



What Makes the Rise of China's Comprehensive National Power Possible?

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Abstract

After the 'Reforming and opening up' implemented by Deng Xiaoping, China has experienced the dramatic changes in the past forty years. While its comprehensive national power is increasing, China is trying to enhance the international image in order to gain the initiative in international affairs. The rise of the national power raises a solid foundation for China to take part in the international affairs actively. This article argues that the rapid economic development of China is the main factor that attracts the attention of the world. Notably, China's infrastructure development and outbound investment have become key links in the growth of the national power. However, by analyzing the reasons for the deteriorating relations between China and the core western countries of the world. This article investigates that there exist many problems with China's soft power output. One of the critical issues is that wolf warrior diplomacy causes savage foreign propaganda. Moreover, this article implies that the peaceful rise of China is predictable in the future, due to the inseparable relationship between China and the rest of the world at the economic level under the globalization system.

Keywords

Infrastructure, Belt and Road Initiative, Soft power, Wolf warrior diplomacy, Chinese global image

1. Economic makes national power

Infrastructure is an important factor in measuring a country's economic development and overall national strength. For many developing countries, the shortcoming of infrastructure is an important issue that their governments urgently need to address. In some medium-developed countries, where infrastructure development is also flawed, investment in infrastructure development is an important tool for their governments to maintain their stability. Asian development Bank (ADB) asserts that Infrastructure needs in developing Asia and the Pacific will exceed \$22.6 trillion through 2030, or \$1.5 trillion per year, if the region is to maintain growth momentum, according to a new flagship report by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The estimates rise to over \$26 trillion, or \$1.7 trillion per year, when climate change mitigation and adaptation costs are incorporated (Erik, 2017). These data indicate that the demand of the infrastructure is increasing over the recent years.

At the same time, the economic rise of China is impressive, which relies on the exports and investment of the infrastructure. China has proposed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which views foreign investment in infrastructure development as the most important global development strategy. BRI set up the cooperation across Asia, Africa and Europe. There is no doubt that the BRI is an expansionist initiative which aims to promote Chinese interests from Asia to Europe and beyond (Dunford Liu, 2019). Several studies have shown that the BRI indeed has a posi-

tive effect on China's economic development and has brought closer relationships with the participating countries of the BRI, in some countries and regions with lower levels of development (e.g., Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan). It is hard for them to attract investment and aids from developed countries, and their governments struggle to address economic development issues. Chinese investments in these countries have been more successful after China provided loans and infrastructure assistance. By September 2018, under the BRI framework, China had signed cooperation agreements with over 130 countries and organizations, conducted institutionalized industrial cooperation with over 30 countries and constructed 82 overseas economic and trade cooperation zones in 24 countries, while Chinese companies had invested over \$50 billion, creating nearly 200,000 local jobs (Woodward, 2017). Through the Belt and Road, China has been strengthening its economic cooperation with various countries around the world. BRI has contributed positively to the development of infrastructure in other countries while enhancing their economic situation.

Furthermore, through its infrastructure investments, China is trying to make the countries that benefit from the BRI dependent on the Chinese economy, thereby further enhancing China's economic power and international discourse. The core concept of the BRI is to build "a community with a shared future for mankind", which is presented by XI JINPING in 2017. The essential aim behind the concept is to establish a new world order with China at its core. China seeks to counter these strategies through care in the exercise of "predominant power" and emphasis on non-interference and the economic advantages of closer cooperative relationships with China, China's "spirit of reciprocity" and "win-win" economic benefit (Content Engine LLC, 2021). For the less developed countries that have benefited from the BRI, Chinese investments have saddled them with huge national debts. China has used the BRI to create the appearance of a bilateral partnership in the spirit of win-win and reciprocity. In fact, China is trying to control these countries in international cooperation through debt. Many countries must reconsider their strategic options and have gradually started to move towards China while forming alliances with the US.

BRI is gradually turning the "Three Worlds Theory" into a reality. China's tremendous achievements in economic development have become the most significant part of China's national power. China is using the BRI to expand its international influence by targeting infrastructure development and challenging the US dominance of the world. From the trade war waged by the US against China, the US perceives the deepening dependence of the US economy on China in the process of globalization, deeply appreciates the great challenge from Chinese economic and tries to blockade China in the economic sphere to prevent the further expansion of BRI. From this, the conclusion can be drawn that the high rate of economic development is the most important part of China's national power. The economy is the most solid guarantee for China to gain attention and discourse in the international community.

