

# SOFT POWER AND CULTURAL AGGRESSION: EXAMINING SOCIO-CULTURAL DYNAMICS UNDER BRI

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper conducts a comprehensive socio-cultural analysis to elucidate the complex aspects of cultural aggression and soft power dynamics within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The primary objective is to analyse the many socio-cultural effects of BRI projects and their implications for cultural identities, local agencies, and the strategic use of soft power. This study utilises an innovative mixed-methods methodology to combine constructivist viewpoints for a thorough analysis of the complex socio-cultural processes related to the BRI. The constructivist perspective, highlighting the significance of ideas, norms, and identities, guides our approach to reveal subtle and explicit expressions of cultural aggression and soft power dynamics inside the BRI. The study used a mixed-methods approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Content analysis is used qualitatively to encapsulate the core narratives associated with BRI initiatives. Quantitative analysis entails the study of soft power indicators and cultural effect evaluations to identify patterns, correlations, and measures of influence. The results demonstrate instances of cultural aggression inside BRI projects, demonstrating how these processes affect local cultural identities and contribute to the destruction of indigenous heritage. The research simultaneously reveals the strategic use of soft power by countries participating in the BRI. Nonetheless, the intricate structure of socio-cultural interactions suggests that certain subtleties may remain unexamined, and results may not be universally relevant across many cultural settings. The practical consequences of this study include identifying and comprehending the soft power methods used to cultivate more equitable and successful diplomatic narratives, therefore promoting collaborative global alliances.*

**Key Words:** BRI, Socio-Cultural, Cultural Aggression, Soft-Power, Local Agency, Identity Transformation, Diplomatic Influence

## INTRODUCTION

BRI is a large-scale infrastructure venture ingenuity led by China aimed at fostering connectivity, trade, and communication throughout Eurasia, Latin America, and Africa [1]. The fiscal advantages of the venture in terms of international exchange and capital spending have been extensively analyzed by numerous individuals. Therefore, it is essential to comprehend the financial and infrastructural aspects to grasp the interconnection and movement of Chinese economies and other economies, particularly those in nations besides BRI economic passages. However, the venture is observed as a component of the Chinese government's strategy and use of cultural aggression and soft power dynamics to pursue global control and leadership. In this context, numerous academics have examined the cultural aspect and diverse cultural components that facilitate socio-cultural integration amid China and the countries situated along the BRI. Therefore, fostering a mutual cultural comprehension and interpersonal connectivity that leads to the establishment of cooperative cultural regions. While, the other aspect relates to reflecting the character of soft power, which involves employing non-coercive methods like aggression towards cultural exchanges to achieve desired outcomes [2].

However, the primary emphasis of BRI is centred on the development of infrastructure, business activities, and trade across the designated corridors. Chinese investments are focused on developing infrastructure projects, specifically highways, bridges, railroads, and ports. These projects aim to connect and link cities within the country as well as across international borders [3].

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has enabled China to ascend the global value chain and assert its status as a significant force in economic supremacy, considering its current standing as the world's first and biggest economy.

Furthermore, it enabled China's transformation from an agricultural economy to a technology-oriented one and redirected its emphasis from local markets to international markets. In the context of this economic revolution and globalisation, there is an elevated degree of economic interconnectedness and interdependence in areas like food, agricultural goods, energy, and other industrial resources. This restructuring allows China to diversify and grow its global supply chain, thereby reducing its reliance on a limited number of places within the supply chain circuit [4]. Given China's relentless demand for resources and raw materials to fuel its manufacturing sector, which has positioned it as the world's leading factory in the global production network, this is particularly vital. Similarly, China is currently striving to transition into a knowledge-based economy by emphasizing the development of artificial intelligence and digitization. Additionally, it created avenues for prominent private entities to grow and extend their influence, while also enabling small and medium-sized firms (SMEs) to establish an international and worldwide presence [5].

