



THE GRIFFITH-TSINGHUA 'HOW CHINA SEES THE WORLD'

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*From Comprehensive National Power to
Soft Power: A Study of the Chinese
Scholars' Perception of Power*

By QI Haixia



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Project Introduction

How to understand China's rise and its implications for Asia and the world is an imperative task for both scholars and policy makers. China has become the second largest economy next to the United States since 2010. China is also the major trading partner for over 140 countries in the world. As United States-China relations will define the next century, it is essential to build mutual understanding for policy makers. If strategic distrust is a major obstacle in US-China relations, as Kenneth Lieberthal and Jisi Wang have suggested, deepening our understanding of Chinese perceptions and views on international relations will be a crucial task for bridging the perception gap and mitigating the strategic distrust between the two nations.

This project aims to make sense of China's rise in world politics through examining Chinese International Relations (IR) scholars' perceptions and debates on key issues in international relations and Asian security. This project will deepen our understanding of Chinese scholars, especially regarding how they perceive world politics and how they can impact Chinese policy making via internal debates. There are two parts in this project. First, we organize and conduct onsite surveys of IR scholars at the annual conference of the Chinese Community of Political Science and International Studies in Beijing. Second, we examine the internal debates among Chinese scholars over international politics, Asian security, and Chinese foreign policy.

With generous support from the MacArthur Foundation (grant No. 16-1512-150509-IPS), the Griffith Asia Institute is able to successfully collaborate with Tsinghua University's Institute of International Relations to carry out the survey research as well as conduct the research project on the Chinese IR debates through expert conferences and other academic exchanges. This working paper series will feature major Chinese scholars' analyses of internal debates and our survey findings.

We appreciate your comments and suggestions very much.

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From Comprehensive National Power to Soft Power: A Study of the Chinese Scholars' Perception of Power

Abstract

The concept of power, a keyword in International Relations (IR) theory, has long polarized academic attention in China. In the 1990s and early 21st century, many Chinese academics concentrated their energies on gauging the comprehensive national power of major world powers. But, in contrast to their foreign peers, Chinese scholars have tended to underestimate China's comprehensive national power. In the first decade of the 2000s, soft power superseded comprehensive national power as a main focus of attention in China's academia, and variations in China's foreign policy accompanied this shift of scholarly focus. Traditional policies such as "keeping a low profile" and "never seek hegemony" were questioned, while new slogans, such as "be a responsible great power" and "peaceful rise" gained more support. The study of Chinese scholars' perception of power is helpful for understanding China's foreign policy choices.

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This Working Paper Series presents papers in a preliminary form and serves to stimulate debates and discussions among scholars and policy analysts. The views expressed are entirely the author's own.

From Comprehensive National Power to Soft Power: A Study of the Chinese Scholars' Perception of Power

Qi Haixia

Introduction

China's rapid development and its persistence on peaceful rise have recently caused widespread public concern. How to interpret China's foreign policy correctly and how to predict China's strategic choices successfully are questions facing scholars today. The debate on whether China is a status quo state or an assertive power has also become a hot topic.¹

According to Deborah Welch Larson (2015), the study of scholars' opinion about power can contribute to the forecast of China's future foreign strategy. Li Mingjiang (2008) introduces the Chinese scholars' debate on soft power and finds that Chinese scholars' understanding of soft power is not limited to the scope of Joseph Nye's framework. Young Nam Cho (2008) studies China's recognition of soft power and points out that soft power is helpful for China's leadership in Asia. James Paradise (2009) discusses the relationship between China's emphasis on soft power and its setting up of Confucius Institutes overseas. Although the findings are helpful for us to understand the Chinese view of

Power, one of the core concepts of international relations, has undoubtedly gained enormous attention in China.

soft power, these scholars neglect the fact that Chinese scholars' perception of power has experienced an evolution from comprehensive national power to soft power. This paper argues that without a thorough comparison of Chinese scholars' understanding of comprehensive national power and soft power, one can hardly grasp the essence of China's foreign policy.

Power, one of the core concepts of international relations, has undoubtedly gained enormous attention in China. After thoroughly analyzing Chinese scholars' interpretation of the concept of power since 1980, it is noted that the Chinese academic community has experienced a transition from emphasizing the importance of comprehensive national

¹ See, for instance, He Kai and Huiyun Feng (2012); Alastair Johnston (2003, 2013); Thomas Christensen (2011); David Shambaugh (2001); Nicholas Taylor (2007); Huiyun Feng (2009); Scott Kastner and Phillip Saunders (2012); Brantly Womack (2015).

power to concentrating on soft power. From 1980 to 2000, many Chinese scholars conducted researches on understanding the content of comprehensive national power. In the twenty-first century, however, the emphasis of power analyses shifted to soft power. Why the shift? Do experts' debates help with understanding the decisions of the Chinese Government? The purpose of this paper is to answer these questions.

With China's rise, China is getting socialized by the outside world (Cameron Thies 2015). The impact of China's socialization is evidenced from Chinese scholars' systematic adoption of foreign concepts and theories. Although Chinese scholars may not impact the foreign

From 1980 to 2000, many Chinese scholars conducted researches on understanding the content of comprehensive national power. In the twenty-first century, however, the emphasis of power analyses shifted to soft power.

policy making process directly, their consensus is undoubtedly helpful in explaining some long-lasting Chinese foreign policy decisions, such as "to keep a low profile" and "never seek hegemony". Chinese

government's policy choice may correspond to scholars' preferences. If a certain policy gains the support of both China's Government and academia, it may be influential and long-lasting. So the study of Chinese scholars' understanding of comprehensive power and soft power is the starting point for us to grasp the key point of China's foreign policy. It should be noted that this paper does not try to prove the causal link between the discussion of scholars and China's policy, but is limited to surveying the Chinese scholarship's understanding of both comprehensive national power and soft power. Through the uncovering the academic inclination and preferences/biases of scholars, we can easily grasp academic consensus and divergence and thereby successfully analyze China's foreign policies.

The first part of this paper will analyze the ranking of comprehensive national power of the major powers in the world by Chinese scholars in comparison to Western scholarship. The key difference between the rankings by Chinese scholars and foreign scholars is that Chinese scholars' ranking of China is not as high as that of foreign scholars. The second part concentrates on analyzing Chinese scholars' research on soft power. The third part examines the transition of scholarly attention from comprehensive national power to soft power, and finally the last part will draw some conclusions.

Chinese Scholar's Debate on Comprehensive National Power in 1990s

Since the 1990s, many Chinese scholars have exhibited a strong interest in measuring and ranking the comprehensive national power of major states. After introducing the operationalization and ranking of comprehensive national power and comparing Chinese scholars' and foreign scholars' research works on this topic, we will be able to identify the selection preference and biases of Chinese scholars.

