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## The Admiral's Carrot and Stick: Zheng He and the Confucius Institute

Peter Weisser

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THE ADMIRAL'S CARROT AND STICK: ZHENG HE  
AND THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

in

Social Science

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by

Peter Eli Weisser

March 2018

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Approved by:

Jeremy Murray, Committee Chair, History

Jose Munoz, Committee Member

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## ABSTRACT

As the People's Republic of China begins to accumulate influence on the international stage through strategic usage of soft power, the history and application of soft power throughout the history of China will be important to future scholars of the politics of Beijing. This study will examine Beijing and its government official's perceptions of its soft power and how there have been historical parallels between the modern People's Republic of China and the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) in regard to soft power politics and China's search for its legitimacy as a rising global power. This study will use two examples that have similar parallels: The eunuch admiral Zheng He (1371-1433) and his journey's through the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean and the Middle East and the Confucius Institute, a teaching and cultural exchange program under the auspices of the Office of Chinese Language International, known colloquially as Hanban, an organization under the direct control of the Chinese Communist Party's leadership.

What connects these two topics is the subject of soft power, a term coined by Joseph S. Nye, relating to the kind of power wielded by countries that does not involve military force and uses a "Charm Strategy" to support favorable treatment amongst its trading partners. Zheng He sailed the oceans to neighboring countries, in an attempt to give legitimacy to Ming China through the imperial tribute trade system. The Confucius Institute continues that legacy today, teaching a view of China that is shaped in Beijing. I will show the parallels

between this historical figure and that of the Confucius Institute, showing that the pursuit of soft power is not a recent phenomenon in Chinese politics but a theory and a motivation that has existed in China since medieval times in China's endless search for legitimacy in the eyes of its neighbors. I will be researching the life and journeys of Zheng He, along with the controversies surrounding the Confucius Institute and how all of these factors relate to China attempting to re-instate a legacy that the nation has lost over since the nineteenth century's "Century of Humiliation". This loss of prestige was a result of European colonial power's ambitions in the area. I will also use evidence to prove the importance of Confucianism in regard to the development of soft power in China. As China seeks to find its legitimacy, we will see that this has been some centuries in the making and plays a crucial part of Chinese politics today. The re-assertion of China's place in the world as a rising world power will have geopolitical implications for decades to come.

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I would first like to thank my mother and father Stan and Ellen Weisser for all of their continued support. I would also like to thank the students and staff at CSUSB especially Dr. Jose Munoz and Dr. Christin Lyon for being supportive graduate program chairs. Special thanks go to Dr. Jeremy Murray for helping me craft this thesis and turn it from a mold into a piece of substance and for being a perfect mentor who spent a considerable amount of his personal time to help me create this work.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### THESIS, METHODOLOGY, SOURCES, PURPOSE OF THE STUDY AND DEFINITIONS OF SOFT POWER

*Why mount such a diplomatic charm offensive? As China turns its gaze to nearby seas in search of prosperity and secure energy supplies, it has embarked on a naval buildup unprecedented in modern history. Beijing evidently hopes to allay suspicions aroused by its bid for sea power. In so doing, it hopes to discourage the coastal nations of East, Southeast and South Asia from banding together-or with powerful outsiders such as the United States-to balance the growth of Chinese power. At home, Chinese leaders summon up Zheng He to help turn the attention of the populace seaward, rousing rank and file for seaward pursuits. Maritime history, in short, now suffuses Chinese politics abroad and at home.*

*-James R. Holmes in "Soft Power at Sea"<sup>1</sup>*

#### Introduction and Thesis

In the study of world politics today, there is a great deal of focus on the soft power aims of the People's Republic of China. However, there is a very common misconception that the PRC's push for soft power is a recent affair. Indeed, China has been seen as a rising power in the last few decades but has

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<sup>1</sup> James R. Holmes, *Soft Power at Sea: Zheng He and China's Maritime Diplomacy*, University of Georgia Center for International Trade and Security, (2006).

taken a unique view of its own power as non-hegemonic. From the point of view of the PRC, the PRC is a non-hegemonic power and claims that the recent amount of soft power that the PRC has gained in the last few decades has been a result of China's peaceful rise. However, the perception of what soft power is may differ from that of western nations and Beijing. Joshua Kurlantzick a special correspondent for *The New Republic* in his book *Charm Offensive* makes an interesting observation in that "Beijing offers the charm of a lion and not a mouse".<sup>2</sup> In the last year, the United States under the Trump administration has moved away from international cooperation and the possibility that Trump is ceding America's global leadership role becoming more apparent. As the United States seems to push away from globalization and as America has been willing to push away former allies and interests, China under President Xi Jinping has been more than willing to fill the void. This can be seen in a historical light as well. China has long considered the nineteenth century as its "century of humiliation" when colonial powers forced a series of unequal treaties during the two Opium Wars with Great Britain. In the first years of the twentieth century the anti-foreign Boxer Uprising's aftermath also forced humiliating concessions on the waning Qing Dynasty who in 1911 would fall from power, replaced with the Republic of China. In 1927, the Nationalist movement and later in 1948, Mao Zedong's Communists came into power, making the twentieth century a century

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<sup>2</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World*, (New Haven: Yale University Press.) 2007, 6.

of upheaval in China. Beijing's international relations today are often motivated by an urge to recapture the lost glory of the "Middle Kingdom" and through soft power methods and China has found a way to accomplish this through the use of finding ways to improve Beijing's international image. While some scholars would refer to this method as "soft power" as a collective term for Beijing's motivations, there are problems with portraying these motivations as purely an issue of soft powers vs. hard power. What Beijing and the PRC's perception of what soft power is can be very different from that of the United States and the European Union for example. Beijing's perception of its soft power in some cases may blur the lines of the original concept of soft power as originally defined by Joseph S. Nye. In any case, it seems that the term soft power may be a problematic concept to give simple definitions to. It will be important to distinguish and unpack what soft power means and also discuss the problematic concept of soft power in itself and critically examine if Beijing's diplomatic practices can be considered soft power at all.

The use of soft power in China's history has hardly been a recent development however. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Admiral Zheng He (1371-1433) a eunuch military commander and explorer exercised soft power during the rule of Zhu Di, the Yongle Emperor (1402-1424) and third emperor of the Ming Dynasty. Zheng He traveled through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean along the way visiting numerous countries along the way in an effort to show both the wealth and power of the Ming Dynasty, a charm offensive

in its own right. In the modern day, the Confucius Institute an educational and cultural exchange program run by Hanban and organization with ties to the PRC's politburo has in many ways taken up Zheng He's mantle as a soft power force. These two examples of soft power will serve as the two main examples of this study which is to not only show that there are historical and modern-day components to the PRC's recent soft power but that the most core component of all in terms of China's recent interest in soft power is the search for legitimacy in its soft power relations with the nations of the world.

The thesis of this study is that there are parallels between Zheng He and the Confucius Institute in two periods of China's soft power: the fifteenth century and the twenty-first century. Furthermore, the perceptions and meanings of soft power in China may be different than that of other nations or other periods of time. Joshua Kurlantzick noted that China's soft power resembles that of a "lion and not a mouse". This form of power may be different from traditional soft power in that it is used by authoritarian regimes as a form of coercing other countries viewpoints to the regimes point of view. The National Endowment for Democracy, a Washington based think-tank has defined this as "sharp power". This paper will examine the soft power efforts of the PRC, using the Confucius Institute and Zheng He as examples to show the historical parallels between the two while examining the motivations of the PRC government which is the search for legitimacy.

This legitimacy that is perceived by members of the PRC government to have been lost in the nineteenth century and only started to be regained in the waning years of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> One of the main ideas of this paper is also that there is an explicit link between the ideas of Ming glory, non-hegemonic expansion and the Confucius Institute. A common claim made by the PRC regarding the foreign policy of China is that historically and today China remains a non-hegemonic power with the peacefulness of its rise often being touted by its leadership, which has an implied claim that China's rivals such as the United States do not follow a similar policy. In September 2011 the Information Office of the State Council of the PRC released a white paper titled: "*China's Peaceful Development*" that gives a summary of this point of view held by the PRC government:

China has declared to the rest of the world on many occasions that it takes a path of peaceful development and is committed to upholding world peace and promoting common development and prosperity for all countries. At the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century and on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC), China declared solemnly again to the world that peaceful development is a strategic choice made by China to realize modernization, make itself strong and prosperous, and make more contribution to the progress of human civilization. China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development.<sup>4</sup>

This idea of cooperation and common development has been a crucial part of China's recent success in diplomacy within the last decade. Rather than

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<sup>3</sup> Valarie Hilton, *The Open Empire: A History of China to 1800*, (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company Inc. 2015), 420.

<sup>4</sup> PRC Government, PRC State Council, "China's Peaceful Development", (Beijing: State Council Information Office, 2011) 1.

seeing China as an antagonist on the world stage, the PRC has allowed a more benevolent and non-interventionist image of the country to be formed in its new state propaganda. This new view allows Beijing to wield its soft power in a way that allows former adversaries to become partners. Whether or not the Communist system of government of the PRC can survive in its present form in the future under the face of such pragmatism will also be something to consider in the coming decades.

The lionization of historical figures of the Ming as soft power heroes such as Zheng He, have been used by leaders such as Xi Jinping to prove to the world that China has always been and peaceful and non-hegemonic power. This study will attempt to establish the link between this idea of idealizing the past and using figures of the past to promote modern China's rise in importance to the world and show that the Confucius Institute's mission at its core is to promote similar ideas to the world of non-hegemonic power regarding the PRC. The paper will also show who has explicitly pushed this form of historical soft power, starting with Confucian and eunuch officials in the fourteenth century and the Ministry of Education and the in the twenty-first.

The Confucius Institute has today, a stated goal of influencing foreign perceptions of China and spreading Chinese culture, with teaching and cultural studies as the Confucius Institute's method of choice. The first stated by-law of the Confucius Institute's constitution lays out clearly this mission statement of the Confucius Institute:



Confucius Institutes devote themselves to satisfying the demands of people from different countries and regions in the world who learn the Chinese language, to enhancing understanding of the Chinese language and culture by these peoples, to strengthening educational and cultural exchange and cooperation between China and other countries, to deepening friendly relationships with other nations, to promoting the development of multi-culturalism, and to construct a harmonious world.<sup>5</sup>

The Confucius Institute's funding comes directly from the PRC

government. showing there is direct government control.<sup>6</sup> Zheng He sailed with his fleet to spread China's influence and to increase the prestige of the Dragon Throne. Zheng He used trade and goodwill as a carrot, but he also wielded the threat of military force (the stick) when required, hoping the Ming Dynasty's neighbors to see China as a powerful but benevolent super power.<sup>7</sup> However, what often can be defined as soft power may also have some hard power elements or indeed may not be soft power at all. For example, in 2006, Nye wrote an article in *Foreign Policy* regarding the difficulty in defining soft power titled: *Think Again: Soft Power*. In this article Nye uses the example of economic sanctions being considered a form of soft power and how that point of view is erroneous. Nye writes:

Economic Strength Is Soft Power: No. In a recent article on options for dealing with Iran, Peter Brookes of the Heritage Foundation refers to soft power options such as economic sanctions. But there is nothing soft about sanctions if you are on the receiving end. They are clearly intended to coerce and are thus a form of hard power. Economic strength can be converted into hard or soft power: You can coerce countries with

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<sup>5</sup> Hanban, Constitution and by-laws of the Confucius Institute, 1.

<sup>6</sup> John Sudworth, "Confucius Institute: The Hard Side of China's Soft Power," *BBC News*, 22 Dec. 2014,

<sup>7</sup> Louise Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas, The Treasure Fleet of the Dragon Throne, 1405-33*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 20.

sanctions or woo them with wealth. As Walter Russell Mead has argued, economic power is sticky power; it seduces as much as it compels. There is no doubt that a successful economy is an important source of attraction. Sometimes in real-world situations, it is difficult to distinguish what part of an economic relationship is comprised of hard and soft power. European leaders describe other countries' desire to accede to the European Union (EU) as a sign of Europe's soft power. Turkey today is making changes in its human rights policies and domestic law to adjust to EU standards. How much of this change is driven by the economic inducement of market access, and how much by the attractiveness of Europe's successful economic and political system? It's clear that some Turks are replying more to the hard power of inducement, whereas others are attracted to the European model of human rights and economic freedom.<sup>8</sup>

The key point that Nye is coming across here is that coercion is the main determining factor between the difference between soft and hard power in the case of economic sanctions. This is an example of the problematization regarding of what exactly defines soft power. So, if the PRC for example were to use economic sanctions against another country, this would be a form of coercive hard power on the part of the PRC by Nye's definition. It is important to consider also that just because soft power does not use military force as part of the process of soft power, it does not mean that soft power is inherently peaceful or even as Nye points out in the article, the most humane option.

By studying what defines soft power and proving that the PRC has utilized both a historical and contemporary trend of using soft power in its approach to politics, we can gain a better understanding of what the PRC's political goals will be in the coming decades by using the methods of history and political science. Just as Zheng He's two voyages across the vast ocean to Africa served for the

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<sup>8</sup> Joseph S. Nye, "Think Again: Soft Power", *Foreign Policy*, Feb 23, 2006.

dual purposes of benefiting from trade and spreading Chinese culture, so too does the PRC, by way of its Confucius Institute gain influence and build infrastructure in order to benefit from modern day African nation's supply of resources. As James R. Holmes explains, economic development has been the key driving influence in China's recent interest in expanding sea power.<sup>9</sup> Other nations and especially those of us in the United States, would do well to learn from the historical nature of Beijing's soft power methods.

This study will be divided into six chapters and will examine Zheng He's life and how it relates to modern soft power politics to China today and how it influences China's perceptions of its own power. I will use and problematize the very concept of soft power in itself to show that the PRC's perception of soft power does not necessarily align with other concepts of the definition of soft power. I will also explore the idea of the Confucius Institute as a tool of modern day soft power strategy as well as a parallel to Zheng He. I will also examine the PRC's efforts to find legitimacy and respect around the world. By examining the methods of teaching practiced in western universities, I will attempt to prove that there is also a threat to academic freedom from these teaching approaches. Finally, this study will also examine the historical roots of soft power in Confucian thought, using quotes from Confucius as primary sources to show the long

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<sup>9</sup> Holmes, *Soft Power at Sea*, 5.

historical trend soft power has had not only on the politics of Beijing, but in the ancient culture itself.

This chapter (Chapter One) will focus on a review of the literature examined for this study's sources and show the methodology used as well as give a brief overview concerning the history and development of soft power as a political theory. The second chapter will focus on Zheng He himself and will give historical examples of his usage of both soft and hard power and how the Ming have been historically used by succeeding dynasties and governments to promote ideals of national and on some occasions, racial unity, especially in terms of the Han ethnic group which connects Ming glory to aspects of Han chauvinism. Chapter Three will focus on the Confucius Institute, giving examples of the Confucius Institute's policies and the controversy surrounding its actions in universities around the world. Chapter four will examine Confucianism and the history of the eunuchs of the court who were the rivals of the Confucian scholar officials during the lifetime of Zheng He and lead to him nearly being erased from the historical record.<sup>10</sup> But most importantly, Chapter Four will also focus on using quotes from Confucius to show that the practice of soft power has long been a part of Confucian thought and is therefore a long-term practice in Chinese culture itself.<sup>11</sup> Chapter Five will consist of defending my thesis statements with

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<sup>10</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 34.

<sup>11</sup> Anja Lahitan, China's Soft Power: Challenges of Confucianism and Confucius Institutes, *Journal of Comparative Asian Development*, vol. 14 no. 2, (24<sup>th</sup> July 2015): 200-226.

counter-arguments, giving common arguments against the supposed “peaceful” nature of Zheng He’s voyages as well as showing the Confucius Institute’s point of view when dealing with the controversy surrounding them. The sixth and final chapter will be my conclusion to the sources I have collected and will make the concluding arguments of this study. Finally, I will focus on what possible future research can be done with this topic and how it might benefit students of history and the other social sciences.

#### Research Questions, Definition of Terms and Sources

There are several questions that will be important to consider during the writing of this study. These questions will allow the reader to examine the methodology of this study, which will use a documentary form of analysis using primary and secondary sources as evidence. Some examples of these questions will be questions such as: Was Zheng He a peaceful explorer or an Imperialist? Is the Confucius Institute a mere teaching organization or is it a soft power gambit used by the PRC, or perhaps both? Is there a historical continuity with China starting to show interest in gaining resources in Africa, similar to Zheng He’s travels to Africa for trade purposes? What role did the Ming tribute trade system have in the treasure voyages? Perhaps the most important question that can be asked is what benefit will this study have in the research of Chinese history as well as modern day Chinese politics? What can students learn from

this study, and what benefits will there be for these future students to study this topic? This study will attempt to answer these questions throughout the entire work and these questions will also help the reader understand the arguments that will be made in this study.

Before the concept soft power is to be defined, it is important to give the reader some knowledge about the numerous sources being used in this study. The following sources are the ones of most importance, a full list of sources can be found in the bibliography.

### Primary Sources

One of the most important Primary Sources I will be using is the *Mingshi* (The history of the Ming) which is the official history of the Ming Dynasty written throughout 18<sup>th</sup> century during the Qing Dynasty. By examining passages in the *Mingshi*, there will be a greater comprehension of what the political world that Zheng He lived in was like for the purposes of this study. Several of the passages of the *Mingshi* that I will be using come from Edward L. Dryer's translations in his book *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty* which he includes in his appendices. This chapter of the *Mingshi* has a lot value, especially since it shows what the total size of the military forces and crew

members were.<sup>12</sup> Dryer's translations of the *Mingshi* will also be insightful into what concepts of Imperial Chinese rule entailed such as the tribute trade system. Excerpts from the *Mingshi* will give insight into what Chinese scholars of the time thought about nearby foreign nations and what their role was deemed to be as "clients" of the Dragon Throne.

Another primary source that will be used are the stele inscriptions that Zheng He left behind in the ports of Liujiang and Fujian that were erected by Zheng He himself. These inscriptions were erected in preparation for Zheng He's seventh and final journey (1431-33).<sup>13</sup> Dryer has two of these inscriptions translated in his book and they will both be used to show what Zheng He thought of the Treasure Voyages himself and what his own motivations were according to Zheng He himself. Zheng He also mentions firsthand what his perceptions of numerous foreign nations were in the context of how well they submitted to accepting client state status under the Ming Dynasty. For example, Zheng He, admits to the kidnapping of foreign rulers who in his words "resisted transformation."<sup>14</sup> These inscriptions are also useful for cross-referencing different accounts of Zheng He from both past and modern-day scholars.

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<sup>12</sup> Edward L. Dryer, *Zheng He and The Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, (New York: Pearson Education, 2007), 187.

<sup>13</sup> Zheng He, *Zheng He's Liujiang Inscription*, Translated by Edward Dryer, (New York: Edward Dryer. 2007) 191.

<sup>14</sup> Zheng He, *Zheng He's Changle Inscription of 1431: Record [of Prayers] Answered by the Divine Spirit of the Heavenly Princess*, Translated by Edward Dryer, (New York: Edward Dryer. 2007), 198.

The Confucian *Analects* will be used in this study to show what Confucian thought was in terms of foreign relations between nations as well as what the Confucians thought of foreign wars and their justification. This is meant to show what the Confucian view of hard and soft power are. Furthermore, by studying the *Analects* we can compare and contrast the Confucian scholar officials' view of foreign policy with that of the Eunuch officials as detailed in *Mingshi*. The Confucians tended to also disapprove of foreign policy adventures such as the Treasure Voyages due to the Confucian belief that "lesser" nations should come to China rather than China come to them, as well as seeing mercantile profit as being an unworthy thing. This is the opposite view of what the Yongle emperor's eunuch officials who saw a lot of profitability, as well as gains in power for the empire if direct foreign interventionist actions and relations were pursued.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, study of both the *Analects* and the entries in the *Mingshi* can give an informative look at what Ming era politics were like in Zheng He's time and what the motivations for these two factions were.

Ma Huan who was one of Zheng He's lieutenants and served on the treasure fleet as a translator is also a crucial primary source as he was one of Zheng He's contemporaries and accompanied him on many of the treasure voyages. His work the Ying-Yai Sheng-lan (Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores" details and gives many first-hand accounts of the places Zheng He journeyed to and remains

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<sup>15</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 175.



one of the few surviving primary sources remaining of one of the treasure fleet's members and gives first hand descriptions of the places Zheng He traveled to, especially his descriptions of Calicut.<sup>16</sup> Another contemporary of Zheng He, Fei Xin wrote the *Xingcha Shenglan (Overall Survey of the Star Raft)* dated 1436 which was three years after the death of Zheng He.<sup>17</sup> Fei Xin also writes of the countries that Zheng He visited, which he (Fei Xin) was a part of. These two primary sources will prove invaluable by giving a narrative of Zheng He by men who knew him.

The primary sources that I will be using for the Confucius Institute will be newspaper articles and scholarly journals as well as statements from the Confucius Institute themselves. While a good portion of this study will be focusing on the criticisms of the Confucius Institute, it is important to give the Confucius Institute's side of the issue as well. Marshall Sahlin's, a professor at the University of Chicago and one of the leading critics of the Confucius Institute's practices regarding academic freedom will also be a useful but not unbiased source of information. Sahlin's pamphlet *Academic Malware* gives a good account of a lot of the controversy that has surrounded the Confucius Institute in universities in North America<sup>18</sup> His pamphlet has proven to be a large resource

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<sup>16</sup> Ma Huan, *The Overall Survey of the Oceans Shores*, Translated by J.V.G. Mills, (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge: J.V.G. Mills.1970) 137-145.

<sup>17</sup> Fei Xin, *The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, Translated by J.V.G. Mills, (Otto Harrassowitz. 1996) 3.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Redden, "Chicago Faculty Object to their Confucius Institute"., *Inside Higher Education*, April 29, 2014.

for newspaper sources as he cites many of the controversies surrounding the Confucius Institute in his book and it has links to many newspapers articles and scholarly journals that can prove to be useful sources for this work, although it is equally important to realize that there is some considerable bias in this material.

Another valuable source that will be used in this study will also be the numerous white papers and government reports that are published by the governments of the PRC and the United States. These will give perspective into the soft power that is wielded by both nations in international affairs. The white papers will also be used to show what the opinions of both the US and PRC are in regard to the Confucius Institute and what their role is in the world. Using these government sources will help answer questions such as “what does soft power and hegemony mean from the perspective of the US and the PRC?” for example.

### Secondary Sources

One of the most important sources used in this study is *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. by Joseph S. Nye Jr. Nye, the creator of the term “soft power” gives an overall layman’s understanding of soft power in this book. Nye defines power itself as the ability to get outcomes one wants.<sup>19</sup> While written under the George W. Bush Administration, the book is still relevant to soft

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<sup>19</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2008), 1.

power studies today. as we see the soft power of the United States start to slip away. Nye argues that America's "go at it alone" approach to foreign affairs such as the Iraq War have cost America power and friends.<sup>20</sup> Nye argues that soft power was always the foundation of America's power and that America should refocus on its soft power elements if it wants to regain prestige. While not about China per-se the Nye book is a good introductory text to the concept of soft power and explains it very well in ways a person new to the concept of soft power would understand. Another important source concerning soft power is *Charm Offensive* by Joshua Kurlantzick. Kurlantzick is a journalist from Baltimore, Maryland who is a Fellow on the Council of Foreign Relations. Kurlantzick gives an in-depth history of the rise of Chinese modern soft power and China's new place in the world economy. Kurlantzick argues that it's important for the US to understand this soft power and warns that China is making friends and inroads in economic partners while the US is facing a decline in its standing in the economic world.<sup>21</sup> Overall, Kurlantzick's book gives a good explanation of the rise of China's soft power and how the US should pay more attention to it.

Michael Barr in his work, *Who's Afraid of China? The Challenge of Chinese Soft Power* argues that China being seen as a threat is a result of the insecurity of the government in the US. Barr's book looks at China's rising

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<sup>20</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power*, 19.

<sup>21</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 10.

economy and its role in creating soft power, but does so by having some criticisms of the West. There is often a fear in the United States that since China is not following Neoliberal policies, it might not meet western democratic standards. Barr dismisses a lot of these notions as sinophobia and sinomania and looks into issues of ethnocentrism and models of development. Barr feels that a lot of the arguments against China's rise comes from a massive "chip on the shoulder" of Americans concerning China. Barr argues that many concerns about China in the west are outdated and needlessly aggressive and stem from fears of losing soft power in the world to China.

When studying the subject of Zheng He, one of the most important books available to western readers is Louise Levathes' book, *When China Ruled the Seas*. Levathes makes the argument that had the Ming Dynasty continued its naval buildup, China may have well become the premier colonial power instead of European nations.<sup>22</sup> In the beginning of Levathes' book she gives a brief overview of the voyages and the political machinations that ended them. Levathes argues that the conflict between the eunuchs at the Ming Court and the Confucian Scholar Officials was one of the primary reasons that Zheng He fell from grace and how the voyages were unable to reach their full potential. Levathes also examines the inner workings of the Yongle emperor's court as well as technical specifications on the ships that Zheng He had in his treasure fleet.

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<sup>22</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 20.

Levathes also looks into the power play politics Zheng He engaged in, such as interfering in the Ceylon civil war, gaining the submission of foreign leaders to the Dragon Throne and the establishment of client states in Southeast Asia and India. Overall, Levathes' work is one of the most complete works regarding Zheng He and has often been used as an important source by many studying the subject of the treasure voyages.

Besides Levathes, there is another book that many China scholars refer to in the study of Zheng He. China historian Edward L. Dryer's book, *Zheng He: China and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty* gives a very detailed account of Zheng He's life. Dryer gives an explanation of why Zheng He's fleet despite being far better funded and organized did not achieve the successes of his European counterparts.<sup>23</sup> Dryer takes a very methodological approach to the subject matter and relies heavily on primary sources for his research many of which are his own translations. One of the more interesting things that Dryer argues is that while Zheng He's ships probably were the largest in the world at the time, their size may have been exaggerated in the historical record.

A well cited secondary source when discussing the impact that the first Ming ruler Zhu Yuanzhang (1328-1398) has had on both historical and modern soft power in China is *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder across Six Centuries of East Asian History* which is a collection of essays by numerous

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<sup>23</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 99.

historians edited by Sarah Schneewind. While Zheng He and Zhu Yuanzhang's son Zhu Di are the main focus of this work in terms of historical soft power, Schneewind's work will be valuable in showing that soft power politics were also being practiced both at the time of the Ming founder's death and for six centuries beyond. Using Zhu Yuanzhang as a national "hero" in both Nationalist China and the PRC has proven to be an effective tool of propaganda and has helped China's domestic soft power in considerable ways which will also be examined.

Geoff Wade takes a look at Zheng He in a much different perspective in his journal article published in the *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* titled *The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment*. Wade argues and gives a revisionist view of the Zheng He voyages. Rather than seeing these as "friendship voyages" Wade argues instead that they were examples of Imperialism of the Yongle emperor and connects them to the invasions of Dai Viet and Yu-Nan. Wade argues that these were attempts to create a Pax Ming in the East Asian maritime world. Wade argues that these voyages were essentially proto-colonialism.<sup>24</sup> Wade's work will serve as an effective counterpoint to the thesis of its study giving credence to the argument that Zheng He's voyages were not as entirely peaceful as portrayed. One of the final major sources that is important to this work, is a journal article by Barbara Peterson titled *The Ming Voyages of Cheng Ho (Zheng He)*. Barbara Peterson gives basic background on

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<sup>24</sup> Geoff Wade, *The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment*, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 78, no.1. (2005): 1

the life of Zheng He, his early life and death and the specifications and the purpose of Zheng He's treasure ships as compared to the ships Columbus sailed in. Peterson's main argument in this article is that the purpose of the voyages was to both consolidate power at home and impress and build allies while projecting Ming power at the same time.<sup>25</sup>

#### Definitions of Important Terms and Historical Figures Related to the Study

Soft power is a term coined by Joseph S. Nye in regard to a type of political and social power. Soft power is the ability to use peaceful negotiation, or ideally charm for one party to force a more favorable outcome on another. This concept is contrasted with hard power, which is often achieved with coercion, most famously with military power. Soft power by contrast, is accomplished through the promotion of culture, using negotiation and influencing social and public opinion. Soft power is generally defined with the analogy "the carrot" which is part of the famous "carrot and stick" analogy representing reward and punishment. The use of soft power in modern day diplomacy and politics is considered to be highly important and is an integral part of U.S., EU and PRC diplomacy all around the world. One of the biggest advantages it gives is allowing smaller countries without much military power to "punch above their weight".

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<sup>25</sup> Barbara Peterson, *The Ming Voyages of Cheng Ho (Zheng He) 1371-1433*, (Perth: Australian Association for Maritime History Vol. 16, 1994), 43.

Hard power on the other hand, is “the stick” form of the hard power/soft power dynamic. Hard power can be seen as a form of power and negotiation using force to achieve one’s objectives. The most famous form of this power is that of military strength. This military strength (or implied usage of it as a threat) is a central tenant of the concept of hard power, but other forms of hard power can be shown through economics as well, such as the use of sanctions. Hard power is often distinguished from soft power due to its coercive nature.

The problem regarding soft power in many cases is a matter of perception. Looking back at the article in *Foreign Policy* written by Nye, we see a clear problematization in modern day perceptions of soft power. Economic sanctions, recalling or the resignation of ambassadors in protest of a country’s policy and trade wars may be perceived by the casual observer as soft power. As Nye argues, this is a misinterpretation of soft power. Soft power in itself is non-coercive and relies on charm for the method to work.<sup>26</sup> There is also the idea that it is rare that soft power and hard power work in complete isolation of each other. A country can use charm and wealth to woo a country, but that very same wealth can be used to conduct trade wars and military funding for the recipient nations rivals. It is important in the study of soft power not to confuse popular perceptions of soft power with the reality and nature of this method of diplomacy.

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<sup>26</sup> Nye, “Think Again: Soft Power.”



When studying the connection between historical soft power and modern day soft power, the historical figure Zheng He is often brought up as the most prominent example of this connection. Zheng He was Ming era Admiral who is famous for his diplomatic missions to Southeast Asia, Ceylon and Africa. Zheng He was a eunuch who had great favor in the court of the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Di (1360-1424). Among his many accomplishments was the recognition of Chinese authority with China's neighbors, the establishment of trade ties in Palambang, Ceylon and Sumatra as well as in Africa and Indonesia. He also engaged in a brief land war against the kingdom of Kotte in 1411 in modern day Sri Lanka after the expedition fleet was attacked. After the death of Zhu Di in 1424, Zheng He's fortunes and favor fell somewhat but were briefly resurgent in the reign of the fifth Ming emperor, Zhu Zhanji. After 1433 there were no more treasure voyages and Zheng He died shortly afterward, either in 1433 on the way back to China or in 1434 shortly after the completion of the final voyage.

The dynasty which Zheng He served at that time was the Ming Dynasty. Founded in 1368 by Zhu Yuanzhang, the first Ming emperor, the Ming Dynasty was the final native Han Chinese dynasty of Imperial China. The dynasty rose in the final chaotic years of the Mongol Yuan Dynasty, and became the dominant power in East Asia. In the context of this study, the Ming Dynasty was the dynasty in power during Zheng He's tenure as admiral of the treasure fleet. The Ming Dynasty lasted two hundred and seventy-six years until it was overthrown

the Li Zicheng who then established the short lived Shun dynasty. The Shun dynasty was overthrown shortly after by the Manchu-led Qing in 1636 which would be the last dynasty of China

The treasure fleet is a general term referring to the armada of Zheng He that sailed across the Indian Ocean in the 14th century. The fleet was both a display of Ming military might used to awe the nations it visited, but also to show off the technological might of China and serve as an example of Ming prosperity. The fleet was decommissioned at the end of the final treasure voyage in 1433 due to Ming hostility to foreign travel. One of the most important technological innovations of these ships was watertight bulwark compartments that the Ming shipwrights modeled on the multichambered structure of a bamboo stalk. In addition, the treasure ships also had a balanced rudder which placed itself as much of the rudder towards the stern of the ship as behind it, making the steering of the ship much easier.<sup>27</sup> The treasure fleet was a technological marvel of its time period and showed the advanced nature of Ming shipbuilding.

During Zheng He's tenure as admiral of the fleet, the emperor that he served was the Yongle Emperor also known by his personal name, Zhu Di. Zhu Di came to power in 1402 after the conclusion of a brutal civil war lasting from 1399-1402. In the context of this study, Zhu Di is an important historical figure due to his long-lasting friendship and patronage of Zheng He. Zhu Di came to

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<sup>27</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 81.

power as a usurper, and therefore was obsessive in finding ways to show off his legitimacy as a ruler. One-way Zhu Di intended to show off his power and legitimacy was gaining recognition of his supremacy from foreign neighbors and this was done through Zheng He's journeys. Zhu Di was also famous and distinct from his father Zhu Yuanzhang by showing great favor to the eunuch members of the Ming court, at the expense of the Confucian Scholar officials.

Another important term in understanding the soft power politics of the Ming era is the tribute trade system. The tribute trade system was the official system that numerous Chinese dynasties, and most famously the Ming and Qing dynasties, used to deal with trade agreements with neighboring nations. The implication of this system was that the countries wishing to trade with China were considered inferior due to their "barbarian" status and that they were obliged to recognize the Chinese emperor's suzerainty over them. Most famously during the Qing dynasty this was shown in a physical sense when foreign emissaries would "kowtow" to the Emperor during formal audiences. This kowtowing was a form of submission demonstrated by the supplicant going on to one's hands and knees and pressing their head to the floor several times. This was meant to show that China was the "center of the world" (The Middle Kingdom) and that the Emperor and therefore China, was the "elder brother" of these nations. In reality however, nearly all of these tribute states were de-facto independent nations and these rituals were merely a formality that had to be performed to participate in trade. In the nineteenth century, this ritual kowtowing would become a point of

concertation with European Empires such as the British Empire which saw these rituals as an insult to their pride and standing.

In the history of the Ming Dynasty, Confucian scholar officials played a role as one of the two major factions in court life at the time of Zheng He's life. The scholar officials had thrived under the first Emperor of the Ming Zhu Yuanzhang, but by the time of Zhu Di's reign they had lost a degree of influence in favor of their rivals the palace eunuchs. The scholar officials as good Confucians, were against the treasure voyages as it violated the Confucian policy that foreign nations should come to China for diplomacy instead of the other way around.<sup>28</sup> After the death of Zhu Di much of their lost power and influence was restored to them and they regained influence in the court.

The Palace Eunuchs were officials who had undergone castration at a young age and were the only one's trusted to oversee the concubines of the emperor, and under Zhu Di served in high office. Zheng He was amongst their number. Often taken as prisoners of war at a young age and castrated, they were given unique positions close to the imperial family since due to their castration they posed no threat of overthrowing the emperor and forming their own dynasty. They flourished under Zhu Di and were ardent supporters of the treasure voyages, and were often rivals of the Confucians.

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<sup>28</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the early Ming Dynasty*, 3.

Besides the political and historical aspects and terms used in this paper, there are aspects of philosophy and education that are related to Chinese identity and power politics. The history of soft power in China is intimately related to a philosophy and moral guidance system known as Confucianism which is based on the teachings of Chinese philosopher and educator Confucius (551-479 BC). The teachings developed by Confucius placed a large emphasis on the family and filial piety to one's parents was considered one of the main tenants of the philosophy. By the time of the Ming Dynasty, officials in high positions of the government would have been scholars of the Confucian school and based their foreign policy around Confucian principles. These principles tended to favor isolationism in foreign affairs and also a dislike of engaging in foreign conflicts.<sup>29</sup> While Confucianism was suppressed in the early years of the PRC, Confucius has been "rehabilitated" in modern day China and his name has been given to the Confucius Institute. This signals a revival of Confucius as a central figure in Chinese educational life.<sup>30</sup>

The Confucius Institute was started in 2004, as a PRC-led non-profit public educational organization, overseen by the Office of Chinese Language Council International, also known as Hanban. The goals of the Confucius Institute are to promote Chinese culture, language and perform cultural exchange

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<sup>29</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 163.

<sup>30</sup> Evan Osnos, "Confucius Comes Home", *The New Yorker*, January 13, 2014.

in countries outside of China. The Confucius Institute cooperates with its associated colleges, with many CI's in a number of universities around the world including North America, Europe, Australia, Africa and Asia. The Confucius Institute is sometimes compared to other language and cultural institutes such as Académie Française from France and the Goethe Institute in Germany. The Confucius Institute can also be seen as an aspect of the PRC's soft power policies, hoping to present an image of China that is consistent with the principles the PRC government wishes to promote. The Confucius Institute is controlled by Hanban which is the colloquial abbreviated form of the Office of Chinese Language Council International. Hanban is a self-described "Non-governmental Organization" but has explicit ties to the Chinese Ministry of Education as reported by *The Economist*.<sup>31</sup> In the context of this study, Hanban is the organization that is in charge of The Confucius Institute. The current director of Hanban is Xu Lin, who also serves as a vice ministerial official in the politburo of the People's Republic of China.

