

**THE CHINESE SELF, THE OTHER, AND WESTERN EUROPEAN MEDIA:
A CROSS-MEDIA CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS ON CHINESE
SOFT POWER NARRATIVES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE 'ONE BELT,
ONE ROAD' INITIATIVE AND THE ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE
INVESTMENT BANK**

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Abstract

Soft power is defined as one country's capacity to influence other countries in its favor through non-aggressive means, and its ability to be accepted by other actors as a moral leader domestically and abroad. For that purpose, a country may rely on its culture, political values, and foreign policy. The acceptance or rejection of those elements by other countries thus defines the former country's capacity at projecting its soft power. Regrettably, this definition fails to properly characterize Chinese soft power and more especially the preferred image the country has ambitioned to project abroad. The discrepancy between China's projected image and Western Europe's perceived image of China is particularly flagrant, and would require further analysis. At the core of this disagreement lie two different definitions of 'soft power' – that is, opposing sets of cultures, political values, and foreign policy – stemming from two divergent sources – respectively the Chinese government and Western European civil society. Divergences in the basic elements of soft power, its instrumentalization by the polities in question, as well as broader shifts in current geopolitical dynamics may explain China's difficulty in successfully projecting its preferred image in Western Europe. Critical discourse analysis with a focus on sociopolitical discourse is therefore key in examining how discourse practices participate in the production, reproduction, and challenge of current forms of dominance. Further assessment in the dynamics of asymmetrical power relations between emitters of soft power provide key-elements in understanding how one country's projected image may be successfully or unsuccessfully perceived by its receivers.

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter 1 – Research project, methodology, and literature review	3
1.1. Introduction to the research project	3
1.1.1. Presentation of the research project.	3
1.1.2. Research question and hypotheses.	5
1.1.3. Textual resources.....	6
1.1.4. Outline of the research project.	6
1.2. Methodology.....	7
1.2.1. Critical discourse analysis	7
1.3. Literature review.....	9
1.3.1. Soft power	10
1.3.2. Western critique of Chinese soft power.	11
1.4. Conclusion	15
Chapter 2 – ‘One Belt, One Road’ and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	16
2.1. Chapter introduction	16
2.2. The ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative.....	16
2.2.1. General introduction to the One Belt, One Road initiative	16
2.2.2. OBOR and soft power	19
2.2.2.1. The historical narrative.	19
2.2.2.2. The all-encompassing nature	20
2.2.2.3. China versus the Other.....	21
2.2.2.4. Conclusive remarks.....	22
2.3. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.....	22
2.3.1. Presentation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.....	22
2.3.2. AIIB and soft power	24
2.3.2.1. Conclusive remarks	27
2.4. Conclusion	28
Chapter 3 – Projection and perception of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank by Chinese and Western European media.....	30
3.1. Chapter introduction	30
3.2. People’s Daily.....	31
3.2.1. Micro-level: argumentation and rhetorical figures.....	31
3.2.2. Meso-level: lexical style and storytelling.....	32
3.2.3. Macro-level: Structural emphasis of actions and sources’ credibility	33

3.3. Global Times	35
3.3.1. Micro-level: argumentation and rhetorical figures.....	35
3.3.2. Meso-level: lexical style and storytelling.....	37
3.3.3. Macro-level: Structural emphasis of actions and sources' credibility.	39
3.4. Le Monde.....	41
3.4.1. Micro-level: argumentation and rhetorical figures.....	41
3.4.2. Meso-level: lexical style and story telling.....	43
3.4.3. Macro-level: Structural emphasis of actions and sources' credibility.	45
3.5. Financial Times	47
3.5.1. Micro-level: argumentation and rhetorical figures.....	47
3.5.2. Meso-level: lexical style and story telling.....	48
3.5.3. Macro-level: Structural emphasis of actions and sources' credibility.	50
Conclusion.....	53
Appendices	60
Table 1	60
Table 2	61
Table 3	62
Bibliography.....	63

INTRODUCTION

The concept of soft power emerged in the early 1990s, partly in response to new geopolitical rearrangements of the global order. In the post-Cold War context, it was indeed necessary to rethink one's political and military strategies as to better adapt to an environment where power was gradually eluding traditional centers of power, and where non-state actors played an incrementally important role.¹ Nye argues that conventional great powers were then left unable to rely on their sole military capabilities: the deletion of physical boundaries between politically dissimilar entities had rendered cooperation more fluid, and minimized the reliance on direct armed intervention. Moreover, as dialogue between non-state actors had become more far-reaching, states increasingly relied on said transnational participants to further both the scope and depth of their interests. The traditional "test of great power," namely one country's "strength at war" as well as its "possession of the population, territory, natural resources, economic size, military force, and political stability,"² had to be shifted towards more intangible means such as "technology, education, and economic growth" for their growing "[significance] in international power."³ In other words, hard power, or "the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow [one's] will,"⁴ had become an obligatory-yet-superfluous form of power assertion that would be used in extreme situations only.

China was no stranger to this shift. Approached in the 1990's, soft power was to be incorporated into the country's foreign policymaking in the mid-2000's and thoroughly promoted from Hu's presidency onwards. Due to China's growing importance, Chinese soft power has emerged as a vividly discussed topic amongst academics and pundits with an

¹ Joseph Nye, "Soft power," *Foreign Policy*, No. 80 (1990): 160

² *Ibid.*, 154

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Joseph Nye, "Propaganda isn't the way: soft power," *International Herald Tribune*, January 10, 2003.

interest in Sinology. More specifically, great attention has been devoted to the understanding of the concept by Chinese authorities. Scholarly debates have been divided over the efficiency of said concept, for some researchers believe that Beijing has greatly wielded soft power and seduced members of the international community, and others argue that the Chinese Communist Party still lacks the attributes to successfully entice other international actors. Nevertheless, very little attention has been devoted to the efficiency of soft power upon Western European audiences and, by extension, media in their representation of China in the context of its efforts to appear more favorable in the eyes of said publics. The aim of this dissertation is therefore to understand to which extent Chinese soft power efforts have been successful at convincing Western European audiences of China's positive image – its 'Self'. This chapter will serve as an introduction to this topic. It will first introduce the research question and sub-questions guiding this research, as well as the rationale behind this scholarly choice and its hypotheses. It will then present the methodology, and present the academic discussion related to Chinese soft power.

CHAPTER 1 – RESEARCH PROJECT, METHODOLOGY, AND LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1. *Introduction to the research project*

1.1.1. Presentation of the research project.

This research project endeavors to assess to which extent Chinese soft power efforts have succeeded in projecting a favorable image of China in Western European media, with a special attention for British and French media. In other words, this project will first analyze reporting on one given topic in Chinese media, then look for discursive differences in the reporting on the same topic in Western European media. For this purpose, it will examine the case of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative and that of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank from 2015 to 2017 across Chinese, French, and British media. Textual sources will include both Chinese online newspapers (*People’s Daily* and *Global Times*) and Western European newspapers (*Financial Times* and *Le Monde*). The political stances will thus encompass official standpoints from the Chinese Communist Party, albeit with more or less hardliner stances, and centrist to moderate leftist opinions from the Western European point of view. By adopting a sociopolitical discourse analysis methodology, this research project first aims at determining the soft power terminology used in Chinese, French, and British media at a textual level. Second, by opposing discourse practices, expected results should provide a compilation of elements proper to China’s representation of Self and Western media’s representation of the Chinese Self. Finally, said elements will be analyzed against the backdrop of their social context. The finality of this project is to hypothesize the rationales behind diverging representations of the Chinese Self in the light of the soft power-foreign policymaking nexus, and to analyze the success or failure of the projection of China’s ‘preferred image’ onto Western European media in the context of China’s near abroad policymaking.

Chinese soft power has been a bountiful topic of academic interest for the past decade, for both Chinese and foreign academics. However, the bulk of said research has mainly approached the utter success or absolute failure of the Chinese government at adapting said concept in their own terms. While evaluating either policies or on-the-ground results of Chinese soft power, most researchers have failed to critically assess the underlying connections between the implementation and the receiving end of the soft power ‘chain of command’. Additionally, the concept has mainly been judged from Nye’s standpoint, and many scholars have failed to consider the sociopolitical characteristics that have been added to the brand of soft power used by Chinese authorities, whose role is equally preeminent at dictating political and cultural norms altogether. From a Western European perspective, scholars have claimed that Chinese soft power had been inefficient with local audiences due to the many sociopolitical issues that the public associated with China, such as human rights record breaches, autocratic system, and repressive policies towards minorities and dissidents, as well as disrespect for freedom of speech. Critical discourse analysis having been utilized with regards to Chinese soft power in Africa or South-Easter Asia, and comparisons between U.S. soft power and its Chinese equivalent having been abundantly drawn, it is thus useful to observe its effects on Western Europe – one region that has so far resisted to China’s unique blend of economic and cultural charm offensives, in spite of the country’s Dantesque resources. More importantly, it is relevant to understand the reasons behind Beijing’s sluggish drive at strengthening its influence within this particular region of Eurasia, despite its incremental investments and presence in that geography. It is therefore my hope that this research project shall contribute to the better understanding of Chinese soft power from a critically discursive standpoint, and to provide potential leads that might be of interest for future research on a similar matter.

1.1.2. Research question and hypotheses.

The project having been introduced, I wish now to turn towards the main research question that shall guide my investigation.

- **To what extent does Chinese soft power succeed at projecting the Chinese ‘Self’, China’s favorable image of itself, in the Western European press in the context of the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank?**

In the light of the elements presented hereinabove, a few hypotheses can be formulated when considering both research question and methodology. My main assumption is that Western media fail to thoroughly represent China’s projection of its Self due in part to biases inherent to conflicting political and cultural values; in other words, the Western Other is not successful at representing the Chinese Self, due to sociopolitical and cultural discrepancies. Therefore, the following three hypotheses can be made:

- **Hypothesis 1:** Structural divergences in the core elements of soft power hamper the thorough transmission of soft power’s core elements from the emitter to the receiver.
- **Hypothesis 2:** Differences in the structural “language” of soft power (in its core elements) sometimes fail to be properly understood by speakers of a different paradigmatic soft power.
- **Hypothesis 3:** If differences in the structural “language” of soft power affect the meaning of any core element of soft power, then chances are that the concept as a whole might fail to be properly understood by the receiver.

Succinctly put, structural divergences in the basic elements of soft power hamper the thorough transmission of information from the emitter to the receiver, insofar as the

‘languages’ utilized by the two parties may vary too broadly. If divergences in these ‘languages’ are too big, then the overall concept might fail to be properly transmitted from one party to another.

1.1.3. Textual resources

Daily newspapers such as the *People’s Daily* or the *Global Times* shall be selected for their close relationship with the Chinese government. The *People’s Daily* is indeed the official mouthpiece of the Chinese Communist Party, and often offers direct and pristine information and viewpoints on policies and events as per experience by the government. The *Global Times* provides a more controversial and populist stance, and focuses on international events from the perspective of the Chinese Communist Party. Toned down in its English-language publications, this journal may be closer to the opinion of Communist hardliners. As quasi-Party mouthpieces, they also offer viewpoints that coincide with those of actual politicians and decisionmakers. The *Financial Times* offers a section on China with a relatively diverse coverage of Chinese news, ranging from politics to miscellaneous news on society. With right-center to left-center stances, this newspaper is allegedly unbiased and well-sourced in its reporting. *Le Monde*, a French-language editorial, will also be selected for its diverse coverage on China and daily reporting on the matter, which includes societal facts and reporting on the country’s politics. While allegedly neutral in its stances, *Le Monde* has been accused of backing leftist candidates throughout the decades, whilst providing a relatively balanced coverage on their news items.

1.1.4. Outline of the research project.

The first chapter introduces the research project, and details its main question, the rationale behind this investigation, the hypotheses that I expect to reach, as well as the case study under scrutiny. The sub-section devoted to methodology shall give a brief introduction of post-positivism and discourse, and introduce critical discourse analysis; a final segment

shall present the analytical framework that will be utilized throughout the research project. The third sub-section presents the literature review on soft power as well as a critique of Chinese soft power. A conclusion will briefly summarize the main points and findings of the chapter.

The second chapter introduces the Belt and Road and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank from an academic standpoint. It then provides indications on how these two initiatives influence China's soft power traction, and which themes are used to legitimize said endeavors. The third chapter provides an assessment of how Chinese, French, and British media perceive the Chinese Self and its Other through the three-dimensional critical discourse analysis framework, as to test the hypotheses made in the first chapter. It concludes that, while this project remains limited in the resources utilized to test the hypotheses, the particular combination of critical discourse analysis with Fairclough and Van Dijk's frameworks give optimistic pointers in understanding how the Chinese Self fails to be properly transmitted from emitters to receivers. Divergences in textual production, discursive practices, and social context appear codependent, and any imbalance in their fragile relationship may hamper faithful transmission of information – be that the case for the Chinese Self or soft power narratives.

