

**Look Beyond and Beneath the Soft Power:  
An Alternative Analytical Framework for China's Cultural Diplomacy**

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**Abstract**

This paper contextualizes China's contemporary global cultural footprints by examining the recent development of its cultural diplomacy. It started with discussing the limitations of applying 'soft power' as the mainstream analytical tool: its lack of historical perspective and engagement of the domestic dimension, as well as the incompatibility with the very purpose of cultural diplomacy with its binary view of cultures and values. Then an alternative and more sophisticated framework of analysis building on cultural hegemony, Orientalism and nationalism is proposed to look beyond and beneath the soft power narrative to reveal a three-dimensional picture against the historical, international and domestic contexts. The dynamics among all the forces at work in this terrain are also critically analyzed to illuminate the complex nature of this uneven global cultural terrain of struggle and the unique challenges faced by China's cultural diplomacy.

Keywords: cultural diplomacy, soft power, cultural hegemony, Orientalism, nationalism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

China's expanding global presence goes hand in hand with its deeper engagement across cultural, economic, and diplomatic realms of international affairs. Amidst its growing influence, China has been trying to carve out a new identity in the global cultural terrain. The cultural diplomacy campaign was launched to fulfil this new mission. At the same time, when the China Dream of national rejuvenation is staged by President Xi Jinping, its push to regain the glory of Chinese culture has prompted both the Chinese society and China watchers to rethink China's historical, ideological and cultural heritage.

As the oldest continuous civilization on earth, China has survived 4000 years history with a rich cultural heritage, and re-emerged as the second largest economy in the world from 2010. However, since the perception of Chinese civilization in the rest of the world shifted from admiration in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to growing contempt in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, China's image has been misrepresented in many Western countries since this negative downturn until today: from 'yellow peril' to 'red threat', the transformation brought by China's modern development seems to have only changed the color code, from race to regime.

If seen through theoretical lenses, we will be able to see two images of 'otherness' here. Firstly, the dichotomy of East and West as cultural entities was dissected by Said's critique of Orientalism, in which the Orient is rendered as being the 'inferior other' for the Occident to define its own superior identity; in a way, an Orientalist perception of the world is 'the West and the Rest' (Hall, 1992, 185), with 'the West' at the center and 'the Rest' as the inferior. In history, although China had mostly been held as a civilized Confucian utopia until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it became a rotten Oriental empire towards the end of the Qing Dynasty that had its cultural identity subject to 'otherness'.

Secondly, despite the shifting of the dynamic hub of the world economy, the traditional equation of the West with modernity and the Orient with the exotic past was carried onto modern times, when China's authoritarian regime evolved its image from being 'the cultural other' to being 'the ideological other'. As long as China maintains that the values of its political system are fundamentally different from the leading Western countries, China is still considered as the 'other' ideologically. Moreover, in the discourse of nationalism, China again fell into the camps of 'us' and 'them'. These polarized 'other' representations upheld each other, and became dual forces of Western domination over China's power of discourse when they came into play with the power and knowledge relations as defined by Foucault (1980).

In response, the Chinese government believed launching a campaign of cultural diplomacy as a 'strategic communication' would help it 'get the right message to the right audience through the right medium at the right time' (Anderson and Engstrom, 2009, 36). Chinese scholar Guo (2008,

30) also argued for the right timing in that:

The international interest in, and recognition of, China's role in the global economy and international politics appear to coincide with a Chinese government's rethink of the image of China as a world power in tune with its reputation as an ancient civilization.

This shows both an internal and external dimension: internally, China needs to construct a coherent view of its national identity at home that is commensurate with its people's expectation to re-establish China as a major power and culture in today's world; externally, China wishes to communicate with the world Confucius's belief in 'harmony with diversity', not to fight for 'hegemony with universal values'. Therefore, cultural diplomacy is expected to serve the dual aims of countering the China threat argument and advocating cultural pluralism at the same time, corresponding to the afore-mentioned two images of 'otherness'.

Academic interest in the study of China's cultural diplomacy has only recently developed into a substantial body of research. However, its focus has almost been exclusively on how it is functioning as a tool to build China's soft power. The aim of this paper was neither to measure the soft power generated by China's cultural diplomacy, nor to argue whether or not it has been successful. Instead, its point of departure was to show the limitations of applying the Western-defined narrative of 'soft power' in non-Western contexts, and why an alternative and more sophisticated theoretical framework is needed to look both beyond and beneath the soft power lens to illuminate the complex nature of China's cultural diplomacy.

