

THE US-CHINA RIVALRIES OVER SOUTHEAST ASIA: CHINESE QUEST TO DOMINATE ITS NEIGHBORHOOD

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This thesis investigates the depths of soft power within the intricate fabric of international relations, focusing specifically on the rivalries between the United States and China over Southeast Asian countries. As two of the world's most influential powers, the United States and China are engaged in a complex and multifaceted competition to expand their spheres of influence and secure strategic advantages in the Southeast Asian region. While their approaches differ significantly, both powers acknowledge the crucial role of soft power in achieving their respective objectives.

The US and China are the defining game-changers of international relations today. As the two superpowers compete for power and influence, their competition has moved beyond military and economic to soft power. This research looks at how the US and China use their soft power to shape opinions, publics and advance their national interests in the context of global domination.

Soft power is a key tool for nations to exert influence and build relationships. By looking at the strategies and tactics of the US and China in their soft power competition we can learn a lot about international relations and global governance.

Purpose

The thesis aims to contribute to the existing knowledge on soft power and international relations by offering an in-depth analysis of the US-China rivalries over Southeast Asian countries. By exploring the theoretical foundations of soft power, the motivations and objectives of the United States and China, and the application of soft power in their policies, this research seeks to shed light on the complex dynamics at play on the global stage. Through a deeper understanding of these dynamics, policymakers, scholars, and practitioners can gain valuable insights to navigate the complexities and implications of the US-China rivalry, ultimately fostering more effective and informed strategies for engagement in the Southeast Asian region.

Methodology

As for the methods, comparative and descriptive analysis were chosen. So the research will be a descriptive and comparative study of the strategies and tactics used by the US and China in their soft power competition. A descriptive approach will be used to detail the specific soft power tools used by each country – cultural exchange programs, media influence, public diplomacy initiatives etc. A comparative analysis will then be done to identify similarities and differences and to assess how effective they are in shaping international perceptions and geopolitical outcomes. The data will be analyzed using thematic analysis. This involves identifying themes and patterns in the data to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying strategies and motivations of the US and China. The analysis will focus on the specific soft power tools used by each country, the target audience and the intended outcome.

Recognizing that the US pivot towards the Asia-Pacific region in general and Southeast Asia in particular would lead to confrontation and inevitable tensions between the US and China, the Jinping administration has coined the phrase 'new type of great power relations' to describe the relations between China and the US. The new type of great power relations advocated by Beijing involves the mutual respect of both great powers for each other in areas of priority for a state, such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, social system and development model. Thus, China has sought to ensure that the United States respects its interests in Southeast Asia and in the South China Sea, an area of sovereignty, and does not take actions that undermine or compete with its initiatives. Under Trump, Jinping has continued this approach of the US and China respecting each other's interests and avoiding competition or conflict. At a time when Trump has emphasized economic competition in the international arena and in regions such as Southeast Asia and increased freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea, Jinping has reiterated his call for cooperation, arguing that global competition will

benefit no one [2, p.13].

In recent years, Southeast Asia has taken an important place in China's soft power strategy, as the region's geopolitical importance and economic potential have been increasing. Relations between China and Southeast Asia go back to ancient times. Trade, cultural exchange and migration have been the basis of these relations. Throughout the history of the Silk Road, trade relations between China and Southeast Asia have strengthened, contributing to the development of cultural and economic ties between the two regions. Today, China is trying to be effective in geopolitical issues as well as using soft power to increase its economic and political influence in the region. China's strategies in this region aim to both expand its domestic market and balance the influence of the United States and other Western countries.

China uses several key tools and strategies to exert soft power in Southeast Asia. These include cultural diplomacy, expanding economic ties, partnerships in education and technology, as well as media influence [3, p.10].

Cultural Diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy is one of the most important tools in China's soft power exercise. China's ancient cultural heritage, language and cultural events spread throughout the region. For this purpose, Confucius Institutes, Chinese language teaching and the organization of cultural festivals are noteworthy. These institutes have opened hundreds of branches in the region, promoting the Chinese language and culture and thus trying to increase interest in China. Through cultural diplomacy, China works to build a positive image of itself in the region and promote its national values.

Economic Diplomacy. Economic diplomacy also plays an important role in China's soft power strategy. Under the "One Belt One Road" initiative, infrastructure investments and economic support are offered to Southeast Asian countries. It is used as a tool to strengthen economic relations with the countries of the region and increase its political influence. China's proposed projects include the construction of roads, railways and ports, which both increase China's economic influence and deepen economic dependence with countries in the region. China's intention to increase its influence by expanding trade ties and establishing economic partnerships is also noteworthy [1, p.8].

