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**Nation Branding and Marketing Strategies in China**

At this point in time, as the world moves to the post-modernist age, many cultures and societies are attempting to adapt to the imposing forces of globalization. Globalization, and the altering of space-time relations, has re-configured complex and delicate regional and international public relations. As a result of these changes, societies have faced the challenge or redesigning their marketing strategies, in order to remain relevant in an increasingly competitive society. To help maintain their own countries particular sphere of influence in light of a rapidly transforming society, countries have resorted towards nation branding to improve their own nation’s image and acceptance globally. [[1]](#footnote-0)While there exist certainly various overlaps regarding the commercial strategies internationally, the manner in which these commercial theories are executed greatly differs between Western and Eastern countries. China thus, has changed the manner in which it engages in marketing and community interactions, as for it is these inter-cultural exchanges that can affirm or weaken a nation's influence. As a result, China thus has integrated a variety of methods in order to improve its nation brand such as through the use of soft power, the hybridization of certain aspects of Chinese and Western culture, and shifting of values propagated by advertisements to appeal to foreign consumers. Through the influence of multimedia and rapidly shifting technologies, China continues to take great strides in attempting to transcend the challenges of a hyper-competitive society and reaffirm its position in the global market.

**Western Attempts at Nation Branding: US and Edutainment**

As a result of today’s increasingly rapidly changing society, in which, corporate and product brands must also maintain a reliant and reputable nation brand that consumers prefer and as a point of differentiation among other competitors. In the Western Hemisphere, the United States has attempted to continue building and maintaining its image throughout the world, through the manipulation of multimedia “edutainment,” For instance, the United States attempted to reaffirm its notoriety as a cultured, advanced, developed civilization through the creation of inter-cultural exchange programs on National Geographic. Through the televised episodes in Worlds Apart, the directors of the United States attempted to support their hegemonic position and their position as a “modern nations and masters of globalization” through televised intercultural exchange. Due to the competitive marketing world of the 21st century, multimedia exchange has been used as a tool by the US “secure ideological terrain in the in the global/national cultural imagery, and to symbolically enforce a natural hierarchy of nations within the world order.” (Worlds Apart)

**Soft Power Usage to Rebuild China’s Nation-Brand**

However, just as the US and other Western Nations have utilized multimedia communication systems and edu-tainment to refurbish their nation brand image, China has particularly begun to integrate various multi-media marketing strategies to increase their overseas brand influence. China’s rise towards becoming one of the greatest participants in the international marketing sphere has been gradual, as for it was not until around 40 years ago that China allowed for greater transparency and interactions with foreign nations. Since the Open Door Policy was enacted in 1978, China has fought to cultivate its image and maintained its status as one of the global economy’s greatest low-cost manufacturers. As result of changes within China’s international policy regulations, China transitioned towards harvesting the power of marketing to strengthen their often fluctuating “soft power.” First coined by Joseph Nye of Harvard University, it is a term used to describe “ to describe the ability to attract and co-opt rather than by coercion, using force or giving money as a means of persuasion.” Through increased efforts towards rebuilding China’s soft power, government officials believed that it would simultaneously strengthen the prowess of China’s nation brand and influence in an increasingly competitive market.

**Successful Soft Power Ventures**

China’s journey towards enforcing its soft power strength has been a complex and challenging expenditure, as marketers experienced the challenge of maintaining many of China’s ideologies while also attempting to increase acceptance among other partnering countries nation wide. One manner in which China has attempted to increase its soft power influence, is through emphasis on its rich culture, which has typically always been a great source of attraction. Through the creation of several hundred [Confucius Institutes](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confucius_Institute) around the world to teach its language and culture, China has been able to increase its enrollment of foreign students in China has increased from 36,000 a decade ago to at least 240,000 in 2010. It is through the introduction of confucius institutions, that China is attempting to promote a positive image of China by integrating institutions that are at once both historically symbolic and which promote important philosophical ideologies such as the desire for a “harmonious society,” a concept which is centric within Chinese culture. The Confucius Institute project can be seen at one level as an attempt to increase Chinese language learning and an appreciation of Chinese culture. The institution thus focuses on maintaining its objective as being a place for “foreigners to learn language and culture as well as understand modern China.” Through such programs, the Institute thus endeavors to strengthen its soft power by encouraging cross-cultural understanding in order to deepen the friendly relationships with other nations and and to promote “the development of multi-culturalism construction of a harmonious world.

