

The comparative study of U.S.-China soft power diplomacy to
ASEAN



An Independent Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements

for the Degree of Master of Arts in Southeast Asian Studies

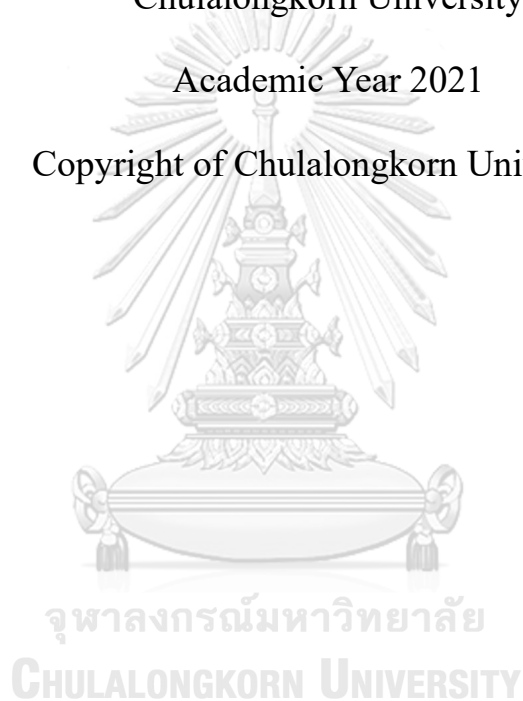
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การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบการทูตแบบซอฟต์แวร์ของจีนและสหรัฐฯ ที่มีต่ออาเซียน



สารนิพนธ์นี้เป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษาตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต

สาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา สหสาขาวิชาเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา

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สุข มา : การศึกษาเปรียบเทียบการทูตแบบซอฟต์พาวเวอร์ของจีนและสหรัฐฯ ที่มีต่ออาเซียน. (The comparative study of U.S.-China soft power diplomacy to ASEAN) อ.ที่ปรึกษาหลัก : ดร.โลเวล สการ์

วิทยานิพนธ์นี้ตอบคำถามต่อไปนี้: “จีนและสหรัฐฯ ใช้การทูตแบบซอฟต์พาวเวอร์แตกต่างกันอย่างไรในประเทศอาเซียน ในช่วงหลังๆ นี้” ซอฟต์พาวเวอร์เป็นหัวข้อสำคัญที่ทั่วโลกให้ความสนใจมานานกว่าสามสิบปี โจเซฟ ไน ได้นิยามพลังที่นุ่มนวลว่าเป็น “ความสามารถ [ของรัฐ] เพื่อให้ได้ผลลัพธ์ที่ต้องการ โดยการดึงดูดมากกว่าการบีบบังคับหรือการจ่ายเงิน” เป็นสิ่งที่มีอยู่ใน “ค่านิยมทางวัฒนธรรม ระบบสังคม รูปแบบการพัฒนา วิถีชีวิต และอุดมการณ์” ของประเทศ และเป็นองค์ประกอบสำคัญของอำนาจชาติที่ครอบคลุมของประเทศ ภายใต้อำนาจในการสร้าง “ความดึงดูด” คือผ่านวัฒนธรรม โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งการทูตทางวัฒนธรรม การส่งเสริมอำนาจอ่อนของประเทศจะเอื้อต่อการเสริมสร้างอำนาจของชาติที่ครอบคลุม รักษา และปกป้องความมั่นคงของชาติ และตระหนักถึงผลประโยชน์ของชาติ นับตั้งแต่สิ้นสุดสงครามเย็น ความสัมพันธ์จีน-อาเซียนได้พัฒนาขึ้นอย่างก้าวกระโดด นอกจากการพัฒนาความร่วมมือทางเศรษฐกิจแล้ว จีนยังใช้การทูตแบบ soft power ในอาเซียนเป็นช่องทางสำคัญในการส่งเสริมผลประโยชน์ของตน สหรัฐฯ เองก็มองว่าอาเซียนเป็นส่วนสำคัญของยุทธศาสตร์อินโด-แปซิฟิกของสหรัฐฯ เช่นเดียวกัน และหลายๆ ประเทศในกลุ่มอาเซียนเป็นพันธมิตรระยะยาวกับสหรัฐฯ สหรัฐฯ มีอิทธิพลอย่างแข็งขัน (ทางทหารและการเมือง) ในเอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ นอกจากนี้ยังใช้นโยบายต่างประเทศรูปแบบต่างๆ ที่มีอำนาจอ่อน ตั้งแต่สงครามเย็น แต่มีความสม่ำเสมอมากกว่าที่จีนทำ โดยเน้นที่ทรัพยากรพลังงานอ่อนของเอกชนและค่านิยมประชาธิปไตยแบบเสรีนิยม เพื่อพยายามส่งผลกระทบต่ออาเซียน

บทความนี้พยายามวิเคราะห์การทูตแบบ soft-power ของจีนและสหรัฐอเมริกาในภูมิภาคอาเซียนในรูปแบบของการศึกษาเปรียบเทียบโดยใช้ทฤษฎี soft power โดยใช้ตัวอย่างมากมายเพื่อสะท้อนและวิเคราะห์ข้อดีและข้อเสียของการสร้าง soft power ระหว่างจีนและสหรัฐอเมริกา เพื่อให้เข้าใจความหมายและบทบาทของการทูตแบบ soft power ได้ชัดเจนยิ่งขึ้น กระดาษนี้แบ่งออกเป็นหกส่วน บทนำในส่วนที่ 1 กล่าวถึงปัญหาที่จะกล่าวถึงในเบื้องหลัง การวิจัยในปัจจุบัน และวิธีการวิจัย ต่อจากนี้ไป ในตอนที่ 2 โดยการอธิบายเพิ่มเติมเกี่ยวกับทฤษฎีพลังอ่อน ส่วนที่ 3 พิจารณาแรงจูงใจและการพัฒนาอำนาจอ่อนของจีนในภูมิภาคอาเซียน ในขณะที่ส่วนที่ 4 วิเคราะห์สถานะการพัฒนาของอำนาจอ่อนของสหรัฐฯ ในภูมิภาคอาเซียน ส่วนที่ห้าให้ตัวอย่างและวิเคราะห์ตัวอย่างต่างๆ ของ soft power ที่จีนและสหรัฐอเมริกาใช้ในภูมิภาคอาเซียน และเปรียบเทียบการทูต soft power ที่ทั้งสองประเทศลงทุนในภูมิภาคอาเซียนในช่วงไม่กี่ปีที่ผ่านมา ส่วนสุดท้ายเป็นการผสมผสานระหว่างการวิเคราะห์ข้างต้นและการวิเคราะห์เปรียบเทียบความพยายามด้านอำนาจอ่อนของทั้งสองประเทศในภูมิภาคอาเซียน เพื่อวิเคราะห์จุดแข็งและข้อจำกัดของพวกเขา และเสนอแนะแนวทางในการปรับปรุงการพัฒนาพลังงานที่อ่อนนุ่ม

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สาขาวิชา เอเชียตะวันออกเฉียงใต้ศึกษา

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This paper addresses the following question: “How have China and the U.S. Used soft power diplomacy differently in ASEAN countries in recent times?” Soft power has been a key topic of global interest for more than thirty years. Joseph Nye has defined soft power as “the ability [of states] to obtain preferred outcomes by attraction rather than coercion or payment.”[1] It is something embodied in a country's "cultural values, social system, development model, way of life, and ideology" and an important component of a country's comprehensive national power. A key way to generate “attraction” is through culture, especially cultural diplomacy. Enhancing a country's soft power is conducive to strengthening its comprehensive national power, maintaining, and safeguarding its national security, and realizing its national interests. Since the end of the Cold War, China-ASEAN relations have developed by leaps and bounds. Besides developing economic cooperation, China has also used soft power diplomacy in ASEAN as an important means of promoting its interests. The U.S. has likewise seen ASEAN as a key part of its U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, and many This paper attempts to analyze the soft-power diplomacy of China and the United States in the ASEAN region in the form of a comparative study, based on soft power theory, using many examples to fully reflect and analyze the advantages and disadvantages of soft power construction between China and the United States, to perceive the connotation and role of soft power diplomacy more clearly. This paper falls into six parts. The introduction in part 1 discusses the problem, it will address in relation to the background, current research, and research methods. This is followed in part 2 by an elaboration of the theory of soft power. Part 3 considers the motivation and development of China's soft power in the ASEAN region, while part 4 analyzes the development status of U.S. soft power in the ASEAN region. The fifth part gives examples and analyzes several examples of soft power implemented by China and the U.S. in the ASEAN region and compares the soft power diplomacy invested by the two countries in the ASEAN region in recent years. The final part combines the above analysis and a comparative analysis of the soft power efforts of the two countries in the ASEAN region to analyze their strengths and limitations and suggests ways to improve the development of soft power.

[1] Nye, J. (2017). Soft power: the origins and political progress of a concept. Palgrave communications, 3(1), 1-3.

Field of Study: Southeast Asian Studies

Student's Signature

Academic Year: 2021

Advisor's Signature

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In the twinkling of an eye, my study life as a graduate student is coming to an end. The one and a half years college life has made me grow up a lot. I must thank for many people.

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Hui Ma

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Introduction

After Joseph Samuel Nye proposed the idea of soft power in the late 1980s, it has been recognized and accepted all over the world. He sought to consider how a state could “influence others by ideas and attraction that sets the agenda for others or gets them to want what you want.”¹ More and more countries have used the theory of soft power as part of their national development and diplomatic strategies and added to their repertoires of important processes that could enhance their overall power. Under the theme of development of today's era, hard power (tied to the military and to the economy) is no longer the only criterion for measuring a country's comprehensive national power. The role of soft power in national development and international relations is increasing. With the increasing growth of China's hard power, China has also begun to focus on building national soft power, and the Southeast Asian region, with its superior geographical location and occupying a central position in the Asia-Pacific region.

Given this situation, both China and the United States see Southeast Asia as an important region for their own development, and in the context of the competition between China and the United States, the ASEAN region has chosen a "balance of power" strategy. The proper use of soft power in the ASEAN region is important for both countries to establish friendly relations with ASEAN and promote the healthy

¹ Nye, J. (2017). Soft power: the origins and political progress of a concept. *Palgrave communications*, 3(1), 1-3.

development of both sides. The purpose of this paper is to study the current situation and the advantages and disadvantages of soft power development in ASEAN between China and the United States, which will not only help to enrich the practical experience of soft power theory, but also give a clear understanding of soft power development in both countries so that a more appropriate and clear strategy can be formulated for future soft power development.

Literature review

1. Status of research within China

In recent years, soft power has increasingly become a hot topic of discussion. In *Adjusting Chinese soft power: Using country-specific strategies 2019*, Wenbo Bai mainly analyzed the different sources of soft power in China. From the sources of cultural soft power, political soft power, and foreign policy soft power, the current situation of China's soft power resources and the Suggestions for the future development of China's soft power.

In *The Exploration of China's soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia 2010*, Tang Xi takes Southeast Asia as the study region, explores the results of China's soft power diplomacy in the region, and analyzes the problems in the implementation of China's soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia from China's perspective. In *The Exploration of China's soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia 2010*, Tang Xi discusses the

achievements of China's soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia and analyzes the problems in the implementation of China's soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia from China's perspective, to suggest China's soft power diplomacy strategy.

In A comparative study of the soft power diplomacy of China and the United States: A case study of the Southeast Asia (2008), Li Qingsi analyzes the performance of the soft power competition between China and the United States in Southeast Asia and the resulting in this paper, we analyze the performance and impact of the soft power diplomacy between China and the United States in Southeast Asia and make some policy recommendations for China.

Men honghua & Yu yongqun in Soft Power of China and the U.S. (2017-2020): A comparative analysis takes the factor analysis as the core elements of national soft power, culture, perception, development model, international system, and national image, and builds a logic to assess and compare the soft power of China and the U.S. In this paper, we use elemental analysis as the core element of national soft power. Based on the comparison of the soft power of China and the United States, it also makes recommendations for the development of China's soft power. In general, most domestic Chinese scholars are more objective in their evaluation of China's soft power, but their research on soft power is still not deep enough. The concept of soft power is still controversial, and there is a wrong direction of taking Chinese cultural soft power as China's soft power. Soft power should be combined with China's national conditions to construct a theory of soft power that belongs to and is suitable for

China's development and to provide strong theoretical support for Chinese diplomacy.

2. Status of foreign research

In the 1990s, the American scholar Nye introduced the concept of soft power and published his paper *Soft Power*, 1990. Nye's more systematic elaboration of soft power theory was published in 2004 when he published *soft power: The means to success in world politics*, suggesting that U.S. soft power is unmatched in the world today. However, China's soft power is also expanding rapidly and may challenge the United States.