Educational and Scientific Partnerships. Soft power in education is an important part of China's strategy in Southeast Asia. Chinese higher education institutions offer scholarship programs to students from countries in the region, thereby trying to increase interest in China. When students who study in China later return to their home countries, they can serve to further spread China's influence. In addition, technology and scientific partnerships deepen cooperation relations with the countries of the region. China is trying to increase its influence in both the economic and political spheres by transferring technology and innovations to these countries.

Media and Public Diplomacy. One of China's soft power strategies is to use media influence. Chinese state-owned media outlets are also undertaking various initiatives to promote a positive image of China through media resources in regional countries. Through such initiatives, China seeks to directly influence the public of the countries of the region and promote its foreign policy goals [4, p.147].

China's use of soft power has had mixed results in Southeast Asia. These results are observed with both positive and negative effects:

Positive Effects: China's cultural diplomacy and economic support have increased interest in China in the countries of the region. Through the "One Belt, One Road" initiative, the development of the economic infrastructure of the countries of the region has been accelerated. It also allowed China to expand its trade relations and strengthen its economic influence. Educational and cultural programs help to form a positive image of China in the countries of the region and pave the way for deepening relations with these countries.

Negative Effects and Challenges: There are also some negative reactions to China's use of soft power. For example, the territorial disputes in the China Sea have caused mistrust towards China in the countries of the region. Also, China's human rights record and domestic policy issues may weaken the influence of its soft power. The growth of China's influence in the countries of Southeast Asia sometimes causes suspicion and anxiety, which increases the resistance of the countries of the region to China's initiatives.

China's use of soft power in Southeast Asia is taking place against the backdrop of geopolitical competition with the United States and other Wes-

tern countries. While the US uses a variety of military and economic tools to maintain and expand its influence in the region, China places more emphasis on soft power tools. In this context, China's soft power plays an important role in counterbalancing US influence in regional countries and gaining the support of local governments [5, p. 49].

Table 1. The USA and China Soft Power Strategies in Different Regions

Region	U.S. Focus	China's Focus
Asia-Pacific	Strengthening alliances (e.g., Japan, Australia)	Economic investments and infrastructure development
Africa	Promoting democracy, humanitarian aid	Resource investments, development aid
Europe	Cooperation on human rights and NATO support	Investments in technology and infrastructure
Latin America	Support for anti-corruption and democratic reforms	Trade and investments, infrastructure projects
Middle East	Military presence and counterterrorism efforts	Diplomatic ties, energy partnerships

China's use of soft power in Southeast Asia is part of a strategic approach to increase its regional influence. Tools applied in the fields of culture, economic diplomacy, education and technology enable China to build a positive image in the region and increase its political influence. But China's use of soft power also faces a variety of challenges: human rights and domestic policy issues, as well as regional mistrust, may limit the effectiveness of this strategy. China's use of soft power in Southeast Asia is one of the tools it has widely used to assert its claim to regional leadership, and the success of this strategy will depend on both domestic and foreign policy moves.

Conclusion. The increasing importance of the Asia-Pacific region in world politics in the 21st century is placing this administrative perception on a stronger basis. However, China, concerned about the hegemonic structure of the United States in the international system, is also faced with a paradoxical foreign policy choice. The relative security provided by the USA in the Asia-Pacific region, the imbalances that this power will create from the region and the possible arms race are likely to hinder China's economic development. In this respect, such a development will create major problems for China,

which has not overcome its economic fragility and uses the US market with a high purchasing power with great advantage. China's large-scale consensus "prioritizing economic development" will be greatly damaged. Whether this economic competition between the US and China will turn into a hot war or not will be determined by the steps taken by both states within the framework of their strategic plans.

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Useynova Ulkar

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the weight of soft power in the escalating rivalry between US and China for influence over Southeast Asia. Drawing on theoretical conceptions of soft power and with reference to selected policies and strategies adopted by the two countries, this article contributes new insights into how states wield soft power in order to shape perceptions, build relationships, enhance national interests within the region.

The research concludes that both the US and China have utilized soft power to accomplish this through bilateral diplomacy, cultural exchange promotion, and storytelling via pro-government narratives. Cultural diplomacy and people-to-people exchan-

ges, as well as public diplomacy have been different tactics implemented by the US while China has embarked upon a strategy focused more on economic power derived through its cultural identity initiatives along with using infrastructure support projects.