A rival to the Confucius Institute has emerged in the form of the Taiwan Academy. The Taiwan Academy is the Taiwanese government's foreign teaching organization. Unlike the Confucius Institute they are known for teaching traditional Chinese characters in their language program as opposed to simplified Chinese writing which is common in the PRC. While the Taiwan Academy

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<sup>31</sup> Satoshi Kambayashi, "Confucius Says", *The Economist*, September 13, 2014.

officially denies they are competing with the Confucius Institute, it has nevertheless shown signs of competition and rivalry, with both organizations promoting their respective government's views and definitions of China to foreign students. However, their reach and power are minor compared to that of the Confucius Institute which is far better organized and funded and has many more associations with foreign universities.<sup>32</sup>

### Methodology

For the methodology of this work, I will be using a documentary method of analysis, due to much of this study being related to the field of history and political science and primarily the former. I will be analyzing numerous documents, that have to do with the Confucius Institute and Ming China and other documents relevant to the time period. This will allow a type of research that will help make the argument for my thesis much stronger. Books and newspapers will of course be one of the primary documents that I will be analyzing, but I will also be giving a lot of attention to scholarly journals by experts in the field, primary source documents such as the afore-mentioned *Mingshi*, as well as the writings of famous Confucian scholars. Additionally, I will use all forms of media both written and broadcast and biographies. The two

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<sup>32</sup>Aries Poon, "Soft Power Smackdown! Confucius Institute vs. Taiwan Academy", *The Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2011

schools of the arts and sciences that I will be using in this form of analysis will be that of history and political science. The historical method of analysis will use historiography and primary sources to argue for the thesis of this work while political science will be used in a historical and modern sense. In the historical sense I will show the inner workings of the Ming Court especially concerning the conflict between the main two factions of the court: the court eunuchs and the Confucian scholar officials.

This documentary form of analysis will be used in a way that attempts to present a non-biased view of events. For example, not will I only use documents that argue for the Confucius Institute's controversies but also show the Confucius Institute's side of the story as well. By examining primary sources for historical context and supplementing them with secondary sources from authors and experts on the subject of Zheng He, a balanced narrative will be given that is concise and attempts to be free of bias. From a historical standpoint, this will also analyze why Zheng He's journeys have been considered historically to have been "failures" in the long term as compared to that of the European explorers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which gave rise to the empires forged by European colonialism. I will also examine the numerous allegations against the Confucius Institute and delve deep into why the Confucius Institute is considered to be controversial, but most importantly I will show why the Confucius Institute is at its very heart a method of modern day soft power, which parallels with similar soft power policies of the fifteenth century.



## Understanding Hard and Soft Power

*Power is like the weather, everyone depends on it and talks about it, but few understand it. Just farmers and meteorologists try to forecast the weather, political leaders and analysts try to describe and predict changes in power relationships. Power is like love, easier to experience than to define or measure, but no less real for that. The dictionary tells us that power is the capacity to do things. At this most general level, power means the ability to get the outcomes one wants. The dictionary also tells us that power means having the capabilities to affect the behavior of others to make those things happen.*

-Joseph S. Nye in  
"Soft Power"<sup>33</sup>

Before a lengthy and critical examination of historical and modern soft power in China can be attempted it will be prudent to define what "power" actually means. At a basic level, power can have many definitions. Is power the ability for one group to coerce another group to conform to the other groups will? Or is power the absolute measure of a person's ability to exert his or her will? In the time of the Roman Republic and Empire, a man's personal "command power" was called "Imperium" (where the words imperial, empire and emperor have their basis in Latin and Germanic based languages) which was defined as how much power an individual, such as a senator for example, had at his disposal. The higher the Imperium, the more influence or "gravitas" the individual had. From Nye's point of view, power is the ability to get others to do what one wants. This kind of power in the political sense at least, is defined by Nye as having two

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<sup>33</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 1-2.

definitions, “command power” and “co-optive power”.<sup>34</sup> Hard and soft power is therefore defined as being that of “command” and “co-optive” which is a simple way of saying that hard and soft power can be defined and related to each other. Nye defines these two methods of power:

Hard and soft power are related because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one’s purpose by affecting the behavior of others. The distinction between them is one of degree, both the nature of the behavior and the tangibility of the resources. Command power-the ability to change what others do-can rest on coercion or inducement. Co-optive power- the ability to shape what others want-can rest on the attractiveness of one’s culture and values or the ability to manipulate the agenda of political choices in a manner that makes others fail to express some preferences because they seem too unrealistic. The types of behavior between the command and co-option range along a spectrum from coercion to economic inducement to agenda setting to pure attraction.<sup>35</sup>

From Nye’s perspective, the main thing that differentiates soft and hard power is the threat of force in the case of hard power and in the case of soft power, “making one’s arguments attractive.” Therefore, charm and coercion are what define soft and hard power. Using soft power in modern times has been a very attractive way for nations to flex their power on a global scale giving smaller nations a more level playing ground with nations that may have much more military might and strength. This allows smaller nations to punch above their own weight class. Soft power can take many different forms as well. Soft power for example, can be things like culture and entertainment, foreign aid and development and not just pure economic power. American culture for example, is

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<sup>34</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 7.

<sup>35</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 7.

recognized (although not necessarily universally loved) around the world. This can be seen as a far more powerful weapon in America's political arsenal than all the military equipment in the world, and if one is to believe Nye, America would be far better off sticking to soft rather than hard power, in Washington's diplomatic relations. This definition of hard and soft power has been traditionally in diplomacy referred to as the "carrot and the stick." This idiom comes from the concept of a cart driver with a mule using carrots and sticks as an example of reward and punishment. Therefore, hard and soft power can be categorized as "reward" and "punishment". The way to properly wield soft and hard power however is to find a balance between the two. When two reasonable actors come together it may be more advantageous to use charm and convincing policy for the two actors to come to a mutually beneficial (or at least presumed mutually beneficial) arrangement with one another. This can come in the form of treaties and trade agreements which are two very common examples of the results of soft power policy. This is not to say that all agreements and treaties are won through soft power. The 1918 Treaty of Versailles was certainly seen as "the stick" by the German government of the time period, which helped usher in even more destructive war two decades later, showing the coercive nature of hard power.

A true problem arises however, when two non-rational state actors meet and "the stick" may be the more prudent choice to use in a confrontation. But ideally this should be seen as a last resort, where one can see no path forward

through simple negotiation. Of course, much like soft power, hard power is not easily defined, since hard power can be the utilization of force, but it more often is the implied *threat* of force that tends to win the day when hard power is utilized. War is after all, expensive and the threat of war is usually more successful (in the short term) in these kinds of negotiations. Another great equalizer in the hard power and soft power dynamic is the threat of nuclear weapons. In 2014, Andrew Cottey a researcher for the Royal Irish Academy published a paper titled “*The EU and Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Soft Power and the Bomb?*” which discusses the impact nuclear weapons have on soft power policies. The abstract sums up the problem between the reach of soft power and the unwillingness for all the EU member states to have a coherent nuclear policy:

In the last 20 years the European Union has sought to play a larger role in international efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It's member states have advanced common EU positions in the main global non-proliferation frameworks; it is a leading provider of technical and financial assistance to other states and multilateral organizations in support of non-proliferation; and it has used its political and economic leverage to support non-proliferation (in particular, in relation to Iran). The EU's non-proliferation strategy reflects a primarily soft or normative power approach, emphasizing support for multilateral institutions and international norms. The EU's soft power is limited, however, by continuing differences between its member states in relation to nuclear weapons and the difficulty of persuading other states to buy into the EU's approach.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Andrew Cottey, “The EU and Nuclear Non-Proliferation: Soft Power and the Bomb?”, *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 25, (March 2014): 1.

There is difficulty in finding a coherent soft power approach in many international affairs as the example of the EU as shown in Cottey's work demonstrates. This is also a good example of where the perceived nature of soft power is problematized. What exactly are the methods being used by the EU in pursuit of non-proliferation? Do they involve sanctions? Who do these sanctions affect? Can these methods truly be called soft power when there is a threat of coercion? By using Nye's measurements of power there are some hard-power elements in the coercive nature of these actions. It suffices to say that while charm and wealth can be used to woo a nation, hard power and soft power rarely work within full isolation each other. Coercion is not soft power and it is important not to label any non-violent political policy as a soft power policy.

In the case of China, even a casual observer can see that soft power has had an impact how the PRC has been conducting Beijing's diplomatic affairs. China has for example, been doing a lot of aid and development in African nations rich with natural resources. In these nations, China has been creating better roads, funding education and has even played a large role in the African Development Bank, signaling clear economic intent in these areas. China may not be doing these actions for purely altruistic reasons, but their effect has been undeniable. China's soft power policies have also caused academic leaders such as Kurlantzick to re-assess Nye's definitions of soft power. Kurlantzick claims that in Nye's definition of soft power he excluded other elements such as investment, trade and formal diplomacy, instead defining soft power as a nation

advertising its “brand”.<sup>37</sup> Kurlantzick, however, claims that China has significantly changed the game, and therefore the definitions of soft power. Kurlantzick claims that China defines soft power as anything outside the military and security norm and can include “coercive” economic levers like development and aid. Kurlantzick finishes this idea by saying “Indeed, Beijing offers the charm of a lion, not a mouse: it can threaten other nations with these sticks if they do not help China achieve its goals, but it can offer sizable carrots if they do”.<sup>38</sup>

The most apparent observation that can be taken from both Nye and Kurlantzick’s views of soft power is that while its definition may change, the overall goal of “charming” another nation instead of using force is apparent. In the case of China’s understanding of its power, it has been a huge boon for the nation’s rise to relevance in the world stage and has also allowed China to change the image in its country by accumulating political capital through soft power. China’s new “charm offensive” has also allowed China to engage in an increasingly effective way in the economic world. BRICS, which is an acronym for an association of five major national economies (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa respectively), has recently emerged as a rival to the World Trade Organization. China is a founding member of the BRICS bank and the bank is becoming a rival to the WTO. No longer can America claim to be the sole nation in charge of the world and the world economy. Many nations are now turning up

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<sup>37</sup> Kurlantzick, Charm Offensive, 6.

<sup>38</sup> Kurlantzick, Charm Offensive, 6.

their nose to American aid and development, and are instead turning to China as the next world leader. As both Nye and Kurlantzick have pointed out, it would be in the United States' best interest to re-examine Washington's foreign policy and start embracing soft power policies, which contrary to popular belief the United States has a long history of and at least for now, leads in terms of popular culture, entertainment and many other advantages. But these will not necessarily last forever and now that a new cultural rival has emerged on the scene perhaps it time for the United States to adopt a charm strategy of its own?

China's history with soft power politics is often times erroneously said to have its origins in response to the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which is known as the "century of humiliation" in popular Chinese historical thought.<sup>39</sup> The century of humiliation refers to the era of colonial exploitation by European colonial powers between 1839 with the First Opium War (1839) and the 1949 establishment of the People's Republic of China. This was the era when great colonial powers such as Great Britain and France took advantage of China's political weakness and imposed multiple unfair treaties on China which turned China into a second-rate power. Beijing's modern-day rise is therefore seen by many Chinese as a "reclamation" of its past glory rather than China being the new kid on the block.<sup>40</sup> Much as Beijing has now reclaimed its place in the world, there is vast historical

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<sup>39</sup> William A. Callahan, "National Insecurities: Humiliation, Salvation, and Chinese Nationalism," *Alternatives*, vol.29, no.4, (March 2004): 205.

<sup>40</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 11.

evidence that the PRC government is now reclaiming a centuries old tradition of soft power. China has often been portrayed as a “closed empire” but this perception, often held by western nations, does not take into account the centuries of Chinese diplomatic missions to other nations, the Tribute Trade system and the massive influence China has had on the culture of nations surrounding it such as Japan, Korea and Vietnam. China has had many numerous foreign wars in its past as well as centuries of trade with other nations and due to China considering all nations it traded with to be client states, it shows that the numerous Chinese dynasties did care greatly about wielding power either through military force for nations hostile to China, to trading peacefully and acting as a “big brother” to nations China considered in its sphere of influence. The Ming was the best example of both hard and soft power being wielded to benefit the Ming state and its divine emperor, and will be a great example of historical usage of soft power that the PRC has inherited from China’s past.

However, to completely ignore the impact that the “gunboat diplomacy” of the nineteenth century had on China would also be an error. China in modern times has been in a search for legitimacy in the eyes of the world and a lot of China’s motivations to gain that legitimacy is due to past humiliations. Evidence for this point of view can even be found in the government documents that China publishes every year. In the “what it is about” section of the “China’s Peaceful Development” white paper there is a statement that details the need for



legitimacy as well as past humiliations being a motivator for this new strategy on the part of the PRC:

Over the past 5,000 years, people of all ethnic groups in China, with diligence and wisdom, have created a splendid civilization and built a unified multi-ethnic country. The Chinese civilization has a unique feature of being enduring, inclusive and open. The Chinese nation has endeavored to learn from other nations and improved itself through centuries of interactions with the rest of the world, making major contribution to the progress of human civilization. In the mid-19th century, Western powers forced open China's door with gunboats. Internal turmoil and foreign aggression gradually turned China into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. The country became poor and weak, and the people suffered from wars and chaos. Facing imminent danger of national subjugation, one generation of patriots after another fought hard to find a way to reform and save the nation. The Revolution of 1911 put an end to the system of monarchy which had ruled China for several thousand years, and inspired the Chinese people to struggle for independence and prosperity. However, such efforts and struggle failed to change the nature of China as a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, or lift the Chinese people out of misery. Living up to the people's expectation, the CPC led them in carrying out arduous struggle, and finally founded the People's Republic of China in 1949. This marked the realization of China's independence and liberation of its people and ushered in a new epoch in China's history.

In the past six decades and more since the founding of New China, and particularly since the introduction of the reform and opening-up policies in 1978, the Chinese government has worked hard to explore a path of socialist modernization that conforms to China's conditions and the trend of the times. Overcoming difficulties and setbacks, the Chinese people have advanced with the times, drawn on both experience and lessons from the development of China itself and other countries, deepened understanding of the laws governing the development of human society, and promoted the self-improvement and growth of the socialist system. Through arduous struggle, the Chinese people have succeeded in finding a path of development conforming to China's reality, the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>PRC Government, PRC State Council, *China's Peaceful Development*, 1.

The idea of the “path of socialism with Chinese characteristics” has been used by the PRC to justify using capitalist business practices while still being in theory a communist state. This practice has been used since the time of Deng Xiaoping and has been continued by all succeeding presidents of the PRC, including Hu Jintao and more recently Xi Jinping. To understand the concept of soft power from the point of view of China it is important to look into both China’s past and present. The travels of Zheng He indeed had soft power elements to his journeys but the “century of humiliation” is also a crucial part in understanding why Beijing wishes to have a legitimate role that is taken seriously by other nations on the world stage in the modern day.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE EMPEROR AND THE ADMIRAL: THE LIFE AND ADVENTURES OF ZHENG HE AND ITS IMPACT ON MING SOFT POWER RELATIONS

*Rebellion, (that is plotting against the dynasty) and lese-majeste (that is plotting to desecrate imperial ancestral alters, mausoleums, and palaces). All conspirators regardless of whether they are leaders or followers shall be executed by slicing. Their grandfathers, fathers, sons, grandsons, older brothers, younger brothers, and those who live with them regardless of surname differences; sons of paternal uncles and brothers regardless of whether they have the same registration; if they are sixteen years of age or over, regardless of serious or crippling disease, they shall be executed. Those fifteen or below, mothers, daughters, wives, and concubines older and younger sisters, sons' wives and concubines, shall be given as slaves to the households of titular nobility. Their property shall be confiscated by the government...*

*-Excerpt from the Penal  
Section of The Great Ming Code  
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<sup>42</sup> *Da Ming Lu, Great Ming Code, As Cited in Theodore De Barry and Irene Bloom, Sources of Chinese Tradition, Vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 784.*

## The Origins of the Ming Dynasty

Before getting into the specifics of Zheng He's life, it would be prudent to present a basic overview of the early history of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), its first two emperors, and the rise of Zhu Di the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty, and Zheng He's patron. By looking at these historical figures, we will see the kind of world Zheng He lived in, and what the political realities were that he faced. The Ming Dynasty was the last ethnic Han dynasty in the history of China. The previous dynasty, the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) founded by Kublai Khan (1215-1294) was overthrown in 1368 by Zhu Yuanzhang, the leader of the rebellion against the Yuan, who would come to be known as Ming Taizu (r.1368-1398) first emperor of the Ming Dynasty. Like many founders of previous dynasties, Taizu was of humble birth,<sup>43</sup> but he was able to rally support against the hated Mongols, and succeeded in his civil war despite the odds, against the more militarily powerful Yuan. Once the Yuan Dynasty fell in 1368, Zhu Yuanzhang began to consolidate power in his new capital of Nanjing (Nanking) and began to build up state infrastructure. The Confucian scholar officials benefited the most from this new arrangement of power and the court eunuchs felt their power decrease due to Zhu Yuanzhang's distrust of them.<sup>44</sup> Many of Zhu Yuanzhang's

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<sup>43</sup>Theodore de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. 1, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 779.

<sup>44</sup> Shin Shan Henry Tsai, *Eunuchs of The Ming Dynasty*, (Albany: State University of New York Press. 1996), 13.

closest friends and allies took up the position of commanders of the Ming's armies. This arrangement would not last forever. After the purges of 1380, many of the merit-based nobility in the empire were executed and Zhu Yuanzhang's sons would remain as the most powerful military commanders in the empire commanding vast armies from their fiefs.

The rise to power Zhu Yuanzhang shows the interplay between both hard and soft power. Zhu Yuanzhang used the power of charm and persuasion back when he was a peasant soldier rebelling against the Yuan Dynasty. Once Zhu Yuanzhang came to power however, he used coercion and strict autocratic policies to cement his power. This is often a common strategy throughout history with autocratic rulers who often play the liberator at first but become the tyrant once their power is achieved. Zhu Yuanzhang was very conscious of how he was able to overthrow the Yuan through popular rebellion and became increasingly paranoid that the same might be done to him. In 1380, he executed Chancellor Hu Weiyong on charges of conspiracy and forming a faction (a capital crime) and thereafter abolished the chancellery.<sup>45</sup> In the wake of this event, Zhu Yuanzhang established the Jinyiwei (Embroidered Uniform Guard) as his secret police and they would assist considerably in helping Zhu Yuanzhang in the purges of his late reign. Zhu Yuanzhang also wrote extensively on the responsibilities of rulership and how the founders of dynasties such as himself proved to be better

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<sup>45</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 17.

at ruling the common people due to his humble origins. Zhu Yuanzhang himself writes on his own brand of populist ideals in this passage of the *August Ming*

*Ancestral Instruction:*

I have observed since ancient times, when states established their laws it was always done by the ruler who first received the mandate. At that time the laws were fixed and the people observed them. Thus, was the imperial benevolence and authority extended through the realm so that people could enjoy peace and security. This was because at the outset of the founding the ruler endured hardships, saw many men, and became experienced in handling affairs. In comparison to a ruler born and bred deep within the palace, unfamiliar with the world, or a hermit scholar living alone in the mountains or forests considering himself enlightened, how different it was for me. When I was young I was orphaned and poor and grew up amidst warfare. At the age of twenty-four I joined the ranks and was ordered about for three years. Then I gathered together and studied the ways of training soldiers, planning to compete with the warlords. It was trying and worrisome. I was apprehensive and on guard for nearly twenty years until I was able to unite the empire.<sup>46</sup>

Zhu Yuanzhang in this period began abandoning the path of charming and wooing the population and instead began to exercise his power of coercion in order to maintain his own power. Seeking to prevent that path of power to any potential rival, the emperor initiated the brutal purges which would leave many of the upper echelons of the Ming government dead. In the case of Hu Weiyong, the purge that followed after his fall from power and execution left an estimated thirty thousand people dead. Zhu Yuanzhong fathered twenty-six sons and

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<sup>46</sup> Zhu Yuanzhang, *Ming Taizu: August Ming Ancestral Instruction*, 1368, Translated by Edward L. Farmer, (de Bary): *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 781.

sixteen daughters through the empress Ma and his numerous concubines.<sup>47</sup> One of these sons, Zhu Di (r.1402-1424) the future Yongle emperor, was born from Zhu Yuanzhang's lesser consorts. Zhu Di would eventually become the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty but not until after winning a successful civil war that would not end until 1402 against his nephew Zhu Yunwen (1377-1402) the future Jianwen emperor, who would rule as the second emperor of the dynasty. In 1380, Zhu Di along with the rest of his brothers were ordered to their fiefs in a practice known as *Zhiguo* which was the standard rite of passage for younger sons of an emperor.<sup>48</sup> Zhu Di's fief was the region of Yan with the city of Beiping (Beijing) as its capital. Zhu Di as the Prince of Yan was therefore given considerable military power on the northern border of the Ming Empire. For Zhu Di, this base of power would prove crucial in his rise to power.

After the death of his oldest son in 1392, Zhu Yuanzhang considered having Zhu Di, whom he considered the most capable of his sons, succeed him, but he was advised against this by his Confucian courtiers. They instead recommended his grandson Zhu Yunwen as successor.<sup>49</sup> The reasoning for selecting Zhu Yunwen had to do with laws of succession that were strictly enforced in the Ming Dynasty. According to Hok Lam Chan, a later edition

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<sup>47</sup> Hok Lam Chan, *Ming Taizu's Problem with His Sons: Prince Qin's Criminality and Early-Ming Politics*, (*Taipei: Academia Sinica*, Asia Major. Vol. 20. No.1 2007) 45.

<sup>48</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 18.

<sup>49</sup> Hok Lam Chan, *Ming Taizu's Problems with His Sons*, 89.

passage of the *August Ming Ancestral Instruction* translated by Edward L.

Farmer lays out the order of succession which Zhu Yuanzhang had to grapple with:

If there are no imperial sons (i.e., the eldest son born to an emperor's primary consort) in the court, the succession will pass to the younger brother when the elder brother dies. Those born of lesser consorts shall not be elevated even though they are older. If there are treacherous officials who advocate abandoning sons of the primary consort and elevating the sons of lesser consorts, the sons of the lesser consorts shall hold fast to their station and not move. They should send a message to the son of the primary consort who ought to be appointed. The essential of the matter is that the son of the primary consort occupy the throne. The throne shall decapitate the treacherous officials immediately.<sup>50</sup>

In order to secure a smooth succession for Zhu Yunwen, Zhu Yuanzhang launched another purge to ensure none could challenge Zhu Yunwen for the throne upon his succession. Fifteen thousand civil officials and military commanders were killed in this purge. Upon the death of the first Emperor of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang ordered his sons to their fiefs and remain there so they would not threaten Zhu Yunwen's ascension. Here we once again see a hard power approach in contrast to the revolutionary peasant hero figure of Zhu Yuanzhang's early years. Instead of using persuasion and the granting of favors to officials of uncertain loyalty, Zhu Yuanzhang decided that a hard purge would be the most effective method to secure his son's future. By using coercion and

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<sup>50</sup> Zhu Yuanzhang, *Ming Taizu: August Ming Ancestral Instruction*, Translated by Farmer, Hok Lam Chan, 89.



terror, the later years of Zhu Yuanzhang's reign match perfectly with many historical autocratic regimes facing their first succession crisis.

In 1398 Zhu Yuanzhong finally died and Zhu Yunwen ascended to the throne as the Jianwen emperor. By 1399, Zhu Yunwen had ordered the death of five of his uncles and two more had died of natural causes.<sup>51</sup> Zhu Di in a clever ruse, feigned madness in order to reduce the suspicion of Zhu Yunwen while he quietly built up his forces and consolidated power. Meanwhile in Nanjing, Zhu Yunwen surrounded himself with Confucian scholar officials often taking their advice in regard to how to consolidate his power as a wise and sagely ruler. Zhu Di, no doubt, feared for his life after seeing the very obvious example of what happened to his other brothers and soon plotted rebellion against his nephew knowing that time was short.

The Confucian scholar officials that surrounded Zhu Yunwen suggested that he carry out a policy in 1398 known as "wasting of the feudatories" which was a policy that deprived feudatory fief holders (Zhu Yunwen's uncles) of the military power of the fiefs they controlled. This caused Zhu Di in his fief of Yan to be sealed off from the rest of the empire, while Zhu Yunwen took action against the weaker fief holders. Zhu Di however played a very successful gambit against his nephew in the summer of 1399, convincing his nephew to release his two sons who were being held hostage back into Zhu Di's custody, to ensure loyal

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<sup>51</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 67.

behavior from his uncle. Therefore, Zhu Di had quashed the biggest obstacle to his seizure of power by manipulating his naïve nephew into returning the only insurance of Zhu Di's cooperation with the new Emperor.<sup>52</sup> Zhu Di determined that it was then time to strike, and began an open rebellion against his nephew in 1399. The excuse Zhu Di used to justify his rebellion was that "deceitful ministers" (the Confucians) had "corrupted" the young emperor and according to Dryer, issued a manifesto that called for "Ancestral Injunctions" which gave the Prince of Yan the right to come to Nanjing and "suppress difficulties" with the ministers who had "deceived" his nephews.<sup>53</sup> This began the long and bloody civil war (1399-1402) of Zhu Di which would last four years. Initially, Zhu Yunwen underestimated Zhu Di's military aptitude due to the loyalist's vastly superior numbers. Zhu Di engaged in successful guerilla tactics and raids to sap at the supply lines of Zhu Yunwen's numerically superior forces.

The first troops sent by Zhu Yunwen were easily routed by Zhu Di's forces. A successful night raid against loyal forces, who were in their camp drinking and celebrating the Autumn Festival in Hebei province, resulted in eight thousand loyalist forces being killed or captured, and this was further compounded by an additional loss of ten thousand soldiers in another ambush, with Zhu Di's soldiers hiding under a bridge underwater using reeds as breathing

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<sup>52</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 67.

<sup>53</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 21.

instruments.<sup>54</sup> These successful guerilla tactics devastated the initial forces sent to suppress the rebellion and after they retreated and regrouped, Zhu Yunwen began to take his uncle's rebellion seriously. He raised a new army and marched straight into the prince of Yan's lands in 1399 and in December laid siege to Beiping itself. This was the First Siege of Beiping (1399) and proved to be a decisive victory for the rebel forces. On the very walls of Beiping, the city managed to hold due to the resourcefulness and strategy of Zhu Di's commanders and managed to inflict two hundred thousand casualties on the loyalist forces. One of the commanders defending the walls was a young eunuch and companion of Zhu Di by the name of Ma He. Ma He and the other commanders of the city proved decisive in the siege of Beiping and after the Imperial army retreated, it gave the rebel forces some breathing room. After a failed invasion of Shanxi in 1400, a second loyalist army was routed. This temporary success for Zhu Di came to an end in 1400-1401 when a new fresh army forced Zhu Di on to the defensive.

This was the low point in the rebellion for Zhu Di and a stalemate occurred which Zhu Di gave into despair.<sup>55</sup> However, the disunity among the eunuchs in the Imperial Court gave an opportunity to Zhu Di. The defecting eunuchs, who had felt their power being reduced during the reign of the first and second Ming emperors, defected to Zhu Di's cause and brought secrets with them, showing

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<sup>54</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 69.

<sup>55</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 21.

the weaknesses in Nanjing's defenses. This would be a crucial turning point in the war and give Zhu Di the opportunity to seize the Dragon Throne. As for the prince of Yan's companion Ma He, who had played a decisive role in the defense of Beiping, this would be the beginning of a very long and fruitful career as the right-hand man of Zhu Di. In January 1402, Zhu Di's armies marched out of Beiping with Ma He as one of the commanders of Zhu Di's army. This would be the turning point of the war and would change the young eunuch's life forever as he marched alongside his master, ready to lay siege to the Imperial Capital of Nanjing.

The story of Zhu Yuanzhang's rise to power is a perfect example of a leader using both hard and soft power to achieve their own ends. The emperor was able in his early years to craft the image of a peasant hero, a virtuous exemplar who fought to liberate the common people using the charm and persuasion inherent in soft power politics. After wooing the population however, and coming to power, Zhu Yunwen frequently used coercion to get what he wanted becoming an autocratic ruler as brutal as the Yuan emperors. The comparisons one could make with later figures in Chinese history such as Mao Zedong are similar to that of Zhu Yuanzhang and many other autocratic rulers. This also shows that once again, hard and soft power rarely work in isolation from each other and indeed often complement one or the other

## Culture Heroes: Soft Power and Uses of Zhu Yuanzhang in International Politics and Culture

The early years of the Ming Dynasty have a lot of relevance in perceptions of how soft power is used by the government of the PRC. Film and popular culture have been a medium of soft power not only in the United States but in China as well. The populist peasant revolutionary Zhu Yuanzhang has taken a life of its own in film and popular culture. By maintaining the persuasive image of Zhu Yuanzhang, the proto-communist revolutionary and ignoring his later coercive autocratic hard power tendencies of Zhu Yuanzhang's later reign, the PRC has the perfect icon to show that it has always had a "revolutionary past". This also lends a sort of legitimacy to the PRC government itself as it gives a veneer of continuing historical legitimacy being passed on from the Ming and Qing dynasties. For example, Michael Szonyi of Harvard University writes about "Ming Fever" which is his description of the craze for everything Ming Dynasty related in China when in 2007 he noticed this trend take off following the successful miniseries detailing the life of the Ming founder. Szonyi noticed back in 2005 that the "Ming Fever" had its genesis in the Zheng He story:

The first symptoms of what would come to be called the 'Ming fever' or fad appeared in 2005, the six hundredth anniversary of the voyages of Zheng He 鄭和 (1371-1433), the eunuch who led a series of massive official naval missions throughout southeast Asia, as far as the Middle East and the west coast of Africa. The anniversary inspired a host of commemorations, culminating in the State Council declaring 11 July to be 'China National Maritime Day' (Zhongguo hanghai ri 中國航海日). There were state sponsored conferences and exhibitions, historical reconstructions, and a high-budget television drama about the exploits of

the fifteenth century traveler. The Nanjing shipyards where Zheng He's boats were built have been developed as a park and museum.<sup>56</sup>

The using of Zheng He, Zhu Di and Zhu Yuanzong as popular culture icons has proven to be very successful. China in its search for legitimacy in the eyes of the world is tempted to use historical personages in its past, even though these figures would sharply contrast with orthodox Marxist political theory by romanticizing historical rulers who would have been "feudal" by Marx's definition.<sup>57</sup> That being said the story of a peasant who led a "people's revolution" can fit nicely into the official narrative of the PRC if certain historical context is ignored. Szonyi gives an explanation for this contradiction:

The People's Republic (PRC) has always had a complex and fraught relationship with China's history. Mao Zedong read historical works voraciously and was fond of quoting from them and employing historical allusions. But he also launched campaigns like the Anti-Four-Olds movement (po si jiu 破四舊), seeking to destroy the influence of the past as well as its material legacies in the hope of producing a blank slate on which to build a utopian future. Like other regimes in China and elsewhere, the PRC government has frequently used historical narratives to construct national identity and to legitimate policies. One has only to think of official accounts of the history of Taiwan or Tibet. The current Ming fever suggests that the past is still very much part of life in the present in China.<sup>58</sup>

One of the key words used here is a recurring theme in China's past and present: legitimacy. The need for legitimacy in the eyes of the world is one of the

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Szonyi, *Ming Fever: The Present's Past as the People's Republic Turns Sixty*, (Cambridge: Mass. China Heritage Quarterly. No. 21. March 2010), 1.

<sup>57</sup> This is hardly unique to the PRC. The 1938 Soviet film *Alexander Nevsky* by Sergei Eisenstein similarly uses the story of a medieval monarch of the Russian city state of Novgorod portrayed as a "people's revolutionary".

<sup>58</sup> Szoyni, (2010) *Ming Fever*, 1.

concepts that has driven China to reclaim its position as a world power. It was legitimacy that as one of the primary motivations for the treasure voyages and it is the search for legitimacy that plays a crucial part in China being able to use its past to prop up heroes that are needed to cement that legitimacy. The fact that the PRC also uses practicality in dealing with its past has indeed been an effective part of China's usage of soft power and that practicality also led to China becoming a very relevant and very powerful country by the end of the twentieth century.<sup>59</sup>

There have been further uses of using the Ming as a rallying cry for many of China's upheavals in the twentieth century. In Sarah Schneewind's edited work *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder Across Six Centuries of East Asian History*, there is an essay written by Rebecca Nedostup titled *Two Tombs: Thoughts on Zhu Yuanzhang, the Kuomintang, and the Meanings of National Heroes*. In this essay Nedostup explains how national heroes were used by Nationalist China under Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek as "racial heroes" of the Han Chinese ethnic group during the 1911 revolution. Nedostup argues that despite the autocratic nature of Zhu Yuanzhang, the Ming founder was often used by the KMT as a symbol of Han unification, especially in the "racialist" nature of the historical figure. Using Zhu Yuanzhang's rebellion against the

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<sup>59</sup> Howard W. French, Ian Johnson, "How China's History Shapes, and Warps, its Policies Today", *Foreign Policy*, March 22, 2017.

Mongol Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) as an analogy for the Han fighting against the Manchu led Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) proved to be an effective form of propaganda to rally the mostly Han revolutionaries against the Manchu Qing and served as a way to promote Han nationalism.<sup>60</sup> Nedostup's argument of using heroes of the past to promote modern day causes has plenty of analogies in modern day politics in China. The anti-corruption campaign of President Xi for example, has a historical analogy with Zhu Yuanzhang's own anti-corruption campaign, albeit Xi's may be less draconian than that of Zhu Yuanzhang's which saw thousands of civilians butchered.<sup>61</sup>

This usage of national heroes also in many ways contributes to the soft power policies of Beijing's charm strategy. By using versions of historical that may be "sanitized" to fit into the nominally socialist but also practical world view of the PRC, national heroes like Zhu Yuanzhang can be used to promote the "One China" principle, especially in the sense of national unity. Another paper as cited in Schneewind's written by Gray Tuttle is an essay, *Using Zhu Yuanzhang's Communications with Tibetans to Justify PRC Rule in Tibet* explains the argument that the modern-day PRC has used Zhu Yuanzhang's communications with the Tibetan lama's in the fourteenth to prove that China and Tibet have been

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<sup>60</sup> Rebecca Nedostup, "Two Tombs: Thoughts on Zhu Yuanzhang, the Kuomintang, and the Meanings of National Heroes" in "Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder across Six Centuries of East Asian History", ed. Sarah Schneewind, (Minneapolis: Society for Ming Studies, 2008),357.

<sup>61</sup> HSBC, "Ming The Merciless", *Week in China*, September 5, 2014,



undivided at least since the Yuan Dynasty. The Ming Dynasty by this argument's assertion, inherited in its rise to power in terms of continuance of governance. Tuttle gives a refutation of this point of view, pointing out that despite the Ming Dynasty giving out certain honors and titles to some of the religious sects in Tibet such as the Sagya Sect, this does not mean that the Ming Dynasty ruled Tibet in a unified sense, but rather that it was a policy of "pacification" with the Ming Dynasty only conferring rule upon on sects that had "control of their own areas". Tuttle also argues that despite the PRC's claim to the contrary, no one religious leader had full control over Tibet during the time of the Ming.<sup>62</sup> Nevertheless, the PRC has adamantly claimed that Tibet was not independent fully in this time period and has used this argument to justify its continued rule of the territory.<sup>63</sup> The soft power benefits of this policy are clear in that they support the idea of an "undivided" China, a policy that Beijing is very sensitive to in international affairs.

If Beijing can convince other nations to adopt the point of view that historically Tibet was always a part of China and use the "culture hero" Zhu Yuanzhang to achieve this end, then the PRC will be able to gain a considerable amount of soft power on the world stage and diminish the Tibetan Independence

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<sup>62</sup> Gray Tuttle, "*Using Zhu Yuanzhang's Communication with Tibetans to Justify PRC Rule in Tibet.*", in *Long Live the Emperor! Uses of the Ming Founder across Six Centuries of East Asian History*, ed. Sarah Schneewind, (Minneapolis: Society for Ming Studies, 2008 (Minneapolis: Society for Ming Studies, 2008), 424-25.

<sup>63</sup> Tom Grunfeld, "*Reassessing Tibet Policy.*", (Albuquerque: Interhemispheric Resource Center and Institute for Policy Studies, April 2000), 1.

Movement without firing a shot using coercion. In the larger picture of power politics, the PRC can use charm and persuasion to convince nations to accept its foreign and national policy, no matter how questionable the historical claims the PRC presents as evidence are.

### The Early Life of Zheng He and Zhu Di's Ascension

In the aftermath of the toppling of the Yuan Dynasty in 1368, the Mongols and remnant Yuan forces had retreated to Yunnan, with the newly created Ming Dynasty hot on their heels. In 1374, Zhu Yuanzhang demanded that the Mongols and their leader Basalawarmi submit to Ming rule and sent envoys to convey this message. The envoys were killed, and in response the Ming forces under General Fu Youde invaded Yunnan. Fu Youde's three hundred thousand strong army successfully invaded Yunnan and by 1382 had captured the provincial seat of Kunming after which the rebellion's leaders committed suicide to avoid capture. Fu Youde then began a reign of terror against the local population, killing hundreds of thousands of Miao and Yao tribesmen.<sup>64</sup> Another common method used against the population was the kidnapping of young boys to serve as eunuchs in the imperial court. One of these boys was a young ten-year-old child by the name of Ma He. Ma He's surname **Ma**, according to Dryer, often but not always indicated Muslim faith. Also, according to Dryer, Ma He's grandfather

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<sup>64</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 57.

and father both had the name Haji indicating they had completed the Hajj, a pilgrimage to Mecca. While Ma He's family were of Chinese Muslim extraction, Ma He was known to mostly practice Buddhism in his religious life and took a Buddhist name<sup>65</sup> The boy was taken by Fu Youde and was subjected to castration. According to Levathes, in China in this time period, castration was accomplished by the quick stroke of a knife that cut off both the penis and testes of the victim with a plug left in the urethra.<sup>66</sup> After this brutal act, Ma He was put into the household of the Prince of Yan, Zhu Di.