## **2. UNPACKING THE KEY CONCEPTS**

### **2.1 Cultural Diplomacy**

The hybrid term 'cultural diplomacy' does not have a particularly long history. It first appeared in the 1934 Oxford English Dictionary, as a laudatory reference for English language teaching abroad, but the concept did not gain much currency until the term 'public diplomacy' was coined by Edmund Gullion in 1965 during the days of the Cold War. It then appeared across a range of discourses, including academic, journalistic and governmental, to mean the 'active, planned use of cultural, educational and informational programming to create a desired result that is directly related to a government's foreign policy objectives' (McClellan, 2004, n.p.).

The above definition explains why cultural diplomacy was often considered as a core element of public diplomacy, or public diplomacy often assumes the form of cultural diplomacy, which is 'the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspect of culture, with the intention of *fostering mutual understanding*' [emphasis added] (Cummings, 2009, n.p.). The definition given in the *Cultural Diplomacy Dictionary* echoes this: 'the

essential idea is to allow people access to different cultures and perspectives, and in this way, foster mutual understanding and dialogue' (Kishore, 2013, n.p.). It was also made clear by the Institute for Cultural Diplomacy (2011, n.p.) that it 'is not a promotion of its own culture, but rather of understanding and reconciling, as well as learning from each other'.

An important difference between 'cultural difference' and 'cultural diversity' was made by Bhabha (1994), who contended that the latter is static and concerns knowledge, while the former stress on the dynamic process and concerns interaction, during which an 'Other' culture was involved and a difference was produced between 'Self' and 'Other'. Multiculturalism thus addresses the process of mutual recognition, generation, and transformation in this interaction with other cultures, particularly between conflicting cultures, and reveals the tensions and exclusions involved in the process when the dominating culture tries to establish and maintain its authority. This distinguished 'cultural pluralism' from the simple fact of 'cultural diversity': it is 'a political response to the injustice done to members of formerly oppressed culture' (Sabbagh, 2005, 100).

From the above we can see cultural pluralism underpins the ultimate goal of cultural diplomacy. After clarifying this key concept of the research subject, the following section will look at the mainstream theory of using 'soft power' to explain the purpose of China's cultural diplomacy, followed by a critical review that exposes the inadequacy and even inappropriateness of applying it in examining China's cultural diplomacy.

## **2.2 Soft Power**

Coined by Joseph Nye in the late 1980s, the term 'soft power' means 'the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment' (Nye, 2004, x). The definition was expanded by adding the word 'persuasion' when he explained the new concept of 'smart power', a strategy that describes a successful 'combination of the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction' (Nye, 2011, xiii). Again, in another article Nye published in 2012 about soft power in China, he referred to soft power as 'the ability to get what one wants by *attraction and persuasion* rather than coercion or payment' (Nye, 2012, n.p.). It is an ideal situation when 'attraction' and 'persuasion' merge seamlessly, but the inherent tension existing between the two, whereby the former draws on intrinsic values while the latter depends on extrinsic aids, was never discussed, although it has huge implications on how to build soft power in practice, especially for an authoritarian 'hard state' like China.

According to Li (2009, 31), soft power in China is 'primarily utilized to refute the 'China

Threat' thesis, facilitate a better understanding of China's domestic social-economic reality, and persuade the outside world to accept and support China's rise'. However, a question worth pondering is: will state-led *persuasion* campaign increase or decrease the *attraction* of a country's culture, political values and foreign policy, the three sources of soft power defined by Nye? Nye's answer to this question was quite blunt in that Beijing is 'trying its hands at attraction, and failing – miserably', with the explanation being that China 'made the mistake of thinking that government is the main instrument of soft power' (Nye, 2013, n.p.). Yet, ironically, despite the academic and foreign policy debates it has induced at home in the US, the concept of 'soft power' was probably more enthusiastically embraced by the Chinese government than anywhere else, even to the extent of obsession according to Shambaugh (2013) and Tao (2015). It has gained considerable currency in both official and scholarly discourse in China, particularly after 2007 when it was adopted into the official lexicon: Chinese president Hu Jintao made it clear at the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress that 'cultural soft power' has become 'a factor of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength' (Hu, 2007, n.p.), and 'building cultural soft power' was listed on the agenda in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year-Plan (2011-2015). After Xi Jinping took over in 2012, he not only continued to endorse this concept, but linked it with the new vision of the China Dream in a speech: 'enhancing national cultural soft power is crucial to the realization of the two 'centennial goals' and the China Dream of national rejuvenation' (Xi, 2013, n.p.).

