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The Evolution of Global Competition: The Creation of a Soft Power Escalatory Dilemma

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Abstract

As relationships between actors have become much more important for security in a globalized world and raw capabilities have become less important, the security landscape has fundamentally changed. When looking at the modern competition between the United States and European Union against China, global infrastructure investment has become a new arena to compete within. When examining each actor's global infrastructure initiatives, China with the Belt and Road Initiative, the European Union with its Global Gateway, and the United States heading the G7's initiative dubbed the Build Back Better World initiative, competition is deemed to be present within the global system. These infrastructure initiatives help cement positive relations with actors by building off of them with health initiatives. Soft power gains can be seen when looking at the leadership of international institutions. By then examining how actors are reacting to these changes within the global network, centrality becomes a large concern as actors wish to maintain their dominance. As actors or nodes then compete for stronger relationships or ties with other nodes, a soft power escalatory dilemma is formed. This competition leads to an escalatory spiral for more soft power in order to be able to co-opt or persuade others to do what they want rather than to force or incentivize them.

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Introduction

As competition has now evolved between global powers there is a focus on creating non-allied relational ties within the global network. When reputation may matter more for an actor than capabilities for its security within the global system, emphasis is placed on the power of positive perception by others. The strength of positive relations between actors can now be utilized without kinetic capabilities to help draw in other actors in a given network to either, "attract or co-opt them to want what you want."[1] This means that actors must create stronger and closer relationships with other actors in the system by positively interacting with one another so that they can call on each other for help within the system as necessary. By utilizing a new concept dubbed the Soft Power Escalatory Dilemma, we can better understand why these positive perceptions of an actor are sought after within modern-day competition between the United States and European Union against China. The Soft Power Escalatory Dilemma will be applied to global infrastructure initiatives consisting of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Global Gateway, and the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative. The thesis then examines how vaccine diplomacy serves as a tool to help an actor to gain legitimacy on top of foreign investment. Finally, the thesis will examine the effects gained from soft power competition by analyzing United Nations leadership positions.

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[1] (Nye 2004, 2)

Despite rapidly increasing interest in competition between the US, EU, and China, there is a lack of explanation for why initiatives creating and elevating these cordial relations between actors have been launched and funded so heavily outside of military cooperation. As the EU and the US have taken on a hawkish perspective towards China and focus on structural components and institutions of the system all while assuming the worst from others or in this case China. The EU and the US both actively perceive China as pursuing advantage over others through institutions, actors continuously engage with the concept of the security dilemma to help understand the world around them. Looking at the United States, European Union, and China, both sides tend to perceive one another advancing in any regard as a threat to their own advancement within the system.

An essential component of the relationship between the EU, the US, and China in the 21st century is that there are more arenas to compete in now than in the past. Foreign investment in infrastructure is an emerging arena in which we can witness competition. Traditionally, if a developing state had needed foreign investment concerning an infrastructure project, it would look to Western institutions like the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or even private companies to the point that U.S. companies had accounted for over a third of all foreign direct investment in the 1990s.[2] Specifically, U.S. companies dominated the market share of the electrical industry, and French companies dominated the market share of both the transport and water industries.[3] With the emergence of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) from China in 2013, Beijing signaled a shift in its foreign policy now to focus on infrastructure development

[2] (Sader 2010, 8)

[3] (Sader 2000, 8)

assistance and offer this initiative as an alternative to the traditional actors who have monopolized infrastructure development.

Alternatives to the Belt and Road have subsequently been introduced by Western actors. The United States decided to lead the charge in offering a new alternative to the BRI through the G7 dubbed Build Back Better World (B3W) in 2021. The European Union then composed its option entitled the Global Gateway in 2021 to align itself with B3W. As these two infrastructure initiatives had come to quick succession after one another, offering vast amounts of resources to accomplish their goals, the competition over infrastructure investment and development had fully emerged as a new arena for competition which will be discussed in the section on global infrastructure initiatives. This fight for positive perceptions through infrastructure, especially tourism infrastructure,[4] is considered to be a new phenomenon of soft power escalatory dilemmas. Similar to a security dilemma where there is an escalation spiral due to misperceptions in other actors' behavior,[5] a soft power escalatory dilemma is where an actor or group of actors feel concerned about their level of influence within a system due to a non-kinetic or non-tangible outcome that may include the creation of new norms within a system, the undermining of a governing or legal institution, slander, cultural deterioration, cultural idealization for other cultures, or the phenomena known as brain drain.

Using this new phenomenon of the soft power escalatory dilemma, the current competition between the EU/US and China regarding infrastructure can be better

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[4] (Mamirkulova et al. 2020, 2)

[5] (Jervis 1978, 211-212)

understood as reactionary policies from Washington and Brussels due to misperceptions about Beijings's intentions and goals from its BRI strategy. Just as the West and China have always remained skeptical of one another's actions, these foreign policies are no different and still lead to a fear of losing out on either forming positive relations with or becoming friendlier towards other actors in the global system. The United States, the EU, and China recognize that strong positive relationships, relationships that may be utilized for an actor's advantage, with other actors in the system may help to place them at an advantage over one another to achieve strategic goals and overall security from others within the system. By perceiving these relationships as valuable commodities to an actor, the West, and China engage competitively to acquire more and stronger relations with other actors. These stronger relations come into play as a component of diplomatic engagement that can be seen in the politics of international institutions and international organizations or IOs.