The cultural values component of the BRI introduces an additional perspective to the likelihood of success and the potential economic implications for China, whether it be a threat or an opportunity. Undoubtedly, the BR-Initiative presents a lucrative economic prospect for some nations, while simultaneously posing an economic challenge to others. What impact would the variations in cultural values have on growth, international trade, marketing, finance, and politics [6]. Acquiring a profound and comprehensive comprehension of cultural values is crucial for achieving success [7]. However, the probability of misunderstandings increases as cultural differences become more pronounced, leading to miscommunication, confusion, and unintentional offences. Therefore, it can generate tension between partner countries and significantly raise the cost of conducting business, while

also diminishing the likelihood of a successful relationship. When individuals in one nation exhibit norms, values, languages, communication patterns, and different behaviors that diverge and frequently clash with the norms, values, and behaviors in another nation, it necessitates more time, resources, and effort to bridge the disparities.

The emphasis on the Culture of a shared future has motivated the Chinese government to initiate many cultural initiatives to strengthen the "people-to-people" connectivity of BRI. Moreover, there are diverse cultural activities and cultural heritage, such as Chinese cuisine and traditional Chinese medicine that are intentionally being promoted to foster social connections between China and the host countries, specifically linked with BRI. Thus, increased movement of people will ultimately result in the creation of collaborative cultural effects. Therefore, a collaborative culture emerges as a result of the interaction between different groups of people along the BRI corridors. Groups of people interact and form connections through business, education, tourism, and other cultural activities. They exchange different methods of conducting business and managing transactions, knowledge and transmission in education, cultural elements such as food consumption and cooking styles, medical systems, and cultural practices. Within the corridors, these common cultural aspects surpass the boundaries of different ethnic groups and, over time, develop into significant collaborative cultural hubs that unite these diverse communities. Similarly, BRI has enticed the Chinese to enhance connectivity with local populations. This has led to the emergence of diverse Chinese diaspora communities within China and the reorganization of existing Chinese Diasporas worldwide, particularly along the BRI routes [8].

This research utilizes a unique combination of approaches to thoroughly analyze the complex socio-cultural dynamics present in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from a constructivist perspective. Thus, emphasis on the importance of ideas, norms, and identities, is effective in revealing both obvious and subtle forms of cultural aggression and the exercise of soft power within the BRI framework [9].

### Theoretical Framework of Socio-Cultural Soft-Power Context:

This research attempts to comprehensively examine the socio-cultural impacts of BRI by analyzing key factors such as cultural dominance, soft power dynamics, and their diverse consequences [10]. This involves independent factors like Narrative Building besides strategic use of soft power. Moreover, the cultural dynamics within BRI impact dependent variables like Indigenous Heritage Erosion and Global Diplomatic Relations. Historical relations act as a moderating component that impacts the relationship between the use of soft power and its broader effect. Recognizing the enduring impact of historical links between countries involved in BRI remains critical and aimed at considering power and its broader socio-cultural consequences. Diplomatic gestures within the BRI framework are interpreted based on historical linkages, impacting the dynamics of cultural exchanges. This research seeks to investigate the effects of past ties on the effectiveness of soft power strategies after BRI. Thus, it tries to offer a more detailed knowledge of the socio-cultural consequences by considering the historical backdrop (Figure 1).

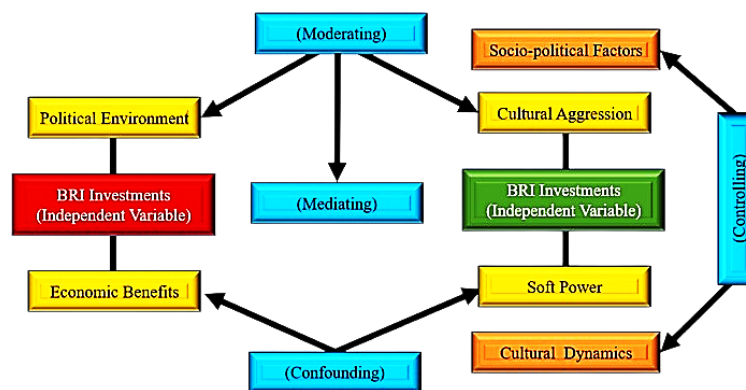


Figure 1: Nature and Relation of Different Variables

When analyzing the sociocultural impacts of BRI, thus crucial to take into account possible confounding elements including economic circumstances and development. It is essential to include these factors to correctly ascribe the observed effects to the primary variables of interest, which are cultural aggressiveness and soft power dynamics. Cultural integration and community participation may serve as mediating variables. This affects the relationship between cultural aggressiveness or the use of soft power and its socio-cultural impacts. Furthermore, the Controlling variable encompasses Cultural Compatibility and might include geographic location, political institutions, and socio-