Growing up in the Prince of Yan's court, Ma He rose through the ranks to become an able military commander. He was one of the commanders during the siege of Beijing in 1399.<sup>67</sup> Early in his life at court, Ma He had befriended Zhu Di, and the young prince and the eunuch had become very close friends. Ma He served as a boyhood companion and later in life as a rising military general. These early skirmishes in Mongolia were formative years for Ma He and were crucial for him to get the necessary training for a military career. Most importantly, these campaigns and hard fighting forged an ever-closer bond between Zhu Di and Ma He. These campaigns would also give Zhu Di's troops an opportunity to "cut their teeth" in warfare. These veterans would prove crucial to the 1399-1402 Ming Civil War, especially the Mongol defectors of the

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<sup>65</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 57.

<sup>67</sup> Shin Shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 156.

Uriyangqad tribe who fought for Zhu Di in the civil war.<sup>68</sup> In particular, a Mongol leader by the name of Nagahachu surrendered to Zhu Di during his campaign with Inner Mongolia. Zhu Di treated Nagahachu and his men like honored guests and soon convinced them to join his forces. These expert horse-archers would prove to be a strategic asset in the civil war.<sup>69</sup> This consolidation of forces and military power showed that Zhu Di was indeed thinking in the long term, indeed his chances of success in the war may have been much slimmer.

The beginning of the war was nowhere near as dramatic and climactic as the final siege of Nanjing in January 1402. Zhu Di had left Beijing with his generals, among them was Ma He and Zhu Di's new Uriyangqad allies. Nanjing had formidable defenses, defended by perhaps the longest wall in any city of the time period and strict punishments for guards who were found sleeping on duty or intoxicated, with the punishment being death or if under a lenient commander the removal of one's ear.<sup>70</sup> As well prepared as Zhu Di was for the siege, these defenses proved to be a difficult obstacle to overcome. However, even in the context of military siege soft power (intrigue) could have its advantages over hard power (an all-out assault, or lengthy siege). The river fleet commander, Chen Xuan (1365-1433) was one of many disgruntled military commanders who had

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<sup>68</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 124.

<sup>69</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 67.

<sup>70</sup> Frank A. Kierman, *Chinese Ways in Warfare*, (Cambridge: Mass. Harvard University Press. 1974), 177.

lost faith with the loyalist regime in Nanjing.<sup>71</sup> With Chen Xuan's help, Zhu Di's forces crossed the Yangtze. With the help of two defected commanders who agreed to open the gates, Zhu Di, Ma He and the rebel army marched through Nanjing's Jinchuan gate on July 17<sup>th</sup> 1402. By the time Zhu Di had reached the Imperial palace, the Jianwen Emperor's last loyal servants and guards had set the Imperial Palace ablaze. A charred corpse was presented to Zhu Di as the corpse of his nephew, but the corpse was so badly burned it could not be identified. According to the *Comprehensive Mirror of the Ming Dynasty*, a work written by Chinese historian Xia Xe, the Jianwen Emperor Zhu Yunwen very likely died in the conflagration, there were rumors he had escaped, most famously as a monk as cited by Leavthes.<sup>72</sup>

Despite these rumors Zhu Di ascended to the Dragon Throne on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July as the Yongle (perpetual happiness) Emperor. Zhu Di, being a usurper was quick to find ways to give himself legitimacy and prove that The Mandate of Heaven had indeed been granted to him. However, the rumors of his nephew's survival haunted him and so he almost immediately started financing searches for his possible whereabouts or conclusive evidence of his death.<sup>73</sup> Zhu Di's eunuch general Ma He for his part also rose in stature due to invaluable generalship during this campaign. Ma He was elevated by Zhu Di to the position

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<sup>71</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 21.

<sup>72</sup> Xia Xe, "*Comprehensive Mirror of the Ming Dynasty*", (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), Chapter 14.

<sup>73</sup> Hilton, *Open Empire*, 352.

of Taijian (Grand Director) of the Directorate of Palace Servants, one of the highest-ranking positions a Palace Eunuch could attain. This also allowed Ma He the right to wear the red robes of a high-ranking Eunuch of the court, a symbol of his new high status. In 1404 on New Year's Day in commemoration of Ma He's defense of the Zheng Village Dike during the civil war, Zhu Di conferred upon Ma He the name of Zheng in honor of his role in this battle.<sup>74</sup>

The civil war of Yongle once again shows the need for legitimacy in the politics of China both past and present. Perhaps one of the greatest factors in Zhu Di's favor to grant him legitimacy was the promise of stability. The promise of stability is a common way many governments in China either Imperial or the PRC have kept their power. In an article written for *The Diplomat* by Ankit Panda argues that it is the promise of stability, rooting out corruption and giving China an important place in the world is what keeps the CCP in power in China and not only, as conventional wisdom would argue, the massive economic growth that has resulted from the legacy of Deng Xiaoping. Panda argues:

Where does the CCP's legitimacy come from then? As Greer notes, maybe looking at the per capita distribution of wealth in China has been the wrong measure all along—it's unnecessarily reductive and dismissive of the opinions of actual Chinese people. Instead, Chinese people would attribute the legitimacy of the CCP to specific policy initiatives (i.e., fighting corruption, delivering justice to wrong-doers within the country's power apparatus) as well as more diffuse, nation-level factors (i.e., the CCP's

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Tsai, *Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 157.

role in helping China, as a country and a nation, become wealthy, powerful, and respected on the international stage”).<sup>75</sup>

President Xi, the current President of the People’s Republic, has been an exemplar of this idea. Xi has in recent years launched a tireless anti-corruption campaign intended according to government sources to clean up rampant corruption in the party leadership. Critics of this policy have noted that many of these “corrupt” officials have been at times Xi’s rivals and that the anti-corruption campaign has been an excuse for President Xi to remove political opposition.<sup>76</sup> Xi has also not been much of a stranger to the concept of raising China’s prestige around the world, hoping to reclaim China’s place in the world by focusing hard on foreign relations and diplomacy.

Zhu Di in an apparent parallel in history also sought to increase China’s prestige to its neighbors. In Zheng He’s biography in the *Mingshi* as cited in Dryer’s work, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, a similar yearning for China to gain prestige under the tenure of Zhu Di is expressed:

Zheng He a native of Yunnan, is the one whom the world calls the Grand Director of the Three Treasures. Originally, he served the Prince of Yan in the palace of his princely fief. He followed [when the prince] raised troops, accumulated merit [in his service, and] was promoted to Grand Director. [Emperor] Chengzu had suspected that Emperor Hui had fled beyond the sea and wanted to track him down moreover, he wanted to display his

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<sup>75</sup> Ankit Panda, “Where Does the CCP’s Legitimacy Come From? (Hint: It’s Not Economic Performance)” *The Diplomat*, June 18 2015,

<sup>76</sup> Rob Schimz. “What Motivates Chinese President Xi Jinping’s Anti-Corruption Drive?” *NPR*. October 24 2017,

soldiers in strange lands in order to make manifest the wealth and power of the Middle Kingdom. (304.2b-4b)<sup>77</sup>

Zhu Di recognized not only his need for legitimacy as a ruler justifying a civil war but also the need for legitimacy around the world. Using the excuse that he was following leads concerning rumors of his nephew's survival, Zhu Di in reality was re-asserting China's prestigious place in the world and wished to use soft power to display the wealth and prestige for China hoping to forge favorable trade agreements with China's neighbors. In the modern day, President Xi's foreign policy which hopes to show that China is a wealthy and advanced nation is motivated by enticing foreign investment to come to China and take part in China's new booming economy is a clear parallel to these events. In both ruler's cases a theme of "reclaiming lost glory" and showing of the prestige and wealth of China in order to attract "investment" whether 14<sup>th</sup> century style tribute trade policies or the economic policy of the PRC remains a constant theme in China's search for legitimacy.

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<sup>77</sup> Zhang Tingyu, *Mingshi*, Trans. Edward Dryer, (New York: Peter N. Stearns, 2005), 187.



Soft Power and the Search for Legitimacy:  
The First Voyage and the Birth of the Treasure Fleet

*In autumn of 1405, the fleet of 317 brightly painted junks with a total crew of more than 27,000 men was ready to depart from Nanjing. As the ships assembled in formation in the center of the Yangzi, the sculpted “eyes” on the majestic bows looked anxiously downstream toward the open sea. The destination of the treasure ships was Calicut—the powerful city state in Kerala on the west coast of India that had a market for spices and rare woods that attracted traders throughout the Indian Ocean. Here in this isolated coastal region west of the Ghat range, grew cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, turmeric, and precious pepper, worth its weight in gold. After the flooding of the ancient Indian harbor of Muziris in 1341, Calicut had emerged as the most important port not only in India, but in all of south Asia*

*-Louise Levathes  
on the voyage to  
Calicut by the  
Treasure Fleet<sup>78</sup>*

While Zhu Di now had full and absolute power as emperor, he was still in a very tenuous position. First of all, Zhu Di and the entire empire were painfully aware that he was a usurper. While this was nothing new in the history of China, indeed the concept of The Mandate of Heaven, an ideal similar to the European “Divine Right of Kings” seemed to support it. The Mandate of Heaven was a concept started in the Zhou Dynasty (1046 BC–256 BC) that justified a ruler’s divine right of rule and the right of rebellion against an unjust ruler who would have lost the mandate in the eyes of the divine. The tricky part in this case was

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<sup>78</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 88.

that the loss of the Mandate of Heaven usually applied to one dynasty overthrowing another, rather than a usurpation of the same dynasty, although Zhu Di was hardly alone in being the usurper of the same dynasty. Nevertheless, the possible survival of Zhu Yunwen the Jianwen Emperor disturbed and worried Zhu Di greatly. Not only were there rumors that he had escaped disguised as a monk, but there were other rumors that Zhu Yunwen had escaped overseas, plotting his return to China.<sup>79</sup> Regardless of whether this was true or not, Zhu Di was in desperate need to see his rule as legitimate and what better way to gain legitimacy than having it acknowledged by rulers of China's neighbors?

In 1403, still new on the throne, Zhu Di ordered the construction of the Treasure Fleet, a vast armada of war and trade ships that would sail around the Indian Ocean and collect tribute and acknowledgement of the Ming Dynasty's superiority from China's neighbors. The military usage of this fleet and the threat of force in a hard power sense could not be denied, but Zhu Di's plans tended to be of a more diplomatic soft power tone. These ships would display the vast wealth and power of the Ming and its new emperor, showing the benefits of token submission under the tribute trade system. The rumors of the Jianwen's survival overseas indeed may have been a motivation for these journeys although

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<sup>79</sup> Yang Wei, *Admiral Zheng He's Voyages to the "West Oceans"*, *Maritime Asia*, Vol. 19, no.2, Fall 2014, 1.

according to Yang Wei, that was very unlikely as the cost of launching seven voyages because of a mere rumor would not have been very feasible.<sup>80</sup>

According to the Mingshi, the official history of the Ming, the treasure ships were 447 by 183 feet in their size.<sup>81</sup> According to Sally K. Church in her scholarly article “*Zheng He: An Investigation into the Plausibility of 450-foot Treasure Ships*” the actual sizes of these ships in Longjiang were probably closer to 200-250 ft. in length. Church bases her argument on the findings of Professor Xin Yuan’ou, a shipbuilding engineering professor at Shanghai Jiaotong University.<sup>82</sup> Church writes:

At a conference entitled "Venture Toward the Seas" held in Taipei in September 2001, Xin Yuan'ou, shipbuilding engineer and professor of the history of science at Shanghai Jiaotong University, presented a paper entitled "*Guanyu Zheng He baochuan chidu de jishu fenxi*" (A Technical Analysis of the Size of Zheng He's Ships.) In this paper, he argued that Zheng He's ships could not have been as large as recorded in the official Ming history (Ming shi). According to that work, the ships constructed for Zheng He's maritime expeditions were 44 *zhang* 3<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> long and 18 *zhang* wide, equivalent to 447 ft. by 183 ft. (138.4 m by 56 m).<sup>3</sup> A ship this size would have been roughly 1.4 times the size of an American football field,<sup>4</sup> and approximately the same size as the USS Minnesota (456 ft. long by 78 ft. 10 in wide), a steel battleship launched in 1905 and later used in the First World War. In arguing against this size, Xin was motivated in part by an immediate, practical concern. Preparations were being made for the 600th anniversary of Zheng He's first expedition in 2005, and proposals were being put forward for the construction of replicas of Zheng He's

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<sup>80</sup> Yang Wei, *Admiral Zheng He's Voyages to the "West Oceans"*, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Sally K Church, *Zheng He: An Investigation into the Plausibility of 450ft. Treasure Ships*, *Monumenta Serica*, vol. 53, (2005): 2.

<sup>82</sup>Sally K Church, *Zheng He: An Investigation into the Plausibility of 450ft. Treasure Ships*, 3.

ships. Xin was concerned that any such replica be of a realistic size so as to be economical, seaworthy and safe.<sup>83</sup>

Despite the controversy regarding the size of the Treasure Fleet itself, the ships and their vast numbers, this was indeed an impressive fleet. The Treasure Fleet was no merchant fleet either, it was a full armada and the military nature of this fleet, whatever soft power intentions the emperor may have had cannot be denied. The fleet represented a massive show of force against China's neighbors, but still had the intention of trade, although this was in the context of the tribute trade system, which relied on an understanding that any nation trading with China acknowledged the emperor as their overlord. It is hard to determine whether or not this was a course of soft power or hard power. On the one hand, the tribute trade system, is coercive, on the other there is a degree of charm involved in the tribute trade process as well. This example shows that often times hard and soft power work together and not in isolation of each other. By having a token acknowledgement of supremacy, the Ming Dynasty could have control over China's neighbors without having to use an all-out military invasion. This often worked for the rulers of China's neighbors as well, since they realized this was at best only a *de jure* surrendering of their sovereignty, a rather small price to pay to participate in the sharing of China's vast wealth.

Shortly after coming to the throne, Zhu Di had repudiated his father's decree that had limited trade between China and foreign nations. The first

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<sup>83</sup> Sally K Church, Zheng He: *An Investigation into the Plausibility of 450ft, Treasure Ships*, 2.

emperor of the Ming had been advised by his Confucian scholar-officials that agriculture alone was the basis for Chinese wealth. Zhu Di on the other hand, saw the advantage of opening up trade with China's neighbors, decreeing, "Now all within the four seas are one family! Let there be mutual trade at the frontier barriers in order to supply the country's needs and to encourage distant people to come!"<sup>84</sup> In the previous thirty years the trade of the Indian Ocean had become nearly nothing, so it became obvious that Zhu Di wished to open up this vast trade route and with Calicut, a city state in the West Indian region of Kerala. This would be the first Chinese international fleet operating in the Indian Ocean.<sup>85</sup> The cutting of trade in southeast Asia as well had been devastating in Indonesia and Malaysia.<sup>86</sup>

As cited by Levathes, there was definitely a prevailing appetite within southeast Asia and India to resume the mutually beneficial trade relationship that had been ended by the first emperor of the Ming, on advice from his Confucian officials. In autumn 1405, after over a year of planning and construction Zheng He's grand armada sailed out of Longjiang towards the state of Champa (Vietnam). While in Champa, Zheng He traded in Ming porcelain and silks. In exchange, the people of Champa traded with aloe wood, rhinoceros horn and

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<sup>84</sup>Tan Xisi, "A *Compilation of Important Policies in the Ming Court*, (Ming Da zheng zuan yao)", Translated by J.J.L. Duyvendak. 357.

<sup>85</sup> James L. Holmes, Zheng He Goes Sailing-Again, *Education About Asia*, Vol.11, No.2, Fall 2006, 11.

<sup>86</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 89.

elephant ivory, all of which was regarded as tribute to the Yongle Emperor. Moving on from Champa, the armada made its way to the island of Java. The Chinese and Javanese had endured difficult relations in their past, culminating in the 1377 execution of several Chinese envoys, (sent by China in order to force the recognition of the state Palembang, a rival of the Javanese) by Javanese King Hayam Wuruk. This was of course an affront to the Dragon Throne, and trade as a result had dwindled to nothing and Zheng He was determined to reverse this. Fei Xin (1385-1396), who served as one of Zheng He's lieutenants in his work *The Overall Survey of the Star Raft* gives a well detailed description of Java and its many trade items during the treasure fleet's visit:

The port in the mouth of the river where one lands and leaves [this country] is called hsin-t'sun. The inhabitants live all round. They plait *kayang* leaves to cover their houses. The shop-houses run side by side, forming a market, where they buy and sell [the things] which have been gathered together. This country is rich and prolific. Pearls, gold and silver, *yakut* stones and cat's-eyes, blue, red and other kinds of [precious] stones, mother-of-pearl, carnelians, nutmegs, long peppers, gardenia flowers, patchouli and [even] salt-there is nothing which they don't have. This certainty is so because [the country] is situated in a place where all trade comes through.<sup>87</sup>

On his way to Java and Sumatra, Zheng He had avoided the state of Palembang, which out of all these city states was the wealthiest of them all. Their wealth came as a result of a war between the Javanese city states who had claimed Palembang as their own and had installed a Javanese controlled puppet government in the city. The inhabitants of Palembang had thrown out the

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<sup>87</sup> Fei Xin, *The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, 48-49.

Javanese but during this time of upheaval, the notorious Chinese pirate Chen Zuyi had taken control of the city and made Palembang a stronghold of piracy and lawlessness, similar to the “Pirate Republic” of Nassau in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century during British rule in the Bahamas. On his return to China, Zheng He would deal with Chen Zuyi but the time was not quite right for a full military engagement, especially when Zheng He was trying to repair relations with the Javanese, thus showing that at least for now, soft power diplomacy would win the day.<sup>88</sup>

We can see through this narrative that the Chinese already had a large and thriving community in Java and indeed dominated a large part of the trade there, which would have made Zheng He’s job considerably easier. After spending some time in Java and Sumatra trading, the fleet moved on to the kingdom of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), where unlike what happened in Java, Zheng He met with a much different reception than he did in Java, which was rather positive compared to that of Ceylon. Zheng He noted that the ruler of Ceylon, as cited by Dryer and Levathes, had treated him and the emperor’s emissaries badly and had proved “arrogant and disrespectful and wanted to harm Zheng He”.<sup>89</sup> Zheng He decided it would be best to leave Ceylon for the time being but made note of Ceylon’s military defenses and vast wealth in precious gemstones. According to Ma Huan, a Chinese Muslim scholar who participated in the voyages and

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<sup>88</sup> Yang Wei, *Admiral Zheng He’s Voyages to the “West Oceans*, 28.

<sup>89</sup> Zhang Tingyu, *“Mingshi”* translated by Edward Dryer, 54.

contemporary of both Zheng He and Fei Xin, Zheng He and the fleet made haste to their original destination of Calicut which the Chinese regarded as “The Great Country of the Western Ocean” showing the amount of prestige and admiration the Chinese put on this west Indian city state. Ma Huan described the people there as being “honest and trustworthy.”<sup>90</sup> According to Levathes, Zheng He stayed in Calicut from December 1406 to April 1407. The unusual extended duration of this trade mission was due to the rituals and bargaining that was standard of an official trade mission sent by the emperor. Zheng He’s experience in Calicut was peaceful and he knew that by following a soft power policy he could gain a favorable trade relationship in Calicut which was one of the busiest ports in all of Asia. From this port flowed goods from all over Asia, Europe and the Middle East. He also took great care to show respect to the Zamurim which was the title of the ruler of Calicut. According to Ma Huan the bargaining stage in these trade missions could take a month if done quickly and two to three months if slow. He gives a description of the lengthy process:

If a treasure-ship goes there, it is left entirely to the two men to superintend the buying and selling; the king sends a chief and a Che-ti Wei-no-chito examine the account books in the official bureau; a broker comes and joins them; [and] a high officer who commands the ships discusses the choice of a certain date for fixing prices. When the day arrives, they first of all take the silk embroideries and the open-work silks, and other such goods which have been brought there, and discuss the price of them one by one; [and] when [the price] has been fixed, they write out an agreement stating the amount of the price; [this agreement] is retained by these persons. The chief and the Che-ti, with his excellency

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<sup>90</sup> Ma Huan, *Overall Survey of the Oceans Shores*. (1433), Translated by J.V.G. Mills, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1970), 140.



the eunuch, all join hands together, and the broker then says 'In such and such a moon on such and such a day, we have all joined hands and sealed our agreement with a hand-clasp; whether [the price] be dear or cheap, we will never repudiate it or change it. After that, the Che-ti and the men of wealth then come bringing precious stones, pearls, corals, and other such things, so that they may be examined and the price discussed; [this] cannot be settled in a day; [if done] quickly, [it takes] one moon; [if done] slowly, [it takes] two or three moons.'<sup>91</sup>

Since Zheng He understood the need and benefits of diplomacy to gain recognition of Zhu Di's legitimacy, Zheng He likely spent a lot of time negotiating with the Zamurins and gaining recognition of Zhu Di's sovereignty under the tribute trade system, but this is still speculation. Regardless, in April the fleet began its return journey to China. Coming along with Zheng He were ambassadors from Calicut, Java and Sumatra who were to be taken to the imperial court and submit themselves to Zhu Di, a time-honored ritual in Imperial China, where emissaries would prostrate themselves before the emperor in submission, and in return the emperor would reward them with rich gifts and treat them as guests of extreme honor. But there was one further amount of business that had to be taken care of: the pirate Chen Zuyi. Here Zheng He abandoned his soft power policy and turned the wrath of the Ming Navy onto Chen Zuyi. Zheng He utterly destroyed the pirates and burned their hideout in Palembang, both freeing the people of Palembang from Chen Zuyi's rule and capturing alive the pirate. Chen Zuyi was bound in chains and was to be taken with Zheng He to

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<sup>91</sup> Ma Huan, *Overall Survey of the Ocean Shores*, 140-141.

Nanjing to face execution for his crimes.<sup>92</sup> Fei Xin also gives a firsthand account on the capture of the infamous pirate:

In the third year of Yung-lo (1405) when Emperor Tai-tsung Wen huang-ti (Zhu Di) of our present dynasty ordered the principal envoy, the Grand Eunuch Cheng Ho, and others to take supreme command of a fleet and to precede to all the foreign countries, the pirate Chen Tsu-I and his followers met in the country of Srivijaya where they plundered foreign merchants and even attacked our ships. [But] they became victims of a secret plan on the part of our principal envoy, and like brutes caught in a net, they were exterminated, their leaders being captured alive and sent as prisoners to the imperial palace. After this the seas were restored to imperial peace and order.<sup>93</sup>

In the summer of 1407, the fleet had returned to China and Zheng He returned to a very pleased emperor, who while distraught that no word had been heard about his predecessor Zhu Yunwen, was still very pleased that the legitimacy of his rule had been recognized by many rulers of southeast Asia and India. Overall, the first expedition had shown that Zheng He had a great grasp of knowledge on both soft power and hard power. He re-established trade relationships using the awe and majesty of the Treasure Fleet, relationships that were in great deterioration for over thirty years. He also made quick work of a notorious Chinese pirate that was affecting trade relationships all around the area and had quickly brought him to heel. Ceylon had proved to be problematic in establishing relations but they could be dealt with in the future as Zheng He would later prove.

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<sup>92</sup> Yang Wei, *Admiral Zheng He's Voyages to the West Oceans*, 28.

<sup>93</sup> Fei Xin, *The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, 53.

The journeys to Java and Calicut have had lasting impacts on the relations between China, India and Java today. A crucial part of China's soft power is using its past to establish that China's relations were peaceful and prosperous with its neighbors for centuries, especially when it comes to Zheng He, who has served as a useful bit of propaganda in the last few decades when dealing with relations with China's neighbors. In May 2005, the Nanjing Museum and many numerous cities in China, Java and India celebrated Zheng He's sexcentenary, celebrating 600 years since the first voyage of the admiral. The *China Heritage Quarterly* gives a brief summarization of the celebrations:

This tribute to Zheng He, master mariner of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), is merely one frisson in the flurry of activities organized for the sexcentenary. Stamped with patriotism, most events are designed to appeal to Chinese who hail from the various hometowns and localities in China associated with Zheng He, or who now live in the areas of Southeast and South Asia, as well as the Middle East and even East Africa, once visited by Zheng He's fleets. Although Zheng He came to be deified and included in local Chinese pantheons in Tian Hou temples, he was in fact a Muslim, a fact not overlooked in the present celebrations.<sup>94</sup>

Beijing has found a great propaganda spokesman in the form of the Ming admiral. The PRC has recently been using Zheng He in its relations with the Javanese and India as a way to promote the "peaceful co-existence" between nations that have had long standing relations with China. However, there have been some pitfalls in the relationship between the PRC and Java. In Tuban a part of East Java, a 30.4-meter-tall statue of Guan Yu a famous Chinese general of

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<sup>94</sup> *China Heritage Quarterly*, "Shipping News: Zheng He's Sexcentenary" No.2 June 2005,

the Three Kingdoms Era (220-280 BC) who was later deified was unveiled in Tuban sparking massive controversy with a fundamentalist minority of Tuban's Muslim population. In the *Straits Times* the events and controversy are summarized:

Indonesia has urged officials to stand up to mob pressure after Muslim and nationalist protesters called for a 30m-tall statue of a Chinese deity erected in a temple complex in an East Java town to be torn down. The brightly painted statue of Guan Yu, a general who is worshipped by some Chinese people, was inaugurated last month in a temple complex in the fishing town of Tuban, and is claimed to be South-east Asia's tallest representation of the deity. The statue in Tuban, about 100km west of the city of Surabaya, has been partially covered up after the protests, provoking both praise and ridicule on social media in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. Teten Masduki, chief of staff to President Joko Widodo, told reporters: "If they ask for the statue to be torn down, the authorities cannot bow to such pressure. "Protesters demonstrated this week outside Surabaya's Parliament against the statue, some wearing paramilitary-style outfits and waving placards that read "Demolish it" and "We are not worshippers of idols". Allowing a depiction of a foreign general was "a symbol of treason to this nation", an unnamed protester said in a video of the rally on news portal Kompas.com. Officials of the Kwan Sing Bio Temple in Tuban declined to comment, but the media have quoted residents as saying the statue was good for tourism.<sup>95</sup>

While China's perception of its soft power is a perception that celebrates peaceful exploration and relations, that perception may not always be shared with the nations China is attempting to woo. In the example shown in East Java concerning the Guan Yu statue, what China may see as sharing its culture, some Javanese natives may see China's perception of its own soft power as being a kind of cultural imperialism. There is also a perception by an extreme religious

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<sup>95</sup> *Straits Times*, "Tension in East Java over statue of deity", August 12 2017, <http://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/tension-in-east-java-over-statue-of-deity>

minority that the statue serves as an insult to the Muslim population's religious beliefs tinged with Indonesian nationalism clashing with Chinese nationalism. When it comes to Zheng He, there is perhaps a bit of irony in this point of view seeing that Zheng He was born to a Muslim father and there is considerable evidence he may have shared his father's beliefs at least on a cultural level. The overall point that is being established here however is that China's own perceptions of its history and soft power may at many times clash with what other nations and peoples consider Chinese soft (and hard) to be. Quite likely in the case of the Guan Yu statue, religious belief may be used as an excuse and the real problem lies with nationalism as implied in the article.

This distrustfulness of China's motivations has also been the source of contention when it comes to national territory as well. The Senkaku/Diaoyu islands dispute between China, Japan and Korea has shown that China is willing to forego soft power diplomacy when it comes to territorial integrity. From the forward to a white paper published by the PRC State Council in 2012, we can see how seriously China considers territorial integrity to be to its foreign policy:

Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands are an inseparable part of the Chinese territory. Diaoyu Dao is China's inherent territory in all historical, geographical and legal terms, and China enjoys indisputable sovereignty over Diaoyu Dao. Japan's occupation of Diaoyu Dao during the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 is illegal and invalid. After World War II, Diaoyu Dao was returned to China in accordance with such international legal documents as the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation. No matter what unilateral step Japan takes over Diaoyu Dao, it will not change the fact that Diaoyu Dao belongs to China. For quite some time, Japan has repeatedly stirred up troubles on the issue of Diaoyu Dao. On September 10, 2012, the Japanese government announced the

"purchase" of Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated Nanxiao Dao and Beixiao Dao and the implementation of the so-called "nationalization". This is a move that grossly violates China's territorial sovereignty and seriously tramples on historical facts and international jurisprudence.

China is firmly opposed to Japan's violation of China's sovereignty over Diaoyu Dao in whatever form and has taken resolute measures to curb any such act. China's position on the issue of Diaoyu Dao is clear-cut and consistent. China's will to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity is firm and its resolve to uphold the outcomes of the World Anti-Fascist War will not be shaken by any force.<sup>96</sup>

Notice the terms "inseparable" and "inherent territory" in the language of this white paper. These concepts lend credence to the idea that the past humiliations in losing territory to the European powers in the nineteenth-century shape China's national and foreign policy. The idea of China being "inseparable" has long been a road-block in finalizing territorial borders between China and her neighbors. Therefore, the concerns of nationalists in Indonesia doesn't necessarily come out of nowhere or out of just pure nationalism and jingoism. There is a perceived fear of losing territory and cultural influence though both traditional and cultural imperialism. Either from the aspect of territory as can be seen in the Senkaku island dispute or through cultural imperialism as seen through the incident involving the Guan Yu statue. As China's soft power increases, there will be indeed blowback towards what is seen as China encroaching on the culture of others, which can even fuel conspiracy theories such as one popular one amongst certain nationalists in Indonesia, claiming that

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<sup>96</sup> PRC Government, PRC State Council, "*Diaoyu Dao 钓鱼岛, An Inherent Territory of China*," (Beijing: PRC State Council Information Office, 2012) 1.

the government is secretly in control of the entire Indonesian government and that these soft power efforts are examples of China imposing its culture on an unwilling population, threatening cultural sovereignty.<sup>97</sup>

The United States Congressional Research Service published a white paper in December 2015 summarizing a lot of these issues of sovereignty and territory. Titled "*Maritime Territorial and Exclusive Economic Zone Disputes Involving China*" the white paper asserts that China using the so-called "nine-dash line", a vaguely located line of demarcation that the PRC asserts are its territorial waters. The white paper asserts that China is using a "'salami-slicing" strategy that employs a series of incremental actions, none of which by itself is a *casus belli*, to gradually change the status quo in China's favor." in the words of the report.<sup>98</sup> If China is indeed being more aggressive in its territorial ambitions, this may give credence to the "sharp power" theory in that while China is using soft power to increase its territorial sovereignty, it is still using elements of coercion and flexing of military muscle to achieve that end.

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<sup>97</sup> *Coconuts Jakarta*, "After Igniting Controversy on Social Media, Giant Statue of Chinese Deity Covered Up in East Java, August 7<sup>th</sup> 2017,

<sup>98</sup>Ronald O' Rourke," *Maritime Territorial and Exclusive Economic Zone Disputes Involving China*", (Washington: United States Congressional Research Service, 2015), 1.

## Second and Third Voyages: China's Power Increases and the Civil War of Ceylon

The second voyage of the treasure ships was considerably smaller than that of the first. The reasoning for this return voyage to Calicut was to give formal imperial recognition to Calicut's new king Mana Vikraan. On the way to Calicut, the Treasure Fleet also stopped in Java to settle some old scores with the Javanese. As previously mentioned in Zhu Di's grandfather's day, several envoys had been executed by the Javanese and rather recently from 1401-1406 there was a civil war between the two kings of Java, (whom the Ming referred to as the west and east kings respectively). The west king had killed 170 Chinese diplomatic staff during the war and Zheng He and his fleet were dispatched to Java to show the emperor's displeasure and demand recompense.<sup>99</sup> It is interesting to note, however, that there is not much mention of this event during Zheng He's first voyage to Java during the first expedition, which turned out to be largely peaceful. Nevertheless, the large armada had cowed the Javanese into submission and Zhu Di demanded that the Javanese send ambassadors to Nanjing to apologize and pay retribution for their acts. The Javanese and Ming agreed to 60,000 ounces of gold. Zhu Di also told them to reflect on the "situation in Vietnam" which Zhu Di had recently begun a conquest of.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 63

<sup>100</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 63.



The fleet's sequence of stops likely followed this pattern: The fleet would leave from Nanjing to Liangjiang to Changle and then would have sailed to Siam (Thailand) and then Java; from Java the fleet would have sailed to Malacca then Sumatra and then finally Calicut.<sup>101</sup> Barbara Peterson in her scholarly article "The Ming Voyages of Cheng-Ho (Zheng He)" writes a very succinct description of the second voyage:

The second voyage was planned in 1407, setting sail in 1408, sailing into Calicut when Cheng Ho generously dispersed gifts to the king, carrying out "the formal investiture of the king of Calicut", and erecting a commemorative pavilion, then returned by way of Siam and Java. The blessing or investiture given by the Chinese fleet commander representing the emperor in China set an important precedent, and contributed again that China was the Middle Kingdom and that foreign regions were vassal or tributary states. Further, while in Java, Cheng Ho and the Chinese fleet was called upon to settle a local power struggle, which he did again exerting the pre-eminence of China, "strengthening the idea that China as the Middle Kingdom had the power to arbitrate disputes involving its tributary states. Upon returning to Nanking (which had served as capital until 1420 when it moved to Peking), Cheng Ho built a temple to honor Tien Hou (Queen of Heaven).<sup>102</sup>

According to Peterson, Zheng He during his second voyage seemed to be practicing hard power politics when it came to Java, but in the case of Calicut, a softer diplomatic (but still forcefully imperialist) form of diplomacy was practiced by Zheng He. Although by Nye's definition of soft power, this would be closer to a hard power action due to the coercive nature of the tribute trade system. The first two journeys also showed a rising interest in the Ming government to reassert

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<sup>101</sup> Dryer, (2005) *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 64.

<sup>102</sup> Barbara Peterson, The Ming Voyages of Cheng-Ho, *The Great Circle* Vol. 16, No. 1, (1994): 44.

itself as the “bigger brother” of China’s neighbors and extract tribute from its *de jure* vassal states under the tribute trade system. As mentioned earlier, this is the most apparent and historically recognizable method of Chinese soft power, gaining political power and influence through nominal “submissions” by various rulers increased China’s prestige but also made it so that China could build mutually beneficial trade relationships with their neighbors. However, the fact that Zheng He personally intervened in Java’s political affairs (and as we will see in Ceylon’s during the third voyage) shows that Zheng He was pursuing a simultaneous hard power policy as well if it was deemed necessary. In Zheng He’s defense, the situation in Java was a lot more important and “nearby” to Chinese trade interests so it was necessary to have more direct action when dealing with the Javanese. Furthermore, the past and present incidents of Chinese diplomats being slaughtered was an insult that was too great to ignore. In either case, Zhu Di had clearly shown that he was interested in the affairs of China’s neighbors, and that Ming China was at least, under Zhu Di, moving away from its agrarian based economy supported by the Confucians, and getting closer to the eunuch supported foreign trade policy.

In 1409, Zhu Di gave the order for a third expedition to Calicut. Calicut however, was not the most important destination of this third expedition. Ceylon had been aggressive towards China and especially towards Zheng He during the first expedition had been disrespected by Alagakkonara, the king of Ceylon. Furthermore, Ceylon had been performing raids against China’s new trade

partners and Zhu Di felt that now was a good time to begin a show of force. As recorded in the *Tailong Shilu*, a primary source of the time period when Zheng He reached Ceylon and came ashore, the forces of the king attacked them after demanding the Chinese surrender their gold and silver. Dryer cites this passage from the *Tailong Shilu* in full:

Palace official Zheng He and the others, who had gone to the barbarian countries of the Western Ocean, returned and presented as captives the King of Ceylon, Alagakkonora, together with his family and dependents. Zheng He and the others, in the course of their first embassy to the barbarians had arrived at Ceylon, and Alagakkotona had been rude and disrespectful and intended to kill Zheng He. Zheng He realized this and left. Moreover, Alagakkonora was not on friendly terms with the neighboring countries, and he had often intercepted and plundered their embassies *en route* to and from China. Since the other barbarians all had suffered from this, when Zheng He returned they once more treated Ceylon with contempt. Because of this provocation, Alagakkonora lured Zheng He into the interior of the country and sent his son Nayanar to demand gold, silver, and other precious goods. If these goods were not turned over, then 50,000 barbarian troops were to rise from concealment and plunder Zheng He's ships. Moreover, trees had been felled to block the narrow passages and cut off Zheng He's path of retreat, so that the separate Chinese contingents could not reinforce one another.

When Zheng He and the others realized they were in danger of becoming separated from the fleet, they pressed their troops to return to the ships quickly. When they reached the roadblocks, Zheng He said to his subordinates, "The main body of the bandits has already come out, so the interior of the country must be empty. Moreover, they are saying we are only an invading army that is isolated and afraid and incapable of doing anything. But if we go forth and attack them, then contrary to their expectations we may gain their objective." Then he secretly ordered messengers to go by other unblocked roads back to the Chinese ships, to order their petty officers and soldiers to hold out to the death with all their strength. Meanwhile he personally led over two thousand troops under his immediate command by indirect routes. They assaulted the earthen walls of the capital by surprise and broke through, capturing Alagakkonora and his family, dependents and principal chieftains. The barbarian army then returned and surrounded the city. Zheng He engaged them in battle several times and heavily defeated them.