At times, the United States and the European Union view China as the aggressor attempting to alter the system structure to its advantage. Additionally, the US views other practical initiatives, such as vaccine diplomacy, as helping to foster legitimacy and build on relational gains made by infrastructure initiatives. These other initiatives that help China to gain legitimacy as a positive and responsible actor within the system can predominantly be seen through China's vaccine diplomacy. Vaccine diplomacy is not a new form of diplomacy as more developed countries have traditionally utilized it to build goodwill in other more developing countries; the US and the EU regard these initiatives as another avenue China uses to gain relational power within the system.

China appears to the United States and the European Union as an actor out for itself by first building a positive relationship through infrastructure investment and development and then cementing this identity through vaccine diplomacy. Perceiving this sequential approach, the US and EU view China as an active threat, as these were some of the post-colonial tactics that helped the West secure strong relationships worldwide. But how do these positive relationships then lead to power? This is displayed most prominently within the United Nations as China continues to win support in gaining control of leadership positions in various committees. As China capitalizes on these connections and essentially uses the soft power it has accrued for itself, the EU and the US perceive this as a threat to the global order as China becomes less of a junior partner and more of a peer competitor than it traditionally has been.

Though China has not gained enough power to be seen as a perfect equal to the EU and the US, the EU and US continue to perceive these soft power initiatives as threatening their position in the global system. By the EU and US perceiving these actions as a threat, China is then led to continue with and ramp up soft power initiatives as Washington and Brussels then attempt to counter Beijing's soft power and positive relationship gains. As the EU, the US, and China try to counter one another for positive relationships and gain more soft power than the other, the soft power escalatory dilemma occurs and leads to a spiral of further competition.

Literature Review

The Security Dilemma

John H. Herz talks about the security dilemma existing in every anarchic society. Herz directly defines the security dilemma as,

> "Groups or individuals … usually are, concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attack, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on."[6]

Through this definition we see that a source of power can instill fear in other actors simply by trying to attain a level of power so that they will not have to fear another actor's power. Robert Jervis defines the security dilemma as

> "many of the means by which tries to increase its security decrease the security of others. In domestic society, there are several ways to increase safety of one's person and property without endangering others. One can move to a safer neighborhood, put bars on the windows, avoid dark streets, and keep a distance from suspicious-looking characters. Of course these measures are not convenient, cheap, or certain of success. But no one save criminals need be alarmed if a person takes them. In international politics, however, one state's gain in security often inadvertently threatens others."[7]

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[6] (Herz 1950, 157)

[7] (Jervis 1978, 169-170)

As the security dilemma turns into a version of an arms race it is seen as an issue of hard power and has not been seen as an issue with soft power. A security dilemma, as defined by John H. Herz, can be seen as presenting itself in a conventionally physical manner. This point is necessary to understand why a differentiation must be made when soft power initiatives are causing a phenomenon similar to a security dilemma and subsequently causing an arms race of sorts, but in regards to soft power "weapons."

The security dilemma has been conventionally thought about in terms of physical security as decision-makers act based on how vulnerable they feel and then react accordingly based on their perceived threat level and if they are predisposed or not to view an actor as an adversary.[8] As decision-makers have traditionally only seen conventional physical threats against states, the security dilemma has been locked into a mindset of it only being able to manifest itself in physical security concerns. Jervis specifically mentions in his article "... aggressive intentions and the military means to act on them."[9] This again represents the conceptualization of the security dilemma as a physical threat when applied to states and international actors. Jervis also goes on to speak about the escalation of military advancement and increasing overall military strength, which once again points to the security dilemma, having been historically thought of through a physical or hard power perspective. Contrasting the point of a security dilemma requiring a physical threat, Jennifer Mitzen argues that while physical security is important, assuming that states only attempt to gain physical security limits the

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[8] (Jervis 1978, 174-175)

[9] (Jervis 1978, 181)

conceptualization of security as a whole as states also attempt to seek non-physical

security for themselves.[10]

Soft Power

Joseph S. Nye Jr. first coined the term "soft power" in his book *Bound to Lead*.

The concept of soft power is described as "... the ability to get what you want through

attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's

culture, political ideals, and policies."[11] Just as Nye asserts that soft power stems from

culture and identity,[12] Katzenstein has also stated that culture and identity are crucial

factors that help to determine national security policy.[13] While recognizing that security

issues stem from a multitude of factors, it is important to understand the policy that is

created by an actor. This understanding will help to piece together the exact reason why

an actor is fearful enough to pursue an active security policy against a perceived threat.

When examining why actors behave in the way they do and construct the policies they

do, it must be remembered that actors are rational and behave through rational thought in

their decision-making. By utilizing rational choice theory, actors are understood to

choose an outcome that will bring the most benefits that can be expected to come from

this choice.[14] Since actors are understood as rational and national security policy is

composed of various non-physical factors such as culture, identity, perceived threats, and

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[10] (Mitzen 2006, 342)

[11] (Nye 2004, X-XI)

[12] (Nye 2004, 8)

[13] (Katzenstein 1996, 499)

[14] (Walt 2000, 6)

overall understandings of the global system, it can be assumed that actors may perceive behaviors as threatening even if they are not physical threats that we have traditionally seen and understood as hard power.

