

Does the One-China policy shape the People's Republic of China's foreign policy?:

Soft, sharp, and hard power

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## **I. Introduction**

This analytical paper asks, does the One-China policy shape the People's Republic of China's foreign policy? This paper begins by briefly defining the One-China policy and situating it in the respective histories of China and its current incarnation as the People's Republic of China (PRC). Then, after untangling the often muddled classifications of soft, sharp, and hard power, the question is interrogated in the context of each class of power (Nye, 2004; Nye, 2011; Nye, 2018; Raby, 2019; Walker & Ludwig, 2017). This analytical essay concludes that the PRC does employ predominantly sharp and hard power strategies that are heavily influenced by the One-China policy.

## **II. Understanding One-China**

As with any nation-state, ethnic and political boundaries have shifted significantly during China's several-thousand year existence (Figure 1). Under its current incarnation as the PRC, this trend continues (Anderson, 2010; Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). The PRC's One-China policy seeks to define who, where, and what should be internationally recognized as a part of the PRC and thus under the authority of the PRC's Communist Party (Anderson, 2010, pp. 173-205). In this context, the concept of One-China is a doctrine that organizes the leadership of the PRC both domestically and abroad (Anderson, 2010, pp. 173-205).

Career intelligence analyst Eric C. Anderson's (2010) book attempts to comprehensively assess the various arguments concerning the PRC's return to its status as a regional hegemon and global power. Central to Anderson's (2010) assessment is that the PRC's growth should not be viewed as inherently adversarial, as many would-be "experts" would assert. Specifically, Anderson (2010) argues that the PRC will seek to become a global partner in trade and security, while seeking to establish a modern equivalent of its traditional regional tribute-state hierarchy.

Anderson (2010) offers compelling evidence that the PRC does not, and likely will not, seek global hegemony. Its regional dominance should instead be understood as equivalent to the U.S. Monroe Doctrine in Central and South America. Only through dialogue, cooperation, patience, and cautious optimism can the U.S. and the PRC avoid harmful conflict and achieve the goal of a peaceful and prosperous global order (Anderson, 2010; Nye, 2011)

