Chapter 3: Chinese Soft Power

Prior to the introduction of reform and opening policies in 1978, the CCP’s rhetoric for its domestic audience painted China as the world’s foremost revolutionary force striving to spread Communist worldwide. Since the 1979, the party has shifted to portraying itself as an advanced force endeavoring to build “socialism with Chinese characteristics” and capable of delivering peace and prosperity to its people. Message to the outside world has since centered around China’s peace-loving nature and its desire to achieve common prosperity and lasting peace with others players. As explained in chapter two, the change of Chinese rhetoric reflects the shift of Chinese national interests.

During the initial reform periods, for instance, foreign capital and business skills made up Beijing’s major interests on its reform agenda. As its economic scale continues to expand, today Beijing sees securing supply of natural resources, raw materials, and advanced technology as critical to bolstering continued economic growth. To ensure access to those resources, Beijing has gone great lengths to repair relations with neighbors and seek allies afar. Therefore, in addition to convincing its domestic audience of its competence—and hence its legitimacy as the unchallengeable ruling party, Beijing has also been testing new grounds to strengthen its communications with foreign publics hoping to brush its image and achieve desired outcomes.

Beijing recognizes that projecting its images as a peaceful, cooperative global great power, as opposed to the old-day images as a revolutionary force aiming to overthrow current international order, is more effective in gaining access to much-needed resources. In this sense, it is economic interdependence in an increasingly global world that has considerably reduced Beijing’s inclination to use
hard power to get what it wanted. In so doing, Beijing has since increasingly turned to soft power and public diplomacy for winning over favorable opinions and outcomes. The following discussions look into the concept of soft power, the kinds of soft power China seeks to project, and China’s soft-power diplomacy.

3.1 Defining Soft Power

Joseph Nye coined the term “soft Power” in 1990 in his book of that year, *Bound to Lead*, and again expounded the idea in greater detail in his 2004 book, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. In the latter book, Nye identifies three sources of power, all of them relevant in modern international politics: military, economic, and soft power. He relates hard power to command power and soft power to co-optive power. Whereas command power seeks to change others’ behavior by means of coercion or inducement, co-optive power works to shape what others’ want with the attractiveness of one’s culture and values or the ability to influence others’ agenda or political choices. The following table illustrates Nye’s definitions of three types of power.

**Figure 5. Types of Power**

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<th>Behaviors</th>
<th>Primary Currencies</th>
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<td>Military Power</td>
<td>Coercion</td>
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<td>Economic Power</td>
<td>Inducement</td>
<td>Payments</td>
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<td>Soft Power</td>
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<td>Agenda</td>
<td>Culture</td>
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As the table shows, Nye places economic power in between the hard, military power and the soft power. The United States, for instance, often applied economic power—a carrot-and-stick strategy—to make sure its counterpart complies with its agenda. Soft power, on the other hand, refers to a country’s attraction and the ability to set agenda for its target. In Nye’s view, the resources of a country’s soft power come from its institutions, values, policies, and culture. He observes that the importance of soft power will increase in a global information age:

It is not smart to discount soft power as just a question of image, public relations, and ephemeral popularity…it is a form of power—a means of obtaining desired outcomes. When we discount the importance of our attractiveness to other countries, we pay a price…if the United States is so unpopular in a country that being pro-American is a kiss of death in that country’s domestic politics, political leaders are unlikely to make concessions to help us. Turkey, Mexico, and Chile were prime examples in the run-up to the Iraq War in March 2003.¹

Nye further categorizes soft power in this global information age into the attractiveness of a country’s culture, the appeal of its domestic social and political values, and the style and substance of its foreign policy. Elizabeth Economy defines soft power as culture, education, and diplomacy, and she observes that China has historically had a well-grounded network to promote soft-power influence.² Meanwhile, Joshua Kurlantzick notes that Nye used a more limited definition for soft power when he coined the term, excluding investment, aid, and traditional diplomacy. Today in Asia, he observes, China and its neighbors view soft power in broader terms to include all elements outside the security realm, including investment and aid.