Nye has been refining and adding to the concept of soft power in recent years, and comparing Chinese soft power resources with those of the U.S. In two recent studies, Nye in *Soft power: the origins and political progress of a concept*, (2021), describes the source of soft power and the role that source soft power and the role soft power plays in political practice, and its continuing relevance in the unfolding geopolitical context.

In *Soft power: the evolution of a concept, published in January (2021)*, Nye revisits the concept of soft power and responds to some of its criticisms. Nye also compares the development of soft power in China and the United States, as well as how the two countries use soft power in the development of international relations, implying that hard power is the driving force and soft power is the attraction. It also suggested that the focus of China's soft power should be on its people rather than its government.

Chang Zhang in *Battlefield and global ranking: how do power rivalries shape soft*

power index building? (2019) Based on the growing popularity of soft power and the increasing measurement of soft power indices, this paper examines the Portland Soft Power 30 index and the China National Image Global Survey, two soft power indices. The paper finds that soft power indicators from Western organizations largely regulate liberal values and the current international hierarchy, whereas the China National Image Survey provides a more self-reflective measure of soft power.

Edward F. Hwang in *China's soft power and growing influence in Southeast Asia, (2008)* analyzes the soft power factors in China's state relations with Southeast Asian countries and uses China's development plan for the Lancang-Mekong River development plan of the Lancang-Mekong River as a case study to examine how China uses soft power in Southeast Asia. It has great significance for the study of China's soft power building in Southeast Asia, but due to its long time ago, there are still some limitations for today's soft power study.

In *China's Soft Power Diplomacy in Southeast Asia, 2008*, Johannes Dragsbaek Schmidt analyzes China's new geopolitical and geo-economic strategic relationship with Southeast Asia and examines how China's soft power foray into Southeast Asia will affect the region as well as the It also explores how China's soft power foray into Southeast Asia will affect the region and the United States, and briefly compares the similarities and differences between U.S. and Chinese approaches in Southeast Asia. Pioneering research on China's soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia and subsequent studies have provided a different perspective on political relations, but the

article focuses more on political and economic factors and less on cultural and other soft power factors for China's soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia.

In general, Western scholars have understood and elaborated on soft power based on Nye. Although they have studied the essence of China's soft power and the relationship between soft power and hard power and have seen the problems that exist in China's use of soft power, they have not fundamentally distinguished the purpose and essential differences between China's and the West's use of soft power. When evaluating China's soft power, it always carries an inherent view or bias against China, and in the viewpoint of soft power building, it is from the standpoint of Western countries and does not adhere to a fair and impartial position on the development of China's soft power, believing that China is a threat to the development of the world and its soft power will also pose a threat to the world. Foreign scholars should look at China's soft power development objectively.

Combining Chinese scholars and foreign scholars, the research on the soft power construction of both China and the United States in ASEAN is still weak, and there is no systematic and comprehensive analysis of the soft power construction of China and the United States in the ASEAN region, and there is almost no analysis of the evaluation of ASEAN countries on the development of soft power of China and the United States; therefore, such research still has a certain gap and requires scholars to conduct deeper research.

Research methods

1. Qualitative analysis

Using developments of “soft power” thinking emerging from Joseph Nye's soft power ideas, this paper analyzes how developing projects tied to soft power by China and the United States in the ASEAN region have evolved. This entails looking at various types, manifestations, and development paths of soft power by China and the U.S. in Southeast Asia. After identifying the concept of soft power and how it developed, the essay examines various types of soft power. This helps to identify a flexible framework for studying soft power projects overseen by China and the U.S. in the ASEAN region.

Because the theory of "soft power" is tied to the study of soft power diplomacy, this paper first introduces this theory, looking at the development concepts of Western scholars and Chinese scholars. Then, by looking at the history of cooperation and development are done by China and the United States in ASEAN in recent years, this paper explores how over time, the relationship between the two countries changed with the change of the international pattern, and in the contemporary international pattern, the application of hard power has limitations. It stresses that the use of soft power is an effective way to promote bilateral cooperation and regional development. The paper also analyzes the connotation of soft power and the resources of soft power. The second section pays attention to the integration of theory with practice and studies the current situation of soft power between China and the United States. The

third section analyzes the soft power construction of China and the United States respectively in the ASEAN region. Through the practice of different soft power projects, it is possible to see differences and problems in the use of soft power by China and the U.S. Then, it analyzes the existing problems and shortcomings and puts forward suggestions on the different soft power construction of the two countries in the ASEAN region.

2. Comparative research method

The author analyzes the construction and development of soft power concepts concerning projects tied to soft power supported by China and the U.S. in the ASEAN region, noting several types of soft power at work. The comparative analysis of cases helps to discover the differences as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the two countries in the development of soft power in the ASEAN region and provides an objective basis for a comprehensive understanding of the development of soft power.

3. Literature Review

Many scholars have written about soft power as an idea, both in the U.S. and in China, but fewer have examined the diverse types of projects and practices that constitute soft power. In this literature review, the paper examines diverse sources – both articles and books – that deal with soft power.

1. The Conceptual Framework of Soft Power

1.1 Concept proposed

The term 'soft power' was systematically used in 1990 by Joseph Nye, a professor at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government and a leading international relations scholar, to refer to a country's ability to get what you want by attracting and persuading other countries to comply with your goals. It is mainly divided into political values (when the country strives to achieve such values at home and abroad), culture (works where it can be attractive to others), and foreign policy (when the policy is perceived as legitimate and morally prestigious).² Many Chinese and foreign scholars have examined, developed, and extended the concept of soft power into other areas and provided new meanings to it, so that it is used to refer to literary and artistic works, films, the cultural industries, overseas cultural institutions, foreign students and tourism in the cultural field, development models, multilateralism in foreign policy, participation in international affairs and resolution of regional hot issues in the political field. Other scholars who study China's soft power have added new elements such as cultural attraction, political values, development models, international mechanisms, national image, and economic temptation to the three initial elements, and subdivided them into religion, higher education, language, Media, sports, and immigration to the three initial elements. Based on differences in national conditions

² Joseph S.Nye, Jr. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* [M]. New York: Public Affairs, 2004: 11.

and national systems, China and the U.S. have different interpretations and perceptions of soft power. Some scholars distinguish the differences: Nye emphasizes the appeal of contemporary American popular culture and political system, and his soft power strategy aims to sell the United States to the world; China focuses on the appeal of traditional culture and economic development model.

Unlike hard power with coercive overtones, soft power acts more as a force of attraction, and it does not require the same excessive investment of resources as hard power. In some cases, soft power is more effective than hard power since it is more easily accepted and implemented. In today's world, which emphasizes themes of peace and development, the use of hard power is not in line with the trend of development, and coercive measures sometimes make it difficult to achieve the desired purpose or may be seen as even unacceptable. Soft power, on the other hand, as a relatively soft measure, is a very effective initiative to attract others to follow you through your own cultural appeal, political values, and foreign policy. According to Joseph Nye's theory, the comprehensive power of a country in contemporary times is composed of its "hard power"

Joseph Nye's notion of soft power sees a country's comprehensive national power as composed of its "hard power" (mainly based on its economic power, military power, technology, territory, population, science and technology, natural resources, etc.) and "soft power" (mainly expressed in a country's international influence and domestic

national cohesion and centripetal force, etc.).³ Therefore, the improvement of a country's comprehensive national power depends on the joint development of hard and soft power. The growth of hard power can promote the improvement of soft power, and the expansion of the influence of soft power can enhance the construction of hard power, with the two complementing each other. Therefore, soft power has an irreplaceable position in the development of a country or even the whole world.

Since Nye discussed the concept of soft power in 1990, he has continuously revised and improved his soft power ideas and used them to examine and measure the development of U.S. soft power, with the aim of serving U.S. foreign policy and achieving better development of soft power. In 2003, Nye's book *The Paradox American Power* further addressed "soft power," arguing that, unlike hard power, soft power does not just belong to the government, but only echoes the goals of the government component.⁴ In his 2004 new book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, he elaborated on soft power, dividing its resources into cultural appeal, ideological or political value appeal, and shaping power, which included the ability to shape international rules and to determine political issues.⁵ Nye also studied China's soft power and compared it with U.S. Nye believes that China's strongest soft power

³ Nye Jr, Joseph S. "Public diplomacy and soft power." *The annals of the American academy of political and social science* 616.1 (2008)

⁴ Nye Jr J S. *The paradox of American power: Why the world's only superpower can't go it alone*[M]. Oxford University Press, 2003.

⁵ Nye, J.S. (2004). *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. Public Affairs, New York, NY

is reflected in the cultural field, firstly in the traditional cultural sphere, such as the spread of Confucian ideological values and the holding of Confucius Institutes; secondly in the popular cultural sphere, with foreign tourists and international students, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV, the wide distribution of the English version of China Daily, and the holding of international events such as the Olympic Games and the World Expo.⁶

Since the theory proposed by Nye has some limitations and ambiguities, other scholars have modified Nye's ideas on soft power. Walter Russell Mead proposed the term 'sticky power' in 2004, referring to economic power, which he believes is distinct from both hard and soft power.⁷ In his article "Hard Power, Soft Power, and the Purpose of Diplomacy," Robert Cooper argues that the core of soft power is legitimacy since the primary resource of legitimacy is maintaining international order.⁸ In his article 'The Dangers of Soft Power', Joseph Joffé questioned Nye's proposed theory of soft power as having limitations, arguing that soft power is a two-way street, not only the ability of the power holder but also closely tied to the acceptance of other countries or the public. Therefore, the use of soft power should take into consideration public acceptance, social psychology, and other factors.

As early as the early 1990s, Chinese scholars began to pay attention to the study of

⁶ Huang Sansheng. Joseph Nye's comparative study on the soft power of China and the United States[J]. Cultural Soft Power,2020,5(04):31-39.DOI:10.19377/j.cnki.43-1531/g0.2020.04.005.

⁷ See Mead, W.R. (2004, March/April).Sticky Power, Foreign Policy. Mead, W.R. (2004). Power, terror, peace and war: America's grand strategy in a World Risk. New York, NY

⁸ R. Cooper (2004).Hard power, soft power and the goals of diplomacy. American Power in the 21st Century,pp.

soft power. For the first time, Professor Wang Huning's 'Culture as National Power: Soft Power' in the Fudan Journal in 1993 elevated culture to the level of "soft power." Although Chinese scholars had previously paid attention to soft power, it was not until after 2003 that soft power was truly taken seriously in China. Chinese scholars have expanded Nye's concept of soft power, according to which soft power comes from three sources: culture, political values, and foreign policy.

According to Zhou Guiyin, soft power consists of three elements: the ability to establish and control the international system, culture and values, and ideology, and the international image and status generated by foreign policy.⁹ He adds new elements to Nye's theory by adding an international image and international status. Gong Tieying further divides soft power into institutional power, identity power, and assimilation power.¹⁰ When Chinese scholars introduced the theoretical doctrine of "soft power," they "Chineseized" it, transforming it from the original vision of competitive and dominant power to a harmonious vision that emphasizes their own "strength" and "coexistence with others." "The Chinese doctrine has evolved from a competitive dominant power vision to a harmonious vision of "coexistence with the other."¹¹

⁹ Zhou Guiyin and Yan Lei: Changes in U.S. Hegemonic Position from the Perspective of Soft Power Theory, Journal of the PLA Institute of International Relations, No. 1, 2005)

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Cao Dong.2009 (35) A review of domestic and international research on soft power in recent years[J]. Leadership Science:44-49. DOI:10.19572/j.cnki.ldkx.2009.35.019.

¹¹ See Sun Liang, "Principles and Elements of the Construction of the Indicator System of "Cultural Soft Power"", Theoretical Monthly, No. 5, 2009.)

For his part, Professor Zunyi Liu, President of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, believes that "soft power is an ability to win friends and influence others through moral dominance. This includes treating all countries fairly and not abusing power (including hard power). He emphasizes the moral influence as the core of soft power, which is the 'moral theory' of soft power theory, that is, "convincing people with virtue," as it was said in ancient China.¹² Professor Yan Xuetong, director of the Institute of International Studies at Tsinghua University, believes that soft power is not the same as cultural soft power and that the enhancement of cultural strength does not necessarily enhance a country's comprehensive strength. He proposed that political strength and cultural strength are both components of soft power, and one cannot be missing, while political strength is operational strength and cultural strength is resource strength. Without political strength, no resource strength can be effective.¹³ Combined with the development and extension of the concept of soft power by these scholars in recent years, soft power has been continuously given new content, more reflecting the development concept of Chinese socialism, and soft power diplomacy has been added to China's development strategy.

