

To Build A “Harmonious World”: China’s Soft Power Wielding in the Global South

SHENG DING*

This study attempts to answer a new but important question in China’s foreign policy—how Beijing has wielded its soft power to construct its ideal of international order in the age of China’s rise. Before empirical analyses, this study tries to set up a conceptual framework on the relations between the idea of “harmonious world” and China’s soft power wielding in its rising process. Within this framework, this study examines a rising China’s foreign policies towards three targeted regions in the global south—Africa, East Asia, and Latin America. On the one hand, due to Beijing’s carefully-designed and soft power-based foreign policies, the global south has become an increasingly harmonious environment for Beijing to cultivate a favorable national image, exert its political influence on regional affairs, benefit its own domestic economic developments, etc. On the other hand, some problems such as the so-called “China’s New Colonialism” and the increased vigilance from the other powers have already began to challenge Beijing’s harmony in those regions.

Key words: Harmonious World, Soft Power, China’s Peaceful Rise, Global South, Bandwagoning

Since it was officially presented by the Chinese President at the United Nations summit in 2005, the term “harmonious world” has become one of the most popular lexicons for talking about Beijing’s ideal of international order in the age of China’s rise. Moreover, during the last decade, not only have Chinese media and scholars paid increasingly more attention to the development and wielding of China’s soft power, but also Beijing has adopted more and more soft power-based foreign policies in recent years. However, in the existing scholarly literature on Chinese foreign policy, there is no adequate or persuasive study on the relations between Beijing’s idea of “harmonious world” and Beijing’s soft power wielding in its rising process. By examining the opportunities and challenges associated with a rising China’s foreign policies towards the three targeted regions—Africa, Latin America, and East Asia,¹ this article attempts to provide some discussion on how

* Sheng Ding is assistant professor of political science at Bloomsburg University. He received both his masters and doctoral degrees from Rutgers. His research interests include soft power in international relations; transnational identity in globalization; information technology and world politics; politics in Pacific Asia; Chinese politics and foreign policy; U.S.-China relations, etc. His research articles have been published by *Pacific Affairs*, *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* and *East Asia: An International Quarterly*. The author would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on the draft of the paper.

Beijing has wielded its soft power to construct its desired “harmonious world” in the global south. Before this article starts empirical analyses, it is necessary to set up a conceptual framework on the idea of “harmonious world” and soft power wielding in the age of China’s rise.

“HARMONIOUS WORLD” AND SOFT POWER WIELDING IN THE AGE OF CHINA’S RISE

Classical international relations theorists believe that, in international politics, the quality of diplomacy—the substance and style of foreign policy—is not only the most important element of national power, but also an immeasurable and unstable element. According to Hans J. Morgenthau, a nation that has strong capabilities but underdeveloped diplomacy “must yield to one whose diplomacy is prepared to make the most of whatever other elements of power are at its disposal, thus making up through its own excellence for deficiencies in other fields.”² He also contends that “nations must rely on the quality of their diplomacy to act as a catalyst for the different factors that constitute their power.”³ While conceding to realism’s important assumption that states are unitary actors rationally pursuing their self-interests, neo-liberal theorists Robert Keohane believes “regimes can be viewed as intermediate factors, or ‘intervening variables,’ between fundamental characteristics of world politics such as the international distribution of power on the one hand and the behavior of states and non-state actors such as the multinational corporations on the other.”⁴ Joseph Nye also argues, “if [a state] can establish international norms consistent with its society, it is less likely to have to change. If it can support institutions that make other states wish to channel or limit their activities in ways the dominant state prefers, it may be spared the costly exercise of coercive or hard power.”⁵

Since the end of the Cold War, China’s rise has become a global phenomenon. Although there are some disputes about the speed and extent of China’s rise, much attention has been paid to the question of whether China’s growing power portends a threat or how China will wield its national power. Many China observers point to China’s territorial and demographic size, its fast-growing economy, and its continuously rising national defense budget as evidences that China may become a revisionist power capable of dominating the Far East and challenging American interests globally. The current debates over the implications of China’s rise in the 21st century have focused on whether an authoritarian and nationalistic China would adhere to international norms, and fully integrate itself into the existing global system. Under this backdrop, Beijing must carefully design its foreign strategy in order to establish a favorite national image (i.e., a peaceful and responsible great power) and create a friendly international environment for its ascendancy.⁶ Evaluating the effectiveness of a country’s foreign strategy cannot be separated from how this country wields its national power, including both hard power and soft power, to achieve its foreign policy goals. Officially, the basic goals of China’s foreign policy are to “preserve China’s independence, sovereignty and

territorial integrity,” and to “create a favorable international environment for China’s reform and opening up and modernization construction.”⁷ However, the ongoing rise of China and the ensuing power shift incur readjustment of behavioral patterns of other affected powers that have a stake in the existing international system.⁸ Will other powers, especially the *status quo* power—the United States, allow China to transform the existing international system to its desired “harmonious world?” How will they respond to the rise of China, counterbalancing or bandwagoning? It all depends on the manners of China’s national power wielding in world affairs.

A rising power that focuses on developing and wielding hard power will often lead to balancing from the *status quo* power or neighboring countries. The hard power-based foreign policies obviously will either provide very limited help to or sabotage Beijing’s efforts in realizing its foreign policy goals in the rising process. These hard power-based foreign policies include military threat, political isolation, economic sanction, as well as imposing its political and cultural values on others, bullying other countries based on its stronger status in the perspective of military strength, manipulating some international rules against some other countries’ national interests, etc. Therefore, while it designs its foreign strategies in its rising process, Beijing has to focus on soft power-based foreign policies. These soft power-based foreign policies may include, but not limited to, economic cooperation based on mutual benefits; attraction-oriented cultural and educational exchange; regular high-level official visit between two countries; active involvements in multilateral activities of international regimes; efficient campaign of public relations over sensitive global issues; etc.