Afterward, when Zheng He returned, the assembled Ming ministers requested that Alagakkonora and other captives be executed. But the emperor pitied them as ignorant people who were without knowledge of the Mandate of Heaven; he treated them leniently and released them, giving them food and clothing, and ordering the Ministry of Rites to advise on selecting a worthy one from Alagakkonara's family to be set up as king, in order to continue the sacrifices of the kingdom of Ceylon.<sup>103</sup>

This narrative of Zheng He's capture of Alagakkonora does confirm that at least from the Chinese point of view, that Zheng He was not the initial aggressor and makes Zheng He justified in his breaking of soft power policy in order to avenge past and present wrongs upon Ceylon. However, there are some inaccuracies in the report that may have inflated Alagakkonora's importance in Ceylon. To begin with, there was no unified "Kingdom of Ceylon" at this time. The island was divided into three warring states that were participating in the civil war in which Alagakkonora was a participant, furthermore the rulers of the cities of Gampola and Kotte, his opponents, had a greater legitimate claim to the throne of Ceylon. According to the Sinhalese version of events, Alagakkonora suspected that Zheng He was attempting to steal the island's holy relic the "sacred tooth of Buddha" and was also resisting a conquering army sent to subjugate his kingdom.<sup>104</sup> Barbara Peterson on the other hand seems to regard the Sinhalese as being the initial aggressor, perhaps due to a desire to plunder Zheng He's ships because of the massive bounty of wealth they were carrying, but also conceding the possibility that like the Sinhalese version of the story,

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<sup>103</sup> *Tailong Shilu*. Translated by Geoff Wade, South East Asia in the Ming Shilu: An Open Access Resource. (2005)

<sup>104</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty* (2005) 69.

they were resisting a foreign invasion.<sup>105</sup> Fei Xin gives firsthand account of

Alagakkonora's capture:

[But] their king, Alagakkonara was stubbornly ungrateful and formed a plot to injure the [imperial] fleet. [Therefore] our principal envoy, the Grand Eunuch Cheng Ho, and others secretly planned [to strike first]: they drew up troops unobserved, and with three or four brief orders, they caused the whole body to hasten forward, [with each man] keeping a gag over [his] mouth. During the middle of the night, at one sound from a signal gun, they made a furious onslaught with ardent courage and captured the king alive. In the ninth year of Yung-lo (1411) he was taken [to China] and presented below the imperial palace. He asked for clemency, and being pardoned, he was allowed to return to his country. [Since then] the "four barbarians" are all respectful.<sup>106</sup>

Regardless of whichever faction started the hostilities, both Ming and Singhalese sources agree that Alagakkonora was taken captive and deposed by Zheng He and Zhu Di. Zhu Di's mercy in sparing his life was a tactical choice; it both showed the "benevolence" of Zhu Di and also allowed him to hand pick a member of Alagakkonora's family as a puppet ruler. This was a standard practice of the Chinese of the time. Unlike the later Europeans who often took a hard power approach of directly conquering or at least bringing local nobility to heel, the Chinese were more likely to install puppet rulers who were friendly but still nominally independent of Chinese rule, despite their oaths of allegiance. In this way, Zhu Di and Zheng He employed a cunning method of soft power; they were able to maintain China's prestige in the "submission" of the countries, while having knowledge that they would not be able to enforce it *de facto*, making the

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<sup>105</sup> Barbara Peterson, *The Ming Voyages of Cheng-Ho*, 45.

<sup>106</sup> Fei Xin, *The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*. Translated by J.V.G. Mills (1996), 64-65.

submission of these rulers cause the nation in question to “lose face”. The extremely profitable trade relations and wealth they gained in trading with China certainly helped.

### The Importance of Face

The capture of Alagakkonora also has parallels in Chinese perceptions of their soft power. One of the concepts is of honor and “saving face” which was one of the motivations for Zheng He to attack and capture Alagakkonora due to the “disrespect” he had shown the emissaries of the dragon throne by attacking the fleet. In this case soft power had to be forgotten for a small time but it wasn’t completely abandoned in the event. Once Zheng He had brought Alagakkonora before the emperor he was ceremoniously “pardoned” for his offense and was either allowed to return to Ceylon or was exiled, depending on the sources. In either case, Zheng He and Zhu Di were able to cause a change in government and put a puppet ruler that was more controllable by the Ming Dynasty on the throne of Ceylon. The action against Alagakkonora is perhaps one of the most cited examples of opponents of the theory that Zheng He was a peaceful explorer, such as Geoff Wade tend to use an example. At the very least it is unsurprising that a military fleet engaged in hard power politics. Even in the lens of soft power policy, it is plain to see that by creating a puppet ruler that the Chinese concept and perception of soft power may be very different from the

western concept, which agrees with Kurlantzick's theory that in perceptions of soft power, Beijing is more like a lion than a mouse.

This concept of "saving face" is perhaps one of the most crucial parts of Chinese culture westerners often have trouble understanding. All cultures have concepts regarding proper etiquette and honor especially the perceived personal honor of a person in society's eye. There are however, vastly complex unique traits to the Chinese concept of "face" that have been a part of Chinese culture for millennia. The concept of face in China has also evolved and has hardly stayed the same, often reflecting the point of view of the current society. In *The New York Times*, journalist Tom Doctoroff gives this description of the importance of face in Chinese culture to give western readers a better understanding of the importance of "face" in Chinese culture:

"Face — a cliché, but it's so true — is the currency of advancement," he said. "It's like a social bank account. You spend it and you save it and you invest. And when you take away somebody's face you take away someone's fundamental sense of security." You make someone lose face if you make them feel that they've given a wrong or silly answer" in a meeting, Mr. Doctoroff said. "You need to take whatever people are saying, whether it's a creative idea or a strategy idea, and you need to find that kernel of wisdom in there. Usually there is something that is relevant. And they need to build on that. "If you end up with a Charlie Brown situation, with the entire class ha-ha-ing, that's a disaster, and people will loathe you for it."

In the same article, Saul Gitlin gives an explanation as to why when comes to westerners, face can be doubly important to the Chinese:

"Because of China's history of exploitation by foreign countries who colonized China or raided China for business purposes, particularly in the

business sphere, Chinese do not want to be seen culturally as having been 'had' by Western businesspeople," he said.

"That may sound fairly intuitive, but it is related to the very recent 200-year history in China, up through the middle part of last century, when Western businesspeople clearly had the upper hand commercially and politically in China," he explained. Today, there is a fierce concern that China must "never go back to that inferior position during that dynastic and imperial period, when China was exploited by imperialist Western powers."<sup>107</sup>

As explained above, Zheng He's motivations of saving face against

Alagakkonora is connected to a sense of both pride and shame. Zheng He under no circumstances could allow an insult to the emperor slide, especially when Alagakkonora was trying to raid the treasures Zheng He was bringing back to his master i.e. the emperor's personal property. In this understanding of face, we can see why Zheng He had chosen the hard power option at first rather than the soft power option. In modern times, the "century of humiliation" has been a more recent cultural component in the concept of face as Saul Gatlin explained. Part of China's perception of its own power is not only to reclaim its rightful place in history, but to never again be weak enough to be exploited by outsiders.

"Face" itself in Chinese culture also has two different "kinds" or definitions.

The first is a more ancient concept known as *Mianzi* "status, shame and position" and *Lian* which is related to societal expectations. Aris Teon, a journalist writing for the *China Journal* gives an explanation of these two concepts in a way that's easier for westerners to understand:

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<sup>107</sup> International Herald Tribune, "Saving Face in China" *New York Times*, Dec 13, 2010,



However, the first difficulty in defining the Chinese concept of “face” is that the Chinese language uses two different words: *lian* (臉/脸) and *mianzi* (面子). Each of them has a distinct, though somewhat overlapping connotation. According to Hsien Chin Hu, *mianzi* is the older word, dating back to ancient literature. *Lian*, on the other hand, is a more recent word whose earliest reference can be found during the Yuan Dynasty (1277-1367). Broadly speaking, *lian* means “sense of shame in relation to social standards of morality and behavior”, while *mianzi* means “status, prestige, social position”. A person may have *mianzi* and yet have no *lian*. For example, a corrupt official who disregards social and moral standards has no *lian*; however, if he has status and prestige, he has *mianzi*, despite having achieved his success by immoral means.<sup>108</sup>

This understanding of face will have to be better understood by diplomats and businesspeople dealing with China in the near future. The concept of face, shame and rectifying these problems are a crucial component of China’s own understanding of power either in its harder form or the softer one. As Alagakkonora realized too late, an insult to an emissary of the emperor is not one to be taken lightly, as in today insulting the *mianzi* of a Chinese CEO could very well cause an agreement between two companies to fail for example.

There are similar issues of “face” in western societies as well. It would be disingenuous to suggest that there is no concept of “face” when it comes to social standards and morals and behavior in western countries. National pride in many cases has been a motivator for foreign policy with the United States. For example, the 1991 Gulf War with Iraq, there is a persuasive argument that the United States was trying to save “face” due to a bad reputation in military

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<sup>108</sup> Aris Teon, “The Concept of Face in Chinese Culture and the Difference Between *Mianzi* and *Lian*”, *China Journal*. February 25, 2017,

success following the Vietnam War. The main difference between saving face in East Asian societies and that of western ones is how societies are built on the expectations of face. This concept in East Asian and especially Chinese, Japanese and Korean society is built upon and strengthened by philosophies such as Confucianism that gives concepts of filial piety and obedience to the civil order a unique east Asian view of the concept of face. In Imperial China, fatherhood was considered the paramount top of the social pyramid and this is enforced by filial piety. Concepts of “face” and honor are deeply tied to the Confucian mindset of just rule and filial piety. In the realm of politics, it is no wonder that “face” is so important in Chinese foreign policy. To lose ones “face” is to shame the greater “family” of the nation. While personal honor and pride are significant parts of western society, the aspect of filial piety gives the Chinese concept of face a deeper and far more personal meaning. While cultural determination should be avoided as well as giving such “absolutes”, from sociological point of view it is worth noting that they are unique concepts of face in different cultures that can differ but also complement one another in different ways.

The *Qilin* and The Riches of the Middle East and Africa:  
the Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Voyages

*In 1414 Zheng He's men encountered an African giraffe in Bengal, where it had been sent as a gift from Kenya. The Bengali king agreed to send the animal on to Beijing, where the Yongle Emperor first refused to greet it, but in 1415, when a second giraffe arrived, the emperor agreed to participate in a lavish welcoming ceremony. The giraffe reminded the Chinese of a mythical, auspicious unicorn-like animal, the qinlin.*

-Isabel Hilton  
in "*The Open  
Empire*"<sup>109</sup>

The most famous of Zheng He's voyages were the three voyages that brought his fleet to the Persian Gulf and Africa. These voyages were the ones where Zheng He famously brought a giraffe, an unknown creature at the time that was associated with the legendary creature known as the *Qinlin*. On 18 December 1412, after a year and a half of staying in China, Zheng He was ordered by Zhu Di to embark on a fourth voyage. Zhu Di was still campaigning in the north in Mongolia and busy establishing Beijing as a second imperial capital when the fleet departed in the autumn of 1413. The fleet followed the usual pattern of sailing to Champa, Java, Sumatra, Ceylon and Calicut but this time Zheng He would sail farther west. Zheng He after likely visiting the islands of the Maldives and Laccadives, made out for his final destination of Hormuz, and island city in the Persian Gulf famed for its riches. Hormuz was a massive

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<sup>109</sup> Hilton, *The Open Empire*, 357

shipping port that handled trade from all over the Middle East and India and was often a first stop for trade goods making their way to China. The choice of Hormuz was made both to establish a naval presence in the Persian Gulf in an effort to show of the wealth and power of Ming China and in an effort to encourage trade with distant nations.

On Zheng He's return voyage back to China, he once again took part in a military intervention, this time in Semudera. Sekandar, a rebel had started a rebellion against the legitimate ruler, a young prince by the name of Zain al-Abidin. Semudera was captured by Zheng He in a brief land engagement in Sumatra. This conflict arose when Sekandar had attempted to seize the throne for himself, claiming to be the legitimate son of the former king and thus the young prince's half-brother who was considered by the Ming ruler to be legitimate. When Zheng He arrived, he showered Zain al-Abidin with gifts and praise, thus confirming that the Ming saw Zain as the legitimate ruler. Sekander was enraged that he was not chosen to receive these luxurious gifts and led ten thousand soldiers against Zheng He.<sup>110</sup> In the following battle Zheng He was victorious against Sekander's more numerous, but less disciplined force and Sekander as well as his family were captured. On the return voyage to Nanjing, Sekander was transported with Zheng He's men to the capital where at an

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<sup>110</sup>Ma Huan, *Overall Survey of the Oceans Shores*, 147-51.

unknown time later was publicly executed in the presence of the court. Fei Xin gives a detailed first-hand description of these events:

In the eleventh year of Yung-lo (1413), a false king, Sekander, robbed and usurped this country. The [legitimate] king sent an envoy to the Imperial Court to explain his case and seek relief. The emperor ordered the principal envoy, the Grand Eunuch Cheng Ho, and others to take command of government troops, to destroy [the usurpers], and to seize the false king alive. In the thirteenth year of Yung-lo (1415) he was taken [to China] and presented below the imperial palace and all the foreigners were relegated to a state of submission.<sup>111</sup>

This intervention would be the last of Zheng He's major military interventions and would signal an end to his "hard power" stance during these voyages. As with Chen Zuyi and Alagakkonora, Zheng He had interfered militarily to establish Ming supremacy and in Chinese tradition, put a friendlier ruler on the throne (or in this case re-establishing one of Zhu Di's vassals as a ruler). The fourth voyage also proved that Zheng He was willing to explore more distant lands. Zheng He had not gone beyond Calicut in the first three voyages so the fourth had major significance in that Zheng He was willing to truly become an explorer rather than simply the commander of an armada keeping order.

The most important event of the fourth voyage came in the form of tribute while Zheng He was in Bengal. A gift from Bengal's ruler was transported with Zheng He as a gift to the emperor: a giraffe. To the Chinese, this creature was identified as the mythic *qilin* (known to the Japanese as a *Kirin*, which serves as

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<sup>111</sup> Fei Xin, *The Overall Survey of the Star Raft*, 58.

the mascot and name for Kirin Beer).<sup>112</sup> The giraffe had never been seen before in China and had caused a great sensation when presented to the Ming court on 20 September 1414. The *Qilin* as a mythical creature was purported to only appear in times of great peace and tranquility, and is considered to be included as one of the four sacred animals of China, including the dragon, phoenix and the tortoise.<sup>113</sup> Zheng He's Lieutenant, Yang Min, considered the giraffe brought on to the Treasure Fleet to indeed be this mythic creature and saw it as an auspicious sign of Zhu Di's reign. Yang Min was sent as part of a detached fleet to travel to China personally to present the giraffe to the emperor's court while Zheng He stayed in Hormuz to trade. Zhu Di was pleased by this rich and exotic gift. Such a rare and exotic creature from Africa, a creature at that time completely unknown to the Chinese, displays the wonder and adventure of the treasure voyages and in a mythical sense, displayed the favor that heaven had granted on Zhu Di's reign. A second giraffe would be brought to the court in 1415 and this time Zhu Di decided not to show his traditional humility and formally welcomed the *qilin* as an auspicious sign of his divine reign.<sup>114</sup>

In 1416, Zhu Di had returned to Nanjing and was greeted by the ambassadors of seventeen countries which had accompanied Zheng He during

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<sup>112</sup> Hilton, *The Open Empire*, 357.

<sup>113</sup> Charles S. Williams, *Outlines of Chinese Symbolism and Art Motifs*, (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh 1932), 409.

<sup>114</sup> Hilton, *The Open Empire*, 357.

the fourth voyage.<sup>115</sup> He had been spending more and more time at his other capital Beijing (formally Beiping) but decided to spend the year 1416 in the old capital of his father. The ambassadors were received with great fanfare and upon their oaths of submission the emperor by tradition in the tribute trade system, lavished them with expensive and exotic gifts, showing the emperor's favor. By autumn 1416, Zhu Di ordered Zheng He to undertake a fifth voyage to return these ambassadors home. The fleet departed visiting the usual destinations: Champa, Pahang, Java, Palembang, Sumatra with the fleet then making its way to Semudera, then to Ceylon and finally making port in Zheng He's usual base in Calicut. After leaving Calicut (during the voyages Zheng He likely dropped off the numerous ambassadors on the way) Zheng He once again made the journey to Hormuz in the Persian Gulf to trade in precious rubies and other gemstones, pearls and of course famed Persian carpets.<sup>116</sup> Zheng He himself in his *Changle Inscription of 1431* as cited by Dryer, describes the journey to Hormuz and the numerous gifts he received:

In the fifteenth year of Yongle (1417) we went in command of the fleet to the Western Regions, whose country of Hormuz presented lions (*shizi*), leopard (*jinqianbao*), and large Arabian horses (*daxima*), [while the]country of Aden {Adan) presented qilin, whose foreign name is zulafa, along with the long-horned maha animal (oryx), the country of Mogadishu sent zebras (*huafulu*)as well as lions, the country of Brava (*Bulawa*) presented thousand-*li* camels (*luotuo*) as well as ostriches (*tuoji*), and the countries of Java and Calicut both presented *miligao* animals. There were none who did not vie to present gems hidden in the mountains or submerged in the ocean, or pearls buried in the sand or cast upon the

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<sup>115</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 82.

<sup>116</sup> Ma Huan, *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores*, 165-72

shore, and each sent as on, paternal uncle, or younger brother of the king, bearing a memorial of submission written on gold leaf, to court with the tribute.<sup>117</sup>

Zheng He's voyages to Africa, all those centuries ago, created lasting and positive consequences and opportunities for China that continue to the present day. Never before had the Chinese sailed so far, and Africa to this day remains a primary trading interest of the PRC. By 1421, Zhu Di was already campaigning in Mongolia when, three years after the end of the fifth voyage he once again was visited by ambassadors of numerous countries. On 3 of March 1421, Zhu Di requested that these ambassadors, after lavishing the usual gifts upon them, were once again ordered to be returned home by the treasure fleet. The fleet set sail in spring of 1421, beginning the shortest of the treasure voyages which is also the voyage of which there is very little confirmable details. According to Levathes, this voyage along with the mission of returning the ambassadors was a voyage of pure exploration rather than one of trade and military intervention.<sup>118</sup> The length of the journey and its dates have been of some considerable debate among scholars. As cited by Dryer, there is mention from Gong Zhen a contemporary and secretary of Zheng He, that Zheng He was present in China in November of 1421 which would not have given Zheng He the required time to

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<sup>117</sup> Zheng He, *Zheng He's Changle Inscription of 1431*, 198-199.

<sup>118</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 151.



have visited all the places he was purported to visit.<sup>119</sup> Dryer ultimately concludes that this interpretation is hard to confirm writing;

J.J.L Duyvndek argued that Zheng He was still in China on 10 November 1421, citing Gong Zhen's *Xinyang Fanguo Zhi* for an imperial edict of that date instructing Zheng He and three other leading eunuchs had received orders to conduct the barbarian leaders home. Even though Zheng He could have departed shortly afterward, the voyage would have then have taken place entirely in 1422, and that would not allow enough time for Zheng He to personally visit all of the countries he allegedly traveled to on the sixth voyage. Under this interpretation, he assigned squadron commanders to finish the business of this voyage, and it is explicitly stated for this voyage that the fleet was divided into squadrons.<sup>120</sup>

If Dryer's interpretation was right, it would seem Zheng He may not have visited all of these places on his journey but he may well have visited a good number of them while returning to China. Regardless, the sixth journey remained much smaller and less impactful than the other five treasure journey

Zheng He's journey to Africa has a very apparent parallel in the history of China in recent decades. One of the largest exercises in China's soft power has been its diplomatic and cultural influence (or in some interpretations cultural imperialism) over Africa. As the United States begins to pull back from a lot of international commitments in the last decade, especially in a much sharper turn in the last year during the first year of the Trump administration.<sup>121</sup> Beijing, following the steps of Zheng He has re-shifted a large portion of its foreign policy

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<sup>119</sup> Gong Zhen, *The Annals of the Foreign Nations in the Western Oceans*, (1434), (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1961) 24.

<sup>120</sup> Dryer, Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty, 92.

<sup>121</sup> Gina McCarthy, "Trump is ceding the future of energy to China" *Business Insider*. Jun. 4<sup>th</sup> 2017,

in China. A lot of this motivation has been a desire for Africa's vast resources while at the same time increasing Beijing's soft power in Africa, often through cultural exchange, sharing of wealth business contracts and in recent years even join-military exercises.<sup>122</sup> However the relationship with African nations may not be as equal as perceived. Recalling the historical tribute trade system that the Ming Dynasty practiced in Zheng He's time, there may be an implication from China that nations in Africa have a junior partner status. Writing for *Fortune* Mark Esposito and Terence Tse summarizes this new relationship:

But despite the substantial investments, most of them have been routinely cast as detrimental to Africa's overall competitiveness. The projects are dependent on deals made at the highest political levels. They lack competitive and transparent bidding processes, and most of the work force employed at these ventures has been Chinese. Promises of job creation have not been fulfilled. Further, when Africans are hired, local rules and regulations are often flouted, leading at times to poor safety. For instance, at Chinese-run mines in Zambia's copper belt, employees must work for two years before they get safety helmets. Ventilation below ground is poor, and deadly accidents occur almost on a daily basis. More frequently, jobs are lost to Chinese employees, who are ferried in project by project. For example, the growing Chinese presence in South Africa may have cost the country 75,000 jobs from 2000 to 2011. In Nigeria, the influx of low-priced Chinese textile goods has caused 80% of Nigerian companies in this industry to close. Africans' impression of Chinese firms could also be shaped by illegal practices carried out by them. For example, by law, mining on small plots of 25 acres or less is restricted to Ghanaian nationals. However, many Chinese continue to explore for gold in conjunction with local landowners, even though regulations have made it clear that such practice is illegal. The result: Many Africans see themselves to be exploited by the newcomers.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Tom Porter, "China Displays Global Expansion With Military Showcase in Africa" *Business Insider*, November 26, 2016

<sup>123</sup> Mark Esposito and Terence Tse, "China's Growing Footprint in Africa is Potentially Damaging", Nov 20 2015.

There is perhaps, a sense of historical irony here. Since China has lost face historically and was forced into a series of unequal treaties in the aftermath of the Opium Wars and the Boxer Uprising, it would seem that the reverse is happening in the case of China and Africa. While many countries like Kenya have eagerly accepted Beijing's economic development, Africa has also been exploited by foreign powers and it is understandable that many would see their relationship with China as one-sided. Beijing however for its part, has been quick to deny any exploitation. There is also some truth to China's defense in not following in the footsteps of European colonialism. In the *Harvard Political Review*, Elizabeth Manero gives some justification to China's actions in Africa in regard to accusations of neo-colonialism:

Despite criticisms of colonialism, this relationship has provided Africa with significant benefits. China, for its part, has gone out of its way to deny claims of colonial abuses. Wang Yi, China's Foreign Minister, insisted in a 2015 tour of Kenya, that "[China] absolutely will not take the old path of Western colonists, and we absolutely will not sacrifice Africa's ecological environment and long-term interests." Indeed, this relationship is not as black and white as it may first seem. Dirk Willem de Vilde, a Senior Research Fellow and head of International Economic Development at the Overseas Development Institute (ODI), told the HPR that "on all the infrastructure indicators, African countries are way behind compared to other countries. There is a huge infrastructure gap that is holding back development in many African countries at the moment."

In an attempt to rectify this, numerous infrastructure programs funded by Chinese developmental assistance have created much needed roads, bridges, railways, schools, and hospitals that are beginning to bridge this gap. Chinese doctors played an important role in addressing the Ebola outbreak in 2015, and, despite criticisms of exploitative labor treatment, the Chinese saved mines that had been deteriorating under previous investors, which expanded facilities, rescued jobs, and created thousands

of new ones. Beyond this, there has been significant investment in services and manufacturing as well.<sup>124</sup>

As for Beijing's own arguments for its efforts in Africa, a white paper published by the PRC state council in 2010 lays out clearly what Beijing's views on its efforts in Africa are:

During their years of development, China and Africa give full play to the complementary advantages in each other's resources and economic structures, abiding by the principles of equality, effectiveness, mutual benefit and reciprocity, and mutual development, and keep enhancing economic and trade cooperation to achieve mutual benefit and progress. Practice proves that China-Africa economic and trade cooperation serves the common interests of the two sides, helps Africa to reach the UN Millennium Development Goals, and boosts common prosperity and progress for China and Africa.<sup>125</sup>

From Beijing's point of view, Beijing is merely cooperating in a mutual trade partnership and denies any accusations of colonialism in Africa. Of course, accusations of actual traditional colonialism are hard to prove and, in most cases, would be a gross exaggeration. In the case of Africa, a continent that like China, has felt the sting of colonialism in its past, it is perhaps very understandable why some African nations would be weary and suspicious of both Washington and Beijing's diplomacy in the area. It is clear that Beijing's relationship to Africa can't be so easily put into black and white categories as Esposito claims Africa on the other hand, can hardly be considered an equal partner in terms of the power dynamic between the two countries. China's government may be helping out

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<sup>124</sup> Elizabeth Manero, "China's Investment in Africa: The New Colonialism?". *Harvard Political Review*. Feb. 3, 2016.

<sup>125</sup> PRC State Council, "*China-Africa Economic and Trade Cooperation*" (Beijing: PRC State Council Information Office, 2010) 1.

Africa on an economic basis, but there is no guarantee that Beijing will keep the relationship equal. Now with the PRC military operating in numerous African countries, we can now see a brand-new fleet journeying to Africa much like the Grand Eunuch himself. China scholars and political scientists would do well to focus their attention on Beijing's relationship to Africa and the upcoming future decades will tell if the PRC has learned from its experiences also as a previously exploited nation or if the PRC will become a neo-colonial force.

### The Death of Zhu Di and the Final Voyage

On August 12, 1424, a serious blow to Zheng He's fortunes and that of the eunuchs occurred: Zhu Di, the Yongle Emperor "grew ill and died. Zhu Di was on the way to Beijing to start a new campaign in Mongolia when he died and for the eunuchs, losing their benefactor was a serious blow. The new Emperor Zhu Gaochi was enthroned in September of 1424. According to the *Renzong Shilu* the annals of the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Gaochi (1378-1425) restored the disgraced Confucian ministers and released from captivity all the scholars he had imprisoned and the Confucians once again controlled the court.<sup>126</sup> One of the scholars released, Xia Yuanji, was reinstated as finance minister for the new Emperor and persuaded Zhu Gaochi to end the treasure

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<sup>126</sup> Grand Secretariat of the History Office of the Ming, "*Renzong Shi Lu*", (1424), (translated by Geoff Wade, 2005), Chapter 1.

voyages, according to the *Renzong Shilu*.<sup>127</sup> Zhu Gaochi's main interest was decreasing the tax burden on his subjects and promoting the more isolationist stances of the founder of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhong, his grandfather. These policies would fit in more with the plans of reverting back to the agricultural economy of Zhu Gaochi's grandfather, and which had largely been promoted by the Confucian officials since the reign of the first Ming Emperor.

Zheng He however, was not as seriously affected by these changes in policy, unlike his eunuch colleagues. Zhu Gaochi had given Zheng He the role of commander of Nanjing's military defenses, a very prestigious position in the Ming hierarchy. This relaxing life in his twilight years was not to last forever, on May 29, 1425, Zhu Gaochi succumbed to an illness he had been suffering from for several months and died, leaving his son Zhu Zhanji (1399-1435) as his successor. Zhu Zhanji assumed the throne upon his father's death in 1425 and took the Dragon Throne under the reign name of Xuande. Zhu Zhanji's personality could be described as a mix of his grandfather and father, favoring a balance between the eunuchs and Confucians in terms of influence in the court. Once the greatest and staunchest opponents of the Treasure Fleet, Xia Yuanji died in 1430 and Zhu Zhanji started showing interest in making a seventh and final voyage for the Treasure Fleet, which had remained unused for quite some time. It was clear by 1430, the tribute trade between China and its neighbors had

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<sup>127</sup> History Office of the Ming, *Renzong Shilu*, Chap. 1

been decreasing the international prestige of the Ming Dynasty. To combat this image, Zhu Zhanji had ordered a new expedition to begin a brand new soft power campaign of regaining the recognition from other nations that China had lost. Levathes records that on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1430, Zhu Zhanji had issued an edict naming Zheng He the commander of a new fleet to improve the deteriorating relations China was experiencing with the nations of southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean.<sup>128</sup>

This new Treasure Fleet would be the largest of the assembled fleets of the treasure voyages, over 100 ships with 27,500 men in total for the entire expedition.<sup>129</sup> The fleet also had a secondary mission objective of solving a diplomatic crisis between the king of Siam and Malacca, with Zheng He given a written letter from the emperor demanding the king of Siam cease all aggression towards Malacca. Once again, the main destination for the fleet was Calicut and this would be the final voyage of Zheng He where either in Calicut or on his return journey he would die in 1433. When the fleet set sail, Zheng He now in his sixties, wished to document all of his accomplishments for future explorers and commissioned a stone tablet in Changle, which detailed all of his accomplishments, and remains one of the most important primary sources regarding Zheng He's life.

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<sup>128</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 168.

<sup>129</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 169.

On 19 of January 1431, the fleet set out from China beginning the last of the great treasure voyages. The fleet stayed in China proper for a few months, gathering supplies and did not fully depart until 1432, a year later. The fleet in this final journey visited Java, Palembang, Malacca, Semudera, Ceylon and finally arrived in Calicut in December 1432. Here Zheng He remained while smaller squadrons were sent to the Middle East and Persia under the command of Hong Bao, one of the eunuchs accompanying Zheng He. The detached fleets were said to have traded for Arab medical texts and medicine which the Chinese had begun to take a keen interest in and the Arabs were renowned for at this time for having made great successes in the field of medicine. These and other precious trade items such as aloe were traded in exchange for the famed Ming porcelain, Jade and other items from China which the Middle Eastern nations were hungry for.

Zheng He, however, back in Calicut was facing increasingly ailing health at his age of sixty-two. As cited by Levathes, Ma Huan was sent by Zheng He as an emissary to Mecca and gave a description of the Muslim holy city while there<sup>130</sup> According to Levathes, Zheng He's health waned and he likely died in 1432 on the return Journey and was buried at sea.<sup>131</sup> Barbara Peterson argues that Zheng He may have died a bit earlier while he was still in Calicut.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ma Huan, *The Overall Survey of the Oceans Shores*, 174-77

<sup>131</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 172

<sup>132</sup> Barbara Peterson, *The Ming Voyages of Cheng-Ho*, 46.



Regardless, with Zheng He's death the support for funding of such extravagant projects ceased as the Confucians gained more power, and considered such journeys to be an extravagant waste. While trade would continue between China and foreign nations for some time, this was the end of the treasure voyages and Ming naval superiority would crumble in later decades. The legacy of Zheng He would live on for some time and in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, official Chinese views have changed from him from being considered an example of early Ming waste and extravagance on the part of the eunuchs, to being rehabilitated historically as China's Magellan or Columbus. It did take a long time however for Zheng He to be recognized and rehabilitated as noted by Yang Wei, who also notes that the Confucian scholar officials had burned Zheng He's logs to discourage any future expeditions.<sup>133</sup>

### Soft Power and the Legacy of Zheng He

While a more thorough examination of Zheng He and the Confucius Institute's motivations will be examined in Chapter 5, it will be important to end this narrative on Zheng He's life briefly with the impact his legacy had on Beijing's present day soft power policies. While his contemporaries in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century sought to suppress knowledge of Zheng He and his adventures,

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<sup>133</sup> Yang Wei, Admiral Zheng He's Voyages to the "West Oceans, *Maritime Asia*: vol.19 no.2, (Fall 2014), 29.

scholars in the PRC and in western nations have begun to take a keen interest in his actions. Zheng He indeed had a very hard power and militaristic nature to his treasure voyages, but was the military nature of the fleet the primary motivation for Zheng He's travels? The three major hard power interventions of the fleet were in Palembang, Ceylon and Samedura. These do stand out as stark contrast to the accepted narrative today popular amongst PRC scholars which usually contend that Zheng He's voyages were of a peaceful soft power nature. There is a lot of evidence however to support the point of view of most scholars of this subject, that view being these were mostly peaceful soft power missions with trade and recognition of Chinese suzerainty as its main goals. With the exception of the three examples above and the pirate suppression campaign of the first journey, Zheng He and his men engaged in relatively little fighting for a giant war armada and certainly spent more time trading than fighting. The nature of the tribute trade system, with foreign rulers making token gestures of submission, while in reality not losing any of their power *de facto* fits in with Chinese policy at the time which was not very expansionist, preferring to have client states and puppet rulers as opposed to the colonial ambitions of European powers. China's soft power during the Ming indeed increased with nations stretching from southeast Asia all the way to the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula recognizing Chinese influence and the power of the Ming emperors.

Zheng He's legacy also has an important part to play in the PRC's modern day soft power policies. As explained by James L. Holmes, the PRC's new interest in developing sea power. Holmes writes:

How China's leadership uses the Ming legacy says much about what it hopes to accomplish at sea in coming years. Economic development drives this quest for sea power. Chinese industry's demand for reliable seaborne shipments of fuel and other commodities has beckoned Beijing's attentions and energies to the waters plied by Zheng's fleet six centuries ago. Assuring free passage throughout the sea lines of communication linking the Persian Gulf region and the Horn of Africa with Chinese seaports has been a matter of surpassing importance. Indeed, Chinese leaders have come to believe the survival of communist rule depends on economic development and the comforts it brings a potentially restive populace.<sup>134</sup>

Zheng He has therefore become a symbol of a new China, eager to increase its soft power and trade amongst the nations of the world. After the "century of humiliation" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the PRC has had reason to look to its past as Beijing re-asserts its "rightful place" on the world stage. Zheng He serves as a convenient symbol for Beijing to rally around, showing that China was a sea power long before their European counterparts and if it were not for the interference of government officials in the Ming Dynasty, Ming China may have become a Maritime Empire in its own right. As China re-asserts itself on the world stage, Zheng He may be the beacon that the PRC needs from its own history to light the way into a multi-polar world and serve as a symbol of China's proud maritime history often forgotten until recently. Zheng He may have lost his influence in the years after his life but today he remains a strong and iconic figure

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<sup>134</sup> James L. Holmes, *Soft Power at Sea*, 5.

in Chinese history and as a symbol of the Ming Dynasty's early soft power efforts in the Indian Ocean and beyond.

There is also an importance in tying Ming glory to China's soft power which Zheng He's story is a crucial part of. Ming glory also has a relation to the concept of Han chauvinism or ethnocentrism in favor of the Han people. As mentioned earlier in regard to the first Ming ruler Zhu Yuanzhang, the first emperor was lionized as a "vanquisher of alien culture."<sup>135</sup> The racial component of the 1911 revolution against the Manchu rulers of the Qing Dynasty was a useful rallying cry for the mostly Han revolutionaries. Zheng He's story can also be used in similar ways to that of Zhu Yuanzhang. Under the context of the tribute trade system, Zheng He was seen by his contemporaries as fulfilling China's role as the "Middle Kingdom" and proving the superiority of Ming (therefore Han) culture to the "barbarian" nations. This was often accomplished through the giving of gifts to foreign envoys and using displays of power such as the treasure fleet to show off the Ming Dynasty's power to its vassal states. Such displays are used in Chinese soft power projection today as journalist Lorand C. Laskai has observed. The expensive and dazzling displays during the 2008 summer Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai expo show that the concept of glory

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<sup>135</sup> Schneewind, *Long Live the Emperor!*, 374.

and using that concept to impress foreign visitors is a crucial part of Chinese soft power.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Lorand C. Laskai, "Soft Power or Ancient Wisdom?", *The Diplomat*, August 19, 2013.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE: SOFT POWER IN THE CLASSROOM

The Confucius Institute is a non-profit educational organization that is overseen by the People's Republic of China's Ministry of Education. The Confucius Institute promotes Chinese language and cultural exchange and focuses primarily on students in universities. Along with my argument made in the previous chapters regarding historical use of Chinese soft power in the person Zheng He, I also want to propose an additional argument: that the Confucius Institute is the vehicle for one of the most effective uses of soft power used by the PRC today. The Confucius Institute claims to be solely a nonprofit educational organization free from government interference.<sup>137</sup> However there has been some considerable controversy regarding just how much control the PRC government actually has over it. Serious complaints have been leveled that the Confucius Institute stifles academic freedom.<sup>138</sup>

The Confucius Institute was founded in 2004 under the Office of the Chinese Language International. It originally opened in 2004 in Seoul, South Korea.<sup>139</sup> and as of 2015 there were 450 Confucius Institutes operating in 120

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<sup>137</sup> Hanban, Constitution and by-laws of the Confucius Institute, 1.

<sup>138</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 3.

<sup>139</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 1.

countries. In the United States there are approximately 100 Confucius Institutes as well as 650 so-called “Confucius Classrooms” that usually operate in K-12 schools.<sup>140</sup> Judging from the size and reach of The Confucius Institute it can be said that this organization has enjoyed a significant amount of success. The Confucius Institute has been compared to *Goethe Institute* in Germany, *Alliance Francaise* in France and Italy’s *Societa Dante Alighieri* who are also teaching institutions that have a focus on language and culture. The criticisms of the Confucius Institute however, come from complaints regarding the integrity of academic freedom. These accusations often stem from the fact that the Confucius Institute operates not only in foreign universities, but their teaching material is also supplied by Hanban, the Office of the Chinese Language International who are sitting members of the policy making committee of the CCP or Politburo.<sup>141</sup> The main complaint about these teaching materials is that they do not challenge the PRC’s view of the “One-China” policy. Additionally, it is considered by some critics such as Marshall Sahlins at the University of Chicago to be part and parcel of the PRC’s soft power policies.

The soft power capabilities of the Confucius Institute are indeed formidable. While there has been some considerable backlash in universities in the US, Europe and Australia, the Confucius Institute has had much more

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<sup>140</sup> Sahlins. *Academic Malware*, 2.

<sup>141</sup>Hagar Cohen, “Australian Universities the Latest Battleground in Chinese Soft Power Offensive”, *ABC Australia*, October 14<sup>th</sup>,2016.

success in pursuing its soft power aims in developing nations in Africa. The PRC itself has sunk a lot of money into its Africa policy and the spread of Chinese language proficiency in countries such as Kenya shows that the Confucius Institute has been very successful in teaching Mandarin and Chinese culture in these countries. The Confucius Institute has had less success in Australia in spite of Australia being a huge part of China's soft power aims, and especially in light of its geographic proximity. It is also true that there is no shortage of criticism against an organization that is seen by its critics as a tool of the PRC state apparatus.

