

# The Strategic Pathways and International Communication Strategies for Enhancing China's Cultural Soft Power

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**Abstract:** *As a vital component of a nation's overall strength, national cultural soft power is attracting significant attention from countries worldwide. There is a focus on harmonious development between "soft power" and "hard power," striving to build cultural soft power commensurate with the demands of competition among major powers. Drawing upon Joseph Nye's three dimensions of soft power, which encompass cultural appeal, the attractiveness of political values, and foreign policy, China has made remarkable strides in developing its soft power across these facets. Examples include the global popularity of the Chinese language as a manifestation of cultural appeal, the concept of a shared future for mankind embodying political values, and the Belt and Road Initiative within foreign policy, all of which have garnered widespread international attention. Based on this, it is proposed to continuously enhance the international acceptance and recognition of China's political ideology, actively play a leading and coordinating role in international affairs, innovate propaganda forms, attach importance to the power of folk communication, win the understanding, recognition and support of a wider range of people around the world, and continuously improve the country's cultural soft power and other response strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Cultural soft power; International influence; Excellent traditional Chinese culture; International discourse power*

## 1. Introduction

A thriving culture leads to a thriving nation, and a strong culture makes for a strong nation. The competition among countries in today's world encompasses not only hard power such as economics but also soft power including culture. "Soft power" refers to a country's international influence manifested through its culture, ideology, institutional arrangements, and cultural exchanges. This concept was first introduced by American scholar Joseph Nye in 1990, who argued that a country's comprehensive national strength comprises both hard power (e.g., economic, technological, and military prowess) and soft power (e.g., the attractiveness of its culture and ideology). Amid the increasingly fierce competition in comprehensive national strength, major powers worldwide have adopted enhancing cultural soft power as a crucial national development strategy, striving to elevate their respective cultural soft power in order to gain a proactive position in the new round of adjustments to the international strategic landscape. As China emerges as the world's second-largest economy, countries worldwide pay close attention to the Chinese path and proposals, and are more eager to learn from China's wisdom and experience. China has the capability, responsibility, and ability to play a more significant role in global governance.<sup>[3]</sup>

In today's era of frequent interactions and clashes among diverse ideologies and cultures, enhancing China's cultural soft power is not only vital to the construction of a socialist cultural power, but also crucial to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. From the first mention of "enhancing national cultural soft power" in the report of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China to the "continuously enhancing national cultural soft power" outlined in the report of the 20th National Congress, the Party and the state have attached great importance to the development of national cultural soft power, leading to a rapid improvement in China's cultural soft power. According to the "2024 Global Soft Power Index Rankings" released by British brand consultancy Brand Finance, China's national soft power index has grown significantly, propelling it to the third position globally, with a larger increase than any other country.

While China has achieved remarkable accomplishments in its comprehensive national strength and

is increasingly taking center stage on the world stage, we must be soberly aware of the existing gap in cultural soft power between us and developed countries, particularly in terms of international influence. It is imperative to interpret China's practices with Chinese theories and elevate Chinese theories through China's practices. By innovating international communication methods and adopting effective measures to enhance international influence, we must forge a cultural soft power commensurate with China's comprehensive national strength and international status.

## **2. The Current Status and Remarkable Achievements of China's Soft Power**

In the early days after the founding of the People's Republic of China, the economy was in shambles, and the country was impoverished, with everything needing to be rebuilt. Through decades of relentless efforts and struggles, China has achieved leapfrog progress in productivity and rapid growth in economic aggregate, accompanied by a qualitative leap in people's living standards. China has created a miracle of rapid economic development and long-term social stability, which not only demonstrates the remarkable achievements of China's pursuit of peaceful development but also profoundly interprets the unique charm and robust vitality inherent in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Notably, China not only attracts global attention with its current high level of economic development but also serves as a widely admired and aspired-to model for many developed countries and even the international community for its pioneering and steadfast adherence to the path of peaceful development. This is a vivid manifestation of China's significantly enhanced international appeal and cultural soft power, presenting to the world an alternative possibility distinct from traditional models – that peace and prosperity can coexist, offering the Chinese solution for reforming and improving the international governance system, pushing global governance towards a more just and rational direction, and becoming a distinctive banner leading the trend of the times and the advancement of humanity.