economic conditions. The study aims to thoroughly understand the intricate socio-cultural environment after the BRI by analyzing the components related to cultural aggression and soft power dynamics.

The study uncovers the factors that contribute to the socio-cultural impacts aimed at BRI by examining development focusing on cultural identities and the conceptual aspects of soft power. Moreover, the study integrates aspects of critical cultural theory to analyze power dynamics and inequalities that are inherent in cultural exchanges inside the BRI. The paper investigates the impact of cultural aggression in BRI projects on the degradation of indigenous heritage and the

imposition of dominant cultural norms. Thus, drawing from Edward W. Said's concept of imperial continuation to carry considerable socio-cultural impact following the contemporaneous experience, or Homi K. Bhabha's concept of space for cultures to reach each other and lead to a new hybrid culture [11]. This critical perspective enables an examination of the unequal distribution of power and the possible marginalization of local cultures in the wider framework of global connections fostered by BRI.

### Cultural Aggression and Soft Power Dynamics:

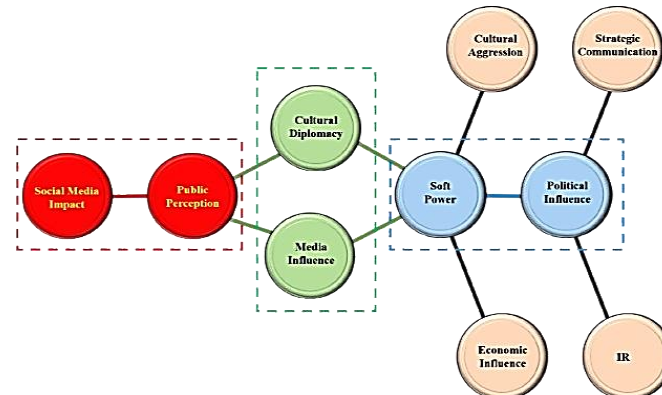


Figure 2: Elements of Cultural Aggression and Soft Power Dynamics

Moreover, cultural soft-power is interconnected with politics, business, and military affairs. The heightened competition surrounding national power encompasses various aspects, including economic prowess, scientific and technical advancement, defence capabilities, and cultural influence. The cultural universality norms, rules, and regimes for governing international behavior are the primary sources aimed influence. Nye concedes the ability to measure intangible power by considering factors such as a country's internal unity, and involvement in trans-national organizations [12]. In the absence of cultural assets and a global impact derived from cultural means, a nation is unable to assert its presence in international affairs. Culture constitutes be fundamental component of power. Thus, a nation's "hard" power is contingent upon the cultivation of "soft" power. Nevertheless, a significant number of individuals consistently prioritize the aspect of competition related to authority, while simultaneously disregarding the fight for cultural influence. Given the growing significance of "soft" power in global affairs, major nations prioritize the strengthening of their "soft" power capabilities. Hence, cultural benefits and drawbacks are subjective, therefore in contemporary global society, the growing convergence of interests has led to varied cultures engaging in reciprocal learning, albeit often accompanied by conflicts.