This thesis is based on Nye’s concept of soft power to examine Chinese

¹ Nye, 2004, p.129.
image-making efforts for two reasons. First, as will be explained in the following section, Nye’s concept of soft power is well-received in China—with “Chinese characteristic” interpretations of what soft power entails and ways to exploit that power. Second, this thesis agrees with Nye that the information age has made soft power and public diplomacy ever more important in today’s globalizing world. Nevertheless, even though Nye seeks to define soft power in specific terms and scope, the concept leaves much room for interpretation or over-interpretation so long as it lacks the support of a scientific structure to measure and verify its scope and effect.

The current wave of China’s efforts to project an overall “peaceful and cooperative” image globally that began in the wake of the 1989 Tiananmen Incident has transformed its foreign policy conduct in a number of ways. To stay in focus, this thesis limits its scope to China’s soft-power related moves. The rest of this chapter will discuss Chinese views of soft power and the content of Chinese soft power based on Nye’s classification: culture, domestic social and political values which in this case comes in the alternative form of the “Beijing Consensus,” and style of diplomacy.

3.2 Soft Power in Chinese Terms


The most notable sources of soft power identified in the Chinese discourses are culture

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3 Hongying Wang, “Chinese Conception of Soft Power and Its Policy Implications.” An earlier version of this paper was delivered at the international conference on China in the World Order, University of Nottingham, UK, September 2006. This revised version was kindly provided on May 30, 2007, by Prof. Wang, who noted that it would later appear in the Journal of Contemporary China after final revision.
and domestic institutions and values...they see cultural competition as an increasingly vital part of international competition...Chinese pundits argue that Chinese development model has become widely appealing to other countries, especially developing countries...there is a lot of discussion in the Chinese discourse about a number of other components...One such component is national coherence...Another component of soft power is regime legitimacy...science and technology are important sources of soft power...Finally, like Nye, Chinese scholars and policy analysts attribute soft power to senior diplomatic skills and styles.4

Wang notes Chinese scholars agree to the three components that Nye defines as the resources of soft power—culture, domestic institutions and values, and substance and style of foreign policy, but they place emphasis on difference sources. In terms of culture, Nye stresses on contemporary American pop culture, whereas Chinese discourse highlights traditional culture. By domestic institutions and values, Nye refers to American political institutions and values such as democracy and human rights, while Chinese analysts look to China’s economic development model as the attractiveness of Chinese soft power. When it comes to policy recommendations, Nye has focused on improving the substance and style of American foreign policy, particularly the value of multilateralism, while Chinese academics emphasize national coherence and government legitimacy as domestic foundation of power.

Chinese scholar Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin define soft power as “a combination of a country’s international attractiveness, and its external and international mobilization capabilities.”5 In comparing Chinese and American soft power, the authors further translate the three components into five indicators. First, the appeal of political

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4 Wang, 2006, pp. 4-8.
system is rated by the number of countries sharing similar political systems. Second, cultural attractiveness is represented by the number of countries sharing similar national culture, of films exported, and of foreign student enrollment. Third, the power to formulate international rules measured by the number of allies in the UN Security Council and the voting rights in the World Bank and IMF. Fourth, domestic mobilization capability among elite groups is assessed by proportion of representatives from the ruling party. And last, domestic mobilization capability at grassroots level is measured proportion of members of the ruling party among the adult population.

The authors conclude that China’s international appeal comes to one-eighth less than that of the United States, while the attractiveness of China’s development model more or less parallel that of America. Overall, China’s soft power arrives at one-third of that of America. The authors suggest that, among others, both hard and soft power can affect the overall national strength and that China’s must improve its international strategic reputation “as the penetration point” for its foreign policy of “promoting a harmonious world.” Many would agree to Yan and Xu’s suggestion of China’s overall soft power being much lower than the United States, however, the results have been subject to the use of limited indicators and hence reflect only partial picture.