1.2 Types of soft power

According to research lines related to the "soft power" concept, the understanding and

¹² Cao Dong.2009 (35) A review of domestic and international research on soft power in recent years[J]. Leadership Science:44-49. DOI:10.19572/j.cnki.lckx.2009.35.019.

¹³ Cao Dong.2009 (35) A review of domestic and international research on soft power in recent years[J]. Leadership Science:44-49. DOI:10.19572/j.cnki.lckx.2009.35.019.

acceptance of soft power varies from scholar to scholar and from school to school. Joseph identifies three sources: a culture that is appealing to other countries, political values that are followed both domestically and internationally, and a foreign policy that is seen as legitimate and has moral authority. These are the three main types of soft power: political soft power, cultural soft power, and diplomatic soft power.

1.3 The function of soft power

1. Propaganda function

National soft power is the best publicity for a country, like a business card, conveying a country's core values, political system, social outlook, and social culture. The propaganda capacity of soft power can not only promote the awareness of other countries in the world about the country, but also enhance the international image of the country and improve its international status. By interacting with other countries through soft power diplomacy and propaganda, the country's political philosophy and diplomatic ideas are promoted to deepen the correct understanding of the country, which is conducive to the establishment of friendly relations and harmonious development.

2. Communication function

Soft power differs from hard power in that it is softer and more easily accepted than hard power. It can communicate and exchange with other countries in a flexible way and influence other countries' thoughts and behaviors. When dealing with international hot issues or controversial issues, soft power functions to avoid collision

with hard power and solve problems in a softer and more peaceful way. It can also promote the establishment of a new international order by learning from each other through the exchange of soft power and promoting progress with the times between countries.

2. U.S. Soft Power Development in ASEAN

The mutual relationship between the U.S. and ASEAN began in 1977 and was elevated to strategic partner status in 2015. Compared to China, the United States is geographically far away from Southeast Asia, but with the U.S. global strategy and the "Indo-Pacific Strategy" proposed, the United States must strengthen its attention to Southeast Asia, to enhance its influence of the United States in the region. To compensate for the geopolitical location, the U.S. can only balance the lack of influence in the region by continuously strengthening its soft power construction. As of 2019, cumulative U.S. investment in ASEAN reached \$329 billion, higher than U.S. direct investment in China, Japan, South Korea, and India combined.¹⁴ ASEAN also serves as the fourth largest export market for U.S. products, and the U.S. also serves as ASEAN's fourth-largest trading partner. The soft power of the U.S. government shows phases of strength and weakness due to the different foreign policies as well as development strategies pursued by different U.S. administrations. U.S. soft power

¹⁴U.S. -ASEAN business council, Jul 22, 2019, <https://www.usasean.org/why-asean/investment>

policy from the Bush administration's hard power to promote the development of soft power, President Bush used military force to promote the so-called American-style democratic ideas, and he carried out armed aggression against other countries in the name of democracy, not only to the U.S. domestic burden but also let the U.S. national image is damaged, the U.S. soft power received damage. The next Obama administration, on the other hand, proposed 'smart power', a strategy that combines hard power based on Nye's soft power theory. "Smart power is the integration of hard power by coercion or domination with soft power by attraction into a successful strategic capability". Smart power also consists of public diplomacy, cultural and educational exchanges, development assistance, and disaster relief.¹⁵ The Obama administration began to return to a focus on the Asia-Pacific region, launching programs and strategic partnerships such as USAID and US-ASEAN, investing and building aid to ASEAN countries, establishing friendly partnerships, and promoting U.S.-ASEAN economic development and U.S. soft power building in ASEAN. Then came the Trump administration, which began to pursue an 'America First' policy, apparently abandoning the U.S. soft power strategy and returning to hard power. Coupled with the U.S. policy of responding to the outbreak of the new crown epidemic, U.S. soft power also began to decline in Southeast Asia.

In today's world, the regional strategic game between major powers is the most intense between China and the United States. The Center for a New American

¹⁵ Nye Jr, Joseph S. "Smart power." *New Perspectives Quarterly* 26.2 (2009): 7-9.

Security (CNAS), argues in its report "Keys to U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy in the Post-Epidemic Era" that Southeast Asia is the region where the U.S. and China are competing most intensely for influence.¹⁶ With China's expanding regional strategic influence in Southeast Asia, the U.S. has taken notice and actively guarded against this phenomenon and has begun to shift its strategic focus eastward, making Southeast Asia a key strategic area while proposing an "Indo-Pacific Strategy. The Obama administration began shifting the center of its strategy to the Asia-Pacific region, promoting American democratic values to target countries by implementing different soft power measures. But compared to hard power, far fewer resources are allocated to soft power programs. During the Obama administration, the most notable manifestation of this was the official visits of Obama and his Secretary of State to ASEAN countries.¹⁷ In addition, Obama elevated the relationship between the United States and ASEAN to a "strategic partnership" in 2015, and the establishment of the new partnership provides a new framework for strengthening the bilateral relationship between the United States and ASEAN. Obama also regularly attends ASEAN summits in Southeast Asia, which not only recognizes ASEAN's centrality in Asia-Pacific affairs but also actively builds regional multilateral cooperation with

¹⁶ Stephen Tankel, Lisa Curtis, Joshua Fitt, and Coby Gold-berg, " Positive Vision, Powerful Partnerships, the Keys to Competing with China in a Post-Pandemic Indo-Pacific," CNAS, March 31, 2021, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/positive-vision-powerful-partnerships>.

¹⁷ Siangyen, Chamaiporn. "US Smart Power in Southeast Asia During the Obama Administration: More Hard or Soft Power?" Thai Journal of East Asian Studies 22.1 (2018): 72-93.

ASEAN to enhance the US's influence in Southeast Asia. But when Trump took office, he gave up regional and multilateral cooperation, put forward America first, and did not participate in any ASEAN affairs. The current Biden administration has proposed a strategy of returning to the Asia-Pacific and the Indo-Pacific. Biden is actively seeking cooperation with ASEAN. One is to consolidate the position and influence of the United States in ASEAN and the Asia-Pacific region, and the other is to curb China's growing influence. In 2021, the United States' engagement with Southeast Asia was starting to catch up to make up for lost diplomatic influence during the Trump administration and China's intensive neighborhood diplomacy. And the US sought areas of cooperation and called for "guard rails" in US-Chinese relations to avoid unnecessary escalation by either side, with Southeast Asia clearly being one of them. ¹⁸ The Biden administration has established cooperation with ASEAN in the economy, trade, politics, education, culture, and infrastructure. The administration is developing Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), and the "Build Back Better World Initiative", aiming to build a better ASEAN area. Recently, on the 45th anniversary of cooperation between ASEAN and the United States, the United States invited leaders of ASEAN countries (except the Philippines and Myanmar) to participate in the "U.S.-ASEAN Special Summit" in Washington, the United States.

¹⁸ Hoang Thi Ha& Ian Storey, "The Biden Administration and Southeast Asia : One year in Review", Researchers at ISEAS-YUSOF ISHAK Institute analyse current events No.11(2022)

At this summit, Biden promised to invest 150 million US dollars and used it in infrastructure, security and pandemic preparedness, and other aspects of the ASEAN region. This move is not only to win over ASEAN and strengthen strategic cooperation with the ASEAN region but also aimed at countering the influence of rival China.

3. China's Soft Power Development in ASEAN

China and its neighboring countries in Southeast Asia are connected by mountains and water and have a natural affinity and friendship that has lasted for thousands of years. China, by virtue of its superior geographic location, has used Southeast Asia as a bridge to the world and has actively established deep ties with the region. China has made "unprecedented inroads" in prioritizing new security partnerships with ASEAN countries, indicating the region's importance in China's geopolitical ambitions.¹⁹ With the shift of China's strategic development focus, coupled with its historical humanistic and traditional ties, Southeast Asia has become the fastest-growing region in terms of China's soft power. China's relations with ASEAN countries are aimed not only at promoting bilateral economic cooperation and strategic ties, but also at promoting

¹⁹ Parameswaran, P. (2019). China's Military Ambitions in Southeast Asia: Much Bigger than Cambodian Bases. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved 09 May 2021.

regional stability. China is actively promoting the establishment of a network of friendly bilateral relations and expanding ties with ASEAN and its member states in this regard. Countries in Southeast Asia that share borders with China include Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam. China wishes to establish friendly relations with these countries to ensure peace and tranquility along their borders. These borders also connect its landlocked regions to the global economy for strategic trade. David M. Lampton, an expert in China studies at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies, describes China's soft power as an intellectual element that encompasses leadership quality, human resources, innovation, traditional culture, national nationalism, and national image.²⁰

In international interactions, comprehensive national power is demonstrated and used in two ways: one is the model of power diplomacy, and the other is the model of peaceful coexistence. The former manifests itself more as intervention and sanctions against other countries mainly through military means or economic power, which is the usual power politics and hegemony. The latter manifests itself in the form of soft power as the main attraction and peaceful coexistence diplomacy as the principle, established in the spirit of equality and democracy. This model of peaceful coexistence started with the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" proposed by Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai in 1953, in which non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries is accepted by most countries and has become an important norm in

²⁰ Lampton, D. M. (2008). *The three faces of Chinese power: Might, money, and minds*. Univ of California Press.

regulating international relations. China's idea of peaceful development is conducive to creating a favorable international environment, eliminating the "China threat theory", re-establishing China's image and building a good regional order. From the perspective of the law of historical development: China's development and stability necessitate the use of both hard and soft power, which are mutually reinforcing. Hard power is an important pillar for the development of soft power, and soft power provides strong support and a source of strength for hard power while also creating a favorable international environment for China's peaceful development path. China has had great success in soft power diplomacy over the last 20 years. The term first emerged in Chinese leadership discourse in 2007, when President Hu Jintao mentioned the importance of strengthening China's cultural soft power at the 17th Party Congress, after Hu Jintao, Xi Jinping has elevated the significance of soft power by invoking it in more speeches, Xi emphasizes the importance of soft power for both domestic and international contexts.²¹ Especially in cultural diplomacy, where China has attracted the world with its excellent traditional culture. While the PRC is not the only country to take this approach, it is one of the few that has consistently promoted it as a viable counterbalance to concerns about the country's growing power and international influence.²²

²¹ Repnikova, Maria. "Chinese Soft Power." *Elements in Global China* (2022).

²² Balderrama Santander, Renato, and Selene Martínez. "China, América Latina y el Caribe: el doble filo de una relación positiva." *UNISCI Discussion Papers* 24 (2010).

In 1991, China and ASEAN established the ASEAN dialogue partnership. In 1997, the two sides held the first "10+1" leaders' meeting, and China became ASEAN's first dialogue partner. China-ASEAN established a strategic partnership in 2003. The China-ASEAN Free Trade Area was officially established in 2010, and its establishment began the process of economic integration between China and ASEAN. Subsequently, in 2021, China and ASEAN will be upgraded from "strategic partnership" to "comprehensive strategic partnership", marking the further development of China-ASEAN relations. Southeast Asia is adjacent to China, and China has had close ties with the Southeast Asian region since ancient times. Harmonious coexistence between China and Southeast Asia is beneficial both to the prosperity and development of both sides and to the development of regional security. Because Southeast Asia occupies an important geostrategic position in China, it occupies an important position in China's national security and regional security construction. In today's globalization development trend, a country's development requires not only the country's own internal efforts but also a group of trustworthy leading, and friendly countries in the international arena. Both ASEAN countries and China need to maintain the country's stable development, which requires close cooperation between China and ASEAN countries. Soft power building for China's development in Southeast Asia enhances ASEAN countries' trust in China and re-establishes the country's image through cultural exchanges, economic and trade cooperation, and strategic cooperation. China maintains ties with ASEAN countries

with a foreign policy of peaceful development and promotes peaceful and stable regional development.

Southeast Asia has benefited greatly from infrastructure development, economics, trade and investment, and other levels of cooperation in the initiative region as an important step in soft power diplomacy, particularly the Belt and Road Initiative proposed in 2013. This demonstrates not only the resilience of Sino-Southeast Asian cooperation, but also China's growing focus on the region. China has also consistently emphasized that it is the "first" major power to support various ASEAN initiatives, from ratifying ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to launching an ASEAN-China free trade zone.²³ Nowadays, Southeast Asia is one of the regions with the most upside in economic development, and ASEAN is an important trading partner of China.