The Operationalization of Comprehensive National Power

Since the topic was introduced in China, comprehensive national power has gained enormous

attention and has been thoroughly studied by academic circles in recent decades. However, despite the fact that Chinese scholars have reached consensus that the measuring of comprehensive national power is helpful for an informed judgment of the status of major powers, their conclusions seem to differ from those of foreign scholars.

In China, many scholars have quickly accepted the concept of comprehensive national power and have been studying it since the 1990s. One of the most influential researchers is Wang Songfen. He has divided 17 countries into three kinds: the first is Western countries such as the United States, Japan, Germany, France, Italy, Britain and Canada; the second is other developed countries such as Russia (or Soviet Union), South Africa and Australia; and the third category includes developing

In China, many scholars have quickly accepted the concept of comprehensive national power and have been studying it since the 1990s.

countries such as India, Indonesia, South Korea, Brazil, Mexico and Egypt (Wang Songfen 1997: 13). According to Wang Songfen's calculations, in 1970, China was in the tenth place while the United States was in the first and Japan in the eighth. Ten years later, in 1980, China was still in the tenth position and the United States was still in the first, but Japan rose to the fifth. Finally, in 1990, China was still in the tenth place, the United States kept on to being the strongest while Japan rose to the fourth position (Wang Songfen 1997: 15).

Some Chinese scholars calculated each state's comprehensive national power in the 1990s. Huang Shuofeng (1999: 199), a researcher in China's People's Liberation Army Academy of Military Sciences, measured the overall ranking of some major states' comprehensive national power in 1996 and concluded that China was the seventh while America was the strongest. Surprisingly, Japan was the second strongest in 1996, according to Huang's research findings. IR scholars from the Chinese Institute of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) also measured and compared the comprehensive national power of major states. They declared that in 1998 the United States was the strongest state in the world and Japan was the second. China was also the seventh here because they were not optimistic about its future due to the difficulties in maintaining the momentum of long-term economic growth (Zhongguo Xiandai Guoji Guanxi Yanjiusuo Zonghe Guoli Ketizu 2000: 8).

Some scholars studied the comprehensive national power of major states after 2000. Researchers from the Chinese Academy of Sciences released China's *Sustainable Development Strategy Report* which measured China's comprehensive national power from the 1990s to the 2000s and declared that China had risen from the eighth position in 1990 to the seventh position in 2000 (Zhongguo kexueyuan Kecixu Fazhan Zhanlue Yanjiuzu 2003: 115). Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou (2006: 240), researchers from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), released a report about the international political environment by evaluating the comprehensive national power of major states. According to this report, in 2006 the United States possessed an absolute advantage over other countries as the only superpower in the world. The United Kingdom, Russia, France, Germany, China, Japan and Canada belonged to the second echelon. According to their

assessment, China ranked the sixth (Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou 2006: 265). In the CASS report on the evaluation of comprehensive national power of the major states in 2010, China was in the seventh place. The results then were: the United States ranked first, followed by Japan, Germany, Canada, France, Russia and China (Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou 2010: 273–275).

Table 1 shows the evaluation results of different Chinese scholars. Although their conclusions of China's comprehensive national power in different periods seem different, we find that

Surprisingly, most scholars believe that from 1970 to 2010 China was not as strong as Japan, whose military strength was limited after World War II.

they all regard China as a developing state, far behind great powers with its status slipping from fifth to tenth place. Table 1 not only shows China's ranking, but also

that of the US and Japan. The US is undoubtedly the strongest in the eyes of Chinese scholars. Surprisingly, most scholars believe that from 1970 to 2010 China was not as strong as Japan, whose military strength was limited after World War II.

Table 1 The Ranking of China's Comprehensive National Power by Chinese Scholars

Scholar or Institute	China's ranking	America's ranking	Japan's ranking	Countries compared	Ranking year	Ranking results
Wang Songfen	10	1	8	17	1970	1.The United States, 2.The Soviet Union, 3.Canada, 4.Australia, 5.Germany, 6.France, 7. England, 8.Japan, 9.Italy, 10.China, 11.Brazil, 12.Mexico, 13.India, 14.South Africa, 15.South Korea, 16.Egypt, 17.Indonesia
Wang Songfen	10	1	5	17	1980	1.The United States, 2.the Soviet Union, 3.Canada, 4.Germany, 5.Japan, 6.France, 7.Australia, 8.England, 9.Italy, 10.China, 11.Brazil, 12.South Korea, 13.Mexico, 14.South Africa, 15.India, 16.Indonesia, 17.Egypt
Wang Songfen	10	1	4	17	1990	1. The United States, 2. Russia, 3.Canada, 4.Japan, 5.Germany, 6.France, 7. Australia, 8.England, 9.Italy, 10.China, 11.South Korea, 12.Brazil, 13.Mexico, 14.India, 15.South Africa, 16.Indonesia, 17.Egypt.
Huang Shuofeng	7	1	2	12	1996	1.The United States, 2.Japan, 3.Germany, 4.Russia, 5.France, 6.England, 7.China, 8.Canada, 9.Italy, 10. Australia, 11.Brazil, 12.India.
China Institute of Contemporary International Relations	7	1	2	7	1998	1.The United States, 2.Japan, 3.France, 4.England, 5.Germany, 6.Russia, 7.China
Chinese Academy of Sciences	8	1	2	13	1990	1.The United States, 2.Japan, 3.Germany, 4.Canada, 5.France, 6.UK, 7.Russia, 8.China, 9.Italy, 10.Australia, 11.India, 12.Brazil, 13.South Africa

(Continued)

Chinese Academy of Sciences	7	1	2	13	1995	1. The United States, 2. Japan, 3. Germany, 4. Canada, 5. France, 6. UK, 7. China, 8. Russia, 9. Australia, 10. Italy, 11. India, 12. Brazil, 13. South Africa
Chinese Academy of Sciences	7	1	2	13	2000	1. The United States, 2. Japan, 3. Canada, 4. Germany, 5. France, 6. UK, 7. China, 8. Russia, 9. Australia, 10. Italy, 11. India, 12. Brazil, 13. South Africa
Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou	6	1	7	10	2006	1. The United States, 2. England, 3. Russia, 4. France, 5. Germany, 6. China, 7. Japan, 8. Canada, 9. South Korea, 10. India
Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou	7	1	2	10	2010	1. The United States, 2. Japan, 3. Germany, 4. Canada, 5. France, 6. Russia, 7. China, 8. England, 9. India, 10. Italy.

To match whether the conclusions of Chinese scholars are similar to those of Western scholars, Table 2 shows the comparison of their results (Wang Songfen 1997: 16). Withelm Fucks, Cox and Ray Cline are foreign scholars, while Huang Shuofeng and Wang Songfen are representatives of Chinese scholars. At the same time, Table 2 also shows the ranking of major countries such as the United States, the Soviet Union (Russia), Japan, China and Federal Germany (Germany).

it is obvious that Chinese scholars' perception of China's comprehensive national power may not be as strong as it seems in the eyes of foreign scholars.