Moreover, the measurement of domestic mobilization capability in Yan and Xu’s study may be misleading as China is one-party polity, where proportion of representative from ruling party would be monopoly, while the United States is not. Still, this study is valuable in that it reflect the desire of Chinese scholars to define the distance between China and America in terms of soft-power development. Indeed, many Chinese scholars and officials have since repeatedly called for concerted efforts by the government and cultural elites to develop Chinese soft power and to draw up
communication strategies to project that power outside China.\textsuperscript{6}

In January 2008, for instance, two symposiums took place in Beijing where Chinese academics, writers, and artists vowed to enhance China’s image through improving their works and expanding foreign exchanges so as to distinguish China from other cultures. More notably, the term soft power, however defined, has since entered Chinese official rhetoric. In his keynote speech to the 17\textsuperscript{th} National Congress of the CCP in October 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao stressed the need to “enhance culture as part of the soft power of [China] to better guarantee the people’s basic cultural rights and interests.”\textsuperscript{7}

Addressing CCP publicity officials, government officials, and scholars in November 2007 in Beijing and Tianjin, senior member of the CCP Central Committee of Politburo Li Changchun expressed the need to push for a cultural “go global” strategy in order to expand the export of cultural products and services in a bid to promote Chinese soft power.\textsuperscript{8} As will be discussed in the next section, China has not only embraced the concept of soft power, but also has launched the cultural “go global’ strategy with the export of Confucianism as its flagship project.

3.3 Chinese Soft Power

As Wang Hong-ying observes, the Chinese government has in recent years taken active steps to mobilize the three major resources of Chinese soft power that public discourse in China identifies: Chinese culture, China’s development model, and

\textsuperscript{6} See the website of the State Council Information Office of the PRC, which contains a collection of articles and speeches by scholars or by Chinese officials regarding the topic. See, for instance, Shen Suru, “Cai Zan Ruanshili Yu Dui Wai Chuan Bo de Yen Jeou” (A Study of the Development of ‘Soft Power’ and External Communication) available online from at http://www.scio.gov.cn/glfw/cmsk/qkj/c/dwdb/200706/t117584.htm.

\textsuperscript{7} See the website of China Internet Information Center, authorized government portal site offering access to news, government position papers, and other related information about China, at http://www.china.org.cn/english/congress/228142.htm.

\textsuperscript{8} The website of China Internet Information Center at http://wwwchina.org.cn.
China’s independent and peaceful foreign policy. The emphasis on culture was already evident in March 2004, when the Central Committee of the CCP issued an opinion calling for faster development of philosophy and social sciences. The same theme appeared again in the Politburo’s monthly seminar in May that year. Greater efforts have also been devoted to the promotion of Chinese language and culture in other parts of the world. Beijing officials have referred to the Chinese development model as useful lessons for many developing countries, crediting its model as providing a different path toward modernization than what have been prescribed by Western countries. The following sections discuss more detailed efforts by Beijing in this regard.

3.3.1 The Chinese Culture

China’s new emphasis in recent years on traditional culture as the reservoir for Chinese soft power marks a stark departure from the Maoist period, particularly the Cultural Revolution decade. Today in search of soft power resources, the Chinese government has looked deep into traditional Chinese culture and upheld Confucianism as its flagship soft-power initiative to attract foreign public. China began to establish Confucian Institutes in other countries in 2004, hoping that the Confucian Institute would become effective cultural-diplomacy instruments resembling the British Council l’Alliance Francais, and the Goethe Institute.9

By December 2007, 210 Confucian Institutes and Confucian classrooms have been established in 64 countries.10 Reportedly, an additional 300 more Confucian Institutes and Confucian classrooms will be set up around the world by 2010.11