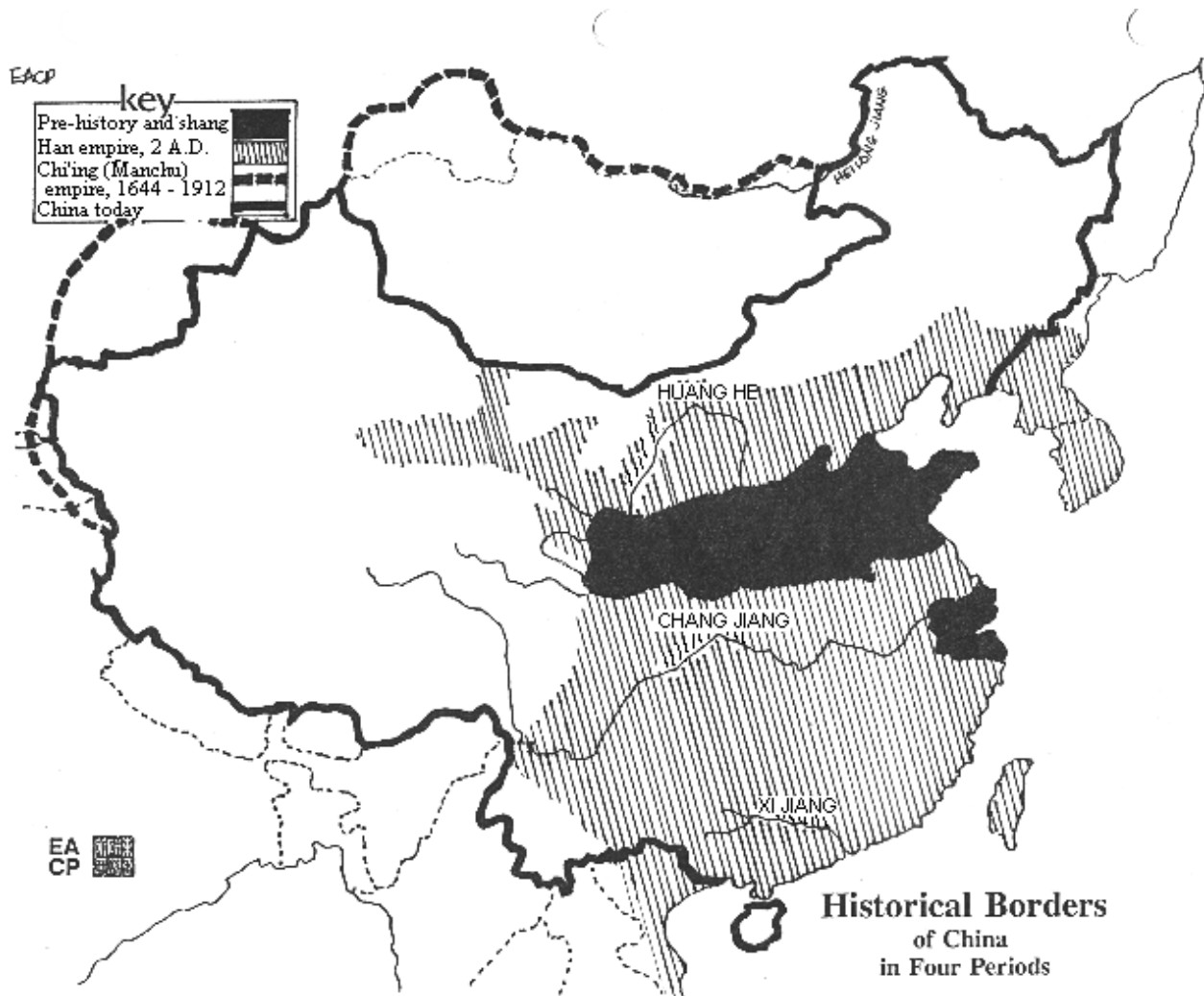


Figure 1. Historical borders of China in four periods (Asia for Educators, Columbia University, 2009)

Since Anderson's (2010) book, much has changed and much is the same. U.S.-PRC disputes have focused on issues such as the sovereignty and treatment of Tibet and Taiwan, interests including the South-China Sea, and the interests of U.S. partners in the South China Sea, with the Spratly Islands perhaps being of greatest public consciousness (Anderson, 2010). There are also numerous past and ongoing border disputes between the PRC and other nation-states including borders between the PRC and India, Bhutan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Japan, North Korea, Russia, Tajikistan, Burma, and Thailand (Anderson, 2010; Central Intelligence Agency, 2019).

Anderson's (2010) argument is that the PRC is not expansionist so much as attempting to re-establish its historical boundaries. In this context Anderson (2010) discusses Tibet, the Spratly Islands, and Taiwan. However, between border fluctuations, Chinese Diasporas, the One-Belt One-Road Initiative, the PRC's leadership and rising military, global trends of nationalism, and resource competition, the PRC's One-China policy clearly has the potential to evolve into expansionism. As the PRC seeks to "reclaim" territory it argues is historically Chinese, utilizing

One-China definitions to legitimize such claims, it becomes imperative to interrogate the role of One-China in the PRC's foreign policy.

### III. Untangling soft, sharp, and hard power

In international relations and related disciplines there are three terms commonly used to delineate forms of power: soft power, sharp power, and hard power (Nye, 2004; Nye, 2011; Nye, 2018; Walker & Ludwig, 2017). Soft power was coined circa 1990 by Joseph S. Nye Jr. (2004; 2011; 2018). Since then, misunderstandings and misuses of soft power have permeated international relations discourse, particularly when it comes to distinguishing soft power from hard power (Nye, 2004; Nye, 2011; Nye, 2018; Raby, 2019; Walker & Ludwig, 2017). Further complicating things, sharp power, coined in 2017 by Walker and Ludwig, is a relatively new term that falls somewhere between soft and hard power (Nye, 2018; Raby, 2019). In this context, this section will define and untangle these three forms of power (Nye, 2004; Nye, 2011; Nye, 2018; Walker & Ludwig, 2017). By initially distinguishing soft and hard power, it becomes easier to appreciate how sharp power fits into the picture.