Table 2 The Ranking of China's Comprehensive National Power by Chinese and Foreign Scholars

Scholar's Formula	Year	Number of indexes	Ranking of major states				
			United States	Soviet Union (Russia)	Japan	China	Federal Germany (Germany)
Withelm Fucks' National Power Equation	1970	3	1	2	3	5	4
	2000	3	1	2	4	3	5
Cox's Equation	1950	5	1	2	9	5	7
	1958	5	1	2	10	4	7
	1967	5	1	2	5	5	7
Ray Cline's Equation	1978	44	2	1	5	7	4
Huang Shuofeng's Equation	1986	150	1	2	3	4	5
	1989	150	1	2	3	6	4
Wang Songfen's Equation	1970	85	1	2	8	10	5
	1980	85	1	2	5	10	4
	1990	85	1	2	4	10	5

Based on Table 1 and Table 2, it is obvious that Chinese scholars' perception of China's comprehensive national power may not be as strong as it seems in the eyes of foreign

scholars. The underestimation of Chinese scholars may possibly be attributed to their operationalization because in Table 2 Chinese scholars' indexes are far higher than those of foreign scholars.

Chinese Scholars' Conceptualization of Comprehensive National Power

The major difference between Chinese scholars and foreign scholars appears to be that Chinese scholars underestimate China's comprehensive national power and the complexity in indicators, not only as a result of preferences of Chinese scholars, but also from the definition and measurement of the concept.

According to Wang Songfen (1997: 13), the definition of comprehensive national power is the sum of all kinds of strengths of a sovereign state in a certain period of time, including eight factors: resources, domestic economic situation, foreign economic and trade developments, scientific and technological ability, social development, military ability, governmental ability and diplomatic ability. In Wang Songfen's eyes, China's resources and military strength are high and right behind that of the United States and the Soviet Union, while China's abilities in science, technology and social development are weak and lag far behind other major states (1997: 16).

The Research Group of China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on the evaluation of comprehensive national power of the world's major countries defines "comprehensive national power" as the ability of a sovereign state to survive, develop and affect the outside

power is the sum of all kinds of strengths of a sovereign state in a certain period of time,

world in a certain period of time. Here the ability to survive is the basic requirement for a country's security, the ability to

develop provides the impetus for sustainable development, and last the ability to affect the outside world can enhance the international status of a country and expand its international influence (Guojia tongjiju shijie zhuyao guojia zonghe guoli pingjia ketizu 2015: 1).

Huang Shuofeng (1999: preface, 5), a researcher in the Chinese People's Liberation Army's Strategic Research Department of the Academy of Military Science, believes that a country's comprehensive national power includes all kinds of strength, both material and spiritual. Indicators of comprehensive national power include political power, economic power, abilities in science and technology, national defense force, cultural and educational ability, diplomatic ability and total resources (Huang Shuofeng 1999: 13).

Researchers in Chinese Academy of Sciences regard comprehensive national power as including not only such factors as governmental capability, economic development and social progress, but also ecological system factors. The emphasis on the ecological system may represent a unique feature of these scientists' understanding (Zhongguo kecixu fazhan zhanlue yanjiuzu 2003). Researchers in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences hold the opinion that comprehensive national power includes three factors: national resources (including the abilities in science and technology, human capital, capital resources,

information resources and natural resources), governmental control ability and national power (including military, diplomatic and economic strength) (Li Shenming and Wang Yizhou 2006: 240). Furthermore, Wu Chunqiu (1989) argues that comprehensive national power should at least include land area, geographical location, natural resources, weather and terrain, population, national production, abilities in science and technology, abilities in culture and education, transportation ability, defense ability, ideology, political systems, political principles and foreign policy, leadership and courage, allies and international aid.

As to the explanation of Chinese scholars' underestimate of China's power, there are three possible reasons. First, Chinese scholars are inclined to choose more indexes in evaluating comprehensive national power than foreign scholars. For example, Huang Shuofeng includes 150 indicators in his report, while in the famous Cline formula comprehensive national power is the product of hard power and soft power with only 44 indexes (Cline 1981: 13). It is clear that the different results are caused by different evaluation systems with different indexes and evaluation methods.

The function of different factors of national power is not equal. Some are of key importance while others are less relevant, so the inclusion of too many indexes may result in the weakening of key factors. It is evident that when a concept like comprehensive national power includes so many factors, its accuracy may be vague. The choice of indexes might also be related to the background of scholars. Foreign researchers concerned with this topic are mainly realists, so their indexes consist of mostly material factors. But Chinese scholars are different. Many Chinese scholars have the professional background of natural science. For example, Huang Suofeng graduated from the Department of Mathematics and Wang Songfen majored in statistics, so they may be influenced by their own specializations and inclined to choose some indexes that are not so important in the IR field but not negligible in their eyes.²

Second, Chinese scholars emphasize the significance of per capita GDP and have been applying it as an index to estimating China's economic strength (Zhou Fangyin 2005: 28). For example, Wang Songfen (1997: 17) points out that the reasons for China's national power being less than other major powers are the limited resources per capita, low efficiency and imperfect economic institutions. Huang Shuofeng (1999: 98) lists four factors in the economic field: gross index, per capita index, industrial system and people's living standards. By contrast, Western scholars tend to focus on total amounts. For example, in the National Material Capabilities Data Documentation of the Correlates of War project (COW), the Composite Index of National Capability (CINC) score is measured by concrete

Chinese scholars emphasize the significance of per capita GDP and have been applying it as an index to estimating China's economic strength

² The analysis here is based on the interview with Professor Zhou Fangyin who is the main expert in Zhongguo Xiandai Guoji Guanxi Yanjiusuo Zonghe Guoli Ketizu (the comprehensive national power research group in the China Institute of Modern International Relations).

indicators such as military expenditures, military personnel, primary energy consumption and total population.³ Although China has the largest population in the world, population is a burden when Chinese scholars calculate national powers. Therefore Zhou Fangyin (2005: 32) points out that the measurement of comprehensive national power should be total amount rather than per capita GDP. This difference justifies the purpose of this research. Many foreign scholars emphasize the importance of factors related to military ability such

the lack of self-confidence of Chinese scholars can partly explain their undervaluation.

as military spending, iron and steel because they are concerned with a state's performance in war. By contrast, the studies on

comprehensive national power by Chinese scholars have taken place in the context of Reform and Opening Up, when both the Chinese Government and individuals were concerned with keeping economic development as the central task. Therefore the Chinese measurement of comprehensive national power also includes some economic and social factors.⁴

Third, the lack of self-confidence of Chinese scholars can partly explain their undervaluation. To explain the details of operationalization, Table 3 shows a Chinese scholar's comparative evaluation of the powers of several countries in different fields (Wang Zaibang 2000: 2).