The world having changed from a time of militaristic conquest to a newly found emphasis on soft power brings into question the need to expand the concept of the security dilemma. Throughout the literature, there is an extreme emphasis on hard power and the concept of an arms race stemming from security dilemmas. The most famous example of the security dilemma in modern times being the arms race in the Cold War. There is a consistent thought of hard power being directly attached to the concept of the security dilemma. There is also a more modern example of China's rise being feared from the West and other Indo-Pacific actors and this being viewed through a hard power lens which has led to the formation of "the Quad" or other small working groups of states to help contain China.[15] This need for security can be seen stemming from the United States overall policy of containment of China that had taken place with the United States' pivot towards China.[16]

Moving on to discussing Chinese soft power, it is important to remember Joseph S. Nye Jr.'s conceptualization of soft power and where this power stems from. Nye tells us that soft power is derived from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies.[17] Various additions into this concept are important for a more robust understanding of the concept as a whole. Maria Repnikova touches on even using hard

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[15] (Wuthnow 2018, 133 & 134)

[16] (Wong and Yue 2014, 35)

[17] (Nye 2004, X)

power assets in a co-optive manner, commercial products being linked to a country, the various aspects that a country leads in whether that be education, climate change initiatives, technology, or communications, and also includes a countries political and economic development models as components of soft power.[18] Specifically looking at the piece that mentions hard power assets as a source of soft power, there are mentions of utilizing these hard power assets for issues such as UN peacekeeping missions or even for help with disaster relief from other scholars.[19] Mingjiang Li also goes on to discuss other ways in which a state may generate more soft power such as abiding by agreed upon rules of the system as well as helping to solve international issues and having states see and acknowledge the effort that is being put in.[20] There is also an emphasis from Li that Chinese analysts tend to place a very large amount of importance on mass media when examining a state's soft power.[21]

While soft power has been a longer conversation in the West, discourse has been seen in China since 1993 in an article written by Wang Huning.[22] The term was not extremely well received by American defense officials with Nye stating that after he gave a speech at a conference where Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was also speaking, Secretary Rumsfeld was asked for his opinion on soft power and, "... he replied

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[18] (Repnikova 2022, 3-4 cited Li 2009, Zhao 2014, Huang & Ding 2010, and Zhao 2007)

[19] (Li 2009, 5)

[20] (Li 2009, 8)

[21] (Li 2009, 27)

[22] (Li 2009, 25 cited Wang Huning 1993)

"I don't know what it means.""[23] On the other hand, the first time that we saw this talked about by a high-level Chinese official, however, was at the Central Foreign Affairs Leadership Group meeting in 2006 by Party Chief and President Hu Jintao where he directly mentioned soft power.[24]

The stark difference in receptiveness to the concept of soft power may be due to the fact that the United States has traditionally been largely empowered by its own soft power where it is able to obtain what it wants without force or coercion. The United States has traditionally been a force when it comes to soft power which stems from a multitude of sources. The United States sources of soft power come from media, technology achievements, foreign students whether they are domestic students or international students, mass media promotion of US culture, attractive US values and policies that are followed through on, as well as multilateral foreign policies that are being spearheaded by the United States.[25] The United States has been consistent post-World War II in ensuring its place at the top of society in regards to soft power due to the fact that, "Power is passing from the "capital-rich" to the "information-rich.""[26] While the United States may not be in the leading positions for every aspect of a developed country, it has maintained a sense of leading the developed world through its overall power including both hard and soft powers.

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[23] (Nye 2004, IX cited "Old Softie" 2003)

[24] (Li 2009, 23 cited Ma Lisi 2007)

[25] (Nye 2004, 33-34, 44-45, 47, 55, 61-63)

[26] (Nye Jr. 1990, 164)

Although Nye's book is from the early 2000's, it still holds true that Europe is also host to a large amount of soft power and remains a peer competitor to the United States in regards to soft power.[27] This soft power stems from cultural resources primarily whether than be from the arts, promotion of cultures and language across the globe, or consistently ranking at the top of foreign aid and development assistance.[28] Europe also has many countries within it that hold leadership spots in regards to popular issues such as climate change since most leading actors are from Europe.[29] By operating specifically with this global issue, Europe is able to better position itself to be able to wield its soft power as it continues to gain more soft power by actively participating and coming up with solutions for a global problem. These gains are then compounded by continuously acting on the same initiatives that it suggests which in turn increases its own legitimacy and subsequently its soft power.

Throughout the literature we have yet to see the true mention of a soft power escalatory dilemma. The closest mention of the concept can be seen in Linus Hagström's article, *The Sino-Japanese battle for soft power: pitfalls and promises*, where he mentions that as China and Japan have both lead successful campaigns in their own respective domestic civil societies over drumming up support that the other is a threatening presence so that they are able to attempt to legitimize violence against the other over territorial disputes. Hagström then tells us that

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[27] (Nye 2004, 75)

[28] (Nye 2004, 75-77)

[29] (Upton 2013) (Burck et al. 2021)

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> "Both states have boosted the presence of coastguard ships, and the number of near misses, involving both ships and planes, has increased. The result might well be a security dilemma of traditional conceptualization concerning hard power, but one that is clearly produced by the domestic successes of both states' soft power campaigns."[30]

This conceptualization shows that while yes the security dilemma here is linked to soft power, the issue is of hard power overall. Whereas the domestic soft power campaign has led to usage of hard power externally in the international system, this was not an attempt to further a global influence campaign to accumulate more soft power that we are seeing between other actors.