Arguably, during the last decade, Beijing has increasingly employed soft power-based approaches in its foreign policy process. While the media and scholars have paid more and more attention to the development and wielding of China’s soft power in its rising process, the term of “China’s soft power” has frequently appeared in media reports and scholarly works. To what extent, has the idea of soft power been accepted by Beijing’s policymakers? How has China developed its own soft power resources and wielded them in its foreign relations? Is there any intricate connection between Chinese idea of soft power and its ideal of international order—“harmonious world?” It is Nye who first coined the term of soft power, but such ideas as attraction and agenda-setting have always embedded in ancient Chinese philosophy and culture. For more than two millennia, the idea of soft power had been consistently advocated and comprehensively utilized by ancient Chinese. Even Western international relations scholars admit that since the time of Mo Zi (470-390 B.C.), idealism has provided a counterpoint to realism.⁹ For example, Mo Zi, the founder of Mohism and the advocate of the doctrine of non-offense, argued that offensive uses of force would sow the seeds of long-standing conflicts like theft and murder. Taoism—China’s native religion—has always supported the preservation of life and the avoidance of injury by advocating non-activity or non-intervention (*wu-wei*).

It is very easy to find the idea of soft power in ancient Chinese philosophies. Confucianism, which functioned as China's dominant ideology for about two thousand years, advocates that a state should obtain its lead status by setting example, and opposes imposition of one's values on others. Confucius (551-479 B.C.) preached the golden rule of means by advising "do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (behave toward others as you would like to have them behave toward you). In his teachings, he put great emphases on the limitation and regulation of power, and rarely elaborated on the use of coercive power, not mentioning war. Mencius (372-289 B.C.), another great Confucian thinker, believed a benevolent king had no rivals in the world and could easily win the support of the masses. He denounced all wars as unjust, and claimed that boasting of military expertise was a grave crime. Thus, ancient Chinese philosophies believed that human nature was not evil; morality and law could form the basis for relations among states; and peaceful and cooperative relations among states were possible.

The idea of "harmony" and the approaches of reaching "harmony" were discussed in the Confucian canon—the *Analects*:

In the practice of the rites harmony is regarded as the most valuable thing, and in the ways of the ancient kings this is regarded as the most beautiful thing. It is adopted in all matters, both small and great...¹⁰

I have heard that the possessors of states or noble families do not worry about underpopulation, but worry about the people being unevenly distributed; do not worry about poverty, but worry about discontent. For when there is even distribution there is no poverty, and when there is harmony there is no underpopulation, and when there is contentment there will be no upheavals. It is for such reasons that, if far-off people do not submit, then culture and virtue are enhanced in order to attract them; and when they have been attracted, they will be made content.¹¹

Daniel A. Bell, an expert in the study of Confucian political philosophy interpreted the Confucian views of world order as followed: "Confucians defended the ideal of *tian xia* (the world under heaven), a harmonious political order without state boundaries and governed by a sage by means of virtue, without any coercive power at all. Moreover, this harmonious order can and should be attained by means of benevolence and positive example, once again without any coercive power".¹² Thus, there is a strong connection between the idea of soft power and the ideal of "harmonious world" in ancient Chinese political philosophies.

Influenced by ancient Chinese philosophy which emphasized the idea of soft power and the concept of "harmony," ancient Chinese governors historically preferred to defuse security threats internally through moral government, i.e., the benevolent king set a good example for his people.¹³ When dealing with external relations, ancient China's foreign strategies emphasized diplomatic maneuvering rather than military confrontation. For example, the ideas of "culture winning over an enemy" and "winning a battle before it is fought" are traceable throughout

China's strategic culture. In his masterpiece—*The Art of War*, China's ancient military strategist Sun Zi put forward his famous idea that it was better to attack the enemy's mind than to attack his fortified cities. He stated, "To gain a hundred victories in a hundred battles is not the highest excellence; to subjugate the enemy's army without doing battle is the highest of excellence. Therefore, the best warfare strategy is to attack the enemy's plans, next is to attack alliances, next is to attack the army, and the worst is to attack a walled city."¹⁴ The sources of Sun Zi's "highest excellence" are similar to what are currently defined as soft power resources—people's rationality, morality, values and aspirations. These power resources have persistently embedded in Chinese culture and traditions through which Chinese people define their own ethnicity.

Learning from ancient Chinese idea of soft power and philosophy of "harmony," Beijing's current policymakers have smartly developed a new foreign strategy to build up its desired international order in the age of China's rise. In his speech at the UN Summit marking its 60th anniversary, Chinese President Hu Jintao presented the new idea of building a "harmonious world." His detailed policy proposals include:

1. multilateralism should be upheld to realize common security with the UN playing an irreplaceable role in international cooperation to ensure global security;
2. all nations to encourage and support efforts to settle international disputes or conflicts through consultations and negotiations;
3. mutually beneficial cooperation should be upheld to achieve common prosperity with developed countries shouldering a greater responsibility for a universal, coordinated and balanced development in the world;
4. the spirit of inclusiveness must be upheld to build a world where all civilizations coexist harmoniously and accommodate each other.¹⁵

These policy proposals can be regarded as China's soft power-based foreign strategy of building up its desired international order. In an editorial published in *People's Daily* on December 28, 2005—"China's Diplomacy: Pursuing Balance to Reach Harmony", Beijing's new soft power-based foreign strategy were further interpreted as followed,

[China's new foreign policy of building a harmonious world] helped to lift China's international status, fundamentally because of its pursuit of balance. That is, to balance national development against international responsibilities, economic benefits against political and security interests, relations with world powers against those with various countries, and reform against the maintenance of world order. We should build a harmonious world by aiming at "performing great deeds."¹⁶

During the last two years, Beijing has made great efforts to publicize Chinese new thoughts about world affairs centered on the idea of "harmonious

world.” In his keynote speech at the 17th National Congress of Chinese Communist Party in November 2007, President Hu emphasized this new idea again: “Sharing opportunities for development and rising to challenges together so as to further the noble cause of peace and development of humanity bear on the fundamental interests of the people of all countries and meet their common aspirations. We maintain that the people of all countries should join hands and strive to build a harmonious world of lasting peace and common prosperity.”¹⁷ Indeed, drawn on its own idea of soft power from traditional Chinese ideology, Beijing’s new global strategies in China’s rising process has shown greater attentiveness in reassuring others and greater responsiveness to others’ reassurance in global affairs. As commented by a senior Chinese scholar in Beijing, “China’s development has relied primarily on ‘soft power’... The key to the rise of a major power is creativity. A new trend that is very likely to be of global historic significance is emerging in China—the theories of the peaceful rise to power and a harmonious world.”¹⁸