Table 3 Major States' Comprehensive National Power in Different Fields (1998)

Indicators	United States	Japan	China	Russia	Germany	France	England
Economic field	8924	6670	2511	2424	5143	4820	4850
Science and technology	9492	8641	1337	3124	6276	6904	6077
Military field	9503	1338	1068	3172	1222	2085	2183
Natural resource	3330	1401	4621	5210	1289	1918	1792

In the Table 3, Wang Zaibang compares national powers in four fields: economics, science and technology, military and natural resources. The figures show that China's abilities in the science and technology field and in military power are the lowest. China's economic power only surpasses Russia and is far less than that of other major states. The only advantage China possesses is that of natural resources. Wang Zaibang's score of China's science and technology abilities and military power may be partly due to Chinese scholars' lack of self-confidence, for whoever holds the opinion that China is strong enough may face severe criticism by other scholars. A case in point is Professor Li Shaojun, a researcher in China's Academy of Social Sciences. He attracted stern disapproval in 2006 when he voiced the opinion that China was the second strongest state in the world in the military field.⁵ This phenomenon may be the product of long-term social unrest and academic reflection. Since the late Qing Dynasty, China has experienced many failures in battles with

³ Correlates of War Project National Material Capabilities Data Documentation (Version 4.0). Available at <http://correlatesofwar.org>.

⁴ According to the interview with Professor Zhou Fangyin.

⁵ According to the interview with professor Zhou Fangyin.

Western states. As a result, the Chinese have been questioning and criticizing their own traditional culture such as Confucianism and began to look up to Western science and technology. China's military power is also questioned by Chinese scholars, even though China had fought wars with the United States, South Korea, India and Vietnam during the Cold War.

Chinese Scholars' Debate on Soft Power

Before the twenty-first century, Chinese scholars had shown keen interest in studying comprehensive national power, whereas since 2000 their interest seems to be concentrating more on soft power. What is the reason for this shift? To find the answer, we need to thoroughly analyze the related scholarly works.

The Transition from Comprehensive National Power to Soft Power

The underestimation of China's comprehensive national power was not the mainstream view in the 2000s. Ever since the late 1990s, some Chinese scholars started to argue that China was the second strongest country. Hu Angang, a Professor at Tsinghua University, might be the first Chinese scholar who promoted such an argument. He points out that in 1998 China's comprehensive national power developed quickly to rank second (Hu Angang and Men Honghua 2002: 77). Obviously this position hardly gained any support from other Chinese scholars in the early 2000s, nevertheless, with China's speedy rise, more Chinese scholars came to realize that China

is in fact stronger than expected. Professor Yan Xuetong (2006a: 21) has adopted a power-class approach to evaluate China's national power and comes to the conclusion

The underestimation of China's comprehensive national power was not the mainstream view in the 2000s. Ever since the late 1990s, some Chinese scholars started to argue that China was the second strongest country.

that China ranked second in 2005 because China is strong in military power, political power and economic power. Tang Yanlin (2014) has pointed out that China's comprehensive national power was the second in the world in 2010. But Hu Angang is too optimistic now, he has argued that China's comprehensive national power has even surpassed that of the US and became the strongest in 2013 (Hu Angang et al. 2015).

Although an underestimation of Chinese power is no longer the mainstream view, in the 2000s Chinese scholars showed more obvious interest in soft power rather than in comprehensive power. In 1990, Joseph Nye pointed out the importance of soft power which is defined as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than through coercion". During that time, Chinese scholars were paying remarkable attention to the concept of comprehensive national power and—relatively speaking—ignored the importance of soft power. Wang Huning (1993), former Professor at Fudan University, might be the first Chinese IR scholar to introduce the concept of soft power to China. But his introduction did not gain immediate academic attention on this topic in China. Strangely enough, it was not until the 2010s that the concept of "soft power" began to gain more academic attention

than the concept of “comprehensive power”.

To find detailed evidence of the Chinese scholars' shift in attention, Figure 1 shows the number of articles in Chinese journals which use the words “comprehensive national power” or “soft power” in their abstracts from 2000 to 2015.⁶ The data comes from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) database, the largest database on Chinese journals used by many scholars (Li Mingjiang 2008). Figure 1 reveals an interesting phenomenon: the increase in the number of articles related to “soft power” is sharper than that of the number of articles concerned “comprehensive national power”. The turning point emerges in the period from 2008 to 2012, when “soft power” gained more attention than “comprehensive national power”.

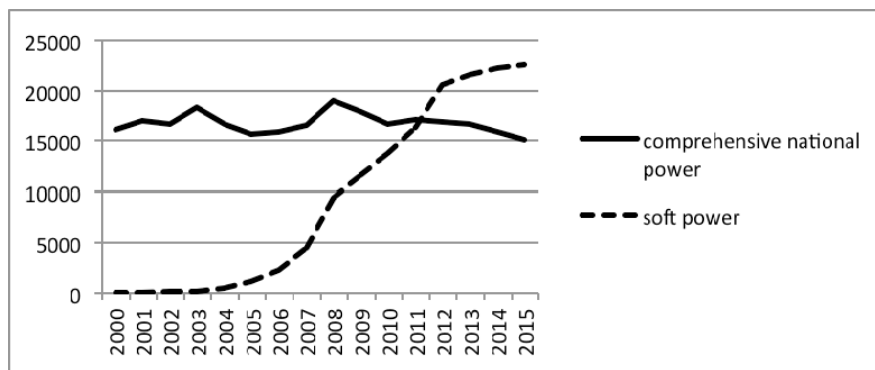


Figure 1 The Number of Chinese Articles about Power since 2000

A closer look at Chinese understanding of comprehensive national power, we notice that this transition is not totally unexpected. As mentioned above, Chinese scholars are inclined to add such indexes as culture and value in the total indexes when measuring comprehensive national power. Chinese scholars focus not only on material factors, but also emphasize subjective factors such as institution and culture. For example, Huang Shuofeng (1999: preface, 162–165) divides elements of national power into two categories: physical forces and spiritual forces. Wu Chunqiu's (1989) indicators of national power such as ideology, leadership and courage are considered subjective elements. In Wang Songfen's (1997: 13) study, such subjective factors as governmental capability and diplomatic ability belong to

it is natural that Chinese scholars would easily welcome and accept the concept of soft power when it was introduced into China.

the indexes of national power. Jia Haitao (2012) points out that comprehensive national power combines five basic factors: resources, military power, economic power, cultural power and soft power. In Li Zhongjie's view (2002: 22), comprehensive national power includes natural factors, social factors, physical factors, and mental factors. So it is natural that Chinese scholars would easily welcome and accept the concept of soft power when it was introduced into China.

⁶ Data source is <http://www.cnki.net/>.