Possibly because of its frequent appearance in official rhetoric, there was not much scholarly debate on the concept's relevance to China but extensive elaborations on its importance for China, almost as a timely cure found for China's image problem that the government is facing after China's economic and military rise. Therefore, of the myriad literature about China's cultural diplomacy, the great majority has attributed its purpose to 'building soft power': it was expected to be the lubricant to transform China's rise from a hard rise to a soft rise.

True, if affluence were to lead to influence, the hard power of economic and military might need to be combined with cultural and values attraction to make the influence positive. Nye (2004, 2005, 2012, 2013, 2015) likes to quote changing positions in the opinion polls as an indicator of how successful one's soft power strategy is, which encourages a common view of seeing soft power as a 'competition between great powers' (Guo, 2004, 20). Although Nye (2013, n.p.) himself claimed that 'soft power need *not* be a zero-sum game', the way he pitched China's soft power growth in 2005 as 'at America's expense' actually says it is. Nye and Wang's research (2009, 21) also found that 'most of these (American) views assume a zero-sum game perspective and cast a more negative rather than positive light on China's soft power growth'. When China's ranking slipped down across a number of international polls including

Pew Global Attitude Survey (PGAS) after 2011,<sup>1</sup> Nye (2011b) commented on the enormous gap between Chinese political values and the Western prevailing norms as one of the intrinsic reasons.

If we remember the purpose of cultural diplomacy as 'fostering mutual understanding', we can see why this defies the validity of 'soft power' as being the underpinning theory for cultural diplomacy that clearly does not aim at one side winning over the other but focusing on a notion of a plus sum game. The soft power approach is still a binary one in essence and projects different cultural and value systems as representing identities that are rivals to each other. As the two separate sources of 'soft power' identified in Nye's definition, 'culture' and 'political values' are becoming increasingly overlapping today, to the effect that the blurred boundary between the two has complicated conceptualizations of Chinese soft power and become a potential barrier for the focus of China's cultural diplomacy on cultural promotion, which tends to be interpreted as steeped in political value promotion. By the same token, alongside the political value divide between China and most Western countries, the cultural dimension was considered an extra layer of China's non-Western identity.

Also, since the concept of 'soft power' is affixed vis-a-vis China's rising hard power, which is already causing great concerns internationally, this approach tends to picture China's cultural diplomacy as a softening agent of the China Threat. It may be useful in analyzing the gap between the soft and hard powers of China and exploring why China's soft power growth does not synchronize with its increases in hard economic rise as many scholars (Huntington, 1998; Lai and Lu, 2012) have argued for, but it is too narrow a lens through which to both view the purpose of China's cultural diplomacy and to evaluate its effects, as it tends to apply the same lens to look at China as the U.S. and fails to recognize the unequal power positions associated with culture and ideology. Rather, the difference it shows is China's drive is stronger in the soft power competition to match its recent rise in hard power, thus receiving more attention and funding from the central government.

What is more important is that the 'soft power' lens has only put China in the limelight as the projecting side that launches a 'charm offensive' (Kurlantzick, 2007), while detaching it from the background of the global cultural terrain that it has not engaged with any historical analysis: the legacies of cultural hegemony, knowledge-power nexus and Orientalism have shaped national imaginaries and political discourses while underpinning the foundation of the current

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<sup>1</sup> Pew Global Attitude Survey was carried out by Pew Research Centre; available at: <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2012/06/Pew-Global-Attitudes-U.S.-Image-Report-FINAL-June-13-2012.pdf>. 42.

global cultural terrain. Nor did it address nationalism as the domestic driving force for China to launch cultural diplomacy to communicate its fresh self-perception, which is also connected to and regenerated from its own deep-seated historical past. The remnants of the historical contexts, both internationally and domestically, continued to permeate life in China today. If the purpose of China's cultural diplomacy is only examined from the perspectives of 'building soft power', it has only scratched the surface.