In recent years, China has made a lot of investments and bilateral economic and trade cooperation projects in Southeast Asia, which has injected many new economic vitalities into ASEAN countries, while ASEAN countries provide China with a broad market and abundant labor resources. Economic and trade communications between China and ASEAN are beneficial to the economies of both ASEAN and China, particularly in the Greater Mekong Subregion. China has created a healthy and positive international opportunity for business innovation and facilitated access to relevant political and economic benefits by developing its soft power in Southeast

²³Li, K. (2013). Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's Keynote Speech at 10th China-ASEAN Expo. Retrieved May 09, 2021

Asia. Because Southeast Asia has a similar cultural background to China, Southeast Asia has become an important region for spreading traditional Chinese culture. Culture is an important component of soft power; exporting Chinese culture contributes to increasing Chinese cultural influence and allowing Chinese culture to spread throughout the world. At the same time, the cultural exchange of talents between China and ASEAN countries has increased China's cultural dissemination and exchange in Southeast Asia, encouraged the growth of China's cultural industry and increased the influence of China's cultural soft power.

4. Analysis of U.S. and China's Soft Power Diplomacy Projects in the ASEAN Region

China and the United States have developed their own strategic plans for the ASEAN region in recent years. Because of its unique geographical location, the Southeast Asian region has become a hot spot for competition between China and the United States in today's increasingly fierce competition between China and the United States. Both countries want to increase their influence in the region through strategic layout, to occupy a dominant position. Nowadays, soft power is an important manifestation of nationwide power, both China and the United States build their own soft power forces in the ASEAN region by using different soft power resources. The following will analyze the differences in soft power diplomacy between China and the U.S. towards

the ASEAN region by comparing the different soft power constructions of China and the U.S., involving economic investment, dialogue partnership, education and culture, humanitarian aid, and regional infrastructure construction, to be able to understand the construction of soft power of China and the U.S. from various aspects.

4.1. U.S. Soft Power in ASEAN

Because different governments have different policies on Southeast Asia, and the United States has been known for its military power and other hard power in Southeast Asia, with the development of the times, the development of hard power alone can no longer meet the comprehensive national power, the construction of soft power is gradually attached to countries, the United States has also begun soft power diplomacy, from the Obama administration's "smart power" From the Obama administration's "smart power" policy, which skillfully combines hard power and soft power to build U.S. influence in Southeast Asia, to the Biden administration's "return to the Asia-Pacific", which takes soft power as its main strategy and actively promotes ties and cooperation with ASEAN countries. The specific measures of U.S. soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia are mainly foreign aid, non-traditional security cooperation, regional public goods supply, and cultural exchange and dissemination. The following are examples of these soft power programs to understand more clearly how the U.S. builds its own soft power.

The Mekong-US Partnership (MUSP)

The Mekong-US Partnership (MUSP) is a strategic partnership between the US and

the Mekong Basin countries that promotes stability, peace, and sustainability in the Mekong Subregion through cooperation between the US and Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. Since its creation, the partnership has developed almost 50 projects in a variety of fields, including economics, education, health, environmental governance, peace and security, human rights, and humanism. Between 2009 and 2021, the United States government has provided more than \$4.3 billion in bilateral and regional aid grants for the five Mekong partner countries.

The major objectives of the Mekong-U.S. are:

1. Improve transparency, good governance, connectivity, and sustainable development in the region through the implementation of regional capacity development activities, promoting dialogues on regional policies and the exchange of expertise and best practices.
2. Strengthen regional connectivity through linkages between institutions, the public and private sectors, and residents of the Mekong region and the United States.
3. Collaborate with Mekong region countries and international partners to identify and implement solutions to major regional challenges.

From 2009 to 2021, the U.S. government has provided over \$4.3 billion in bilateral and regional aid grants to five Mekong partner countries, as illustrated in the table below:

MUSP Aid funding in the ASEAN region

1.4 billion	health program
636 million	human rights
709 million	peace and security
837 million	economic growth
265 million	education and social
165 million	humanitarian assistance

Source: <https://mekongpartnership.org/partners/usa/>

The Sustainable Infrastructure Partnership (SIP) Effort

SIP, as part of Mekong-US, is a collaborative effort to address environmental and resource issues resulting from the increased pace of economic development and urbanization. Human economic activities and resource overuse have put enormous strain on the five lower Mekong countries' land, water, and other natural resources. Even though, for example, fisheries production has decreased, and groundwater has been depleted, the United States and the lower Mekong countries have collaborated to promote the Mekong River's sustainable development. The SIP, a corporate sustainability initiative, has many Mekong River Basin development initiatives. The Thailand Groundwater Resources Management Project was proposed in 2021. Thai farmers and poor households in some arid areas of Thailand depend on groundwater for drinking and irrigation, but changes in land-use patterns, groundwater abstraction, and climate can affect Thailand's groundwater system. So, a group of professional geologists and planners from Thailand's Department of Groundwater Resources (DGR)

learned the skills to manage groundwater data through a custom-designed training course led by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS).

In addition, SIP and USAID's safeguard project will co-finance research on new energy sources in Thailand in 2020 to study renewable resources, find more available energy sources, and maintain the ecosystems of the Mekong and Salween River basins.

The U.S. Department of State has launched the Mekong Water Data Initiative in partnership with Mekong countries to improve the management and sustainable development of the Mekong River by establishing a database to collect, analyze, and manage water and water-related data (land, weather, and socioeconomic data) to reduce water-related risks, improve regional response to environmental emergencies, and promote long-term development of water, food, energy, and the environment. In addition to the monitoring of water data, the U.S. has proposed the Mekong Dam Monitor (MDM) with the Mekong River countries, which is used to monitor water data on the Mekong River. American efforts to facilitate Mekong River hydroelectric development began in the 1950s, when American policymakers sought ways to grow the region's economies as bulwarks against communist insurgencies in the countries bordering the Mekong River.²⁴

The Lower Mekong Initiative

It is a cooperative initiative between the United States and five Lower Mekong countries (Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos) in 2009 to pursue

²⁴ Chang, Felix K. "The lower mekong initiative & us foreign policy in southeast Asia: Energy, environment & power." *Orbis* 57.2 (2013): 282-299.

sustainable economic development in the region. The LMI provides financial and technical resources for development in Mekong countries. The US has provided more than the US \$3.5billion to assist the Mekong region, facilitated US\$109 billion in two-way trade, and US\$ 17 billion in investment. ²⁵

The initiative covers the environment, health, education, infrastructure, energy, agriculture, and other areas, aiming to improve environmental management and ecology in the Mekong River Basin, improve energy security and research and development of renewable energy; in public health, to improve the public health environment and reduce the infection rate of public health diseases in the region. In the field of health, LMI has contributed to a 50% reduction in the HIV/AIDS infection rate in Cambodia.²⁶

In the area of education, educational opportunities are provided to regional youth, and English language training is provided to government officials of the initiative countries; LMI also holds various conferences and scientific workshops on strengthening transboundary river governance, with the aim of conducting research studies on the health and environmental sustainability of the Lower Mekong region. In addition, a Young Scientists Program was established to select young researchers and scientists from the United States and five Lower Mekong countries to provide

²⁵ US Mission to ASEAN (2020), 'Strengthening the U.S.-Mekong Partnership', 20 May, <https://asean.usmission.gov/strengthening-the-u-s-mekong-partnership/>)

²⁶Daily Press Briefing, Lower Mekong Initiative, Feb 21, 2019, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, <https://www.state.gov/lower-mekong-initiative/>

financial and technical support for research on development issues in the Lower Mekong region. The Annual Scientific Symposium gives participants in the LMI young scientist program an opportunity to compete for an annual seed grant of up to \$15,000 to develop their collaborative research project.

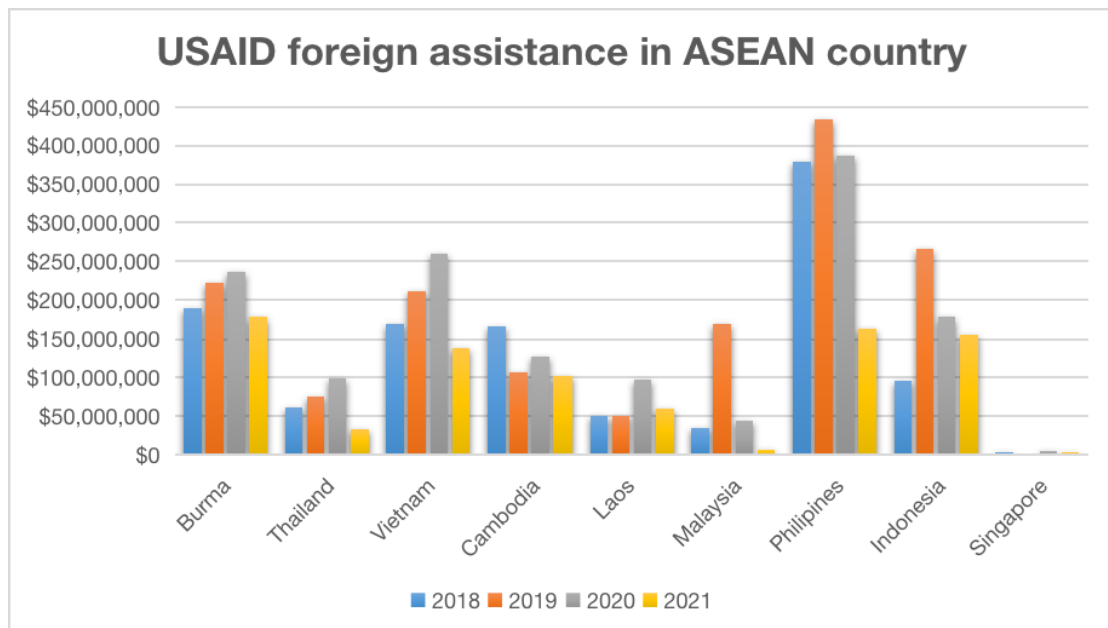
Since 2019, the Trump Administration has included LMI as part of its Indo-Pacific strategy²⁷. Due to its growing importance and to meet the growing needs of the Mekong partner countries, LMI continues to launch new projects, including the Mekong Water Data Initiative (MWDI), which aims to enhance the role of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) for forecasting and decision-making on water data sharing.

United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Projects

USAID is the government agency that undertakes the majority of U.S. foreign non-military assistance, and through development and humanitarian assistance to foreign countries, its mission is to promote democratic values around the world and help countries become self-reliant while advancing U.S. interests abroad. USAID works in many different areas, including food and agriculture, democracy, human rights, economics, health, and humanitarian assistance. The agency helps partner countries achieve their goals through small business loans, technical assistance, disaster relief and training.

The following are USAID assistance grants to ASEAN from 2018-2021

²⁷ Chu Minh Thao, "Role of the US Lower Mekong Initiative in the Mekong Region": Indo-Pacific analysis briefs vol.10.2020



Source : <https://foreignassistance.gov/aid-trends>

From the above table, USAID to the Philippines, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Indonesia is higher, and USAID to most ASEAN countries is gradually increasing from 2018 to 2020, and probably due to the impact of COVID-19, they all show a decreasing trend after 2021. The U.S. has increased its attention to the ASEAN region in recent years and tries to enhance its influence in the region through economic aid, show its image as a great power, promote its political values, and create influence in the ASEAN region in the process of aid.

Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI)

Established in 2013, for building regional networks and developing leadership skills among ASEAN youth, the U.S. government invited Thai youth ages 18-35 to enroll as members and become part of the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI).

The program brings together young leaders ages 18-35 from Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Laos, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. The U.S. supports these young people in addressing ASEAN development issues through training and grants, and they provide recommendations and responses to existing ASEAN issues to promote better development of ASEAN. Among the topics discussed were: Civic Engagement, Economic Empowerment, and Social Entrepreneurship. Economic Empowerment and Social Entrepreneurship, Education, and Environmental Issues.

The YSEALI program also includes a professional fellowship to the United States and an academic fellowship to the United States. Both internship programs offer young people the opportunity to spend five weeks in the United States for practical and advanced study, in addition to knowledge related to their major. Both internship programs offer young people the opportunity to spend five weeks in the U.S. for hands-on and continuing education, including exchange opportunities on a variety of topics, in addition to knowledge related to their profession. In addition, there are regional workshops, where the U.S. Embassy selects youth participants in the ASEAN region to attend workshops on various topics, providing them with opportunities to exchange on regional development issues, address current regional hot issues, and promote better development in the ASEAN region.