1.2. Methodology

1.2.1. Critical discourse analysis

Discourse, in the post-positivist paradigm, is highly valued for “its political emphasis, and its ability to account for ideology,”⁵ as well as for its capacity to reflect power relations between speakers and listeners, or groups of such people. Fairclough describes discourse “as ways of representing aspects of the world – the processes, relations and structures of the

⁵ Ibid., 23

material world, the ‘mental world’ of thoughts, feeling, beliefs and so forth, and the social world.”⁶ Discourses also enable one the creation of groups defining the Self and the proverbial Other, where the Self is positioned vis-à-vis the Other, and where in turn the Other positions the Self. Interpretations on one given fact may vary depending on context and time, but remain hopelessly socially constructed and specific to a particular grouping, extending its influence over their thoughts, feelings, words, and reactions towards that very phenomenon. In the examination of post-positivist discourse, critical discourse analysis is best conceptualized in Fairclough’s three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis, which captures discourse as ““(i) a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice.”⁷ In other words, discourse is embedded “in the immediate situation, in the wider institution or organization, and at a societal level.”⁸ Going one step further, Van Dijk emphasizes “sociopolitical discourse analysis” as an important sub-category of critical discourse analysis, and examines “the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of dominance.”⁹ His theoretical framework assesses the power relations between social groups, especially between the elites and non-dominant groups. As he argues, “[p]ower involves *control*, namely by (members of) one group over (those of) other groups. Arguing that modern forms of power are mostly cognitive, his argument is that elites utilize “persuasion, dissimulation or manipulation, among other strategic ways to *change the mind of others in one’s interests*.”¹⁰

Critical discourse analysis seems a befitting methodological instrument insofar as it offers three levels of analysis considering not only the text, but also its discourse practice, and the broader sociopolitical level whereby both elements operate. It appears to me as

⁶ Fairclough, Norman, *Analyzing discourse: textual analysis for social research* (London: Routledge, 2003), 124

⁷ Fairclough, Norman, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Essex: Pearson Education, 1995), 97

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Van Dijk, Teun A, “Principles of critical discourse analysis,” *Discourse and Society*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1993): 283

¹⁰ Ibid.

particularly relevant to the examination of soft power discourse with Chinese characteristics, which falls under discursive, sociopolitical, and cultural practices altogether. Moreover, instead of focusing on “language or language use per se,” this methodology examines instead “the linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures.”¹¹ As Blackledge argues, critical discourse analysis “is fundamentally political in its orientation, interdisciplinary in its scholarship and diverse in focus.”¹² The very trans-disciplinary nature of this methodology also provides a very promising framework for the examination of newspapers. Considering the expanding width of this body of documents, it could prove efficient in becoming a sharp tool of textual and contextual analysis when combined with other disciplinary approaches, offering more comprehensive definitions of a given phenomenon. For the purposes of this research project, I shall mainly utilize Fairclough’s model presented hereinabove, and Van Dijk’s framework of discourse structure.¹³ Van Dijk’s framework will be utilized twice: once in the context of Chinese media defining the Chinese Self, and once for British and French media discussing the Chinese Self. Related questions will be added to complement this very tacit methodology, as per indicated hereinbelow, as they will examine how the Chinese Self and China’s Other are portrayed in Chinese and non-Chinese media coverage, and how these two elements can be located in, and interact with, discourse practices and the broader social context in which they emerge. A summarized version of this methodology shall be provided in the Annex section of this research project.

1.3. Literature review

¹¹ Blackledge, Adrian, “Discourse and power,” in *The Routledge handbook of discourse analysis*, edited by James P. Gee, Michael Handford (New York: Routledge, 2012), 616

¹² Ibid., 616-7

¹³ Van Dijk (1993): 264

1.3.1. Soft power

Nye argues that “[p]roof of power lies not in resources but in the ability to change the behavior of states.”¹⁴ Soft power is thus defined as the capability possessed by “one country to get other countries to *want* what it wants.”¹⁵ This capacity rests on a country’s culture, or the “places where it is attractive to others”; its political values, either “[lived] at home or abroad”; and its foreign policies, perceived by others as “legitimate and having moral authority.”¹⁶ Wielding soft power remains nevertheless a very difficult task, since “many of its crucial resources are outside the control of the governments, and their effects depend heavily on acceptance by the receiving audiences.”¹⁷ Their implementation also remains a very laborious process yielding results in the long term;¹⁸ the success of soft power therefore remains harder to assess than hard power initiatives, and presents the risk to be a fruitless enterprise should efforts prove neglected or disrupted. This pivot to soft power, the author argues, mainly lies in the political transitions happening in the post-Cold War era, but also in the prodigious technological progress having taken place in the past three decades. Warier of the authority, audiences have hence turned towards non-governmental actors for unbiased information, as well as civil society members for transnational exchanges, rather than solely relying on traditional state-to-public or state-to-state interactions. This confidence crisis has triggered two reactions. On the one hand, it has forced states to reassess their position vis-à-vis their audiences, both domestic and foreign, as sole provider of information. On the other, the ‘production chain’ of information has consequently been adapted to better suit the characteristics of the audience emitters intend to address. Information – its production, transmission, and reception – has thus become quintessential in the production, diffusion, and wielding of soft power.

¹⁴ Ibid., 155

¹⁵ Ibid., 166

¹⁶ Joseph Nye, “The future of power,” *PublicAffairs* (2011): 84

¹⁷ Joseph Nye, *Soft power: the means to success in world politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004): 99

¹⁸ Ibid., 103.

However, as information has become abundant, attention has become scarce – credibility and reputation have hence become essential components of world politics, as well as in civil society. Sound or unreliable information can therefore strongly influence institutional reputation or credibility. Nye argues that successful communication “involves listening as well as talking,” along with “shared values”¹⁹ that resurface in soft power. The latter concept consequently relies on one country’s capacity to “getting others to want the same outcomes [it wants],” but also on its ability to “[understand] how they are hearing [its] messages, and fine-tuning it accordingly.”²⁰ For that purpose, it is important to consider the cultural biases inherent to different audiences, and acknowledge that information will be filtered and perceived through said biases; if left unchanged, the original message may consequently fail to be properly understood. Adaptation to said filters is necessary, and often the successful maneuver to a better understanding of the target audience’s culture, as well as a wider acceptance of the emitter’s message. Part of an institution or a country’s soft power therefore strongly depends on this adaptive capacity to incorporate foreign semiology as well as linguistic and cultural codes, rather than mindlessly cleaving to one’s customs.

1.3.2. Western critique of Chinese soft power.

The concept of soft power was first introduced in China in a 1993 article written by Wang Huning, one of China’s leading political theorists, and was presented as an alternative to hard power in getting other countries to follow a given international actor with “a culture and admirable ideology.”²¹ Several historical factors intervene in the promotion of Nye’s concept: Courmont, quoting Sheng Ding,²² hypothesizes that China needed an ideology able to present the country in a softer light in the aftermath of the Tian’anmen massacre, whereas

¹⁹ Ibid., 111

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Courmont, Barthélémy, “What implications for Chinese soft power: charm offensive or new hegemony?,” *Pacific Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (2013): 346

²² Ibid.

Sayama argues that the country sought to diffuse the proverbial “‘China Threat’ theory,”²³ after its claim of most of the East and South China Seas by adopting a seemingly liberal theory as a calling-card on the international stage. It is nonetheless important to mention that the theory underwent a twenty-year journey from academic circles to the very heart of Chinese politics, as most of the 1990s and early 2000s were devoted to the engineering and development of “a more comprehensive conception of Chinese values, based on a mixture of modern Marxist values – so-called ‘socialist core values’ – and traditional Confucian values.”²⁴ Politically speaking, Party members initiated a very careful campaign regarding the promotion of Chinese culture as early as the 16th Party Congress of 2002, with then-President Jiang Zemin calling for “cultural development and reform”²⁵ thus paving the way for the Hu-Wen tandem in the decade yet to come. Soft power was therefore to be officially adopted, albeit in very ambiguous terms, “in the Political Report of the 17th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in 2007,”²⁶ and was formally espoused as a core element of Chinese foreign policy in 2012, during the 18th National Congress. According to Courmont, experts such as Glaser and Murphy, and Sheng and Li, have nevertheless failed to agree on the reception of the concept in China: the former assert that soft power had “been well received since its introduction” in the country, whereas the latter “believe on the other hand that this text [had] had little impact.”²⁷

As the intellectual father of the concept, Nye considers that Beijing authorities have failed to properly understand the concept. Chinese charm offensives have mainly “[emphasized] high-profile gestures” but only gained “a limited return on [their] investment” despite not being restricted “by the institutional or human rights concerns that constrain

²³ Sayama, Osamu, “China’s approach to soft power: seeking balance between nationalism, legitimacy and international influence,” *RUSI Occasional Paper* (2016): 4

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Courmont (2013): 346

Western aid.”²⁸ While politically less invasive than Western aid, and faithful to China’s non-intervention principles, these high-level initiatives only prove successful with local oligarchs and in the short-to-medium term. On the one hand, they mainly involve government-to-government exchanges, and emphasize the fruitful establishment of economic cooperation mechanisms between Chinese state-owned enterprises and local authorities – with, oftentimes, generous financial and material packages for the host country. For Breslin, part of China’s attractiveness lies in its economic rise and politically non-binding investment principles rather than on soft power alone; yet, this lure remains complicated to quantify, as “it remains difficult to separate hard material factors from softer attraction to values and world-views.”²⁹ The author describes state-engineered soft power as an effort to “promote a preferred Chinese idea of what China is and what it stands for... to correct misconceptions among overseas audience about Chinese motivations and intentions”³⁰ whilst ensuring the diffusion of Chinese official discourse practices and the attenuation of the country’s “worrying and/or offensive”³¹ representation. He thus opposes the more organic notion of soft power – “something that states and/or societies simply have”³² – to the blunt political instrumentalization made to serve the Party’s purposes, in order to “impose a preferred national image on debates over China’s global role and future projection of power.”³³

For D’Hooghe, China’s sole authoritarian party and centralized political system, as well as its practical knowledge of propaganda instruments render Chinese public diplomacy unique. Nevertheless, while successful in certain aspects, this overwhelming control upon national information proves harmless to the expansion of Chinese soft power abroad, as well

²⁸ Nye, Joseph, “What China and Russia don’t get about soft power,” *Foreign Policy*, April 29, 2013, accessed on May 4, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/sci-hub.io/2013/04/29/what-china-and-russia-dont-get-about-soft-power/>

²⁹ Breslin, Shaun, “The Soft Notion of China’s ‘Soft Power’,” *Chatham House* (2011): 2

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 7

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 9

as equally damaging to the country's reputation in the eye of international beholders. The author thus considers Beijing to be "trapped between its aim at perfection in image projection and the structural lack of openness of its society, as well as its inability to give up control."³⁴ These factors ultimately prove harmful to the preferred national image the Party ambitions to project abroad. Callahan argues that Chinese soft power is an inward-looking strategy rather than an endeavor directed to the outside world. The concept is for him "negative rather than positive, and is employed as tool in domestic policy more than foreign policy."³⁵ He theorizes that China's current soft power strategy is built around opposing pairs such as domestic/foreign, China/world, "civilization/barbarism," "positive/negative expressions of power,"³⁶ and Self/Other.³⁷ The official discourse thus equates anything foreign with "'mistakes' that are either stupid misunderstandings or evil conspiracies, both of which are accused of undermining China's rightful rise"³⁸ rather than emphasizing national successes, qualities, and positive values. The idea is here to strengthen the Party's legitimacy domestically through the creation of national identities and values opposed to their foreign equivalents, hence symbolically separating a civilized core from a barbaric periphery.³⁹ Domestically rather than internationally, the many twists and turns of the Chinese soft power discourse become, the author argues, "a useful heuristic device for understanding how Chinese policy makers and public intellectuals are actively constructing a 'China' and a 'world' to promote their ideological projects"⁴⁰ rather than indicating how the country perceives itself regionally or globally.

³⁴ D'Hooghe, Ingrid, "Public diplomacy in the People's Republic of China," in *The new public diplomacy: soft power in international relations*, edited by Jan Melissen (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005): 102

³⁵ William A Callahan, "Identity and Security in China: The Negative Soft Power of the China Dream." *Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 3-4 (2015): 217

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 220

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 219

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 224

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 225

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 219

1.4. Conclusion

While abundantly discussed for its ideational essence, resemblance to Nye's original idea, and achievements, few authors have endeavored to look into the inner mechanisms that define the core elements of soft power from the perspective of China and that of Western European countries. Having established a base of theoretical knowledge on the subject of Chinese soft power, the next chapter aims at presenting how the case studies, the 'One Belt, One Road' initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank serve as vessels for Chinese soft power, and how they connect to China's understanding of said concept.