After clarifying the definition of cultural diplomacy and analyzing the inadequacy of the current theoretical framework of soft power, the next section will proceed to present an overview of the historical, international and domestic contexts specifically for China, where the legacies of Orientalism, cultural hegemony, power-knowledge nexus and nationalism were interwoven into the complex global cultural terrain that China's cultural diplomacy was launched into.

### **3. THE HISTORICAL AND INTERNATIONAL CONTEXTS: CULTURAL HEGEMONY POWER RELATIONS AND ORIENTALISM**

This section will look at the historical dimension in the international contexts, which is underpinned by Gramsci's concept of 'cultural hegemony', Foucault's notion of 'power relations' and Said's critique of 'Orientalism'. What follows is an overview of these key concepts.

A good place to start with is the concept of culture hegemony, which was first formally put forward by Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s as 'intellectual and moral leadership whose principal constituting elements are consent and persuasion' (cited in Fontana, 1993,140). Gramsci contrasted the functions of 'domination' (direct physical coercion) with those of 'direction' (consent) in defining hegemony as 'a complete fusion of economic, political, intellectual and moral objectives which will be brought about through the intermediary of ideology' (cited in Mouffe, 1979, 181). This process of 'manufacturing consent' was further elaborated by Foucault (1980), who pointed out incisively that discourse is created and perpetuated by those who have the power and means of communication, and power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, which are reinforced and redefined constantly through the education system, the media, and the flux of political and economic ideologies. They have both highlighted the role played by ideology in producing and maintaining hegemony and power, which is 'that part of culture which is actively concerned with the establishment and defence of patterns of belief and value' (Fallers, 1961, 677). These two terms of 'establishment' and 'defense' captured the essence in this process: it aims at creating something new to cope with

the cultural threats posed by the 'other', but it is also a defense of 'our' culture.

Gramsci was visionary enough to take the conventional Marxist theory beyond class struggle to the fight for cultural hegemony as a more significant battle, Foucault's elaboration of power relations revealed how this battle is constant and pervasive in nature, and how power functions - the means by which it controls knowledge and vice versa. His research frame suggests analysis to be enmeshed in complex dynamics among truth, knowledge and power (Rowan and Shore, 2009).

It is based on Gramsci's concept of 'cultural hegemony' and Foucault's theory of 'knowledge is power' that Said developed his critique of Orientalism by arguing from a different dichotomy of Occident and Orient, which is not about knowledge but about power: Said (1978, 3) dislocated the 'familiar' concept of the Orient to expose how the Other helps define the West via contrasting languages, experiences and images in a 'Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient'. He established that power and knowledge are inseparable components of the intellectual binary relationship with which Occidentals claim 'knowledge of the Orient'. Just as Dabashi (2015, 15) pinpointed, 'the critique of Orientalism was a critique of a mode of knowledge production'. It exposed how the relationship between the "East and West" as potentially cultural contestants was transform into 'West and the Rest': the study of the Orient by the Occident is not to achieve a truthful knowledge and perception, but to define the relationship between the two, with Western power standing at its very core. In short, Orientalism established the West's cultural hegemony over the East, under Western domination, the East has lost its power or even the right of discourse to the West. This was best summarized by the famous quote of Karl Marx in the first page of Orientalism: 'they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented'.

Today, Orientalism is still one of the most powerful analytical concepts as the globalization of knowledge and the Western culture constantly reaffirms the West's view of itself as the center of legitimate knowledge and the source of 'civilized knowledge'. A word of explanation must be entered here regarding the East and West as 'binary oppositions', which makes them appear unified and homogeneous, essentially with one view about the other. Of course, this is not the case, both the East and West are terms covering enormous historical, cultural and economic distinctions; they are used as short hand generalizations here to make a point of the dialectic relationship. Hall (1992, 186) has remarkably deconstructed the concept of 'the West' as 'a historical, not a geographical construct'; it is 'a tool to think with', 'an ideology', 'a system of representation', and a means by which such a non-generalizable identity is imagined as a standard or model of comparison' in a system of global power relations.