2. Purpose on "Wolf warrior diplomacy"

China has gained a great deal of attention from the world through its rapidly increasing economic power, but behind the economic success, the imbalance in China's national power has become a major obstacle to its further development. China has maintained three decades of stable development through a conservative foreign policy. But as China's image gradually expanded into the world, its weak soft power struggled to maintain its image as a great power. This is reflected in China's constant attempts to export Chinese culture, values, ideology and models to the world in order to enhance its international influence and status. However, it is difficult to shake the Western value system with liberalism at its core. On the one hand, in the context of globalization, China is in a "deficit" relationship with the world in terms of soft power, as the culture of Japan and other Western countries is imported into China on a large scale, while China is unable to form an effective export. On the other hand, China has struggled to respond effectively to the attacks by Western countries on the lack of democracy, liberty and human rights in China. Rather, it is the "wolf warrior diplomacy" that is used to stir up nationalist sentiment within China through savage propaganda. The savage propaganda has led to a rift in values and ideology between China and the rest of the mainstream world.

"Wolf warrior diplomacy" means that China uses fierce attitude and savage propaganda to respond to criticism from other countries about the issues on Chinese society and its international behavior. However, the Chinese leaders have thrown themselves into a trap. On the one hand, they promised the world a temperate and benevolent China. On the other hand, they promised the internal public a strong and decisive China (Pal, 2020). "Wolf warrior diplomacy" has a negative effect on Chinese international image formation. The recent arm-twisting with Australia, its continuous disagreements with the US, its bullying tactics in the South China Sea is making more and more countries apprehensive of the Chinese. Add to it the coronavirus, which originated in China and has now engulfed the world for a complete year, one can see the coming together of nations opposed to the Chinese (Silver, Devlin, &

Huang, 2020). An anti-China front is rapidly and comprehensively forming in the developed world, and the number of important countries supporting and sympathizing with China on all fronts is decreasing significantly. China's soft power has come to a standstill amid anti-Chinese sentiment around the world. The Chinese government has tried to build up an image of a fighter against hegemony to gain the sympathy of other countries, but this strategy has clearly failed.

Why the Chinese government still insists on the "Wolf warrior diplomacy" when the Chinese Communist Party has noticed that it will bring about the discontents and conflicts from the other countries? A majority in each of the 14 countries surveyed has an unfavorable view of China. In most countries, around three-quarters or more see the country in a negative light. In Spain, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands, the U.S., the UK, South Korea, Sweden and Australia, negative views have reached their highest level in the 12 or more years that Pew Research Center has been polling in these countries (Pew Research Center, 2020). The answer to this question can also approximately explain the reason why it is difficult for China to improve its international image in order to enhance its soft power.

A persuasive explanation is that the Chinese government continues to prove the legitimate for the Chinese Communist Party's rule. Sociologist and political philosopher Max Weber defines that legitimacy does not necessarily imply any sense of rationality, right, or natural justice. Rather, domination is legitimate when the subordinate accepts, obey, and consider domination to be desirable, or at least bearable and not worth challenging (Weber, 1946). "Wolf warrior diplomacy" was not really meant to inform actual foreign policy. It was an attempt to create a national antagonism between China and the free world, thus stirring up nationalist sentiment domestically and making the Chinese people unconsciously stand on a united front with the Party. To maintain what Max Weber called the legitimacy of governing while maintaining the satisfaction of the people with the Chinese Communist Party. Over the years, there have been remarks about the need for gratitude for Taiwanese, remarks about Hong Kong's protests are influenced by the Western countries, remarks about Japan's never apologizing for World War II, and remarks on the justice of the party and government. Speeches about the harm to the Chinese people have infiltrated and occupied the mainstream. At this level, "Wolf warrior diplomacy" has already achieved a certain objective at a certain level: stirring up nationalist sentiments in the country to deflect the social and political crisis in China.

"Wolf warrior diplomacy" has gone too far and not only caused unprecedented nationalist sentiment in China, but also created a state of hostility between China and other major countries. In such a situation, even if China did act in a way that would positively help the world's development, it would not be praised by major countries. For example, China's positive cooperation on environmental issues and vaccines has been met with resistance and competition from the US in return. China also sees the US as the biggest driver of undermining Chinese interests. Chinese mainstream media will not promote any positive behavior from the US, instead portraying the US as the symbol of hegemonic and power politics. Such a relationship is highly detrimental to China's image enhancement. On the one hand, the US is unshakeable in its international position due to its great comprehensive power. On the other hand, China's strong nationalism makes the Chinese people extremely sensitive. Crossing the border by other countries would draw an overreaction and strong affirmation from China. Combining with China's frequent actions in the Taiwan Strait. The world can hardly believe that China is a country that believes in peace. If the situation continues, the possibility of a rapprochement between China and the West keeps declining. The promotion and export of Chinese soft power seems to be in a dilemma while the Chinese government can hardly come up with an effective solution.