Another close piece of literature to a soft power escalatory dilemma can be seen in the article written by Dalei Jie, which outlines a security dilemma emerging from ideology that is being fought over between the United States and China.[31] Jie does make a clear difference that this is not a traditional security dilemma as ideology is present but it is not on the level of being in "the traditional security realm" even if it has some characteristics close to a security dilemma in terms of each side perceiving a threat that is not necessarily there.[32] As the United States and China compete to have their own ideologies heard throughout the world, it will only further the other's point in that it appears to be relatable to a security dilemma where each other will continue to feel as though they must do more so that the other does not win this war of ideologies.[33]

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[30] (Hagström 2015, 134)

[31] (Jie 2020, 184)

[32] (Jie 2020, 192-193)

[33] (Jie 2020, 192-193)

Network Theory or Social Network Analysis

Understanding the network or system that these three actors are a part of is

paramount to contextualizing the soft power escalatory dilemma that is occurring.

Defined by Chad Whelan, a network is defined as,

> "a set of actors (or 'nodes') that are linked by various relationships (or
> 'ties'). Actors can be individuals, units within organisations, or
> organisations. Relationships can be personal relationships between
> individuals, functional relationships between units within an organisation
> or strategic relationships between organisations."[34]

Whelan says there are two structures of networks consisting of,

> "the hub network, each actor is tied to a central actor and all other actors
> must interact through that central actor. The all-channel network refers to a
> network in which each actor is tied to every other actor."[35]

Whelan then explains,

> "In the all-channel network, for example, information is shared between
> all actors and the adopted form of governance is likely to be shared. The
> hub network, in contrast, suggests that information and the task of internal
> network governance is coordinated through a central actor or broker."[36]

When an actor behaves as a broker, this creates a power dynamic between those actors

that are being connected by the broker, thus creating a hierarchy.[37] As brokers have a

unique position within a system, "Brokerage can generate connections that bring together

a wider variety of actors and inspire new ways to think about global issues."[38]

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[34] (Whelan 2012, 11)

[35] (Whelan 2012, 43)

[36] (Whelan 2012, 43)

[37] (Montgomery 2016, 22)

[38] (Avant 2016, 127)

Actors must have continual interactions with each other to keep strong ties. Lack of interaction can weaken ties, and hence weaken the overall relationship between actors. The landscape of global politics shifted considerably under the United States' Donald Trump administration from 2017 to 2021 as the country withdrew from global politics and the European Union saw much less of America on a global scale. Tension built as US officials discussed cutting funding to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO),[39] of which 22 of 27 EU member countries are signatories. Members of the European Union voiced concern over whether NATO should continue to rely on the United States to protect member states.[40] This strained relationship between the United States and the European Union created a sense of concern, leading to both actors facing an ontological security dilemma.[41] Jennifer Mitzen describes ontological security as,

> "the condition that obtains when an individual has confident expectations, even if probabilistic, about the means-ends relationships that govern her social life. Armed with ontological security, the individual will know how to act and therefore how to be herself."[42]

However, while being confident about stable relationships, Mitzen says that being open to change is an important part of security by not perceiving all uncertainty as a threat to an actor's core identity.[43]

When looking deeper into Network Theory, a Transgovernmental Network (TGN) has core characteristics consisting of: non-authoritative rule where there is not a specific

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[39] (Browne 2019)

[40] (Rose 2019)

[41] (Mitzen 2006, 347)

[42] (Mitzen 2006, 345)

[43] (Mitzen 2006, 344-345)

legal effect that comes from their formation such as an Memorandum Of Understanding

or MOU,[44] a lack of a formal hierarchy where heads of government or their proxies may

initiate the TGN but do not manage daily operations and instead rely on more localized or

specific government agencies or institutions,[45] and decentralization where,

> "formal IGOs [Intergovernmental Organizations] may centralize tasks
> such as information-gathering, decision-making, implementation, and
> monitoring of compliance, decision-making and implementation in TGNs
> is generally dispersed, with each participant enacting and enforcing
> agreements in accordance with domestic laws."[46]

Subsequently, when looking at a TGN as a network itself, Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni

says that, within a TGN, central nodes must be able to have a core access as this is

fundamental for many TGNs[47] Eilstrup-Sangiovanni also tells us that,

> "In addition to functional benefits of speed, flexibility, and expertise
> (which supposedly accrue to all organizational networks) a crucial
> advantage said to distinguish TGNs from treaty-based IGOs is reduced
> governance costs (i.e., costs of negotiating and implementing agreements).
> There are often high costs associated with negotiating and codifying
> international legal agreements and potentially delegating powers of
> dispute resolution and enforcement to IGOs."[48]

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni goes on to tell us that,

> "...although they build on agency-to-agency ties, it is reasonable to assume
> that executives effectively control the formation of TGNs and shape their
> activities. This suggests that transgovernmental cooperation is best viewed

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[44] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 137)

[45] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 137)

[46] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 137)

[47] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 141)