As a rising power, China’s hard power resources still either weaker or equal to the other major powers like the U.S., Europe Union, Japan, Russia, etc. It is a rational choice for Beijing to put more efforts to wield its soft power in dealing with other major powers. How about those small and weak countries in the global south whose hard power is obviously weaker than China? Is Beijing still willing to wield its soft power while it develops its foreign relations with those developing countries? After China started its “reform and opening up” process amidst its diplomatic normalization with the United States and the Soviet Union consecutively, Beijing’s foreign policy toward the developing countries became increasingly more pragmatic. In this milieu, the developing countries, especially African and Latin American countries, walked away from the central stage of Beijing diplomacy in 1980s. In the post-Cold War world, as the international structure went through a series of dramatic changes, the association between China and the developing countries has re-gained new momentum. On the one hand, Beijing has not only paid attention to the developing world in both economic and political perspectives, but also made a series of new efforts to reestablish its comprehensive relationship with both “old friends” and “new partners” in Asia, Africa and Latin America. On the other hand, many developing countries, especially those alienated by the American foreign policies or marginalized by the existing international system, have looked at the rise of China as an “opportunity,” and attracted by the idea that a powerful China will contribute to a multi-polar world. In the followings, this article attempts to examine the opportunities and challenges associated with Beijing’s efforts of employing its soft power-based foreign policies toward three targeted regions in the global south.

BEIJING’S “WALTZ” IN AFRICA: A NEW CHAPTER BEYOND “POLITICAL BROTHERHOOD”

In the 1960s and 1970s, China’s national security faced severe threat from both the United States and the former Soviet Union. In order to survive in such a

“hostile” international environment, Beijing had strong interests of constructing ideological solidarity with other underdeveloped nations to promote Chinese-style communism and repel the so-called Soviet “revisionism” and American “imperialism.” With the guidance of the above policy goal, Beijing had aggressively pursued a comprehensive political alliance with many African countries by helping with many large-scale projects in Africa. In the wake of the surging nationalist independence movement in Africa in 1960s and 1970s, China’s similar historical tragedy as a colonized country and its generous foreign aids had won many African friends. Moreover, Beijing has actively and continuously supported many nationalist leaders and their governments in Africa like Robert Mugabe’s ZANU Liberation Movement. Besides its rhetoric policy objectives like “anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism and anti-revisionism,” Beijing’s ideology-based African policy in 1960s and 1970s were aimed at competing with the influence of the Nationalist Government (Taiwan). Beijing worked hard to counter recognition of Taiwan as the legal representative of China and shore up enough votes for the eventual rejection of Taiwan’s membership in the UN.¹⁹

After the Cold War ended, African countries are no longer considered strategic priorities by two superpowers which they enjoyed during the Cold War, and foreign aids becomes more and more highly valued in this continent. With the U.S.’ absent-mindedness and negligence, and the European countries’ indifference of the region, Beijing has launched its well-designed diplomatic offensives toward Africa. For example, only in 2006, there are five major diplomatic events in Beijing’s diplomacy towards Africa. From January 11 to January 19, Chinese Foreign Minister kicked off a tour to Cape Verde, Senegal, Mali, Liberia, Nigeria and Libya. On January 12, the Chinese Government released China’s first ever official paper on Africa—*China’s Africa Policy*.²⁰ From April 24 to April 29, the Chinese President Hu Jintao visited Morocco, Nigeria and Kenya. From June 17 to June 24, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao toured Egypt, Ghana, Angola, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda and the Republic of the Congo. In November, Beijing laid down the red carpet for up to 50 heads of African states as it hosts a summit to celebrate 50 years of diplomatic relations between China and African countries. Built on Beijing’s long-time “political brotherhood” with Africa, China’s new diplomatic efforts in Africa have been characterized with economic cooperation on the basis of the respect for state sovereignty and “win-win” strategy, rather than political rhetoric. During the last decade, the style and substance of Beijing’s African policy have showed the following features which are closely associated with China’s soft power wielding.

Various forms of public diplomacy, including cultural diplomacy, have served as pioneer in Beijing’s savvy outreaching efforts in Africa. For example, by October 2006, China had sent 16,000 medical personnel to forty-seven African countries and they have treated 240 million patients.²¹ Beijing employs very active approaches to communicate with African people directly. China Radio International launched its FM station in the Kenyan capital on February 27, 2006. The station is

transmitting 19 hours of programs in English, Kiswahili (the language widely spoken in East Africa) and Mandarin Chinese. According to China Radio International Director, the station will broadcast the latest news from China and around the world, and focus on the friendly exchanges between China and East African countries. Also accompanied with China's growing economic presence in Africa, Mandarin Chinese has become an increasingly popular foreign language in Africa. So far China has set up three Confucius Institutes in Africa. Due to the extensive financial support from the Chinese government, hundreds of young African students come to China to study abroad. According to Beijing's official paper of *China's African Policy*, by the end of 2005, Beijing had offered over 18,000 governmental scholarships to African students, signed 65 cultural agreements with African countries and implemented 151 plans of cultural exchanges. Furthermore, Beijing has strived to implement the program of Chinese citizens' group tour to some African nations and grant more African countries destination status for outbound Chinese tourist groups in recent years. As a result, the number of outbound Chinese tourists to Africa reached 110,000 in 2005, doubling that of the previous year.²²

China is very sophisticated in using its international aids to establish a favorite national image in Africa. Compared to traditional foreign aids which are often diverted into elite pockets, Beijing's financial supports have been mainly provided to some infrastructure projects, from new parliament buildings and medical centers to football stadiums and school buildings. These infrastructure projects will benefit the African people in a long term. More importantly, unlike the foreign aids from the Western countries, Beijing's help came without preconditions. The prospering China-Ethiopia relations are a good example. When Ethiopia went to war against neighboring Eritrea in the late 1990s, the US responded by reducing its diplomatic presence. Yet China reacted by dispatching even more diplomats, engineers, businessmen and teachers to Ethiopia and offering new aid grants and bank credits. This explains why today China is able to exercise important influence in Ethiopia.²³ Beijing has also provided such African countries as Angola with necessary loan, technology and equipment, which are badly needed by those countries in their post-civil war economic construction.²⁴ Also according to a news report, not only did China design, build and launch the satellite for developing countries like Nigeria, but it also provided a huge loan to help pay the bill.²⁵ China's foreign investments in Africa are a blend of pursuing business interest and providing foreign aids which is based on the mutual benefits. It will not only break into Africa's satellite markets controlled by the Western countries, but also establish a favorite national image—"an old and true friend of African people"—among many African people.