### ***2.1 Fruitful Achievements in Economic Development and Social Governance Showcase the Charm of the "China Path"***

China is widely recognized for its proficiency in social governance, in addition to its swift economic progress. The Chinese government swiftly organized medical teams from every province and the military to respond to disasters and combat the epidemic during the Wenchuan earthquake and the COVID-19 pandemic. The government achieved major wins in this endeavor, thereby demonstrating the superiority of the Chinese system. China has demonstrated the strong mobilization and unifying force of the socialist system in the face of disasters, promoting a safe and secure society. The Chinese government values human life and places a high priority on group interests. These benefits have greatly improved China's reputation abroad and helped to debunk foreign misconceptions about its socialist system. All of these indirect effects have improved China's standing abroad and its soft power.

As China's frequent presence on the global stage continues to strengthen its positive image, the world is gradually recognizing that China is forging an unprecedented development path. Amidst the post-globalization wave, many countries are at a crucial juncture of rejuvenation, seeking development paths tailored to their national conditions. China's development achievements have not only infused confidence and momentum into these countries but also provided valuable experiences and inspirations, with the potential to further promote international learning and cooperation, attracting more countries to join hands with China.

### ***2.2 Deep Engagement in Global Affairs, with Increasing Influence on International Institutions***

China's participation in international organizations has not only addressed bottlenecks and challenges in its own development but also injected new vitality into global prosperity. This process has not only realized national interests but also refined China's international image. China's integration into and active engagement with the international institutional system holds immeasurable value for fostering a positive and enhanced international image. Conversely, dismissing or rejecting international institutions would undermine China's reputation as a reliable partner in international cooperation, tarnish its image as a responsible major power, and ultimately hinder the safeguarding and advancement of national interests. China is now immersing itself unprecedentedly in the wave of global innovative governance, widely integrating into various international organizations, and playing a pivotal role as an active participant and contributor in multilateral affairs, striving to steer the international order and system towards greater justice and rationality.<sup>[1]</sup>

### ***2.3 The Prevailing Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture Further Manifests Cultural Confidence***

Rich and wide, China's exquisite traditional culture serves as the nation's common spiritual home and is a vital source of inspiration for the country's advancement, continuity, and unification. It also symbolizes the importance of historical records and cultural legacy. With its inclusive nature showcasing its global significance, Chinese traditional culture stands as a key focus in strengthening China's soft power. China attaches great importance to the dissemination of traditional Chinese culture, emphasizing not only its promotion overseas but also reinforcing its status among Chinese citizens, particularly the youth. Confronted with the formidable influence of Western culture on the younger generation, delving into traditional Chinese culture enables them to profoundly appreciate the nation's rich cultural heritage, thereby fostering stronger cultural confidence.

Adapting to the evolving demands of the times, Chinese culture continuously updates its content and forms, further enriching its essence and significantly contributing to the enhancement of China's cultural soft power, playing a pivotal role in global cultural exchanges. In recent years, accelerated globalization, particularly with the advancements in digitalization and self-media, has propelled Chinese culture, particularly its traditional aspects, into global popularity, inspiring a worldwide trend of embracing Chinese culture. In 2010, the United Nations designated April 20th as the International Chinese Language Day, urging countries to strengthen Chinese language education and promote Chinese character culture, greatly benefiting the international dissemination of Chinese culture. Simultaneously, International Chinese Language Day celebrations worldwide have become significant platforms for the international spread of Chinese culture.

Beyond disseminating China's excellent traditional culture to the world, the Chinese government places significant emphasis on cultural innovation and industrial upgrading to enhance the international competitiveness of the cultural sector. This upgrade can facilitate the promotion of cultural products in the international cultural market, strengthening China's cultural influence and dissemination through enhanced international cooperation and exchanges, thereby fostering a deeper cultural soft power and advancing the internationalization of Chinese culture.

## **3. Comprehensive Construction and Enhancement Strategies of China's Soft Power**

Amidst the rising tide of anti-globalization and the escalating non-traditional challenges confronting humanity, China's political values, imbued with the essence of Eastern philosophy, and the achievements of its socialist development under their guidance, have increasingly demonstrated their unique international allure, becoming an indispensable and increasingly significant component of China's cultural soft power landscape. These achievements not only embody the profoundness and breadth of Chinese wisdom but also provide the international community with new perspectives and solutions to address complex challenges.

### ***3.1 Continuously Disseminating Political Ideas and Value Orientations Embedding Unique Chinese Elements***

#### ***3.1.1 "Chinese Dream" Outlining a Visionary Blueprint for Future Development***

The introduction of the concept of "Chinese Dream" has painted a promising future for China, aligning with the developmental achievements since China's reform and opening-up, instilling genuine confidence in the world about China's peaceful development and the realization of various goals under the "Chinese Dream." This concept has sparked intense resonance and widespread discussions both domestically and internationally. Domestically, it serves as a motivating force, outlining a fresh and vibrant developmental vision for the Chinese people, significantly boosting their enthusiasm for struggle, unleashing boundless creativity and cohesion.