So, is the Confucius Institute merely a teaching and cultural exchange organization as Hanban claims? Or is it a soft power method used by the PRC to spread influence in foreign countries to promote a view of China that's favorable to the PRC's views, being one of the many components of China's "charm offensive"? If the latter is true, would this also be an example of the PRC using a type of soft power which Joseph Nye has defined as co-optive power? Co-optive power as defined by Nye is a soft power method that uses the attractiveness of one's culture as a method for a country to accomplish its goals.<sup>142</sup> There is certainly evidence that the PRC has used co-optive power before, especially in its efforts of building infrastructure in Africa. Conversely, is there evidence that the Confucius Institute is what it claims to be? Is the criticism used against it

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<sup>142</sup> Joseph S., Nye, *Soft Power, the Means to Success in World Politics*, (Cambridge MA: Public Affairs Books, 2004), 7.



merely a symptom of rival nations in the west, especially the United States, using a backlash against Chinese influence due to fears of being overtaken by China's rising influence in the world? What about worries that the Confucius Institute is a threat to academic freedom in the Universities it's embedded in?

In order to understand these questions, it would be useful first to take a look at how the Confucius Institute has wielded its soft power by examining its efforts and activities throughout the world.

#### Confucius Institute: Policies, Goals, Academic Freedom and the Wielding of Co-optive Soft Power

*The teaching component of the local Confucius Institute is often complemented by academic programs such as guest lectures and scholarly conferences on China. Considering that the political constraints in effect on public discussions of certain topics in China are usually followed in Confucius Institutes-no talking of Taiwan independence, the status of Taiwan, the fourth of June 1989 at Tiananmen Square, Falun Gong, universal human rights, etc.-these academics are largely consistent with the "cultural activities" of CIs, insofar as they likewise present a picture of a peaceful, harmonious, and attractive People's Republic.*

-Marshall Sahlins in "Academic Malware"<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 3.

According to Hanban's official website, the official purpose of the Confucius Institute is described thusly: "Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters, as a public institution affiliated with the Chinese Ministry of Education, is committed to providing Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide. It goes all out in meeting the demands of foreign Chinese learners and contributing to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world."<sup>144</sup> In this context it would seem that at least officially, the Confucius Institute is modeling itself on similar language and cultural exchange institutions like Alliance Francaise. Cultural exchanges in the context of the Confucian Institute policy would be events like classes on making dumplings and cultural festivals that are used as opportunities to teach about Chinese culture such as the Chinese New Year. These so called "culturetainments" as titled by Lionel M. Jensen have had a big impact on promoting Chinese culture that falls in line with the image of China that Beijing wants to project.<sup>145</sup> According to Sahlins, however, there is one worrisome aspect of this: the plans of the Confucius Institute must be submitted to Beijing for approval and the Confucius Institute that doesn't do so is liable to be taken to court for sponsoring an event that Beijing has not approved.<sup>146</sup> So while The Confucius Institute claims to be doing its service in the name of vague "Foreign

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<sup>144</sup> "About us", Hanban, accessed Jan.15, 2017, [http://english.hanban.org/node\\_7719.htm](http://english.hanban.org/node_7719.htm)

<sup>145</sup> Timothy B. Weston and Lionel M. Jensen, *China in and Beyond the Headlines*, (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2012,) 295.

<sup>146</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 3.

Chinese Learners”, Beijing clearly has the final say on what these interests will be. This point however, has been contested by the Confucius Institute itself. Directors of the Confucius Institute deny that they take orders from Beijing and that Hanban has in no way had its policies shaped by the PRC’s politburo according to the directors of the Confucius Institute.<sup>147</sup>

Another component of the Confucius Institute and arguably its most important and successful, is its language program. Designed to teach foreign students to speak Mandarin and learn to write in simplified Chinese characters. There have been significant measures of success in these efforts in African nations, for example in Kenya there is an increasingly large number of Mandarin speakers arising in the student population and Mandarin is starting to overtake English as the primary spoken foreign language in Kenya and is now part of the nation’s school curriculum.<sup>148</sup> In Cambodia, over 100 teachers of the Mandarin language have been sent to Cambodia with Cambodia’s government requesting more teachers due to increased demand as Chinese language proficiency increases in the nation.<sup>149</sup> These are just two of many examples that show that Mandarin language instruction has been very successful not only in western universities, but in developing nations as well, especially in nations that the PRC may have a geopolitical interest in.

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<sup>147</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 4.

<sup>148</sup>, “Kenya to introduce Chinese Language into School Curriculum”, *Xinhua*, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2015.

<sup>149</sup> Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 69.

On the part of the Confucius Institute, there is a considerable effort to promote scholarships in Chinese language learning for foreign students in China. The State Council of the PRC published the recruitment procedures of the Confucius Institute in 2014, which shows that as part of Confucius Institute policy, non-Chinese citizens are given the opportunity to study in China, paid for by the Confucius Institute. These are the recruitment procedures and eligibility criteria published in this paper:

For the purpose of supporting the development of Confucius Institutes, facilitating international promotion of Chinese language and dissemination of Chinese culture, as well as cultivating qualified Chinese-language teachers and excellent Chinese-language learners, Confucius Institute Headquarters/Hanban (hereinafter referred to as Hanban) launches a “Confucius Institute Scholarship” program to sponsor foreign students, scholars and Chinese language teachers to study Chinese in relevant universities of China (hereinafter referred to as “Host Institutes”).

#### Category of Scholarship and Eligibility Criteria

The scholarship of 2014 is divided into 5 categories:

1. Scholarship for Students of Master’s Degree in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (MTCSOL),
2. Scholarship for Students of One-Academic-Year + MTCSOL,
3. Scholarship for Students of Bachelor’s Degree in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (BTCSOL),
4. Scholarship for One-Academic-Year Students,
5. Scholarship for One-Semester Students.

Applicants shall be non-Chinese citizens in good health, aged between 16 and 35 (Chinese language teachers in post shall be aged below 45, and applicants for BTCSOL scholarship should be aged below 20).<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> PRC State Council, “Recruitment *Procedures for Confucius Institute Scholarship*” (Beijing: PRC State Council Information Office, 2014) 1.

The Confucius Institute reaching out to students of the Chinese language serves China's soft power interests in two ways. Primarily it allows the Confucius Institute to have a pool of potential recruits into its organization. Students who were given a scholarship by the Confucius Institute may find themselves interested in continuing their association with the Confucius Institute in the form of employment. This gives China considerable soft power as its point of view on the nuances of the Chinese language will be the dominant one in the minds of these students. A secondary advantage is that China will appear to be a benevolent power interested in sharing its culture to the world which helps the PRC's worldwide legitimacy be respected. This fits neatly into the PRC's efforts to charm the world through soft power and gain legitimacy through the international community.

So, do these goals and policies of the Confucius Institute represent the wielding of co-optive soft power as defined by Nye? Nye separates hard and soft power through the definitions of command power and co-optive power, or coercion and charm, respectively. In his definition Nye writes,

Hard and soft power are related because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one's purpose by affecting the behavior of others. The distinction between them is one of degree, both in the nature of the behavior and in the tangibility of the resources. Command power - the ability to change what others do - can rest on coercion or inducement. Co-optive power - the ability to shape what others want - can rest on the attractiveness of one's culture and values or the ability to manipulate the

agenda of political choices in a manner that makes others fail to express some preferences because they seem too unrealistic.<sup>151</sup>

Does the Confucius Institute fit Nye's definition of soft power then?

Certainly, the PRC government and the Confucius Institute's efforts in Africa and South-East Asia have had a remarkable amount of success using a "charm offensive" to make Chinese culture and language appealing to students and educators alike. The wielding of soft power in western universities has also had noteworthy and significant successes. At the University of Massachusetts Boston, the Confucius Institute that is associated with the University held celebrations for the Chinese New Year (Year of the Rooster) in 2017 on February 8<sup>th</sup>. Over 400 students and faculty attended.<sup>152</sup> Such an enormous turn-out promoting cultural activities gives credence to the idea that the Confucius Institute is a useful tool in promoting an image of China that is peaceful and welcoming, and one that also strictly follows the Chinese Communist Party's view of how China should appear to the world. A lot of the focus on what constitutes as "Chinese culture" as promoted by the Confucius Institute are topics that could be considered "safe" in the eyes of the PRC government. Examples such as Chinese New Year celebrations, cooking classes and teaching state approved forms of Chinese writing, such as simplified characters (as opposed to the more complex traditional characters as Taiwan uses) are an easy way for China to

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<sup>151</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 7.

<sup>152</sup> "Confucius Institute Hosted 2017 Chinese New Year Celebration on Campus", UMass: *Boston News Feb 8<sup>th</sup> 2017*.

promote itself abroad while not interfering with the PRC's orthodoxy at home. A common criticism of the Confucius Institute is its avoidance of topics that would be considered ideologically "dangerous".

A common saying is knowledge is power, therefore the suppression of certain kinds of information can lead to increased power to those who wish to control a narrative. As described in college professor and Confucius Institute critic Marshall Sahlin's *Academic Malware*, Liu Yunshan minister of Propaganda and first ranked Politburo member, wrote a speech on September 7, 2010 as reported in *The People's Daily* saying: "Make sure that all cultural backgrounds, cultural products, and cultural activities reflect and conform to the socialist core values and requirements."<sup>153</sup> The accusations of suppression of academic freedom in the universities of such countries as the United States and Australia come from these kind of directions from the PRC government.

The Confucius Institute uses co-optive soft power to present a sanitized image of the People's Republic of China that conforms to views as expressed by Liu. Therefore, topics such as the occupation of Tibet, the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident and the legal status of Taiwan are subjects that are forbidden by the Confucius Institute. Problems that arise from this approach come from western universities whose efforts to promote academic freedom can collide with this policy. For example, if Taiwanese students were studying in an American

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<sup>153</sup> Liu Yunshan, *People's Daily*, September 7, 2010.

university and espoused views on Taiwanese independence in his or her academic work, they might end up butting heads with their university Confucius Institute or in some cases professors who are either Confucius Institute members or associated with them or in some cases, simply sympathetic.

An example of a situation like what was described above occurred in 2009.

According to Sahlins, Bloomberg reported that a scheduled visit of the Dalai Lama was cancelled at North Carolina State University. Writing on the subject, Sahlins reports:

A scheduled 2009 visit of the Dalai Lama was cancelled by the interim Chancellor of North Carolina State University, Jim Woodward, ostensibly because there had been insufficient time to prepare for such an august guest. The director of the NC State Confucius Institute, Bailian Li, a forestry professor, got involved after the cancellation, he said, as a warning for the future-telling the provost that a visit by the Dalai Lama could disrupt “some strong relationships we were developing with China.”<sup>154</sup>

This is a clear case where academic freedom can easily be challenged. All of the students of the University were denied their chance to hear a university guest make a speech, and who was subsequently no-platformed by those who did not wish the Dalai Lama to come to campus. The ominous “warning” which could be seen as a threat by Dr. Bailian Li, shows evidence that not only is the Confucius Institute willing to enforce its political views on its employees, but is also willing to use soft power in the form of protest against speakers and policies it does not

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<sup>154</sup> Daniel Golden, “China Says No Talking Tibet as Confucius Funds U.S. Universities.” *Bloomberg*, Nov 1. 2011.



agree with. There is also a coercive hard power element in these forms of protests. The Institute threatening its continued relationship with the university, especially with the implied threat of withholding funds is similar to sanctions which under Nye's definition of power leans towards the harder side of the power spectrum.<sup>155</sup>

This is certainly not the only case where a Confucius Institute has used its influence in an American university to protest academic policies they have objections to. As reported by Bloomberg on November 2, 2011, The Confucius Institute gave an offer to Stanford University of \$4 million to help host a Confucius Institute at Stanford. There was only one caveat: No talking about issues such as Tibet. Stanford, however, refused citing academic freedom and the Confucius Institute decided to back down according to Daniel Golden. Stanford in this case, managed to preserve its commitment to academic freedom. But the fact that the Confucius Institute was bold enough to ask Stanford to violate its commitment to academic freedom shows a trend that the Confucius Institute is willing to assert its position the universities they are associated with strongly. There is a legitimate fear that these efforts are compromising the academic principles of the university system.

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<sup>155</sup> Nye, "Think Again: Soft Power".

## The Backlash Against the Confucius Institutes and The Hegemony of Academic Narratives

*“Universities should cease their involvement in Confucius Institutes unless the agreement between the University and Hanban is renegotiated so that (1) the university has unilateral control over all academic matters, including recruitment of teachers, determination of the curriculum, and choice of texts; (2) the university affords Confucius Institute teachers the same academic freedom rights...that it affords all other faculty in the university; and (3) the university-Hanban agreement is made available to all members of the university community.”<sup>156</sup>*

-Statement by the  
American  
Association of  
University  
Professors, June  
2014<sup>157</sup>

Predictably, the backlash against the Confucius Institute, especially when it is concerned with matters of academic freedom has been loud and clear. The most famous example would be in April 2014, when the University of Chicago disassociated itself with its Confucius Institute and refused to renew its contract. Dr. Marshall Sahlins who has led the charge in criticism against the Confucius Institute is a tenured professor there. He reveals in *Academic Malware* how worrisome and underhanded the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the

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<sup>157</sup> Associate Committee, *American Association of University Professors*, “On Partnerships with Foreign Governments: The Case of Confucius Institutes”, June, 2014.

University of Chicago was. According to Sahlins, the Asian Studies faculty was not even aware of the opening of the Confucius Institute on campus until some faculty members read a newspaper article announcing it.<sup>158</sup> Sahlins claims that an expat professor Dali Lang was the impetus for getting the Confucius Institute established. Sahlins claims the Council of the Faculty Senate was not allowed to vote on the establishment of the Confucius Institute at the University of Chicago in 2009 nor on its renewal in 2014.<sup>159</sup> Also in 2014, a petition signed by 110 senior faculty members was also blocked by the board of directors, although this petition eventually became vital in convincing the University to cut its ties with the Confucius Institute in 2014.<sup>160</sup> The University of Chicago after these events became sort of a rallying symbol in 2014 for universities to heavily criticize the establishment of the Confucius Institute in American universities.

While the Confucius Institute has been portraying itself as a legitimate cultural exchange and teaching organization, there is considerable evidence of events such as at the University of Chicago that not all universities are willing to accept this definition. Indeed, a lot of universities in the United States including such prestigious names as UC Berkley, Cornell, Harvard and UC San Diego have refused to host the Confucius Institute on their campuses.<sup>161</sup> The soft power

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<sup>158</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 57.

<sup>159</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 57.

<sup>160</sup> Sharon Bernstein, "Second U.S. University Cuts Ties With China's Confucius Institute" *Reuters*, October 1, 2014.

<sup>161</sup> Arthur Kane, "Confucius Institute Under Fire as Conduit of Chinese Propaganda", *The Daily Signal*. October 16, 2014.

aims of the Confucius Institute have not gone unnoticed by critics who also point out the irony of using the philosopher Confucius's name, pointing out that Confucius was reviled historically during Mao's regime. Back in 2009, an article in *The Economist* stated the irony of using Confucius's name, stating,

China's decision to rely on Confucius as the standard-bearer of its soft-power projection is an admission that communism lacks pulling power. Long gone are the days when Chairman Mao was idolized by radicals (and even respected by some mainstream academics) on American university campuses. Mao vilified Confucius as a symbol of the backward conservatism of pre-communist China. Now the philosopher, who lived in the 6th century BC, has been recast as a promoter of peace and harmony: just the way President Hu Jintao wants to be seen. Li Changchun, a party boss, described the Confucius Institutes as "an important part of China's overseas propaganda set-up."<sup>162</sup>

As described in this article in *The Economist*, there is a certain irony in using Confucius's name to promote a government that once despised him as being a symbol of "feudal" oppression in the Marxist understanding of the word. Of even more interest, is Li Changchun's admission that the Confucius Institute is a part of the PRC's soft power efforts and shows that its very intentions are soft power oriented, and more importantly not afraid of throwing its weight around. Of course, the irony of using the name of Confucius can be explained logically from a soft power standpoint. Confucius is a name that has a lot of recognition in the west. It also gives Hanban the image of an educational organization by promoting one of the biggest advocates of education in China's history. Name

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<sup>162</sup> "A Message from Confucius: New ways of Projecting Soft Power", *The Economist* October 2009.

brand recognition, coupled with a famous proponent of education who is well known worldwide as one of the greatest philosophers in history, Hanban has given itself the perfect mascot. It would be hard after all, to promote a cultural educational organization called the “Mao Institute” or “Deng Xiaoping Institute” in North America and opting for a more familiar name such as the ancient sage is understandable from a business point of view.

The Taiwan Academy is perceived to be Taiwan’s answer to the Confucius Institute and also as Taiwan copying the PRC’s soft power strategy. According to the Taiwan Academy’s website, the aims of the Taiwan academy are: Establishing a Taiwan Academy digital information integration platform to serve the global internet users, promoting Mandarin Chinese instruction and traditional Chinese characters, invigorating the research of Taiwan Studies and Sinology and disseminating the results, managing scholarship programs introducing Taiwan’s diverse and exquisite culture to the world and finally. Establishing worldwide agencies and resource centers.<sup>163</sup> The most important of these points would be introducing Taiwan as a separate and unique culture. This is a threat to Beijing’s perception of its own sovereignty as part of the “One China Policy” and in terms of saving face, constitutes a threat to the PRC’s *Maizan* or its social position. Several professors have had their academic freedom threatened in western universities for teaching a view of Taiwan that promotes

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<sup>163</sup>“About the Academy”, Taiwan Academy, accessed Jan 10, 2018, <http://english.moc.gov.tw/article/index.php?sn=2721>.

the small island nation as a separate political and cultural entity. In Australia, as reported by *The Australian* there has been a recent example of a lecturer being forced to apologize for teaching this point of view:

A University of Newcastle academic has been targeted by Chinese international students over teaching material which reportedly suggested Taiwan and Hong Kong were separate countries. The incident comes just days after a University of Sydney IT lecturer was forced to issue a public apology after international students were outraged by his use of a map showing Chinese claimed territory as part of India. Now, High Commissioner of India to Australia Dr. Ajay M. Gondane has come forward to urge universities to protect the right to freedom of expression in the wake of the map incident. The reported incident at the University of Newcastle is the fourth prominent case since May where academic staff at Australian universities have been targeted and their actions or teaching material attacked on Chinese social media. Earlier this month, an Australian National University lecturer said he had made a “poor decision” after translating a warning about cheating into Mandarin.<sup>164</sup>

A university lecturer being forced to apologize after exercising an academic right to teach material without political restraint is an interesting example to use, especially in this case due to the influence that both the PRC’s social media and the international students from China had. This is not very surprising considering the important relationship the PRC and Australia have. Chinese international students are a huge tuition component of Australian universities. This has caused some serious issues regarding Chinese nationalism clashing with academic freedom. Many of these students are full-paid tuition students of these respective universities, this gives said students a large amount

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<sup>164</sup> Primrose Riordan, “Uni Lecturer Targeted Over ‘Separate Taiwan’”, *The Australian* August 24, 2017,

of sway over University policy. Australian universities coming from a sense of self-preservation are quick to side with student demands in cases such as these. If these students protest and raise enough of a fuss, its better in the eyes of many university administrations to bow to pressure and acquiesce to these demands. Students in this case are certainly using a mix of soft power and hard power in this instance. The students use charm and persuasion in the form of protest to make themselves heard. If that fails, the coercive nature of these protests may give them what they want as a hard power strategy. The position of the universities is understandable, since tuition income for the university itself is threatened and many Australian universities don't have the luxury of alienating parts of the student body, lest international students boycott the school which can threaten the entire budget. *The New York Times* reported on the rise of this phenomena:

MELBOURNE, Australia — It was a routine quiz in a university business class in Australia, but the answer to one of the questions was a surprise: Chinese officials are truthful only when careless or drunk. Gao Song, a student from China at Monash University in Melbourne, was so upset that he condemned it online. His post created a stir back in China, where it was quoted in the local news media. The Chinese Consulate in Melbourne contacted him requesting regular updates. Global Times, an influential state-run newspaper in China, asked him to write articles about the incident. Under pressure, the university judged the question to be inappropriate, and it suspended the professor. “As China is becoming more and more powerful, we have strong backing even when we’re overseas,” said Mr. Gao, 24. “When others find faults with China, we can stand up to them and tell them we Chinese are great. “Like their counterparts in the United States, Australia’s universities have opened their doors to well-heeled Chinese students as a source of much-needed tuition revenue. But as the number of Chinese students has grown, so has the willingness of some like Mr. Gao to speak out against what they see

as slights against China, and to push back at offending classes and instructors.<sup>165</sup>

This phenomena in itself is an example of soft power, especially in China's perception of its own soft power. The PRC is more than aware of the influence it can have on social media. The PRC is also more than aware of the importance that is placed on the relationship between the two nations. It also gives the PRC an aura of plausible deniability, the PRC could claim after all that this just the view of the students and not the government and that any pressure exerted from China itself is wrapped in the veneer of protecting the academic rights of its citizens abroad. The clash between nationalism and academic freedom also shows the amount of power nationalism has in shaping the discourse between students and professors. A view of China that is promoted by the PRC has a lot of problematic issues if they were being regarded by a lecturer of Taiwanese descent for example. Should said lecturer's rights to teach his or her class the way the teacher wants to be considered less important than that of a student from Beijing or Shanghai objecting to this point of view? The threat to academic freedom is something that if ignored can have serious consequences for a university's integrity down the road and should not be ignored.

The Taiwan Academy claims not to either compete or cooperate with Hanban, the promotion of traditional Chinese characters in language instruction

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<sup>165</sup> Xuizhong Xu, "Chinese Nationalism Jostles with Academic Freedom in Australia" *New York Times*, November 15, 2017,



shows a very visible challenge against the Confucius Institute.<sup>166</sup> There is also some controversy in regard to what Taiwanese culture actually is. Although Chinese culture is dominant in Taiwan, there are many different cultural influences on Taiwan as well, including that of Japan, Korea and even traces of Spanish and Dutch culture from colonial times, as explained by Philip Yang, head of Taiwan's Government Information Office.<sup>167</sup> Given the Taiwan Academy's goal to promote Chinese culture as Taiwan's main culture (giving itself legitimacy as a "Chinese" nation as opposed to the PRC's One-China policy) and its promotion of traditional writing styles as opposed to those favored by Beijing, the Taiwan Academy has indeed shown as a competitor to Hanban.

From these clear examples it is certain that there is plenty of ample evidence that the Confucius Institute is being utilized in China's soft power policy. The Confucius Institute does not deny that they are a soft power organization; they just disagree on what their critics accuse their motives of being. While Hanban may argue that their methods are a peaceful way to promote both Chinese language and culture in a bid to improve China's image in the world favorably, (This is actually the exact definition of soft power according to Nye.)<sup>168</sup> the critics of the Confucius Institute have a different point of view. The point of

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<sup>166</sup> Staff Writer CNA, *Taipei Times*, "Academy 'Not Competing' with PRC", June 7, 2012.

<sup>167</sup> Aries Poon, *Wall Street Journal*, "Soft Power Smackdown! Confucius Institute vs. Taiwan Academy", August 12, 2011.

<sup>168</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 5.

view of the Confucius Institute also supports this study's argument of soft power being a tool of Chinese diplomacy in the past and on into the future, but with a different and much more aggressive motive: the promotion of Beijing's view of what China should be. This is what is at the heart of the argument that the Confucius Institute presents a threat to academic freedom which the following subsection shall now focus on to give a greater understanding of what many universities fear is the curtailing of very basic academic freedom, as well it will be examining the discriminatory hiring practices of the Confucius Institutes.

#### Academic Freedom and Discriminatory Hiring Practices

*The first day in class the teacher asked all the students with obvious Asian heritage to say where their families were from. When my daughter said, her mother was from Taiwan, the teacher said, "Taiwan is part of China." Months later, during some free minutes in class, my daughter was looking at a map, which showed Taiwan and all of the South China Sea as belonging to China (naturally since all of the teaching materials come from China). The teacher approached, bent down, and whispered into her ear: "Taiwan is a part of China.*

-Testimony of a Tennessee man whose daughter attended a Confucius Classroom<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> Jeffery Hayes, *Facts and Details*, "Confucius Institutes and Spreading China Abroad." April 2008,

Academic Freedom is a concept that defines itself as being the freedom of inquiry by university faculty members. Ideally, this gives a professor the freedom to teach whatever content he or she wishes in their chosen discipline without the fear of being censored by the university for their beliefs, and without fear of any political or academic forces threatening their job, repression or censorship of their work and in extreme cases the threat of imprisonment. In American and European universities as well as in Australia, academic freedom has been lauded as one of the greatest virtues of the university system. This allows professors to publish their research and findings in a free setting and allows the flow of accurate information to go unhindered. By far, the greatest threat the critics of the Confucius Institute claim against the organization is that they threaten this cherished right that many professors feel is at the core of the philosophy of the university system.<sup>170</sup>

The argument in favor of this criticism is that there are numerous examples of the Confucius Institute repressing information with examples such as the legal status of Taiwan, the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident and Falun Gong. The above quoted example about the Tennessee man and his daughter in the Confucius classroom also shows a bullying nature when it comes to subjects the PRC may find controversial. The United States is not the only country being subjected to this kind of bullying. In June 2014, Sinologist Isabel Hilton wrote that

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<sup>170</sup> Sophie Beach, “Confucius Institutes and Academic Freedom”, May 1, 2017,

there have been many attempts by Chinese officials to condition academic life in British educational institutions. Hilton claims that events such as the Dalai Lama visiting are often protested by Chinese officials who, according to Hilton, threaten to discourage Chinese students from enrolling in British universities in response.<sup>171</sup> Sahlins references another example used by Hilton in his book *Academic Malware* where Hilton describes some worrisome censorship in a book she contributed to. Hilton claims:

I contributed to a short book for 6<sup>th</sup> formers (12<sup>th</sup> graders) on China, without knowing that it was sponsored by a CI. The chapter was to the length requested, and it was not until I saw a copy at the launch event that I discovered that an entire passage about the work and subsequent arrest of the Lake Tai campaigner Wu Lihong had been excised. I wish I could believe it was just a coincidence.<sup>172</sup>

This passage shows an allegation that not only do the Confucius Institutes bully and censor students, but that respected professors also have had problematic dealings with the Confucius Institute. It shows a trend that Hanban not only has shown evidence that it tightly controls its teaching materials but has a stake in controlling information about China as a whole, and will use its clout to get its way when it finds material that the PRC finds objectionable. While the Confucius Institute claims to follow all the laws and academic rules of its host universities, it has shown it is not beneath using underhanded tricks as well as exerting enormous pressure on the board of directors of many universities to get its way. This usually comes in the form of threatening to discourage students

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<sup>171</sup> Isabel Hilton, *China File*, "Debate over Confucius Institutes", June 24, 2014.

<sup>172</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 28.

from attending universities as we have seen in the UK or in many cases in the US, putting unofficial but heavy pressure on school officials.

It would seem that Hanban has found a very clever, effective, and heavy-handed strategy in using the threat of discouraging students from enrolling or the threat of cutting their funding to Asia Studies programs. It is likely to be troubling to professors who may feel that the very institutions they work for are being undermined and seriously influenced by Hanban. Withholding funding is an extremely effective bargaining chip, and so many professors are fearful, especially those in Asian studies departments, that their academic freedom may be undermined by university administrators not wanting to “rock the boat.” When academic freedom is restricted there can also be the threat that the quality of work is being compromised in academic research. A university at its core is a place where all academically sound ideas and concepts can be researched and tested. If another nation’s government has enough pull behind the scenes (also giving it the ability of plausible deniability) then the actual flow of viable research can arguably be diluted if not completely stopped. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) put out a statement on its website in October 2014 warning American universities to re-think their connections to the Confucius Institute. The warning read:

Confucius Institutes function as an arm of the Chinese state and are allowed to ignore academic freedom. “Their academic activities are under the supervision of Hanban, a Chinese state agency which is chaired by a member of the Politburo and the vice-premier of the People’s Republic of China. Most agreements establishing Confucius Institutes feature

nondisclosure clauses and unacceptable concessions to the political aims and practices of the government of China. Specifically, North American universities permit Confucius Institutes to advance a state agenda in the recruitment and control of academic staff, in the choice of curriculum, and in the restriction of debate.<sup>173</sup>

While a good number of these points outlined in this statement show a clear and present threat to academic freedom, one of the most worrisome practices noted here is the practice of discriminatory hiring. This is what is meant by “the recruitment and control of academic staff” as mentioned in the statement above. One of the most infamous cases of discriminatory hiring happened in Canada at McMaster University in 2012 involving the case of a former CI teacher by the name of Sonia Zhao. Ms. Zhao complained that the Confucius Institute had discriminated against her due to her religious beliefs, namely because she was a member of Falun Gong who have long been suppressed in the PRC. As reported in *The Globe and Mail* the Confucius Institute does not allow its teachers to join “illegal organizations like Falun Gong.”<sup>174</sup> The discriminatory hiring as practiced by Hanban, was the main catalyst that caused McMaster University not to renew its contract with the Confucius Institute similar to the events at the University of Chicago. These events underline a problematic situation where by following Hanban’s hiring practices, universities are breaking their own countries’ anti-discrimination laws. In much the same way, the

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<sup>173</sup> Edward Graham, *American Association of University Professors*, “Confucius Institutes Threaten Academic Freedom”, October 2014.

<sup>174</sup> James Bradshaw and Colin Freeze, *The Globe and Mail*, “McMaster Closing Confucius Institute Over Hiring Issues”, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

Confucius Institute has posed a threat to academic freedom when professors at American and Canadian universities are forced to undergo an “ideological purity test” in violation of American and Canadian anti-discrimination laws. It is also not above some Hanban-approved teachers to manipulate the students in their classes to become involved in protests and demonstrations. According to Sahlins, the academic director at Waterloo University by the name of Yan Li, used her students to protest coverage of a Tibetan uprising in 2008.<sup>175</sup>

Yan Li was formally employed as a reporter for the Chinese news agency, Xinhua, and had considerable connections to the CCP. Sahlins recounts that Yan Li rallied Confucius Institute students to protest what Yan Li described as “local sympathy for Tibetan separatists.”<sup>176</sup> Yan Li was ultimately successful in her protest causing the local TV station to apologize for perceived biased coverage as reported in the *Epoch Times*.<sup>177</sup> The amount of support Yan Li was able to rally shows that the Confucius Institute has an iron-fisted grasp on the realities and tactics of soft power. By using the powerful symbolism of student protest as well as using perceptions of media bias, The Confucius Institute has shown that it can use soft power to achieve its aims, even in a foreign country.

This is of course, ironically denying the media organization being protested its right to a free press. There is also an argument to be made that

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<sup>175</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 33.

<sup>176</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 33.

<sup>177</sup> Matthew Little, “Spymaster Warns of Foreign Influence on Canadian Officials”, *The Epoch Times*, July 6, 2010.

using students to protest in favor of Beijing's policy in a Canadian university is an abuse of power from an authority figure. While there is no direct evidence that Yan Li threatened to punish any of her students if they did not participate in the protest, it is still a professor using her position of considerable power to influence and manipulate her students to bully a media organization into complying with a policy from a foreign country. And this does not consider what might have happened to any of her students who might have disagreed with the professor being silenced and having their own academic freedom violated, not to mention the right of a free press. Perhaps the most worrisome aspect is not that Yan Li committed these actions, which was her right under the same academic freedom she threatened, but that her soft power tactics worked.

#### Ceding Power: The Future of Chinese Soft Power

With the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States many academics have been worried about some threats to the field of academia. Not only has President Trump threatened to de-fund universities such as Berkley in 2017 in response to massive student protests, but Trump's withdrawal from international commitments has left a void that Beijing is more than happy to fill.<sup>178</sup> Despite the nationalist rhetoric of the Trump administration has espoused, Trump has been more than willing to be conciliatory to China in many respects. This

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<sup>178</sup>Callum Brochers, "Trump's Threat to Defund Berkeley After Protest of Breitbart Writer Makes No Sense". *Washington Post*, Feb.2 2017.



isolationist view towards politics can be dangerous to many academic institutions especially concerning the Confucius Institute. Under the previous Obama Administration, academics could at least count on a strong and assertive US government to protect academic freedom, but as the Trump Administration turns a blind eye to Chinese soft power, university faculty can't count on a strong advocate for their rights concerning academic freedom on the international stage. As Fareed Zakaria of the *Washington Post* reports:

The first major act of the Trump administration was to pull the United States out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, a treaty that would have opened up long-closed economies such as Japan and Vietnam, but also would have created a bloc that could stand up to China's increasing domination of trade in Asia. The TPP was, in Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong's words, "a litmus test" of U.S. credibility in Asia. With Washington's withdrawal, even staunchly pro-American allies such as Australia are hedging their bets. Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has raised the possibility of China joining the TPP, essentially turning a group that was meant to be a deterrent against China into one more arm of Chinese influence. The United States' global role has always meant being at the cutting edge in science, education and culture. Here again, Washington is scaling back while Beijing is ramping up. In Trump's proposed budget, the National Institutes of Health, NASA and the national laboratories face crippling cuts, as do many exchange programs that have brought generations of young leaders to be trained in the United States and exposed to American values. Beijing, meanwhile, has continued to expand "Confucius Institutes" around the world and now offers 20,000 scholarships for foreign students to go to China. Its funding for big science rises every year. The world's largest telescope is in China, not the United States.<sup>179</sup>

With Trump ceding power, the void that is being filled by China is very good news for the Confucius Institute. If academic freedom becomes less of an

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<sup>179</sup> Fareed Zakaria, "Trump Prepares to Pass the World Leadership Baton to China", *Washington Post*. March 16, 2017.

issue, the Confucius Institute may be able to wield influence over universities in the United States much like they have in Australia. One only needs to look at the appeasement shown in Australia towards the Confucius Institute to get a possible preview of what might happen to American universities under an administration disinterested in the battlefield of soft power politics. This new-found cynicism can not only threaten academic freedom but also threaten perceptions on the efficiency of democracy, a tactic that has covertly been a large part of PRC policy.<sup>180</sup>

As soft power is ceded to Beijing, Washington will inevitably find itself in a diminished position. Trade treaties that Trump has threatened to withdraw from for example will give Beijing a void to fill in trade and soft power influence. Furthermore, confidence in Washington itself will be shaken by even the most pro-American allies may find themselves finding the PRC a more attractive partner to deal with than the United States. Another thing to consider is the Trump Administration's antagonistic attitude towards the UN, which Trump has threatened to decrease US funding to. China would gain enormous credibility and soft power overseas and could become the most senior member of the Security Council under these circumstances within less than a decade.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Jiayang Fan, "Trump, Confucius, and China's Vision", *The New Yorker*. May 19 2017.

<sup>181</sup> John Hudson, "Trump's UN Speech Was a Giant Gift to China and Russia", *Buzzfeed*. September 19 2017.

The Confucius Institute inarguably demonstrates its highly skilled use of soft power, as well as its eagerness and lack of moral constraint by western standards to employ “harder” versions of coercive power to achieve its aims. Public persons such as Xu Lin and Yan Li have no reluctance whatsoever in coercing and even bullying opposition and in that resolve, have found the means to gain a cultural victory for Beijing by using grassroots level protest against ideas that Beijing finds subversive, and in this practice, paradoxically also enjoying the legal protections of free speech to its logical conclusive advantage.

The Confucius Institute has played a considerable role in the “charm offensive” that has been Beijing’s soft power initiative for over two decades. Joshua Kurlantzick identifies this in *Charm Offensive* as being a critical part of Chinese diplomacy. According to Kurlantzick the promotion of cultural studies and language by Beijing is a crucial part of the PRC’s public diplomacy.<sup>182</sup> Kurlantzick quotes Hu Youqing, a deputy to The National People’s Congress as saying, “Promoting the use of Chinese language will contribute to spreading Chinese culture and increasing China’s global influence. It can help build up our national strength and should be taken as a way to increase our country’s soft power.”<sup>183</sup> Hu’s statement can be seen as a part of Hanban’s goals as a whole, and the Confucius Institute serves as a kind of “front-line fighter” in China’s

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<sup>182</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 36.

<sup>183</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 37.

“charm offensive”. It is an intelligent and effective strategy because it applies the principle of infiltration and stealth, in the Confucius Institute’s dealings.