In 2017, YSEALI also presented the seeds for the Future program, which aims to provide funding to the region's most promising young leaders to carry out projects to

improve their communities, countries, and regions, with program themes including civic engagement, economic empowerment, social entrepreneurship, education, and environmental issues. As of 2021, the SEEDS for the Future program has funded 113 projects with grants.²⁸

Culture is an important component of soft power, and higher education, as part of culture, has a significant impact on a country's soft power, as demonstrated in the United States. Higher education in America is an important component of its soft power. In the talent exchange programs between the U.S. and ASEAN, not only have U.S. values and policies been spread through the exchanges but also many elites friendly to the U.S. have been cultivated. Coupled with the fact that the U.S. has a world-dominating pop culture, American movies and American music are loved around the world. Thus, the mainstream culture and level of higher education in the United States have driven the expansion of US soft power.

The U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership

The program is a new U.S. investment in 2018 to stimulate digital infrastructure development in the ASEAN region. It promotes prosperity and innovative urban development in the ASEAN region by piloting 26 cities in the ASEAN region, using digitally driven technologies to rationally improve and manage urban resources and enhance the infrastructure development and quality of life in cities. The main objectives of the USASCP are to: promote U.S. private sector participation in smart,

²⁸ YSEALI Seeds for the Future N.D. <https://culturalvistas.org/our-programs/yseali-seeds>

sustainable urban solutions to improve the service delivery capacity of ASEAN cities; and enhance the service delivery capacity of ASCN cities through U.S. cities, universities, and institutions to exchange with ASCN cities to provide technical cooperation and strengthen the digital economy and cybersecurity capabilities of ASCN cities. The project involves cooperation in water security, healthcare, transportation, urban services, cybersecurity, sustainable energy, etc. It also promotes city-to-city cooperation through U.S. cities driving the development of ASEAN cities, such as Las Vegas-Phuket , Dallas-Kuala Lumpur, Los Angeles-Jakarta. The U.S. provides technical and financial assistance to ASEAN countries through intergovernmental and private sectors to help ASEAN countries with basic urban development issues, promote urbanization, and use digitalization to promote sustainable development in the ASEAN region.

In addition to USASCP, the U.S. is also promoting digital development and improving cybersecurity in the ASEAN region through other approaches. USAID and the U.S. Congress are contributing \$5 million to the Information technology partnership for workforce development in Cambodia. which aims to strengthen the capacity of Cambodian higher education institutions to build information technology programs and provide employment opportunities for young Cambodians²⁹. In addition, USAID supports a range of information and communications technology activities in the

²⁹ FACT SHEET, SEPTEMBER 11, 2020, U.S. embassy & consulates in China, Office of the spokesperson, Washington, D.C, by U.S. Mission China.

ASEAN region, funding the implementation of the National Broadband Network Project in the Philippines to provide Internet access to underdeveloped areas of the country. It has also established the U.S.-ASEAN Connect and U.S.-ASEAN Connects digital economy series, which aims to provide digital connectivity and cybersecurity training to ASEAN countries to improve their cybersecurity and lay the foundation for the development of a digital economy.

Green Invests Asia

The USAID Asia Green Investment Program helps medium-growth agricultural and forestry companies improve their sustainable commodity production and business practices by providing business strategies, environmental assessments, and advice. In Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam, the initial focus is on rice, rubber, timber, coffee, coconut, and cocoa.

The project aims to provide technical and financial support to agriculture and plantations in ASEAN countries to help solve problems in production processes and promote sustainable agricultural and ecological development. By 2022, the USAID Asia Green Investment Program aims to mobilize \$200 million in private financing for sustainable commodity production.

Overall, through the implementation of soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia, soft power programs at different levels, whether it is economic assistance, or the establishment of various regional cooperation mechanisms and cultural programs for talent exchange, have strengthened the relationship between the U.S. and Southeast

Asia, and the U.S. has actively promoted the values of "democracy" and "human rights" in Southeast Asia. The U.S. has actively promoted the values of "democracy" and "human rights" in Southeast Asia and has achieved certain results in cultural dissemination, which has enhanced the cultural influence of the U.S. in Southeast Asia. The main purpose of U.S. soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia is to maintain the central position and realistic interests of the United States, to spread American values and ideology in the construction of soft power in Southeast Asia, and to increase its influence in the region. In addition, the U.S. also wants to balance China's growing influence through soft power diplomacy in Southeast Asia. Because of the strong hegemonic overtones, the U.S. takes the opportunity to interfere in the internal affairs of other countries through soft power means to form its own dominant power in the region, making it difficult for the people of Southeast Asia to accept, thus also making the U.S. soft power diplomacy much less effective.

4.2. China's Soft Power in ASEAN

Since the 1990s, China's economy has developed rapidly, and its comprehensive national power and international influence have been increasing, especially in Southeast Asia. As a major leader in Southeast Asia, China has established close relations with Southeast Asian countries and strengthened them through exchanges and cooperation and has gradually integrated into the integration process of Southeast Asia, thanks to China's soft power diplomacy. China has gradually gained the trust and cooperation of Southeast Asian countries by virtue of its long history and culture

and its insistence on "peaceful development". In recent years, China has not only actively established multilateral cooperation mechanisms with ASEAN, such as ASEAN+, RCEP, the Belt and Road Initiative, the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation but also established profound bilateral cooperation relations with ASEAN countries. Besides, it also actively participates in ASEAN affairs and always lends a helping hand for the first time when ASEAN countries need help most, which has won the trust of ASEAN countries. Cultural soft power is also an important part of China's soft power diplomacy and is considered a core component of China's soft power. Because most ASEAN countries share similar cultural backgrounds with China, and ASEAN has 75% of the world's Chinese community, China has made cultural soft power the forerunner of soft power diplomacy, China has actively established Confucius Institutes in ASEAN countries to spread traditional Chinese culture and the Chinese language and has also promoted bilateral talent exchanges between China and ASEAN, thus enhancing China's cultural soft power in the ASEAN region.

The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS)

Established in 1992, the member countries are Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, and China (especially Yunnan Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region). The regional program aims to strengthen regional economic ties and linkages, promoting regional development. The Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Program promotes the implementation of high-priority subregional project facilitation and

urban development in agriculture, energy, the environment, health and human resource development, information and communications technology, tourism, transportation, and trade. Since its inception, the program has facilitated the implementation and construction of over 200 projects.

China's direct investment to five GMS countries in 2011-2016 (US\$100 million)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Laos</i>	<i>Cambodia</i>	<i>Thailand</i>	<i>Vietnam</i>	<i>Myanmar</i>	<i>Total</i>
2011	12.8	17.6	13.1	12.9	21.8	78.2
2012	19.2	23.2	21.3	16	30.9	110.6
2013	27.7	28.5	24.7	21.7	35.7	138.3
2014	44.9	32.2	30.8	28.7	39.3	175.9
2015	48.4	36.8	34.4	33.7	42.6	195.9
2016	55	43.7	45.3	49.8	46.2	240

Source : Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China

Chinese FDI in GMS countries has gone through three phases: the initial phase of investment (2003-2005), the stable growth phase (2006-2008), and the rapid growth phase (2009-2012).³⁰ In recent years, China's investment in GMS countries has gradually slowed down and started to shift to higher-quality investment, transitioning from a rapid growth phase to a higher level of steady growth (2013-present).

³⁰ Xiong, B., Ma, S. Analysis of the stages and dynamics of Chinese direct investment in GMS [J]. (Regional Economics, 2014, 10:167-168)

In terms of investment subjects, China has invested in GMS countries in a wide range of areas and with a wide range of investment subjects, among which investments by central enterprises are in the main position and investments by local enterprises and private enterprises, although accounting for a relatively small share at the beginning, have grown faster. The investment of central enterprises is mainly concentrated in large industries and capital-intensive industries such as mining, water and electricity, manufacturing, and construction, while local and private enterprises mainly focus on labor-intensive industries such as garment manufacturing, agriculture, and fishery, wholesale and retail, and food processing industries.

China's investment in the GMS region not only promotes local economic development, drives local employment, and improves the living standards of local people; it also promotes China's influence in the region to a certain extent and enhances China's image as a great power. Because China's investment projects in the GMS region are mainly focused on infrastructure construction, they not only improve the backwardness of infrastructure in the sub-regional countries, promote sustainable development in the region, and promote China's soft power building in the region.

China has been actively promoting regional development in the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) for more than 20 years, playing the role of major power and driving the development of countries in the region. The "North-South Economic Corridor" and the construction of the Trans-Asian Railway proposed under the GMS regional cooperation have also been successfully promoted, enhancing inter-regional ties. In

recent years, with the introduction of the 'One Belt, One Road' concept, China has increased its investment in GMS regional cooperation and has made great progress in the areas of energy, trade and investment, transportation, tourism, and anti-drug cooperation. In terms of energy, starting from 2011, China's Yunnan Province began to send electricity to Vietnam through the estuary, and by the end of 2013, it had developed four power generation channels and six power generation lines, and by 2015 had sent a total of 292 kWh of electricity to Vietnam, with electricity trade between the two sides reaching \$1.56 billion. ³¹In addition to Vietnam, electricity is also delivered to Laos and Myanmar. In addition to the energy sector, the proposed "North-South Economic Corridor" and "East-West Economic Corridor" have also brought China closer to other countries in the sub-region, based on the combination of the construction of transportation corridors and economic development, through the construction of highways and railroads to create transportation facilities and thus strengthen economic ties. The proposed economic corridor is based on the construction of transportation corridors and economic development, through the construction of highways and railways to create transportation facilities and thus strengthen economic ties. In terms of highway construction: In 2013, China's first international highway, the Kunman Highway, was opened, which starts in Kunming, Yunnan Province, passes through Yuxi and Pu'er, and then enters the territory of Laos

³¹ Li Chunlei. Study on China's Participation in Greater Mekong Sub-Regional Cooperation [D]. Shandong Normal University, 2016.

and then Thailand from the Mo'dan border crossing in Xishuangbanna. In terms of railroad construction, in 2014, the entire Yunnan section of the Greater Mekong Subregion North-South Economic Corridor between Kunming and Vietnam was opened, which greatly promotes trade, material and personnel exchanges between Yunnan and Vietnam, as well as economic and trade exchanges and cultural exchanges in the region, in December 2021, the entire China-Lao Kunwan Railway will be opened to traffic, and the China-Lao Railway, as a major component of the Trans-Asian Railway's Central Line, it is not only an important tool for promoting the construction of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area. ASEAN Free Trade Agreement, but also an important infrastructure to promote connectivity between China, Southeast Asia, and the Greater Mekong Subregion. The China-Laos Railway has fueled economic development in Laos and the surrounding areas, as well as strengthened trade and people-to-people exchanges between China and Southeast Asian countries.

The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation Mechanism

The Lancang-Mekong Cooperation is a new sub-regional cooperation mechanism established in 2016 by China, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. It aims to strengthen good neighborliness and practical cooperation among the six Mekong countries, promote the economic and social development of the riparian countries, establish an economic development belt in the Mekong basin, create a Mekong community of destiny, and contribute to the ASEAN community and regional integration process.

Through China's "multi-nation, multi-park" plan, China has promoted cooperation in investment, infrastructure development, and technological innovation, and has not only generated significant economic income for these countries but also provided many jobs. It also provides many jobs. In recent years, the Lancang-Mekong countries have been actively promoting the construction of special economic zones, such as the Rayong Industrial Zone in Thailand and the Sihanoukville Special Economic Zone in Cambodia. Chinese digital companies such as Huawei and ZTE have introduced digital development strategies in the Mekong countries. Huawei has signed 5G agreements with Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, and other countries to develop the e-market in these regions.

In 2018, Shenzhen Foundation for International Exchange and Cooperation, together with the governments of Mekong countries, public welfare organizations, and Shenzhen PV enterprises, launched the "Mekong Sun Village" project to provide solar PV technology and equipment to rural areas in Cambodia, lighting up the happy lives of villagers.

In June 2020, the first phase of the "Mekong Sun Village" project in Myanmar was launched, donating a total of 300 sets of small distributed solar power generation systems and 1,700 solar lamps to two villages in Magwe Province and 32 sets of medium distributed solar power generation systems to Myanmar community libraries. Trade between China and the five Mekong countries reached US\$322.1 billion in 2020, a 66.3 percent increase from 2015. With nearly 3,000 regular weekly flights,

more than 50 million people traveled between the two sides in 2019. China is Vietnam's, Cambodia's, Myanmar's, and Thailand's largest trading partner, and Laos' second largest trading partner. Vietnam has surpassed the United States as China's fourth-largest country-specific trading partner. ³²

In 2021, China's trade with the Mekong countries reaches US\$ 398 billion, up 23% year-on-year. ³³

The Lancang-Mekong Environmental Cooperation Center

This is an ecological and environmental project between China and six Mekong River Basin countries to encourage cooperation in ecological conservation in the Lancang-Mekong River Basin, including environmental, ecological, and environmental management, as well as biodiversity conservation. The focus is on freshwater management within the basin, as well as ecological restoration in the region. To address the problems of over-exploitation and ecological damage in Southeast Asia, we will discuss cases and propose restoration measures for existing problems. So far, we have discussed and resolved issues such as sustainable development of forestry in Cambodia, rural strategy in Thailand, impact analysis of land use and rubber plantation in Laos, the role of clean energy in forest conservation in Myanmar, and the sustainable use of bamboo resources in Vietnam.