CHAPTER 2 – ‘ONE BELT, ONE ROAD’ AND THE ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK

2.1. *Chapter introduction*

This chapter ambitions to present the ‘One Belt, One Road’ and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank as institutions and as vessels of Chinese soft power. It first examines facts and figures about said institutions, and then provides an academic overview of the relationship between OBOR, AIIB, and soft power.

2.2. *The ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative.*

2.2.1. *General introduction to the One Belt, One Road initiative*

The ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative (hereinafter as OBOR) is a comprehensive political and economic project launched by Chinese President Xi Jinping in 2013. In September of that year, during a state visit to Kazakhstan, Xi christened the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ as a means to “enhance commercial engagements of China with Central Asia and beyond via land transportation networks.”⁴¹ Several weeks later, China’s paramount leader called for a ‘21st Century Maritime Silk Road’ in another state visit to Indonesia, which would aim “at developing China’s economic ties along the sea route with multiple players in Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Africa.”⁴² From a political standpoint, the OBOR initiative belongs to Xi’s broader ‘Chinese dream’, a soft power endeavor calling for the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation aimed at promoting Chinese values, culture, and traditions domestically and abroad. Researchers have nonetheless claimed that both initiatives are embedded into

⁴¹ Sidaway, James D., Woon, Chih Yuan, “Chinese narratives on the ‘One Belt, One Road’ (一带一路) in geopolitical and imperial contexts,” *The Professional Geographer*, Vol. 0, No. 0 (2017): 1

⁴² Ibid.

more ambitious political endeavors which would, upon successful completion, further legitimate the rule of the Chinese Communist Party and concomitantly celebrate the founding of China's unique ruling party in 1921, as well as the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949 – respectively in 2021 and 2049.⁴³ The OBOR initiative is Beijing's most important diplomatic and economic endeavor in decades, as well as its most far-reaching and risky one. The land route and the maritime road are indeed bound to cross “areas generating 55 percent of the world's GNP, 70 percent of the global population, and 75 percent of known energy reserves” for the sole purpose of connecting China and the “65 countries traversed by the OBOR.”⁴⁴ The project itself will be completed in an estimated 30 to 35 years and should generate “an annual trade worth US\$ 2.5 trillion between the countries located along OBOR within ten years.”⁴⁵ The capital injected by Beijing in the project is also colossal, as demonstrate the following figures: “the US\$ 40 billion New Silk Road Fund, the US\$ 20 billion China-ASEAN Investment Cooperation Fund, the US\$ 3 billion Investment Cooperation Fund between China and the CEE countries, China's sovereign wealth fund (US\$ 746 billion) and its foreign exchange reserves (US\$ 3.19 trillion as of May 2016).”⁴⁶ Infrastructurally, the bulk of development and construction works will be granted to Chinese state-owned enterprises, and benefit from further backing from domestic banking institutions such as “Export-Import Bank of China (EXIM), China Development Bank (CDB) and Agricultural Development Bank of China (ADBC),”⁴⁷ further pushing the internationalization of the *Renminbi* on the global financial markets.

The OBOR initiative could ensure China's long-term political and economic influence in both its direct neighborhood as well as in more remote areas, while “reducing concerns that

⁴³ Grieger, Gisela, “One Belt, One Road (OBOR): China's regional integration initiative,” *European Parliament Research Service* (2016): 2

⁴⁴ Cassarini, Nicola, “Is Europe to benefit from China's Belt and Road initiative?,” *IAI Working Papers*, Vol. 15, No. 40 (2015): 2

⁴⁵ Grieger (2016): 4

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 6

Beijing will employ such greater influence in threatening ways.”⁴⁸ However, conflicting opinions and stances are bound to eventually emerge. On the one hand, Russia and India, Beijing’s main rivals, could grow concerned at China’s territorial activities and commercial claims in, respectively, the Indian Ocean and Central Asia, for Chinese influence in those regions could bypass that of the two aforementioned countries.⁴⁹ On the other, in the South China Sea region, Vietnam and the Philippines could take a dim view at similar activities in the region, for Beijing’s main militaristic interests would lie in that very region rather than expanding.⁵⁰ The further implication of the United States and Japan, economic and military heavy weights in the area, could also render Chinese ambitions in East and South Asia more strenuous “due to structural competition”⁵¹ and a general lack of diplomatic support from its neighbors.

More than a simple industrial powerhouse, Beijing’s influence could expand diplomatically and economically, as the country would be encouraged to increasingly partake in global affairs. However, and regardless of how beneficial for China said measures could be, the OBOR initiative might have a series of very serious consequences, and cause the emergence of unhealthy relationships between Beijing and foreign host governments. From a political standpoint, Beijing could benefit from “increased leverage” over other capitals and rule over them with an iron fist regardless of its non-intervention principles. Economically, OBOR could also create dependency “on China-related trade flows for the transit countries,” and cause the numerous investments made by “China or China-controlled entities”⁵² to further structural and financial reliance in host countries or regions. While noble in goal and all-encompassing in scope, the OBOR initiative is a powerful economic and diplomatic weapon

⁴⁸ Swaine, Michael D., “Chinese views and commentary on the ‘One Belt, One Road’,” *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 47, July 14, 2015, accessed on May 16, 2017, <http://www.hoover.org/research/chinese-views-and-commentary-one-belt-one-road>

⁴⁹ Grieger (2016): 7

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 2

⁵² Ibid., 33

that should be carefully utilized, lest the negative consequences might exceed positive outcomes and prove effective from a short- to medium-term perspective.

2.2.2. OBOR and soft power

The multiple narratives behind the OBOR initiative play a significant role at extending the outreach of Chinese soft power across the Eurasian landmass. The academic literature reviewed discusses three variations of the OBOR-related soft power discourse: the historical narrative regarding the Silk Road; the initiative's all-encompassing nature; and the 'China *versus* the Other' discourse.

2.2.2.1. The historical narrative.

The OBOR initiative narratively embodies the resurrection of "the cultural meaning of the ancient Silk Road", insofar as its modern symbolism accentuates "cultural exchange and historical trading relationships between China and the world beyond."⁵³ Chinese policymakers have therefore chosen a very powerful narrative to enhance their soft power throughout the Eurasian landmass, as the itinerary bears "positive historical connotations and provides strong references for the 21st Century plans."⁵⁴ The emphasis on "flows, connectivity, linkages, and mobilities"⁵⁵ properly conveys both historical and modern-day narratives of the Silk Roads by land and sea, and strongly echo throughout our globalized world, thus sending an appealing message to the current and future participants of the OBOR project. It nevertheless questions the current world order, as the OBOR initiative appears aimed at reconstructing a geography gravitating around multiple centers of power, one of which would be China. One of the main concerns regarding this perspective would be the increased Sino-centrism of Eastern and Central Asia both politically and economically, as those regions' dependency on China could increase in the upcoming decades. The other preoccupation

⁵³ Sidaway, Woon (2017): 3

⁵⁴ Grimm (2015)

⁵⁵ Sidaway, Woon (2017): 5

would regard the extreme polarization of the Eurasian continent in the short- to medium-term perspective, as the region could become a mere transit zone between the two extremities of the OBOR itineraries. The integration of Central Asia in the economic framework of the OBOR could prove difficult due to further competition with Russia over influence and economy, thus hampering the overall economic and political independence of the region in the long term. Such questions remain however beyond the scope of this paper and subject to much projection.

2.2.2.2. The all-encompassing nature

The second narrative aspect of the OBOR initiative lies in the all-encompassing nature Chinese policymakers have attributed to the project, as it ambitions to “finance infrastructure projects and [integrate] new initiatives and existing ones”⁵⁶ under its umbrella. The initiative is indeed “purportedly intended to be as open and inclusive as possible, apparently involving few if any requirements or restrictions, and to exist in cooperation with, and not against, other international development strategies.”⁵⁷ Beijing furthermore emphasizes the transparent, open, and inclusive nature of the Belt and Road enterprise, which is described as a “joint undertaking of all the countries concerned.”⁵⁸ Erroneously attributing the strategy to China’s paramount leader, Wu Jiamin has thus counseled the Chinese presidency to rely on the “three ‘togethers’”⁵⁹ strategy as the OBOR’s Ariane thread. Roughly paraphrased, the first precept is the identification of mutually beneficial cooperation projects through dialogue amongst concerned parties; the second principle relies on cooperative enterprises motivated by common interests amongst participants; and the third aspect is the fruitful completion of the aforementioned cooperative activities, enabling the concerned stakeholders to reap the multilateral benefits of their common endeavor. Wu thus concludes that “China’s

⁵⁶ Grimm (2015)

⁵⁷ Swaine (2015): 6

⁵⁸ Ibid., 7

⁵⁹ Wu, Jiamin, “China to play a bigger role as a world contributor,” *China Daily USA*, April 20, 2015, accessed on May 17, 2017, http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/opinion/2015-04/20/content_20481447.htm

development is inseparable from the world, and the world's stability and prosperity are inseparable from China.”⁶⁰ Additional word selection has also been undertaken as to separate the positive outcomes of the OBOR initiative from negative terminology that could refer to other, non-China-led projects. Positive terminology enhances, for instance, aspects such as participants' independence and freedom of choices, inclusive strategies incorporating relevant parties' opinions, with the outspoken goal of creating “synergy with the existing regional cooperation mechanisms.”⁶¹ Negative references, albeit veiled, prevent the creation of culturally and politically exclusive, inflexible institutions that shall seek political intervention or regional domination, as the overall initiative “is not [just] a Chinese matter.”⁶²

2.2.2.3. China versus the Other

One of Beijing's strongest affirmations regarding the OBOR initiative is that the latter bears no resemblance with U.S.-led programs, may that be in scope, infrastructure, or narrative. A very distinct set of positive and negative phraseologies is constantly utilized to separate the Chinese project from American initiatives, emphasizing the absence of political obligations of the former. Such terminological choices suggest that Beijing has embarked on a very vocal campaign of reassertion of the Chinese Self vis-à-vis the Western Other in its political narrative. Consequences could be twofold. On the one hand, U.S.-led projects could be utilized as the negative baseline against which the OBOR initiative should be compared, and means through which other international actors could cast obloquy on Western political ideologies and institutions. On the other, and provided its successful implementation, the OBOR initiative shall validate China's political and economic systems and thus further legitimate the rule of the Chinese Communist Party.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Swaine (2015): 6

⁶² Ibid., 7

2.2.2.4. Conclusive remarks

OBOR's soft power is yet to become fully effective. The resurrection of the Silk Road certainly echoes a common history and cultural links that span across Eurasia and within the geography of the Indian Ocean, but faces much reluctance from China's economic partners and rivals, as both fear that there is much to the initiative than meets the eye. On the one hand, the reconstruction of the current global order inherent to the Belt and Road discourse leads traditional centers of global power to question their current capacities, be it economically, diplomatically, or militarily. While this change seems inevitable as we speak, concerns arise regarding the swiftness of power's migration toward potential new gravitation points, and which consequences this will bring about. The intentional benevolence of the OBOR narrative may indeed hide more stringent realities, which might be at polar opposites with its all-encompassing nature. It is hypothesized that quarrels may arise between China and other partner countries, as both parties will seek to protect their own interests while trying to take full advantage of the OBOR framework. Suspicion regarding both the soundness of the initiative as well as the trustworthiness of Chinese authorities remains therefore a very important element that shall, in due time, positively or negatively curb OBOR's expected outcome.

2.3. *The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank*

2.3.1. Presentation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

The idea of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (hereinafter as AIIB) was launched by Xi Jinping in October 2013, during a state visit to Indonesia, with the aim of “[boosting] connectivity and commerce between China and the 65 countries traversed by the OBOR”⁶³ and was, at its beginnings, closely related to the development of the Belt and Road

⁶³Cassarini (2015): 2

initiative. Two years were necessary to formally establish the AIIB as a banking institution, with “57 founding members, including four G-7 economies (France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom) [which] began operations in mid-2016.”⁶⁴ As per stated in the Articles of Agreement of the AIIB, the institution seeks, amongst other things, to “foster sustainable economic development... and improve infrastructure connectivity in Asia by investing in infrastructure and other productive sectors” and to “promote regional cooperation and partnership in addressing development challenges by working in close collaboration with other multilateral and bilateral development institutions.”⁶⁵ Jin Kai reports that president Xi is attempting to build a “community of common destiny”⁶⁶ through the establishment of AIIB, as participant countries would be bound by common economic and infrastructural goals. His understanding of the ‘community of common destiny’ nears that of Ingo W. Schröder, described as “countries that ‘share a common history and have been exposed to the same process of socioeconomic structuring’.”⁶⁷ In other words, the AIIB aims at harnessing “some of China’s vast financial resources and the expertise acquired in the spectacular modernization in recent decades of China’s own infrastructure in order to improve it elsewhere in the region.”⁶⁸ Complementing the OBOR initiative, the AIIB would give China a central role in the region with regards to infrastructure, as other countries would be encouraged to cooperate with China in their infrastructure projects and, ultimately, engage in sustained forms of trade with Beijing. With regards to investment, China had pledged a “50 billion-dollar initial capital (to be raised eventually to 100 billion dollars)”⁶⁹ to the AIIB.