Now, the question is why Chinese scholars did not favor the concept of soft power until the beginning of the twenty-first century. The answer is also related to the underestimation of China's national power mentioned above. The huge status gap between China and other major countries in the eyes of Chinese scholars was not questioned until the early twenty-first century. The year of 2008, when China held the Beijing Olympic Games, was a turning point. Before 2008, the number of articles related to "soft power" was lower than that of articles concerned with "comprehensive national power". At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the number of articles discussing soft power was almost zero. But in 2008, the number of articles studying soft power increased quickly to more than 1000 and in 2011 the number of those on "soft power" surpassed the number of articles on "comprehensive national power". The Olympic Games and the world financial crisis henceforth made both the Chinese and foreigners conscious of China's rise. Obviously, the underestimation of China's comprehensive national power by Chinese scholars may not retain popular support all the time. According to Yan Liang (2007), when the outcome of measuring comprehensive national power is not suitable for the current situation, scholars tend to choose new concepts. Furthermore, the concepts of "comprehensive national power" and "soft power" were both introduced in China in the 1990s. The reason Chinese scholars favored the former and ignored the latter may have something to do with the popularity of realism in the Chinese IR academic circle at the time. Similar to Marxism, which regards economic factors as a basis for the superstructure such as ideology and culture, realism also stresses the importance of material factors. So Chinese scholars easily came to regard the function of "comprehensive national power" as superior to that of "soft power" in 1990s. After 2008, however, China faced enormous outside pressures such as America's rebalancing strategy and the South China Sea dispute. Chinese scholars found that the improvement of comprehensive national power may not naturally result in the success of China's peaceful rise. To improve China's international status, they turned to "soft power".

Chinese Scholars' Conceptualization of Soft Power

The concept of soft power has been popular in China recently. Just as Zheng Yongnian and Zhang Chi (2007: 7) point out, as an interesting phenomenon, the Western concept of soft power has obvious defects and did not get widespread attention and application in the Western academic circles, but did spread quickly and has had a far-reaching impact in China in recent years. Nevertheless, the definition of soft power is to some extent ambiguous, since Chinese scholars have different views on whether the essence of soft power is cultural or political. According to Joseph Nye's definition,

Chinese scholars have different views on whether the essence of soft power is cultural or political.

"Soft power is not merely the same as influence...and soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument... soft power is attractive power...soft power

resources are the assets that produce such attraction... The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)" (Nye 2002: 8–12).

Since both cultural and political factors are included in this definition, the debate of Chinese scholars is also focused on these two fields.

The first school of scholars regards culture as the core of soft power. Wang Huning (1993) points out that soft power is essentially culture or value. Yu Xintian (2008: 16) also stresses that the core of soft power is culture and that political activities should be instructed by correct values. Another school of Chinese scholars holds the view that political factors play a decisive role in soft power. For example, Yan Xuetong (2007a, 2007b) points out that political power is the operational power while culture is just the resource.

Chinese scholars' definitions of soft power are also different from each other. For those who stress the importance of culture, their definition always relates to value. For Wang Huning (1993), soft power includes national morale, the economic system, the political system, science and technology, ideology, and other factors. Zhu Feng (2002) defines soft power as the ability of a country to attract or persuade other countries. Pang Zhongying (2005: 62) believes that soft power is just moral strength and moral prestige. Zhang Xiaoming (2005: 22–23), from Peking University, points out that soft power can indirectly cause others to determine their own preferences or allow other countries to follow voluntarily and obey rules through ideological and cultural attraction.

For those who stress the importance of political factors, their definition is obviously related to the political system and ability. Professor Yan Xuetong (2006b) regards soft power not

The cultural school held the dominant position at the beginning, but was challenged from 2007 by the second school. The two schools have debated ardently about the function of political and cultural factors.

as the material resource but as the ability to use resources and strength. Professor Chu Shulong (2003: 74–76) believes that soft power includes science and technology, management ability, cultural attraction,

and national competitiveness. For Chu, the most important part of soft power is the attractiveness of values, cultural creativity and innovation ability.

The cultural school held the dominant position at the beginning, but was challenged from 2007 by the second school. The two schools have debated ardently about the function of political and cultural factors. Yan Xuetong (2007a) points out that the increase in political power can accelerate the development of culture, but the development of culture cannot promote the progress of political power. Furthermore, strategic reputation is the core of political power. Lu Gang (2007) disagrees with Yan and insists on the central role of culture and value in soft power with the historical study of the former Soviet Union's

experience. Without cultural attraction, he maintains, political reputation could have hardly promoted the rise of this major power. Wu Xu (2007) comments that both schools are right in certain circumstances and that the reason for this debate is the ambiguous meaning of soft power itself. Eventually, Yan Xuetong (2007b) responds by clarifying the meaning of political power and cultural power. According to his explanation, a voting right in the UN is political power while a Kung Fu film is cultural power.

Although Chinese scholars' understanding of soft power comes originally from Joseph Nye, the different definitions demonstrate that they have not reached consensus on this concept. Wang Hongying and Lu Yeh-Chung (2008: 428–430) have made a summary of the discussion of soft power in China and find that the concept of “soft power” is widely used by Chinese scholars. In their view, Nye's concept of soft power is mainly aimed at international relations, while Chinese scholars use it for both foreign policy and domestic issues. Nye's understanding of soft power is mainly popular culture and political mode, while Chinese scholars concentrate on traditional culture and the mode of economic development.

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Chinese Scholars' Measurement of Soft Power

Chinese scholars have paid much attention to the measurement of soft power of different countries. Wang Jingbin (2007) has conducted a survey at Osaka Sangyo University to compare the soft power of Japan and China through questionnaire research. His conclusion is based on the subjective judgment of students at Osaka Sangyo University. For Wang, popular culture is not the source of soft power because popular culture cannot become the social norm, while traditional culture, which has an obvious impact on social norms, is part of soft power. He finds that the images of political leaders in China and Japan have great influence on soft power.

Professor Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin (2008: 26) measure soft power by three elements: international attraction, international mobilization, and internal mobilization. International attraction includes cultural attraction and the attractiveness of a country's mode of development; international mobilization includes strategic relations and international rule-making ability; and internal mobilization includes the mobilization ability of the upper social class and the lower social class. According to Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin's calculations, China's overall soft power is only one third of that of the United States. When comparing the three indexes, China's international attraction and international mobilization are far lower than the level of America, but China's internal mobilization ability is better than that of America (Yan Xuetong and Xu Jin 2008: 28). By using Yan Xuetong's model, Zhong Zhen and Wu Wenbing (2012: 14) measure and compare the soft power of China and India. They find that although China's soft power is stronger than

India's, the rising speed of India's soft power after 2005 has been faster than that of China.