China is eager to treat African as equal partner and identify the common historical background. Generally speaking, Beijing has focused its diplomatic campaigns in Africa in the economic fields, and has not used its economic clout to interfere with their domestic affairs. The only exception is Beijing's diplomatic tug-

of-war with Taiwan. In promoting its economic agenda, Beijing seeks to differentiate itself from Western countries by stressing the common history of exploitation that both China and Africa had experienced under Western colonialism. As the Chinese President stressed in the beginning of his speech at the China-Africa Summit in late 2006, "In the modern era, our peoples launched unremitting and heroic struggle against subjugation, and have written a glorious chapter in the course of pursuing freedom and liberation, upholding human dignity, and striving for economic development and national rejuvenation." Unlike the Western countries which are promoting their political values in a unilateral way, Beijing intentionally shies away from political issues by keeping telling African leaders that China will honor and support their independence, sovereignty, political systems, and traditions and lifestyles. This strategy not only draws sympathy from African media and leaders, but also creates an image that Chinese companies tend to invest in business that benefits rather than exploits Africa, making China's investment and development more welcome.²⁶ Furthermore, it helps Beijing to achieve another policy objective—to squeeze Taiwan's "international space" in this continent. At present, only 4 African nations have diplomatic relations with Taiwan—about one sixth of the total.

Besides political violence, regional conflict, civil war, widespread corruption, infrastructure bottlenecks, etc., there are several new challenges that Beijing has to deal with in its new Africa policy. While China is stepping up its efforts of pursuing economic partnerships in Africa, how can Beijing differentiate its current economic relations with Africa from the Western colonialism in the 19th century in the perspective of public relations among African people? While China is pushing forward its soft power offensives in Africa, how can Beijing make a balance between economic interests and political responsibility on such issues as sustainable development and human rights in African countries? In recent years, there are many criticisms focusing on the following perspectives of Beijing's African policies.

Many Western media and scholars criticize Beijing that its new Africa policies are completely based on its own needs of economic construction, especially China's soaring demand of energy and materials. As wrote in a policy report of the Heritage Foundation, China's new African policy was described as "an attempt to gain control over African nations as likely hydrocarbon acquisition targets." An estimated 25 percent of China's total oil imports currently come from Africa, and Beijing has placed a high priority on maintaining strong ties with its African energy suppliers through investment, high-level visits, and a strict policy of "noninterference in internal affairs" that Africa's dictators find comforting.²⁷ Some of China's economic activities in Africa have led to accusations of "neo-colonialism," which may endanger Africa's sustainable development. In fact, cheap Chinese exports have already undercut some local industries and become a political issue in some African countries like South Africa. Also, Beijing's "generous" investments may contribute to unchecked environmental destruction and poor labor

standards, since Chinese firms have little experience with green policies and unions at home, and some African nations have powerful union movements.²⁸

More importantly, Beijing's "friendships" with various dictators in the developing world nevertheless have already brought a lot of negative publicities to its carefully cultivated national image as "a responsible great power on the rise." Rapid economic growth has increased the need for more natural resources and overseas markets. As the world's second largest oil consumer, China has vital oil interests in Sudan, Nigeria, Angola, Iran, Myanmar, and Venezuela, all governed by questionable governments. In boosting aid and investment, however, Beijing appears to express no qualms about dealing with corrupt, even brutal dictators. Just recently, Beijing lavished honors on the visiting Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe, a pariah in the West whose urban eviction program has been criticized by UN as causing "catastrophic injustice."²⁹ Close economic and political ties keep afloat these dictatorships and blunt the international pressures for any meaningful economic and political reform. In 2004, China foiled US efforts to impose sanctions on Sudan, which supplies nearly 5 percent of China's oil but has a notorious human rights record, especially on the issue of Darfur genocide.³⁰ Recently, the humanitarian crisis in Darfur has become new "flashpoints" in China human rights records. From French Presidential candidates to Hollywood celebrities to Australian college students, increasingly calls are even now been made for a boycott of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games.

Behind the above accusations, there are already some backlashes against Beijing's economic expansion in Africa. For example, more and more Western companies complain that Beijing's special relationship with many African countries has given it an advantage over many Western nations. Cuddling dictators today will only antagonize democratic oppositions in these countries and will not help Beijing expand influence in the future if regimes that it is closely associated with are toppled. Given soft power also rests on the legitimacy of its wielding, to some extent, Beijing's win-win strategy and the approach of "Let's do business and don't talk about politics" have caused some inharmonious factors, which will not contribute China's "harmonious world" in the global south.

CHINA'S "BENEVOLENCE" IN EAST ASIA: AN AMICABLE "ELEPHANT" FROM THE MAINLAND

In East Asia, including Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, China's territory and population are larger than all the other East Asian countries combined. Whatever China is naming its new foreign strategy in this region, the rise of China has inevitably made its neighboring countries suspicious that China might attempt to restore the imperial regional order which ancient China had maintained for hundreds of years in its pre-modern history. Such suspicions can be attributed to many historical factors. For example, as an "Asian Colossus," China is surrounded by many smaller but tough-minded neighbors who used to have territorial disputes with China for hundreds of years. Most of them had fought with China in ancient