⁶⁴ Weiss, Martin A., “Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB),” *CRS Report*, Congressional Research Service (2017): 2

⁶⁵ Articles of Agreement, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, <https://www.aiib.org/en/about-aiib/basic-documents/articles-of-agreement/>

⁶⁶ Jin Kai, “Can China build a community of common destiny?,” *The Diplomat*, November 28, 2013, accessed on June 21, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/11/can-china-build-a-community-of-common-destiny/>

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Bayan, “An Asian infrastructure bank: only connect,” *The Economist*, October 4, 2013, accessed on May 21, 2017, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/analects/2013/10/asian-infrastructure-bank-1>

⁶⁹ Cassarini (2015): 2

The main criticisms against the AIIB denounce an attempt by Beijing to challenge “Bretton Woods institutions”⁷⁰ such as the World Bank, the Asia Development Bank, or the International Monetary Fund and, ultimately, American leadership in the region. Callahan argues that the AIIB is a means whereby Beijing could “leverage China’s economic power to build a network of new institutions, inspired by new ideas, to pursue new economic projects that will knit Eurasia, the South Pacific, and Eastern Asia into a tight network of economic, cultural, political, and strategic relationships.”⁷¹ Nevertheless, Weiss and Bayan have noted that, in parallel to the launching and investing into the AIIB, Beijing has also enhanced its participation in the abovementioned global institutions so as to endorse a more significant role in them and try to push forward its reforming agenda.^{72 73} More than advancing its own political agenda and influence, China seems to be ensuring its economic survival through the persistence of the region as a whole. Nevertheless, concern is understandable, insofar as China has had a poor record of investment in infrastructure projects in regions such as Central Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The ‘no strings attached’ model of investment it sponsors has indeed done very little at “[promoting] good governance and democracy in developing countries.”⁷⁴ These endeavors have indeed served to “enhance China’s influence and access to raw materials, especially in Africa and Asia, at the expense of the United States.”⁷⁵ The AIIB remains however a very young institution and years will be needed to assess the outcome of its investments in those regions.

2.3.2. AIIB and soft power

As per argued in the previous sub-chapter, critics have pointed that the AIIB could be China’s opportunity to exert a stronger influence globally. However, while created

⁷⁰Weiss (2017): 2

⁷¹ Callahan, William A., “China’s ‘Asian Dream’: the Belt and Road Initiative and the new regional order,” *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (2016): 228

⁷²Weiss (2017): 2

⁷³ Bayan (2013)

⁷⁴ Ibid., 4

⁷⁵ Ibid.

concurrently with the Silk Road Fund “for the better implementation of ‘One Belt, One Road’,”⁷⁶ the AIIB has ever since parted ways the OBOR initiative, as the former institution would not exclusively finance infrastructural projects related to the Belt and Road but tend to the requests of member states.⁷⁷ China’s status as the institution’s main shareholder is nevertheless bound to enhance its soft power traction, especially amongst developing economies; if properly managed and kept apart from Chinese politics, the AIIB could moreover improve China’s reputation with developed countries. The creation of AIIB therefore sends a very powerful message in terms of soft power. First, the creation of the AIIB enabled economic cooperation with numerous “other multilateral institutions”⁷⁸ such as the World Bank and private finance in many parts of Eurasia. On the one hand, this demonstrates China’s capacity to implement institutions similar in reach and functioning to those formerly established by traditional developed countries, thus defying the customary prerogative of ‘great powers’. It is no longer solely the privilege of ‘great’ nations to lead global and collective economic endeavors, and to set norms in this given realm – this is particularly important as China has been attempting to assert its own values and system as equally as viable as those of other developed nations. On the other hand, the creation of the AIIB may help bolstering developing countries’ confidence, insofar as the institution was launched by a conventionally ‘non-mature’ economy and was able to gather global financial support. This reinforces Beijing’s idea that a new world order is emerging, where nations gravitate towards several regional centers of power with more limited influence rather than towards one all-mighty hegemon, and that, consequently, a divided hegemony will mathematically augment the role of smaller states regionally.

⁷⁶Weiss (2017): 6

⁷⁷Mitchell, Tom, “AIIB expansion plans underscore China’s global ambitions,” *Financial Times*, June 26, 2016, accessed on May 19, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/1e53b6fe-3b74-11e6-8716-a4a71e8140b0>

⁷⁸Hsu, Sara, “How China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank fared its first year,” *Forbes*, January 14, 2017, accessed on May 19, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahsu/2017/01/14/how-chinas-asian-infrastructure-investment-bank-fared-its-first-year/#234fc095a7f0>

Second, the founding of the AIIB, as well as that of OBOR, has enabled China to diversify its soft power narrative and, for the first time, to attempt to express it multilaterally.⁷⁹ However, OBOR and AIIB represent both an opportunity and a threat to the expansion of Chinese soft power.⁸⁰ In the former case, the multilateral nature of both initiatives will enhance the country's reputation internationally, as Beijing has called upon numerous other countries for the joint achievement of its projects. Centrally located within these two sub-groups of countries, China is henceforth responsible for the efficient management of both endeavors, as well as tacitly encouraged not to privilege its domestic politics in the process. The flip side of the coin is that both OBOR and AIIB exert a tremendous amount of pressure on Chinese authorities, as the failure of either initiative would throw an unprecedented blow to China's unique ruling party and greatly indents its international and domestic legitimacy and credibility. Should there be a failure, Beijing could and would be held responsible for such misfortune in the eyes of participating countries, thus heaping opprobrium on China's responsible stakeholder status and political system. In either case, Chinese soft power, as well as the country's overall reputation, depend on the outcome of the Belt and Road initiative, and on the sound management of the AIIB.

Finally, AIIB and OBOR's multilateral soft power may be considered as "slogan diplomacy", but Beijing nevertheless attaches great importance to it."⁸¹ Slogan diplomacy, multilateral in nature, should therefore be managed differently than its bilateral and domestic counterparts. This thus requires an additional level of terminological engineering from Chinese authorities, insofar as both OBOR and AIIB cannot afford to be considered by foreign audiences as mere propaganda. However, doubts remain regarding OBOR and AIIB's

⁷⁹ Laforgia, Rebecca, "Listening to China's multilateral voice for the first time: analyzing the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank for soft power opportunities and risks in the narrative of 'lean, clean and green', *Journal of Contemporary China* (2017): 3

⁸⁰ Ibid., 3

⁸¹ Shambaugh, David, "China's soft power push: the search for respect," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2015, accessed on May 23, 2017, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2015-06-16/china-s-soft-power-push>

capacity to “move beyond a mere ‘slogan’ into the realm of the strategic narrative to become an authentic story,”⁸² as internal and external elements could hamper or accelerate the initiatives’ proceedings. Should it happen, such transition is highly important, as it represents the officialization and crystallization of the projects’ narrative domestically and internationally. In other words, China is openly committing to other global actors and no longer solely to its domestic audiences. It will consequently be placed under international scrutiny and critique, as well as it will have to endorse greater responsibilities not only as a global economy but also as a political entity.

2.3.2.1. Conclusive remarks

As per explained above, China’s engaging in the AIIB will be challenging not only economically but also with regards to the country’s soft power. Ensuring the sustained infrastructural upgrade of the Eurasian region through multilateral engagement is an arduous task that Beijing cannot afford to fail, lest the country could suffer critical economic backlash and the ruling party see its legitimacy questioned domestically. Whereas the OBOR initiative remains a series of bilateral agreements between China and Eurasian and Eastern African countries, thus benefitting from a more Sinicized version of soft power narrative, AIIB’s does not enjoy similar rights insofar as its own narrative has to comply to more international standards and speak a language that can be understood globally. This means that Beijing’s favored ‘slogan diplomacy’ must become a well-defined and institutionalized concept rather than strictly adhering to shallow catchphrases. More than semantic adaption, AIIB’s soft power narrative must become a series of concrete actions, both institutionally or in the materialization of its infrastructure projects. However, OBOR ventures and AIIB-funded projects may overlap, as member countries of the latter institution may also be bilaterally engaged with China in the context of the Belt and Road. Multiple AIIB-funded projects might

⁸²Ibid.,

also more or less indirectly support the achievement of OBOR-related infrastructural enterprises in the region, as could also joint investment ventures between the AIIB and Bretton Woods institutions. As the AIIB's major stakeholder, Beijing could throw its full political and economic weight behind some projects rather than others, which could not be as equally beneficial for the OBOR initiative in the long term. While unlikely, given the stakes involved, such options might be nevertheless envisaged if, for instance, economic or political circumstances were to worsen for the Middle Kingdom. If concretized, such events could deal a fatal blow to Chinese soft power at large, as the country's political credibility would be left shattered beyond recognition and its numerous multilateral or bilateral enterprises voided of its participants. More than anything, it's a risk that the country cannot afford to take, as its economic viability remains fragile and more than ever dependent on international input. Respecting its oral engagements should therefore remain Beijing's first and foremost priority, if it hopes to generate enough interest of trust towards its political system and core values at large.

2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has provided useful insights regarding the OBOR initiative and the AIIB vis-à-vis their position within China's soft power narrative. The conclusion is that both endeavors are very new projects that shall connect the divide between words and actions, but that they might greatly increase the reach of China's soft power narrative in the near future. While useful in providing useful pointers, they rely nevertheless on the perspective of academics and only partially reflect China's perception of its Self in the context of the aforementioned two endeavors. Next chapter shall address this shortcoming, as it will analyze the outcome of media outlets in both China and Western Europe, and seek to understand how

efficient Chinese soft power regarding OBOR and AIIB is at conveying China's original perception of itself to French and British audiences.

CHAPTER 3 – PROJECTION AND PERCEPTION OF THE ASIAN INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT BANK BY CHINESE AND WESTERN EUROPEAN MEDIA.

3.1. *Chapter introduction*

The following section will closely examine newspaper articles reporting on both the ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. This choice was made upon the following realization. On the one hand, OBOR-related articles are very emphatic with regards to their semantic field and turns of phrase, thus enabling the study of China’s soft power narrative on the matter. They mostly mention the creation or existence of AIIB as to reinforce OBOR’s economic vigor and legitimacy in the eyes of the readership, while progressively increasing AIIB’s presence as a funding institution for certain OBOR-related projects. On the other, AIIB-related articles mostly present economic figures and facts that remain beyond the scope of this research project. Despite the institution’s multilateral nature, most articles focus on bilateral or trilateral interactions between the Bank and third-party representatives, with little or no mention of the Belt and Road. While quantitatively relevant, they remain limited in terms of soft power narratives, and offer a very narrow sample of relevant vocabulary viable for critical discourse analysis. Nevertheless, an interesting shift seems to have occurred throughout the years and the consulted articles, as the two initiatives have become increasingly interconnected within Beijing’s political discourse. The predominantly bilateral nature of OBOR is in dire need of AIIB’s multilateral capacities, and the latter needs the drive triggered by the former to attract more participants and gain global visibility and legitimacy. Simply put, whereas the Belt and Road is China’s flagship long-term project, the Bank is projected as its economic spearhead. One thus needs the other as to bear fruitful results, and both need collective participation from other global actors to achieve their goals.

This upcoming section will analyze how the Chinese media present the Chinese Self and the Chinese Other according to the framework described in Table 2. It will then examine how French and British media examine the Chinese Self and China's Other using the framework in Table 3.

3.2. *People's Daily.*

3.2.1. Micro-level: argumentation and rhetorical figures

These four articles were published shortly before or after high-level events involving the participation of Chinese decisionmakers and foreign representatives and mostly centered around the conclusion of bilateral or multilateral political and economic agreements between China and third-party countries. They relate to both OBOR and AIIB insofar as authors mostly mention proponents or participants to both projects, and insist on the solid ties that such actors sustain with Beijing. These sample of articles introduces for instance the consensus on China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor, the Opening Ceremony of the B20 Summit, and the 'Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation', as well as an unnamed and undated "national legislature's annual session."⁸³ Three out of four events have taken place in Beijing, while the fourth one – the B20 Summit – has been relocated to Hangzhou, traditionally dubbed China's most prosperous city.