[[2]](#footnote-1)

**Hybridization Techniques in Chinese Films**

Another strategy that has proved particularly successful in aiding China in constructing its soft power influence, is through the hybridization of culture in films and other media. In light of the growing pressures of globalization and localization, hybridization has become part of an ongoing tactic being incorporated in current advertising strategies. Hybridity, according to film and critic cultural critic Homi Bhabha, has proved to be a powerful tool in opening up a ‘a third space,’ within which elements encounter and transform each other (Papastergiadis, 2000: 170; Young, 1995). Through the incorporation of hybridization, marketers attempt to create a ‘third space’ for discussion that helps abolish the “distinctions between center and periphery”, and helps us look beyond some of the more restricting boundaries of boundaries of nation, community, ethnicity or class. In an attempt to adapt to a more “global” world, in which production industries feel the pressures of creating products that appeal both to local and international audiences, hybridization is used to facilitate “cultural delocalization.” The reasoning using hybridization to create this form of delocalization, is in order to create products that are “culture specific” and that may have ethnic, historical, or religious barriers and divisions.

Recently China has been inspired by the successful music and pop culture hybridization techniques used by the Korean entertainment industry, to bridge language and cultural gaps. Kpop, for instance, has benefitted from such techniques by incorporating aspects of Korean and Western traditional and pop values to enable greater commercialization of *Hallyu* pop culture. Searching for similar success, China began incorporating both Western and Eastern values and ideology to create a film that would be more culturally accessible. Mulan is one such attempt to transcend cultural barriers by extracting a traditional Chinese folk story, and re-assembling it to appeal to Western audiences. For instance, whereas the Chinese story characterizes Mulan as a more quiet and thoughtful girl who is involved in family duties and weaving, the personality of Disney’s Mulan is drastically different. To appeal to a more global audience, Disney’s Mulan maintains a more outgoing and tomboyish personality that aligned more favorably with family audiences in the US at the time. The film then integrates a melange of various parts of Chinese and Asian culture that is not necessarily historically or regionally accurate, perhaps to create a sense of “otherness.” Yet, in order to enable to film to be more accessible towards its audience, the film hires a range of multi-cultural voice actors and actresses from various backgrounds and integrates Western-centric themes and values. For instance, the concluding message of the film that it is one’s individualism and authenticity personal attributes, and not one’s role in society, that is of most importance. Thus, it is through the integration of hybridization techniques in film and other media enterprises, that China attempts to reassert its dominance within the competitive international market. [[3]](#footnote-2)

**China’s Current Challenges in Improving Soft Power Influence**

Although China has experienced various successes in developing ways in which to enhance their nation brand and improve their power in the international market, it has not been without difficulty. China now is facing a variety of challenges even though it attempted to adapt its policies and open its doors to global market to a certain degree. On the one hand, China has struggled to extend its campaigns to only rely on the appeal and influence of Chinese culture and tradition within their central advertisements, and not integrating any aspects of politics within their marketing strategies. This mentality has been widely engraved within marketing practices even in recent years, as can be witnessed by Xi Jingpeng’s lecture at a Chinese University in early 2013 that emphasized that “the Chinese approach to soft power should focus on culture, not politics.” [[4]](#footnote-3)Although it is widely regarded that culture stands as the main source of Chinese soft power projection, not everyone subscribes to the notion that it must remain at the heart of current campaigns. While focusing on China’s vibrant and captivating culture is beneficial in certain aspects, it is not the only strategy that is necessary to cultivate the stronger relations that China seeks. [[5]](#footnote-4)Yan Xuetong, a leading international relations scholar , argues that it would be beneficial if China emphasized that it is making efforts towards decreasing its censorship and maintaining ethical politics and governance. An emphasis on these qualities, would increase China’s credibility and would help remedy and increase its relationships within the international business sphere. In order to benefit all partners sides in the debate agree that domestic stability and maintaining favourable internal conditions for China’s peaceful rise and sustained growth are of paramount importance. [[6]](#footnote-5)

