by the Hanban, the administrative unit co-ordinating the CI in Beijing⁷.

We argue that China lacks an attractive contemporary culture, as explained by Zhang Yiwu (2018) from Peking University: "Even as global interest in China grows, its value system and cultural traditions have yet to be understood by the international community. Likewise, China's creative and cultural outputs have not yet captured the attention and imagination of wider global audiences" (Soft Power 30 2018, 70).

While we recognize that, as elaborated by Nye, soft power is the attractiveness of several aspects of a country, only the cultural dimensions are discussed in this paper. As said earlier, we argue that the place of a country in the rankings to some extent reflects its attractiveness dimension. Communication studies give a prominent place to the expansion and reflection of identity in these discourses. The indices inform us as to the perceptions of the receivers.

The position of a country in the indices reveals a dissonance between an official discourse and the reality of a soft power policy. If, as Nye suggests, we add foreign policy to the equation, we notice a decline in the attractiveness of the political values typified in China's political model. This reflects the perception of China as an authoritarian state or as deploying sharp power. Such results suggest that the political system is predominantly scrutinized by European citizens, both through cultural and foreign policy lenses, as Nye believes.

China has traditional cultural elements to promote, but no contemporary ones. Its strategy emphasizes media and broadcasting, in order to improve the alignment with China's perception of communication. Even so, the present perception of the country, as revealed by the indices, is less than favourable.

One of the most famous Chinese political scientists offers a conclusion that we adopt. For Yan Xuetong (2007), the Chinese reputation on the world stage largely depends on the international perceptions of its internal policies. Global social equilibrium, sustainable growth and some flexibility for citizens are key factors in revising depictions of China, and

⁷ Discussion with a CI Director, Bruxelles, March 2017.

enable it to be more favourably received on the world stage. That is, the internal and external soft power must be more cohesive. This is especially true in view of the difficulty that countries face in controlling images and perceptions, the importance of which cannot be overlooked. China's lack of credibility is related to its authoritarian régime. Here, China is its own worst enemy at making its culture acceptable at a global level, at least by the Western world. In 2016, Yan argued that the debate will focus on political might, in order to create a bipolar world (Yan 2016).

We began with culture, values and foreign policy and have ended with a reflection on and an evaluation of the norms where the core elements remain attractive. Combining attractiveness with credibility under a normative framework allows us to shift from culture, image and media to qualitative studies on norms elaborated by NGOs. From our point of view, this contributes to strengthening the analyses of soft power in action.

As Nye (2011) has said, the states that are ready to project soft power are those whose dominant ideas are closer to global norms, which now emphasise pluralism and autonomy. China as a global power faces major problems that may impede the efforts by the People's Republic of China to present an image of support for the country's cultural dimensions. In this context, we consider that there is a dissonance and a lack of credibility regarding Chinese messages and the country's influence on the world stage.

An expansion of traditional and contemporary Chinese culture requires a politically relaxed environment that encourages freedom of expression and a free exchange of ideas among Chinese and the world at large. As argued by Li and Chitty (2009), framing a national image cannot be constructed by spending money on messages, digital broadcasts or communication capacity without considering the target, the perceived and the projected media images. Despite an extensive use of soft power, the government of the PRC has not yet developed an ideal mix of soft-power resources to achieve their desired foreign policy objectives. The gap between an increasingly cosmopolitan and confident foreign policy and a closed and rigid domestic political system is responsible for the imbalance between the three pillars of soft power: cultural attractiveness, examples set by domestic values, and values expressed through foreign policy. Examining the efforts of China from 2008 to 2011, Nye (2011) concludes that China's offensive is ineffective, partly because of its internal policy, composed of censorship, harassment of citizens, laws against NGOs, and trials against foreign companies.

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