To begin with a simple definition, ‘Hard power is push; soft power is pull’ (Nye, 2011, pp. 20). Nye states that the resources “associated with hard power include tangibles such as force and money [...] [t]he types of resources associated with soft power include intangible factors such as institutions, ideas, values, culture, and the perceived legitimacy of policies” (Nye, 2011, pp. 22). In more concrete terms, “[a] tangible hard power resource, such as a military unit can provide both command behavior (by winning a battle) and co-optive behavior (by attracting) depending on how it is used” (Nye, 2011, pp. 21). Nye (2011) fully defines soft power as, “the ability to affect others through co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes” (pp. 20-21). Specifically, soft power refers to powers of, “persuasion and attraction” (Nye, 2011, pp. xiii), rather than through, “the hard power of coercion or payment” (Nye, 2018, p. 2).

Put another way, soft power is the ability to, “harness the allure of culture and values to enhance a country's strength” (Nye, 2018, p. 2). As, “soft power is a descriptive rather, than a normative, concept”, it, “can be used wielded for good or bad purposes” (pp. 81). Thus, ultimately, soft power wars for legitimacy. In this sense, soft power is not just a tool of states; “[c]orporations, institutions, NGOs [...] transnational terrorist networks”, and, “[e]ven celebrities”, use soft power, “by making ideas, palatable, acceptable, colorful” (Nye, 2011, pp. 83). Looking to the PRC specifically, “successful economic performance [...] can produce both the hard power of sanctions and restricted market access and the soft power of attraction and emulation success” (Nye, 2011, pp. 22). These examples illustrate Nye's (2011) point concerning the ability of an agent to convert the means (resources) of (soft and hard) power towards their intended ends (desired behavior).

Walker and Ludwig (2017) state that, “[a]s the Cold War era faded, analysts, journalists, and policymakers in democratic countries came to view influence efforts from authoritarian countries, such as China and Russia”, as, “soft power” (p. 1). Walker and Ludwig (2017) argue that the influence being peddled by authoritarian state actors, “is not principally about attraction or even persuasion”, and instead, “centers on distraction and manipulation” (p. 1). Walker and Ludwig (2017) state that, “[a]uthoritarian influence efforts are ‘sharp’ in the sense that they pierce, penetrate, or perforate the political and information environments in the targeted countries” (p. 5).

In the context of what they describe as, “the ruthless new competition that is under way between autocratic and democratic states, the repressive regimes’ sharp power techniques should be seen as the tip of their dagger” (Walker & Ludwig, 2017, p. 5). This is because, “[t]hese regimes are not necessarily seeking to ‘win hearts and minds,’ the common frame of reference for soft power efforts” (Walker & Ludwig, 2017, p. 5). Instead, “seeking to manipulate their target audiences by distorting the information that reaches them [...] authoritarians to cut into the fabric of a society, stoking and amplifying existing divisions” (Walker & Ludwig, 2017, p. 5). This is, “unlike the blunt impact of hard power”, as, “sharp power entails a degree of stealth [...] meaning that they benefit from a lag time before the targeted [countries] realize there is a problem” (Walker & Ludwig, 2017, p. 5).

Of paramount importance, Walker and Ludwig (2017) argue, is that the term, “‘sharp power’ captures the malign and aggressive nature of the authoritarian projects, which bear little resemblance to the benign attraction of soft power” (p. 5). Specifically, “[t]hrough sharp power, the generally unattractive values of authoritarian systems—which encourage a monopoly on power, top-down control, censorship, and coerced or purchased loyalty—are projected outward” (Walker & Ludwig, p. 5). In this context, “those affected are not so much audiences as victims” (Walker & Ludwig, 2017, p. 5).

In his article addressing Walker and Ludwig’s (2017) introduction of “sharp power”, Nye (2018) describes sharp power as referring, “to the information warfare being waged by today’s authoritarian powers, particularly China and Russia” (p. 1). Both states have spent, tens of billions of dollars to shape perceptions, public opinion, and behavior around the world (Nye, 2018; Walker & Ludwig, 2017). This money fuels, “tools new and old that exploit the asymmetry of openness between their own restrictive systems and democratic societies” (Nye, 2018, p. 1), though of course the target audiences are not limited to democracies.

Examples of sharp power as utilized by the PRC include, “disguising state-directed projects as the work of commercial media or grassroots associations [...] or using local actors as conduits for foreign propaganda and tools of foreign manipulation” (Walker & Ludwig, 2017, p. 7-8). Additionally there are, “thousands of people-to-people exchanges, wide-ranging cultural activities, the development of global media programs, and educational programs” (Walker & Ludgate, 2017, p. 2). Perhaps most widely discussed are Confucius Institutes (Walker & Ludgate, 2017). Their controversy stems from the argument that, “they ‘function as an arm of the Chinese state and are allowed to ignore academic freedom’” (Walker & Ludgate, 2017, p. 2).