Fang Changping (2007) compares Chinese and American attitudes towards soft power. He finds that Americans believe that their social system and political values are universal and need to be propagated to other states. China holds the recognition of soft power that the world is full of various cultures and states should respect each other. So China need not rashly export its culture, social system and development model to other states (Fang Changping 2007: 22). The United States also believes that governmental and non-governmental organizations are equally important in the implementation of soft power. For example, the United States' Government has many agencies directly involved in overseas promotion of democratic plans, and the majority of non-governmental organizations in the external promotion of democracy play an irreplaceably important role. China, on the contrary, promotes soft power only by a strong government without the help of non-governmental organizations (Fang Changping 2007: 23).

Despite huge divergence on the concept of soft power between Chinese scholars and foreigners, their views on its measurement are similar. In April 2008, the US Congress released a report and stressed that America's soft power had declined partly because China's soft power has been rising (Thomas Lum et al. 2008). The Chicago Council on Global Affairs (2008) has measured soft power through a survey of 6000 people in China,

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the United States, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia and Vietnam. Their survey result indicates that China's soft power ranks third, following that of the United States

and Japan, and that the economic and military power of China has not yet been totally converted into soft power. According to a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report, China is now debating about soft power, but it lacks the strategy to use soft power and its utilization of it is defensive and passive, because China's soft power is mainly used to reduce the threat of other countries (Carola McGiffert 2009).

There are clear difference in Chinese and foreign scholars' analyses/evaluations of comprehensive national power and soft power. An interesting phenomenon is that the underestimation of traditional culture by Chinese scholars no longer exist after 2000. This can be explained by China's fast and impressive economic development after the Reform and Opening Up of the 1980s. We also note that many scholars attribute economic development to China's own traditional culture.

The Chinese Scholars' Debate on Power and China's Foreign Policy

It may be helpful for us to understand China's relevant policies through an exhaustive study of Chinese perception of comprehensive national power and soft power. Chinese

scholars' understanding of power has been through a long process of discussion and debate from comprehensive national power to soft power. Although there has been a lot of divergence on measuring and ranking comprehensive national power and soft power, Chinese scholars are unanimous about the importance of these two concepts.

Transition of Scholars' Focus to Foreign Policy

From the 1990s to the 2010s, together with the Chinese scholarship's transition in focus from comprehensive national power to soft power, China's foreign policy also experienced profound changes. Since the end of the Cold War, China has stressed policies such as "keep a low profile" and "never seek hegemony". But recently such phrases as "responsible great power" and "rising peacefully" have appeared more frequently in the Chinese Government statements. Figure 2 and Figure 3 list the number of articles using these words in their abstracts.⁷

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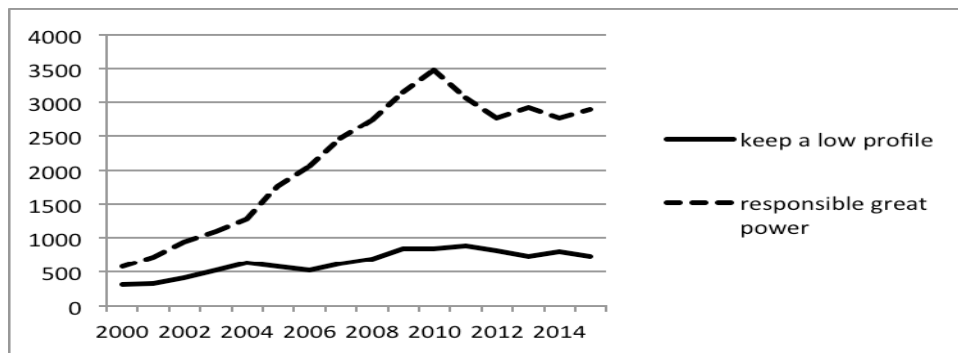


Figure 2 The Number of Chinese Articles about Foreign Policy since 2000

Figure 2 shows the number of Chinese articles on the two themes in foreign policies—"keep a low profile" and "responsible great power". The curves show two obviously different trends with the line of "responsible great power" rising rapidly and the line of "keep a low profile" growing slowly. It is clear that since 2000, more and more Chinese scholars are inclined to see an influential China in the world and prefer China to be a "responsible great power". In practice, China's contributions to the UN peacekeeping budgets are increasing.⁸ At the same time, China's involvement in peacekeeping operations is expanding (Bates Gill and Chin-Hao Huang 2009; Zhao Lei 2011; Courtney Richardson 2011).⁹

⁷ Data source is available at <http://www.cnki.net/>.

⁸ United Nations (UN) Secretariat. 2010. Assessment of Member States' Contributions to the United Nations Regular Budget for the Year 2011. December 28. Available at http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=ST/ADM/SER.B/824.

⁹ United Nations (UN) Peacekeeping. 2016. Troop and Police Contributors Archive (1990–2016). Available at http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/resources/statistics/contributors_archive.shtml.

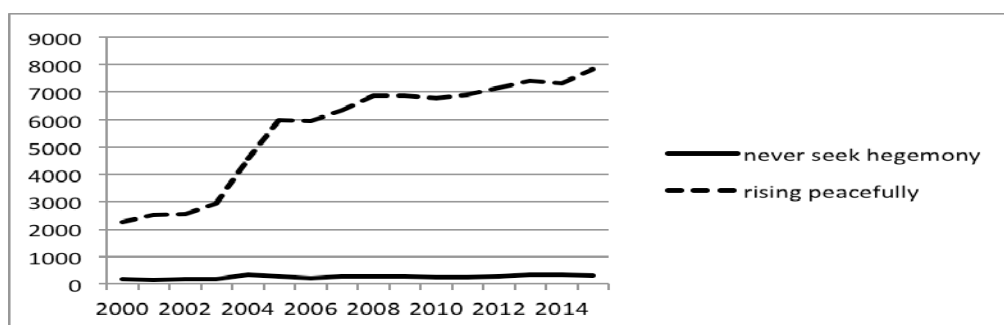


Figure 3 The Number of Chinese Articles about International Role since 2000

In Figure 3, the rapid growth of the number of articles concerned with “rising peacefully” clearly indicates the projections of Chinese scholars about China’s role in the world. On the other hand, the influence of the traditional view of “never seek hegemony” seems small due to the number of articles related to this topic. Hegemony has been regarded as a derogatory term by Chinese scholars since the Cold War, when both the US and the Soviet Union were regarded as hegemons.

Through the comparison of these concepts and policies it is clear that the shift in focus of these policies seems to be linked to the shift of studies on power. Therefore the following section will analyze China’s preference for certain policies after introducing the leanings of the scholarship.

Recognition of Comprehensive National Power and China’s Foreign Policy

It is interesting to notice that most Chinese scholars rank the status of China’s comprehensive national power lower than foreign scholars. This underestimation is helpful for us to understand China’s foreign policy.

First, in tandem with Chinese scholars’ underestimation of national power, Chinese people have always regarded China as a developing country. Both Chinese leaders and the public believe that China is a state with dual identity: both a developing country and a major power (Xinbo Wu 2001: 293). Even in 2011, when China experienced long-term rapid economic development, the Chinese Government declared in Peaceful Development

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White Paper that “for China, the most populous developing country, to run itself well is the most important fulfillment of its international responsibility.”¹⁰ This self-perception is in line with the scholarship’s underestimation of Chinese strength. A case in point is that at a UN climate conference, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stressed China’s status as a developing country and pointed out the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” as the core of international cooperation on climate change.