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addition, the National Development and Reform Commission approved a multibillion-RMB project in October 2007 to transform the ancestral homes of Confucius and Mencius into a “cultural symbolic city” of China. Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao have both endorsed the project, which will cover a 300-square-kilometer area in Ji’ning City.\(^\text{12}\)

Meanwhile, China is devoted to attracting more foreign students to the Chinese soil to study as well. China’s Ministry of Education has been advertising Chinese universities abroad, setting up scholarship programs for students from developing nations, loosening visa policies for foreign students, and increasing budgets for attracting elite foreign scholars to teach in China and thereby upgrading its higher education systems. Nye has noted a triple increase in the number of foreign students enrolled with Chinese schools from 36,000 a decade ago to 110,000 at the end of 2005.\(^\text{13}\) The next year saw an increase by 10,000, according to Yan Xueton and Xu Jin.

Nye has noted that China has always had an attractive traditional culture, but today it is also cultivating its charm in global popular culture. In 2000, Chinese novelist Gao Xingjian became China’s first Nobel laureate for literature. Chinese basketball player Yao Ming is becoming a household name in the United States as the star player for Houston Rocket of the National Basketball Association. In contrast with Voice of America’s cutting its Chinese broadcasts from 19 to 14 hours a day, China Radio International was increasing its broadcasts in English to 24 hours a day.

Moreover, as Joshua Kurlantzick has observed, Chinese expatriates have become vital to Beijing’s global charm offensive, rebuilding relations with ethnic Chinese


organizations around the world and calling on them to help boosting China’s relations with developing countries. Beijing has used such techniques as recognizing the importance of overseas Chinese groups by hosting meetings like the World Chinese Entrepreneurs Conventions or sending weighty PRC ministers to visit overseas Chinese. It has also been cultivating leading ethnic Chinese tycoons in each nation, bidding for them to publicly support Beijing. In countries like Panama, which officially recognizes Taiwan, Beijing goes beyond reaching out to the country’s ethnic Chinese to bring important Panamanian Chinese opinion leaders to China for higher education. Kurlantzick observes that Beijing’s efforts are likely to jeopardize Taiwan’s diplomatic tie with Panama.14

Another Chinese asset that Beijing has found in its traditional past is Zheng He, who commanded seven voyages of trade and discovery in Southeast and South Asian waters during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The peaceful nature of Zheng's naval expeditions has been touted by Beijing to underscore its peaceful intention in its making of maritime policies. By honoring Zheng He, Beijing sees the potential of turning this historical asset into an “intricate diplomacy depicting the rapid growth of Chinese maritime power as a new phase in a benign regional dominance that had its origins six centuries ago.”15 The story of Zheng He has attracted some foreign attention, most notably the Discovery Channel’s series on his voyage. What is yet determined, however, is whether China’s publicity effort on this mariner has indeed succeeded in raising its image as a peaceful maritime power.

14 Kurlantzick, pp. 76-79.
3.3.2 Chinese Broadcasting Power

As discussed in Chapter 2, section 1, earlier studies have demonstrated the powerful influence of broadcasted messages on foreign publics. The two World Wars in particular provided plenty of evidence confirming the power of broadcasting. Today, major countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France all have established broadcast channels in other parts of the world. This thesis believes that such establishments themselves can be viewed as a source of soft power in that they represent a nation’s ability to reach out to foreign publics. China has, too, allocated resources to expanding its broadcast network internationally as a major element of its cultural “go-out” policy.

Under this “go-out” policy, China’s State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television has since 2001 actively sought to “create an amiable environment where international opinions favor Chinese reform and modernization.” In exchange for access to major cities across the continents, China’s state-run China Central Television (CCTV) has cooperated with such Western media groups as Time-Warner, News Corps, and Viacom that are interested in exploring the Chinese market. These exchanges allow CCTV’s English-language channel, CCTV-9, and Chinese-language channel, CCTV-4, to enter such major cities as New York, Berlin, and Frankfurt.

