

The China Model vs. American Soft Power: Going Global and Peaceful

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Abstract

As a rising power with a global outlook, China has been regarded as a potential model for the developing countries in the 21st century. Yet, the United States is still the solo superpower as widely recognized. Given that the world's two most important countries now race for their own influences globally, it is critical for both sides to find as many ways as possible to keep lines of communication between them open. The reasons are self-evident since knowledge brings mutual understanding. The lack of reciprocity breeds suspicion, miscalculation, and both hot and cold war. There is no assurance that the two nations can always be best of friends, but there are indeed the potentials t of a vigorous partnership. Truly, ignoring each other and the Thucydides trap can be our undoing by working together to concede our differences offers hope not only to the citizens of both countries but to the whole world who are affected by the Sino-US relationship.

Keywords: Soft Power, Global Order, Power Transition

Amerika'nın Yumuşak Gücü Karşısında Çin Modeli: Küresel ve Barışçıl Tutum

Öz

Küresel bakış açısıyla yükselen bir güç olan Çin, 21. yüzyılda gelişmekte olan ülkeler için potansiyel bir model olarak görülmektedir. Ancak yaygın görüş, Birleşik Devletlerin hala tek süper güç olduğu yönündedir. Dünya'nın en önemli iki ülkesinin, kendi etki alanları için küresel düzeyde rekabet halinde oldukları düşünüldüğünde; her iki taraf için de aralarındaki iletişim kanallarını açık tutmaya yönelik mümkün olan her yolun denenmesi önem arz etmektedir. Bunun nedenleri açıktır, çünkü bilgi karşılıklı anlayışı da beraberinde getirir. Mütekabiliyet eksikliği; şüpheye, yanlış hesaba ve sıcak ve soğuk savaşın her ikisini de neden olur. Her iki milletin sürekli iyi dost olmalarının bir teminatı olmamakla beraber, aslında etkin bir ortaklık potansiyeli

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taşımaktadır. Doğrusu, birbirini göz ardı etme ve Thucydides tuzağı felaketimiz olabilir, birlikte çalışarak farklılıklarımızı kabullenmek sadece her iki ülkenin vatandaşlarına değil, Çin-Birleşik Devletler ilişkisinden etkilenen tüm dünyaya umut verecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yumuşak Güç, Küresel Düzen, Güç Dönüşümü

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There are two races between China and the United States today: one is for national prestige based on “hard power” and another for image-building in terms of “soft power”. China as a rising power has aspired for a status of “greatness” globally while the United States as the sole superpower in the world has always been anxious to maintain the *status quo*. Given the obvious divergence between the two countries, both powers are in competition to determine who actually has the greatest influence for image-building globally. This introduces a question “Can the United States and China go soft?”

Since 2008, the financial crisis has contributed to the erosion of American soft power influence by calling into question the liberal capitalist model of modernity. This is evidenced by the steady growth of world attention to China’s authoritarian developmental model—the so called “Beijing Consensus”—and China’s own initiative to promote its developmental model abroad.¹ China’s increasing ability to grasp international attention is a clear indication of a dramatic decline in American soft power which may be considered irreparable. Despite this controversy, the China model which is promoted by a great deal of Chinese authorities as a kind of “attractiveness”, is perceived by the international media as an alternative to liberal capitalism, and it aims to address why these processes reflect the decline of America’s soft power. While doing so, it helps clarify the concept of soft power, which was first advanced by Joseph Nye in the 1990s and has been oft-cited since then.

According to Nye, “the resources that produce soft power arise in largely part from the values an organization or country expresses in its culture, in the examples it sets by its internal practices and policies, and in the way it handles its relations with others.”² By application of this definition, many popular political regimes including domestic institutions utilize important components of the soft power praxis. However, the decline of America’s popularity in the world in no diminutive measure, results from its unilateral practice of the War on Terror after the tragic events of September 11. What is even more significant is that the 2008 financial crisis brings into focus the structural

¹ “President Xi Jin-ping Addresses at Central Work on Foreign Affairs”, *China Daily*, November 30, 2014.

² Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004, p. 8.

weaknesses in the liberal-capitalist model represented by the United States.³ Indeed the perceived rise of the China model attests the decline of the American model. Nye has not ever examined this dynamic in detail but it is imperative to do so in practice. It is a cliché for anyone to believe that changing a policy is much easier than changing a socioeconomic system. However, the decline of soft power is manageable if it is predominantly caused by the failure of a country's foreign policy. Significant attention should be drawn to the decline in American soft power and how it arguably may present even greater international consequences.

To date, this phenomenon has inspired a worldwide interest in what the post-American world is like. While the definition of "U.S. Dominance" in world order varies ambiguously, China is presenting itself as an alternative to America's model economically in developing countries. As a result, the international public has begun taking the rise of the China model more seriously. This is deeply rooted in their waning confidence in the liberal capitalist model with which American soft power is associated. To that, international economist Dambisa Moyo flatly argued for America's own folly in policy-making due to various reasons from cold war mentality to geopolitical competitions.⁴

Given this, the article first introduces the concept of soft power, arguing that the viable way to measure soft power is to look at how other countries perceive it. Then the bulk of the discourse is directed to the rise of the China model with a view to demonstrating the decline of American soft power. The final part concludes with an emphasis upon the ramifications of soft power dynamics and its limitations in real exercise.