Said further claimed that Western representations of the 'Orient' amounted to a form of cultural

imperialism. One meaning of the term is that representations which claim to be objective and universal, in fact are the products of undisclosed relations of power. Huntington (1998,184) elaborated this in one sentence: ‘What is universalism to the West is imperialism to the rest’. In contrast to Huntington’s view that cultural and religious identities will be the primary source of conflicts in the post-Cold War international system, Said has continuously challenged the notion that difference implies hostility, and called for a new way of conceiving the conflicts that have stimulated generations of hostility, war, and imperial control, however, in his 2003 *Preface* to the new print of *Orientalism*, Said (2003, xviii) still lamented that we were imprisoned in ‘labels and antagonistic debate whose goal is a belligerent collective identity rather than understanding and intellectual exchange’.

Apart from this label of being the inferior Orient, China also found itself haunted by another antiquated view as a representation of the ‘yellow peril’, a psychological fear that was projected mainly on East Asia. In modern days, the rise of a Communist China has activated this embedded fear when the new term ‘red threat’ resonated the continued fear as a recurrent pattern. In Tchen & Yeats’s words (2014, 16), it ‘becomes part of the politics of a people. It becomes ideology and faith’. The evolution of China’s image from being the ‘yellow peril’ to ‘red threat’ suggests a system of Othering. In a way, if we can argue for a de-Orientalized cultural China in the modern world, this new vision of ‘ideological otherness’ is to re-Orientalize China: the inheritance of being the ‘cultural other’ has revived itself into being the demonized ‘ideological other’.

To a certain extent, Gramsci’s ‘cultural hegemony’, Foucault’s knowledge-power nexus, Said’s ‘cultural imperialism’ and Huntington’s ‘clash of civilizations’ have all partially explained the coercive use of cultural power in international relations. Culture has always been a weapon of the powerful, and cultural resistance is therefore an eternal theme. Cabral (1973) has pointed out that cultural resistance may take on new forms (political, economic, armed) in order to fully contest foreign domination, and Wallerstein (1991, 100) argues that ‘cultural resistance today is very often organized resistance – not spontaneous resistance, but planned resistance’.

Thus, under this theoretical framework, cultural diplomacy can be considered as a new form of planned cultural resistance for emerging powers like China, which has been held as the cultural and ideological ‘other’ and put under the Western hegemonic influence despite the shifts in global economic relations. If taken from Said’s and Gramsci’s perspectives, the purpose of China’s cultural diplomacy would be counter-hegemonic, giving it an active defensive edge, completely different from the commonly accepted synonym of launching a ‘charm offensive’. The mission is not just to wield soft power, but to shift the power relations underpinning those misperceptions, which have the ‘Us’ and ‘Other’ ideology embedded in cultural hegemony.

After analyzing the historical legacies in the international context, we must simultaneously take note of the domestic context, which is an integral part in understanding the purpose of China's cultural diplomacy, especially concerning the timing: why do it now? The Chinese government has always been a firm believer of Lenin's famous statement that diplomacy is the extension of domestic affairs, and building soft power is indeed communicated a lot to domestic audiences to generate national identity, build national cohesion and safeguard regime legitimacy, but there is another domestic dimension that was inadequately addressed in the current literature related to China's cultural diplomacy: the role played by nationalism. The subject of Chinese nationalism is not under-researched, but more in the sphere of national sovereignty, security and international relations, with its double-edged role in both driving and limiting China's cultural diplomacy yet to be explored.

#### **4. THE HISTORICAL AND DOMESTIC CONTEXT: NATIONALISM AND NATIONAL IDENTITY**

The significance of looking at the domestic context has special bearings on understanding why cultural diplomacy is now considered a priority on the government agenda. In the last three decades, China went through unprecedented transformation in history both in terms of scale and speed – cultural, economic, social and political. When the astonishing developments are shaping up a new China, the old ideology underpinning the regime legitimacy is being shaken. As argued by Hroch (1985), nationalism becomes a substitute for factors of integration in a disintegrating society. Many scholars have argued that in today's China, nationalism is considered to be one of the two pillars that the national coherence and regime legitimacy rest on alongside rapid economic growth. The perception of state-sponsored nationalism as a strategic means to popular legitimacy corresponded to the two categories of Chinese nationalism defined by He and Guo (2000): 'state nationalism' refers to any doctrine, ideology or discourse in which the Chinese party-state strives to identify itself as the nation, while 'popular nationalism' comes from below and represents unsystematic, popular national sentiments.