Soft power, an intangible force, plays a crucial role in shaping the relationships between nations or groups of nations in the field of international relations. In contemporary global society, the fight for national power, rooted in cultural influence, is a significant phenomenon that shapes international relations. However, culture significantly influences the decision-making process of political leaders, as

Regarding the content of culture, it can be broadly defined as the tangible and intangible assets that have been produced over the history of human society remaining within cognitive and non-cognitive domains (Figure 2). More specifically, culture can be understood as the collective beliefs, values, and practices of a society, encompassing various aspects such as ideology, social systems, institutions, ideas, politics, legislation, morality, art, religion, and science. Regardless of the perspective we use, culture is not a fixed entity but rather a fluid and evolving phenomenon.

they base their decisions on the cultural judgments unique to their own culture. Moreover, cultural variations have an impact on leaders, states, and individuals, as they are a reflection of their own beliefs, viewpoints, interests, customs, and aspirations. Failure to acknowledge these distinctions will result in incorrect interpretations and assessments. Therefore, it is evident that cultural systems are intricately connected to international relations. Furthermore, cultural notions exert a significant influence on the perspectives of national leaders regarding political concerns and frequently shape the strategies they use to address these challenges, both on an individual and collective level. Hence, cultures play a crucial role for these leaders, provided that they effectively tackle these matters in the context of international relations. Thus, it also serves as a guiding principle in the context of international relations and a foundation for fostering global social trust that determines the competitiveness of a nation [13].

However, the globalization of BRI has led to a growing overlap of national interests and an expansion of international interdependence. During the development of BRI, cultural tensions that arise during encounters will undoubtedly be constrained and diminished. The proliferation of shared interests fosters reciprocal knowledge exchange and assimilation among diverse civilizations. The intensity of cultural conflicts lessens in proportion to the cultural dynamics. The dynamics of cultural soft power being employed by the Chinese through BRI are undergoing a significant transformation due to the growing impact of globalization. This influence is not exclusively related to economic corridor developments, which are relatively more aggressive and attractive. However, it encompasses many

aspects, such as impact aimed at cultural soft-power, humanitarian concerns in different dimensions, and off course the economic assistance provided to developing nations [14].

### **Socio-Cultural Impacts of BRI:**

The socio-cultural effects of BRI are complex and diverse area, resulting from a convergence of factors that influence cultural identities, interpersonal relationships, and broader socio-economic dynamics in the countries involved. The effort, through its extensive infrastructural projects and commercial partnerships, brings about significant changes in cultural environments. However, the major themes that arise include cultural integration and hybridization, preservation or destruction of indigenous heritage, and the strategic use of soft power. These topics demonstrate the complex interaction between global connections and regional cultural dynamics. Thus, it plays a significant role in shaping cultural identities and also has a profound impact on diplomatic narratives, hence promoting the development of global relationships. Nevertheless, the intricate and multifaceted socio-cultural effects of this enormous worldwide endeavour require a thorough investigation that recognizes the contextual differences and complexities that arise in its aftermath. Therefore, the character of divergent and shared cultural soft powers extends the values of socio-cultural impacts of the states and culture along BRI.

#### **The character of Divergent Cultural Soft-Powers:**

Varying cultures have varying characters which are present in different nations along BRI, thus, disparities might also result in cultural trade obstacles. Moreover, varying cultural norms and communication methods can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts, which can undermine the effectiveness of economic partnerships and hinder their success. Multiple research projects have revealed that export markets are adversely affected by the extent of cultural disparities between nations. The costs associated with trading are influenced by factors such as distance, asymmetrical and incomplete information about cultural differences, as well as institutional and political disparities. These factors can harm international trade, leading to increased trade costs and difficulties in enforcing contracts. Consequently, this can result in a decrease in the volume of trade and cooperation between countries [15].

However, offered achievement by BRI remains liable to various crucial aspects, such as the diverse ethnic groups, cultures, customs, communication methods, philosophies, ethics, and thought processes prevalent among the countries participating in the BR initiative. There is a plethora of religious views, like as Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and lesser-known local religions, found along the pathways of BRI countries. Significant disparities are seen in the economic systems, ideologies, cultural values, and historical traditions of these nations. Moreover, cultural disparity diminishes China's trade with BRI nations, and this is mostly attributed to transaction costs and the presence of asymmetric information. Numerous Chinese enterprises lack expertise, training, or proper training when it comes to engaging with countries that are ethnically and culturally diverse. Chinese enterprises and business executives have occasionally been criticized for their lack of consideration for

local customs and practices, their failure to accommodate religious customs, and their reluctance to try local foods.