Soft Power: Significance and Conceptual Ambiguities

An admonition to all students of intellectual history is to critically bear in mind the sociopolitical context in which a concept was advanced and popularized at the outset. There is no exception to the concept of soft power. Whereas it was popularized worldwide soon after the end of the Cold War, few people remain aware that this concept was proposed in the final years of the Cold War and it was by no means intended to predict the end so unexpected. Rather, it was in defense of American values vis-à-vis the Soviet Union that soft power was invoked for speaking of the former. According to Nye, soft power is a power of attraction and persuasion as opposed to coercion. Due to this concern, it is a "co-operative behavioral power—getting others to want what you want" and thereby relies on such resources as

³ A shrewd analysis of these two dimensions of decline of American soft power is offered by Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, New York: Basic Books, 2012, p. 12.

⁴ Dambisa Moyo, *How the West Was Lost: Fifty Years of Economic Folly –and the Stark Choices Ahead*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011, p. xiii.

“cultural attraction, ideology, and international institutions.”⁵ In this respect, Nye rightly suggested that the United States has additional power resources than the former Soviet Union, which would safeguard against the presumed cycle of great powers’ decline.⁶

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The underlying assumption here is that the US-Soviet rivalry would persist into the future. Nye endeavored to remind people at the time that “given their basic resources and military strength, it would be a mistake to discount the Soviet Union as a great power in the *twenty-first century*” (emphasis added).⁷ The end of the Cold War and the sudden demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, altered the context in which soft power was to be understood. The dramatic manner in which Moscow relinquished its empire highlighted the power of ideas as opposed to military capabilities. Soft power in this context came to assume new momentum for the first time. It is not merely useful in explaining what Cold War analysts failed to predict. It also instilled ideological vigor into the narrative of the Cold War. By arguing that the power of ideas finally triumphs over the power of tanks, the soft power concept helped boost the legitimacy of the US leadership in the post-Cold War world. Needless to say, in contrast to the well-established theories and concepts that hardly survived the shock of sudden historical change, Nye’s soft power evidently benefited from the historical change.

Nevertheless, the 9/11 attack and the subsequent crusade against terrorists did once again underscore the importance of soft power which had buttressed America’s preeminence. This time the neglect of soft power taught America a costly lesson. For Nye, the exercise of soft power becomes ever more important in the era of globalization. Now states no longer hold absolute monopoly over previous coercive means and non-state actors could threaten national security through the proliferating transnational channels. Thus, for practical and normative reasons he suggests that the United States should take the lead in coordinating the international efforts for fighting terrorism. As the United States cannot bomb Al Qaeda cells in Hamburg, Kuala Lumpur, Detroit or any city centers, Nye continues to argue that “success against them eventually depends on close civilian cooperation, whether sharing intelligence, coordinating police work across borders, or tracing global financial flows.”⁸

Critical of the Iraq War, Nye has pointed out that the Bush administration failed to use the US hard power smartly, which accordingly does enormous damage to America’s image all over the world. It is in the

⁵ Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*, New York: Basic Books, 1990, p. 188.

⁶ Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500-2000*, New York: Vintage Books, 1989, p. 285.

⁷ Nye, *Bound to Lead*, p. 130.

⁸ Joseph Nye, *The Paradox of American Power – Why the World’s Only Superpower Can’t Go It Alone*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 145 & p. 168.

criticism of George W. Bush administration's unilateralism that Nye further elaborates on soft power, which, as he puts it, is "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments", thus it "arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies."⁹ In other words, soft power means power being used softly on the one hand; and on the other it represents an attractive image or a model for others to admire and emulate. Obviously, a new congruence of foreign policy, technology and history makes this a reasonable prospect.

This interpretation of soft power will always be subjected to criticism. Students and scholars of American foreign policy have already begun to examine the ambiguities inherent in the meaning of soft power. They argue that if the soft power is conceptually incoherent, how could we expect it to exert substantial influence on foreign policy for which rigor and consistency are quite necessary? As Christopher Layne notes, the weaknesses of the soft power concept lies in its inability to specify the relationship between soft power and political outcomes. This renders Nye's theory difficult to be falsified by empirical evidence. Hence, soft power is not yet a generative concept for academic inquiry.¹⁰

In response to the critics, Nye admits that "the failure to distinguish power behavior from the resources that can produce it has been a problem for all power analyses, not just soft power."¹¹ Therefore, he maintains that soft power should be defined in relational and behavioral terms. That is, soft power is not a measurable resource; rather, its exercise depends on a strategy that combines both material and ideational resources. Soft power is power being used softly. Its success is a function not only of its own merits but also of what others think. As Nye puts it, "with soft power what the target thinks is particularly important, and the target matter as much as the agents ... Soft power is a dance that requires partners."¹² The question then turns into whether the contemporary major powers in world politics would have the willingness to act in collaborative efforts with Washington. Due to this, the next section explains why and how China's growing influence in the marketplace of ideas attests to the decline of US soft power.