The strength of nationalism derives above all from its ability to create a sense of identity. Hall (1991, 21) has pointed that identity is always a structured representation which has to go through the eye of the needle of the 'other' before it can construct itself, and 'there is no identity that is without the dialogic relationship to the other'. This coincides with Ozirimli's (2005) view that the discourse of nationalism divides the world into 'us' and 'them', and shows a tendency to perceive the world in terms of 'friends' and 'enemies'. During the Cold War era,

nationalist emotions were used to carry out an ideological war against the enemy camp, while China today has shifted out of the party's ideological control, 'counter hegemony' remains the main theme and has infiltrated deeper down in today's stronger China, where popular nationalism has taken root outside the state itself. Increasingly, identity and public memory are fused in popular culture where nationalism is not imposed by the state so much as it resonated with people's feelings.

These two categories of nationalism can be associated with the two fundamental attributes of nationalism argued by Guibernau (1996): its political character as an ideology, and its capacity to be a provider of identity for individuals conscious of forming a group based upon a common culture, past, project for the future and attachment to a concrete territory. Smith (1991, 91) shared this view in talking about nationalism as both a 'style of politics' and a 'form of culture', while Ozikirimli (2005) believes nationalism ultimately turns the language of national identity into a language of morality, and renders it the very horizon of a political discourse. These dual attributes of nationalism were sometimes referred to as 'cultural nationalism' and 'political nationalism' (Yoshino, 1992, 1), which combined in the creation of an ideology that serves to celebrate and emphasize the nation as the preeminent collective identity of a people.

The above shows what gives nationalism its power is its ability to bring the cultural and the political attributes together. If we apply the lens of Orientalism and cultural hegemony in looking at these two attributes in relation to China, we can see the deeply and widely embedded pride in Chinese culture was turned into a strong desire to rise against Western domination, and the political character gives the government a sense of mission that goes beyond the cultural scope. As an ancient and continuous civilization, what gives unity to the Chinese nation is people's deepest attachment to pre-existing characteristics, culture and traditions. Actually, the emotional investment of individuals in the elements of Chinese culture is a key factor exploited by nationalism, and is easily amplified in a country like China that is highly centralized and always seeks to unify people's mind. To a considerable extent, China's ancient historical grandeur and the deep scar inflicted in its modern history is ingrained in China's national psyche. This drive to regain glory and dignity, the deeply held and long-standing aspirations for restoring China's position as a great power in the world is behind the new ambition of 'realizing the dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation' proposed by Xi Jinping. He and Guo (2000, 2) have concluded that 'the core goal of Chinese nationalism is not only to promote and protect the national interests of China, but also to restore its 'greatness', or to reassert China's role in international politics'. In this sense, cultural diplomacy in China naturally converges state nationalism with popular nationalism, which is passionate about achieving an international status commensurate with Chinese people's conception of their

country's rightful place in the world. However, Nye (2015) has explicitly claimed Chinese nationalism to be a negative energy, or 'No. 1 factor limiting China's soft power', why is that? Because the dual characters of nationalism could often render culturally sustained boundaries and identities the subject of political conflicts, leaving the government between a rock and a hard place, as the nationalistic discourse involves a strong sense of morality and can be volatile in nature: while it can strengthen the legitimacy of a regime by mustering people together, give unity to the nation by joining the disintegrating fractions of the right and the left, as well as polarized social classes of the rich and the poor; but on the other hand, it can also become a spear that the populace aims at leaders who are perceived to be weak in the face of external challenges, making the government wary of the rise of popular nationalist zeal might influence China's image and other nations' perception about its rising. Shambaugh (2013, 58) has observed more assertive Chinese nationalism emerging out of the current domestic discourse on China's global identities, while Zhao (2013, 544) also commented on the delicate change in such domestic voices among the state media in 'a dangerously stunted version of a free press, in which a Chinese commentator may more safely criticize government policy from a hawkish, nationalist direction than from a moderate, internationalist one.' This means that however moderate or pragmatic the government seeks to be in its diplomacy, there are powerful domestic forces and voices that call for a more muscular foreign policy:

Seeking status, acceptance and respect on the world stage, popular nationalists routinely charged the communist state as neither confident enough or competent enough in safeguarding China's vital national interests and too chummy with Japan and soft in dealing with the United States (Zhao, 2013, 540).