Internationally, particularly the report titled "The Power and Potential of the Chinese Dream," released by the renowned British media group WPP in the House of Commons on February 24, 2014, examined the "Chinese Dream" from a global perspective. The report profoundly revealed the intimate connection between individual dreams and national aspirations in China, with family happiness and national prosperity viewed as inseparable dual driving forces. According to data, up to 70% of Chinese citizens think that realizing the "Chinese Dream" is important for their personal lives. Among young people, this number rises to 76%, which is significantly higher than the 65% in the US and the 39% in the UK. This highlights the "Chinese Dream's" deep roots and widespread recognition among this

generation. Notably, despite the United States still being perceived as the strongest global force in British society, China is seen as a potential leader in future expectations, reflecting the international community's profound understanding and anticipation of China's development.

Concurrently, the Chinese government is actively promoting the "Chinese Dream" globally. In contrast to the "European Dream" advocated by European and American countries, which emphasizes technological advancement and civilization, and the "American Dream" that cherishes consumer freedom, the "Chinese Dream," with its profound traditional cultural roots, family-centric values, and extensive social responsibility, exhibits unique charm and appeal, becoming a focal point of international attention.

### ***3.1.2 Establishing a New Type of International Relations under the Vision of a Shared Future for Mankind***

The idea of "a shared future for mankind" reflects the desire to create a world that is clean, beautiful, open, and inclusive, as well as one that is consistently peaceful, secure, and affluent. This concept, which has its roots in Chinese diplomatic traditions, is essential for fostering the development of a new kind of international relations since it provides a valuable orientation. It clearly communicates China's firm stance and voice committed to peaceful development, showcasing China's active participation in global governance and its vision of harmonious coexistence. It profoundly reflects China's profound aspiration for the inseparable and mutually supportive development of all countries in the world. The world order advocated by China does not exclude any governance concepts or reform proposals aimed at achieving genuine peace. Instead, the Chinese vision, led by the concept of "a shared future for mankind," is pioneering a new form of global governance civilization.

As a new height of cooperation, the vision of "a shared future for mankind" discards the outdated logic of hegemonism, opens up an innovative path for international interactions, and injects robust momentum into the construction of a new type of international relations and the reshaping of the international political order.<sup>[4]</sup> The idea of "a shared future for mankind" advocates that international cooperation should uphold the noble goal of serving all people and strive toward a global vision of common prosperity and peace, in stark contrast to the traditional Western realist theory, which holds that international conflicts are rooted in the disorderly state of the international society and require the maintenance of order and stability through hegemonic power.

## ***3.2 Implementing a Foreign Policy that Upholds World Peace and Promotes Global Common Development***

### ***3.2.1 Adhering to the Main Theme of Peaceful Development in China's Foreign Policy***

The core principle of China's foreign policy lies in safeguarding global peace and tranquility, promoting common development among all countries, and striving to realize the grand blueprint of a shared future for mankind. Guided by this approach, China has successfully established friendly diplomatic relations based on equality and mutual benefit with the vast majority of countries worldwide, not only creating a favorable external environment for domestic economic prosperity but also increasingly becoming an indispensable force in maintaining world peace, stability, and promoting global development.

Saudi Arabia and Iran, two Middle Eastern nations, restored diplomatic ties thanks to China's intercession. China's diplomatic accomplishments were well illustrated by this reunion, which also improved China's standing among the Middle Eastern nations. China's foreign policy not only builds trust with Middle Eastern countries, which will surely help collaboration between the two sides, but it also gives hope to those countries, contributing to regional peace.

China's peaceful diplomacy has crafted a positive national image on the international stage, laying a solid foundation for the steady enhancement of diplomatic soft power. Amidst the increasingly complex and volatile global landscape, with significantly increased instability and coexisting opportunities and challenges, the diplomatic policies adopted by China and other major powers, such as the United States, not only profoundly influence their respective national development trajectories but also bear relevance to the evolution of human civilization. China is actively embracing the role of a global peacebuilder, endeavoring to promote global stability and harmony through diplomatic efforts. True strength lies in making all nations feel secure rather than threatened, and China is committed to contributing to world peace and security through non-military coercion, enhanced mutual trust, and cooperation.