Rhetorically, all articles praise the creation of OBOR initiative and the establishment of the AIIB, but each contains subtle variations to this main theme. Two out of four address the adhesion of third-party countries to both initiatives and the present or future infrastructural plans and investments intended for the undertaking of OBOR-related or AIIB-financed projects. One text, Xi's speech, praises the OBOR and AIIB while insisting on the economic

⁸³Liu, Junguo, "China-initiated 'Belt and Road' benefits the world," *People's Daily*, March 14, 2016, accessed on May 24, 2017, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0314/c98649-9029792.html>

and infrastructural reforms China will be required to undertake as to support both initiatives in the future. The fourth article condemns the United States' defiance vis-à-vis both initiatives despite its "outdated infrastructure,"⁸⁴ and hails the benefits of joining both OBOR and AIIB. Emphasis is made upon the positive outcomes brought forward by OBOR and the economic support of the AIIB, and global unity under China-led institutions is ardently advocated, whereas refusal to participate in both initiatives is not directly chastised but highlighted as a bad example. Any bad example is therefore cordially invited to join the initiatives, as many a fruitful illustration is utilized to legitimize their abundant institutional merits.

3.2.2. Meso-level: lexical style and storytelling

All four articles display a choice of words with positive connotations, either vis-à-vis the OBOR and the AIIB or third-party countries participating in them. Most stress China's role as a global "provider of public goods" operating for the benefit of all parties involved, and the many positive outcomes that shall be reaped when both initiatives bear fruition. While negative evaluations remain scarcer, they nevertheless converge towards China's reduced participation capacity in Bretton Woods institutions,⁸⁵ or towards Beijing's alleged expansionist ambitions rooted in its initiatives.⁸⁶ Only Stone's article reflects open criticism towards Washington's "[making] a 'strategic mistake' by not joining the AIIB"⁸⁸ and towards the United States' "outdated infrastructure."⁸⁹ Nevertheless, and despite the euphemisms, the condemnation exists and reflects Beijing's exasperation vis-à-vis its foreign detractors.

⁸⁴Stone, Curtis, "U.S. is welcome to join 'symphony' of the Belt and Road initiative," *People's Daily*, April 26, 2017, accessed on May 24, 2017, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2017/0428/c90000-9209096.html>

⁸⁵Ma, Xiaochun, Liang, Jun, "China's AIIB and Belt and Silk Road Initiatives flourish," *People's Daily*, April 9, 2015, accessed on May 24, 2017, <http://en.people.cn/n/2015/0409/c98649-8875690.html>

⁸⁶Liu (2016)

⁸⁷Zou, Luxiao, Bianji, "Keynote speech by H.E. Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China, at the Opening Ceremony of the B20 Summit," *People's Daily*, September 4, 2016, accessed on May 24, 2017, <http://en.people.cn/n3/2016/0904/c90000-9110023.html>

⁸⁸Stone (2017)

⁸⁹Ibid.

The lexical style serves the storytelling of the articles. Either tacit or evident, a strict line is drawn between the merits brought by one's adherence to OBOR and AIIB, and the disadvantages suffered by those who refused to join. The story told by Beijing emphasizes, firstly, China's preeminent role in future global economy and decision-making – as it is to incrementally grow in the upcoming decades –, and underlines, secondly, the forthcoming peripheral position of contemporarily influential countries – whose influence is bound to proportionally decrease in the meantime. Whereas China's effort towards outward and multilateral endeavors, and in creating a fine-tuned narrative fitting that purpose, is laudable, there is also a harsh-yet-veiled condemnation of those refusing this privilege to Beijing. It is precisely here that soft power narratives collide, as Beijing vies to have its version of the story heard, and not simply discarded by lack of legitimacy. Its storytelling therefore highlights the one-sidedness of the Chinese narrative, where a majority of global actors come together to support a greater project that shall ultimately serve China's purpose.

3.2.3. Macro-level: Structural emphasis of actions and sources' credibility

Both words and discursive practices enable the extraction of a Chinese Self from the articles, as well as a proverbial Other. The Chinese Self is expressed through the many slogans and attributes attached to OBOR and AIIB, and is consequently implied in the soft power the country attempts to project by means of OBOR and AIIB narratives. While slogans matter in setting a direction to follow or goals to achieve in the future, their overall importance lies in what they *imply* about China, and how China defines itself vis-à-vis OBOR and the Bank. “Common development,”⁹⁰ “inclusiveness,”⁹¹ and “greater benefits”⁹² thus give a roadmap of what Beijing seeks to achieve, but also emphasizes China's vision of itself as a trustworthy economic federator and benevolent leader working towards the greater good

⁹⁰ Ma, Jiang (2015)

⁹¹ Liu (2016)

⁹² Stone (2017)

of the global community. Should such a narrative be accepted, odds are that Chinese soft power would proportionally increase, and the perception of China as a polity – and not merely as a millennial culture – drastically improve. Soft power is seen as a vehicle through which a country's sense of Self is conveyed, and through which radiates its perceived identity. The creation of this Self and the promotion of related narratives thus feed into the soft power discourse of both initiatives, propelling not only the latter's nature but also China's perception of Self internationally.

These four articles are very discreet when circuitously describing the Other, yet present a proverbial anonymous antagonist that helps reinforcing the Chinese Self. Beijing's interpretation of this Other is deeply rooted in its present and recent history, and feeds upon, respectively, the rights denied to, and humiliations inflicted upon, the country. When faced with criticism, China's discursive is to deflect such gibes by turning them against their emitter and face them with the *fait accompli* or by seeking validation from trusted figures of authority. That is, if accused of expansionist ambitions by means of either the OBOR and AIIB, Beijing will go to great lengths to prove its opponent wrong or to mention the support of any given official or scholar of non-Chinese origin. The first strategy is best illustrated by Stone's article, as the author references to both the empty promises of the White House's current administration or by the quoted words of the former director of the CIA.⁹³ The second strategy exists within the remaining three articles. China's Other is thus engineered to be an oppressing and humiliating character that has kept China in shackles through its ideational and economic might – proud and condescending, yet unnamed.

Finally, most credible witnesses mentioned in these four articles defend or extoll the Belt and Road and AIIB. They occupy preeminent positions in governments or civil society, as they are either members of the Chinese government, bodies of that very institution, foreign

⁹³ Stone (2017)

officials or experts. While the first two serve at strengthening Beijing's ideas and initiatives' legitimacy, the latter two ones give a positive feedback form the international community at large. Are for instance mentioned the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,⁹⁴ "deputies and global scholars,"⁹⁵ and even "[f]ormer CIA Director James Woosley."⁹⁶ Such witnesses remain capital for Beijing, insofar as national policymakers and academics reinforce OBOR and AIIB's narrative domestically, and as the approval of such narratives by foreign officials and scholars increases both the projects' legitimacy and that of the Chinese government, considered as equal by its peers.

3.3. *Global Times*

3.3.1. Micro-level: argumentation and rhetorical figures.

The starting point of these six articles remains quite diverse: three of them reflect on the United States' reluctance to adhere to either AIIB or OBOR; one of them promotes a high-level OBOR-related event; and the last ones offer to clear misconceptions about both OBOR and AIIB. All articles converge nevertheless towards the great benefits brought by either OBOR or AIIB to its participants, as they gain worldwide support, and make a strong point in encouraging the United States to participate in such endeavors for the greater good. Different in their origins, these articles share two commonalities: they seek to demonstrate China's willingness to be understood as an international goods provider which seeks to establish contact with the West (and especially Washington) on an equal footing; and show Beijing's efforts to implement international standards and mechanisms in its own institutions.

⁹⁴ Ma, Liang (2015)

⁹⁵ Liu (2016)

⁹⁶ Stone (2017)

Rhetorically, a strong emphasis is sometimes utilized to illustrate Washington's reluctance vis-à-vis both OBOR and AIIB. Negative examples mainly revolve around U.S.' lack of participation in the two initiatives and misunderstandings from either "some Western media"⁹⁷ or confused foreign audiences. Three texts condemn Washington's lack of cooperation with Beijing using powerful historical examples related to American or great power history. A wealth of examples illustrates the positive achievements of both institutions in Eurasia and abroad; amongst them, one piece goes into great detail about the exclusiveness of U.S.-led global organizations and treaties, extolling the inclusive nature of the Chinese projects and their greater geographical scope. A fourth article condemns Washington for similar reasons but through an opposing strategy it tries instead to reason with Washington administrators by referring to American experts' opinions on the matter, as the latter mainly support U.S.' adherence to OBOR or AIIB. Negative actions remain very peripheral in the two remaining articles. Positive emphases remain similar throughout the articles, as they converge towards the outstanding achievements of OBOR and AIIB. All articles present either investment figures related to both projects or positive slogans regarding expected policy outcomes in the future; all remain adamant regarding the helpful role played by the initiatives internationally. Two articles nonetheless diverge, as one lists the similarities and differences of scope of both OBOR and AIIB, and the other highlights the similarities between American policies and those of the Chinese-led projects within the Eurasian geography. While not as rhetorically creative as negative examples, positive illustrations seek to create a common ground upon which understanding can be achieved and compromise found.

⁹⁷ Zhao, Minghao, "B&R can open opportunities for Sino-US cooperation," *Global Times*, May 14, 2017, accessed on May 25, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1046872.shtml>

3.3.2. Meso-level: lexical style and storytelling

The lexical style of these six articles is richer than previous examples, insofar as the *Global Times* is inherently more vehement than the *People's Daily*. Positive examples observe a standardized approach when describing Chinese endeavors, as they mostly stress the openness and inclusiveness of OBOR and AIIB, and address their respective outcomes or investment figures. They highlight China's deeply misunderstood nature in terms of political and institutional capacity, as the country vainly attempts to share its international ambitions with the United States, but manages to successfully reach out to a limited amount of Western countries. The phraseology clearly stipulates that Beijing has repeatedly sent out amiable messages outwards, but has in spite of everything failed to affect its main target, Washington. One notable exception remains in the comparison that Liang produces between the OBOR and Obama administration's New Silk Road Initiative,⁹⁸ hailed as the defunct equivalent of the former initiative and a gateway to cooperation between the two countries. Negative illustrations are more diverse in content. Whereas two articles only address philistine media or audiences,^{99 100} the remaining ones dig into a richer repertoire of historical and political references so as to illustrate their points. References are made to late 19th and early 20th centuries wars between Western imperial polities over "game-changing transitional infrastructure projects;"¹⁰¹ Cold War-related types of conflicts and the Marshall Plan,¹⁰² both motivated by a deeply polarized system; and current conflicts of interest surrounding Sino-

⁹⁸ Zhao (2017)

⁹⁹ Chu, Daye, "AIIB approves new loans," *Global Times*, March 29, 2017, accessed on May 25, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1040031.shtml>

¹⁰⁰ Liang, Haiming, "Separate AIIB, B&R goals complement each other," *Global Times*, March 30, 2017, accessed on May 25, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1040405.shtml>

¹⁰¹ Luft, Gal, "US petulance towards Belt, Road self-defeating," *Global Times*, July 1, 2015, accessed on May 25, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/929909.shtml>

¹⁰² Mei, Xinyu, "US should join AIIB to improve financial system," *Global Times*, March 21, 2017, accessed on May 25, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1039787.shtml>

American disputes in South China Sea, described as “unpleasant episodes.”¹⁰³ The phraseology is extremely rich in negative connotations, and aims at showing the ‘unpleasant’ outcomes the future shall bring should the United States refuse to acknowledge OBOR and AIIB. These analogies are particularly interesting insofar as positive and negative illustrations are jointly used to balance good and bad outcomes, and provide examples of good and bad examples. Nevertheless, they all serve to reinforce the Chinese narrative vis-à-vis OBOR and AIIB and cast discredit upon their detractors.

The storytelling remains mostly unchanged. China is presented as a benevolent-yet-misunderstood international actor whose importance is bound to increase despite the United States’ many attempts at containing its soaring rise. In other words, despite its numerous calls for cooperation, China remains a capable but overlooked actor of the international community. Another interpretation of the story, more political in content, tells us the tale of a power transition from a worn-out United States to an invigorated China, as its dynamic economy is bound to increase its influence and the scope of its actions. Mentions of failed American policies in the Pacific region or Central and Southern Asia serve to reinforce China’s presence in both areas and highlight the alternative methods Beijing intends to utilize so as to fill the void left by the United States’ departure or sheer disinterest, as money outsmarts firearms and shall provide a sounder future than tanks and guns couldn’t concretize. In this narrative, China does not seek to challenge Washington’s rule in the region, but to complement it with its own means – and to reassert its vital interests in both regions. The message is therefore clear: China does not seek to compete with the United States, but its increasing influence will eventually – at least regionally – overshadow that of Washington. Hence, cooperation remains the most viable solution.