Moreover, Chinese residents dwelling in states along BRI may receive preferential treatment from Chinese authorities and investors. However, this might also lead to a negative reaction from other ethnic groups inside these partner countries, resulting in an anti-Chinese sentiment. To avoid potential issues and foster productive connections, Chinese enterprises and investors must acquire a deep understanding of the culture and behavior of their partner countries. Chinese companies frequently employ strategies that isolate local businesses and officials, such as employing Chinese Indigenous equipment, importing Chinese labour to perform tasks in the host country, undermining local suppliers, utilizing their materials, failing to fulfill contractual obligations, and disregarding local regulations. The Chinese manner and business methods can engender hostility among the local populace and enterprises of the host country. Some countries are likewise concerned about Chinese expansionism and the growing global influence of China [16].

Furthermore, it has been noted that joint ventures are adversely affected by significant cultural disparities, leading to a heightened likelihood of joint venture failure in such instances. Additionally, foreign investors' investment patterns reveal the existence of notable disincentives in the presence of substantial cultural disparities. Moreover, China's overseas foreign direct investment is adversely affected when confronted with considerable cultural differences. Thus, it is evident that a significant cultural disparity leads to a decrease in commerce, but a relatively low cultural disparity does not result in reduced trade. Consequently, a greater cultural disparity reduces the likelihood of the partner company being assimilated into the foreign company. Additional studies also revealed an adverse connection between trade and cultural diversity, with other indicators supporting this finding. Nevertheless, cultural differences may potentially influence a country's comparative advantage, but the comparative advantage can outweigh and overcome these cultural differences [17].

#### **The character of Shared Cultural Soft-Powers:**

Empirically, nations that possess more analogous cultural backgrounds are more adept at forging mutually advantageous trade pacts, and the extent of these similarities directly correlates with the magnitude of commerce. Furthermore, trade is facilitated by shared cultural values and qualities, leading governments to favor establishing production in nations that share similar cultural values. Hence, cultures that share similar values are more inclined to engage in mutually advantageous trade. Hence, cultural proximity or cultural affinity fosters comparable consumer preferences and tastes, resulting in increased trade. Nevertheless, once a specific threshold is surpassed, cultural disparities might impede trade. However, before reaching this barrier, trade tends to increase despite the presence of cultural differences.

The importance of cultural similarity in creating mutually advantageous commercial agreements is supported by the finding that countries with similar cultural backgrounds are more skilled at developing and maintaining strong trading relationships. Furthermore, the consequence aimed at shared

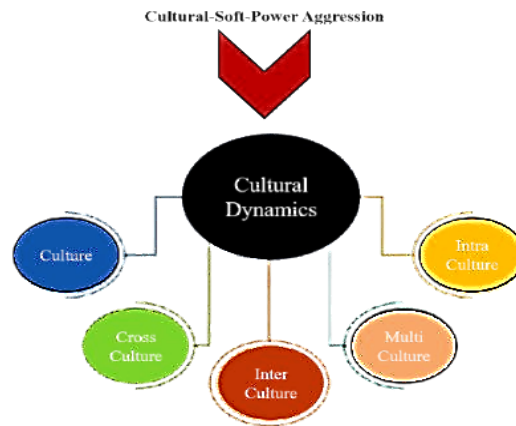
socio-cultural ethics while promoting trade becomes apparent as governments demonstrate a preference for creating production partnerships in nations that have similar cultural characteristics. The inclination for common cultural values is based on the understanding that they foster a favourable atmosphere for collaboration and economic cooperation. Cultures with shared values are naturally more motivated to participate in mutually beneficial trade, use their cultural affinity to manage complexity and establish trust in economic transactions. The relationship between cultural proximity and trade becomes more profound as it encourages similar consumer preferences and tastes. This convergence in consumer behavior enhances the smooth flow of products and services, hence increasing trade volumes among nations that share comparable cultures [18].