The evidence is conclusive that the Confucius Institute uses grassroots activism as well as pressure against university faculty and administration to achieve its goals. The Confucius Institute is able to achieve this while presenting itself as a legitimate teaching exchange program. This allows the Confucius Institute plausible deniability, that is to say concealing its intentions, despite its overt ties to Beijing and the PRC’s politburo. From the standpoint of preserving academic freedom, it is encouraging to see that some universities in North America have begun questioning their ties to Hanban and the Confucius Institute, but that does not mean that universities in other parts of the world have that luxury. In African nations like Kenya for instance, there is sizable reliance on Beijing for aid development which many of these nations depend on. Therefore, it may not be prudent in their case, to antagonize Beijing. In the case of North America, Europe and Australia however, it is not so easy. As Nye points out, soft-power is very hard to wield as it exists outside total government control and relies on charm and also because it can sometimes take years for its effects to be realized.<sup>184</sup> Western universities so far have shown to be both resistant to the coercive power of the Confucius Institute such as in the famous case of the University of Chicago, but also susceptible in many cases to Hanban’s pressure

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<sup>184</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 99.

such as was seen in North Carolina State University's cancellation of a speech by the Dalai Llama. Certainly, one thing is for sure: Hanban both recognizes and utilizes a form of power that has been used all around the world and in China since at least the Ming Dynasty, that being the power of charm and shaping a narrative, which the Confucius Institute has a monopoly on when it comes to the field of sinology.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONFUCIANISM AND SOFT POWER: POLITICS

### AND FOREIGN POLICY IN MING AND MODERN CHINA

*“Can Confucianism enrich modern Chinese foreign policy? This would have been an unthinkable and certainly ‘counterrevolutionary’ question in the revolutionary era of Mao Zedong (1949–1976), who took eradicating ‘feudal dregs’ such as Confucianism as one of the main missions of his continuous revolution. Yet for contemporary China it is no longer an idle or quixotic question. Reform-era (1978–present) Chinese leaders from Jiang Zemin onwards have occasionally invoked Confucian concepts in foreign policy statements. With President Xi Jinping, however, a significant shift has occurred: President Xi has made the use of ancient Chinese classics, including Confucian texts, one of the hallmarks of his political discourse.”<sup>185</sup>*

-Feng Zhang, in  
“Confucian Foreign  
Policy Traditions in  
Chinese History”

The practice of soft power in China has a long and detailed history. As observed previously, in the historical sense in the person of Zheng He and observed in the modern sense with the example of the Confucius Institute, there are examples that can easily be seen by researchers and students alike that can be easily accessed. What concepts and philosophies form the basis of foreign

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<sup>185</sup> Feng Zhang, Confucian Foreign Policy Traditions in Chinese History, *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 8, Issue 2, April 2015,

policy in both the Ming era and the modern PRC? Confucianism has played a large role in the historical narrative of Chinese history as well as that of the eunuch officials in the courts of many Chinese dynasties. During the tenure of Chairman Mao Zedong however, Confucianism was officially looked down upon by the government of the PRC, seeing it as a relic of China's "feudal" past according to Mao.<sup>186</sup> However, Confucius has begun to have a bit of a rehabilitation with China's leadership, especially in recent times under Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping. With the example of the Confucius Institute, which is a government sponsored program, we can see that at the very least, the current government in the PRC recognizes the value of the Confucius name, especially when marketing to an international audience.

It is important to also consider that Confucius is hardly the only figure in how soft power has developed through Chinese history. In Chapter Two, the Ming Dynasty eunuchs were discussed in length in terms of foreign policy, and it was the Confucian scholar officials who gave them their greatest opposition. Another figure in historical Chinese philosophy, Mencius (385-302 BC) wrote extensively on the virtues of "just rule" and emphasizes the importance of being good to the common people. This is in clear contrast to Confucius who himself wrote extensively on the virtues of rulers and generally held the ruling upper classes in high regard. Where Mencius and Confucius find some common

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<sup>186</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 68.

ground, however, is in the rejection of profit. Perhaps in this rejection of profit we can also see the historical origins of how the merchant class in many East Asian societies, especially in China and Japan were treated as a far lower class in the traditional class systems of both nations, often being regarded as “parasitic” in nature. This also goes to explain the opposition the eunuch officials faced in Ming China from their Confucian rivals in regard to the treasure voyages. These voyages would have been seen by the Confucian officials as wasteful and against the better interests of the state as profit was considered a vice rather than a virtue in the minds of the Confucian scholar officials.<sup>187</sup>

It will also be important in this chapter to look at the foreign policy of the PRC under Mao and his successors and the vilification of Confucianism under Mao and the rehabilitation of Confucius by his successors, especially within the last few decades as Beijing has begun its rise in the world and study of the classics have become an integral part of China’s soft power policy. The Confucius Institute also bears a name that would have shocked Chairman Mao greatly. But before China’s historical and modern soft power policies can be discussed, it will be prudent to give some historical background information on Confucius and his life. Also, the roles eunuchs played in the Ming Dynasty will be important to examine as well as modern day efforts to rehabilitate the conceptualization of Confucius.

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<sup>187</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 55.



## Confucius and Soft Power

*The Master Said: "To Learn and then, in its due season put what you have learned into practice- isn't that still a great pleasure? And to have a friend visit from somewhere far away- isn't that still a great joy? When you are ignorant by the world like this, and bear no resentment-isn't that the greater nobility?"<sup>188</sup>*

*-Confucius,  
The Analects  
(1.1)<sup>189</sup>*

Confucius (551-479 BC), known in China as *Kongzi* (Grand Master Kong) was born in 551 BC in the state of Lu which was a vassal state of China's Zhou Dynasty (1050-771 BC). Losing his father at an early age and then his mother when Confucius was 23, left the young man truly alone in the world.<sup>190</sup> After finishing his basic education, Confucius began his early writings and teachings, gaining a small number of followers. His reputation as a teacher and philosopher had begun to gain him considerable recognition and the government of Lu expressed an interest in having him serve in a political career. By 501, Confucius was appointed governor of a small town in Lu. Eventually Confucius would rise to the position of Minister of Crime. He served with distinction and high position in the state of Lu until he ran afoul of a viscount by the name of Ji Huan whose policies forced Confucius into self-

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<sup>189</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, translated by David Hinton, (Counterpoint, Washington DC: 1998), 3.

<sup>190</sup> Huang, Yong, *Confucius: A Guide for the Perplexed*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, UK: (January 2013), 11.

exile in 497 BC. This was a result of Confucius's policy of trying to centralize the government of Lu failed. After spending several years wandering the numerous city states, Confucius was able to return home when he was 68 years old. During this time period, he taught 77 disciples and wrote down his teachings in several texts known as The Five Classics.

The goal of Confucius was for his students and mankind to awaken and achieve their humanity (Ren). If there is one overall ethic that Confucius considered the most important out of all his philosophies it would be the pursuit of study and education. With the emphasis on study, it is little wonder that the teaching and cultural organization the Confucius Institute borrows his name. Likewise, throughout the history of Imperial China, in order to become a scholar official of the state, a state examination system focusing on mastering the Five Classics was started during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). By the time the Ming Dynasty came to power, the first emperor of the Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang had re-established the Imperial Examination system, essentially giving China a state-run Confucian school system as well.

Concerning the establishment of the Ming school system, Theodore de Barry writes:

When it came to schooling however, the plebian autocrat Taizu left no doubt that he conceived of it as training and indoctrination-not at all the voluntaristic process of learning for one's self that Zhu Xi had advocated. He provided Ming China with a universal, state-funded Confucian school system down to the county level. A college in the capital, and the schools in each of some thousand prefectural and county seats

throughout China, served a student body of some 25,000 licentiates (shengyuan).<sup>191</sup>

These schools while different and stricter than some of the academies of the past, still offered a way for Ming subjects to obtain their degrees and enter the civil service, with a *Jinshi* degree from passing the court exam, these few students could even enter the court as high-ranking officials. These academies were also notoriously strict concerning the rules and regulations governing their students. By order of the emperor Zhu Yuanzhang, a series of incredibly strict rules were applied for those studying for their examinations. The following is a few excerpts from The Ming Shilu's *The Horizontal Stele*<sup>192</sup> showing the rather authoritarian nature of Zhu Yuanzhang's state school system:

1. Students are forbidden to present legal suits before the officials, unless the case involves them personally and in some major way.
2. Students are forbidden to exceed their station and recklessly discuss political or military affairs.
3. The Way of teaching requires that students revere and respect their teachers. Students must listen with sincere minds to their teacher's explanations. They are forbidden to act arrogantly and argue.<sup>193</sup>

This clear authoritarian bent on the rules of the Confucian Academies established by Zhu Yuanzhang is reflected in his autocratic nature. His attempt to extend this to the Confucian academies is therefore rather

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<sup>191</sup> de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 787.

<sup>192</sup> For a full list of the rules see Theodore de Bary's *Sources of Chinese Tradition Vol. 1 p.778*

<sup>193</sup>Zhu Yuanzhang. *The Horizontal Stele*, in Theodore de Barry and Irene Bloom *Sources of Chinese Tradition Vol. 1*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 788.

unsurprising. Perhaps there is an interesting parallel between these authoritarian Confucian public schools and the Confucius Institute. For example, followers of the religion Falun Gong are forbidden to serve as Confucius Institute instructors. The PRC state has often accused religions that break away from the orthodoxy of the state to be individualistic and therefore destroying social harmony between the state and the people. McMaster University in Canada ended its association with the Confucius Institute for example, due to these strict and discriminatory hiring practices.<sup>194</sup> Much like Zhu Yuanzhang's authoritarian state schools, there is a strict implied obedience to the state and that not being obedient causes social disharmony through excessive individualism. Consider these quotes from the Confucian *Analects* in regard to the wrongness of individualism and the virtues of being deferential to authority for the greater good of humanity:

The Master said: "In youth, respect your parents when home and your elders when away. Think carefully before you speak, and stand by your words. Love the whole expanse of things, and make an intimate of Humanity. Then, if you have any energy left, begin cultivating yourself.

(The Analects: 1.6)<sup>195</sup>

Adept Ch'in asked of Adept Kung: "Whenever the Master visits a country, he learns all about its government. Does he have to search out this information, or is it just given to him? Adept Kung replied: "Congenial, good-natured, reverent, frugal, deferential-that's how he learns so much. Its altogether different from the way others inquire, don't you think?"

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<sup>194</sup> Samantha Craggs, "McMaster Cuts Chinese Institute, worried by discrimination", *CBC News* Feb. 11 2013.

<sup>195</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 4.

(The Analects: 1.10)<sup>196</sup>

When Lord Meng Yi asked about honoring parents, the master said: “Never disobey.” Later when Fan Chi’ih was driving his carriage, the Master said: “Meng asked me about honoring parents, and I said *never disobey*. “What do you mean by that?” asked Fan Ch’ih. “In life, serve them according to ritual,” replied the Master. “In death, bury them according to Ritual. And the, make offering to them according to Ritual.”<sup>197</sup>

(The Analects: 2.5)<sup>198</sup>

The filial piety promoted in Confucianism were applied to society as a whole and not just one’s parents, with the emperor (or in modern times the state) being the “father” and his subjects the children. When it comes to Falun Gong and the Confucius Institute’s discrimination against them, the Confucian aspect of social harmony explains the hostility towards “dissenting” groups as they violate the very social harmony that Confucius and the state espouse in their outlook on life. It is therefore, easy to understand why the first Ming emperor had such harsh policies when it came to education and the parallels to this harshness in the modern day have become evident.

The traditional Confucian Ming curriculum was extremely difficult for prospective students when it came for them to finish their Confucian education and take the Imperial Examination. These examinations traditionally had been performed by the writing of several long three-legged essays on the Five Classics, with commentary by Zhu Xi.<sup>199</sup> However, the

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<sup>196</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 5.

<sup>197</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 12.

<sup>198</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 12.

<sup>199</sup> de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 787.

early Ming Dynasty may not have had as complex examinations as its predecessors owing to the fact that much more attention was focused more on the other famous Confucian Texts, the Four Books, which were considerably easier to understand.<sup>200</sup> In the 18<sup>th</sup> century Qing historian Qian Daxin (1728-1804) pointed out that even in the Yuan Dynasty the Five Classics were still expected by the Chinese to be understood and applied in their essays.<sup>201</sup> Qian Daxin theorized that this was conceived as a concession to non-Han Chinese during Zhu Yuanzhang's time. In any case, it is certain that China, stretching back to the Sui and Tang Dynasties had an unrivaled system of education in the world at the time, and under the Ming Dynasty Neo-Confucianism flourished.

By the time of Zheng He's voyages, the rivalry between the Confucian Scholar officials had developed a decades long rivalry with eunuch palace officials, which Zheng He got caught up in as well, leading to the end of his voyages and his near-erasure from history due to the machinations of his Confucian rivals.<sup>202</sup> Going back to the teachings of Confucians, these officials educated either by private tutors or by the Confucian state schools would have applied the teachings of Confucius in all aspects of their duties, including that of foreign policy. Concerning the scholar officials' opposition to

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<sup>200</sup> de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 787.

<sup>201</sup> de Bary, *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, 787.

<sup>202</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 165.

the treasure voyages, this can be partially explained on the Confucian principle that stated profit was something not to be sought and could be considered an unvirtuous aspect in a person. It was fine in Confucius's mind to gain wealth properly by following "The Way" but not at a cost of one's "humaneness." Confucius himself devoted several sayings on the subject of profit and also the proper way to gain wealth. Confucius also devoted sayings on the practice of frugality which he saw as a virtue. These selections come from David Hinton's translation of *The Analects*:

The Master said: "Wealth and position-that's what people want. But if you enjoy wealth and position without following The Way, you'll never dwell at ease. Poverty and obscurity-that's what people despise. And if you endure poverty and obscurity without following the Way, you'll never get free. "If you ignore Humanity, how will you gain praise and renown? The noble-minded don't forget Humanity for a single moment, not even in the crush of confusion and desperation. (*Analects* 4.5)<sup>203</sup>

The Master said: "If profit guides your actions, there will be no end of resentment." (*The Analects* 4.12)<sup>204</sup>

The Master said: "How noble Yen Hui is! To live in a meager lane with nothing but some rice in a split bamboo bowl and some water in a gourd cup-no one else bear such misery. But it doesn't Hui. His joy never wavers. O, how noble Hui is!" (*Analects* 6.10)<sup>205</sup>

The Master said: "The noble-minded are clear about Duty. Little people are clear about profit." (*Analects* 4.16)<sup>206</sup>

Confucius considered distractions to duty such as profit to lead to unwise governance. He also promoted aestheticism in his students and praised

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<sup>203</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 33.

<sup>204</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 57.

<sup>205</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 58.

<sup>206</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 36.

governance that showed proper respect to duty and humaneness, instead of simply profit and gain. The treasure voyages were indeed profit motivated, as Ming China was also hungry to reestablish the formally lucrative trade empire China once had in the Indian Ocean which was temporarily stopped by Zhu Yuanzhang and was re-established by Zhu Di with Zheng He as his agent. The treasure voyages' desire for profit was not the only thing wrong with them from a Confucian point of view. Confucius also disapproved of foreign wars and entanglements that weren't defensive in nature. Confucius considered good and humane governance to be the primary concern of the state rather than that of war. From *The Analects*, Confucius writes:

Duke Ling of Wei, asked Confucius about tactics, and Confucius said "I've learned something about the conduct of worship and sacrifice. But for the conduct of war-that is something I've never studied." (Analects 15.1)<sup>207</sup>

The Master treated three things with the greatest care: fasting, war and sickness. (Analects 7.13)<sup>208</sup>

Confucius as we can see saw war outside of defensive measures as wasteful of the state's resources, and it would be better for members of a nation to honor their parents, perform the necessary rituals for daily life and give good and just governance to discover their humaneness. Very likely, the Confucian scholar officials of Zheng He's time saw his voyages as a waste of expenditure, but also as Zheng He getting involved in foreign conflicts which

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<sup>207</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 171.

<sup>208</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 70.



is discouraged in Confucianism.<sup>209</sup> This is an important point to understand when trying to study the conflict between the scholar officials and the eunuchs: foreign wars and their support or opposition as controlled by court factions who used philosophy as policy. Even foreign travel in itself from the Confucian point of view could be seen as “rude” and “debasing” according to Levathes who recounts Confucius’s justification for isolationism:

Once feeling underappreciated in his native Shandong in northern China, Confucius announced to his disciples that he was going to live with the “wild tribes.” “How could you do such a thing” one follower asked. “They are rude.” He replied that as the superior man among them, he would tame their rudeness. But, aside from this boast, as his writings make clear, Confucius thought foreign travel interfered with important familial obligations and believed trade was inherently mean and debasing.”<sup>210</sup>

What then was Confucius’ and the Ming Confucian’s view of correct foreign policy? The Confucian point of view tended to look inward at China itself. There was a distrust of mercantile pursuits, and foreign travel was generally frowned upon, with the Confucian view being that these were wasteful pursuits and worse of all interfered with filial piety, which was above all the highest priority in a “humane” person’s world view according to Confucius.<sup>211</sup> Shin-shan Henry Tsai, author of *The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty* gives an excellent summary of what Confucians saw as the just and

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<sup>209</sup> Levathes, *When China Rules the Seas*, 163.

<sup>210</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 33.

<sup>211</sup> Levathes, *When China ruled the Seas*, 55.

moral way of diplomacy and foreign relations as it regards the tribute trade system:

The tributary system is the Chinese version of imperialism, not by territorial conquest or economic exploitation but control of ideas and cultural domination. The Confucian concept of diplomacy differed from its European counterpart, which stressed legal equality of nations and the sanctity of state sovereignty. In international relations Confucian family morality was applied as a guide for the preservation of harmony. As such, China the superior “Middle Kingdom” was not equal to her peripheral states, who were considered younger brothers or children in the family of nations. China produced the dominant civilization from which the peripheral states derived much of their culture. States around China were civilized only to the extent that they accepted Chinese ideas, customs, and institutions and agreed to use the Chinese lunar calendar to date their official documents. Such an ideology also engendered a chauvinistic concept that China was a world in itself, not a nation among nations and that no other human authority was equal in the Son of Heaven in China. As a consequence, there was no need for treaties as agreements of any kind at the foundation of the tributary system. The core of the system was the periodic exchange of visits of state, envoys and the requirement of the lesser states to recognize China’s cultural superiority and political suzerainty.<sup>212</sup>

The tribute trade system worked in a Confucian mindset because it allowed officials to be closer to home, and instead demanded that other nations come to China to pay their respects to their overlord the Emperor of China. While the Confucian’s promoted the tribute trade system as a way to preserve the teachings of Confucius in proper governance, with China being seen as the center of the world there was perhaps a small tinge of irony in this arrangement. The irony is that while the Confucians had helped create and build up the tribute trade system, only for the eunuchs to use the tribute

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<sup>212</sup> Tsai, *The Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 120.

trade in the Ming Dynasty to justify the voyages of Zheng He. After all, was China not the Middle Kingdom? Should China not then send envoys and powerful military ships to gain acknowledgement of China's suzerainty? It is very apparent then why the Confucians would have considered Zheng He an enemy. He was a threat not only to their power but also to their outlook on life. It is easy to see why that at the end of the Zheng He's life, the Confucians took such pains to minimize his role in history, and portray his journeys as useless expenditures.<sup>213</sup>

#### Eunuchs of the Court: Historical Scapegoats and Ming Foreign Policy

The eunuch ministers and officials of the Ming Dynasty stand out as a clear contrast to the Confucian ministers. The eunuchs had a very clear understanding about the importance of soft power and its role in politics. While the eunuchs weren't a group with a common philosophy like the Confucians, many eunuchs saw the advantage of foreign commerce and trade as opposed to the Confucians, who saw agrarian principles as the best economic method for China. The Confucians held the pro-agrarian view mostly due to Confucius's belief that the welfare of the people was considered more important than the profit and advantage of the state.<sup>214</sup> The eunuchs

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<sup>213</sup>Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 165.

<sup>214</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 164.

themselves were organized into twelve directorates, four offices and eight bureaus in the final organization of the eunuch bureaucracy.<sup>215</sup> They were required to wear a special uniform that denoted their rank and position. For example, as Professor Tsai explains, the eunuchs of the fourth rank were required to wear red robes while eunuchs of the fifth rank and below were required to wear blue robes instead.<sup>216</sup>

While many eunuch officials seem to have thought ahead in terms of economic prosperity, this focus on profit, often cast them as the villains of the era. The view of the miserly scheming eunuch is still a powerful trope in literature and film in China, even in modern times. There are exceptions such as Zheng He, but the historical view of eunuchs until the twentieth century had been a rather dim one, not to mention it did not help that many of their rivals the Confucians, were the record keepers. Professor Shin-shan Henry Tsai in the opening of his book *The Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty* gives some elaboration on the subject:

Constantly locked into an adversary position against the eunuchs, these highbrow bureaucrat- scholars had a tendency to portray their arch rivals as rapacious, wicked and unscrupulous. They attributed all the evil to the despised and hateful eunuchs when in fact the cause of the ills of the society was the very imperial institution that the Chinese intelligentsia gleefully served. The two groups collided, interacted and conflicted throughout the Ming period and for nearly 250 years vied with one another for control of the imperial apparatus. Corresponding to such idealism and rivalry was the timidity and lack of revolutionary tradition of the Chinese

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<sup>215</sup> Robert B. Crawford, *Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty*, T'ong Pao, Second Series, Vol. 49, (1961):122,

<sup>216</sup>Tsai, *Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 32.

intelligentsia. Consequently, Chinese historians rarely openly and persistently criticized the autocratic political system and the tyranny spawned from it. Instead, they singled out the eunuchs as the scapegoats and refused to treat this lowbrow group as a social and political complex.<sup>217</sup>

Professor Tsai introduces a pretty compelling argument that the common negative view of the eunuchs throughout Chinese history was made by their rivals the Confucians in an effort to discredit them and place all the woes of the imperial administration on the shoulders of the eunuchs, while failing to criticize the very system that was causing the suffering to the common people. The eunuchs indeed had an unfair reputation as schemers and connivers, negative traits that were put on them due to the jealousies of their rivals. Jealousy was not the only motivation or the hatred against the eunuchs by the Confucians however. As previously noted, the pursuit of profit had been condemned by the Confucians ever since the time period of Confucius himself and the eunuchs would have been seen as “parasitic” to their rivals. The distrust of eunuchs has a long historical origin, but a lot of its origins in the Ming Dynasty can be traced back to Zhu Yuanzhang the founder of the Ming Dynasty. Professor Tsai summarizes Zhu Yuanzhang’s attitude towards the eunuchs in this passage, citing a historical decree from the Emperor:

When Zhu Yuanzhang (known as Emperor Hongwu) founded the Ming Dynasty in 1368, he was keenly aware of the potentially pernicious eunuch problems and decided to limit the number of court eunuchs to fewer than 100. Even though he was later to increase the number of palace servants to more than 400, he reportedly also decreed that no eunuch be permitted to learn books or to give advice on political matters. Even the

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<sup>217</sup> Tsai, *Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 8.

few eunuchs with whom Hongwu might chat were kept dutifully awed and were never allowed to discuss politics. In 1384, he had the following inscription engraved on an iron tablet in front of the palace: "Eunuchs are forbidden to interfere in government affairs. Those who attempt to do so will be subjected to capital punishment." Shortly before his death he ordered that the eunuchs should no longer be allowed to wear the uniform of government officials and that their rank should not exceed the fourth grade. Officials of all departments were forbidden to communicate with eunuchs by written documents.<sup>218</sup>

Zhu Yuanzhang clearly intended to limit the power of the eunuchs in favor of the learned scholar officials. However, according to Professor Robert B. Crawford in his 1961 scholarly journal article *Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty*, Zhu Yuanzhang also did not trust the scholar officials much either and allowed the eunuchs to exist as a power balance, despite the Emperor's distrust of them.<sup>219</sup> Despite Zhu Yuanzhang's dislike for the eunuchs by the time Zhu Di came to power in 1402, the position of the eunuchs was greatly enhanced in contrast to Zhu Di's father's policy. Dr. Tsai suggests that one of the reasons that eunuchs like Zheng He were so trusted and put into high position was because of the Confucian officials' tendency to remain loyal to the former Jianwen emperor whom Zhu Di had deposed.<sup>220</sup> It was under Zhu Di that the eunuchs were for the first time given posts outside of the palace and were given a higher diversity of positions such as Zheng He's military career.<sup>221</sup> The eunuchs serving in the military became one of the positions open to them in the time of Zhu Di's reign

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<sup>218</sup> Tsai, *Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 13.

<sup>219</sup> Robert B. Crawford, *Eunuch Power in the Ming Dynasty*, 118.

<sup>220</sup> Tsai, *Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 13.

<sup>221</sup> Charles O. Hucker, "Governmental Organization of The Ming Dynasty", *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol 21 (Dec. 1951): 10-11.

and it was thanks to him so many such as Zheng He were able to excel in the military. Professor Tsai recounts how even after Zhu Di's death the eunuch's found plenty of new opportunity in the military:

Then in the first moon of 1425, the Admiral Zheng He was named *shoubei*, or the grand commandant of Nanjing; and one month later the eunuch Wang An, a Sinicized Jurchen native, was appointed grand defender of Gansu, hence the beginning of the eunuch Zhenshou system. During the late summer of 1426 two more court eunuchs, Huang Rang and Chen Jin, were dispatched to the important Grand Canal city of Huai'an to suppress a rebellion staged by Prince Gao Xu of Han. In short, only two years since the death of Emperor Yongle, the eunuchs had become increasingly visible in the management of Ming military affairs.<sup>222</sup>

The new opportunities given by Zhu Di during and carried on as policy after his death allowed the eunuchs to gain power outside the palace. Even after their fall from grace after Zhu Di's death they managed to be far more powerful and useful to the Ming Dynasty than they had during the reign of Zhu Yuanzhang. Another gain that the eunuchs were able to achieve, at least during Zhu Di's time, was the eunuchs getting involved in foreign policy, which should be noted was a capital offense during Zhu Yuanzhang's reign.

In the field of foreign policy in Zhu Di's time, the conflict between the two groups intensified to a huge level and the treasure voyages of Zheng He was the perfect catalyst. The treasure voyages re-ignited the debate about the value of soft power foreign policy in the service of the Ming Dynasty. The Confucians who believed the treasure voyages as being a wasteful burden on the people of

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<sup>222</sup> Tsai, *Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 60.

China, motivated by profit and the eunuchs who believed that the treasure voyages would bring glory and recognition to the emperor's regime once again clashed. The eunuchs, being part of the opposition who helped Zhu Di come to power, recognized that the nations of the Indian Ocean as well as China's neighbors could bring legitimacy to a usurper's regime. This would also fit into Nye's idea of attractiveness and exporting one's culture, which was a key component of the tribute trade system.<sup>223</sup> The eunuchs also did not agree with the way Zhu Yuanzhang and his Confucian advisers had decided on an agrarian economic system in China in order to conform to Confucian ideals, which had an unfortunate effect on the Ming economy during the beginning of Zhu Di's reign. This was another motivation for the treasure voyages. The eunuchs were also supporters of Zhu Di's expansionist beliefs and Hilton gives credence to the assertion that out of all the motivations for the treasure voyages, Zhu Di was probably motivated the most by hoping to surpass his father's achievements and re-opening the Indian Ocean sea trade was the greatest way to enhance his prestige.<sup>224</sup> Regardless of Zhu Di's reasons, the already trusted eunuchs had much to gain by going along with the emperor's plans and the profit from the numerous trade relations being developed would be an excellent motivator. After all, wars cost money and Zhu Di proved to be a very expansionistic emperor.

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<sup>223</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 60.

<sup>224</sup> Hilton, *The Open Empire*, 334.



Using charm is an aspect of soft power that Nye has mentioned and earlier I connected it to the tribute trade system in this paper. Attractiveness to culture as mentioned before, was a deeply embedded part of the tribute trade system, while the Confucian advisers saw the tribute trade system as part of the family system of filial piety. The eunuchs saw the spread of China's culture almost as an early modern advertising campaign for countries to engage in trade with the Ming Dynasty and bring it prestige. For example, the large number of foreign ambassadors that would come to visit Zhu Di was significant in improving China's image. These emissaries were so important to the emperor's image that Zhu Di's grandson Zhu Zhanji the Xuande Emperor, lamented the lack of so many grand emissaries coming to the court to pay tribute. This was one of the motivations that allowed Zhu Zhanji to authorize Zheng He to go on his final voyage.<sup>225</sup> Even under the Xuande Emperor who did not fully embrace soft power and the treasure voyages, there was a sense that international recognition and reaching out to foreign nations had some merit even if they could on occasion conflict with the Confucian view of the tribute trade system which demanded that other nations come to China instead to display their filial loyalty to their "elder brother."

The eunuch members of the court play a part in Ming political history that has been sadly misrepresented by their rivals, a trend that only started seeing a

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<sup>225</sup> Levathes, *"Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty,"* 169.

reversal in the twentieth century. The eunuchs by supporting the creation of the Ming armada and support for Zhu Di's expansionistic policies may have created a very different China than the one encountered by the British in the 19<sup>th</sup> century during the Opium Wars. Had the Ming kept their advanced navy, by the time of the Qing Dynasty would China have had the technological prowess to avoid the "century of humiliation"? Perhaps if Zheng He's legacy had been successful; Ming China would have been the great colonial power of latter centuries. Fortunately, thanks to scholars such as Professor Tsai, the eunuchs of Imperial China are getting a far fairer representation in history and they are slowly being portrayed as being competent advisers, military leaders and political force in their own right.

Looking at the experiences of the eunuchs, one must wonder if there are any parallels in modern Chinese history with scapegoats being used to further a political cause. In modern Chinese history there is a parallel between the treatment of the eunuchs as scapegoats and the treatment and demonizing of academics and teachers during the Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976. Much like the eunuch's there was an "othering" of teachers who were accused by the CCP and more specifically The Red Guards, student-led revolutionaries who were infamous for their violent "struggle sessions." Like the eunuchs the academics were seen through their teachings as a violation of the social orthodoxy, in the case of the teachers being accused of being against the socialistic tenants of Marxism, despite many of these teachers being ardent

Marxists themselves. Chen Qiang who was a student at these time period shares his experiences:

I have always been a very direct speaker. When the Cultural Revolution was starting, I spoke out about what I was seeing. The day after I said something, a big-character poster appeared on campus overnight: "Save the reactionary speechmaker Chen Qigang." I was so young. I didn't understand what was going on. Yesterday we were all classmates. How come today all of my classmates are my enemies? Everyone started to ignore me. I didn't understand. How could people be like this? Even my older sister, who was also at my school, came to find me and asked, "What's wrong with you?" You saw in one night who your real friends were. The next day I only had two friends left. One of them is now my wife. At the time, no one really knew who was for or against the revolution. It was completely out of control. The students brought elderly people into the school and beat them. They beat their teachers and principals. There was nothing in the way of law. There was a student who was two or three years older than me. He beat two elderly people to death with his bare hands. No one has talked about this even until this day. We all know who did it but that's the way it is. No one has ever looked into it. These occurrences were too common.<sup>226</sup>

The violent reaction against academics and students who did not toe-the line like Chen Qiang were ostracized and if unfortunately, even killed. Revisiting the conflict between the court eunuchs and the Confucian scholar officials, there are similar motivations to suppress perceived "dissidents" and blame the state of the country on them. For the eunuchs they were blamed for the economic woes of the later Ming and were used as scapegoats. For these teachers, similar economic and social consequences were being put upon them, with both eunuchs and academics being blamed for bringing misfortune on the country and accused of "scheming". The caricature of the scheming eunuch and the

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<sup>226</sup> Chris Buckley, Amy Qin, "Voices from China's Cultural Revolution", *New York Times*, May 16<sup>th</sup> 2016.

scheming “counterrevolutionary” would also serve in both cases to further vilify them. Perhaps the most striking similarity would be the call for the destruction and criticism of their works. Zhen He’s story was almost lost to history due to the burning of his log books and countless books, political pamphlets and ideas written to paper were similarly burned by the Red Guards. Reactionary repression against perceived threats to the state seems to be a common theme in the history of many countries and China is no exception, nor is there any exception in the use of censorship and violence to enforce a state orthodoxy. Even today with the Confucius Institute there is a longing to enforce strict orthodoxy and obedience to the state and any teachers with views contrary to this would be considered problematic. While China seeks to find legitimacy as a global power, anything that can possibly threaten the social harmony would be seen as detrimental to that goal.

### The Legacy of Deng Xiaoping: Modern Day Foreign Policy and Soft Power

The foreign policy of today’s modern-day PRC is complex and times often contradictory, but it has in recent decades fully embraced the theory of soft power in international relations. There has been a long and rocky road from the era of Mao Zedong to the era of Xi Jinping in the context of the embrace of soft power but in recent years it has given rise to China’s standing in the world. It was the work of Deng Xiaoping, (1904-1997) Mao’s successor who had worked hard

to reform the Chinese economy and could be considered the “founder” of the more market friendly People’s Republic that is better known today. The embrace of soft power however, has been a slow process that could be traced to the end of Deng Xiaoping’s time and encouraged by his successors. The peaceful transfer of Hong Kong from the UK to China in 1997 and the growth of Chinese markets in the early twenty-first century have propelled Chinese economic power to amazing heights and China is able to contend with even heavyweights such as the United States in terms of economic power. Despite Mao Zedong’s support of “righteous struggles” around the world such as the Khmer Rouge in the 1970’s in Cambodia, the PRC of Deng Xiaoping, Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping have taken a “non-interventionist” stance on world affairs. This approach had its genesis even during Mao’s time in the 1950’s by China’s agreement with India’s “Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence” (known in India as the Panchsheel Treaty) on the 29<sup>th</sup> of April 1954. The treaty stipulates:

- Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- Mutual non-aggression.
- Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit.
- Peaceful co-existence.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>227</sup> *United Nations Treaty Series*, Vol.229, 1958, 57.

The principles that China claims to follow in the Panchsheel Treaty give a good look to how China conducts itself in foreign affairs. China will often vote against interventionist measures in the UN and currently makes the claim that China “will not seek hegemony” as Xi Jinping claimed in 2015 during commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the victory of the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japanese aggression, according to Xinhua.<sup>228</sup> China's efforts in Africa and Southeast Asia in recent years have been based on creating mutual co-operation and in Africa's case have given China access to resources and new allies in China's effort to create a multipolar world in opposition to the hegemony of the United States. In this case, China has been very successful in offering an alternative form of diplomacy in developing countries offering mutual cooperation and benefit by helping developed countries reach new levels of development and giving a helping hand to resource extraction (which allows China to gain access to resources without resorting to hard power methods). The embrace of soft power as a whole, however, has only been seen since Mao's death, indeed the foreign policy of the modern-day PRC may have been met with hostility from Mao if he could have been able see it today. Joshua Kurlantzick writes in *Charm Offensive* how the PRC in Mao's time rejected some soft power principles (The Panscheel Treaty notwithstanding):

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<https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20299/v299.pdf>

<sup>228</sup> Heixua, “China Will Never Seek Hegemony, Expansion: Xi says,” *Xinhua* September 3, 2016.

Back in 1949 Beijing also believed it might wield power in the world, but not soft power. Triumphant over both the Japanese invaders and Chiang Kai-shek's seemingly superior nationalist forces, Mao Tse-tung's communists thought themselves invincible when they established the People's Republic of China on October 1<sup>st</sup> 1949. After all, the communists had ended the "century of humiliation" for China that started with the Opium Wars in the 1840's and 1860's when Britain and other European powers had crushed China's military and begun a process of national disintegration that precipitated the end of the Chinese empire.<sup>229</sup>

Mao's PRC had strictly followed the "export the revolution abroad" and the concept of soft power would have been seen as a "weak" method of wielding power abroad, when the Maoist principle was to participate in what Mao deemed "liberation movements" in Asia. During the 1950's, The Great Leap Forward, Mao attempted to industrialize the PRC in order to keep up with its enemies and also to bring a more modern age into China by remaking society in one generation.<sup>230</sup> One of the more famous actions taken during this time was ordering the creation of collectives with the government taking full control of the industrial and agricultural sectors of the country, by following the Marxist principle of "seizing the means of production." During the Great Leap Forward, ordinary citizens were also expected to collect and melt down possessions of theirs made out of iron in order to increase iron production in the country, however due to poor backyard furnaces and the materials the iron was smelted from, a very weak form of "pig iron" that was nearly useless was produced. After the failure of the Great Leap Forward and the blow it gave to Mao's reputation, the Cultural Revolution was

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<sup>229</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 12.

<sup>230</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 13.

announced with the infamous Red Guard inflicting violence on the population and destroying any of the old traditional pillars of society which Mao would have considered to be “feudal”. These included such traditions as Confucianism and Taoism and other traditional Chinese religions, beliefs, as well as the traditional arts and educational institutions.<sup>231</sup> During this time period in the foreign policy scene, the PRC supported revolutions in Burma and were an early backer of the Khmer Rouge. The PRC also cultivated a working relationship with the Soviet Union at first but the Sino-Soviet split starting in the 1960’s complicated the relationship and led to China and the United States to open relations with each other starting with Nixon’s famous visit in 1972.

Mao died in 1976, which allowed the once disgraced Deng Xiaoping to start his return to power. Kurlantzick describes how Deng’s rise to power allowed the political changes necessary for China to embrace soft power and create the foundation for the modern day economic power that the PRC is today:

After Mao’s death, Deng returned to power. A savvy political infighter, Deng carefully cultivated top members of the Communist Party, and then used his backers within the regime to outmaneuver the Chairman’s appointed heir, Hua Guofeng. By the early 1980’s Hua conceded that he had lost the support of the Party, and Deng essentially took control of China, appointing his reform-minded protégés to top positions. And since Deng’s restoration, twenty-five years of unparalleled economic growth has changed China enormously. The drastic changes in China itself have set the stage for China to exert soft power over the world.”<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 13.

<sup>232</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 13.



Deng Xiaoping's rise had given birth to what Kurlantzick termed the "charm offensive." The modern-day PRC to whom Deng can be considered a kind of "father" owes its existence to Deng's reforms and the "charm offensive" which has been so important in the administrations of Hu Jintao and Xi Jinping is thanks to his reforms. The new charm offensive of the twenty first century has followed a lot of Joseph's Nye's principles of soft power attraction. According to Nye, soft power heavily relies on others by finding agreements that aren't signed with threats and payments and instead uses the attractiveness of one's culture to gain cooperation.<sup>233</sup> Beijing has learned that lesson well, and in recent decades even softened its opinion on traditional Chinese customs and thoughts, like Confucianism, in order to present an attractive face to the world. By following the principle of attractiveness, the PRC has presented itself to the world as a rapidly modernizing nation open to investment and a rising powerhouse in Asia. Beijing has also presented itself in its foreign policy as a non-interventionist country on the one hand that wishes peace on its neighbors and economic cooperation, but also a militarily powerful one that is the top and strongest power in Asia and is not to be trifled with. While soft power efforts are a core part of China's diplomacy, the PRC is not afraid to flex its muscles either, with recent events such as the South China Sea dispute showing that the PRC is despite its soft power stance, not a pacifist country.