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¹⁰ Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. 2011. China’s Peaceful Development. Beijing, September 6. Available at http://www.china.org.cn/government/whitepaper/node_7126562.htm.

Second, Chinese scholars' underestimation of China's comprehensive national power may also be related to Deng Xiaoping's grand strategy to "observe coolly (*lengjing guancha*), hold the line (*wenzhu zhenjiao*), deal calmly (*chenzhuo yingdui*), keep a low profile (*taoguang yanghui*), guard weaknesses (*shanyu shouzhuo*), never take the lead (*juebu dangtou*), and play a role (*yousuo zuowei*)" which was raised at the beginning of the post-Cold War era when China faced the blockade of Western states (Qian Qichen 1996: 6–7). The instructions of Deng Xiaoping have provided fundamental guidelines on China's diplomacy (Shaun Breslin 2013). Deng Xiaoping's diplomacy "to keep a low profile" is consistent in logic with Chinese scholars' underestimation of the comprehensive strength of China and therefore is easily accepted by scholars. Professor Ye Zicheng (2002: 63) pointed out in 2002 that the strategy "to keep a low profile" has been generally accepted by Chinese scholars and has played an important guiding role in academic consensus. Wu Jianmin, former Chinese Ambassador to France, pointed out in September 2005 that the policy "to keep a low profile" was proposed by Deng Xiaoping and his judgement is wise, so the Chinese Government will maintain it over the long term.¹¹

Third, since Chinese scholars started to realize that China's comprehensive national power might have reached the second since 2000, the strategy of peaceful rise also gained a lot of attention. In November 2003, when Zheng Bijian first introduced the term "peaceful rise", it received enormous attention at the Boao Forum. Shortly afterwards, in December 2003, Chinese leader Hu Jintao introduced the term "peaceful rise" in an official speech for the first time (Hu Jintao 2003: 2).

But the term "peaceful rise" was widely questioned in the early 2000s. Both Chinese scholars and government worried that acknowledging China's actual national power as the second and using the term "peaceful rise" would cause the US to treat China as a major rival, just like it did with the Soviet Union in the Cold War. To escape the same fate as the Soviet Union, Chinese scholars tend to underestimate China's comprehensive national power (Yan Xuotong 2006a: 8). So China's Government prefers the policy

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"to keep a low profile".¹² In April 2004, Chinese then President Hu Jintao used the concept "peaceful development" instead of "peaceful rise" at the Boao Forum (2004: 1). In December 2005, the White Paper *China's Path to Peaceful Development* expressed the Chinese intention to rise by peaceful means (Information Office of the State Council 2011). It is obvious that "peaceful development" is the new Chinese strategic concept (Bonnie Glaser

¹¹ Wu Jianmin. 2005. China Should Continue to Follow the Principle of "Keep a Low Profile and Play a Certain Role" Over the Long Term [Zhongguo yao changqi jianchi taoguang yanghui yousuo zuowei fangzhen], July 24. Available at <http://www.chinanews.com/news/2005/2005-09-27/8/631955.shtml>.

¹² *People's Daily* [Renmin Ribao]. 2004. Assessing China's Power in a Correct Way [Zhengque Gujia Zhongguo Shili], December 3, p. 7.

and Evan Medeiros 2007).

After the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, China's leaders acknowledged that China's rise was an "open secret", so they started to worry about the possible rivalry between China and the US. In 2014, China's president Xi Jinping referred to the "Thucydides trap" to describe the difficulty facing China. One year later, when Xi Jinping visited the US in 2015, he mentioned the "Thucydides trap" twice and tried to persuade the US to abandon suspicion towards China.¹³ Together with the challenge to "keep a low profile", Chinese policy makers started to consider the possibility of its peaceful rise. But it is obvious that they are not so optimistic about a "peaceful rise" now.

To sum up, we have found that the scholarship's evaluation of comprehensive national power is helpful for us to understand China's choices in foreign policy. Since China kept regarding itself as a developing country even after the Cold War, it is easy for us to understand why it prefers to keeping a low profile and to avoiding taking the leadership role. With the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, China's policy of "never seeking hegemony" (*bu cheng ba*) is helpful to reduce the preoccupation of the Western states with an emerging powerful China.

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Recognizing Soft Power and China's Foreign Policy

Since 2000, the concept of soft power has not only gained the attention of Chinese scholars, but was also noticed by the Chinese Government. In January 2006, China's then President Hu Jintao pointed out at the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group meeting that China's improved international status and influence would rely on both hard power — the economy, science and technology — and soft power, for instance, culture (Ma Lisi 2007). In October 2007, Hu Jintao included the words "soft power" in the official report of the 17th National Congress of the CPC, which meant that soft power had officially gained the support of the government (Hu Jintao 2007: 33). The Chinese Government regards culture as the core of soft power. In 2010, the Communist Party of China declared that China would promote the prosperity of culture and enhance national cultural soft power.¹⁴ In 2011, China's central government stressed the importance of cultural soft power again and tried to enhance national cultural soft power and the influence of Chinese culture.¹⁵ It is clear

¹³ *People's Daily Overseas Edition [Renmin Ribao Haiwaiban]*, 2015. How to Avoid the "Thucydides Trap?" [Daguo Ruhe Bimian "Xiuxi Dide Xianjing"?], November 27, p.16.

¹⁴ Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Zhiding Guomin Jingji he Shehui Fazhan Di Shier Ge Wunian Guihua de Jianyi [The Suggestions of the CPC Central Committee on the Twelfth Five Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development], October 28, 2010. Available at http://www.most.gov.cn/yw/201010/t20101028_82966.htm.

¹⁵ Zhonggong Zhongyang Guanyu Shenhua Wenhua Tizhi Gaige Tuidong Shehui Zhuyi Wenhua Dafazhan Dafanrong Ruogan Zhongda Wenti de Jueding [The Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Deepening the Reform of the Cultural System and Promoting the Development and Prosperity of Socialist Culture], October 18, 2011. Available at http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2011-10/25/content_1978202.htm.

that the Chinese Government does not mention the political system as part of soft power.