3. The deception of the Thucydides Trap

China's relations with other countries are very complex due to the unbalanced of its comprehensive national power. Unlike the national situation in the Soviet Union during the Cold War, China's economic development relies on domestic forces and extensive international investment and cooperation. Thanks to China's superior market conditions and ample foreign investment. The Chinese economy has developed close ties with the world economy, and an important aim of the BRI is also to form a bundle between the Chinese economy and the world economy. In the context of globalization, if the Chinese economy suffers a major shock, it is inevitable that other economies will be affected and that the world economy will also be affected. The US is aware of the penetration of the Chinese economy into the US economy and has therefore launched a trade war to try to rid the US of its dependence on China. However, research has concluded that the US-China 'trade war' appears to have resulted partly in the exact opposite of what it at least officially attempted to do. Firms in the modern world are organized in complex ways

across the boundaries of both sectors and economies. Implementing well-targeted protectionist tariffs in such a world is not easy and, eventually, as in the US–China ‘trade-war’ example, such tariffs may hurt those they are meant to protect (Egger & Zhu, 2020). Although the US has implemented a series of protectionist policy attempting to enlarge the gap between the China and the US, the partnership in economic area between China the US has become virtually inseparable.

As a result, the “Thucydides Trap” between the US and China is a deception. The state of war means the immediate termination of all relations between China and the United States, the immediate severance of business relations and trade cooperation. This would cause a devastating blow to both the US and China. For China, the country is focused on economic development, even if China is aggressive in the South China Sea, it is to ensure that it can increase its energy supply capacity and deal with the Taiwan issues. For the US, its extensive alliances and prominent role in international organizations enabled the US to exert influence without having to go to war, which also helped the US to manage the crisis. Consequently, war is unacceptable to both China and the US.

4. Struggling to rise continuously

Since the war is avoidable between the US and China, the continuously rise of China is uncertain because of its poor global image. Due to its authoritarian politics and ideology, China has difficulty in gaining strong and reliable allies in the world. China’s relationship with its biggest friend in the world Russia is also not as close as it might be. Russia is vulnerable especially with respect to its interactions with China in the economic sphere. To date, Beijing has appeared to be as invested as the Kremlin in the strengthening of the Russian Chinese relationship, but the question remains as to how widening power disparities between the two could shift this state of relative equilibrium in the coming years and decades (Wilson, 2019). Through the above analysis, the war-wolf diplomacy has led to deepening conflicts between China and other major countries, with alliances such as Group of Seven, Five Eyes, Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, AUKUS and others established with the aim of countering the rise of China. The attitude of the Chinese mainstream media towards these anti-China alliances is undoubtedly vicious and vitriolic, instead of seeks mutual-understanding and reconciliation. The antagonistic situation has seen that China constantly isolated by the West. Geopolitically, China and its bordering countries are constantly at odds. It is difficult to find a mutually supportive partner for China’s future development in the world.

In terms of ideological level, China also has difficulty integrating into the international community. In the changing international context, the Chinese values of distinctive socialism have collided violently with liberalism values in the West. Western society portrays such a conflict as a confrontation between the free world and authoritarian politics. The CCP is now increasingly being portrayed as a champion of this “authoritarian camp” and a challenger to the values and ideals that Western liberal democracies espouse (Azar, 2007). The Western world shares this view that the Chinese Communist Party’s cultural output in the international world is tinged with ideological propaganda. It is an attempt to challenge the values of the Western world, which are dominated by freedom and democracy. Although the state has no obvious ideological orientation in its soft power output, it is under the biased perspective of the West. All of China’s actions are labelled as political propaganda. Since we characterize Chinese authoritarian regimes as “enlightened” or “modernizing,” Enlightened autocracies continue to lack strong, rights-protecting institutions to constrain the power of administrators. Without such restraints, these regimes can still enact illiberal policies and even commit horrific human rights violations when they are perceived to be necessary. There is still a long way to go for the Chinese Communist Party to argue its legitimacy to the Western world and at the same time to improve its own governing and administrative capacity domestically, which are undoubtedly crucial for Chinese continued development afterwards.

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