The China Model: A Testing Case for the US Soft Power

True, the discourse on the rise of China is a sort of fad over the past decade. The rising China seems to be qualified as a dancing partner with America in world politics. Given that as the most populated country and the

⁹ Nye, *Soft Power*, p. x.

¹⁰ Christopher Layne, "The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power," in Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox ed., *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives*, London: Routledge, 2010, p. 54.

¹¹ Nye, "Responding to My Critics and Concluding Thoughts," in *Ibid.*, 217.

¹² Nye, *The Future of Power*, p. 84. Also suggested reading "Sino-American Relations: Friends, Enemies or Frenemies", addressed by Harvey Dzodin at University of Queensland, Australia, July 25, 2014.

second largest economy in the world, China's global influence is what the US could not afford to ignore. As former US Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick revealed in 2005, it was wise to persuade Beijing to become a stakeholder in the existing international order, for instance, as it struck a chord among the international audiences. His speech was seen as a formal mark of the US commitment to encouraging China's constructive role in the Asia-Pacific security order.¹³ The spirit of the speech has evolved into a widely shared belief among the US policy establishment that it is in America's long-run interest for Washington to engage rather than to contain the rising China due to the unbearable cost to curb the latter's overall leverage in the region.¹⁴

If such a strategy worked well, China will have proposed some ideas at official levels that reflect compatibility of developmental interests with those of the United States. Hence, the China model serves as an index of the likelihood of the US-China community of interests. It in turn reflects the extent to which America is capable of managing China's peaceful rise with its soft power. If it does, the Chinese official discourse should reflect the norms consistent with the American interests, such as democracy, free trade and liberal peace.¹⁵ The US-China community of interests, as recently coined, could hardly be expected without common values. China was an arguably revolutionary power during the Cold War for it was committed to overthrow international norms such as great-power cooperation and non-use of force.¹⁶ During the later period of the Cold War, Beijing maintained a *de facto* security cooperative relationship with Washington even though the Sino-Soviet split turned into open hostilities in 1969. China by no means accepted the legitimacy of the US world leadership then. This was evidenced by the sudden deterioration in relations between Beijing and Washington during the 1990s'.

Although the US-China relationship in the past few decades had never gone beyond the marriage of convenience, Beijing has inherited a few characteristics of the US hegemonic order which was first established in the Western world during the Cold War. Unlike the Western European countries and Japan which were involved with well-institutionalized cooperation with the US at multiple sociopolitical levels, for China, there are few old paths to

¹³ Thomas Christensen, "Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and the U.S. Policy toward East Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2006, p. 95.

¹⁴ Stefan Halper, *The Beijing Consensus: How China's Authoritarian Model will Dominate the Twenty-First Century*, New York: Basic Books, 2010, p. 135.

¹⁵ Immanuel Kant's idea of liberal peace expresses the key US conception of and the practice in building a peaceful international order: Free trade facilitates the exchange of goods, services, and ideas that eliminate mutual distrust and hostility; democratic system minimizes the incentive of war for state leaders. On this matter, see Michael Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 1983, pp. 205-235. Daniel Deudney and John Ikenberry, "The Nature and Sources of the Liberal International Order," *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 25, pp. 175-196.

¹⁶ Chen Jian, *Mao's China and the Cold War*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001, pp. 6-7.

follow in managing its relationship with America. China is thereby left free to challenge or embrace the US leadership, depending on the perceived appeals of the US policies. This in turn is a function of the US soft power through public diplomacy in our new age.

Moreover, for a wider range of international audiences, the rise of the China model implies a different dimension of soft power which has more far-reaching implications for the future power trend. Here it is critical to distinguish between the US policy and the liberal-capitalist developmental model represented by the United States. International observers have noted that the Bush administration's unilateralism in conducting the War on Terror contributed substantially to the decline of the US influence over its European allies and the Middle East.¹⁷ They have yet to come to terms with the magnitude of the decline in the liberal capitalist model as a source of American soft power. It is relatively easy to change foreign policy but prohibitively costly to change the socioeconomic model of development. Due to this, the challenge of the China model to the US liberal-capitalist model is profound and inexpensive. If the challenge itself is consistent and persistent, the power shift from the West to the East will be merely a matter of time.¹⁸

For clarity, focusing on China in this study by no means suggests that the decline of US soft power generates no significant effect on the US relationship with its traditional allies. It is evidently the case that G. W. Bush's foreign policy unilateralism would alienate the US allies and prompt them into self-regarding actions which may undermine the US leadership in the long run.¹⁹ But the short-run effect may not be quite discernible. The US remains the leading power in an overall sense since it has continued to provide security as a public good for the NATO members and its Asian allies. For these countries, therefore, an open political challenge to US leadership could have too costly consequences. By contrast, historical hostility and the current tensions with Washington may have increased Beijing's sensitivity to the decline of US power that would open a window of opportunity for China to expand its prowess in the region. That being said, China's initiative to promote its soft power could serve as a strategy to delegitimize the US hegemony. On the other hand, the global attentive response to the China model of development helps magnify its effect. Taken together, these two processes reflect the decline of America's soft power a vital component symbolic to its global leadership.