[48] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 143)

as an instance of de facto delegation whereby executives grant authority to lower level officials to pursue broad policy objectives."[49]

Eilstrup-Sangiovanni also tells us that, since TGNs are not institutionalized, central nodes or powerful actors within the TGN are, "relatively free to exploit their superior agenda-setting power and bargaining leverage to dictate policy,"[50] due to the lack of institutionalized equality among all participants in formal processes such as voting or decision-making. TGNs are implemented on the basis that Eilstrup-Sangiovanni suggests,

> "...that the reliance on TGNs allows regime Principals to reduce the costs of regime supply by varying the terms of cooperation offered to individual partners. Effectively, whereas IGOs are multilateral, TGNs are pluri-lateral insofar as they are based on multiple bilateral links (typically in the form of MOUs or joint declarations), which may differ in content."[51]

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[49] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 145)

[50] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 149)

[51] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 151)

Historical Contexts of China and the West

The historical contexts behind both the West and China cannot be overstated. The West has had a history of colonization in the Western hemisphere dating back to the 15th century.[52] China has had a history of being humiliated by Western actors from the 19th century onward, which had lasted a century itself and was labeled as the 'Century of Humiliation'.[53] The literature presents us with the viewpoint that Chinese elites view the 'Century of Humiliation' as a very instrumental point in their history that explains why China is not at the top of the system.[54] China can be seen to have the trauma that was incurred during this era serve as a foundational aspect of why China behaves the way it does in the global system.[55] Through this trauma, China had been forced to open to the West and fall from where it once reigned supreme amongst the states of the tributary system, which only propped China up as the leader of the region with no other actor being able to challenge it, leaving China with the key question of how never to allow this to happen again.[56]

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[52] (Uhl and Wolny 2019, 52)

[53] (Rafatjoo 2020, 75-76)

[54] (Kaufman 2010, 26-27)

[55] (Danner 2018, 22)

[56] (Danner 2018, 21)

China's answer to this question of never being humiliated on the global stage and forever maintaining its territorial sovereignty that was clearly violated[57] was to grow large and powerful enough so that it would not be able to be subjugated to the West's demands ever again. As China has continued to become a larger and larger economic powerhouse in the international system, we see that China has leveraged this to its advantage while fostering further ties with countries such as those in Africa that have also been victims of forced opening, economic suppression, and issues stemming from colonization that have been perpetrated within the Western-led international system.[58] This helpful hand from China was seen as more reliable than Western states, which had been largely problematic for the region as a whole, which then attempted to assert more control by pushing for their own systematic ideals of liberal democracy as the best chance for economic success.[59] China, instead, has attempted to provide an alternative version of the West's development model by presenting their own development model, dubbed by Joshua Cooper Ramo "The Beijing Consensus."[60] This model of development helps to create more ideological ties between the states practicing this model and China as Ramo also states that not only the "Beijing Consensus" but also the "Washington Consensus" contain ideological components and not just economic ideas.[61]

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[57] (Danner 2018, 21)

[58] (Mulhollan et al. 2008, 105)

[59] (Huang and The National Bureau of Asian Research 2013)

[60] (Ramo 2004, 3-4)

[61] (Ramo 2004, 5)

By China's outsourcing ideologies that are in direct competition with Western ideologies, the US and the EU view this as a threat as it had seen how countries and societies could be reshaped throughout their history of colonialism in which they were the perpetrators.[62] By demonstrating that it can integrate itself into other countries' economic models, China spawns a sense of fear in the US and the EU as primary power outlets are turning to soft power as a conventional military force becomes more costly for great powers than ever before.[63] This fear also stems from China's new gains in soft power in four key areas, which consist firstly of the Belt and Road Initiative, which has recently turned to more green infrastructure, where China helps to provide states with development assistance. Second, a more positive affinity for Chinese culture with the expansion of Confucian Institutes across the globe. Third, a newly formed effort of vaccine diplomacy has been witnessed throughout the Covid-19 pandemic. And fourth, Chinese interactions and lack of interactions with international institutions such as the United Nations and the Paris Club.

In regards to the US and EU seeing these new soft power gains as problematic and fear-inducing, there is a need to attempt to discredit China and position it as the evil actor in the system to either eliminate these soft gains that China has seen or attempt to acquire more soft gains for themselves. The attempts to discredit China and produce a show of hypocrisy will impact its overall legitimacy and undermine its soft power, which will subsequently lead to a decline in soft power.[64] If the US and EU wish to gain more

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[62] (Uhl and Wolny 2019, 25)

[63] (Nye Jr. 1990, 157-158)

[64] (Nye 2004, 14)

soft power than China, they may be able to do so by imitating key objectives such as the Belt and Road Initiative. The concept of a security dilemma comes into play here as not only has Washington and Brussels tried to imitate such a foreign policy by introducing two initiatives of their own. Additionally, the US and EU have tried to counter specific initiatives taken by Beijing which induces fear in the West as mentioned previously. The security dilemma discussed is causing an actor to try and gain even more power which leads to a vicious cycle that can be seen currently playing out between the West and China as China continues to rise. China is not competing with the US and EU in a purely militaristic fashion as we have seen in the traditional sense of great power competition, but rather China's source of power largely stems from economic and cultural features.[65] By accepting that China does possess hard power assets but has a vast amount of its power in the form of soft power, the US and EU also accept that China is a powerful actor in terms of soft power. The subsequent fear that stems from acknowledging an actor holding a large amount of power would lead to the security dilemma as a soft power nature which has not been traditionally noted as a valid security concern in national security debates nor security studies.