³² <http://wzgxq.wuzhou.gov.cn/zstz/hzjl/t8469838.shtml>

³³ Lancang-Mekong Cooperation China Secretariat, Top 10 News on China's Participation in the Mekong and Mekong Sub-regional Cooperation in 2021, Jan 27, 2022, http://www.lmcchina.org/2022-01/27/content_41868608.htm

In addition to cooperative governance in the ecological environment, more and more Chinese enterprises have been investing in agriculture and plantation in Southeast Asia in recent years due to the abundant natural resources, low cost of land resources and low labor cost in the region. China Hangzhou Zhonghe Rubber Co., Ltd, invested in Thailand to set up its first overseas automobile tire production plant with a total investment of RMB 1 billion. In 2016, China Railway Construction International Group Southeast Asia cooperated with Thailand Shuang to win Real Estate Development Co. to establish the largest ecological agriculture project base in Southeast Asia with a contract value of RMB 3.73 billion. The establishment of this project is conducive to improving Thailand's agricultural productions technological content and modernization level, enhancing the diversity of Thai agriculture, and improving the economic benefits and added value of agricultural products.³⁴

China has also used water diplomacy in the Mekong subregion through the Lancang-Mekong Cooperation. China's water diplomacy seeks to strengthen the country's persuasive and conceptual power in the Mekong River Basin. The flagship area of Lancang-Mekong cooperation is water resources cooperation. At the same time, China has also given full play to the water diversion role of the Lancang River Water Conservancy Project, helping downstream countries effectively alleviate drought conditions. In 2020, China and LMC launched the sharing of hydrological

³⁴ Source from ; Lancang- Mekong Cooperation Center .<http://www.lmcchina.org/eng/>

information, making positive contributions to the sharing of water resources and the response to flood disasters among the people in the basin.

China's Confucius Institutes

In the soft power diplomacy in the ASEAN region, besides economic and trade cooperation and promoting various cooperation mechanisms, Cultural soft power in China is also an important component of soft power development. The cohesiveness and attractiveness of a country's culture will affect the recognition and image of other countries as a form of "soft power." As a result, in its diplomatic strategy toward ASEAN, China has placed a strong emphasis on cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and ASEAN and has implemented numerous cultural exchange and cooperation activities and projects, the most visible of which is the Confucius Institute. In recent years, Confucius Institutes have become the main vehicle for promoting China's excellent traditional culture in recent years, and an important tool for China to carry out soft power diplomacy. Just as most people agree on the purpose of the Confucius Institutes, the program's goal is to spread and promote China's excellent traditional culture around the world, as well as to present China as a kind and gentle great power. ³⁵Once they realize that Chinese culture is essentially harmonious, there will be no more "China threat theory". Therefore, the Confucius Institute was

³⁵ Bates Gill and Yanzhong Huang, Sources and Limits of Chinese "Soft Power",2006, p.18;Yongjin Zhang, The Discourse of China's Soft Power and Its Discontents,in Mingjiang Li(ed), Soft Power,2009,p.52.)

established to promote the building of China's soft power and to reshape China's image.

The Confucius Institute started as a Chinese language learning school, and in 2004, the first Confucius Institute in China was established to provide a place for foreigners to learn the Chinese language and culture. Later, with the gradual expansion of the Confucius Institute, the Confucius Institute was transformed into a major vehicle for spreading traditional Chinese culture, art, clothing, literature, and cuisine. With its advantages, the Confucius Institute regularly holds a variety of cultural and teaching activities, as a result, it has become an important location for countries all over the world to understand and learn the Chinese language and culture. With the rise of Chinese language fever in Southeast Asia, more and more ASEAN countries are applying to establish Confucius Institutes and more and more people are learning Chinese. Confucius Institutes established in Southeast Asia are provided by China with Chinese language teachers, as well as teaching resources, Chinese language exams, and other services for Southeast Asian countries. At present, most ASEAN countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, Myanmar, Vietnam, Laos, and Malaysia have established cooperation with several universities in China. Students from these ASEAN countries and Chinese students can exchange and study and experience different cultures in their respective countries, which spreads Chinese culture from the side. China, on the other hand, has established a scholarship system to attract students from Southeast Asian countries to study in China, with the Chinese government

funding the best students from Southeast Asian countries to study in China. This undoubtedly strengthens China's cultural influence and soft power.

Number of Confucius Institutes in ASEAN Countries

Thailand	27
Indonesia	8
Malaysia	6
Philippines	5
Myanmar	3
Cambodia	3
Singapore	3
Laos	2
Vietnam	1

Source: Chinese Confucius Institutes official website

Confucius Institutes are the resounding calling card of China's cultural soft power, but with the accelerated construction of Confucius Institutes overseas, they are perceived as cultural expansion by some countries. Since most Confucius Institutes are funded by the Chinese government in cooperation with local school institutions, there will be direct institutional involvement, and with the vertical management of Confucius Institutes under the Chinese Ministry of Education, outsiders will perceive them as cultural institutions with political purposes manipulated by the Chinese government. Confucius Institutes have been perceived with sensitivity in contrast to China's other

power instruments in part because of their distinctive operations and management structure.³⁶ The number of Confucius Institutes in ASEAN countries is the highest in Thailand and the lowest in Vietnam. Thailand and China have had friendly diplomatic relations since ancient times, and the Thai government has always been supportive of cooperation with China, and trust in the Chinese government is relatively high among ASEAN countries. Vietnam is the ASEAN country with the least trust in China, based on its contradictory stance in the South China Sea, and the rapid growth of Chinese influence, Vietnam has refused to establish Confucius Institutes in Vietnam because it sees them more as a tool of the Chinese government to control the Vietnamese people and society³⁷. Other countries, such as Malaysia and Indonesia, are countries with a large Chinese community and a high level of trust in China, so they are more cooperative in establishing Confucius Institutes. In addition to the Confucius Institute, the Chinese side has established mechanisms such as the China-ASEAN Expo, China-ASEAN Education Exchange Week, China-ASEAN Media High-Level Seminar, and China-ASEAN Cultural Exchange Training Center to promote cultural exchanges and cooperation between China and ASEAN and to increase the influence of China's soft power in ASEAN. There is also the "China-ASEAN Youth Training Base" established in Guangxi, which aims to invite ASEAN youth to China to

³⁶ Maria Repnikova. 2022. *Chinese Soft Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

³⁷ Van Chinh, N. (2014). Confucius Institutes in the Mekong Region: China's Soft Power or Soft Border?. *Issues and Studies*, 50(4), 85.

participate in exchange and dialogue programs such as youth camps, summer camps, and youth entrepreneur forums. On October 29, 2010, when attending the 13th China-ASEAN Leaders' Meeting, Premier Wen Jiabao delivered a speech in which he expressed the need to "earnestly implement the policy of expanding the scale of mutual exchange of foreign students by 2020. In his speech at the 13th ASEAN-China Leaders' Meeting on October 29, 2010, Premier Wen Jiabao said he would "earnestly implement the 'Double 100,000 Plan' to expand the scale of mutual exchange of foreign students to 100,000 by 2020 and strengthen the training of high-end talents. China is willing to provide 10,000 government scholarships to ASEAN countries in the next ten years and invite 10,000 young teachers, scholars, and students from ASEAN countries to visit China." ³⁸

Besides using Confucius Institutes to actively drive cultural exchanges between China and ASEAN and to spread Chinese culture and Chinese language learning to ASEAN countries, we should also pay attention to the management and teaching of Confucius Institutes, because Confucius Institutes for foreigners also represents the image of China as well, and while fulfilling their cultural and educational tasks, they should promote China with an open and correct voice and show the real image of China to the world, thus truly improving the construction of China's soft power.

The China-ASEAN Smart City Cooperation Initiative

³⁸ Wen Jiabao. Speech at the Third Meeting between China and ASEAN Leaders [N]. (People's Daily,2010-10-30(03)).

2019, China and ASEAN issued the ‘Smart City Cooperation Initiative’, which could serve as a platform for China's grand connectivity project in Southeast Asia. Based on this initiative, the Chinese technology company Huawei opened the first Artificial Intelligence center in Singapore, powered by 5G capabilities, with a total investment of \$10 million. This center aims to use AI research and development to improve urban safety and security. It enables Singapore's government agencies, research institutes, and small and medium-sized businesses to use the facilities as a digital transformation learning lab. In addition to this, the initiative builds urban partnerships to help build urban infrastructure and social development in ASEAN countries and uses digital technology to build new urban development and improve network security in ASEAN cities.

The Digital Silk Road Initiative in Southeast Asia

In addition to helping the construction of network security information in Southeast Asia, the Chinese government has continued to improve its "going out" development strategy and put forward the Digital Silk Road initiative under the active promotion of the "Belt and Road" initiative. E-commerce has become an important part of the digital economy cooperation between China and ASEAN, and since 2016, Alibaba has acquired the e-commerce platform - Lazada - and subsequently upgraded the platform with technology and more than 30 warehousing centers in more than a dozen regions in Southeast Asia, and the Chinese company has also helped the platform to provide a variety of payment options for consumers. Now, Lazada has grown into the largest

e-commerce platform in ASEAN. Chinese companies are also strengthening e-commerce cooperation with Southeast Asian countries in other aspects, such as Alibaba and Thailand and Malaysia have cooperated to build a joint e-trade platform to help small and medium-sized businesses digital customs clearance, fast customs clearance, and shorten logistics time; Jingdong teamed up with Thailand's CPN to build an online shopping platform JDCentral, which has become one of the top 10 online shopping platforms in Thailand after its launch. In the period of rapid development of electronic trade, China's cashless payment has also spread to Southeast Asia, which not only facilitates cross-border transfer between enterprises but also facilitates the life of Chinese tourists and Chinese in Southeast Asia, for example, in shopping malls, convenience stores, airports, and other large places can see the figure of China Alipay. The Chinese brand gradually out of the country, but also the performance of the gradual improvement of soft power.

China's Humanitarian Assistance to ASEAN

In addition to establishing various cooperation mechanisms and initiatives with ASEAN countries, China has also provided humanitarian assistance to ASEAN countries, demonstrating China's image as a responsible great power. The improvement of the diplomatic influence of national soft power is inseparable from the shaping of the country's international image, which depends more on practical actions than on foreign propaganda. Since the establishment of diplomatic relations with ASEAN countries, whenever ASEAN countries are in difficulties, China has

always been the first to lend a helping hand and give assistance, showing the responsibility of a big country and the style of a big country, which has not only improved China's national international image in the ASEAN region but also increased the influence of soft power. During the 1997 Asian financial crisis, China gave valuable assistance to ASEAN countries while its own country was also affected.

In August 1997, the Chinese government provided \$1 billion in aid to Thailand to help it overcome the crisis. For Indonesia, another hard-hit ASEAN country, China not only granted \$200 million in export credits but also arranged a \$400 million standby loan through the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In December 1997, at the informal meeting of ASEAN+3 leaders, President Jiang Zemin announced the provision of US\$4-6 billion to the IMF to help ASEAN countries overcome the crisis. In addition, China has also provided substantial non-reimbursable pharmaceutical aid to Indonesia³⁹. China's support and assistance to ASEAN countries during the financial crisis has enhanced China's image in the region and strengthened ASEAN's trust in China.

Secondly, after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the massive tsunami triggered by the Indian Ocean earthquake affected 11 countries in ASEAN and South Asia, causing huge losses to many countries. In addition to participating in the relief effort in the

³⁹ Zhao Erwei. 2011. The analysis of China's soft power diplomacy in ASEAN [D]. Northeast Normal University, China academic journal economic publishing house, No.81.

first instance, China also provided 21.63 million RMB to the affected countries for disaster relief assistance, followed by an additional 500 million RMB for disaster relief and post-disaster reconstruction. The affected countries all expressed their gratitude for China's assistance and praised China's actions. China's assistance to the Indian Ocean tsunami demonstrated China's image as a great power, which is a significant manifestation of the use and enhancement of China's soft power diplomacy.