To further communicate with French and Spanish audiences, CCTV in October 2004 established a new channel, CCTV-E&F, targeting French- and Spanish-speaking publics in Africa, Europe, and Latin America. CCTV-9 now boasts a worldwide broadcast network and a viewership of more than 45 million households outside China. Meanwhile, the same month saw the China International Communications

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17 Lu & Teng, p. 10.
Co., subsidiary of CCTV’s China International Television Corp., launched the Great Wall TV (GWTV) Platform, via which selected 17 TV channels of the Chinese mainland and Hong Kong would be programmed worldwide. GWTV has since been providing services in the United States, Asia, and Africa. It will soon be distributing programs in Europe and Latin America.\(^{19}\) The worldwide establishment of Chinese broadcasting network signals China’s ambitious plan to lay down the groundwork for expanding Chinese influence with cultural, soft means.

### 3.3.3 Chinese Originated Value: The Beijing Consensus

Joshua Cooper Ramo introduced the term “Beijing Consensus” in 2004, observing that “China’s rise is already reshaping the international order by introducing a new physics of development and power,” and that “ideas like engagement and containment are outdated in regard to China.”\(^{20}\) Beijing Consensus was coined as a contrast of the Washington Consensus, which Ramo referred to as “an economic theory made famous in the 1990s for its prescriptive, Washington-knows-best approach to telling other nations how to run themselves.”\(^{21}\)

The Washington Consensus was initially coined in 1989 by John Williamson to describe a set of economic policy prescriptions by the IMF and the World Bank that Williamson considered constitute a “standard” reform package for economically shaky developing countries in Latin America. The package involves cutback on government finance, privatization, and liberalization of market and trade. The United States supported the package, which conditioned the loans provided the IMF and the World Bank in the form of aids to countries in need. The American free-market experience failed to copy U.S. success in Latin America, thereby diminishing the

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\(^{19}\) Great Wall TV, [http://www.gw-tv.cn](http://www.gw-tv.cn).


\(^{21}\) Ramo, 2004, p. 4.
popularity of the “Washington Consensus.”

In the Beijing Consensus, Ramo notes, “change, newness, and innovation are the essential words of power”. He observes that “whether China’s reform succeeds or ends in a tragic failure, the Beijing Consensus is already drawing a wake of new ideas that are very different from those coming from Washington.” Moreover, Ramo believes that emergence of the Beijing Consensus marks shift for China from a young reform process heavily conditioned by externalities to one that is now and more determined by its own internal dynamics. In other words, he asserts, China is writing its own book that “represents a fusion of Chinese thinking with lessons learned from the failure of globalization culture in other places.”

In answering the question of what the Beijing Consensus really is, Ramo outlines three theorems. First, Beijing Consensus repositions the value of innovation, dismissing the “old-physics” argument that developing nations must start development from lower technology while insisting on the necessity of “bleeding-edge” innovation to cure problems of change with more change. Second, Beijing Consensus prioritizes quality of life, rather than per-capita GDP. This requires a development model that places sustainability and equality over luxuries. China’s new approach to development stresses chaos management, Ramo asserts. Third, the Beijing Consensus contains a theory of self-determination that stresses the security concept of using leverage to move hegemonic powers before they attempt to attack.

Moreover, Ramo observes that when China’s fourth generation leaders Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao came to power in 2003, their arrival put an end to the left-right intellectual debate about whether or not to marketize Chinese economy. While marketization is future path, the new leaders stress on sustainable growth and social equality. In addition, Ramos notes that China’s so-called New Security Concept,

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22 Ramo, 2004, p. 5.
introduced in 1997 by Jiang Zemin at an ASEAN meeting and refined in 2002, formalize its different approaches than the United States. This new concept no longer places the U.S. at the absolute center of China’s foreign relations. Rather, Beijing desires for a more comprehensive global security strategy where stresses on multi-polarity.