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[65] (Huang and The National Bureau of Asian Research 2013)

Global Infrastructure Initiatives and Soft Power Creation

The Belt and Road Initiative

China's global infrastructure initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative has been a talk of conversation around the world, where American officials claim the BRI is simply debt-trap diplomacy at work[66] and have tended to maintain this sentiment.[67] This is in contrast to the European Union, where the EU was originally hesitant when the BRI was labeled as a geopolitical tool for global dominance as well as it being an overall threat to Europe.[68] Over time, the view within the European Union has shaped into a different view where there are more positive viewpoints and sentiments being shared about the Belt and Road.[69] While the European Union has made advancements and not completely considered the BRI a debt-trap like the United States has continued to do, the EU has still managed to orchestrate an alternative to the Belt and Road. The European Union's initiative is called the Global Gateway, which is a nearly $340 billion planned venture

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[66] (Geraci 2020)

[67] (Biden 2021)

[68] (Skala-Kuhmann 2019, 147 & 155)

[69] (Skala-Kuhmann 2019, 147 & 155)

which plans to cover similar areas to the Belt and Road Initiative.[70] The United

States-led alternative to the BRI is labeled as the Build Back Better World (B3W)

Initiative, which is a joint effort between the G7.[71]

The Belt and Road Initiative can be seen as a reactive measure to aid in China's

rise for soft power so that it will not suffer being powerless again. Through the BRI,

China can gain soft power through economic incentivization and cultural exchanges

associated with foreign investment. This stems from workers and corporations in the area

of investment. as well as the overall policy that China is taking on to help bridge the gap

of necessary infrastructure assistance needed in developing states, which was nearly $3

trillion before the Covid-19 pandemic.[72] China is currently on its way to spend over $1

trillion on its initiative on its own without the help of other countries.[73] The Belt and

Road Initiative focuses on five different goals, which consist of "... policy coordination,

connectivity of infrastructure, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and closer

people-to-people ties as its main goals…"[74] With these main goals, China is better

positioned to acquire soft power as more and more countries join onto the initiative. The

BRI has also seen positive receptions in both the United Nations and even from the

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres, who specifically spoke on the five

goals from the BRI and the UN's Sustainable Development Goals by stating that

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[70] (Cooban 2021)

[71] (Biden 2021)

[72] (Cooban 2021)

[73] (Scull and Healy 2022)

[74] (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and Other International Organizations in Switzerland, n.d.)

"the world will benefit from a Belt and Road Initiative that accelerates
efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. The five pillars of
the Belt and Road – policy coordination, facilities connectivity,
unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people exchanges –
are intrinsically linked to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals."[75]

Through the Belt and Road, China has specifically targeted developing countries
to help better increase connectivity, especially seen through infrastructure. This can be
exemplified through various railway projects to integrate better Europe and Asia, roads to
better link varying parts of Asia, as well as being able to link together maritime ports,
whether that be through Chinese upgrades to ports or simply signing shipping agreements
with countries that have signed onto the Belt and Road.[76]

In addition to transportation infrastructure, China has also been heavily
cooperating with countries to help create more energy facilities.[77] Energy infrastructure
within the Belt and Road has changed throughout the timeline of the BRI. More
conventional energy infrastructure, such as coal power plants now, are no longer being
built abroad.[78] China even announced this new development at the most proper time to
help achieve the most soft power gains and positive public image possible. China has a
history of announcing initiatives at optimal times dating back to the time of Hu Jintao
talking about climate initiatives and climate change overall.[79] With China changing this

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[75] (Guterres and UN Press 2019)

[76] (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and Other
International Organizations in Switzerland, n.d.)

[77] (Permanent Mission of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations Office at Geneva and Other
International Organizations in Switzerland, n.d.)

[78] (Sengupta and Gladstone 2021)

[79] (Chen 2009, 240)

position, in part due to increasing pressure from global norms for China to evolve its environmental practices, the change helps to ensure China's favorability and image within the international system.[80] As China changes its foreign policies to be able to suit the international zeitgeist of modern times better, we see that this is in part to retain soft power because "If a sovereign state now evades its responsibility in this area, its soft power would be greatly reduced."[81] China had even gained soft power by being viewed as a "responsible power" when it came to issues such as climate change during the early parts of the Kyoto Protocol, whereas the United States had withdrawn from the agreement.[82] China as well as the United States had concluded from their experiences with the Kyoto Protocol that there is a clear need for maintaining legitimacy when it comes to these global issues like climate change.