It appears that the more prominent of China's rise on the world stage, the more salient is the double-edged nature of Chinese nationalism. The recent incidents such as the anti-US protests in May 1999, anti-Japanese protests that erupted across China in September 2012, and popular reactions to China's territorial disputes with its Asian neighbors in 2015 have raised particular concerns about enhanced Chinese capabilities will produce new goals to act upon old grievances, and its growing presence in the world economy and its ever prominent role on the world political stage has begun to 'feed Chinese pride, and potentially invites thoughts of Great Power muscle flexing' (Unger, 1996, xii). This shows the tight rope between international and domestic contexts: while nationalism is filling the vacuum of ideology domestically, it is also fueling the China threat argument internationally at the same time. If China's non-Western ideology is the breeding ground for the China threat perception, rising nationalism at home is like an undercurrent that supplies water to its life.

Despite the rich literature regarding nationalism in China, very few have linked it to China's

undertaking of cultural diplomacy. I argue that at least in China's case, we have to fully acknowledge the interplay between the two: on the one hand, nationalism as one of the major sources of identity formation gives driving force for China to launch cultural diplomacy: the desire to elevate China's cultural position and counter cultural hegemony informs the party-state's decision making, while the popular nationalism gives the state moral support and even a sense of urgency to pursue cultural diplomacy; on the other hand, cultural diplomacy can play a dual role in balancing the 'double-edged' nature of Chinese nationalism: when an observable change in its external dimension is showing an increasingly zero-sum approach in China's foreign policy, cultural diplomacy can help rein it in with its plus-sum approach; and when its internal dimension was criticized to 'represent a backward-looking ideology, keeping an eye on the past and obsessed with China's historical and cultural superiority' (Lei, 2005, 495), cultural diplomacy can change this 'backward-looking' ideology into a 'forward-looking strategy, and draw on the cultural confidence produced by the stronger domestic development to turn China from inward-looking to outward-looking.

At the same time, from the inherent attributes of nationalism and the interactions between state and popular nationalism in China, we can see the tight rope between international and domestic contexts. Therefore, viewing China's cultural diplomacy through only one lens, be it domestic or international, misses the critical ways in which it actually works and will only lead to misinterpret or mischaracterize it. The best cultural diplomacy strategy must seek a balance between internal and external forces: both have historical legacies deeply ingrained, making it absolutely essential to be aware of the complex nature of China's cultural diplomacy.

Understanding a subject of a complex nature requires a complex approach. If the purpose of China's cultural diplomacy is only examined from the perspectives of 'building soft power' and forming a positive national image, it has only scratched the surface. Therefore, a central contention of this thesis is that the soft power approach is insufficient, or even to the extent of inappropriate, to understanding China's cultural diplomacy as it neglected crucial processes through which hegemony has been produced and maintained. A three-dimensional analytical framework constructed on historical, international and domestic dimensions, and drawing on the tripartite theories of Orientalism, cultural hegemony, and nationalism (see diagram 1 below) is needed to offer a more comprehensive perspective to investigate the prominent features of China's cultural diplomacy. At the core of this complex is power, which lies at the interface of this new analytical framework. As Foucault (1982) pointed out, every relationship between forces is a power relation, thus all the arrows in the diagram below represents a power relationship.