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that whereas cultural similarity promotes trade, there is a point at which cultural differences can hinder future economic collaboration. This threshold is a critical juncture at which the impact of cultural disparities becomes more evident and could potentially impede the smoothness of commercial transactions. However, before encountering this obstacle, the available evidence indicates that trade generally undergoes a period of growth, even amid cultural disparities. This highlights the flexibility and ability to recover of countries involved in trade, as they navigate various cultural environments to create and foster economic alliances. Essentially, the empirical observations

highlight that cultural proximity strongly influences trade, but the dynamics of international commerce are influenced by a complex interaction of shared values, cultural understanding, and the ability of states to adapt to the global economic landscape [19].

### **Cultural Aggression and Soft Power Model in the Aftermath of BRI:**

While contextualizing the cultural aggression and soft power dynamics, we conclude a model developing around the phenomenal concept of cultural sphere domains including the local (culture which is under the aggressive influence of cultural soft-power, and international culture which is perusing the aggressive influence of cultural soft-power. Thus, the state's cultures residing alongside the corridors in under the influence of Chinese cultural soft power, while China is pursuing its hard-core object of BRI including the use of aggressive cultural influences in the member states [20]. Meanwhile, during the process of exchange, the local cultures are mostly adopting the newly accepted and established norms of blinded culture. Therefore, this cultural exchange under the aggressive cultural soft-power figure outs three main cardinal including Ideas, Norms and Internalization which are developed through the construction and diffusion of ideas and norms while offering a set of actions for emerging cultural implementations (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: Cultural Aggression and Soft Power Model in the Aftermath of BRI**

In this context, the first aspect investigates the characteristics of cultural assault, carefully analyzing the possible degradation of local identities and history among states contributing to BRI. Thus, the investigation examines how narratives related to BRI projects influence the preservation or weakening of Indigenous cultural identities, with a particular focus on the complex effects on heritage in the context of infrastructure development. At the same time, the model presents a framework that evaluates the use of soft power as a strategic weapon in diplomacy.

The model underscores the relationship between cultural dynamics and diplomatic measures, emphasizing their reciprocal impact and the existence of interaction and feedback loops. The loops showcase how cultural subtleties

and diplomatic manoeuvres interact, emphasizing the dynamic and shifting nature of the aftermath of the BRI. The model provides a thorough view of how governments adapt and respond to the cultural legacies generated via BRI projects by analyzing interactions. Furthermore, the model incorporates cultural proximity elements, acknowledging the impact of common values and linguistic interactions on diplomatic ties. This paper explores the influence of cultural values on the efficacy of diplomatic endeavors, noting that nations sharing similar cultural values are more inclined to establish robust and mutually beneficial alliances.

### **CONCLUSIONS:**



Cultural soft power plays a crucial role in the Belt and Road Initiative's shared principles, especially in the areas of economy and development. The influence of "soft" power, which is centred on cultural power, can have both advantageous and detrimental impacts on the advancement of a nation's might. This entails a commitment to identifying common challenges and finding ways to overcome differences. Primary among all factors outside the actual trade itself is the diverse challenges that trade might generate when it comes to the use of cultural aggression and soft power in the aftermath of BRI. Nations along the BRI routes are perpetually aware of its influence within their borders, although such a degree of cultural aggression and soft power besides the development of trade and control is observed in the contemporary past. Although each nation has its distinct concerns regarding the implications of the economic developments and cultural soft power of BRI, many predominant factors will be universally encountered by all nations during both the construction and implementation phases. The challenges arising from cultural differences will exacerbate, and it is imperative not to overlook or downplay these differences. Countries that share comparable cultural traits and exhibit little cultural disparities are likely to encounter less difficulty in forging trade agreements, sustaining partnerships, and achieving success in BRI endeavors. However, countries with significantly divergent cultural values and substantial cultural disparities may encounter more challenges in forging trade agreements, sustaining partnerships, and achieving success in BRI projects. The diverse cultural characteristics in different nations have a significantly impact on response. Thus, the effect in question is of utmost importance and must be duly acknowledged as a significant factor that goes beyond the economic aspects of trade.

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