Ramo’s theory of the Beijing Consensus has met with mixed reverberations. Wang Hong-ying points out that some Chinese scholars, while criticizing the so-called “Washington Consensus,” are happy to talk about the “Beijing Consensus,” which champions stability, development, and reform in that order.23 Citing media reports and recognition of Chinese economic achievements by foreign statesmen, Chinese scholars argue that Chinese development model has become widely appealing to other countries, particularly developing countries. Vietnam is often named as a follower of the Chinese development model with impressive success.

Other scholars do not see the Beijing Consensus in such a positive light. Joseph Nye notes that the Beijing Consensus is more attractive to authoritarian and semi-authoritarian developing countries, and that it actually undercuts China’s soft power in the West. Even within the Chinese soil, some Chinese scholars prefer not to use the term Beijing Consensus when referring to the Chinese development model. Agreeing to Ramo, Mark Leonard has noted that Beijing has developed a series of policies that allow China to grow independently of such institutions as the World Bank and IMF, global companies, or the United States.24

Furthermore, Leonard has witnessed how China’s “intoxicating recipe for success” has inspired people in countries as diverse as Iran and South Africa to discuss the “Chinese model of development.” This model, Leonard observes, is luring

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leaders in countries as different as Vietnam, Brazil, and India. He further notes that many people in the West believe Western values and culture will continue to define the rules of the world even though China might become wealthy. To his observation, that is already changing. “For the first time there is an emerging pole that is strong enough to change the way things are done on the global stage,” Leonard writes.

This thesis agrees with Ramo that China has until present succeeded the intricate task of transforming into market economy with its own set of strategies and solutions. While Ramo stresses on innovations, sustainable development and flexibility and swiftness in problem-solving in the Beijing Consensus, many people have reduced the Beijing Consensus to the idea of the dual existence of authoritarian regime and market economy. This reduction nevertheless appeals to countries such as Venezuela and Cuba. This thesis remains doubtful that Ramo’s broader definition of the Beijing Consensus, which would better fit the Chinese development model into something bordering the realm of soft power, has indeed gained appreciation to the degree of legitimizing the existence of such consensus.

What may be more certain, and as Leonard asserts from personal observation, is that the Chinese people have become more confident in speaking of the Chinese development model. In the mean time, many more people outside China are closely watching this “new physics” introduced by China. Therefore, this thesis believes that the Beijing Consensus, or the Chinese development model, may be viewed as soft power in the sense that China provides an alternative development path where “solving Chinese problems with Chinese ways” became a myth to attract admiration and attention.

3.3.4 Chinese Style of Diplomacy

Throughout the 1960s and prior to 1978, Chinese diplomacy was characterized
by Mao’s support for revolutionary insurgencies. After 1978, Deng led Chinese foreign policy in a new direction to adopt a generally non-ideological approach to diplomacy. Increasingly, China’s interest in economic growth and in reshaping its international reputation restrained it from openly confronting the Western countries. In the 1990s, Deng’s famous 24-character strategy largely governed Chinese foreign policy: “Observe calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership.”

As Chinese economy continues to develop, however, Chinese style of diplomacy also undergoes noticeable transformation. By 2001, China’s quest for resources to sustain its economic growth had driven Beijing to again mend its diplomatic strategy and adopt a new “go out” policy. This outward-looking strategy on the economic front, combined with increasing frequency of much trumpeted visits by Chinese leaders to foreign countries, mark a departure from Deng’s low-profile prescriptions for Chinese Foreign policy. Rhetorically, Beijing officials still swear by Deng’s strategy and the non-interference principle until this day, but they have developed over time more sophisticated diplomatic approaches to securing its interest in energy security and economic growth.

The result is a move toward an active diplomacy. Ample evidence can be placed where the Chinese government modifies its positions and strategies, and taken together, a new style of Chinese diplomacy has been taking shape and continues to refine. This thesis believes that current Chinese style of diplomacy is characterized by “multi-faceted active engagement driven by a strong image-awareness.” This includes investment in diplomatic personnel, active participation in international organizations

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and forums, increased frequency of high-level official visits, goodwill gestures empowered by economic incentives, widespread establishments of partnerships with countries near and far, and dynamic cultural exchange wherever possible. All the efforts appear to contribute to one common aim, that is, to shape a positive Chinese image so as to reduce fear for China’s rise.