¹⁰³ Zhao, Minghao, “AIIB programs offer fresh chance for the Sino-US cooperation efforts,” *Global Times*, April 27, 2016, accessed on May 25, 2017, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/980442.shtml>

3.3.3. Macro-level: Structural emphasis of actions and sources' credibility.

The definition of the Chinese Self remains consistent with the description made by the *People's Daily*. Nevertheless, the Chinese Self has developed characteristics that help refining its own nature in the eyes of the audience. On the one hand, it retains its attributes as an internationally responsible federator that ambitions to provide goods globally through the enterprises it directs, and as a mindful and proactive normative power that is willing to operate under, and further promote, current international standards. This inclusive nature of the Chinese Self has also required the narrative to be adapted to narrower audiences, as Beijing appears more considerate towards local communities.¹⁰⁴ More than promoting global and national benefits, China's efforts henceforth "improve the lives of local communities,"¹⁰⁵ and have "the potential of enabling hundreds of millions of people to lift themselves out of poverty."¹⁰⁶ The Chinese Self thus incorporates an additional layer of inclusiveness, as it addresses both the needs of nations and those of ordinary people. On the other hand, the Chinese Self is attached to the United States in its role of global goods provider. This unlikely matrimony, as Washington oft acts like the Other in Beijing's narrative, helps expanding the federating role of the Chinese Self in the eyes of foreign audiences, as neither power can allegedly fare well without the other. Zhao and Gal develop a diptych promoting the complementarity of the Chinese Self and the American Other joint in action in ways enhancing Beijing's centrality. With regards to Eurasia, Chinese benevolence and industry mirrors the United States' militaristic assertiveness, as "China may build [infrastructure]" and "the US will protect it."¹⁰⁷ Such alternative means, coupled with American warfare expertise, are bound to improve socioeconomic conditions and create employment not only

¹⁰⁴ Zhao (2017), Zhao (2016), Gal (2017), Chu (2017).

¹⁰⁵ Chu (2017)

¹⁰⁶ Gal (2015)

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

domestically¹⁰⁸ – for both China *and* the U.S. – but also internationally, thus curbing locals’ temptation to “[join] the Taliban or [plant] poppies,”¹⁰⁹ as “trade and job opportunities” are “the most effective weapons to deal with terrorism and extremism.”¹¹⁰ The Chinese Self therefore endorses part of the role usually played by Washington, as China endeavors to join the global fight against terror and presents itself as an employment opportunity creator, both of which expand and diversify the ‘global goods provider’ nature of the Chinese Self.

Several Others arise throughout the articles. In its most basic form, the Other represents wary-yet-unnamed “Western media,”¹¹¹ “many people,” and “[l]ocal governments, enterprises and the public,”¹¹² whose sole error is to have misunderstood OBOR or AIIB’s positive nature. This ‘basic’ Other helps the Chinese Self to reinforce itself in the face an omnipresent but discreet adversary, and creates an exaggeratedly hostile sphere strengthening official narratives. More complex, the ‘bullying’ Other is embodied by the United States, insofar as their actions seek to cast obloquy over Beijing’s endeavors and reputation. This attitude is judged “morally objectionable,” “self-defeating,”¹¹³ and cultivates purposeless hostility towards Beijing in spite of the positive outcomes cooperation could bring. For Mei, Washington’s attitude remains mostly exclusive and condescending towards China, as the United States has repeatedly attempted to “squeeze China out of regional trading agreements” lest Beijing could “overturn”¹¹⁴ current institutions and world order. This definition of the Other enables the Chinese Self to reinforce its federating and benevolent nature vis-à-vis adversaries and friends alike. Finally, the ‘complementary’ Other offer a very complex glimpse into the relations sustained by Beijing and Washington. The ‘complementary’ Other shares a common goal with China but diverges with regards to the means employed to reach

¹⁰⁸ Zhao (2017)

¹⁰⁹ Zhao (2016)

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Chu (2017)

¹¹² Liang (2017)

¹¹³ Gal (2015)

¹¹⁴ Mei (2017)

its target. For Zhao, this Other is characterized by its stubborn nature and impermeability to common sense – a quality China possesses in great wealth. Albeit not completely hostile, this Other requires careful handling and reasoning, which enhances the reliability and seriousness of the Chinese Self, as such qualities represent the essence of any leader, and decreases the legitimacy of the unreasonable Other. This last definition of the Other enables China to present itself as a “bridge between East and West.”¹¹⁵

Sources remain rather unchanged, as government reports are mentioned in par with official documents related to both AIIB and OBOR institutions. Are also introduced a series of government officials, scholars, and experts of Chinese or international background as accountable witnesses and trusted sources of information or opinion. Liang’s article stands out, insofar as the author uses his own expertise to write an opinion piece that strongly stresses his stance on the matter – “in *my* opinion.”¹¹⁶ Government officials serve once more to reinforce the legitimacy of the Chinese narrative, or to discredit the legitimacy of foreign governments disagreeing with Beijing’s intentions. Experts play a similar role when Chinese; as foreigners, they either strengthen the official Chinese narrative or further disprove the strategic choices undertaken by foreign authorities vis-à-vis China. Both human witnesses and paper-based sources serve a similar purpose – reinforcing the Chinese narrative and ridiculing that of wary foreign governments and institutions.

3.4. *Le Monde*

3.4.1. Micro-level: argumentation and rhetorical figures.

The initial events having triggered the articles remain political in content as well as international in scope, for they involve high-level visits or meetings related to OBOR or AIIB

¹¹⁵ Liang (2017)

¹¹⁶ Emphasis added. Ibid.

and place China at center stage. These articles do not emphasize the number of participants nor they geographical diversity; they instead critically discuss the links between OBOR, AIIB, and Chinese governance practices; the role of such initiatives in global politics or economy; or interrogations related to China's controversial performance in other investment projects. None of the authors display open hostility towards, nor full commitment to, Beijing's actions, as quoted official sources include the opinion of enthusiastic and skeptical experts alike. Authors are nevertheless cautious about China-led initiatives due to the country's questionable international political reputation, as many bilateral outcomes have brought forth unexpected consequences for both China and partner countries; they express similar concerns regarding OBOR's bilateral nature and China's central position in, and major shareholder status in, AIIB, as Beijing could seek to advance its own interests only.

The rhetoric emphasizes either China's ambitions or shortcomings regarding OBOR and AIIB, perceived as either successful or disproportionate. For the writers, the Belt and Road and the Bank are conceived as inherently positive endeavors vis-à-vis infrastructural development in Asia but doubt remains regarding Beijing's related motivations and expectations. A shadow is cast upon the intrinsic capability of Chinese leaders to separate national interests from international or bilateral ones, and to guide both initiatives towards the latter option. The international scope and diversity of AIIB founding members are described as "a resounding diplomatic success,"¹¹⁷ whereas ambitious OBOR is labelled as "an idyllic vision,"¹¹⁸ a "monumental project" or a "Promethean endeavor."¹¹⁹ China's preeminent

¹¹⁷ Meyer, Claude, "Le succès éclatant, mais ambigu, de la Banque asiatique d'investissement pour les infrastructures," [Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank's brilliant yet ambiguous success], *Le Monde*, July 1, 2015, accessed on May 26, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/07/01/le-succes-eclatant-mais-ambigu-de-la-banque-asiatique-d-investissement-pour-les-infrastructures_4665869_3232.html

¹¹⁸ Thibault, Harold, Pedroletti, Brice, "Avec la BAII, Pékin s'achète la bienveillance de ses voisins asiatiques," [With AIIB, Beijing buys Asian neighbors' sympathy], *Le Monde*, March 31, 2015, accessed on May 26, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2015/03/31/avec-la-baii-pek-in-s-achete-la-bienveillance-de-ses-voisins-asiatiques_4606580_3234.html

position within the Bank can lead to “ambiguities” or “uncertainties,”¹²⁰ and “provokes mistrust.”¹²¹ OBOR is, in turn, depicted as a project whose “economic rationality arouses controversy”¹²² as its substantial infrastructural projects are “opaquely financed and environmentally harmful.”¹²³ Harsher words are utilized for Beijing’s opponents. Kauffmann frames Washington’s reaction towards AIIB and OBOR as “hostile and a bit ridiculous” and “as passé as they are libelous,” and whose consequences are tantamount to “[shooting] oneself in the foot.”¹²⁴ Whereas the Asian Bank of Development has been “used to [Japan’s] advantage,”¹²⁵ Bretton Woods institutions seem to “no longer reflect the economic significance”¹²⁶ of developing countries and remain “paralyzed by major administrative burdens accumulated throughout the decades.”¹²⁷

3.4.2. Meso-level: lexical style and story telling

Lexical choices are very rich in figures of speech, analogies, wording, and phraseology, thus complexifying the overall tone of the authors and allowing for multiple interpretations. Positive endeavors respect to a certain extent the narratives created by the CCP, but are inherently infused with the authors’ own interpretation, as writers approach such data with a pinch of salt. The Chinese Self is interpreted as an ambitious entity whose interests are inherently self-centered rather than purely altruistic. Politically, Beijing is accused of using both initiatives as means to serve “geopolitical imperatives rather than

¹¹⁹De Vergès, Marie, “Une mondialisation « made in China »,” [A ‘made in China’ globalization], *Le Monde*, May 13, 2017, accessed on May 26, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2017/05/13/une-mondialisation-made-in-china_5127201_3234.html

¹²⁰ Meyer (2015)

¹²¹ Thibault and Pedroletti (2015)

¹²² De Vergès (2017)

¹²³Kauffmann, Sylvie, “Embuscade sur la Route de la soie,” [Ambush on the Silk Road], *Le Monde*, April 5, 2015, accessed on May 26, 2017, http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/03/21/embuscade-sur-la-route-de-la-soie_4598508_3232.html?xtmc=embuscade_sur_la_route_de_la_soie&xtcr=7

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Thibault and Pedroletti (2015)

¹²⁶ Kauffmann (2015)

¹²⁷ Meyer (105)

purely commercial ones,”¹²⁸ as the country will necessarily seek to “establish itself as the uncontested leader of the Asian region before Japan and the United States.”¹²⁹ Economically, De Vergès argues that AIIB’s multilateral governance compels Beijing to act carefully by not engaging in “dubious projects that could tarnish its credibility,” but that bilateral agreements within the Belt and Road will enable Chinese authorities to “act as it pleases.”¹³⁰ All authors denounce the ominous presence of the Chinese state in these international and multilateral endeavors as a source of international concern for neighboring and distant actors. Regarding China’s opponents, most authors adopt a less judgmental tone. Most articles acknowledge the privileged position and influence of Beijing’s ‘traditional rivals’ – Japan and the United States – in the Bretton Woods institutions but only Kauffmann openly criticizes the existing imbalance within said organizations. Western countries appear concerned vis-à-vis China’s geopolitical and financial ambitions but unwilling to act against it. Regrettably, most authors perceive Asian countries as socially or economically not robust enough to withstand the might of Chinese infrastructural projects. Such contributes to the stratification and polarization of representations of Western and non-Western countries, not that dissimilar from the imperialist stances coined by Gal in the *Global Times*.

This storytelling highly diverges from the linearity of the Chinese press. French writers seem indeed compelled to balance facts proffered by Chinese authorities and eloquent counterexamples undermining official rhetoric. They oft depart from the Party’s ubiquitous presence in domestic and international infrastructural projects and its abysmal record of interference in said missions; examples of bad behavior or negative outcomes are then provided to the reader to strengthen the author’s argument. Positive examples highlight the federative achievements of OBOR and AIIB. The economic goals of said initiatives, while

¹²⁸ De Vergès (2017)

¹²⁹ Meyer (2015)

¹³⁰ De Vergès (2017)

ambitious in scope and allegedly mutually beneficial, fail to generate more than contained enthusiasm; this can be related to Beijing's forceful intervention in such matters, and to the propagandistic tone of the slogans used in Chinese media. Negative events are used to highlight the shortcomings of Chinese governance, insofar as they mainly pinpoint inherent divergences of Western and Chinese political systems. Veiled remarks mainly underscore state intervention and the privileged status enjoyed by state-owned companies in deals brokered by China. The duality of Sino-American (or Sino-Western) relations transpires in certain articles, as authors point out Washington's efforts at hindering the evolution of Bretton Woods institutions¹³¹ as to prevent China from gaining representation tantamount to its actual economic weight in said organizations. Diplomatic interests in the broader Eurasian region are also discretely mentioned¹³² but remain largely peripheral.

3.4.3. Macro-level: Structural emphasis of actions and sources' credibility.

Across these four articles, the Chinese Self is mainly represented as unifying, but inherently self-serving and dual in its actions. While lauding the diplomatic feat achieved by Chinese authorities in attracting numerous other international actors towards the AIIB,¹³³ or describing the magnitude of the OBOR initiative,¹³⁴ none of the authors separates economic might from overall Chinese influence in their judgement. The two thus seem haplessly codependent, as the former often overshadows the latter and plays an important role in bringing about Beijing's diplomatic potential. The description of OBOR and AIIB thus enhances their role as mere tool to advance Beijing's goals – that is, a second economic opening-up that shall enable the country's economy to survive and transition – with no regard for Chinese authorities' narratives on the matter, systematically dismissed as propagandist and dubious. The portrait drawn by French journalists thus represents a politically polarized

¹³¹ Kauffmann (2015), Meyer (2015).