During the outbreak of COVID-19 in January 2020, ASEAN countries were the first to assist to China. In March, the epidemic was controlled in China, but after March, the epidemic in ASEAN tended to worsen, and China was the first to donate materials to ASEAN countries in different forms, including the Chinese government donating to ASEAN governments through official channels, and Chinese embassies organizing Chinese enterprises to donate to ASEAN countries. In addition, China's assistance to ASEAN countries has gradually escalated, from donating supplies to sending out expert medical teams. On March 23 of the same year, the first medical team sent by China to neighbor countries to fight against epidemics arrived in Cambodia, and Cambodia became the first ASEAN country to receive Chinese medical support.⁴⁰ As the global epidemic continues to worsen, China insists on providing anti-epidemic supplies and vaccine assistance to other countries. As of May 2021, China's vaccine production and exports are among the world's best, with China's vaccine exports

⁴⁰Xu junhao, How China-ASEAN should cooperate to fight the epidemic together? China-ASEAN Expo (Financial Edition), Issue 4,2020//<https://www.fx361.com/page/2020/0420/6581642.shtml>

accounting for 227 percent of Europe's and 84 times that of the United States. China has donated over 26 million vaccine doses to foreign countries and provided over 500 million vaccine doses and stockpiles to over 100 countries and international organizations. Among them, more than 190 million doses of vaccines have been provided to ASEAN countries. ⁴¹Against the backdrop of the global epidemic, China has started "vaccine diplomacy", providing vaccines as public health products to other countries. As a new form of soft power diplomacy in special times, China has provided vaccine aid, and medical supplies and deployed medical teams to ASEAN countries, which undoubtedly enhances China's soft power in the ASEAN region.

By Looking at China's expanding soft power diplomacy to ASEAN countries, we see that China's soft power building mainly focuses on cultural dissemination and regional cooperation. Although China has made remarkable achievements in Southeast Asian economic construction, making China an important force influencing the region's prosperity and development, the spillover effect of bilateral mechanisms between China and ASEAN countries in the political and economic fields is limited.

In recent years, with the increasing competition between China and the U.S., regional security issues between China and Southeast Asia have become prominent, especially the South China Sea issue, which to a certain extent has strained the relationship between China and ASEAN and hindered the construction of China's soft power. But

⁴¹ China ASEAN Expo, Number of vaccines donated by China to ASEAN countries, Tencent, Dec.20.2021./ <https://view.inews.qq.com/a/20211220A0CXNO00>

overall, China is more attentive than the U.S. in both its soft power resources as well as its use of soft power, through a non-politicized and pragmatic approach to engaging the local public.

5. Comparisons and Limitations of Soft Power Diplomacy of China and the U.S.

China's soft power diplomacy is based on the basic requirements of the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics, in line with Xi Jinping's "going out" development strategy, because Deng Xiaoping, the chief architect of the reform and opening up, has upheld the independent diplomatic policy and emphasized openness on this basis since the reform and opening up, stressing that "if we close our doors, if we keep to ourselves, if we are arrogant, we will not be developed" . If we close our doors and keep to ourselves, we will not be able to develop".⁴² In the process of development, it adheres to the principle of peaceful development, infuses the idea of socialism with Chinese characteristics into the construction of soft power, and shapes the image of peace-loving and harmonious China. Beijing's soft power diplomacy can be divided into three areas: building strong political and economic ties with ASEAN through more aid; exploring a comprehensive framework of cooperation through free

⁴² Deng Xiaoping. 1994. Adherence to the Four Basic Principles (March 30, 1979) Deng Xiaoping's Selected Writings, vol. 2 (in Chinese). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

trade agreements and other programs; and strengthening cultural appeal and promoting understanding of China through semi-official programs.⁴³

One of China's strengths in developing soft power is the attitude of its top leadership in valuing soft power. China has done a better job than the United States in considering soft power as an important link in national development and national rejuvenation, and in formulating policies, devoting resources, and seriously conducting soft power diplomacy to this end. David Rampton believes that the redeeming feature of China's modernization process is that it has focused on developing economic and soft power without neglecting the development of military power.⁴⁴

In the context of China's rapid economic development and economic globalization, China's soft power has a relatively good foundation and is more easily accepted by other countries in the world; therefore, China's soft power development is considered to have better development prospects. In 2017, the concept of great power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics was repeatedly emphasized and concretely elaborated in Xi Jinping's report to the 19th National Congress. In the increasingly complex dynamics of international relations, the importance of non-material power has become

⁴³ H H. Michael Hsiao, Alan Yang Ins and Outs of a China Courtship[N] . Asia Times, Dec 4 2008

⁴⁴ Joseph Nye, "The Rise of China's Soft Power," in Leah Bitounis and Jonathon Price, eds., *The Struggle for Power: U.S.-China Relations in 21st Century*, Washington: The Aspen Institutes, 2020.

increasingly prominent, and Xi Jinping's soft power diplomacy has become a flag of Chinese diplomacy.⁴⁵

At the same time, China's soft power diplomacy also has development limitations. The first is the imbalance of soft power resources. China's cultural soft power diplomacy mainly relies on traditional Chinese culture, which is relatively homogeneous in terms of resources and lacks popular culture. At the same time, it is a misunderstanding for China to turn traditional culture into soft power. Most domestic scholars believe that China's traditional culture is a positive factor in building China's cultural soft power, and generally believe that the "Chinese language boom" and Confucius Institutes have supported the development of China's soft power. The development of Confucius Institutes relying on government power is hardly accepted by foreign people, and they have proved to be less and less effective in promoting soft power. China lacks cultural industries with worldwide influence like Hollywood and lacks a popular culture of Korean and Japanese streams that have set trends worldwide.⁴⁶ China needs to develop Chinese culture further, accelerate the modernization of Chinese traditional culture, follow the trend of the times, give full expression to China's excellent traditional cultural resources, and shift the main body of propaganda to individuals and NGOs, such as tourists, international students,

⁴⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 9 December 2017, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbzhd/t1518042.shtml>

⁴⁶ Bates Gill and Yanzhong Huang, "Sources and Limits of Chinese Soft Power," *Survival*, Vol.48,

social media, etc. And present Chinese culture to the world in an honest and flexible way.

Moreover, most Chinese information resources and the main body leading the development of soft power is the Chinese government, and non-governmental forces are relatively weak. Compared to the United States and other Western countries, China's soft power lacks a certain degree of freedom and democracy, and citizen participation is low. In the information age, countries are emphasizing the use of digital tools, social media, and other channels to project soft power, while the Chinese government is cautiously integrated due to national security concerns, leaving it shortchanged in terms of promotion.⁴⁷ In addition to the government as the main body, the use of soft power in regional strategies should also actively encourage the participation of civil society organizations, NGOs, individuals, and other subjects. The reason is that soft power is shared knowledge and culture, and it has been proven that international interactions conducted by non-governmental subjects are more helpful in enhancing the national image of the country. One of the important reasons why the United States has strong soft power resources is that the United States is good at mobilizing social resources, especially with the cooperation between non-governmental organizations. According to the relevant information and statistics,

⁴⁷ Shanthi Kalathil, *Soft Power, Hard Issues: Reports of the 2005 Aspen Institute Roundtable on Public.25. Diplomacy and the Middle East and the Forum on Communications and Society*, Washington: The Aspen Institute, 2006 pp.27-28.

the U.S. IRS has recorded nearly 1.5 million non-governmental organizations.⁴⁸ There are also several unregistered NGOs in the U.S. Not only are there many NGOs, but they all play an important role in U.S. foreign diplomacy. The activities of these NGOs include international exchanges, cultural exchanges, student exchange programs, agriculture and economic development, peace and security, human rights, and immigration. The enhancement of U.S. soft power is inextricably linked to these NGOs.⁴⁹ In contrast, the number of NGOs in China is smaller, with 844,000 registered NGOs as of the end of 2019, according to the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China, and even fewer NGOs can conduct diplomatic activities abroad.

China's foreign exchanges or soft power development, the network information is not open and clear enough, which makes it easy to ignore China's soft power investment, the United States is a strong international influence, a significant reason is the United States has transparent government public information, and independent and completed institutions, China should also make the soft power investment "traceable".

China's soft power effectiveness on a certain level has not been proportional to what has been invested, for example, China has been more cooperative, involved, integrated, and compliant in international affairs, and has not absorbed or changed the

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of State, "Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the United States," <https://www.state.gov/non-governmental-organizations-ngos-in-the-united-states/>.

⁴⁹ Song Wenhui, Cross-sectoral Partnership between the U.S. Government and NGOs, Party Politics Research 2014, no. 6.

behavior of others, being more like a participant. Much of the improvement in China's international image is due to integration into the international community and following norms and institutions. Whereas China's historical development model and approach to things have reflected quick response and efficiency, they have been seen by the overseas public as authoritarian and lacking in inclusiveness. The strategy is emphasizing traditional cultural aspects and economic development achievements in the construction of soft power, and this pragmatic strategy tends to be counterproductive and difficult to be accepted in a long term. In addition to this, China presents an asymmetry in its assistance of public goods or humanitarian aid to foreign countries. Although China has become the fourth largest foreign aid donor in the world, the consequence of the aid is that the governments of the countries being assisted express gratitude, but the public does not experience it enough to leave a deep impression on the public. This is because China is not open and transparent enough in the aid it announces to the outside world and lacks an independent international development aid agency like USAID, with centralized and efficient resources and open and transparent aid information. China's foreign aid resources and projects are scattered, with a low level of organizational structure, a low degree of specialization and internationalization, and a lack of third-party evaluation. This has resulted in a situation where aid is less effective and less familiar to the public.

According to the soft power rankings conducted by the Brand Finance Soft Power Index, the U.S. ranks first and China ranks 5th in 2020; the U.S. ranks 6th and China

ranks 8th in 2021, and the U.S. ranks first and China ranks 4th in 2022. The ranking draws heavily on Josephine's thinking, which is based on three core assessment indices: awareness and familiarity, overall influence, and overall reputation. The rankings over the past three years show that the U.S. has been ahead of China and at the top of the list, except for 2021, when the U.S. performance in response to COVID has lowered its soft power index due to the impact of COVID, but in terms of other soft power indices, the U.S. is higher than China both in terms of international image and international influence. The international community has prejudices and misunderstandings about China's international image, and some countries have always considered China's rise as a threat to world development.

The U.S. has the most open culture in the world, and its political and popular culture constitutes the deeper content of U.S. comprehensive national power and the main resources for U.S. soft power influence.⁵⁰ Unlike China, where the majority of those responsible for exporting U.S. soft power are non-governmental organizations, China's lead is the government, and U.S. soft power resources are more flexible and diverse. For example, Confucius Institutes, which have blossomed in recent years, have been resisted by other countries because they are soft power mechanisms led by the Chinese government, and are seen as a political tool for China to control local people and society. And the Chinese government has noticed the situation and adjusted the establishment of Confucius Institutes by handing them over to newly

⁵⁰ Zhang Dianjun, "A Comparative Study of U.S. and Chinese Cultural Soft Power," *Journal of Chongqing Jiaotong University (Social Science Edition)*, No. 6, 2010,

established foundations, which are non-governmental organizations not controlled by the government. By separating Confucius Institutes from the government in this way, it can effectively eliminate the suspicion of Confucius Institutes abroad and truly realize the purpose of Confucius Institutes to spread the Chinese language and traditional Chinese culture.