### ***3.2.2 Actively Promoting Humanitarian Spirit in International Aid***

China actively collaborates with other nations to address non-traditional security issues such as disasters and conflicts, thereby earning trust from other countries, fostering a favorable international environment for China's development, facilitating China's response to intra- and inter-regional conflicts, and demonstrating international responsibility through tackling non-traditional security threats. China's practice of foreign aid is not a recent phenomenon; dating back to the 1950s, amidst the arduous period of national reconstruction, the new China resolutely extended assistance to other countries to the best of its ability, embodying its core principles of internationalism and humanitarian concern.<sup>[2]</sup> Currently, the global humanitarian sector is undergoing unprecedented challenges since World War II, confronted with geopolitical conflicts like those in Ukraine and Syria, as well as non-traditional security threats such as natural disasters, food shortages, migration waves, and climate change. These challenges have become pressing issues requiring collective global responses. In this context, engaging in international aid is not only a crucial avenue to demonstrate national responsibility and commitment but also an effective strategy to forge international friendships and earn the respect and trust of other nations.

### ***3.2.3 Enhancing International Voice through International Cooperation Initiatives***

China is leveraging international cooperation to strengthen exchanges with other countries while fostering a relatively peaceful international environment conducive to joint global governance. China actively advocates for international cooperation, and through the extensive implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), it has deepened economic cooperation with many countries worldwide, jointly promoting global economic prosperity and development. This process has significantly benefited numerous developing countries, spurring their economic growth and social progress. The BRI has not only broadened the boundaries of international economic cooperation but also established a new platform for mutually beneficial and win-win global economic cooperation.

As a pivotal means of maintaining global peace and advancing human progress, international cooperation is profound in its role in facilitating in-depth cross-cultural exchanges and dialogues, effectively dispelling misunderstandings, deepening mutual understanding, thereby reinforcing the bonds of international friendship and jointly constructing a world characterized by peaceful coexistence, shared prosperity, and synchronized development. Strengthening international cooperation mechanisms can facilitate resource and capability complementarity among nations, assisting developing countries in breaking free from the constraints of Western-dominated economic frameworks, propelling the global economy towards a more balanced trajectory, effectively alleviating regional poverty, and gradually narrowing the development gap between the North and the South.

Furthermore, by deepening economic and trade cooperation and promoting people-to-people exchanges, China has not only fostered prosperous trade relations but also enhanced the foundation of mutual trust in political and diplomatic domains. This process significantly contributes to enhancing China's soft power by broadening the international dissemination channels of Chinese culture, enhancing its global influence and appeal, providing a solid and extensive practical stage for China's advocated political ideologies and values, and further fostering international understanding and recognition of China.

### ***3.3 Forging Cultural Attractiveness Centered on Promoting China's Excellent Traditional Culture***

As the core medium and distinctive symbol for overseas dissemination of Chinese culture, Chinese cultural symbols carry profound significance. In recent years, China has placed particular emphasis on deeply integrating Chinese characteristics into the planning and creation of cultural products. This trait serves not only as an identity badge for cultural products but also as the key to transcending national boundaries and showcasing China's unique style and charm. Maintaining Chinese characteristics in themes and content is the cornerstone for ensuring that cultural products possess a distinct national identity, highlighting China's unique charm, and guiding their core value in attracting and influencing the global stage. During the process of introducing new cultural products, we are delighted to observe that many practitioners in China's cultural industries are actively tapping into the rich mine of traditional Chinese culture, breathing new life into classic elements such as classical literature, historical texts, Peking Opera, and calligraphy through creative transformation and innovative development. These high-quality cultural products rich in Chinese elements have not only strengthened cultural self-awareness and confidence among the Chinese people but also served as ambassadors of Chinese culture, transcending national boundaries to showcase China's cultural charm and soft power to the world.

#### **4. Multidimensional Paths to Enhance China's Cultural Soft Power**

In delving into the historical trajectory of modern international political development, nations that have innovatively contributed political ideologies often play a pivotal role in reshaping the international landscape and evolving the international institutional system. These countries, with their keen insights into the trends of the times, have put forward values that are both original and consonant with the universal development needs of human society, thereby leading the tide of social change. Due to the profound influence and widespread acceptance of their ideologies, they have established powerful exemplars of soft power on the international stage. In this regard, China should continuously enhance the international acceptance and recognition of its political ideologies, actively fulfill leadership and coordination functions in international affairs, innovate promotional forms, attach importance to the power of non-governmental communication, and win broader understanding, recognition, and support from the global public, thereby continuously elevating the country's cultural soft power.