Finally, since China represents an authoritarian alternative to modernity against which America defines its liberal-capitalist model, the rise of the China model is a sufficient cause for the decline of the American appeal. Though

¹⁷ Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, "Varieties of Anti-Americanism: A Framework for Analysis" in Peter Katzenstein & Robert Keohane ed., *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007, pp. 9-38.

¹⁸ Moyo, *How the West Was Lost*, p. 132.

¹⁹ Stephen Walt, *Taming American Power: The Global Response to U.S. Primacy*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2005, pp. 2-4.

there is a sizable variety of Anti-Americanism abound, few of them can serve as a powerful indication of the decline in American soft power. As Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane observed, anti-Americanism is actually more a state of mind which has diverse sources. In particular, they identify three contemporary sources. First, the power gap between America and the rest of the world invites jealousy and resentment. Second, the US liberal capitalist model is a focal point of anti-globalization movements. Third, the conflicting of identities in the United States and elsewhere takes the form of attacks on the mainstream values in American society.²⁰ This dynamics does not necessarily undermine American soft power if American domestic institutions are robust enough to tame them. China however, by virtue of its rapidly growing power, and her unique approach to globalization, does provide a focal point for the anti-American expressions. The rise of the China model in the international marketplace of ideas shows that American domestic institutions have failed to achieve their moral purposes. If America is unable to extend moral appeals abroad, its ability to maintain a legitimate international order is surely on the decline.

China's Promotion of Soft/Ideational Power

The Chinese leadership invoked the concept of soft power for the first time at the 17th Party Congress in 2007. President Hu Jintao associated soft power with “the socialist cultural development” and the “cultural creativity of the whole nation.” On this occasion, Hu did not compare Chinese soft power with US hegemony. Instead, in his formulation, he advanced that the promotion of Chinese soft power is to serve domestic purposes. In particular, Chinese soft power is designed to “better safeguard the people’s cultural rights, to enrich the cultural life of the [Chinese] society, and to raise the people’s aspiration for progress.”²¹

This formulation of soft power fit nicely into the Chinese ruling elite’s drive for “Reform of Cultural System” (文化制度改革). Since the 2002 Sixteenth Party Congress, China has worked hard to strengthen cultural/ideational power that has received expected scrutiny. In those contexts, soft power is deemed as a part of the “comprehensive national capacity (综合国力),” and its function is to enhance national cohesion. In this sense, it is not essentially different from the understanding of “national morale” as a key dimension of power in international politics. In essence, Hans Morgenthau, who applied the political philosophy of statecraft to the study of international politics, openly associated national morale with the degree of

²⁰ Peter Katzenstein and Robert Keohane, “Conclusion: Anti-Americanisms and the Polyvalence of America,” in Katzenstein and Keohane eds., *Anti-Americanisms in World Politics*, pp. 307-311.

²¹ Hu Jintao, Report at the Seventeenth Party Congress, http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2007-10/24/content_6938568_6.htm, 2015-1-2.

public support for governmental action.²² Hence, it seems that in the promoting of soft power, Beijing has been merely re-labeling a time-honored statecraft. Yet, what is also remarkable is that such a practice also expresses a disinclination to follow the America-made rule of the game. To that end, China's leaders are trying to signal a new identity to both international and domestic audiences, as President Xi Jin-ping pointed out at the Central Work conference on foreign affairs in November 29, 2014.²³

Interestingly, scholars like Randall Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu envision three roles (3s) that China is likely to assume in its dealings with the US-led international order. Firstly, as supporters, both powers assume the fair share of responsibilities associated with co-managing the evolving but essentially unchanged global order (effectively with the US); secondly, as spoilers, they might seek to destroy the existing order and replace it with something entirely different; thirdly, as shirkers, they obviously want their privileges of power but are unwilling to pay for them by contributing to global governance.²⁴

While it is unclear which role China would fully assume in the future, Schweller and Pu observed that China is embarking on a de-legitimizing strategy toward the US hegemonic model, which allows China to openly enforce its own vision of international order. For them, de-legitimizing strategy is an "art of resistance" that coexists with "relations of dominance." It takes the form of symbols, ideas, and languages that portrays the leading player's social position as morally unacceptable and conveys the message of discontent.²⁵ In this light, the decline of the US soft power leaves room for China to expand its influence by distancing itself from the US vision of international order.