As Joshua Kurlantzick observes, Beijing has poured resources into improving the overall quality of its diplomatic corps. China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs has seen waves of replacements where older, ideological diplomats retired to make way for young generation of envoys who speak better English and local languages. One 2005 study indicated that one-half of China’s 4,000 diplomats are less than 35 years old. Another study on Sino-Latin America relations suggests that China has since the 1980s actively sought to upgrade the quality of its diplomatic personnel in the Western Hemisphere, sending out 110 young officials abroad to learn Spanish and improving the capacity of its think tanks focusing on Latin America.\(^{26}\)

Moreover, unlike the United States and most of other countries that provide foreign-service officials leeway to choose postings, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has pushed diplomats to focus on one country and repeat their terms of service. Accordingly, Chinese diplomats tend to develop extensive contacts in the local business and political circles and master the local languages to the point of being taken as native speakers. In addition, Beijing has seen some success in making its neighbors feel worthy. Kurlantzick has vividly illustrated this point:

Beijing supports its diplomacy through constant visits by senior Chinese officials to developing nations, and through nonstop coverage in Xinhua…China sends nearly three hundred senior-level delegations annually to Singapore, far outstripping any American efforts; many visits include the signing of new agreements on trade or

\(^{26}\) Kurlantzick, p. 65.
investment…As one US ambassadors in Southeast Asia remembers, when Southeast Asian nations (in 2006) decided to create an early warning system to prevent future tsunamis, the United States sent a low-level official to the brainstorming group. The Chinese, by contrast, sent a senior cabinet-level official, who reaped plaudits for Beijing.27

A January 2008 Congressional Research Service Report for Congress also points out:

A core difference between China’s and America’s soft power in Southeast Asia is the organizing principle of their respective approaches…the U.S. approach places an emphasis on democracy and related objectives along with its main theme of promoting U.S. security interests. By contrast, China’s “non-interference” policy is less intrusive in the domestic affairs of regional states. While this approach may not garner widespread admiration, it is more palatable to relatively authoritarian regimes in the region, and sometimes earns public appreciation because it appears respectful of national sovereignty.28

Beijing may have learned the trick from earlier experience where its good-will gestures were well received. During the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997-98, the Chinese government withheld the pressure for devaluation of the RMB, even though there were ample economic reasons for it to do the opposite.29 Beijing won admiration from its neighbors for so doing. Moreover, to further ease Southeast Asian countries’ anxiety about the implications of its rapid rise, China took the initiative to propose a suspension of the territorial disputes that had heightened tension in the region. In 2002, China and other claimants to the disputed islands in the South China

27 Kurlantzick, pp. 66-67.
29 Wang, 2006, p. 15.
Sea signed an agreement and a Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea.

The treaty and code of conduct greatly reduced tension in the region, as the parties involved agreed to set aside territorial disputes and turned their focus instead on economic cooperation. Furthermore, China has also been a major donor country to developing nations in the region: Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, and the Philippines. China has been providing aids to the developing world since the early 1950s. Between 1950 and 1985, China provided aid to eighty-seven countries, including twenty in Asia, forty-six in Africa, sixteen in Latin America, and five in Europe.30

During the Cold War, Chinese government saw foreign aids as important symbol of China’s claim to leadership in the developing world as it sought to spread proletarian internationalism. Foreign aids also served as a tool of persuasion to switch recipient country’s recognition from Taipei to Beijing. Chinese aid efforts often come in various forms, including interest-free loans, agricultural aid, and technical assistance to help countries become self-reliant, and infrastructure construction projects. According to the 2005 China Statistical Yearbook, China’s “expenditure for external assistance” came to $731.20 million for 2004. But most of China’s foreign aid experts believe that the official figure is too low. Approximately half of Chinese foreign aid goes to Asia and one-third to Africa.31