¹³² Thibault and Pedroletti (2015), Meyer (2015), Kauffmann (2015)

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ De Vergès (2017)

opinion on Chinese actions and transcribes their uneasy vis-à-vis their political system. In this interpretation, the Chinese Self has no room for improvement, nor is it given a chance to redeem its tarnished reputation as an autocratic entity. The Chinese Self seems, in the eyes of French pundits, inseparable from the country's controversial political record and unlikely to improve despite the country's best efforts to promote internationally accepted standards in its multilateral endeavors.

China's Other is treated with more lenience, but does not escape criticism. Many articles denounce Washington's dominance over Bretton Woods institutions and its panic fear of losing ground vis-à-vis Beijing, but laud their sluggish efficiency, transparency, and good governance.¹³⁵ Diplomatically, the White House's wariness towards *Zhongnanhai*¹³⁶ is portrayed as understandable yet exaggerated with regards to the American administration's many attempts at preventing its European allies from joining the AIIB.¹³⁷ However unsatisfied, authors appear more apologetic towards this behavior than towards China's similar attempts at coopting other countries to act with its interests in mind.

Sources remain very wide in scope and stances, and only seldom refer to political figures. Official narratives on OBOR or AIIB serve as an argumentative starting point; scholars or experts are then invited to bring their own opinion, similar or not, to the debate. Governmental sources, while present, remain contextually peripheral.¹³⁸ Therefore, rather than reinforcing a given preferential narrative, they contribute to widen the scope of the debate and bring in new perspectives based on experienced viewpoints, rather than simply endorsing the Self's or the Other's actions. The selection of sources in may not appear

¹³⁵ Meyer (2015), Kauffmann (2015)

¹³⁶ The Chinese equivalent of the White House in Beijing.

¹³⁷ Kauffmann (2015)

¹³⁸ Thibault and Pedroletti (2015), and Kauffmann.

balanced, insofar as authors will select viewpoints complementing their own, but reflects a genuine need to incorporate diversity in their portrayal of both OBOR and AIIB.

3.5. *Financial Times*

3.5.1. Micro-level: argumentation and rhetorical figures.

There is no particular event having triggered the redaction of three out four of the articles under scrutiny in this section. Whereas Cloveret *al.*'s article was written during 2017's Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Liu's piece fits within the context of Beijing's efforts to directly address foreign audiences through the pens of Chinese officials exerting abroad or visiting foreign countries. One can nevertheless hypothesize that the article was destined to European countries in the wake of UK's adhesion to the AIIB, as to once more reaffirm the positive nature of China's intentions in the creation of such institution. The remaining two articles do not provide sufficient information to pinpoint any triggering event, as they mainly address generic aspects of OBOR and AIIB. One can hypothesize that they attempt to provide general updates on matters surrounding OBOR and AIIB to the *Financial Times*' readership.

Rhetorically, these four articles extoll OBOR and AIIB's substance but prove more cautious vis-à-vis its content. Overall, authors converge towards the positive essence of both initiatives, insofar as China is clearly stepping up efforts to bring its complex network of geopolitical and economic ambitions forth, and endorse its enhanced participation in global economy and international affairs. Liu and Cover *et al.* take a particularly one-sided approach at describing OBOR and AIIB's outcomes in an overwhelmingly positive manner. Kynge highlights that, despite the risk of economic losses, OBOR has brought positive shifts in Chinese economic practices, as "Chinese lenders are starting to syndicate participation in

OBOR projects to international private sector investors and lenders”¹³⁹ so as to reap long-term benefits. Magnus, in turn, calls upon Beijing authorities for change in their “political and economic philosophy” as to “extend and deepen its global footprint,”¹⁴⁰ as the country possesses the right elements to bring such projects into fruition but not yet the accurate strategy. Nevertheless, most authors remain cautious vis-à-vis the realization of both OBOR and AIIB given China’s current state of affairs. The AIIB remains “a potential solution” for the concretization of OBOR-related projects, but won’t prevent the emergence of “potential problems”¹⁴¹ caused by social unrest, infrastructural delays, or lengthy returns on investment. Moreover, China’s project mismanagement history could hamper Beijing’s political and economic ambitions in the long term. Indeed, the country would need “a new approach to doing business as home and abroad,” for previous endeavors “based around access to commodity resources were uncommercial, poorly implemented and, in some cases, unpopular locally.”¹⁴² If maintained, such behavior could produce “heightened global risks across Asia.”¹⁴³

3.5.2. Meso-level: lexical style and story telling

The lexical remains less elaborated than previous instances, and provides straightforward information regarding the matter at stake. Selected texts can be separated in two groups. Kynge and Magnus’ articles contain a very balanced selection of positive and negative evaluations revolving around the Belt and Road and the Bank and their respective expected outcomes. Remarkably, these articles’ utilization of Beijing’s narrative on OBOR or AIIB remains peripheral and only serves as the argumentative starting point before other

¹³⁹ Kynge, James, “How the Silk Road plans will be financed,” *Financial Times*, May 9, 2016, accessed on May 20, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/e83ced94-0bd8-11e6-9456-444ab5211a2f>

¹⁴⁰ Magnus, George, “China must prove Silk Road plan in serious,” *Financial Times*, May 4, 2015, accessed on May 29, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/6e8e7f74-f26d-11e4-b914-00144feab7de>

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Magnus (2015)

¹⁴³ Ibid.

sources are summoned. Liu and Clover *et al.*'s texts remain more faithful to articles published in Chinese media in vocabulary, content, and overall articulation. Beijing's narrative on OBOR and AIIB occupies a central role, as similar figures of style address similar instances, and customary omissions or emphases reflect stances close to those of Chinese newspapers. Positive evaluations mainly regard the two initiatives and their expected achievements, whereas criticisms concern the actions of China's geopolitical rivals based on their refusal to join either OBOR or AIIB. No mention is made of the difficulties that both initiatives may encounter throughout their implementation in the field, nor regarding China's controversial record of project management abroad.

Storytelling is very different despite the commonality of the topics at stake. Kynge and Magnus argue that, however ambitious, OBOR and AIIB's successful implementation will come at a very high price – deep changes in Chinese political and economic governance – and current geopolitical conditions in Eurasia might not facilitate said implementation if not properly addressed. The positive and collaborative nature of both initiatives might in fact be significant in assembling otherwise remotely-connected parties, but discrepancies between China and participant countries might render cooperation mooted if Beijing attempts to impose its ambitions too strongly. In other words, the two initiatives – as well as their initiator – still have room for improvement. The second group, Liu and Clover *et al.*, tends to depict the world in binary terms, divided between China's proponents and opponents, and connects present endeavors to the country's history in spite of current circumstances. While OBOR and AIIB are celebrated, little attention is dedicated to the concerns – real or alleged – of naysayers, regional geopolitics, or socioeconomic conditions in the countries soon crossed by OBOR or financially backed by AIIB. Rightful concern and exaggerated criticism are addressed by bursts of well-proven official rhetoric reinforcing Chinese authorities' binary

narrative. Regrettably, the end result reflects a very one-sided and shallow account of reality, where protagonists are coerced to either join or oppose Beijing in its endeavors.

3.5.3. Macro-level: Structural emphasis of actions and sources' credibility.

Depictions of the Chinese Self converge towards its ambitious nature and community-building features, with more or less variations. Liu and Clover *et al.* insist on the benevolent nature of this Self while discrediting the idea that China might be self-serving in its endeavors. China is a well-respected economic partner and diplomatic actor that serves “the good of the entire world”¹⁴⁴ and encourages “partnerships of dialogue with no confrontation and friendship rather than alliance.”¹⁴⁵ Geopolitically, China’s initiatives are described as “a far cry from monopoly or dominance” as the country “welcomes contracting and sub-contracting by all countries”¹⁴⁶ interested in either OBOR or AIIB. Contrary to Liu, Clover *et al.* adamantly expose China’s gargantuan appetite for increased political influence at an international level, and positively present the authorities’ “modern strategy”¹⁴⁷ in doing so. Magnus and Kynge’s presentation of the Chinese Self remains more measured but essentially positive. Kynge presents China as a driven and capable infrastructure builder but deliberately paying no heed to potential difficulties that might arise in its projects. Magnus depicts the Chinese Self as a very proud and vocal entity that could regrettably “put the cart before the horse.”¹⁴⁸ Magnus’ vision of the Chinese Self also values its interests above all and seeks to expand its influence by means of its economic might. The contrast between the two groups of authors is thus similar in the positive in the description of China’s federating capabilities, but highly diverges when addressing its capacity at efficiently leading said federation. These

¹⁴⁴ Liu, Xiaoming, “New Silk Road is an opportunity not a threat,” *Financial Times*, May 24, 2015, accessed on May 29, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/c8f58a7c-ffd6-11e4-bc30-00144feabdc0>

¹⁴⁵ Clover, Ju, Hornby (2017)

¹⁴⁶ Liu (2015)

¹⁴⁷ Clover, Charles, Ju, Sherry Fei, Hornby, Lucy, “China’s Xi hails Belt and Road as ‘project of the century’,” *Financial Times*, May 14, 2017, accessed on May 29, 2017, <https://www.ft.com/content/88d584a2-385e-11e7-821a-6027b8a20f23>

¹⁴⁸ Magnus (2015)

depictions of the Chinese Self seem nevertheless less politically polarized, as the authors seem willing to give Beijing the benefit of the doubt in these new endeavors.

Regrettably China's Other remains underrepresented – at least from Magnus and Kynge's perspective. Clover *et al.* depict the United States and Western countries in general as economically declining and politically instable, insofar as they “are scaling back their international commitments.”¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, China's main Other appears to be India, up in arms against the AIIB. Described as “eying with distrust” a Sino-Pakistani infrastructural project, it has reportedly accused *Zhongnanhai* of “outdated geopolitical maneuverings” that ignore one country's “core concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity.”¹⁵⁰ Fingers are also pointed at “certain countries [having] mixed feelings” towards AIIB or OBOR, “skeptics,” and even “others,”¹⁵¹ thus reviving the unnamed and discrete Other that still haunts Chinese media. Abstract or concrete, China's Other prefers strong words to actions, and fails to understand the essence of China-led projects – or to simply recognize their feasibility in terms similar to Beijing's. Moreover, its anonymity further reinforces the dehumanization of this Other and its incapacity at perceiving the benefits brought by the benevolent Chinese Self, thus fulfilling Callahan's argument on the opposition of a ‘civilized’ Chinese Self to a ‘barbarian’ foreign Other.¹⁵²

Finally, sources appear diverse in scope and opinion, as well as in professional background. Are therefore brought into the dialogue experts, NGO and think tank employees, banking institutions cadres, as well as official representatives of numerous governments around the globe as to express their concern regarding, or support towards, OBOR and AIIB.

¹⁴⁹ Clover, Ju, Hornby (2017)

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Liu (2015)

¹⁵² Callahan (2015): 224

An equitable balance of opinions is maintained in Kynge and Magnus' articles, whereas Liu and Clover *et al.* tend to regrettably favor pro-Beijing sources.

CONCLUSION

OBOR and AIIB are rich in soft power narratives trying to project China's preferred image of itself upon foreign audiences. Nevertheless, this enterprise's success appears at best mitigated in the French and British newspapers under scrutiny. The analysis undertaken hereinabove may prove useful in understanding why such outcomes occur. First, one must not only consider the production of a given narrative but also its means of distribution towards the target audience, regardless of the topic at stake. Much like industrial goods, narratives follow a similar production and distribution chain: in the case of Chinese narratives, they originate from the state and are handed down as they are to official mouthpieces. They then are relayed to a series of new intermediaries, foreign media agencies, that will preselect content based on relevance or current events. National or local newspapers proceed then to an additional screening and selection of said narratives, add their own input, and finally distribute to their audiences a finished product to which modifications have been brought. Similarities between the 'raw' narrative and the 'finished product' can thus be substantial and not thoroughly reflect the original meaning or purpose, be it intentional or fortuitous.

A similar journey is undertaken by the Chinese Self. Tailored to fit and support OBOR and AIIB's soft power narratives, the Chinese Self is implemented in the government's rendition of a given occurrence. The initial information is then handed down to domestic media and distributed to relevant audiences verbatim. Foreign news agencies then collect relevant publications, and then produce their own articles, which may entirely or partially reflect the original event (and related soft power narratives) as per rendered by Chinese authorities. Journalists then further refine the selection process by opting for partial accounts of the original occurrence as per reported by foreign news agencies. Are then combined different sources discussing the original topic in ways that shall support the journalists'

argument, thus adding a layer of subjectivity and bias, and further depleting the original occurrence from its initial purpose or meaning. The end result is therefore a patchwork of different sources and opinions vis-à-vis the original occurrence, ultimately reflecting the writer's assessment of the matter under scrutiny. It is therefore likely that the original soft power narrative, as well as its inherent depiction of the Chinese Self, may have been reinterpreted and rendered differently in the article presented to local, non-Chinese audiences. Given the abundance of information selection bias and external sources, it is also very likely that final depiction of the Chinese Self, as an inherent part of the soft power narrative, is but an avatar of its original self.