The Chinese authorities seemed to have seized or partially grasped the initiative from the very beginning to exploit the opportunity due to America's waning influence. This inclination is further captured by David Lampton's formulation of "ideational power," which is broader than Nye's soft power in scope. For Lampton, ideational power "explicitly embraces innovation and considers political and diplomatic leadership [in leading the innovations]."²⁶ He regards the Chinese exercise of soft power as an attempt to strengthen ideational power evidenced by the Beijing government and its think tanks having dramatically increased investments in selling its cultural brands and

²² Hans Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace* 6th ed., revised by Kenneth Thompson (New York: McGraw Hill, 1985), p. 153.

²³ "President Xi Jin-ping Addresses at Central Work on Foreign Affairs", *China Daily*, November 30, 2014.

²⁴ Randall Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of US Decline," *International Security* Vol. 36, No. 1, (2011), 42.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 47-48. This idea, as Scheller and Pu admit, is borrowed from James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*, New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1985.

²⁶ David Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power: Might, Money, and Minds*, Oakland: The University of California Press, 2008, p. 118.

developing overseas media networks. These efforts may not be designed to balance against the US influence unless they are coordinated by the state propaganda apparatus. As Harvey Dzodin stated, both the United States and China have avoided open confrontations between them. However, the presumed competitive logic of ideational power did find an echo in the comment by the *People's Daily* that:

*"The United States, on its part, not only possesses the world's largest political and military hegemony, but also has in its hands the biggest media and cultural hegemony. The soft strength of Western news media far surpasses its economic 'hard strength.'"*²⁷

More than this, Li Changchun, the Chinese public information chief, reportedly remarked to the effect that the global information space now ranks among the crucial duels for power in the 21st century.²⁸ To that end, the expansion of the Confucius Institute across the globe represents a significant campaign. The number of the Confucius Institutes rose dramatically from 156 in 2007 to 475 by the end of 2014.²⁹ Despite some cases of the close-down, they span across the whole Western world, including all major EU countries. More dramatic is the extravagant style in which Beijing hosted the 2008 Olympic Games. A *People's Daily* editorial eloquently stated that "the Olympic Games provide an extraordinary opportunity for China after 30-year Opening and Reform to present itself as an open and confident country. This is an honor not only to Beijing but also to Olympics."³⁰ In the eyes of most Chinese nationals, the Olympic Games assumed the significance of demonstrating China's power as the Beijing government proved capable of investing enormous national resources into constructing stadiums and overhauling Beijing's traffic system. This demonstrated a surging nationalism in view of the China's soft power.

In sum, the expansion of Chinese soft power abroad aims to serve dual-purposes. Internally, it contributes to the social cohesiveness which could be translated into a public support for the government action. Externally, it could help de-legitimize the US hegemony. Whereas the former reflects the resistance against the effect of American soft power, the latter represents a direct attempt to counterbalance against the US hegemony. Both express the declining ability on America's part to attract China to play by its preferred rule of the game.

There is no denying that the decline of US hard power contributes partly to Beijing's initiative. Yet the image of America's decline assumes more

²⁷ Cited from Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power*, p. 159.

²⁸ Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, p. 10.

²⁹ From the Confucius Institute's official website, *Sohu News*: <http://news.sohu.com/20070610/n250489765.shtml>, 2014-11-1.

³⁰ "Honor Belongs to the Great Olympic," *People's Daily*, August 24, 2008, http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-08/24/content_9688005.htm, 2014-11-8.

significance. It is true that the US complete and ongoing military withdrawals from Iraq and Afghanistan did signal the decline of American hard/material capabilities. But what is at issue here is the image rather than the substance of the real power of the United States. It is evident that America remains predominant in the global distribution of military power as its military spending surpasses that of the rest. Combined and more importantly, its military influence is omnipresent around the globe which is a clear indication that America's overall capacity will remain unchallenged in the foreseeable future, leaving the "delegitimizing strategy" as the only desirable choice.

On the other hand, the enhancement of Chinese hard power is hardly at the same pace with Beijing's expansion of soft power due to the technical difficulties involved in military modernization. In contrast to the use of soft power, China's use of hard power has provoked some foreign observers into speculating that China is seeking to exclude the US influence from the region.³¹ Yet, whether China has the intention now to enforce its own vision of order in the Asia-Pacific region is open to debate. At a glance, since 2008 China has been acting assertive in certain critical international areas. It failed to join the international efforts to sanction North Korea's two military provocations in 2010. It has conducted unilateral diplomacy in the South China Sea with regard to the disputed maritime territory.³² But these facts could not fully support the argument that China harbors an intention to exclude the US influence in East Asia with its own vision of order, the so-called Chinese version of "Monroe Doctrine". Instead, as Thomas Christensen notes, Beijing's more truculent posture since 2008 is rooted in an exaggerated sense of China's rise in global power and serious domestic political insecurity. Specifically, as he argues, the "domestic voices calling for a more muscular Chinese foreign policy have created a heated political environment" in which the Chinese leaders, for fear of being accused of being soft and thereby losing its leadership legitimacy, were pressed hard to act aggressively in international politics.³³ Hence, it is the image rather than the substance of American decline that aroused the nationalist fervor within China. This is illustrated by the way international audiences have perceived the China model.