China has also experienced certain challenges when attempting to manage the fine balance when attempting to emphasize dominant perspectives of the country, and also attempting to illustrate a different image of its country. In recent years, China has engaged in promoting a variety of “Made in China” advertisements, with the goal of asserting the quality of Chinese made goods to the global business community by emphasizing their interaction with foreign companies. Through this marketing strategy, officials were likewise by extension attempting to dismantle the negative perceptions towards what may be considered “cheap Chinese-produced goods.” The ad this was an attempt to create a platform within a global setting that would encourage international partnering organizations to view China’s production abilities in a new, and less stereotypical, manner. Unfortunately, however, this particular multi-media approach did little to bolster China’s image and nation brand as was originally anticipated. Marketers criticized that the advertisement accomplished the opposite, rather reaffirming perceptions of China as the ‘factory of the world’ rather than as the center for creative enterprise. This instance thus reaffirming certain challenges China has encountered to cultivate an image that define the identity and reputation of entire countries by using persons, symbols, colours and slogans to create a distinctive personality. While the article attempting to re-create the Made in China brand in a positive collaborative manner, it was interpreted differently from others. Instead, the ads were interpreted as “perpetuating dominant myths” as for while the video illustrates that the products are made in China, the design of these products are created in elsewhere in other countries. As a result, it simply reaffirms the narrative that while China is exceptional at creating products that are affordable and available worldwide, the creative aspects of the products were conceived in countries already renowned for their design skills. While it is true that the “Made in China” campaign is structured around depicted the manufacturing strengths of the country, it does not further extend China’s image. Rather, it might be beneficial for future ads to recognize the growth of its industries, while simultaneously showing China’s aptitude for creative innovation technology breakthroughs. [[7]](#footnote-6)

**Looking Ahead: Suggestions for a more efficient soft power and nation-branding approach**

In conclusion, China has rapidly come to the forefront in the world of marketing, for its unique way in which it has attempted to adapt to time-space shrinkage, in order to increase its reputation globally. China has showed great flexibility in its ability to cultivate its image through its education ventures and highly developed multi-media advertisements. In addition, China has illustrated great ability to transcend the cultural barriers and gap through its hybrid approach towards film and multimedia.

Yet, despite its many successes in promoting its proud culture and traditions, there are still significant gaps that impact China’s ability to cultivate its soft power. The manner in which China cultivates its soft power will also simultaneously influence its the power of its nation brand, and its ability to reshape the international opinions. Therefore, in order to create a more successful nation branding campaign that will create a favourable and lasting image among partnering countries, there are certain possible solutions.

At the moment, China is navigating a market with a dominant Western slant, and as such may need to consider some of the values that these countries make a priority. In light of China’s often harsh self-governing policy, its reputation and credibility has been largely affected by its strong censorship policies and attempts to heavily monitor free speech. While China certainly does not lack in its ability to create technologically advanced and capturing multi-media advertisements, perhaps it may be necessary to have a shift regarding its marketing ideology. According to David Shambaugh, Chinese government often approaches public diplomacy by “investing money and expecting development.” Unfortunately, despite its economic rise over the last several years, its nation-brand will continue to encounter difficulties connecting with other nations when human development and expression is severely monitored. Soft power, however, succeeds when civilians are able to interact more freely and have a larger influence regarding the ‘cultural political and social aspects and values’ of a nation. As a result, perhaps it would be beneficial if it adjusts its strategy slightly to enable some of its “unrealized and untapped soft power potential” to grow.

1. [https://libcom.org/files/Da#vid%20Harvey%20-%20The%20Condition%20of%20Postmodernity.pdf](https://libcom.org/files/David%20Harvey%20-%20The%20Condition%20of%20Postmodernity.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. (<http://people.hum.aau.dk/cgs-studier/siv_public/eksamensplaner/Eksamen_F14/4%20semester/Syntese/Kinesiske%20omr%C3%A5destudier/Paradise%20China%20and%20International%20harmony.pdf>) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. <https://eclass.uoa.gr/modules/document/file.php/MEDIA165/globalization-%CF%84%CF%83%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%AF%CE%BA%CE%B7/hybridization%20mulan%20crouching%20tiger.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702304451104577389923098678842> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/china-and-nation-branding/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12140-011-9159-7#CR54n> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. <http://flamingogroup.com/nation-branding-china> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)