##### ***4.1 Continuously Enhancing the International Acceptance and Recognition of China's Political Ideologies***

To more effectively voice its stance in the international community and demonstrate the unique charm and superiority of China's socialist system, China should continue to promote a value system that can be widely recognized by the international community. This system should not only embody China's profound thinking and contributions to global governance but also serve as an important bridge for promoting international cooperation and enhancing mutual understanding, helping to dispel misunderstandings and doubts about China's peaceful development and enabling it to play a more proactive and leading role in global affairs. Through such efforts, China will be better positioned to win the respect and support of the international community and jointly advance the great process of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

##### ***4.2 Actively Fulfilling Leadership and Coordination Functions in International Affairs***

Contrasting with the rigid nature of hard power, soft power exhibits a high degree of flexibility and formidable competitiveness, particularly in the current era of information explosion and rapid change, where it can transcend boundaries and bridge gaps between nations and ethnic groups. In the global context of advocating peace and development, countries tend to adopt efficient dialogue and consultation mechanisms to resolve differences, collaborate, and jointly address global challenges. As a crucial aspect of national soft power construction, diplomatic strategies not only help enhance a country's soft influence on the international stage but also provide solid support and guarantees for the smooth conduct of diplomatic work, with both aspects reinforcing each other to promote the harmony and development of international relations.

Given the profound legitimacy and authority carried by international mechanisms, member states can earn widespread praise and respect from the international community through active participation. Conversely, countries that ignore or resist their rules, conventions, and core ideologies will not only undermine their reputation as reliable partners but may also damage their responsible international image, ultimately incurring alienation and criticism from the international community. In the process of deeply engaging in international affairs, China should consistently demonstrate a posture of full integration and constructive contribution, striving to embrace the mainstream value orientation of the international community at a deeper level while actively conveying its positions and concerns and engaging in extensive and in-depth exchanges and dialogues with other countries. <sup>[5]</sup> Given the profound changes in China's status and role in the international system, mere proactive and comprehensive participation is no longer sufficient to meet challenges; China must also play a more constructive role, which is not only a natural outcome of the enhancement of its comprehensive national strength but also an inevitable requirement of adapting to international developments.

##### ***4.3 Innovating Promotional Forms and Emphasizing the Power of Non-governmental Communication***

Firstly, in terms of promotional entities, emphasis should be placed on enhancing the communication power of non-governmental channels. With their unique advantages, non-governmental communication is regarded as an indispensable part of promoting China's public diplomacy and overseas communication due to its natural affinity and closeness. It can effectively deepen the public's understanding and

recognition of national characteristics, thereby achieving a multiplier effect of attractiveness. Therefore, the Chinese government should incorporate non-governmental organizations into the national external communication framework, enriching and enhancing the overall international communication capability, contributing to the construction of a "China image" that is authentic, approachable, trustworthy, and respected, and winning broader understanding, recognition, and support from people around the world. However, the effective utilization of the advantages of non-governmental organizations in this field does not occur automatically; it relies on reasonable strategies and execution. To this end, a coordination mechanism between government departments and non-governmental organizations should be established based on the unique nature of the latter, ensuring both their moderate autonomy and the maximization of their external communication effectiveness, jointly promoting the global dissemination of China's voice.

Secondly, in terms of communication strategies, it is crucial to prioritize the expansion of new media channels to compensate for the limitations of traditional media such as television and newspapers in terms of timeliness and interactivity. With its instantaneity and wide reach, new media has emerged as a vital force to supplement the deficiencies of traditional media. In content planning, the emphasis should be on strengthening humanistic concerns and adopting a propaganda perspective that is closer to people's livelihoods, thereby making the disseminated information more accessible and down-to-earth. The construction of the external publicity system should balance macro and micro perspectives, showcasing not only the country's remarkable achievements in development and the depth of its political ideals but also focusing on vivid stories and emotional resonances of individual members of society. These two aspects are complementary, jointly outlining and presenting a three-dimensional and diverse image of China. More importantly, even when discussing macro issues related to the nation and society, micro-narrative techniques can be employed to showcase the everyday life of ordinary people, allowing the world to intuitively feel China's developmental pulse, profoundly understand the warmth of Chinese policies and the profound connotations of political values, and thereby enhancing the international community's comprehensive cognition and understanding of China.

## 5. Conclusion

Faced with this challenge, China must delve into and fully leverage its inherent advantages to maintain an unassailable position amidst fierce competition. Although China has made significant strides in enhancing its soft power, there are still many unanswered questions and challenges. In contrast to the impact that soft power from Western countries has on the global scene, China needs to put up significantly more effort to leave its mark in this field. In my opinion, China's soft power expansion will have an even greater impact on the world in the future due to the country's ongoing efforts to strengthen its overall national power and develop its soft power infrastructure.

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