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<sup>233</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 60-61.

The PRC State Council issued a white paper in 2015 which shows the sharper side of the power spectrum concerning the PRC. What can be learned from this paper is that while China flexes its military muscles around its neighbors, China still is adamant that this new-found power will not be used for hegemonic purposes:

The world today is undergoing unprecedented changes, and China is at a critical stage of reform and development. In their endeavor to realize the Chinese Dream of great national rejuvenation, the Chinese people aspire to join hands with the rest of the world to maintain peace, pursue development and share prosperity. China's destiny is vitally interrelated with that of the world as a whole. A prosperous and stable world would provide China with opportunities, while China's peaceful development also offers an opportunity for the whole world. China will unswervingly follow the path of peaceful development, pursue an independent foreign policy of peace and a national defense policy that is defensive in nature, oppose hegemonism and power politics in all forms, and will never seek hegemony or expansion. China's armed forces will remain a staunch force in maintaining world peace.<sup>234</sup>

Beijing's foreign policy is very sensitive to clarify its non-hegemonic status. This gives China an opportunity to claim non-interventionist policy as part of its diplomacy, but still use its military to protect the "indivisible" nature of China, especially regarding fishing rights and territory in the South China Sea, and most famously the legal status of Taiwan. The PRC in the future will have to clearly decide whether gaining soft power legitimacy in the eyes of the world versus maintaining the policy of an inseparable China backed with military force is more preferable to China's legitimacy. These two ideas, self-contradictory at times may

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<sup>234</sup> PRC State Council, "*China's Military Strategy in 2015*," (Beijing: PRC State Council Information Center, 2015) 1.

cause a crisis of large proportions in the future. If China feels the status quo is threatened with Taiwan for example, China may suspend the charm offensive and find that a coercive option is preferable.

The current president of China, Xi Jinping, has also shown an interest in reviving Confucianism in the PRC. In the shadow of the Cultural Revolution, Confucius was an almost villainized figure in the Chinese world in Mao's time with the exception of Taiwan where a lot of traditional Chinese culture has been kept intact due to Taiwan not being affected by the Cultural Revolution on the mainland. The "Criticize Confucius" campaign was a large and integral part of the Cultural Revolution, so it may be strange seeing the PRC's leader break with the orthodoxy of Mao, yet now several generations removed, and with the Gang of Four and the far more orthodox members of the CCP either dead or elderly, there has been no easier time than the last decade for China to re-discover its traditional culture. This has been a boon for cultural relations and has helped the Confucius Institute quite a bit, not only allowing the organization being permitted to be named after what Mao would consider a "feudal relic" but also being able to present a culture for China to the world that is not only familiar and traditional, but one that does not conflict too much with the CCP's views of what China should be either.

Xi Jinping in his famous anti-corruption campaign has also promoted Confucian values as a way to fight corruption. In this section from an article

written in *TIME Magazine*, Xi Jinping is shown to have used Confucius as a model for his anti-graft campaign:

Xi seems to be taking this effort to a whole new level. He appears to be employing Confucius as part of a broader program to remake the Communist Party and realign the power structure within it. For instance, Xi apparently believes a dose of Confucian morality will aid stamping out official graft. Over the past year, Xi has launched an aggressive campaign against government corruption, likely engineered to both eliminate political enemies and clean up an out-of-control bureaucracy that had lost the trust of the populace. A high-level Communist Party conference in October pledged to strengthen the independence of the judicial system to improve rule of law. Confucius is part of Xi's reform team. For 2,000 years, Confucius's doctrine laid down the code of ethics for proper behavior in China — the way of the gentleman — and now Xi seems to be trying to recreate those Confucian standards through persistent exhortation.<sup>235</sup>

This new embrace of traditional values has worked very well in the foreign affairs of China. However, China, while appearing soft on some foreign affairs has still projected strength and might showing that they are not a country to be pushed around as it was in the nineteenth century when China was at the complete mercy of the Western colonial powers during the Opium Wars and the Boxer Uprising of the early twentieth century. With the Confucius Institute teaching around the world and President Xi using the Sage's advice to spread Chinese ideals around the world and use Confucius as a moral example against corruption in China's government, the ancient Sage has gotten a new lease on life in the post-Mao PRC. How ironic it is that the PRC has greatly profited from the sage who considered profit to be one of the greatest vice's humanity can

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<sup>235</sup> Michael Schuman, "The Chinese President's Love Affair with Confucius Could Backfire on Him", *Time*, October 29<sup>th</sup> 2014.

commit. In any case, the old Chinese way of foreign policy and politics has merged with the new China and together has presented to the world a country that remembers its past and is willing to use that past to further its goals in the world, but is also a nation that looks forward and is unwilling to ever submit to the West in a humiliating fashion such as in the nineteenth century.

The need for a cohesive social order in the PRC seems to be the priority of the Beijing over that of following a strict communist ideal. Evan Osnos a reporter at the *New Yorker* in his article *Confucius Comes Home* explains how the shift of focus from Marxist ideals to the traditional ideals of Confucius came about. Osnos writes:

It would have been anathema to Chairman Mao, but his heirs have changed their view on revolution. In the eighties, when China set itself in pursuit of prosperity, the Party studied how Confucian values had helped to stabilize other countries in East Asia. Generations of Chinese thinkers had dreamed of finding the optimal recipe for “national studies”—the mixture of philosophy and history that might insulate China from the pressures of Westernization. After the democracy demonstrations at Tiananmen Square in 1989 ended in a violent crackdown, leaders needed an indigenous ideology that might restore the Party’s moral credibility. Top Communists gave speeches at meetings devoted to Confucianism, and state television launched a series about traditional culture intended, it said, “to boost the people’s self-confidence, self-respect, and patriotic thought.” In 2002, the Party officially stopped calling itself a “revolutionary party” and adopted the term “Party in Power.” The Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, declared, “Unity and stability are really more important than anything else.” In February, 2005, the Party chief, Hu Jintao, quoted Confucius’ observation that “harmony is something to be cherished.”<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Evan Osnos. “Confucius Comes Home”. *The New Yorker*, December 14, 2017.

The complicated task of having to maintain a one party communist state and embracing traditional Confucian values that were once seen as reactionary, will be a difficult task for the PRC to balance in the future. The PRC will have to choose between coercion or charm to achieve these ends as well. Will it take the soft power approach and appeal to a traditionalist cultural and moral system or will it use force and coercion to enforce a strict party orthodoxy in the future? More likely, Beijing will follow the pragmatic approach of paying lip service to Communist ideals and use traditional culture to achieve social harmony so that both systems work within one another.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### COUNTER THESIS: ZHENG HE THE IMPERIALIST AND

### DEFENSE OF THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE

*The Ming Eunuch Zheng He who commanded fleets that voyaged to Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean in the early fifteenth century, is today depicted as an “ambassador of friendship” between China and other nations. The present article suggests a revisionist view of the man and his voyages. By examining these “voyages to the western ocean” as simply an element of expansion from the Yongle Emperor (r.1403-1424), linked to his invasions of Dai Viet and Yunnan we see these “voyages of friendship” as aggressive attempts to create a “Pax Ming” in the Asian maritime realm, with Melaka, Palembang, and Samudera as key elements. We also observe the Ming efforts to dominate the trade routes linking the Middle East and East Asia. The paper concludes with a discussion of the characteristics of colonialism and imperialism and suggests the voyages constituted a maritime proto-colonialism.*

-Geoff Wade, in the  
Abstract to The  
Zheng He voyages:  
A Reassessment<sup>237</sup>

*Thus, it is no surprise to find that much of the criticism has come from predominantly English-language speaking countries Whilst both Japan*

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<sup>237</sup> Geoff Wade, The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment, *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol.78, (2005):37.

*and India have been concerned about the general influence of Chinese soft power, most of the fiercest resistance to the CI's has come from the USA, Canada, The UK and Australia. No doubt people are concerned about what they say they are concerned about: political espionage and Falun Gong. Yet evidence for such interference is scant. Whilst CI organizers complain of bureaucratic obstacles and ill-equipped staff, given the number of sites involved and opportunities for political interference, it seems that actual cases of wrongdoing do not match the rhetoric of worry.*

-Michael  
Barr in  
"Who's  
Afraid of  
China?"<sup>238</sup>

#### Counter Thesis Questions and Overview

Now that the main arguments regarding historical and current day Chinese soft power has been discussed, it will be important to take a look at the criticisms regarding the points that have been made earlier in this study. The thesis of this paper was that there are parallels between Zheng He's quest for Ming glory and the Confucius Institute and that perceptions of hard and soft power are not always the same across cultures as well as easily defined. This paper has also made the argument that although there are some hard-power elements to the Zheng He voyages including military action, the general perception of the voyages as being mostly peaceful and diplomatic voyages, with the re-establishment of the tribute

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<sup>238</sup> Michael Barr, *Who's Afraid of China? The Challenge of Chinese Soft Power*, (London and New York: Zed Books, 2011), 77.



trade system that had been in place for centuries as its main goal. However, it would be unwise to ignore a rather imperialist nature to the voyages and that must be addressed. Regarding modern soft power in China, this paper uses the Confucius Institute as an example of soft power being used by the PRC, arguing that the CI's are often used to push an idea of Chinese culture that is acceptable by Beijing, and also that they present a threat to academic freedom as many academics such as Marshall Sahlins have proposed. But what are the criticisms of this point of view? Are the CI's really an effort to subvert academic freedom in the west and teach state propaganda, or can many of the negative incidents concerning the Confucius Institute be explained by poorly trained staffed and a "fear" of China's rise as Michael Barr suggests. For example, author Michael Barr in *Who's Afraid of China: The Challenge of Chinese Soft Power* writes:

In short, CI's are physical representations of China's will to promote its culture to the world. They are in effect China's most comprehensive exercise of soft power to date. And they raise numerous issues, none more intriguing than this: with over 1 billion native speakers, will the spread of Chinese as a second language eventually unseat English as the world's language of choice?<sup>239</sup>

Barr raises an interesting point that should be addressed: that of Sinophobia.

Sinophobia can be described as an irrational fear of China, Chinese culture and Chinese people either local or abroad. The element of Sinophobia in the context of the arguments regarding the Confucius Institute are in effect the "elephant in the room" so to speak regarding the criticism of the Confucius Institute. The fear

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<sup>239</sup> Barr, *Who's Afraid of China?* 77.

of Beijing's rise especially in the United States is nothing new and can be traced back to the colonialism during the nineteenth century also known as China's "Century of Humiliation". In more modern times, there has been vast Sinophobia in the United States and other western countries due to the Cold War and this form of Sinophobia has often been mixed with anti-communist sentiment as well.

In this atmosphere of Sinophobia, there can be a serious case of underreporting the good that the Confucius Institute does around world. For example, as recent as September 7th 2017, *The Nation* the university newspaper of the Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Nigeria, announced that sixty four of its students have been granted government scholarships from the PRC to study in various universities around China, giving these students numerous opportunities that they may have been denied if it were not for the Confucius Institute's language programs at their university.<sup>240</sup> This story is part of the charm component of soft power that China has been attempting to fulfill in resource-rich Africa, and the Confucius Institute has played a large role in education in numerous secondary schools and universities in African nations. Aside from concerns of Sinophobia, there is also the phenomenon of selling fear in many publications that offer news about the Confucius Institute. In the modern day with the internet dominating much of news reporting in the last few decades, the rise of the problem of "clickbait" or articles using sensational and on occasion

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<sup>240</sup> Franklin Onwubiko and Dimson Emmanuel, "64 Students Bag Chinese Govt Scholarship", *The Nation*, September 7, 2017.

misleading headlines, can compound the problem of underreporting positive stories in favor of negative ones. After all, “Confucius Institute accused of espionage and curtailing academic freedom” makes a more sensational headline (and more page views) than “The Confucius Institute has spread Chinese language proficiently in Africa considerably.” While it is important to look critically at the Confucius Institute and what the organizations soft power effort’s consequences have been regarding academic freedom and censorship, it would also be academically dishonest to ignore the boon the Confucius Institute has also been on impoverished nations and bringing opportunities to their citizens. Returning to the dangers of propaganda and historical revisionism, it is also important to investigate the rather “sanitized” version of Zheng He’s voyages that the PRC is eager to present to the world, showing Zheng He as a benevolent and kind explorer and adventurer compared to that of his European counterparts.<sup>241</sup> There is a danger of presenting Zheng He as a wholly benevolent figure by the government of the PRC that borders on straight revisionism rather than presenting Zheng He as a complex figure who used mainly soft, but on occasion hard power to achieve his objectives in building a trade empire in the South China Sea and Indian Ocean.

In order to properly provide a counter thesis for this paper’s points, a series of questions will be presented that will be used to criticize this study’s main

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<sup>241</sup> Barr, *Who’s Afraid of China?* 88.

points. They will be divided up into two categories: historical soft power which will cover the Treasure Voyages and modern soft power which will cover the Confucius Institute. The questions will serve to challenge the thesis of this paper and in the final section of this chapter I will attempt to refute them, making the arguments in favor of the thesis much more convincing and showing that they can hold up under scrutiny.

#### Historical soft power counter thesis questions

- Zheng He's voyages in popular culture and imagination in the 21<sup>st</sup> century have been images of a heroic explorer who brought Chinese culture to numerous nations in the area of the Indian Ocean, Arabian Peninsula and Persian Gulf. In modern times, the government of the PRC has often presented Zheng He in this light. Is this more a form of propaganda or is there some truth in this point of view? Was Zheng He engaging in a form of imperialism or were these mostly soft power actions with the occasional use of hard power?
- In regard to the actions of Zheng He in the Civil War in Ceylon, could this be seen as a threat to the peaceful narrative of Zheng He's voyages?
- Is there a connection between the Treasure Voyages and Zhu Di's invasion of Dai Viet? Is there evidence that the Treasure Voyages may have been part of a grander empire building strategy by Zhu

Di? Could the Treasure voyages been an attempt to refill the state treasury through trade to prepare for more aggressive actions against Ming China's neighbors?

- Are there any modern-day examples of the PRC using the Zheng He story to justify acquisition of territory through historical claims?

Modern Soft Power Questions

- Could the criticisms against the Confucius Institute be rooted in Sinophobia?
- Are there reasons other than Sinophobia for the lack of positive stories of the Confucius Institute's positive contributions? Could this be a problem with so-called "clickbait" articles?
- Do the accusations of violating academic freedom have any validity? Is there any hard evidence of this occurring?

### Zheng He and Imperialism

Zheng He as portrayed in the modern-day PRC has within the last few decades been seen as a national hero and both a symbol of Ming China's technological prowess and "benevolence" in foreign affairs. The PRC has significant motivation to portray Zheng He as a sort of soft power superhero as it fits in with Beijing's policy for the South China Sea and relations with African

nations. According to Michael Barr, former Chinese president Hu Jintao at the University of Pretoria in South Africa claimed:

Six hundred years ago, Zheng He, a famed Chinese navigator of the Ming Dynasty, headed a large convoy which sailed across the ocean and reached the east coast of Africa four times. They brought to the African people a message of peace and goodwill, not swords, guns, plunder or slavery. For more than one hundred years in China's modern history, the Chinese people were subjected to colonial aggression and oppression by foreign powers and went through similar suffering and agony that the majority of African countries endured.<sup>242</sup>

Barr also adds that not only is Zheng He being used in a soft power superhero way in this passage, but also Hu Jintao is bringing up China's "century of humiliation" that had its genesis in the opium wars of the nineteenth-century. He also goes on to explain that by using Zheng He in this manner, Hu Jintao was indicating that China's ambitions in the region will not only be peaceful but will also be non-aggressive unlike that of the western nations which took advantage of Africa during colonialism. This shows that Beijing in recent decades has realized the propaganda value that a sanitized Zheng He story can bring, and portraying Zheng He as a peaceful explorer who visited Africa for fully peaceful purposes gives Beijing a PR campaign that is perfect for portraying the PRC as a non-expansionist power that is only interesting in spreading culture and trade relationships and who better than Zheng He is there to act as a historical poster boy for future policy?

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<sup>242</sup> Barr, "Who's Afraid of China?" 86.

Geoff Wade in *The Zheng He Voyages: A Reassessment* counters the theory that Ming China in this time period was completely peaceful. Indeed, as we read in previous chapters, the emperor whom Zheng He served, the Yongle Emperor Zhu Di, was one of the most expansionistic in the history of Ming China. While Zheng He was sailing in the Indian Ocean, Zhu Di was participating in the invasion of the nation of Dai-Viet which is located in modern day Vietnam. In his article Wade describes the planning and troop numbers Zhu Di used to invade the neighboring country:

In 1406 in an effort to increase Ming influence and power in Dai Viet (the polity known to the Ming as An-An) The Yongle Emperor attempted to send a puppet ruler named Chen Tian-ping (Tran Thien Binh) into that polity. Tran Thien Binh was killed as he proceeded into the country. This killing by the Vietnamese became the immediate pretext for Yong-le to launch a huge invasion of the polity, a move obviously well planned before the event. He appointed senior generals, sea crossing commanders, firearms commanders, rapid-attack commanders, and Cavalry commanders. On a day equivalent to July 30<sup>th</sup> 1406, the boat-borne forces set sail from Nanjing. They landed in southern China and joined with other forces in the border province of Guang-xi. These forces included 95,000 troops from the provinces of Zhe-jiang, Jiang-xi, Guang-dong, Guang-xi and Hu-guang, a further 10,000 cavalry and various infantry troops from other guards, and 30,000 native troops from Guang-xi. An additional 75,000 cavalry and troops were deployed from Yun-nan, Gui-zhou and Si-chuan. Guang-xi and Yu-nan provinces had been ordered to supply 20,000 *shi*<sup>243</sup> of grain to feed the expeditionary army, and Yu-nan was to arrange 10,000 troops as reinforcements. The official account tells us that in all, some 800,000 troops were mobilized for the Ming for this expedition.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> The classic measurement of weight in Ming China and earlier and later dynasties. The *shi* was generally fixed at 132 pounds (60kg)

<sup>244</sup> Wade, *The Zheng He Voyages: A re-assessment*, 43.

Judging from the number of troops involved, (not to mention the sacrificial lamb of Tran Thien Binh to serve as *casus belli* for the invasion) this was a planned and coordinated effort on the part of Zhu Di to annex Dai Viet in a method that can only be explained as expansionism and Imperialism. As for Zheng He himself there were notable events that could be indeed considered Imperialism or as Wade puts it, proto-Imperialism such as the conflict with Ceylon.<sup>245</sup> It is also important to consider that the Treasure Voyages and the invasion of Dai Viet were happening at the same time and likely were related one another. Judging from the number of troops needed for Zhu Di's invasion as presented by Wade, the Treasure Voyages likely had another purpose besides giving Zhu Di legitimacy and re-establishing Chinese hegemony in the Indian Ocean, the replenishment of the treasury was likely a huge motivator for the voyages. After all, invading a nation with nearly a million troops is a costly expenditure on any state's treasury not to mention the costs the subsequent occupation would incur. Zheng He's fleet would also be valuable as a scouting fleet looking for weaknesses in government and military defenses of possible future conquests. Even the Imperial tribute trade system itself can be seen as a form of Imperialism albeit that of a much softer tone. A client state is still subservient to the foreign policy and wishes of its "protector" in many cases. Zhu

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<sup>245</sup> See Chapter 2 for the full narrative on the conflict between Ceylon and Zheng He's fleet. It suffices to say that this is probably the strongest argument against the peaceful narrative of Zheng He's voyages due to the hard power nature of the conflict and is dissimilar to Zheng He's more common method of collecting tribute following the tribute trade system.



Di for his part has plenty of historical evidence that indicates that he had a grand expansionist strategy for much of China's neighbors. Levathes mentions that Zhu Di had an increased interest in improving relations with Siam as part of the Ming policy of "fragmentation of the barbarians" effectly attempting to divide and conquer in way that Caesar in Gaul could have easily recognized.

It is clear there was a military nature to the treasure fleet that is unsurprising due to being a part of a regime under an expansionistic emperor. So indeed, there is an argument to be made that legitimizes the first and third of the questions concerning Zheng He at the beginning of this section. There is evidence as shown by Levathes and Wade that there may have been a connection between the Treasure Voyages and Zhu Di's annexation of Dai Viet as well as using Zheng He as a way to use the fleet as a scouting fleet as much as a trade armada. Furthermore, in the context of the first question, there does indeed seem to be an attempt by Beijing to offer a cleaner version of Zheng He as a form of PR spokesman from the distant past. Much of this line of thinking is as evidence has shown rooted both in China's conflict with Imperialistic powers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as presenting Beijing itself as an alternative trade partner than the United States and the European Union. With Zheng He China indeed has a sufficient symbol to present an effective form of propaganda in the figure of Zheng He.

Concerning the question regarding the invasion of Ceylon being a proto-imperialist venture on the part of Zheng He, there is also considerable evidence

to support this point of view. As explained in Chapter 2, Zheng He had invaded the portion of the kingdom ruled by the usurper Alaggakonora during Alaggakonora's civil war against the legitimate Tamil rulers of Gampola and Kotte. During Zheng He's attack on Alaggakonora's capital city, Zheng He managed to capture the ruler and bring him back to Nanjing to be judged by Zhu Di. While from the point of view of many in Ceylon, Alaggakonora may not have been a legitimate ruler, many still saw him as a warrior hero who resisted the Chinese incursion into Ceylon.

The kidnapping of Alagakkonora despite his supposed illegitimacy, could definitely be seen as aggressive move bordering on Imperialism. While the Chinese elected not to directly rule Ceylon, they still interfered in a civil war which was not theirs and the next ruler of Alakeswara's kingdom, legitimate or not, was still decided by Zhu Di and not the people of Ceylon. Wade also has a similar description for Zheng He's attack on Ceylon:

Perhaps the most telling as to the nature of the eunuch-led maritime voyages was the military invasion of Sri Lanka,<sup>246</sup> the capture of a local ruler, and his being carried back to the Ming court in modern Nan-Jing in 1411. Zheng, He invaded the royal city, captured the king, destroyed his military, and carried the king and his family members back to court. Some say that the Tooth Relic of the Buddha was taken, but there are no contemporary records that support this. As happened in similar scenarios in Yun-nan, the Ming appointed a puppet ruler to replace the king, presumably to act in ways beneficial to the Ming. The Chinese troops who returned from the expedition to Sri Lanka were rewarded in the same

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<sup>246</sup> Modern day name of Ceylon

manner and equivalent levels to those forces who invaded Dai Viet in 1406, suggesting similar aims of the forces.<sup>247</sup>

Wade and Levathes both seem to argue in favor that the attack on Ceylon was an aggressive move. Levathes does however note that on Zheng He's initial arrival, that Alakeswara did attempt to rob Zheng He of the treasure ship's loads of gold and precious materials and that was the catalyst for the battle.<sup>248</sup> However using this as an example to justify a subsequently bloody invasion followed by the kidnapping and forced abdication of a state's ruler seems somewhat dubious although admittedly even in modern times a forceful change of governance is considered a legitimate consequence of winning a war. The heart of the issue of this example is that it does poke a rather large hole in the narrative of Beijing's version of Zheng He that the PRC sells to foreign audiences. Even in the Chinese narrative of the event, Zheng He's actions can be seen as aggressive and there were further examples of aggressive hard power behavior in Java as well in 1407.<sup>249</sup> <sup>250</sup> Indeed, the hard power nature of some of Zheng He's action cannot be denied. The real question is however, what the general nature of the treasure voyages were. There were elements of both traditionally defined Imperialism as described by Wade in regard to Ceylon and Java and the pirate suppression campaign of Zheng He's first journey. However, many of the traditionally expansionist actions taken Zhu Di were land based in

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<sup>247</sup> Wade, "*The Zheng He Voyages: A re-assessment*," 50.

<sup>248</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 115.

<sup>249</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 53.

<sup>250</sup> Wade, "*The Zheng He Voyages: A re-assessment*," 49.

Vietnam whereas with the exception of Ceylon and Java were committed in the context of the Chinese tribute trade system which predated Zhu Di's reign by centuries and was practiced by numerous other dynasties.

The final question concerning Zheng He's actions is related more to recent events. The South China Sea dispute and the Daimyo/Sentamu Island dispute between China, Japan and Korea respectively has taken an interesting turn in recent times. In many of the PRC's disputes regarding overseas territory in neighboring sea regions, Zheng He's journeys have in recent decades been used in the South China Sea dispute by Beijing to give historical "precedence" to their territorial claims as well as justifying the use of the Chinese Navy to patrol in the area. Barr gives a good description and summary of these recent developments in the last decade:

The South China Sea boundaries are an especially problematic issue since there are overlapping unilateral claims to sovereignty over an assortment of semi-submerged islands. Eight states claim title to these South China Sea islands, which are important for several reasons; their position in the midst of strategically important commercial and military sea lanes, their utility for nearby fishing grounds and, last but not least, their supply of mineral resources. The islands are in fact one reason why Beijing has pushed the Zheng narrative in Southeast Asia. However, it's a mixed message, for Zheng's greatest political asset to the Ming was his role in re-establishing the tributary system of relations. Whilst Zheng may have achieved this through diplomacy and gift-giving, his large and well-manned armada must have helped awe-would-be enemies into agreement. As China would have it, the tributary was premised on unequal social relationships, but the relationship was like that between a father and son; unequal but benign.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Barr, *"Who's Afraid of China?"* 87.

Barr brings up an interesting point that while using the Zheng He story as a way to lay claim to uninhabited islands; such claims can prove to be a double-edged sword to Beijing where the uncomfortable subject of the tribute trade system is brought up. While the PRC's official explanation for the tribute trade system may seem outwardly benign, there is still an element of imperialism in it as even Barr admits is based on an unequal relationship in terms of trade treaties and implied submission. This is an interesting point to criticize and lay claims of hypocrisy on the part of the Chinese government, since the root of China's "century of humiliation" was rooted in the unequal trade treaties forced upon China by European powers and the United States. Nevertheless, Zheng He's journeys still have given China an effective PR spokesman in Zheng He showing a benign man who did not loot and plunder but instead brought trade and prosperity to the region, as well as using history for China to lay claim on territory in the South China Sea, which not coincidentally have strategic military and economic value due to their geographic location.

The BBC reported in 2015 that China has claimed to be the "historical owners" of the South China Sea since "ancient times" and the article mentions that with the exception of Zheng He's voyages, that China's historical claim was dubious at best due to China for most of its history having trouble controlling China's own coastlines.<sup>252</sup> Furthermore, in 2013 Professor Mohan Malik at *The*

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<sup>252</sup> Bill Hayton, "Tiny Islands Key to Ownership of South China Sea," *BBC News, Asia*, May 3, 2015.

*Diplomat* reported that a noted Asia-watcher Philip Bowring claims that China was a relative latecomer in the region as a maritime power historically. Malik claims that most of China's overseas claims can at best be traced back to Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist regime and that if there is any people who had a historical maritime claim to the region it was Malayo-Polynesian peoples who had traded in the era for centuries.<sup>253</sup> There is considerable evidence therefore that Beijing's claim on the regions and using Zheng He as an effective form of propaganda may not have the strongest amount of evidence to back it up, despite the claims of China's government. Therefore, while Beijing may currently be using Zheng He as PR for the time being, this method may prove more problematic to Beijing's ambitions due to the uncomfortable historical questions it brings up when Zheng He's actions are put under scrutiny combined with the relatively short time period Ming China held hegemony over the region compared to that of other nations and peoples. Going back to the question of whether Zheng He's actions can be considered Imperialism, the hard power nature of several incidents in his story cannot be historically denied. The real question is what was the nature of Zheng He's actions in terms of soft and hard power in general: hard and soft? In the final section of this chapter I will argue for the former rather than

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<sup>253</sup>Mohan Malik, "History the Weak Link in Beijing's Maritime Claims," *The Diplomat*, August 30, 2013.

the latter while still recognizing that Zheng He was known to engage in hard power politics despite Beijing's claims to the contrary.

### In Defense of the Confucius Institute: Sinophobia and Media Bias

The Confucius Institute certainly has not been a stranger to controversy in recent years. While it is hard to justify blatant attempts at suppressing academic freedom or restricting the hiring of teachers on religious grounds, such as adherents to the Falun Gong movement.<sup>254</sup> However in this era of “fake news” and “clickbait” it is also common for mass-hysteria and xenophobia to also be mobilized as a weapon against the Confucius Institute. As reprinted by Michael Barr, an article in the *Christian Science Monitor* uses a combination of both sinophobia and mass-hysteria to create a moral panic about the Confucius Institute:

Let us suppose that a cruel, tyrannical and repressive foreign government offered to pay for American teens to study its national language in our schools. Would you take the deal? Actually, we already have. Starting this fall, American high school students will be able to take an Advanced Placement (AP) course in “Chinese Language and Culture.” Developing the course and exam cost the College Board, which runs the AP Program, about [US]\$1.4 million. And half that sum was picked up by—you guessed it— the People’s Republic of China. That’s right. The same regime that has brought us public executions, forced labor camps, and Internet censors will soon be funding a language and culture class near you.<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> Marshall Sahlins, “China U”, *The Nation*, 12 November, 2013

<sup>255</sup> Jonathan Zimmerman, *Beware China’s Role in US Chinese Classes*. *Christian Science Monitor*, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006.

The article touches upon to common phobias: both the Sino phobic “othering” of China and playing on the moral fear of “corrupting the youth.” If the *Christian Science Monitor* is to be believed, it would seem that Chairman Mao never died and is indeed still ruling China. While there are valid fears presented in this article, such as being suspicious of a foreign government picking up the tab for funding of Chinese language courses, the article for the most part can be dismissed as fear mongering. China is presented as a nefarious nation that is plotting to corrupt the youth with its communist ideology and “repressive values” in a conspiratorial way that plays on the xenophobic tendencies that this article’s target audience is aiming for. The title: *Beware China’s Role in Us Chinese Classes* also has some Sino phobic undertones, implying China in itself is something to be feared when it comes to influencing education. Michael Barr also lists an incident that occurred in the Los Angeles suburb of Hacienda Heights, which has an unfortunate history of racial tensions between the white population and more recently arrived Chinese immigrants

By 2008, after decades of Chinese immigration into the region, Asians made up more than a third of the population, the same proportion as the city’s non-Hispanic whites. The area’s ethnic and racial make-up provided a backdrop to the CI dispute as ethnic Chinese comprised the majority of the school board whilst the student body was overwhelmingly Hispanic. Armed with signs that read “America, Not Confucius’ opponents vowed to unseat the four members of the five-person board who voted to accept the Hanan’s offer. One letter to the paper commented, “China already owns and [has] changed most of the shopping centers in Hacienda Heights. Do we really want them to change our minds too?”<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Michael Barr, *Who’s Afraid of China?* 70.



The Hacienda Heights incident where a mostly Asian school board accepted Hanan's offer also shows some of the simmering racial tension that also lies at the heart of Sino phobic sentiment. For example, if it were the Goethe Institute teaching German or the Académie Françoise teaching French in Hacienda Heights would there have been as much an outcry by the mostly white members of the community? Bobby Faker, one of the residents of Hacienda Heights was quoted by Jacob Adelman reporting for the *San Diego Union-Tribune* as saying "“These children have young brains that are very malleable and they can be indoctrinated with things that America would not like.”<sup>257</sup> Franker's comment mixes both Sino phobic sentiment and Cold War anti-communist rhetoric against China and the Confucius Institute while also subscribing to the justification of protection of children's minds, a common justification for moral panic. The Confucius Institute in the case of Hacienda Heights had no known controversies with the exception of the school board granting their funding for a language program that was in dire need of it. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Norman Hsu, a longtime school board member claimed he Heights had personally reviewed all of the teaching materials supplied from Hanban and nothing controversial or subversive to PRC interests was found. Furthermore, all of the teaching materials were also available for

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<sup>257</sup>Jacob Adelman, "Chinese gov't school grant divides SoCal community," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, April 24, 2010.

public inspection.<sup>258</sup> In the case of Hacienda Heights, there was no hard-documented evidence of any wrongdoing or subversion the Confucius Institute and indeed, it would seem that the Confucius Institute was being used as a scapegoat for the Sino phobic beliefs of certain members of the Hacienda Heights community. The Hacienda Heights controversy is a very good example of Sino phobic sentiment being used as criticism of the Confucius Institute. It is clear that it was the racial tensions of the community that had caused the controversy and unlike the controversy surrounding the University of Chicago, it is clear that the Confucius Institute was the victim in this situation. Therefore, there is evidence that Sinophobia or at least Xenophobia is used on occasion to criticize the Confucius Institute, even when there are cases that the Confucius Institute can be shown to have not done anything unethical.

Another defense for the Confucius Institute's position is the issue of media bias, namely the phenomenon of fake news and clickbait articles. Clickbait is defined by Merriam-Webster as: "something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click on a hyperlink especially when the link leads to content of dubious value or interest."<sup>259</sup> Fake news is a phenomenon where newspapers print clearly false or at minimum misleading new stories that wish to push a certain agenda, often that of political or cultural points of view. Fake news

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<sup>258</sup> Ching-Ching Ni, "Chinese Government's Funding of Southland School's Language Program Fuels Controversy", *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 2010.

<sup>259</sup> Merriam-Webster.com, Clickbait Definition, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/clickbait>, Accessed January, 2018.

became a part of popular discussion in the United States during the 2016 election between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, with both the left and the rightwing sectors of politics accusing the other of engaging in the practice of fake news. When it comes to newspaper pieces that are critical of the Confucius Institute, there are cases when clickbait sounding articles have been used in ways that might suggest an alternate agenda. For example, Hele C. Dale writing for rightwing online newspaper Breitbart wrote an opinion piece on Chinese soft power on August 1 2010 titled: *Red Alert: China Is Taking Over... With PR*. The article itself is very short and brings nothing but commonly known information such as the statistics on the size of the Confucius Institute and the amount of money Beijing has spent on PR efforts.<sup>260</sup> The sensational title, which would seem more appropriate for a shocking scoop rather than a rather basic list of statistics that are commonly known, is intended to generate clicks due to ad revenue even though the value of the piece is dubious at best.

Fake news on the other hand, can be a bit tricky being able to prove, as the story itself would normally have to be proven false. Since intent is hard to prove and many Fake News stories often use some kernels of truth to give credence to a story, one has to dig deep to avoid stories that outright lie or misinterpret truth. A common tactic with a fake news stories is to twist the truth

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<sup>260</sup> Helle C Dale, "*Red Alert: China Is Taking Over... With PR. Breitbart*," August 1, 2010.

often by using a clickbait title and misrepresenting a fact, statistic or interview with a person to suit a particular agenda. The Confucius Institute for reasons legitimate and illegitimate have made plenty of enemies both inside and outside academia and politics and many would have ample reason to slander or discredit them. It is therefore important to take a look at who is criticizing the Confucius Institute and for what reasons. For example, Marshall Shalin's may have some legitimate criticisms of the Confucius Institute and its practices but that also does not mean that he and other critics of the Confucius Institute are free from personal bias. News stories such as the Hacienda Heights debacle can be blown out of proportion, and the Confucius Institute has proven to be a perfect scapegoat for those who may fear and hate China for Sino phobic reasons rather than concerns regarding academic bullying

#### Response to Counter Thesis: An Appeal to the Middle Ground

Now that the criticisms regarding my position have been established, it would be prudent to perhaps find a middle ground between criticism of Zheng He and the Confucius Institute. In regard to Zheng He following certain practices that in the modern day would be considered Imperialist in modern day definitions of the term, it is also important to look at the tribute trade system as a system as a system of "soft power" Imperialism rather than the traditional "gunboat diplomacy" of 19<sup>th</sup> century European powers (although admittedly the Ceylon intervention

could also be seen as analogous to this concept as well). Modern day Chinese diplomacy also has some relation to Ming and Qing China's soft power tributary systems as well. Eric Tea Chow reporting for the New York Times in his article: *Paying tribute to Beijing: An ancient model for China's new power* compares modern day Chinese soft power diplomacy to the diplomacy of the Ming tribute trade system. Chow defines the tribute trade system by pointing out its three cardinal points:

First, China considered itself the "central heart" of the region; this tributary system assured China of its overall security environment. Second, to ensure its internal stability and prosperity, China needed a stable environment immediately surrounding the Middle Kingdom. Third, the Chinese emperor would in principle give more favors to tributary states or kingdoms than he received from them; for this generosity, the emperor obtained their respect and goodwill.<sup>261</sup>

As Chow shows, there is an idea "reciprocity" in the traditional tribute trade model. Namely, the Emperor would "reward" his client states by giving gifts and favors to its emissaries and better trade deals for acknowledgement of China as the center of the world as it was after all in Chinese thought the "Middle Kingdom". While this would seem more like hard power imperialism in the modern world, in its time period it could be considered a "softer" approach to international diplomacy. It is also important to consider that this relatively peaceful form soft power was being developed and implemented during the time of Zhu Di, who as we have seen through his invasions of Champa and Dai Viet

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<sup>261</sup> Eric Teu Chow, "Paying tribute to Beijing: An ancient model for China's new power", *New York Times*, Jan. 21, 2004.

was no stranger to using hard power means to achieve his goals and with Zheng He's fleet he certainly had the naval power to enforce a hard power stance with China's neighbors. Chow points out in his article that the PRC still follows this form of reciprocity and follows the concept "giving more and taking less." As a long-term strategy this would help increase China's "brand" internationally giving the PRC prestige and being seen as "generous" as a country promoting its "brand" is an important aspect of Nye's definition of soft power.<sup>262</sup>

This helps shed a bit of light on the "Imperialism" argument put forward by Wade. A middle-ground approach to Zheng He's actions may be the last problematic way to approach the subject of Zheng He's journeys. The conflict with Alakeswara for example has two very different narrations from the Ming point of view regarding Zheng He's actions and that of the Sinhalese point of view. The Ming saw themselves as being exasperated by the constant insult of a "rouge state" and took military action to save face and honor the emperor. The Sinhalese point of view from records of the time period portray Alakeswara as a national hero who fought and was defeated defending the honor of his kingdom.<sup>263</sup> Both narratives may have bits of truth in it but both have their biases as well as both of these narratives are meant to defend the national honor of China and Ceylon. A non-problematic position to take on Zheng He's position is somewhere between the praises of Levathes and Dryer and the condemnations

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<sup>262</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 90.