times. Also, as a poor and backward country in the Mao's era, China did not have economic and political leverages to deal with its Asian neighbors and had to pursue an ideology-based foreign policy toward its East Asian neighbors. In Southeast Asia, Mao's foreign strategy of "exporting revolution" and Beijing's ties to the anti-government Communist parties in Southeast Asia had made China a dangerous threat in the eyes of nationalist leaders from this region. The 20-million-strong overseas Chinese who are still living in the Southeast Asia also made Beijing's any inconsiderate move in this region suspicious. More importantly, China's territorial claims over the islands in the South China Sea involve the disputes with Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia, Brunei, Malaysia, etc. In Northeast Asia, China also faced several historical obstacles in its relationships with Japan and two Koreas. For example, there are territorial disputes among all Northeast Asian countries, in which strong nationalist sentiments would prohibit any political leader in these countries from compromising on territorial issues. Especially in the China-Japan relations, on the one hand, many Chinese see Japan through the lens of the Pacific War—a war in which Japanese were foreign aggressors on Chinese soil and guilty of a raft of horrific crimes against Chinese people; on the other hand, in the eyes of most Japanese, China has lost its moral standing in recent decades due to the Beijing's braying criticism of Tokyo's attitude towards the history of World War II and incessant demands for frequent and evermore humiliating apologies for past offences.³¹ Therefore, these long-term and complicated historical issues pose challenges to Beijing's efforts of wielding its soft power to construct a "harmonious world" in East Asia.

As China's East Asian neighbors grow increasingly concerned about the impact of China's rise, Beijing has actively reached out, offering its "smile diplomacy" to defuse the concerns about Beijing's long-term intentions as a rising power in this region. As Beijing describes its new soft power-based foreign policy towards East Asia, China is "persisting in building good-neighborly relationships and partnership with the neighboring countries, we pursue a policy of bringing harmony, security and prosperity to neighbors and dedicate ourselves to strengthening mutual trust and cooperation with the fellow Asian countries, easing up hot spot tensions, and striving to maintain peace and tranquility in Asia."³² Since the outbreak of Asian financial crisis in 1997, the last ten years is really a banner time for China's diplomacy in Southeast Asia, which has been marked by China's steady expansion in that region not only of economic clout, but also of political influence. As one of China's most important policy goals in East Asia, Beijing has always made great efforts to resolve a number of territorial disputes since early 1990s. In Southeast Asia, China has joined ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and agreed on a code of conduct in the South China Sea with the ASEAN, committing all signatories to peaceful resolutions of outstanding issues. For example, both China and Vietnam agrees to speed up and complete before the end of 2008 the process of demarcation and erection of markers along their 1,400-kilometre land border. In Northeast Asia, Beijing has maintained its low-key

positions in its disputes with South Korea over the ancient history of Korea Kingdom, and avoided any escalation of its territorial disputes with Japan over the Diaoyutai Islands.

To act as a “responsible great power,” Beijing is also trying to bear greater responsibility for regional peace and development in East Asia. An obvious example is Beijing’s new diplomacy over the North Korea nuclear crisis. China has taken an unprecedented diplomatic initiative in trying to bring the six-party talks to completion. By engaging itself in vigorous shuttle diplomacy, China has won considerable regard in Washington, Seoul and Tokyo. While much of the attention at the six-party talks has focused on who should be blamed for the North Korea nuclear crisis—the United States or North Korea—China has worked slowly and capably and become a central player in Northeast Asian diplomacy. Some global strategists surprisingly observe that China has its own vision for regional relations, which differs considerably from the existing structure. Beijing wants to eliminate the bilateral alliances that it considers a holdover from the Cold War era and move to a multilateral security framework that is based on mutual trust, mutual benefit, equality and coordination.³³ The six-party talks may be the nascent shape of future regional security forum. The process of completely solving the North Korean nuclear crisis and even the issue of Korean unification may take decades and require an institutional mechanism, but the consultations within this mechanism will make a broader security framework a reality. China will become a key designer and agenda-setter of this new security framework in East Asia.

Beijing’s soft power-based foreign policies of “making good friends with neighboring countries and maintaining harmony with them” have been well received by its East Asian neighbors. Through emphasizing common challenges and mutual interests, and putting aside political difference and bilateral disputes, China has carefully but efficiently expanded its influence in East Asia. In the field of economic cooperation, Beijing has become the leading trade partner of the ASEAN and South Korea. Since 2003, China accounted for 80 percent of Japan’s export growth. China’s promise of continued investment in Southeast Asian countries and its call for a free-market zone in Asia by 2010 strengthen its role as a hub of regional economic development and a leading country in East Asia. In the 1997 Asian financial crisis, China not only provided a large amount of financial aids to the concerned nations, but also insisted on not devaluating its currency—*Renminbi*. Such move was extremely welcomed by its East Asian neighbors who plummeted into economic difficulties. In the field of security dialogue, to build mutual confidence with its Asian neighbors, China has always maintained a very active and cooperative role in the ASEAN Regional Forum, which includes the U.S., Japan and India, and serves as the most important regional mechanism in security dialogue. Beijing’s friendly overture, with China moving toward embracing multilateralism in its diplomacy, would appear to mark a significant strategic departure from its historical preference for unilateralism and secret diplomacy.³⁴ China’s soft power offensives are more obviously in the field of cultural exchanges

with Asian countries. Through strong international cultural exchanges, greater inbound and outbound tourism, and worldwide distribution of cultural products, China has established its favorite its national image in many Asian countries.

East Asian countries have witnessed a major perceptual change regarding China, from what was dubbed a “China threat” in many perspectives just a decade ago to a “friendly elephant” with ample opportunities. Asian countries today embrace unequivocally and acknowledge publicly Beijing’s “one China” policy, and actively engage Beijing in regional cooperation. It was investigated that more Asian people think they have to put more value on China rather than the U.S. in terms of diplomacy and security as well as the economy in the future. According to the results of a poll for which *Dong-A Ilbo* entrusted the Korea Research Center that conducted face-to-face interviews with 1,500 Korean adults nationwide in March 2005, only 6.7 percent of them regarded China as “the most threatening to the security of South Korea.” The U.S. was mentioned by 17.3 percent, Japan by 28.1 percent and North Korea by 46.1 percent.³⁵ Also according to another similar poll in 2004, the majority of poll opinions by members of National Assembly in Woori Party claims that “we should focus more on China than the U.S. in our foreign policy of the future.”³⁶ According to David Shambaugh, China’s well-designed foreign strategy to wield its soft power in Southeast Asia is a great success.