Australia’s former ambassador to China, Geoff Raby (2019) argues that, in contrast with the 2008 Olympics, which he feels exemplified the height of the PRC’s use of soft power, “[t]oday, China’s soft power is non-existent” (Raby, 2019, p. 1). This is because, “content”, whether via their media or foreign based cultural and education programs and partnerships, “must pass through the prism of the propaganda authorities, not that of the marketing people” (Raby, 2019, p. 2). While deeming marketing and P.R. as not propaganda is absurd (Herman & Chomsky, 2002), and even Nye (2018) acknowledges the West’s use of sharp power, the fact remains that such partnerships aggressively pressure host institutions to toe the PRC’s narratives (Anderson; 2010; Nye, 2018; Raby, 2019; Walker & Ludgate, 2017).

Notably, Raby (2019) draws the distinction between the soft power of, “Chinese traditional culture”, and the sharp power, “of the Communist Party” (p. 3). Specifically, Raby (2019) argues that, “[h]istorically, China has had immense soft power in its arts—painting,

calligraphy, ceramics, poetry, music, food and much more” (p. 3). Such, “soft power, this attractiveness to foreigners is age-old”, and, “is inherent in Chinese traditional culture”, and as, “it does not belong to the Communist Party [...] [i]t is authentic”, and, “not propaganda” (p. 3).

#### **IV. Soft power and One-China**

It would appear that soft power, as Nye (2004; 2011) defines it, is generally not a tool employed by the PRC. However, in limited circumstances, particularly tourism (Tungkeunkunt, 2016) and humanitarian uses of the PRC’s military (Zanardi, 2016), it is indeed present. Further, what the PRC conceives of and promotes as soft power, which is more accurately described as blend of sharp and hard power, is indeed shaped by and intentionally reinforces One-China (Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018; Tsang, 2018; Tungkeunkunt, 2016; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016).

The PRC’s use of its military power, particularly naval diplomacy, for humanitarian efforts is one of its only legitimate forms of soft power (Zanardi, 2016). Aside from the 2008 Olympics and tourism, or the world’s passive exposure to aspects of Chinese culture predating the PRC, such as Chinese art history and philosophy, it is difficult to identify any other examples of soft power at all (Raby, 2019; Tungkeunkunt, 2016). Some point to media emanating from the PRC as a form of soft power. However the forms and functions of such examples, which generally predate the term sharp power, are more accurately understood as sharp power (Dugue-Nevers, 2017; Nye, 2018; Tsang, 2018; Tungkeunkunt, 2016; Walker & Ludwig, 2017; Zanardi, 2016).

This is because such examples specify that media emanating from the PRC seeks to counter and control narratives it dislikes (Dugue-Nevers, 2017; Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018; Tsang, 2018; Tungkeunkunt, 2016; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016). Further, such media is heavily influenced, if not controlled, by the PRC’s government propaganda wings as an active part of its security strategy (Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018; Raby, 2019; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016). In this context, it is no surprise that One-China plays an important role in the PRC’s soft and sharp aspects of media (Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018; Raby, 2019; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016).

Though CIs, through passive personal exchanges, may contain elements of soft power, their explicit functions are properly understood as sharp power. In fact, a central aim of CIs is legitimizing and even enforcing the PRC’s One-China policy abroad (Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018; Raby, 2019; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016). Even if CIs feature elements of soft power, they are frequently found to have a negative influence on public perception (Raby, 2019; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016).

Similarly, the effectiveness of the true instances of soft power used by the PRC have been questionable in their efficacy, and even counter-productive. The BBC found that the 2008 Olympics had a negative impact on the global perception of the PRC (Dugue-Nevers, 2017, p. 85). Tourism within the PRC has mixed results at best, and citizens of countries experiencing large amounts of tourism from the PRC often have mixed or negative feelings about the PRC as

a result of the impacts of tourism and the behavior of the tourists (China Power Team, 2019; Tungkeunkunt, 2016).