The Beijing Consensus and the International Perception of the China Model

However what draws more international attention is China's financial strength loomed behind its overseas cultural promotions. The spectacular

³¹John Mearsheimer, "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* Vol. 3, No. 4, 2010, pp. 381-396. Aaron Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy: China, America, and the Struggle for Mastery in Asia*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2011, p. 5.

³² Carlyle Thayer, "Chinese Assertiveness in the South China Sea and Southeast Asian Responses," *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2011, pp. 77-104.

³³ Thomas Christensen, "The Advantages of an Assertive China: Responding to Beijing's Abrasive Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 90, No. 2, p. 60.

growth of Chinese economy over the past few decades has been sufficient enough to fund the language training programs. An interesting contrast drawn by Stefan Halper illustrates this point, in 2009, as legislators in Washington and London wrangled over where to find the cash to pay for expensive stimulus plans, the Chinese government unveiled an ambitious budget of 45 billion RMB (then approximately US\$ 6.8 billion) for a new project literally called “overseas propaganda.”³⁴

More often than not, projection of the global power shift in China’s favor is based on the expectation that China’s current economic growth rate will continue into the 2030s, a very period China would be equal to the United States in terms of GDP.³⁵ Various optimisms about the trajectory of Chinese socioeconomic modernization have converged on the “Beijing Consensus.” Jushua Ramo, the originator of the Beijing Consensus, pits Beijing’s developmental approach directly against the Washington Consensus, which according to him “was a hallmark of the end of history arrogance; it left a trail of destroyed economies and bad feelings around the globe.” By contrast, “China’s new development approach is driven by a desire to have equitable, peaceful high-quality growth... It is flexible enough that it is barely classifiable as a doctrine. It does not believe in uniform solutions for every situation. It is defined by a ruthless willingness to innovate and experiment, by a lively defense of national borders and interests, and by the increasingly thoughtful accumulation of tools of asymmetric power projection.”³⁶

Interestingly but paradoxically, this characterization of the Beijing Consensus deprives the very coherence people want to assign to it. Hence, if China’s approach is not a doctrine applicable to various situations, how could it be learned by other countries? Furthermore, how do the countries disillusioned with the Washington Consensus rally behind this new consensus? Nevertheless, international observers have tended to draw different implications from the Beijing Consensus due to various reasons. Among others, John Williamson tends to associate the Beijing Consensus with the faith in governmental capacity for economic innovation and necessary social stability concerned.³⁷ Halper argues more explicitly that China’s economic success is due to the successful integration of government-led growth model into the world economy. In the process, the political structure remains stable, thus enabling the authoritarian government to mobilize the social resources for its power-seeking activities in international politics.³⁸ But the combination of authoritarian political structure with the capitalist mode of production appears to arouse more concern than admiration. Azar Gat draws

³⁴ Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, p. 9.

³⁵ Arvind Subramanian, “The Inevitable Superpower: Why China’s Dominance is a Sure Thing,” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 90, No. 5, 2011, pp. 66-78.

³⁶ Jushua Cooper Ramo, *The Beijing Consensus*, London: The Foreign Policy Center, 2004, p. 4.

³⁷ John Williamson, “Is the Beijing Consensus Now Dominant?” *Asia Policy*, No. 13, pp. 1-16.

³⁸ Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*, Chapter 4.

an alarming analogy between the imperial Germany and Japan in the 1930s and the contemporary China and Russia, arguing that both Germany and Japan were too small—in terms of population, resources, and potential—to take on the United States. Present-day China, on the other hand, is the largest player in the international system in terms of population and is experiencing spectacular economic growth. By shifting from communism to capitalism, China has switched to a far more efficient brand of authoritarianism. As China rapidly narrows the economic gap with the developed world, the possibility looms that it will become a true authoritarian superpower.³⁹

Though controversial, international public opinions endorse this concern. According to a 2011 research report by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, over 60% interviewees in major NATO countries (Spain, Britain, France, and Germany) have thought that China has or will be able to replace the United States as the world superpower. Even in America 46% interviewees hold the same or ambivalent view on the China's challenge, compared to 45% interviewees holding the opposite view.⁴⁰

However this prevailing perception is not unproblematic. International criticisms of the viability of the China model exist in significant numbers. Among them was Minxin Pei's alarming remark on China's trapped transition as "quite typical". For him, with political reform lagging far behind economic modernization, the Chinese state is degenerating into a predatory mechanism through which state agents profit from economic growth at the expense of public interests. "The inevitable deterioration of governance," Pei argues, "has undermined the state capacity, heightened social tensions, and cast into doubt the sustainability of the progress China has achieved since the 1970s."⁴¹ However, as Chinese economic growth continues, few observable signs exist to suggest that China's developmental model could not overcome its inner weaknesses. As Fareed Zakaria insisted, "an expanding pie makes every other problem, however grave, somewhat more manageable."⁴²

What is observable, however, is that China's developmental model is eclipsing America's. It is the declining appeal of America's developmental model that leads people to seek alternatives. As Arif Dirlik observes, the invocations of the Beijing Consensus invariably point toward the ill-functioning of the liberal capitalist model of development sold by the Washington Consensus. The Beijing Consensus, according to Dirlik, "derives its

³⁹ Azar Gat, "The Return of Authoritarian Great Powers," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 86, No. 4. http://www.viet-studies.info/Return_of_Authoritarian_Great_Powers_FA.pdf, 2012-11-8.