China and ASEAN are forging a productive and lasting relationship that is gradually erasing a history built on widespread suspicion, painful memories, and lingering tensions. China’s efforts to improve its ties with ASEAN are not merely part of a larger “charm offensive.” They represent, in some cases, fundamental compromises that China has chosen to make in limiting its own sovereign interests for the sake of engagement in multilateral frameworks and pursuit of greater regional interdependence. Neither have the Southeast Asian states entered into these arrangements with eyes closed; they believe that China’s rise is inevitable and that the best strategy for ASEAN, to hedge against potentially disruptive or domineering behavior, is to entangle the dragon in as many ways as possible.³⁷

Starting in the second half of the 1990s, China began holding annual meetings with senior officials from the ASEAN countries. In 1997, China helped initiate the “ASEAN + 3” mechanism, a series of yearly meetings among the ten ASEAN countries plus China, Japan, and South Korea. Next came the “ASEAN + 1” mechanism, annual meetings between ASEAN and China, usually headed by Chinese Premier. China also deepened its participation in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, hosting its ninth leaders’ meeting in Shanghai in 2001. In November 2002, China signed the “Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea” with ASEAN at the end of the sixth China-ASEAN Summit. It marked a great enhancement of mutual trust between China and ASEAN countries and signaled China’s willingness to ease its security concerns via multilateral diplomatic efforts.³⁸ China even started to promote its own security framework in the Asian Regional Forum. At the 2003 ASEAN summit, China even

proposed the establishment of a new regional security mechanism. Furthermore, Beijing also took the lead in transforming the “ASEAN+3” mechanism into the East Asian Summit (EAS). The first EAS meeting was held in Kuala Lumpur in 2005, with possible additional countries like India, Australia and New Zealand joining in, but excluding the US. China’s ability to shape what others want is clearly evidenced in the failure of some participating countries to express their preferences Beijing did not favor. Japan’s suggestion that the US at least be invited an observer reportedly “made no headway”, suggesting that Beijing’s soft power is wielded to a level that nations in this region are willing to “risk being left to face the rise of China on their own.”³⁹

As Chinese President Hu announced in his speech, “For our neighboring countries, we will continue to follow the foreign policy of friendship and partnership, strengthen good-neighborly relations and practical cooperation with them, and energetically engage in regional cooperation in order to jointly create a peaceful, stable regional environment featuring equality, mutual trust and win-win cooperation”.⁴⁰ Indeed, Beijing’s soft power offensives in East Asia are helping China achieve its foreign policy goals in this region, and transforming its neighborhood into its desired “harmonious world.” As commented by foreign China scholars and Western media, as Beijing’s influence continues to grow, many East Asian countries are increasingly looking to Beijing for regional leadership, or, at a minimum, they are taking account of Beijing’s interests and concerns in their decision-making process.⁴¹ Already, lower-ranking diplomats of Southeast Asian countries have turned to Chinese colleagues for guidance during international meetings.⁴²

CHINA IN LATIN AMERICA: AN ECONOMIC LOADSTONE AND POLITICAL ALTERNATIVE

East Asian countries not only are adjacent to China, but also most of them share common history with China. African countries can boast of their traditional political friendship with Beijing during the last five decades. Compared to East Asian and African countries, the relationship between Beijing and the Latin America countries was mostly limited to rhetorical diplomatic support and ideological exchanges in 1960s and 1970s. For example, in the Mao era, China’s revolutionary ideology had appealed to peoples in Latin America. Che Guevara, the legend of Latin American revolution, was a loyal follower of Maoism. Yet in the post-Cold War era, with the arrival of the third wave of democratization, the attractiveness of the Maoist ideology has declined dramatically. Since mid-1990s, the bilateral relationship between China and Latin American countries has moved upward after Beijing embarked an aggressive foreign trade policy toward Latin America in the mid-1990s. In this milieu, Beijing has made some strides to establish a “harmonious world” in Latin America.

In 2000, the bilateral trade volume was US\$2 billion and in 2005 exceeded US\$7 billion, up by 2.5 folds within 5 years. Guided by Beijing’s “go abroad”

strategy, hundreds of Chinese companies have flocked into Latin America for various reasons. Within China's 5.5 billion U.S. dollars overseas investment in 2004, 32% or 1.76 billion U.S. dollars went to Latin American countries. Beijing has promised that it will increase its investments in the Latin American countries to at least \$100 billion by 2015. Some Chinese companies have invested in Latin America to ensure a steady and long-term supply of raw materials and agricultural products; some did it for local market potentials; and some others have their eyes on the nearby markets like the United States. China has become a principal consumer of food, mineral, and other primary products from Latin America, benefiting principally the commodity-producing countries in the region. For example, currently, Venezuela claims that China imports 15 percent of its petroleum and related products and hopes that the percentage of the petroleum will increase to 45 percent by 2012.⁴³ Chilean copper accounts for about one-fifth of China's total copper imports while China represents about one-sixth of Chile's copper exports (second only to Japan in its importance for Chile).⁴⁴ Soybeans account for about half of Argentina's total exports to China, with other agricultural and livestock products accounting for nearly all of the remainder.⁴⁵ In 2006 Brazil sent nearly 11 million tons of beans to China, a 50 percent increase from 2005 and nearly double the amount shipped in 2004.⁴⁶

By further looking at the prospering Sino-Latin America economic relationship, this study can easily find clear evidences of China's soft power wielding in the region. First of all, China's soft power resources, including its political values and economic development models with Chinese characteristics, have been found increasingly more attractive in Latin American countries. A broad political shift has been afoot in Latin America in recent years. Currently many Latin American countries are governed by either leftist or center-left governments, including Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Chile. Several recent political elections—Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela—only further cemented the leftist political power shift in this region. Such a leftist trend has proved that anti-U.S. and anti-free market forces continued on the rise in the Western Hemisphere. More importantly, Latin Americans are attracted by Beijing's economic developmental model with Chinese characteristics—Beijing Consensus.⁴⁷ During the last two decades, more than any region in the world, Latin America had been a loyal pupil of the Western neoliberal economic development strategy—Washington Consensus. The more rigorously the Western economic principles were applied, the more disastrous the economic performances in Latin American countries have showed. Beijing's success in developing its economy on its own path has made China's developmental model an alternative for many Latin American governments.