Over time, the Belt and Road Initiative has evolved into more than simply just a traditional infrastructure initiative. China has continued to utilize education as a point of soft power, and this hits on the aspect of the "people-to-people ties."[83] With China attempting to utilize education as a soft power enabler, it is important to note that this strategy is currently both helpful and hindering as mixed results come from foreign students studying in China as some students enjoy their experience and others face negative experiences throughout their education.[84] While there are some soft power

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[80] (Chen 2009, 234)

[81] (Chen 2009, 234)

[82] (Chen 2009, 233)

[83] (Repnikova 2022, 32)

[84] (Repnikova 2022, 35)

losses due to these negative experiences, the fact remains that China is attempting to accrue soft power through this tool. The Belt and Road also touches on healthcare with the "Health Silk Road," which will also be referred to later in this essay.[85] It is clear to see that the Belt and Road, once only envisioned as an infrastructure initiative, has moved into sectors that span across multiple facets of life, whether that be education, healthcare, or even the digital space, as China continues to move forward with a "Digital Silk Road" as well.[86]

The Global Gateway Strategy

The European Union's global infrastructure and development initiative, the Global Gateway, is said to be a $340 billion project that can rival the Belt and Road.[87] Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, had said that the Global Gateway is a new option that will be able to serve as a substitute for the Belt and Road.[88] The five investment priorities within the Global Gateway consist of transport, digital, health, climate and energy, and education and research.[89] The European Union aims to have this initiative serve not only as an alternative to the Belt and Road but as a direct competitor. This direct competition can be seen by the Global Gateway touching on the exact core methods of the Belt and Road, where there are direct links between the

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[85] (Jakovljevic et al. 2021, 6)

[86] (Malena 2021)

[87] (Cooban 2021)

[88] (Cooban 2021)

[89] (European Union 2021)

infrastructure initiatives of both projects. Whether that is through the transportation or energy sectors, the education initiatives in the healthcare sector, or even the digital sector.

Global Gateway does focus on six key guiding principles, which consist of promoting democratic values and high standards, equal partnerships, security-focused, good governance and transparency, green and clean infrastructures, and catalyzing private sector investment.[90] The European Union's strategy is to spread more power by claiming a moral high ground by speaking about the high standards that they wish to spread throughout the world.[91] Both Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, as well as Josep Borrell, High Representative and Vice-President of the European Commission, have spoken about "level-playing fields"[92] As the European Union continues to be a large player when it comes to soft power, it is important to continue on with initiatives that will enable it to solve global problems and be a positive force in the international system.[93] As Europe has traditionally been a large contributor to public goods in the international system, it sees an extreme need to continue with this historical tradition of providing foreign assistance and public goods to the world.[94] China is now perceived as eating into the EU's soft power by becoming a larger player in the realm of foreign assistance through the Belt and Road Initiative. The EU can be seen siding with the United States in the European Commission's press release, saying that

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[90] (European Union 2021)

[91] (European Union 2021)

[92] (European Commission 2021)

[93] (Nye 2004, 78)

[94] (Nye 2004, 80)

"Global Gateway and the US initiative Build Back Better World will mutually reinforce each other."[95]

The Build Back Better World Initiative

The United States-led response, Build Back Better World, is not only an initiative of the United States but of the Group of Seven (G7) in which the US is simply spearheading the overall initiative. The initiative is aimed at helping to bridge the growing infrastructure gap between developed and developing countries which is said to be around $40 trillion.[96] The White House says that it, "... will collectively catalyze hundreds of billions of dollars of infrastructure investment for low- and middle-income countries in the coming years."[97] The B3W initiative focuses on four main areas, which are: "climate, health and health security, digital tech, gender equity/equality".[98] Touching on very similar cornerstones of the evolved Belt and Road, it is clear to see that this is also meant as an alternative to the BRI. While this initiative has been presented and is being led by the United States, there has been a lack of follow-through, with very limited information coming out so far about the G3W. This initiative has not been implemented as quickly as the Global Gateway, which does limit its reactiveness to the Belt and Road.

The B3W is meant to be a global initiative that will span globally, just as the BRI and the Global Gateway are either doing or attempting to do. This initiative will

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[95] (European Commission 2021)

[96] (White House 2021)

[97] (White House 2021)

[98] (Scull and Healy 2022)

specifically work with low- and middle-income countries, as previously mentioned.[99]

President Biden does not directly mention China but does say that "... we [talking about

the EU, the UK, and the US] offer positive alternatives to debt – to debt traps and

corruption."[100] The President also mentions that through this initiative, the partners will

hopefully show the world that democracy is, " … the best way for delivering results."[101]

While this initiative has been stalled, it is important to include this as another response

from the West to accrue soft power and be able to limit China's ability to be the main

competitor in this arena even if this remains rhetorical.

Comparing Global Infrastructure Initiatives

It is clear to see that throughout these three initiatives there is very evident

competition for countries to choose each initiative as their preferred partner. With each

initiative focusing on very specific sectors that consistently overlap one another, it is

obvious that the Global Gateway and the Build Back Better World Initiative were created

to match up against the Belt and Road Initiative. This is especially true when

accompanied by rhetoric from the European Union and the United States casting disdain

on China and the BRI. Whether it is the President of the United States or the President of

the European Commission, talking negatively about China's initiative to have more actors

in the international system side with their individual initiatives is a clear presence of

escalation. Escalation occurs as the US and the EU continuously try to assert a higher

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[99] (White House 2021)

[100] (White House 2021)

[101] (White House 2021)

moral authority through said initiatives by attempting to shape other actors' preferences, which is a key premise of soft power.[102] Paired with the specific sectors that each initiative is working in, it would be hard to say there is no relation between the three initiatives. Escalation is especially evident when the President of the United States is directly referring to 'debt-traps' while the Belt and Road Initiative has been directly referred to as a 'debt-trap' by American officials such as Vice-President Mike Pence in the past.[103]