⁴⁰ Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project, China Seen Overtaking U.S. as Global Superpower: 23-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, July 13, 2011. <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2011/07/PewGlobal-Attitudes-Balance-of-Power-U.S.-Image-Report-FINAL-July-13-2011.pdf>, 2012-11-8.

⁴¹ Minxin Pei, *China's Trapped Transition: The Limits of Developmental Autocracy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006, p. 206.

⁴² Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2008, p. 93.

meaning and appeal not from some coherent economic or political position but from its suggestion of a pole in the global political economy which can serve as a gathering place for those who are opposed to U. S. imperialism.”⁴³ Even Francis Fukuyama who is a jealous guardian of liberal democracy has tried to call into attention the profound socioeconomic crisis that contributes to the delegitimizing of the American model. Sharing with the followers of the China Model “A Faith in Change”, he pins hope on the left-wing mobilization. The chief reason for the absence of the left-wing mobilization, as he argues, is “a failure in the realm of ideas.” Hence, a new ideology is needed to “reassert the supremacy of democratic politics over economics and legitimate anew government as an expression of the public interest.”⁴⁴ On the political issue at least, Fukuyama does not disagree much from the advocates of the China model. For him, America is suffering from the lack of intellectual inspiration for the model of liberal capitalism. In a larger sense, his observation amount to the recognition of America’s declining ability to inspire the world, which is essential to the maintenance of soft power.

In sum, the Beijing Consensus is a Western creation in response to the perceived American decline. China’s international behaviors in the recent decade also contributed to the emergence of the Beijing Consensus. Beijing is conveying the impression that China has the aspiration to take the leadership position that Washington could no longer afford. Taken together, the Beijing Consensus reflects the declining confidence in America’s ability to lead and the expectation for an alternative leadership. The Beijing Consensus may perhaps be a passing fad, yet it carries particular implications for US soft power. Since soft power is a function of image in the audience’s minds, the emergence of the Beijing Consensus is a good index of the decline of America’s soft power.

Conclusion

This study aims to point out that the efficacy of soft power depends on the interpretation by the target audiences. Hence, inferences about the effect of soft power should be drawn from how other countries actually perceive the American model. For this purpose, this article studies the China model in great detail, which serves as a powerful alternative to the American model. Whether the China model would manage to replace the American model is beyond the scope of proper inquiry as it is treated more as an image than as a coherent entity.

To be sure, controversies over the concept of soft power involve divergent perspectives taken by researchers and policymakers. Researchers

⁴³ Arif Dirlik, “The Beijing Consensus: Beijing ‘Gong Shi.’ Who Recognizes Whom and to What End?” *Globalization and Autonomy Online Compendium*, http://www.globalautonomy.ca/global1/article.jsp?index=PP_Dirlik_BeijingConsensus.xml

⁴⁴ Francis Fukuyama, “The Future of History: Can Liberal Democracy Survive the Decline of the Middle Class?” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 91, No.1, 2012, http://www.viet-studies.info/kinhte/FA_FutureOfHistory_Fukuyama.htm, 2014-11-8.

put a premium on finding clear causal relationships as it adds to the validity of their theories. Practitioners, in contrast, value the outcome achieved by their policy, as it directly bears on their career prospects. Indeed, the very purpose of Nye in promoting soft power is to facilitate interaction between theory and policy.⁴⁵ For sure, it is clearly imperative to inform American policymakers how to use power prudently. This is a task in which abstract models can present some assistance. In practice, if the US or China goes down, the whole world goes with them.

Remarkably, the very practice of Nye helps reveal the importance of having soft power which includes the power of ideas (along with nice behaviors). Nye is exercising his soft power on the real world by elaborating the idea of soft power—as his colleague Robert Keohane puts it, “by ordering the world, ideas may shape agendas, which can profoundly shape outcomes.”⁴⁶ These processes take place through intellectual and material means. Military and economic competitions as material facts could be directly observed. The clash of soft powers, by contrast, has to be imagined in the first place if it can possibly be verified by hard evidence. Assuming that the liberal capitalist model of development is a coherent set of ideas that guide human being to create wonderful realities, the emergence of the alternative model, say, the incipient China model, is a challenge to both imagination and practice. The decline of the American soft power is a decline of potentiality, and is open to debate. But the high expectation for the China model as an alternative already implies the uncertainty left by the decline of American soft power.

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⁴⁵ Nye, “Response to My Critics and Concluding Thoughts,” p. 226.

⁴⁶ Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane, “Ideas and Foreign Policy: An Analytical Framework,” in Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane eds., *Ideas and Foreign Policy: Beliefs, Institutions, and Political Change*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993, p. 12.