<sup>263</sup> Levathes, *When China Rules the Seas*, 116.

of Wade: That Zheng He was a product of his time and compared to later explorers he practiced soft power diplomacy far more often than that of hard power, but that does not mean he did not take hard power stance when necessary. However, it is also important not to buy into the narrative of a wholly peaceful Zheng He as promoted by the PRC. Zheng He may not have been an “imperialist” by the traditional definition, but the military nature of his explorations cannot be ignored either, despite them being closer to soft power ventures than military operations.

When it comes to the controversy surrounding the Confucius Institute there are a lot of examples to show that the Confucius Institute has a more dubious legitimacy. While indeed there have been situations where the Confucius Institute has been a victim of discrimination due to racial tensions in Hacienda Heights, there is a bit of irony and hypocrisy on the part of the Confucius Institute to claim discrimination when the organization itself has been known to use discriminatory hiring practices itself. One of the leading reasons for Marshall Sahlins and the American Association of University Professor’s criticism of the Confucius Institute was the University of Chicago being complicit in the Confucius Institute’s discriminatory hiring practices. Sahlins gives evidence of this:

Claims by officials of the Confucius Institute and the Center for East Asian Studies that the University of Chicago fully controls the hiring process of CI teachers from China turn out to be misleading. According to the Chicago faculty member in charge of engaging the Chinese teachers, Hanban recommends the candidate-whose eligibility is thereby limited by

PRC laws and custom: no Falun Gong, human rights advocates, etc.-and no teachers recommended by Hanban have been rejected by the university.<sup>264</sup>

Sahlins comments that this is proof that the University of Chicago before the cancellation of the contract with the Confucius Institute, was complicit in the PRC's discriminatory hiring despite rules and regulations of the University prohibiting such. McMaster University in Canada also cancelled their association with Hanban for similar reasons.<sup>265</sup> The overall point of these examples is to show that while there have been incidents where the Confucius Institute has been unfairly targeted, there are plenty of questionable incidents that give the Confucius Institute deserved scrutiny. A proper middle ground approach to this problem would be not to assume any intentional malice from the Confucius Institute and maybe look at it from a point of view of teacher training and misunderstanding of cultural norms. Perhaps if Confucius Institute teachers were better trained and educated on laws that govern discrimination in universities in the US and Canada for example, incidents such as those at McMaster and the University of Chicago may not have happened. Another possible solution to the problem of discriminatory hiring would be for Universities to come to an agreement with Hanban that allows the universities to have a say over the

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<sup>264</sup> Sahlins, *Academic Malware*, 32.

<sup>265</sup> James Bradshaw and Colin Freeze, *McMaster closing Confucius Institute over hiring issues*, *The Globe and Mail* February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2013,



Hanban hiring practices when Hanban sends its teachers to the university in question.

Overall, it is important to see the Confucius Institute as being an instrument of PRC soft power. Therefore, the Confucius Institute has every reason to suppress bad press and promote good press as they for better or worse are unofficial “diplomats” of the PRC, in some cases being the only exposure an American student may have with PRC representatives in a classroom setting. While it has accomplished the “brand” recognition that is important to Nye’s theory of soft power, it falls short in its charm offensive when running into the rules and regulations governing universities in North America, Europe and Australia. If the Confucius Institute hopes to succeed in North America, arrangements will have to be made to make sure that academic freedom and fair hiring practices are to be followed. It is important not to demonize the Confucius Institute but that does not mean they should be pandered to either. The middle ground approach therefore is the most constructive way to view criticism of the Confucius Institute, and in the case of China may prove a boon to the nation as it attempts to find legitimacy in its role as a future global power

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE FUTURE OF SOFT POWER STUDIES

*Political leaders have long understood that power comes from attraction. If I can get you to what I want, then I do not have to use carrots and sticks to make you do it. Whereas leaders in authoritarian countries can use coercion and issue commands, politicians in democracies have to rely more on a combination of inducement or attraction. Soft power is a staple of daily democratic politics. The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible assets such as attractive personality, culture, political values and institutions, and policies that are seen as legitimate or having moral authority. If a leader represents values that others want to follow, it will cost less to lead.*

*-Joseph Nye  
In "Soft Power"<sup>266</sup>*

*In a short period of time, Beijing has proven that it can shift its foreign policy quickly and woo the world, often focusing on countries America has alienated. China has drastically changed its image in many parts of the world from dangerous to benign. It may already be the preeminent power in parts of Asia, and it could develop China-centered spheres of influence in other parts of the globe, like Central Asia or Africa. American allies like Australia have moved closer to Beijing.*

*-Joshua Kurlantzick*

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<sup>266</sup> Joseph Nye, *Soft Power, The Means to Success in World Politics*, 6.

## The Importance of the Study of Soft Power in Medieval and Modern China

Now that the arguments for the connection between Ming and Modern China's practice of soft power has been established, it is important to show *why* that the points raised in this study are important and what use this study will have on future students of Chinese history and politics. Why for example, does studying Zheng He's life have any value besides what has been established in the paper? What use is there in studying the soft power nature of the Confucius Institute as a component of a larger soft power strategy of the PRC? The importance of studying soft power as a citizen of the United States or any other country is important in understanding international politics. In a time where isolationism is gaining traction in the United States today, there is a clear and present danger that the United States may find itself in a hard situation where the US ignores the value of soft power and China fills the soft power vacuum. Even ignoring geopolitical considerations for the United States, students of both Chinese history and Chinese politics will find a lot of value in the study of historical and modern soft power in China. The People's Republic of China is today a growing economy with an incredible amount of both soft and hard power

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<sup>267</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 226

as part of its foreign policy. However, there seems to be a consensus that soft power is a new or novel concept in Chinese geopolitics.

As this paper has argued, historical Chinese soft power has a long tradition and Zheng He is probably the most prominent example of it that can be found. Students of Chinese history may know who Zheng He was and that he is an example for soft power, but perhaps they do not connect the Treasure Voyages with the modern day soft power policy of the PRC. Therefore, this study has value in teaching students a different perspective, that soft power is a historical topic as well and not relegated to the halls of the Political Science departments. An MA student studying Chinese history for example, may wonder why they have to take political science or economics courses to get a history degree, perhaps thinking: what does this have to do with my field of study? This study can correct that assumption by showing the diversity the social sciences are indeed connected with one another by giving a clear example of different but related disciplines: The Journeys of Zheng He (history and geography) and the Confucius Institute (political science, geography, economics).

Students studying this topic of Chinese soft power will also get a good understanding of Beijing's "charm offensive" which is becoming one of the most debated topics in geopolitics today. China's ability to go from a rather isolated state with limited world relations to a twenty first century economic powerhouse can have many numerous explanations but one of the most prevalent is the charm offensive. It is important for students of Chinese history to look at the

success this has accomplished. As Joshua Kurlantzick points out, the pragmatic lengths that the PRC goes to be successful in “being everyone’s friend” would have been unthinkable to the CCP old guard:

In supposedly trying to be everyone’s friend (Taiwan and Japan stand as notable exceptions), Beijing was displaying a type of pragmatism unthinkable to a previous generation of Chinese leaders. For past leaders, ideology defined relationships, trumping other factors. Now China would deal with any state it thought necessary to its aims. In the Philippines, China would ask to mediate between the government and communist insurgents, so alienating the communists that they started threatening Chinese businesspeople investing in the Philippines. In Nepal the Chinese government would offer support to the monarchy, even reportedly sending truckloads of arms and ammunition, despite the fact that the king was fighting-and eventually lost to-a *Maoist* rebel group pursuing the very military tactics that Chairman Mao himself had pioneered.<sup>268</sup>

This new pragmatic approach to world politics practiced by Beijing should be of great interest to students of history and political science. The PRC which began as a revolutionary Communist state and the founder of the Maoist doctrine was now supplying a “reactionary” force against Maoist rebels. This pragmatic approach to world politics may be part of the explanation of how China's economy is booming today. However, there are still massive problems with authoritarianism that have been having a bit of push-back under the tenure of President Xi Jinping. Xi Jinping has indeed been using China’s soft power as a way to woo countries that have been alienated from the United States and its allies as a way to re-assert China’s role in the world. However, there have been a lot of hard power efforts being made under President Xi’s tenure such as the

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<sup>268</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 45.

artificial islands that China have been creating in the South China sea as a way to claim territory, backed by military force. A lot of Xi's assertiveness is reaching back to China's past when China was the strongest world power and is correcting it's "century of humiliation" in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An article in the *New York Times* written by Ian Johnson gives examples of this kind of thinking prevalent in Chinese geopolitics regarding the "recapture of glory." Ian Johnson writes:

Two weeks after taking China's top office in November 2012, Xi Jinping took part in what seemed like a throwaway photo op. He took his top lieutenants to the newly renovated National Museum of China, a vast hall stuffed with relics of China's glorious past: terra-cotta soldiers from Xi'an, glazed statues from the Tang dynasty and rare bronzes from the distant Shang dynasty. But Mr. Xi chose as his backdrop a darker exhibition: "The Road of Rejuvenation." It tells the story of how China was laid low by foreign countries in the 19th and 20th centuries but is now on the path back to glory. There, in front of images of China's subjugation, Mr. Xi announced that his dream was to complete this sacred task. This soon became the "China Dream" and has shaped his rule ever since.<sup>269</sup>

Johnson also writes extensively in the article about Xi Jinping's authoritarian policies that make him stand out from other leaders in post-Mao China who were less bold and out in the open about authoritarian practices and indeed were open to reform. Johnson now argues that many of those aspects of reform have dried up and practices by Xi Jinping like his anti-corruption campaign have been used to target political rivals.

The study of China's charm offensive is also important in understanding the motivations of the charm offensives of China's neighbors. For example, India

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<sup>269</sup> Ian Johnson, "Xi Jinping and China's New Era of Glory", *New York Times*, October 13, 2017.

has become something of a rival to China both in a hard power military sense with a clear example being the recent showdown between Chinese and Indian military forces over a remote Himalaya mountain pass that has the potential to explode into a wider conflict.<sup>270</sup> But perhaps it's the soft power cultural war between India and China that has been emerging as a threat to China's soft power efforts by India making similar gains through its unique film industry aka "Bollywood." Amy Qin writing for the *New York Times* explains these recent events concerning the release for the Indian movie *Dangal*:

While China's film industry has long sought both to emulate and compete with Hollywood, the runaway success of "Dangal" has prompted Chinese production companies to turn their gaze from West to East. Suddenly, Chinese companies are racing to snap up all things Bollywood — partnerships and distribution rights, but also Indian directors and screenwriters. And that has led to some unease. China and India are engaged in a wary competition for regional influence and leadership. For much of the summer, the two nations were locked in a border standoff over a remote mountain pass in the Himalayas. But more and more, the two Asian giants are also competing to project soft power — or cultural influence — outside their borders. And "Dangal" has revived concerns in China that it is falling behind.<sup>271</sup>

Judging from Qin's article it would seem that India has learned a great deal from the PRC's charm offensive and has launched a soft power initiative of its own, focusing on its very successful film industry. India has become in many the ways the new rising star of Asia and by harnessing a charm offensive of their own, India has shown that it may emerge as a serious rival to Beijing.

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<sup>270</sup> Annie Gowan and Simon Denyer, "China and India Are Dangerously Close to Military Conflict in the Himalayas", *Washington Post*, August 17 2017.

<sup>271</sup> "Amy Qin, China Fears India May Be Edging It Out in Culture Battle", *New York Times*, September 30 2017.

Geopolitically speaking, this could have major consequences in regard to border skirmishes and other hard power military actions that the two rising states may engage in. For the time being however, India has mostly been content with achieving soft power through its film industry which was even predicated by Joseph Nye all the way back in 2005.<sup>272</sup> Beijing is therefore not alone in the charm offensive business and may find some healthy competition from India in the future.

Another use for the study of soft power, is studying how Zheng He's historical narrative has been shaped and modified over the centuries. In Chapter Five we examined how Zheng He has been used as a sort of "PR" representative for Beijing's geopolitical aims. There are also other narratives that show an interesting evolution of Zheng He's story such as local legends that bear some connection to the Zheng He story. For example, in Malacca there is the legend of "The Sultan's Bride" where supposedly the ruler of Malacca at the time Mansur Shah was wed to a Chinese princess named Hang Libo who was supposedly in this legendary account, escorted to Malacca by Zheng He, as Louise Levathes explains:

There is a story every schoolchild in Malacca learns. It is a tale about a beautiful Chinese princess named Hang Libo, whom Zheng He was supposed to have escorted to Malacca to become the bride of Sultan Masnur Shah. So that the princess would not be lonely in her new home, her father sent five hundred maidens with her, who eventually also married and settled at the base of a hill near Malacca's harbor that became known as Bukit China, or China Hill. The princess converted to

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<sup>272</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 88.



Islam and bore the sultan a son named Mimat, and the descendants of the noble maidens were said to be the nucleus of Malacca's large Chinese community.<sup>273</sup>

Although there is no hard-historical evidence for this event and marriage happening, it is still interesting to consider the fact that the treasure voyages have been used as a method of national pride for China but also Malacca as well (or at least by Malacca's significant Chinese minority). There is a lot of historical value in studying legends such as the Sultan's Bride in understanding international relations and how different countries can share national heroes or at the very least have a connection to them. These stories also have a use in the diplomacy of the PRC as it can be used to claim a cultural connection between China and Malacca and Malaysia in general. The Chinese minority in Malaysia have also seen the value of emphasizing the ties between Malaysia and China by using Zheng He as a common uniting historical figure between the two nations. In 2006 on the site of the warehouse complex Guan Chang, which was founded by Zheng He, the Malaysian government created the Cheng Ho Cultural Museum, which has exhibits on the life and travels of Zheng He.<sup>274</sup> Indeed, Zheng He's historical appeal has shown that nations outside of China can benefit from the story of Zheng He in a soft power sense. Zheng He sailed all over the South China Sea and Indian Ocean so nations like Malaysia, especially

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<sup>273</sup> Levathes, *When China Ruled the Seas*, 183.

<sup>274</sup> Edward Wong, Celebrating the Legacy of a Chinese Explorer, *New York Times*, Dec 18 2014.

if they are trying to gain greater relations with Beijing, can benefit by seeing themselves as part of the Zheng He story. This has given a lot of soft power to Beijing as the historical connection between the two nations and a shared national hero can be seen as a force of unity and as a symbol of continuing relations between Malaysia and China that stretch back to the Ming Dynasty. While the “Sultan’s Bride” may be a legend, the study of legends such as The Sultan’s Bride and how they are used in the modern day can be of extreme use to students of soft power and geopolitics as well as students of history.

Overall, the importance of studying medieval and modern Chinese soft power cannot be understated. In a modern world where China and other nations are reaping the benefits of soft power it would be wise to gain an understanding of the historical basis and success of soft power in Chinese history. Zheng He and the Confucius Institutes are of course only two examples, but they serve as two very large and important ones. By using these examples, we can see that both Zheng He and the Confucius Institute both have soft power qualities to them that can be used to both praise and criticize China’s embrace of soft power. Zheng He has proved a huge boon to China, by giving the nation a national hero that transcends borders but also has been used as a way to claim territory in the South China Sea and has been used as a propaganda tool to emphasize the “close relationship” between China’s neighbors, even if that “close relationship” was accomplished through the lens of China being the “Middle Kingdom” and under the tribute trade system where China’s “younger brothers” were clearly the

junior partners in such a relationship. This leaves one to ponder if the tribute trade system is truly abolished or if it has been remade under a form that is more acceptable to modern day geopolitics. Likewise, the Confucius Institute has proven to be very successful and beneficial in developing nations where Chinese is quickly becoming a common second language but on the darker end of things, the Confucius Institute has caused numerous problems concerning academic freedom as well as discrimination in its hiring practices which in some cases make American universities complicit in an action that is illegal.<sup>275</sup> Therefore, it is very imperative that the study of the history of soft power in China be considered an important component in sinology

#### Final Conclusions on Zheng He and the Confucius Institute

The research of soft power concerning Zheng He and the Confucius Institute in the realm of soft power has resulted into several narratives concerning the portrayal of Zheng He's journeys and the Confucius Institute's soft power actions. Zheng, He as we have seen is a complex hero figure whose status as a national hero and legend often conflicts and has indeed grown as large as the actual historical narrative. Likewise, the Confucius Institute has been heavily criticized for reasons both legitimate and illegitimate but it cannot be denied they have had a positive impact on developing nations. Ethics aside, The Confucius

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<sup>275</sup> Matthew Robertson, "At US Universities, Confucius Institutes Import Discrimination", *The Epoch Times*. August 23, 2011.

Institute and the Zheng He story both rely heavily on soft power both in a historical sense and in a sense of purpose since soft power is how these historical and modern symbols of Chinese soft power function. Zheng He as we have seen, has immense soft power value as both a historical figure and as a legendary one. Zheng He can indeed be seen as larger than life and his accomplishments either real or legendary have played a role in China's soft power charm offensive. The Confucius Institute, has been both a boon Africa as far as second language proficiency goes, but that does not mean there has been opposition on this front too as some citizens for South Africa have raised concerns that the teaching of Mandarin comes at the expense of learning local languages.<sup>276</sup> Furthermore as stated in preceding chapters, there is also a worry that the PRC is determining what exactly constitutes the Chinese language. For example, the Confucius Institute exclusively teaches the Mandarin language and simple Chinese characters, neglecting other Chinese languages such as Cantonese and not teaching the more complex characters which may have implications of a political nature. Michael Churchman representing the Australian National University writes an informative piece regarding these teaching techniques centered around the Confucius Institute's "Tenth Principle" in its bylaws that state only Mandarin can be used:

This Tenth Principle is the only explicit evidence for the exclusion of certain subjects from the teaching syllabus of Confucius Institutes, but few

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<sup>276</sup> Lily Kuo, "South Africa's Schools Will Start teaching Mandarin and continue neglecting local languages," *Quartz Africa*, August 12, 2015.

commentators seem to have paid it much attention. The significance of the regulation, however, is clear: not only is it against the rules to teach any Chinese language other than *Putonghua* within a Confucius Institute, it is also forbidden to teach students the non-simplified characters still widely used in Taiwan, Macau, Hong Kong and many other Chinese communities beyond the direct control of the Chinese Communist Party. The reason why the most obvious interdiction covering subject matter in the Confucius Institutes has been so little discussed probably stems from the fact that although outsiders are always on the lookout for evidence that the Chinese party-state is trying to exercise control over prominent political issues, linguistic matters are generally regarded as being relatively insignificant.<sup>277</sup>

Hanban controlling language teaching as implied from Churchman is an exercise in soft power in itself deeply rooted in political conflict. As Churchman implies it's also something largely ignored as most criticisms of the Confucius Institute tend to be "bigger" targets such as academic freedom and discriminatory hiring. Defenders of the Confucius Institute will of course point out that Germany and France also have cultural and language teaching center's such as Goethe Institute and Alliance Francaise respectively. The main difference between these organizations however is that they are nominally independent institutions and they do not embed themselves in foreign universities but instead act as separate entities.<sup>278</sup>

The Confucius Institute overall, has proven to be an effective tool of PRC soft power being wielded in modern times. The organization itself however has

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<sup>277</sup> Michael Churchman, "Confucius Institutes and Controlling Chinese Languages," *China Heritage Quarterly*, 26. (2011).

<sup>278</sup> Jessica Shepard, "China's Confucius Institute: Political or Cultural Bodies?" *The Guardian*, November 6, 2007.

been a bit of a “double edged sword” depending which country university the Confucius Institute is being hosted by. The University of Chicago shows the darker side of this mode of soft power and Marshall Sahlins raises good arguments against the abuses of student’s academic freedom and other criticisms of the Confucius Institute.

This not to suggest however that the Confucius Institute has not been a victim of false accusations such as the Hacienda Heights incident which was rooted not only regular Sinophobia but also in the simmering racial tension of the residents, using the Confucius Institute as a convenient scapegoat. Despite all of this however, the Confucius Institute remains a soft power force and a lot of its success at least in universities in the United States, Canada and Europe lies in its enticing funding model. After all a university, especially an underfunded one, would have a lot of trouble resisting forming a partnership with Hanban, an organization that will provide funding, teachers and textbooks from its own money. This enticing model is perhaps one of the most apparent pieces of evidence linking the Confucius Institute to soft power. This model is a perfect example of China’s soft power policy of giving more than China receives. A Confucius Institute will typically give a start-up fund usually up to \$100,000 USD per annum of the duration of the signed contract which is usually for a period of five years. The university usually in return agrees to provide accommodation and

infrastructure support for the host teachers.<sup>279</sup> This however, gives the Confucius Institute a rather powerful bargaining position. If a university brings in a speaker that is controversial to the PRC, the Confucius Institute can threaten to withdraw funding in protest or encouraging Chinese nationals not to enroll in the university, putting a financial and administrative burden on the school's staff.<sup>280</sup>

The Confucius Institute has shown that it is a soft power force that has given China considerable leverage and power concerning how Chinese culture is perceived by foreigners. It has shown itself to be an efficient model and despite criticisms from the opponents of the Confucius Institute, it remains as one of the foundations of modern Chinese soft power as seen through the lens of the greater charm offensive which is the central part of China's soft power policy. While China in recent years, especially under President Xi has been following a hard power policy regarding territorial disputes, the charm offensive itself is still a huge part of Chinese foreign policy. Even with its numerous criticisms it would be difficult to deny the enormous amount of soft power the Confucius institute has brought the PRC. It has also served as an example of the pragmatism of the new rising China. An organization named after an ancient philosopher who was vilified by the founder of the PRC is now trying to charm the world and putting out a narrative that China is a peaceful, happy and prosperous nation with a rich

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<sup>279</sup> Michael Barr, *Who's Afraid of China? The Challenge of Chinese Soft Power*, 63.

<sup>280</sup> Sahlins. *Confucius Institutes: Academic Malware*, 28.

culture. The traditional Chinese culture that is taught in its classrooms was a culture that Mao the founder of the modern nation of the People's Republic of China deeply loathed and tried to destroy in the Cultural Revolution. Indeed, the Confucius Institute is a good representation of the pragmatism that is being followed under Chinese foreign policy in general and may be the greatest weapon China wields in its soft power arsenal.

Zheng He himself in summation, also represents a powerful component of both historical and modern day soft power. In the second chapter we established Zheng He as a historical character in regard to his actions and the effects they had on soft power historically. In the fifth chapter we examined Zheng He's actions in a modern day soft power light or rather how the Chinese government makes use of the Zheng He story to use as a way to explain China's historical "harmonious" relationship with its neighbors. But what are the other uses that studying Zheng He in the realm of both soft and hard power have in understanding modern day politics and culture? We have already examined Zheng He's record in his own actions regarding whether or not he had Imperialistic tendencies and came to the conclusion that while Zheng He indeed had some imperialistic or rather proto-imperialistic tendencies, the voyages were for the most part peaceful and focused on trade. However, Geoff Wade's argument against Zheng He seems a bit harsh and overzealous (although Wade's point that the PRC uses his story as a way to claim territory or falsely claim that Zheng He was an arbiter of peace in the Indian Ocean is indeed a



valid one). Hansen has a very good counterargument that gives a sufficient explanation of the failure of expansionism during the Yongle Emperor Zhu Di's reign and Zheng He's journeys:

To argue that the Chinese lacked the stomach for empire would be too simple. Zheng He's men did commit atrocities, and they did not hesitate to forage for and even steal food when the local people did not provide it. In one instance, the Chinese ships killed five thousand pirates in Sumatra on the Malacca Strait, and in another, they became enmeshed in a dispute between two rulers in Siam and Java. But these military campaigns were exceptions. The Chinese had reservations about conquering less civilized people so far removed from their own cultural sphere. The objects of Ming attempts at conquest, the Mongols to the north and the Vietnamese to the south, both lay directly on China's borders, and their residents had long exposure to Chinese ways.<sup>281</sup>

Hansen's argument attempts to dispel the idea that European style colonialism and imperialism is comparable to the Ming conquests of Vietnam and Mongolia. Even the conquest of Vietnam was not a long-time occupation since after Zhu Di's death the troops were withdrawn and the invasion deemed a failure twenty years later.<sup>282</sup> While it is indeed true that Zheng He was not perfect and did indeed engage in atrocities as Hansen argues, they were after all exceptions to the main rule and arguably often were in response to aggression such as in Ceylon or the suppression of pirates in Sumatra. It can be easily explained that Zheng He was following the "carrot and stick" approach to soft power as first described by Nye. As was noted previously, Kurlantzick gave a wider definition of soft power, describing it as "anything outside the security realm" and arguing that

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<sup>281</sup> Hansen, *The Open Empire*, 360.

<sup>282</sup> Hansen, *The Open Empire*, 354.

sanctions and other economic punishments can be seen as a form of soft power.<sup>283</sup> In the context of the tribute trade system which Zheng He operated under we can see this system as an economic weapon in itself that Zheng He and Zhu Di wielded with great effect. After all, if the emperor were to restrict trade with foreign powers that could be as much a punishment as a military attack or other hard power method, due to the crippling of the economies China's neighbors would suffer if the emperor were willing to restrict trade. Zheng He's kidnapping of king Alakeswara could also be seen as a soft power action in a sense since the emperor decided to spare his life rather than execute him.<sup>284</sup> The humiliation of Alakeswara was considered to be enough along with replacing him with a king friendlier to Ming interests. The soft power element in this example is that by sparing the king, emperor Zhu Di showed himself to be simultaneously as the dominant power powerful party but also willing to show mercy and being quick to explain that if Alakeswara were more diplomatic with Zheng He's fleet, he would not be in the position he was now. Carrots and sticks, indeed.

Zheng He as both a historical figure and a modern day legendary figure in southeast Asia has indeed also shown the power a good story has in the study of soft power. In summation, Zheng He's story remains a powerful narrative in Chinese politics and has been previously been shown to be used in politics today, especially in territorial claims. But what about soft power elements of a

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<sup>283</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 5.

<sup>284</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans of the Early Ming Dynasty*, 71.

different kind like popular culture? With the story of Zheng He becoming more popular around the world, how long till we see a Zheng He film in Hollywood or be playing roleplaying fantasy video games set in worlds that are based on the Ming era age of sail? In China this may be already happening since Zheng He's story in the last few decades have been something of a sensation and been a huge part of national pride. In 2009, CCTV created a fifty-nine-episode period TV drama directed by Ma Xiao and Liu Hiatiao based on Zheng He's life titled, *Zheng He Xia Xiyang*.<sup>285</sup> It is interesting to wonder how long it will take for a western company such as Netflix to make their own series as Zheng He's popularity and story is becoming more known in countries like the United States. If Chinese television and movie companies could take advantage of this possible rising market it could be another method of soft power that the PRC can engage in. The use of Zheng He in popular culture could give China considerable power in shaping the narrative of Zheng He's story as well. Clearly, the future potential of Zheng He in popular culture as a soft power icon could prove to be lasting and powerful indeed.

Zheng He has proven to be a perfect example of the historical connection of China to soft power politics. This is an interesting turn of events since due to the interference of Confucian scholar officials, his story may not have been told at all. While it has been previously stated, a good review of the actions of the

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<sup>285</sup>Movie Database: *Zheng He Xia Xiyang*: [www.themoviedb.org/tv/34422-zheng-he-xia-xiyang?language=en](http://www.themoviedb.org/tv/34422-zheng-he-xia-xiyang?language=en)

scholar officials should be given to highlight how close this incredibly important historical event was nearly lost to history and thus lost to the study of early Chinese soft power. Shin-shan Henry Tsai gives a good summation of the efforts that went into suppressing Zheng He's historical record:

But as fascinating as these voyages were, Ming Chronicles only used some 700 words in the 330 chapters of Ming official history to describe such epic events. And perhaps because Zheng He was considered one of the "rapacious eunuchs" by his literati rivals, official Ming historians cared to spare only thirty words to identify Zheng He, the half man. In fact, we might not even know about Zheng He and his most significant contributions to maritime explorations had it not been for the three little books written by Zheng He's subordinates. One is called *Yingyai shenglan* or *The Overall Survey of the Ocean's Shores*, dated 1433, written by Ma Huan; the second one was entitled, *Xingcha shenglan* or *The Overall Survey of the Starry Rift*, dated 1436 and authored by Fei Xin; and the third one, written by Gong Zhen, was called *Xinyang fanguo zhi* or *Description of the Barbarian Countries of the West*. Based on these three books, plus many newly discovered monuments, artifacts, and other related sources, recent scholars, many of whom are Europeans and Japanese, have been able to reconstruct a clearer picture of these more extraordinary but least known-so far as the Occidental world is concerned-maritime activities of the fifteenth century.<sup>286</sup>

Shin-shan Henry Tsai's example shows how dangerously close the historical record was in losing the Zheng He story. This would have had a detrimental effect on soft power studies as Zheng He is one of the most cited examples of historical Chinese soft power and this very study itself would likely either not exist or would have had to use other less-documented historical examples. Indeed, it was not until 1905 when Chinese revolutionary Ling Qichao (1873-1929) a reformer and participant in the late Qing Dynasty's Hundred Days

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<sup>286</sup> Shin-shan Henry Tsai, *The Eunuchs of the Ming Dynasty*, 154.

Reform and one of the historical figures who helped modernized China, published an article in his newspaper *Xinmin Congbao* titled: *Zheng He: A Great Navigator of our Times*, which brought Zheng He back into popular Chinese historical thought. Ling Qichao compared Zheng He to Columbus and used him as an example to be followed, especially in light of China's recent humiliating defeats to European powers in the previous century.<sup>287</sup> If not for the tireless efforts of scholars in the recent centuries, Zheng He may have been regulated to those thirty humiliating words in the official Ming chronicles. In effect since soft power is overall a method of wielding influence, the actions of the Confucian scholar officials could also be seen as an example of soft power in itself, using their influence with the emperor to destroy Zheng He's logs and essentially making him unknown until his re-discovery in his homeland in the early twentieth century.

The final question concerning Zheng He in conclusion of this study is *why* Zheng He is important as the best example of China's long history of soft power. Zheng He is more than just a man, but also serves as a symbol. Although that enough isn't enough to explain *why* Zheng He, but it is a good start. The best example is due to how Zheng He's story is used as a PR tool for Beijing's expansionist policies in the South China Sea. Another example is how Zheng He is used to promote the idea of the glory of the Ming to the benefit of the Chinese

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<sup>287</sup> Dryer, *Zheng He and the Oceans in the Early Ming Dynasty*, 180.

state. Some of the claims used in promoting that glory regarding are dubious, with former president Hu Jintao even claiming that Zheng He had reached Australia.<sup>288 289</sup> However, even if some of the more outlandish territorial claims are untrue, the legendary Zheng He has proved a boon for Zheng He, especially domestically. The main reason however that Zheng He was chosen for this study was that he is probably the best known historical example of China having a soft power foreign policy long before the modern times. Indeed, due to the continued use of his story for propaganda purposes it can be argued that Zheng He lives until this day still serving the PRC as a soft power symbol.

#### Sailing Into the Horizon: Future Uses for This Research

Before this study concludes, it would be of great use to describe what future history students could use from this research of historical soft power. The research in this thesis has mostly focused on historical aspects of both Zheng He's life and the function and purpose of the Confucius Institute but that does not mean that future research in trying to prove China's soft power legacy should be solely focused on just Zheng He and the Confucius Institute. Research into the workings of the tribute trade system for example, which far predates the Ming

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<sup>288</sup> Bruce Jacobs. "China's Frail historical claims to the South China and East China Seas", *American Enterprise Institute*, June 26, 2014,

<sup>289</sup> Zoe Murphy, "Zheng He: Symbol of China's 'peaceful rise'", *BBC*, 28 July 2010,

and indeed could be said to have its beginnings in the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) could be and has in the past been used as a very informative way to study soft power in a historical sense in China. According to Michael Barr, even the philosopher Mencius (372-289 BC) had aspects of soft power in his teachings.<sup>290</sup> Michael Barr uses a passage from James Legge's translation of *The Works of Mencius* that shows that even in early Chinese history soft power was a concept known to the great sage:

There is a way to gain the whole world. It is to gain the people, and having gained them one gains the whole world. There is a way to gain the people. Gain their hearts, and then you gain them...If others do not respond to your love with love, look into your own benevolence; if others do not respond to your attempts to govern them, look into your own wisdom; if others do not respond to your courtesy, look into your respect. In other words, look into yourself whenever you fail to achieve your purpose. When you are correct in your person, the whole world will turn to you.<sup>291</sup>

Soft power is shown by Mencius (and also to an extent by Confucius in as shown in Chapter 4) as being an old concept in Chinese history, especially in philosophy. A prospective student studying both politics could gain further research about historical Chinese soft power. It is also important that hopefully further research into the nature of historical Chinese soft power can be influenced by this work, by examining philosophers such as Mencius and Confucius as well as looking at historical figures such as Zheng He and others. In order to fully understand the soft power practiced by Beijing today, it is important

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<sup>290</sup> Michael Barr, *Who's Afraid of China?* 25.

<sup>291</sup> Mencius, *Works of Mencius*, translated by James Legge. (New York: Pacific Publishing Studio, 1990), Book 4, Ch. 9.

to reach into the past and understand that soft power as both a philosophy and a political tactic have existed in China for centuries and continuing research on this topic would be of great benefit to the field of history.

In modern times, Beijing's soft power has grown to an incredible amount of influence rivaling even Washington in many respects. The research made in this master's thesis could help students further understand what a lot of the origins of Chinese soft power comes from and use that history to understand China's actions. China engages today in what Kurlantzick defines as "public diplomacy" which shows a serious departure from China's policies in the cold war era.<sup>292</sup> Part of this public diplomacy is being seen as more accommodating and is an integral part of the PRC's "peaceful rise". Concerning the Confucius Institute, Hanban's efforts can be considered part of this public diplomacy which is an integral part of the charm offensive.

Future students of politics and history, especially in the United States, may benefit greatly from this research. One of Nye's motivations for writing his book was that he believed that the United States had lost its grasp on why soft power was important and was indeed a contributing factor to America's victory in the Cold War.<sup>293</sup> It is no secret that Beijing's rise has worried many leaders in the United States and in order for the United States to catch up with the PRC's charm offensive, Washington will have to re-establish its "brand" by once again

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<sup>292</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 62.

<sup>293</sup> Nye, *Soft Power*, 147.



looking at soft power as a viable strategy. In the past, “blue jeans and rock and roll” were America’s charm offensive in the twentieth century and perhaps it is time for America to establish its “brand” as Nye would put it, once again. In the realm of politics by studying Beijing’s success with soft power the United States may once again keep its soft power hegemony which is just as powerful if not more than America’s hard power hegemony. To achieve this, Kurlantzick gives some good sage advice for future diplomats in the US Foreign Service:

Supporting public diplomacy, the United States will need to rethink its formal diplomacy-how diplomats operate on the ground, and how its top leaders interact with leaders and populaces from abroad. Some of these changes should steal ideas from China. China has pushed its diplomats to return to one country for multiple tours of duty and to learn local languages. Unlike China, the US foreign service cannot force its employees to go to any country, but the state department could more aggressively encourage its Foreign Service Officers to pick one region of the world (or even one country), specialize in that area, and return to it over and over.<sup>294</sup>

Kurlantzick’s advice of diplomats specializing in one particular country of study has some soft power merits to it. By having fully trained and linguistically educated diplomats, the US could give of the veneer of being a highly educated country with well-trained diplomats which could put forth a charm offensive of its own. The supreme irony is however that this is not a new concept in US foreign affairs, but in recent decades starting with the Bush Administration in the early 2000’s hard power has been seen as a more desirable outcome in US diplomacy. Perhaps it is time to take the theories put out by Nye to heart and for

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<sup>294</sup> Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*, 237.

Washington to reclaim its soft power legacy much as Beijing wishes to regain its legacy in the world after its “Century of Humiliation”. In any case, research such as presented in this paper may be useful to those same policy makers who want to understand the origins of Chinese soft power and future students who wish to gain knowledge about the soft power policies of Zheng He and the Confucius Institute may find the information contained here informative into their own research.

As Beijing’s stature rises, the whole world will have to look at the origins of this rise and its motivations, and perhaps by looking at the story of one eunuch admiral who bravely sailed the oceans to spread his culture and bring wealth and prestige to his nation may finally understand why China wishes to reclaim its legacy. There are many reasons, most stemming from China’s century of humiliation but as has been shown in this paper, China’s pride in its culture and accomplishments have also served as a reminder of how powerful China once was. Zheng He therefore is not just a symbol but a motivator, for China to once again reach out to the world and show off its wealth and prestige in an effort to charm others. As Zheng He once sailed around the South China Sea Indian Ocean in the fourteenth century, the Confucius Institute today travels around the world using the same velvet fist of charm and coercion to achieve its goals and through this institution, the PRC can shape the world opinion of what China is and what it should be. As the Confucius Institute sails into the horizon like Zheng He, will the Confucius Institute choose a path of charm or coercion?

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