In November 2006 at the Forum on China-Africa Co-operation, Chinese President Hu Jintao announced the formation of a $5 billion development fund for Africa and a provision of $5 billion in loans over next three years. He then proclaimed that China would forgive all debts due the previous year by thirty-one of its African allies. Besides that rare generous gesture, Chinese aids have become more

31 Glosny, p.2.
attractive in that they come as unconditional offers. This is in sharp contrast with the Western practice of complicated aids laden with conditions. Also, China is often appreciated as a lender by poor countries because it is willing to go beyond its no-strings approach and take on complicated projects in remote areas that Western countries show no interest.  

Compared with its proactive moves backed by increased economic might, China’s diplomatic approach to international politics may have evolved more cautiously. When North Korea unsealed its nuclear ambition to cause great security concern for the United States, China found itself in a delicate position where any misstep may bruise the Sino-U.S. relations or expose the limit of its sway over North Korea. China helped convened the six-party talks in Beijing in 2003, but it preferred the passive role of a host to a more active broker. It was only until 2005 that the Chinese government took on a more active role in drafting the joint statement of September 2005, in which North Korea agreed to destroy all nuclear weapons and disable its nuclear programs.

Beijing’s initial approach to this political issue may have reflected the non-interference principle of its foreign policy, reducing it to “a problem between the United States and North Korea.” After Beijing received a last-minute notice prior to Pyongyang’s missile test in July, 2006, it began to reconsider its fence-sitting approach to the issue. Beijing cooperated with the United States on imposing sweeping UN sanctions against North Korea, while sending a Chinese official to Pyongyang to warn against further testing. Meanwhile, it decided to actively support the multilateral effort to retrain Iran’s nuclear ambitions by voting for UN Security Council resolution demanding Iran to suspend its nuclear enrichment program.

33 Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small, p. 45.
In areas where China’s diplomatic connections with controversial governments involves energy and economic interests, most evidently with Sudan, Myanmar, Iran, and Zimbabwe, Chinese government has moved away from its non-interference position to join international efforts to halt genocide in Darfur and scaled back its support for Mugabe’s government and the Myanmar junta. Partly out of fears for instability that may damage its economic interests in Sudan, China urged the Sudanese government to accept UN peacekeeping force of twenty thousand to Darfur.

China’s growing support for UN peacekeeping operations shows a further sign of its shift from rigid non-interference to a more pragmatic foreign policy. China has become the second-largest supplier of personnel to UN missions among the permanent members of the Security Council. It has also shown more restraints in its support for notoriously repressive regimes at the UN and expressed enthusiasm in the UN reform initiative. These changes suggest that China is dealing with thorny issues with greater finesse. On another front, it has been expanding its connection with key players in the world.

China has since April 1996 intensified its efforts to build partnership with what it saw as likely key players in a multipolar world, primarily major European States and particularly Japan. It entered into “Sino-Russia partnership of strategic cooperation” on April 25, 1996. Moreover, it has established partnership with other target players: “long-term comprehensive partnership” with France; “comprehensive co-operative partnership” with Britain; “trustworthy partnership” with Germany; “long-term stable and constructive partnership” with the European Union; and “friendly and co-operative partnership” with Japan.

Furthermore, Chinese leaders’ attention to relations with the EU as whole

34 Kleine-Ahlbrandt & Small, p. 48.
accelerated in 1998, leading to the first China-EU summit held in April that year. The summit concluded with announced plans to intensify high-level contacts, including possible annual summits. With the various partnerships as the groundwork for advancing Chinese diplomacy, today Beijing has seen more guests from foreign administrations to frequent the city. As chapter four will illustrate, Chinese officials have become more active in the international arena to present China to foreign audiences.