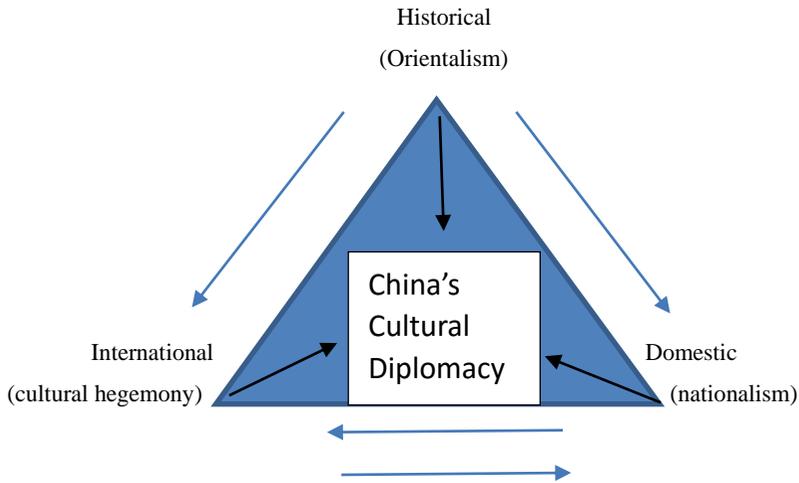


Diagram 1. An alternative three-dimensional theoretical framework

## 5. CONCLUSION

Cultural diplomacy is an endeavor spanning over different nations, territories, races, development stages, social and political systems and cultural traditions, in many cases, it is also over different civilizations in Huntington’s terms. Due to these variances, and the constantly evolving power relationships, it is a very complex subject. While inspired and stimulated by the growing literature about China’s cultural diplomacy, this paper challenged the existing framework of analysis in this research area and argued the necessity to look through multiple lenses of the historical, international and domestic contexts in which China is endeavoring to reshape its image. It has re-conceptualized China’s cultural position in the world from the pre-modern period to contemporary times, and developed new lines of academic inquiry by critically reviewing the mainstream arguments and arguing for a more sophisticated analytical framework.

The ‘soft power’ concept is incompatible with the very purpose of cultural diplomacy and lacks a historical perspective in locating the ‘root cause’ of the unique challenges faced by China, which is a complication co-produced by vestiges of Orientalism, Western cultural hegemony and the power-knowledge nexus; it also fails to show a holistic view of the global cultural terrain where China’s cultural diplomacy is launched into. Specifically, this paper has argued the following three limitations of using soft power as the analytical tool for China’s cultural diplomacy.

First of all, by comparison with the definition of cultural diplomacy, we can see ‘soft power’ concept is not a good match with the fundamental vision of cultural diplomacy, which is a plus sum game of nurturing mutual understanding and mutual respect between cultures, it is the means to achieve the ends of building cultural pluralism, which echoes the ultimate goals of China’s cultural diplomacy. The ‘soft power’ concept still adopts a binary view of political cultures being incompatible with each other, thus tends to interpret cultural diplomacy as a zero-sum game to win hearts and minds. Besides, the two separate sources of ‘soft power’ and the two means of using them identified in Nye’s definition have complicated the conceptualization of China’s cultural diplomacy: its focus on showing the ‘attraction’ of its ‘culture’ tends to be interpreted as steeped in ‘political value’ promotion through ‘persuasion’.

Secondly, the concept of ‘soft power’ is inadequate because it applied the same lens to look at China as other Western countries and failed to recognize the unequal power positions associated with culture and ideology, as it has not engaged with any historical analysis of the legacies of cultural hegemony, knowledge-power nexus and Orientalism, which formed the interwoven foundation of the current global cultural terrain.

Thirdly, it did not address the domestic context where nationalism is a driving force for China to launch cultural diplomacy that converges state nationalism and popular nationalism. Therefore, it is not only inadequate but also inappropriate to use ‘soft power’ to explain and examine the purpose of China’s cultural diplomacy.

After challenging the adequacy and even appropriateness of the mainstream analytical concept in use, this paper proposed an alternative framework of analysis of using cultural hegemony, Orientalism and nationalism to look both beyond and beneath the old perspectives. It has found that both culture and ideology helped draw the line between the two sides of hegemony and counter-hegemony in the global cultural terrain of struggle. Compared with the line of ‘cultural superiority and inferiority’ carved by Orientalism, more antagonist camps of ‘friends or enemies’ were created by anti-Communism, and China’s attempt at gaining more power of discourse was accused of ‘ideological infiltration’ by the hegemonic side. These new frameworks revealed a three-dimensional picture of an uneven global cultural terrain with hidden barriers for the counter-hegemonic side. Only by capturing the intricacies between the intertwined multiple contexts can we begin to acquire a deeper and more precise understanding of China’s cultural diplomacy.

Diagram 1. An alternative three-dimensional theoretical framework, placed on p. 14.

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