Moreover, both Beijing's policy makers and Latin American leaders have strong political wills to improve their bilateral relationship. Since the former Chinese president Jiang Zemin made a high-profile state visit to the region in 2001, there have been frequent visits by senior governmental officials and business

leaders between China and the Latin American countries. The current Chinese President Hu Jintao traveled to Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Cuba in 2004 and visited Mexico in 2005. During Hu's visit, an important policy decision taken by Argentina and Brazil was to grant China "market economy" status, a move that Beijing had been lobbying for with its major trade partners since China joined the WTO as a non-market economy in 2001. At the same time, the presidents of all major countries in the region have paid reciprocal visits to Beijing. So far, Beijing has established strategic partnership or all-round cooperative relations with Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela and Chile. China has also maintained a traditional friendly relationship with Cuba. Meanwhile, China has kept close contact with regional organizations. It became an observer of the Organization of American States and the Latin-American Parliament in 2004, and also established links with other regional organizations such as the Rio Group, Andean Community, Caribbean Community and Common Market, and the South American Common Market. As one of the rarest moves in Beijing's foreign relations, China also dispatched four groups of peace-keeping forces to Haiti since 2004 and helped secure the vote counting center of the general election there in February 2004, as well as the later presidential inauguration.

Regarding Beijing's foreign policies toward the Latin America countries, the most important characteristic is that Beijing has insisted on one principle—economic cooperation without political interference. This is the opposite from the practices of the Western countries, which have always seen economic cooperation can serve as an efficient tool of pressuring developing countries to have Western-style political reforms. Beijing has always called its soft power-style foreign policy—to emphasize common challenge and mutual interests, to put aside political difference and bilateral dispute in its foreign relations with other countries—"win-win diplomacy." On the one hand, for the Latin American countries, especially those who have been alienated or isolated by the *status quo* power (or the United States) in recent years, they can gain direct access to the market of fastest growing economy; the necessary foreign investments from China without political conditions; and the respect and attention from a rising global power. On the other hand, China will acquire energy resources, raw materials, agricultural products, etc., which are highly demanded by China's sizzling economic development; and efficiently contain the Taiwan's pro-independence government's diplomatic efforts in Latin America, which is always the No. 1 priority in Beijing's diplomacy. Of the 23 countries that have diplomatic relations with Taiwan, 12 of them are currently located in Latin America.

However, Beijing's efforts in constructing a "harmonious world" in Latin America do have various challenges. Due to increasingly stronger economic presence of China in Latin America, there has been growing concerns about the potential conflict between China and the United States. Those alarmed at its fast-ascending status have labeled China's growing presence in Latin America as "China's encroachment on America's backyard" and "the beginning of the

‘Sinicization of Latin America’”.⁴⁸ For example, declaring himself to have been a Maoist from the time he was a child, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has repeatedly claimed to place its oil “at the disposal of the great Chinese fatherland.”⁴⁹ Such diplomatic flirtations can cause some suspicions that Beijing may join Chavez with like-minded states such as Iran, Libya and Cuba to form a new bloc of undemocratic regimes to challenge the US.⁵⁰ Washington has reason to be wary about this prospect, given the recent return to power of the leftist governments in many Latin America countries. The potential for divergence with Washington has already been observed in Brazil, where the government has made it clear that it views the connection between the biggest emerging markets of the western and eastern hemispheres (Brazil and China) as a card that can be played to offset American political influence and trade dominance in Latin America.⁵¹ Ideological sympathies were reported to play an important role in forging Brazil’s pro-China policy.⁵² As believed by some Western observers, given expanded Chinese presence in the region and China’s increased economic linkages with Latin America, Beijing has already constituted a potential threat to the American supremacy in the western hemisphere, at least from an economic perspective.

However, some other Western observers contend that Chinese activities are more based on economic interest by pursuing trade and investment opportunities, and Taiwan-oriented—containing Taiwan influence in the region. Moreover, there are some evidences that Beijing has restrained itself in their Latin American contacts. As argued by Gonzalo Sebastian Paz in his recent interview,

Currently, China is pursuing a very similar strategy but there is a difference between the Japanese and the Chinese. The Japanese were very concerned about the United States. The Chinese are more flexible in this regard, but they will never cross the line. They are operating in the backyard of the United States; they know this and will never risk endangering the relationship... Fundamentally, China is not buying products from Latin America in order to achieve political influence, or to use this as leverage to pressure countries, or to try to split Latin America off from the United States. The Chinese are buying soy because they need to feed the people. So, the Chinese policy is economically driven though it may have political consequences... I think this is a very important case that proves my point that China doesn’t want to make waves in the Americans’ backyard. They know they cannot cross certain lines. They do not want to subvert the institutions that are regulating U.S. hegemony in Latin America.⁵³

In its diplomatic tug of war with Taiwan, Beijing has combined its economic clout with its soft power wielding in its diplomatic campaigns in both Africa and Latin America in order to win “minds and hearts” in those two regions. In June 2007, Costa Rica, a small Caribbean country, announced that it was switching its allegiance to Beijing. The move by Costa Rica was the eighth defection from Taiwan’s side since 2000, following in the similar footsteps of Chad, Senegal, Grenada, Vanuatu, Dominica, Liberia, and Macedonia.⁵⁴ Like military action and economic inducement, soft power wielding is also one of important power strategies

to safeguard and promote national interests. In Latin America and Africa, Beijing has proved itself adept at wielding its growing soft power in the conjunction of economic inducement, its desired “harmonious world.”