With the focus of the scholarship shifting from comprehensive national power to soft power, China's foreign policy also experienced some changes. First, with increasing emphasis on soft power and dwindling attention to comprehensive power, the policy "to keep a low profile" faced challenges. At the beginning of 2000, although the situation was different from that of the 1990s, China continued the policy of "never seek hegemony" because at that time Chinese scholars regarded China as a developing country. With China's long-term economic development and the change in international dynamics, Chinese leaders and people seem to have gained more confidence so that China is no longer so reluctant to be the regional leader and even tries to play a major role in the international community. For example, in 2009 then Chinese President Hu Jintao adjusted Deng Xiaoping's guidance of "to keep a low profile" slightly to "continue to keep a low profile and

China's emphasis on cultural factors in soft power may be helpful for us to understand its establishment of Confucius Institutes overseas.

positively play a certain role".¹⁶ In October 2013, President Xi Jinping did not mention "keeping a low profile" at the Working Conference on Neighboring State Diplomacy, but declared "to strive to promote our neighboring state diplomacy".¹⁷ Professor Yan Xuetong (2013: 15) of Tsinghua University argued that Xi Jinping's speech revealed that China had replaced 'keeping a low profile' policy with 'striving for achievements'.

In addition, China's emphasis on cultural factors in soft power may be helpful for us to understand its establishment of Confucius Institutes overseas. In November 21, 2004, China's first overseas Confucius Institute was officially established in South Korea. By the end of August 2012, there were 387 Confucius Institutes and 509 Confucius Classroom schools established in 108 countries and regions.¹⁸ The mission of Confucius Institutes is to provide Chinese language and cultural resources to promote multiculturalism and to build a harmonious world.¹⁹ Obviously, the promotion of the Confucius Institutes will be helpful for the outside world to understand Chinese culture and improve China's soft power in a harmonious way (James Paradise 2009). The appeal and influence of Confucianism are decisive factors for the success of the Confucius Institute project (James Paradise 2009: 662). Confucianism, which has been the official ideology in China for the past thousands of years, still has highly significant influence inside China. So the Confucian creed such as the dislikes of using military means and opposing unjust wars still affects China's policy bias today (Feng Zhang 2015).

¹⁶ Hu Jintao deng zhongyang lingdao chuxi dishiyici zhuwai shijie huiyi [Hu Jintao and Other Central Government Leaders Attend the 11th Meeting of Diplomatic Envoys], July 20, 2009. Available at http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2009-07/20/content_11740850.htm.

¹⁷ *Renmin ribao* [People's Daily]. 2013. Xi Jinping zai zhoubian waijiao gongzuo zuotanhui shang fabiao zhongyao jianghua [Important Speech by Xi Jinping at the Working Conference on Neighbouring States Diplomacy], October 26.

¹⁸ *Renmin ribao* (People's Daily). 2012. Kongzi xueyuan: zhongguo wenhua yongbao shijie [Confucius College: Chinese Culture Embraces the World], August 10, section 1. Available at http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciousinstitutes/node_10961.htm.

¹⁹ http://english.hanban.org/node_7719.htm.

What's more, China stresses the importance of soft power and tries to be a responsible big country through more foreign aid. As a result, China is influential and has been gaining a lot of support in developing countries. According to Pew Global Attitudes & Trends Question

China stresses the importance of soft power and tries to be a responsible big country through more foreign aid.

Database, when asked the question: "Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of China", the

people in developing countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Egypt and Indonesia choose "somewhat favorable" more than "somewhat unfavorable".²⁰ Obviously China's rising strategy of soft power and foreign aid can favor the development of developing countries.

Table 4 Chinese Perception of Power, Foreign Policy and China's Role

Scholars' perception of power	Foreign Policy
Underestimate China's comprehensive national power	1. keep a low profile (<i>tao guang yang hui</i>) 2. never seeks hegemony
Stress cultural factors in soft power	1. overseas Confucius Institutes 2. responsible big country 3. rising peacefully 4. striving for achievements

Table 4 summarizes the content discussed above. The scholarship's shift of focus on national power and foreign policies can be attributed to China's quick economic development and its rising self-confidence.

Since the Reform and Opening-Up in the 1980s, Chinese scholars have confronted many Western theories and ideas which might be contradictory. At the early stage, they chose comprehensive national power. According to Table 4, when measuring and ranking the status of different states' comprehensive national power and soft power, Chinese scholars were inclined to underestimate China's international role. China's dual identity of being both a developing country and a major power led to confusion in the way Chinese scholars interpreted its status. Meanwhile, foreign policies such as "keep a low profile (*tao guang yang hui*)" and "never seeks hegemony" received considerable academic support at that time.

But with long-term rapid economic development, Chinese scholars faced a new challenge and began to pay more attention to soft power. The Chinese fondness for soft power can be explained by a similar idea from Confucianism which stresses the importance of morality and culture in the field of politics (Feng Zhang 2013). So China's developing strategy swang uncertainly from "keep a low profile" (*tao guang yang hui*) to "peaceful rise" (*heping jueqi*). As a result, new policies such as "overseas Confucius Institutes", "responsible big country" and "rising peacefully" have inspired heated debates in China.

²⁰ <http://www.pewglobal.org/>.

Conclusion

This study tries to foresee China's future foreign policy through a comprehensive study of the scholarship's views on power. China has been influenced by the outside world as well as by its own development. Since the 1990s, many Chinese scholars have been exhibiting a strong interest in measuring and ranking the comprehensive national power of major states. Through the comparison with foreign scholars, we find that in the eyes of Chinese scholars, China's comprehensive national power is not as high as it is in the eyes of foreign scholars. This paper has offered three possible explanations: the indexes chosen, the stress of per capita GDP in operationalization and Chinese scholars' undervaluation of their own culture.

The turning point appeared in 2008. Chinese scholars began to pay more attention to "soft power", while "comprehensive national power" received less attention. Recently, China has faced external pressures such as the Diaoyu Islands and the South China Sea disputes. The current situation challenges Chinese scholars' traditional thinking that diplomatic pressure may be reduced with the rise of comprehensive national power. Therefore they have turned to the new concept of "soft power" to find the answer.

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The main purpose of this paper has been to describe the change in the academic debate on power and to find the link between scholarly debate and policy choice. Together with the scholarship's shift in focus, China's foreign policies also experienced an obvious change from "keeping a low profile" to "rising peacefully". This paper does not try to suggest that scholarly attention on certain topics has led to corresponding foreign policies. To prove the causality between scholarly debate and policy changes is beyond the scope of this study. However, we can find an indirect link between scholarly attention and policy choice because the government welcomes consultation with experts before policy is designed and scholars' criticism after the policy announcement. Of course, China's foreign policy may also be influenced by other factors such as outside pressures, presenting a certain complexity that can hardly be explained by the simple angle of power.

This paper tries to provide a macro perspective on China's policy. When the focus of Chinese scholars shifted from comprehensive national power to soft power, China's policy correspondingly exhibited different inclinations. But this does not mean that the current Chinese Government's focus is still on soft power and peaceful rise. The new Chinese Government has been stressing the importance of military strength and—relatively speaking—neglecting soft power, hence China currently pays more attention to such issues as the Thucydides trap. We can deduce from the findings of this paper that in the long run, if Chinese scholars pay more attention to soft power, China may prefer more moderate rising strategies such as "peaceful rise" or "peaceful development".

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