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Özet

İki kutuplu düzenin çöküşünden sonra zaferini ilan eden liberal kapitalizmin merkezi ABD'nin imajı; 11 Eylül olayları sonrasında yürüttüğü tek taraflı terörle mücadele politikası ve 2008 mali krizinden sonra erozyona uğramış, gelişmekte olan ülkeler tarafından model olarak benimsenen liberal kapitalist model prestij kaybetmiştir. Her ne kadar öngörülebilir gelecek için ABD, dünya çapında askeri varlığı ve ekonomik gücüyle maddi güç (hard power) açısından lider konumunu muhafaza edecek olsa da, 1990'lı yıllardaki yumuşak

gücü (soft power) alternatif değerlerin tehdidi altına girmiştir. Çin ise, uzun süredir devam eden ekonomik büyümedeki başarısıyla bu dönemde uluslararası düzeyde yoğun ilgi görmüş, 2008 krizinde dahi koruyabildiği yüksek büyüme oranları ile de gelişmekte olan ülkeler için alternatif bir model haline gelmiştir. Günümüzde liberal kapitalist modelin zayıflıkları ve dönemsel başarısızlıkları karşısında ulusal ve sosyalist kültüre dayalı otoriter kalkınma modeli eleştirilerin dayanağı haline gelmiştir.

Bu çalışmada, Çin'in yumuşak gücünün artan etkisinin ABD'nin hegemonyasını zayıflattığı vurgulanmış ve "Pekin konsensüsü" olarak da bilinen Çin'in otoriter kalkınma modelinin dinamikleri, sürdürülebilirliği ve limitleri açıklanmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu kapsamda ilk olarak; yumuşak güç tanımlanmaya çalışılmış ve zorlamaya karşı ikna ve cazibeyi, silahların gücüne karşı kültürün, fikirlerin, ideolojilerin gücünü temsil eden yumuşak gücün önemine değinilmiştir. Yumuşak gücü ölçmenin diğer ülkelerin algılarındaki değişikliklerin tespiti ile mümkün olduğu üzerinde durulmuştur. Akabinde ise, Batı dünyasında sayıları her geçen gün artan Konfüçyüs enstitülerinin, 2008 Olimpiyat oyunlarındaki görkemin Çin'e dair olumlu tasavvurları güçlendirdiği, Çin'in imajındaki bu yükselişin aynı zamanda, ABD'nin yumuşak gücünün gerilemesinin de bir göstergesi olduğunun altı çizilmiştir. Aslında ABD'nin hakim ideolojisi liberal kapitalist modelin zayıflaması kendi etki alanında boşluk yaratarak Çin'e fırsat tanımıştır. Çin'in yumuşak gücünü artırması ile ABD hegemonyasının zarar gördüğü açıklanarak, liberal kapitalist modelin hem kendi zayıflıklarının hem de Çin'in otoriter kalkınma modelinin başarısının baskısına maruz kaldığı ileri sürülmüştür. Son bölümde ise, 2007 yılından itibaren aslında iç siyasi maksatlar ile yumuşak güç konseptinin ilk hükümet programına dâhil edilerek uygulamaya konduğu, daha sonra ulusal birliği sağlamadaki başarısı yanında uluslararası alternatif bir model olarak uluslararası dikkatleri üzerine çektiği ileri sürülmüştür.

Sonuç olarak; ABD'nin Irak ve Afganistan'dan çekilmesiyle maddi gücünün azaldığı ifade edilebilse de, küresel düzeyde elle tutulur ABD üstünlüğü halen mevcuttur. Dünyanın ikinci büyük ekonomisi Çin ise, büyüme hızını zirvede tutmaya devam etmektedir. Bu iktisadi büyümenin 2030'lara kadar devam edeceği öngörülmekte, ABD'nin zayıflayan imajı karşısında gelecekte Çin'in ulaşacağı başarı düzeyi, özellikle Asya-Pasifik bölgesinde mevcut yumuşak gücünün ana örüntüsünü oluşturmaktadır. Ancak bu yükseliş trendi bazı riskleri de bünyesinde barındırmaktadır. Otoriter siyasi yapının ve kapitalist üretim tarzı ile birlikteliği 1930'ların emperyalist Almanya ve Japonya'sının otoriter rejimlerine dönüşme ihtimali taşımakta, hatta Almanya ve Japonya'nın kaynaklarına nazaran çok daha geniş kaynaklara sahip bugünün Çin ve Rusya'sı gerçek bir otoriter süper güç olabilir. Ayrıca, Çin devlet aygıtının ekonomik potansiyelini kötüye kullanma ihtimali, otoriter kalkınma modelinin liberal kapitalist model kadar entelektüel derinliğe sahip olmaması gibi görüşler de bu modele getirilen önemli eleştirilerdendir. Kısaca; Washington konsensüsünün zayıfladığının göstergesi olan Pekin konsensüsünün başarısı kendine içkin olan dinamikleri ve limitleri çerçevesinde şekillenecektir.