It concludes by considering the implications of US-China competition for Southeast Asia and within a broader geopolitical arena, illustrating how increased tensions could escalate rivalry with unintended negative consequences as well as risks to regional stability should the two powers fail to find common ground or worse; ignore these sources of divergence.

Keywords: *soft power, hard power, competition, rivalry, politics, Southeast Asia, China, USA, diplomacy.*

Усейнова Улькар

СОПЕРНИЧЕСТВО США И КИТАЯ В ЮГО-ВОСТОЧНОЙ АЗИИ: СТРЕМЛЕНИЕ КИТАЯ ДОМИНИРОВАТЬ НАД СВОИМИ СОСЕДЯМИ

АННОТАЦИЯ

В этой тезисе рассматривается вес мягкой силы в обостряющемся соперничестве между США и Китаем за влияние в Юго-Восточной Азии. Опираясь на теоретические концепции мягкой силы и ссылаясь на избранные политики и стратегии, принятые двумя странами, эта статья вносит новый вклад в понимание того, как государства используют мягкую силу для формирования восприятия, построения отношений, укрепления национальных интересов в регионе.

Исследование приходит к выводу, что и США, и Китай использовали мягкую силу для достижения этого посредством двусторонней дипломатии, продвижения культурного обмена и повествования через проправительственные нарративы. Культурная дипломатия и обмены между людьми, а также публичная дипломатия были разными подходами, реализованными США, в то время как Китай сделал ставку на стратегию, ориентированную больше на экономическую силу, полученную через его инициативы по культурной идентичности, наряду с использованием проектов поддержки инфраструктуры.

В заключение рассматриваются последствия

соперничества США и Китая для Юго-Восточной Азии и на более широкой геополитической арене, иллюстрирующие, как возросшая напряженность может привести к эскалации соперничества с непреднамеренными негативными последствиями, а также к рискам для региональной стабильности, если две державы не смогут найти общий язык или, что еще хуже, проигнорируют эти источники расхождений.

Ключевые слова: *мягкая сила, жесткая сила, конкуренция, соперничество, политика, Юго-Восточная Азия, Китай, США, дипломатия.*

Useynova Ülkər

CƏNUB-ŞƏRQİ ASİYADA ABŞ-ÇİN RƏQABƏTİ: ÇİNİN QONŞULARINA HAKİM OLMAQ İSTƏYİ

XÜLASƏ

Bu tezis Cənub-Şərqi Asiyaya təsir etmək üçün ABŞ və Çin arasında artan rəqabətdə yumşaq gücün çəkisini araşdırır. Yumşaq güclə bağlı nəzəri konsepsiyalara əsaslanaraq və iki ölkə tərəfindən qəbul edilmiş seçilmiş siyasət və strategiyalara istinad edərək, bu məqalə dövlətlərin regionda qavrayışları formalaşdırmaq, əlaqələr qurmaq, milli maraqları artırmaq üçün yumşaq gücdən necə istifadə etmələri ilə bağlı yeni anlayışlar təqdim edir.

Tədqiqatda belə nəticəyə gəlinir ki, həm ABŞ, həm də Çin bunu ikitərəfli diplomatiya, mədəni mübadilənin təşviqi və hökumətyönlü yanaşmalar vasitəsilə yumşaq gücdən istifadə ediblər. Mədəni diplomatiya və insanlar arasında mübadilə, eləcə də xalq diplomatiyası ABŞ tərəfindən həyata keçirilən fərqli addımlar olub, Çin isə infrastruktura dəstək layihələrindən istifadə etməklə yanaşı, mədəni kimlik təşəbbüsləri ilə əldə edilən iqtisadi gücə daha çox diqqət yetirən bir strategiyaya əsaslanıb.

Tədqiqat işi, ABŞ-Çin rəqabətinin Cənub-Şərqi Asiya üçün və daha geniş geosiyasi arenada nəticələrini nəzərdən keçirməklə, artan gərginliyin iki güc ortaqları tapma bilmədikdə və ya daha da pisləşdiyini təqdirdə, gözlənilməz mənfi nəticələrlə, eləcə də regional sabitlik üçün risklərlə rəqabəti necə artırma biləcəyini təsvir etməklə yekunlaşır.

Açar sözlər: *yumşaq güc, sərt güc, rəqabət, siyasət, Cənub-Şərqi Asiya, Çin, ABŞ, diplomatiya.*