Influenced by the internal and external policies of the Trump administration, the trust of the U.S. government has been severely weakened at home and abroad, and U.S. soft power has declined significantly, but the great advantage of the U.S. in the non-government sector is still maintained its soft power.⁵¹

They observe that, whereas American soft power is founded on modern cultural traits, Chinese soft power is founded on traditional Chinese cultural values. American soft power promotes liberal political and civic values, whereas Chinese soft power is primarily focused on the attraction of economic and development models.⁵² When practicing soft power diplomacy in the ASEAN region, the U.S. focuses more on economic and political intervention in the ASEAN region through non-government-led institutions, thereby exporting American democratic values, while China focuses more on cultural export, with traditional Chinese culture and Confucianism as the mainstay, focusing on the use of cultural soft power and the provision of humanitarian aid to present the image of great power and enhance its soft

⁵¹ Men, H. H., Yu, Y. Q.. Comparison of soft power between China and the United States (2017-2020)[J]. *International Relations Studies*,2021(04):

⁵² Beeson, M., & Li, F. (2016). China's place in regional and global governance: A new world comes into view. *Global Policy*, 7(4), 491-499.

power influence in the ASEAN region. Because China and the United States are at different stages of development and have different national characters, as well as different strategic cultures and strategic traditions, in terms of soft power strategies, there is a significant difference between the two countries. Some scholars classify China and the United States' strategic types as integrated and allied. The allied type advocated by the United States refers to economic and political intervention in the region to establish itself as a regional ally, such as the Indo-Pacific strategy proposed in Southeast Asia., which aims to expand and strengthen its dominant position and influence in the region, with certain power overtones. China, on the other hand, belongs to the integrated regional strategy, which aims to integrate forces in the region toward a regional integration strategy. China emphasizes the interdependence among countries through a cooperative approach, always adheres to a strategic culture of opposing violence and advocating peace and takes never interfering in the internal affairs and security interests of other countries as its regional strategic goal.⁵³

The different strategic propositions of China and the United States in Southeast Asia determine the direction of their soft power diplomacy. China, which insists on the supremacy of regional harmony and sovereignty, advocates the joint construction of a new regional order of peaceful development and win-win cooperation in Southeast Asia, while the strategic proposition of the United States is to act as the leader of the

⁵³ Ma, Fangfang, Liu, Changmin. On the use of soft power in the regional strategies of great powers--the example of China-US regional strategy in Southeast Asia[J]. Pacific Journal,2021,29(08):1-11.DOI:10.14015/j.cnki.1004-8049.2021.08.001.

region and dominate and participate in the development of the region. At the economic level, both countries' economic soft power is reflected in trade cooperation and economic development model attraction. Many studies look at economic relations as a substitute for soft power. For example, the US and China's respective economic relationships with ASEAN and economic assistance to Southeast Asia are frequently cited as empirical evidence of the two powers' growing competition in the region.⁵⁴ As the U.S. has strong economic power, it is all about playing a leading role in Southeast Asia and guiding the direction of Southeast Asia's economy; while China is based on economic engagement, focusing on development cooperation, and building a community of interests together. RCEP and CAFTA are good examples, not only injecting new vitality into economic cooperation in Southeast Asia but also achieving mutual benefits and a win-win situation for both sides. Through the comparison and assessment of different dimensions of soft power diplomacy between China and the U.S., the two countries have different soft power propositions. China's soft power mainly focuses on cultural attractiveness, but in terms of foreign policy and the appeal of political values, the U.S. is more influential than China. In terms of soft power development time, although China is a latecomer, there are still obstacles and problems in the process of soft power development, and it is prudent to handle regional issues with ASEAN countries, such as the South China Sea dispute, and it should actively dialogue with ASEAN countries to form a demonstration effect so that

⁵⁴ Lum Thomas, Wayne Morrison, and Bruce Vaughn "China's soft power in Southeast Asia" US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, USA,2008

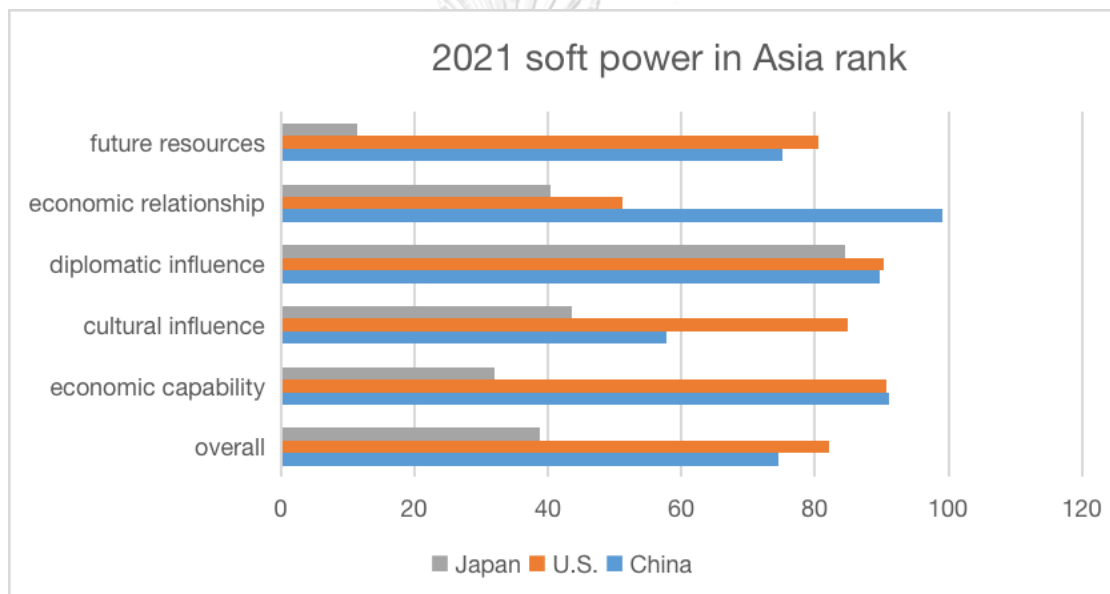
ASEAN countries really see China as a good neighbor, a good partner, and a non-threatening power. China and the United States have two completely different directions for the construction of soft power in Southeast Asia. China focuses more on identification power and institutional power, while the United States focuses on assimilation power and institutional power. Besides, Both China and the United States have established comprehensive strategic cooperation frameworks with countries in the Mekong region, but the two countries have great differences in cooperation initiatives, forms, and priorities. With its geographical advantage, China is actively driving the development of neighboring countries, especially those in Southeast Asia. On 7 November 2015, at the 36th Singapore Lecture, Xi further elaborated on his “China ride “theory: “China welcomes its neighbors to board the fast train of China’s development”⁵⁵. First, as an important member of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, China mostly plays the role of a participant and has few initiatives, while the United States actively provides new initiatives in regional cooperation. While China attaches great importance to cooperation between the public sector, the United States promotes cooperation between the public and private sectors.

In addition to strategic cooperation at the government level, China should actively seek more channels to build its national image of China, as Xi Jinping said, "We should tell the Chinese story well and let the world hear the Chinese voice."⁵⁶ From

⁵⁵ Jinping Xi, The 36th Singapore Lecture: Forging A Strong Partnership To Enhance Prosperity of Asia (Singapore: ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute) , 2015

⁵⁶ Speech by General Secretary Xi Jinping at the opening ceremony of the 11th Congress of the Chinese Federation of Literary and Art Circles and the 10th Congress of the Chinese Writers' Association on December 14,

the level of China's overseas Chinese community, Chinese companies, and NGOs, the maximum effect of soft power can be exerted to influence the local public's perception of China. China's domestic political environment also has an impact on soft power diplomacy, and the Chinese media should distribute more channels of information so that the Chinese public receives more open information, and true cultural soft power is attractive based on openness, authenticity, and diversity.



Source: <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/about/>

In 2021, in the ranking of soft power influence on Asia, the United States dominates in terms of culture, although China has a higher share of economic development and foreign policy. The soft power gap between China and the U.S., although always large, is gradually narrowing with China's excellent performance in the COVID situation.

In its survey titled *The State of Southeast Asia 2021*, ISEAS said: “Southeast Asians' trust in China continues to trend downward, in contrast to the United States' improved trust ratings.”⁵⁷ It is thus clear that countries in the ASEAN region still have certain prejudices against China, and China should seek to implement more flexible and diverse forms of soft power diplomacy in ASEAN to ensure the diversification of soft power resources and the correct export of Chinese culture.

The focus of each country's soft power ranking agency is judged differently for the popularity of soft power. In addition to Lowy institute, other more well-known organizations such as Portland soft power 30 and Brand Finance, are ranking countries around the world in terms of soft power. Their annual reports and rankings are widely used by the media and think tanks and have gradually become the standard by which everyone measures the soft power index. But the fact is that each index has different elements of soft power selected, the measurement criteria and public opinion surveys are different, and the conclusions drawn are not necessarily benchmarks for reference to soft power. Moreover, each country is different, and the criteria may not be applicable to each country, which may not truly reflect the soft power of the

⁵⁷ Arlstyo Rizka Darmawan,,US-China rivalry and public diplomacy in Southeast Asia,Mar,14,2022, Asia Focus,BangkokPost,<https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/2278839/us-china-rivalry-and-public-diplomacy-in-southeast-asia>

country. The rankings of these organizations show that they are all biased in their perception of China, and most of the public opinion polls show that foreign people have a more negative international image of China. Most of the indexes are founded by European and American organizations and most of the organizations that rate soft power resource data are concentrated in developed countries in Europe and America, such as the world bank, the UN, Facebook, Embassy pages, and Lowy Institute. So, it is inevitable that they are influenced by the values and ideologies of Western countries. According to the soft power ranking of the Portland 30 Index, the top three countries of soft power ranking in 2016-2018 are all European countries, while China's ranking is 28, 25, and 27 in order, and the ranking of the United States has dropped from the first to the third and fourth position. The U.S. soft power is higher than China's soft power under the judging standard of soft power in Europe and the United States. But in the past two years, through China's relentless efforts on soft power diplomacy and the U.S.'s laxity in Southeast Asia due to the COVID-19, China's soft power influence in Southeast Asia is higher than that of the U.S. According to The Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index 2021, the United States experienced a 10.7-point decline in economic relationships despite a significant increase in diplomatic influence during the Biden administration's first year. The US scored 51.1, while China scored 99.⁵⁸ Through its rapid economic development and flexible economic policies, China has brought great attraction to its neighbors as well

⁵⁸ Hoang Thi Ha& Ian Storey, "The Biden Administration and Southeast Asia : One year in Review", Researchers at ISEAS-YUSOF ISHAK Institute analyse current events No.11(2022)

as to other countries in the world. In addition, China has actively driven the development of other developing countries while ensuring its own development, promoting various cooperation mechanisms, and attracting Southeast Asian countries with a win-win cooperation model. China's soft power policy has evolved from cultural attraction to "constructive intervention" in regional development, and this term first is mentioned and stressed by Wangyi, the current State Councilor and Foreign Minister in discussing China's "new major country" diplomacy.⁵⁹ Without coercive interference, but with financial, technical, and personnel support to support the development of the region. Constructing strong global soft power takes a long time to operate, the construction of soft power is a protracted war, and China has consciously built its foreign soft power for just over 10 years and still needs to go a long way. In the new era of diplomacy, China should focus on eliminating the international community's anxiety about China's rise, adhere to the right social values, and fully demonstrate China's international image as a responsible power to win the trust of other countries. The same is true for the U.S. At the level of soft power diplomacy, whether in regional strategies in Southeast Asia or in global development, it should show its image as a great power, always adhere to peaceful development, and achieve win-win cooperation.

⁵⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 9 December 2017, <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjbzhd/t1518042.shtml>

6. Conclusion

In comparison to the U.S., China is a latecomer to regional international relations in Southeast Asia. China has focused on establishing relations with countries in the region through soft power, relying heavily on the government to design and to achieve better relations with countries. In recent decades, China has gradually been closing the gap in soft power relations with the U.S. due to its strengths and strategies. Continuing to develop soft power strength remains an important strategy for China's rise. China needs to dig deeper and balance the development of soft power resources and play the role of multiple subjects. Although the U.S. was affected by the Trump administration's internal and external policies, meaning that its soft power was generally on the decline, the U.S. is still a dominant player in culture, in the international system and in international influence in ASEAN. As ASEAN countries adopt a great power balancing strategy between two great powers, China and the U.S., the two countries' soft power building in the ASEAN region is also treated as another form of competition between China and the United States. In response, China should actively adjust its soft power foreign policy toward ASEAN to drive the overall development of the ASEAN region and promote regional integration while maintaining steady domestic economic and political development.

When examining the differences in soft power practices in the foreign policy of the two countries, U.S. NGOs play a key role in soft power diplomacy and often appear as "professional" and "independent" in the process of carrying out activities in

ASEAN. This role of NGOs from the U.S. is not only easily accepted by ASEAN countries but also largely demonstrates the U.S. "pluralistic" view of its power. China, on the other hand, has adopted the concept of "peaceful development" as its basic diplomatic principle and is committed to common development in the region based on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries, which also appeals to ASEAN countries. The different approaches to soft power diplomacy by each country each as lessons for the other to learn from to improve relations with countries in the ASEAN region.

By comparing the soft power-making activities of China with those of the U.S. in Southeast Asia through examining specific projects in several areas, we can clearly see the different approaches and strengths of the two countries in their regional strategies and their different focuses on soft power diplomacy. Still, whether it is the security-focused policy of the U.S. or the cooperation model of China, both bring new vitality to the development of Southeast Asia, promoting economic and political modernization and development, and promoting the integration and globalization of the region. From China's perspective, building soft power with Chinese characteristics should not only have Chinese forms of concepts and expressions, but also requires Chinese ideas, Chinese values, and Chinese propositions with genuinely Chinese characteristics.

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