## **V. Sharp power and One-China**

The PRC spends tens of billions on its sharp power efforts each year via media, diplomacy, and educational programming in the form of CIs (Nye, 2018; Raby, 2019; Walker & Ludwig, 2017). Generally speaking these expenditures aim to influence international perceptions of the PRC's authoritarian model of governance and its growing capacities and uses of hard power. Further, a core function of these expenditures is to promote the legitimacy of One-China. At the moment, the PRC has several primary concerns which it seeks to address abroad via sharp power and which are also influenced by the concept of One-China (Anderson, 2010; Dugue-Nevers, 2017; Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018; Nye, 2018; Raby, 2019; Tsang, 2018; Tungkeunkunt, 2016; Walker & Ludwig, 2017; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016).

First and foremost are the international and Taiwanese communities' acceptance of Taiwan as properly part of the PRC (Anderson, 2010; Bolt & Brenner, 2004; Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018; To, 2012; Tsang, 2018; Tungkeunkunt, 2016; Walker & Ludwig, 2017; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016). Of similar importance is international acceptance of territorial claims in the South China Sea (Anderson, 2010; Dugue-Nevers, 2017; Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018). Additionally, international acceptance and perceptions of the PRC's authority over, and use of hard power in, Tibet and Xinjiang remain a top priority (Anderson, 2010; Clarke, 2017; Dugue-Nevers, 2017; Men, 2016; Nye, 2018; Raby, 2019; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016). Finally, reaching and influencing the perceptions and identities of members ethnic Chinese in regional and global nation-states via PRC owned or influenced media is also a wide spread example of the PRC's sharp power efforts to spread and legitimize tenants of One-China (Ba, 2019; To, 2012; Tsang, 2018; Tungkeunkunt, 2016; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016) .

## **VI. Hard power and One-China**

Hard power, particularly in its economic dimensions, is arguably the most widely used and influential means of implementing the PRC's foreign policy objectives (Anderson, 2010; Liang, 2019; Nye, 2011; Williams & Hurst, 2018). With very few exceptions (Hameiri, 2015; Shen, 2015; Yu, 2018), the PRC requires that countries receiving aid or more formal ties, whether economic or military, accept One-China. This means that institutions and nation-states wishing to establish ties with the PRC must cut ties with or renounce recognition of Taiwan as independent from the PRC, and that such nation-states must refrain from criticizing the PRC's exercise of authority in Tibet and Xinjiang (Liang, 2019; Men, 2016; Mohan & Tan-Mullins, 2018; Williams & Hurst, 2018; Yu, 2016; Yu, 2018; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016).

Much of the literature fails to explicitly identify the ways in which CIs function as a means of hard power, including Hughes (2014), Kalimuddin and Anderson (2018), and Zanardi (2016). Perhaps this author may be mistaken in interpreting various uses of CIs as hard power, as Nye (2018) only deems them sharp power when they seek to influence academic freedom at host institutions. However, under Nye's (2004; 2011; 2018) definitions of hard power, the PRC's use of CIs seem to clearly count as such.

In addition to providing the content of CIs, the PRC also uses CI funding to influence or control the staffing, publishing, and curricular decisions at host institutions (Hughes, 2014;

Kalimuddin & Anderson, 2018; Nye, 2018; Zanardi, 2016; Zhou & Luk, 2016;). Thus, CIs are more than soft or sharp power, but also a primary means of hard power employed towards the end of promoting the acceptance of One-China (Zhou & Luk, 2016; Nye, 2004; Nye, 2011). Notably, “[b]y the end of 2018, a total of 548 [CIs] and 1,193 Confucius Classrooms” (Han, 2019, p.1), worldwide.

Finally, an interesting finding in the literature was the use of tourism as a form of hard power, though it was not explicitly referred to as such (China Power Team, 2019; Hameiri, 2015; Tungkeunkunt, 2016). Specifically, the PRC has used its ability to control the flow of tourism, and thus its economic impacts, to directly influence the economy and politics of Taiwan relative to the islands demeanor towards the PRC and One-China (China Power Team, 2019). This practice is also used to influence other states as well (China Power Team, 2019; Hameiri, 2015; Tungkeunkunt, 2016)

## **VII. Conclusion**

This analytical paper seeks to determine if the PRC’s One-China policy shapes its foreign policy. Analyzing literature concerned with the means and ends of the PRC’s foreign policy makes clear that One-China concretely shapes the PRC’s foreign policy along dimensions of soft, sharp, and hard power. Specifically, while the PRC does employ elements of soft power in narrow contexts, the forms of power employed by the PRC are generally sharp and hard, and are heavily shaped by One-China.

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