CONCLUSION

This article analyzes Beijing’s efforts of constructing a “harmonious world” by examining how Beijing employs its soft power-based foreign policies in three targeted regions in the global south—Africa, Latin America, and East Asia. While the idea of “harmonious world” is Beijing’s desired international order, soft power development and wielding serve as Beijing’s carefully-designed foreign policy approaches to construct that international order in the age of China’s rise. Both ideas of “harmonious world” and “Chinese soft power” can find their evident imprints from China’s ancient ideologies which have embedded in Chinese culture for hundreds of years. This study also finds Beijing has implemented the following specific soft power-based foreign policies toward three targeted regions: (1) to build a harmonious environment with its neighboring countries for common development; (2) to re-define its “old brotherhood” with African countries; and (3) to “exhibit” its own political values in Latin America where undemocratic or semi-authoritarian regimes remain common. These findings have been proved by Chinese President Hu’s speech in the 17th CCP National Party Congress in November 2007. According to Hu:

While securing our own development, we will accommodate the legitimate concerns of other countries, especially other developing countries... We support international efforts to help developing countries enhance their capacity for independent development and improve the lives of their people, so as to narrow the North-South gap... China is committed to developing friendship and cooperation with all other countries on the basis of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence... For other developing countries, we will continue to increase solidarity and cooperation with them, cement traditional friendship, expand practical cooperation, provide assistance to them within our ability, and uphold the legitimate demands and common interests of developing countries.⁵⁵

To various extents, Beijing has efficiently wielded its soft power and constructed its desired international order in those three regions. In East Asia, Beijing has successfully created its favorite regional environment for its ongoing rise. The Southeast Asian countries have more positive perception of China and its ascendancy; and in Japan and South Korea, the policymakers have showed more attention and respect to a rising China. In distant developing countries in Africa and Latin America, especially those alienated by the American policies or marginalized by the existing international system, not only the anxiety over Beijing’s rise is dampened, but the idea of a powerful China challenging the U.S.’ dominant status is becoming increasingly attractive. On the one hand, the global south has become an increasingly more “harmonious” world for Beijing to cultivate a favorite national

image, exert its political influence on global issues, benefit its own domestic economic developments by establishing a “win-win” economic relationship, etc. On the other hand, Beijing’s soft power wielding in the global south are not worry free. Some problems such as its persistent historical disputes with Asian neighbors, the so-called “China’s Neo-Colonialism” in Africa, and the increased vigilance from the U.S. have already began to challenge Beijing’s “harmonious world” in those regions. In both Latin America and Africa, there are increasing debates whether Beijing’s economic partnership is really responsible and mutual-benefit. In the eyes of Western liberal democracies, Beijing’s soft power offensives in the developing world is equal to new form of “colonialism” accompanied with its friendship with dictators in the Third World. This study can predict that as China continues its rising process, those challenges will not disappear in the near future. In order to construct a real “harmonious world,” Beijing has to adopt more creative and carefully-designed foreign policies, and put more efforts to develop and wield its soft power in its rising process.

Note

¹ The author defines the term of “East Asia” as the region including North East Asia and Southeast Asia. Although Japan doesn’t belong to the global south, it will be included in this study.

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⁹ Joshua S. Goldstein and Jon C. Pevehouse, *International Relations* (New York: Longman, 2006), p. 99.

¹⁰ Quoted from *The Analects*, translated by Raymond Dawson (New York: Oxford University Press 1993), p. 4

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65

¹² Daniel A. Bell, “Just War and Confucianism: Implications for the Contemporary World,” in Daniel A. Bell, ed. *Confucian Political Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University, 2008), p. 227.

¹³ Alastair Iain Johnston, *Cultural Realism: Strategic Culture and Grand Strategy in Chinese History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 118.

¹⁴ Quoted from *The Art of War*, translated and published by “sonshi.com” (accessed on April 5, 2005).

¹⁵ See “Hu makes 4-point proposal for building harmonious world,” *XinhuaNet*, September 16, 2005.

¹⁶ See "China's Diplomacy: Pursuing Balance to Reach Harmony," *People's Daily* 28 December 2005.

¹⁷ See the full text of President Hu's keynote speech at the 17th CCP National Party Congress, published by *China Daily*, October 25, 2007.

¹⁸ Shi Yinghong, "China's peaceful rise is all about soft power," *China Daily*, June 14, 2007.

¹⁹ Michael Meidan, "China's Africa Policy: Business Now, Politics Later," *Asian Perspective*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2006, pp. 69-93.

²⁰ See the full text of *China's African Policy* issued on January 12, 2006. URL: <http://www.gov.cn/misc/2006-01/12/content_156509.htm> (accessed on April 5, 2006).

²¹ See "China in Africa: a Sincere, Cooperative, and Equal Partner," speech made by Liu Guijin at Africa Dialogue Lecture Series Held by the University of Pretoria, 25 October 2006. URL: <<http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zwjg/zwbd/t277443.htm>>.

²² See "Africa to Become Hot Destination for Chinese Tourists." URL: <<http://www.china.org.cn/english/travel/156065.htm>>

²³ Karby Leggett, "China Flexes Economic Muscle throughout Burgeoning Africa," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 29, 2005.

²⁴ Loro Horto, "China in Cape Verde: the Dragon's African Paradise," *CSIS Africa Policy Forum*, January 2, 2008. URL: <<http://forums.csis.org/africa/?p=80>>

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³¹ See Robert Sutter, "China and Japan: Trouble Ahead?" *The Washington Quarterly*, 25, no. 4 (2002).

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³⁶ "Public Polls About China," *The Dong-A Ilbo*, May 03, 2004. URL: <<http://english.donga.com/srv.service.php?bicode=050000&biid=2004050493898>>

³⁷ David Shambaugh, "China Engages: Reshaping the Regional Order," *International Security*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2004, pp. 64-99.

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⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Alexei Barrionuevo, "To Fortify China, Soybean harvest Grows in Brazil", *New York Times*, April 6, 2007.

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⁴⁸ See Jiang, "China's Energy Engagement with Latin America."

⁴⁹ See "Chavez ponders Mao and Bolivar friendship," *Reuters*, December 24, 2004; Juan Forero, "China Oil Diplomacy in Latin America," *New York Times*, March 1, 2005.

⁵⁰ See "A Threat to Latin Democracy," *Washington Post*, March 31, 2005.

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⁵² Larry Rohter, "China Widens Economic Role in Latin America," *New York Times*, November 20, 2004.

⁵³ Nikolas Kozloff, "In South America, China and the U.S. Battle it Out," *ZNet*, February 10, 2007. URL: <<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=12086>>

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