Chinese descriptions of the Chinese Self tend to attach overly positive connotations to their description, whereas selected French and British media opt for a more cautious depiction of it, balancing positive and negative aspects. The main difference between these two accounts is that Chinese authorities tend to project an ideational and idealized version of this Self that dismisses concrete actions, whereas French and British media take hard facts and figures into account to assess related ideational values of the Chinese Self, before rendering their own understanding of it. These different outlooks thus contribute to different interpretations of Chinese soft power. Beijing's ideational Self fits into related soft power narratives presenting overly positive aspects of a given occurrence – in this case, OBOR and AIIB. French and British media's ideational and factual Self promotes in turn more balanced soft power narratives related to a similar occurrence – thus presenting both initiatives potentially as successful as they may be unfruitful. Such shifts in narratives happen to occur at the micro-level of Fairclough's three-dimensional model of discourse analysis – that is, within the textual production itself. These findings thus support the first hypothesis of this research project, asserting that structural divergences in the core elements of soft power hamper the thorough transmission of soft power's core elements from the emitter to the receiver.

Second, one must consider the discursive practices utilized by both Chinese and non-Chinese media, and examine how both groups of newspapers use certain groups of words within a certain context to legitimize their allegations and ultimately transmit a message. The first difference hinges on the very nature of the legitimizing arguments. Chinese media mostly rely on governmental allegations spiked with events, figures, and sources that support said arguments. French and British media use hard facts issued by a diversity of trusted sources with a pinch of salt. The former sources present an information, while the latter question it in the process. This is a far cry from saying that Beijing provides erroneous information, but positive arguments seem to be given preeminence as they gracefully embrace the ideational goals of the Chinese leadership and produce narratives that harmoniously fit their opinion, whereas French and British media flout such politically-motivated literary embellishments and seek to extract information from factual content regardless of its positive or negative nature, as to render a balanced account of a given event. The second discrepancy lies in the sources providing the legitimizing arguments. Whereas bias remain in French and British articles, a wide selection of sources and opinions is present. Opposition can thus occur within one given article, as divergent sources are quoted to support the advantages or disadvantages related to the event under scrutiny.¹⁵³ Domestic circumstances may nevertheless not allow Chinese media such liberty. Governmental mouthpieces are indeed to mimic official narratives as to create a sense of unity in the national press. Should opinions be present, articles under scrutiny have shown that three directions are possible: arguments may be used to reinforce the official narrative on a given occurrence; discredit allegations opposing the official narrative; or as reinforcing the official narrative used to discredit allegations opposing this very narrative.

¹⁵³ De Vergès' article is the quintessential illustration of such practices, as the author carefully balances proponent and opponents' opinions on the Belt and Road initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

Differences in discursive practices are twofold. Firstly, linguistic specificities and practices highly impact the way information is produced at the source. Mandarin Chinese is thus a very interesting example, especially when compared with French or English, as a handful of characters may bear very powerful meanings. *Chengyu*¹⁵⁴ have become an organic part of Chinese language and discursive practices over the centuries, and are an inherent part of political narratives, modern or past. Whereas new *chengyu*-like slogans may be created to suit particular political needs, their characteristics befit culturally Chinese narratives more than they do foreign ones, as they may lose coherence or significance if translated.¹⁵⁵ Beijing's political slogans thus sound grandiloquent and legitimate in their original language, but may appear somewhat grand-sounding and factitious in their transliteration. That is not to say that neither French nor English accurately translate the content Chinese political narratives, but the final rendition may not befit the articles' content – as well as delving into linguistic explanations might be unwelcomed. Secondly, Chinese references and argumentative style in political narratives may be at odds with what British and French pundits and audiences are used to. Certain facts are indeed uniquely inherent to a particular set of discursive practices, and may be conspicuous in another. Further transliteration of said references may contribute to the impoverishment of the original narrative, as part of its meaning and purpose may be lost in the process due to semantic divergences between the source and target languages. Different discursive practices thus give rise to different interpretations of a given fact. That is best illustrated by the analysis of the lexical style and storytelling of the numerous articles under observation, as the contexts of their discursive practices changes greatly. While this setting remains constant in the case of Chinese articles, hence best representing the Chinese Self and strengthening OBOR and AIIB's soft power narratives, shifts occur in French and British

¹⁵⁴ Expressions typically built around 4 characters bearing specific meanings based on historical or literary references.

¹⁵⁵ Please refer to Jiang Zemin's 三个代表, oddly translated as the 'Three Represents', or to Deng Xiaoping's 韬光养晦, rendered as 'hide and bide', as illustrations.

articles insofar as the initial information may not be presented as accurately as in the source media. Further bias may contribute to shift the original significance of the Self and the related context in which it shall blossom. This consequently confirms my second hypothesis, in which differences in the structural discursive practices of soft power's core elements sometimes fail to be properly understood by speakers of a different paradigmatic soft power.

Third, we shall now consider the broader social context of these articles. The first discrepancy concerns the role of the state within society and its connection to media outlets. Beijing authorities' centrality grants them the providential role of main information provider and narratives creator in China. These attributes, coupled with its authoritative nature, render Chinese state and media outlets particularly symbiotic, as the latter rely upon the former for their survival and the former rests on the latter for the propagation of its narratives. Nevertheless, this relationship is unbalanced, as Chinese media outlets operate under the iron rule of *Zhongnanhai* and function as its official mouthpieces. Circumstances in France and Great Britain are at polar opposites, as the state grants freedom of speech provided respect for certain regulations. French and British media remain nevertheless vessels of individual expression rather than simple instruments whereby the state reproduces official standpoints. Similarities in the way Chinese media report on AIIB and OBOR and represent the Chinese Self are present, whereas different stances arise not only between French and British media, but also amongst pundits in one newspaper.

A second difference lies in the relationship between the state and cultural values inherent to France, the United Kingdom, and China. Contemporary Chinese values, a combination of traditional values and Socialist principles, befit Beijing's current philosophy of national and cultural Renaissance. However, their implementation remains a top-down endeavor, as the state dictates what shall and shan't be promoted. Such remain therefore highly politically polarized in nature, and befit China's case the best. French and British

cultural values have, conversely, benefited from a bottom-up implementation in the realm of politics, and thus appear less artificial in their making. They remain nevertheless highly politicized, insofar as they are promoted by governments and institutions with a global reach and cause by the two countries' international relevance. Aware of such facts, China is now attempting to similarly promote its cultural values internationally, through soft power initiatives, narratives, and economic endeavors in line with international standards. Nevertheless, whereas a period of cultural readjustment has been required domestically for the Beijing to fully implement promoted values, another equally crucial timespan will be required for Chinese authorities to attune their soft power narratives to internationally held values and standards. If achievable, another substantial amount of time will be required for international actors to consider their validity, and finally implement or discard such principles. The task remains arduous, as Beijing has been able to vocally reproduce internationally relevant narratives, but remains helpless in implementing the principles it professes. This gap between words and actions hampers other countries' perception of Chinese soft power narratives, hardening their stance vis-à-vis not only said narratives but also Chinese political endeavors, and widening the gap between French, British, and Chinese conceptions of soft power.

One party's conception of its cultural values and political system consequently collides with another party's vision of such elements – especially when strong narratives on said matters are displayed, and further geopolitical interests are at stake. Beijing is eager to promote internationally-accepted values in its foreign policy and outward endeavors, but shows reluctance to implement them domestically, as both its political system and preferred cultural values prevent the former principles to be fully absorbed by Chinese civil society. The duality of the situation renders China's international soft power effort moot, as values implemented domestically and externally are not unified, and as the soft power narrative appears fragile and unstable. The dual nature of Chinese soft power narratives has been a

highly debated upon subject in the French and British articles examined, as pundits fail to see how China's record of project mismanagement will meet Beijing's promised compliance with international standards in the context of OBOR and AIIB. Doubts have understandably arisen vis-à-vis the true nature of China's outward initiatives: China has long maintained that it will not seek to challenge nor topple the existing order through said projects; conversely, countries have grown concerned that said endeavors may conceal concrete maneuvers to gain political and economic preeminence over them. Despite Beijing's numerous attempts to clarify its intentions, suspicion remains clearly perceptible in the actions and words of international actors. In other words, China's projection of its Self through the narrative vessel of OBOR and AIIB is neither fully understood nor adequately judged in French and British articles under examination. The overall conclusion is that the social context matters in its ability to shape discourse practices and textual production, as it provides the instruments whereby soft power narratives will be produced and examined. Differences in discourse practices may set off textual production and their respective roles in the broader social context, as the three elements appear codependent. It is so that is proven my third hypothesis, which conjectures that if differences in the structural "language" of soft power affect the meaning of any core element of soft power, then chances are that the concept might fail to be properly understood by the receiver.

APPENDICES

Table 1

Definition and Projection of Self		Van Dijk's framework of discourse structure	Fairclough's three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis
Self defining Self	Other defining Self	Argumentation: the evaluation of the Self that follows from the 'facts.'	Micro-level (<i>text</i>)
		Rhetorical figures: creative semantics of the Self's actions, in a positive or negative light; mention of certain positive or negative aspects of the Self's actions.	
		Lexical style: choice of words that imply negative or positive evaluations.	Meso-level (<i>discourse practice context</i>)
Self projecting Self	Other projecting Self	Story telling: telling negative or positive events about the Self; giving plausible details about the negative or positive features of the events.	
		Structural emphasis of the Self's actions in the context of the textual content used to transmit the information; transactivity structures of sentence syntax (mention of positive or negative actions in prominent positions, for instance).	
		Quoting credible witnesses, sources, experts, etc. in the textual end product.	Macro-level (<i>social context</i>)

Table 2

		Van Dijk's modified framework:	Corresponding questions for the Chinese point of view:
Micro-level	<i>Text</i>	a) Argumentation: the evaluation follows from the facts. b) Rhetorical figures: hyperbolic enhancement of the Self's actions; euphemisms, denials, understatements of negative action by the Other.	a) What is the starting point of this article? Which event has triggered its redaction? Which links can be drawn between this event and both OBOR and AIIB? b) What actions are being judged and why? What has been done and what hasn't, and by whom?
Meso-level	<i>Discursive practices</i>	c) Lexical style: choice of words that imply negative or positive evaluations d) Story telling: telling above events as personally experienced; giving plausible details above negative or positive features of the events	c) Which choice of words for that purpose? What are the main themes around which revolve the terms present in the article? d) What is the overall tone of the article? What is the structure of the article?
Macro-level	<i>Social context</i>	e) Structural emphasis of positive actions, in the article's features, other properties of text schemata, or transactivity structures of sentence syntax. f) Structural emphasis of negative actions, in the article's features, other properties of text schemata, or transactivity structures of sentence syntax. g) Quoting credible witnesses, sources, or experts.	e) Who is the 'Self'? What has it done that deserves praise? f) Who is the 'Other'? What has it done that deserves criticism and/or condescendence? g) What are the sources or figures mentioned in the article? What purpose do they serve, when their name is used? Does that strengthen the Self's action or sanctions the Other's lack of action?

Table 3

		Van Dijk's modified framework:	Corresponding questions for the Western European point of view:
Micro-level	<i>Text</i>	a) Argumentation: the evaluation follows from the facts. b) Rhetorical figures: hyperbolic enhancement of the Self's actions; euphemisms, denials, understatements of negative action by the Other.	a) What is the starting point of this article? Which event has triggered its redaction? Which links can be drawn between this event and both OBOR and AIIB? b) What actions are being judged and why? What has been done and what hasn't, and by whom?
Meso-level	<i>Discursive practices</i>	c) Lexical style: choice of words that imply negative or positive evaluations d) Story telling: telling above events as personally experienced; giving plausible details above negative or positive features of the events	c) Which choice of words for that purpose? What are the main themes around which revolve the terms present in the article? d) What is the overall tone of the article? What is the structure of the article?
Macro-level	<i>Social context</i>	e) Structural emphasis of positive actions, in the article's features, other properties of text schemata, or transactivity structures of sentence syntax. f) Structural emphasis of negative actions, in the article's features, other properties of text schemata, or transactivity structures of sentence syntax. g) Quoting credible witnesses, sources, or experts.	e) How is the Chinese Self represented? Is it praised or criticized? f) How is the Chinese Other represented? Is it praised or criticized? g) What are the sources or figures mentioned in the article? What purpose do they serve, when their name is used? Does that strengthen the Self's action or sanctions the Other's lack of action?

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