While this quest for soft power has emerged, it has created an escalatory dilemma: each actor must take on extremely large soft power initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative, the Global Gateway, or the Build Back Better World. It is clearly seen from all parties that energy infrastructure projects are not enough anymore. Now, these projects must be seen as sustainable to accrue a similar amount of soft power as before since international norms have shifted to view sustainable energy as a must-have expense rather than a costly luxury. This new take on ensuring that there is the sustainable or green infrastructure is important to see that while China has evolved in its approach, the EU and the United States have learned from the Belt and Road's past and are now able to more readily implement similar policies as they will require less cost overall as they do not require an updated strategy. As was seen with the United States' withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, there was a drop in soft power for the United States. The drop in soft power for the US resulted in the loss of credibility and influence in international organizations and governing authorities when it comes to issues of climate change and

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[102] (Nye 2004, 5)

[103] (Widakuswara and Powell 2021)

global warming.[104] The same can be seen with the United States withdrew from the Paris

Climate Accords where one set of experts went as far as to say that,

> "The U.S. is far from invincible on the international stage, and it will only
> become more vulnerable to geopolitical instability if we proceed to
> alienate the rest of the world by refusing to follow through on our
> commitments in Paris."[105]

As the United States continues to grapple with its own lack of follow through on

commitments, the Build Back Better World initiative allows for what essentially would

amount to a 'redo.' The US could potentially gain more soft power than it had previously

forfeited in favor of maintaining more individual freedom in the policy. The United States

views the B3W not only as a possible source of soft power but also views the initiative as

a way to compete with China in a more traditional sense. The US would create more ties

with the developing world so it could accrue more soft power than it previously had,

especially in the realm of climate change and global warming. Traditionally the US has

recognized that it will suffer from a loss of soft power if it is not actively engaging with

the topic of climate change. To combat this, the US has been part of the Asia-Pacific

Partnership on Clean Development and Climate (AP6) which has helped to shield itself

from some liability of not going as far as others would wish regarding climate policy.[106]

The AP6 has also been said to simply serve as a positive public relations campaign by

some observers, which negatively impacts the image of the countries participating,

namely China and the United States, so they must go a step further to show action on the

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[104] (Chen 2009, 233)

[105] (Robert and Jones 2017)

[106] (Chen 2009, 237)

issue.[107] With this ongoing pressure to act on intention, the United States can actualize this rhetoric in implementing the B3W.

Regarding the European Union, the stance on climate initiatives could not be more contrasting to the United States. The European Union is currently leading the world as a bloc regarding climate initiatives and policy, whether through generating the most renewable energy per person globally or by using finances generated from a carbon emissions trading system to finance more sustainable development technologies.[108] The European Union does not require accruing soft power when it comes to sustainable initiatives like the United States is. This lack of necessity is due to European countries ranking among the top of the "world's greenest countries," with 9 out of 10 countries being European.[109] Instead, the EU must maintain its position as a leading actor in the world of sustainability. As the leader of this policy realm, the EU holds a distinct advantage where it can lead in a credible and legitimate fashion. This leadership will, in turn, cause other states to view it as a leading power and then be able to assert more power and control in international organizations. As Chen states, "Participation in international institutions is an important indicator of a state's soft power because it provides the arena for a state to use its power…"[110] With the EU leading the global stage in climate policy, even going as far as the latest round of global action being named after

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[107] (Chen 2009, 237)

[108] ("Taking the lead on climate change" 2021)

[109] (McClelland 2023)

[110] (Chen 2009, 227)

an EU member's capital city, it is evident that there is an advantage to being the leader in the issue area.

Is there soft power being created from global Infrastructure initiatives?

If there were truly no sources of power perceived to be stemming from these initiatives, there would neither be replication nor attempts made to downgrade or damage the reputation of others' initiatives. As stated before, the United States has repeatedly either made reference to or directly said that China engages in "debt-trap diplomacy" through the Belt and Road initiative.[111] This effort to delegitimize the Belt and Road shows that there is a fear of the Belt and Road within the United States, which in turn creates a need for a reaction against the initiative. The reaction is that the US has come up with an entirely new alternative to the Belt and Road with the B3W.

It is also observed that there is a correlation between states severing legitimate diplomatic ties with Taiwan and then joining the Belt and Road Initiative shortly after cutting off said diplomatic relationship. Thomas J. Shattuck states that while most nations recognize China and not Taiwan, a few actors, including the Holy See, are still holding out.[112] This study discusses how China relies on "carrots" and "sticks" but prefers the overall method of utilizing carrots. One would assume that this is due to the inherent nature of using sticks over carrots, leading to less soft power for the actor using said sticks. However, studies such as the study conducted by Blair, Marty, and Roessler have

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[111] (Widakuswara and Powell 2021)

[112] (Shattuck 2020, 334-335)

found that there is "... little or no evidence that Chinese aid enhances Chinese soft power in Africa, diminishes American soft power, increases ideological alignment with China or decreases ideological alignment with the United States."[113] The study continues by saying that the US, however, does see gains in these previously mentioned areas of soft power and ideological alignment.[114] China does not necessarily see the soft power gains that both the United States and Europe perceive to be coming from the Belt and Road. As the EU and the US are moving on to create their own global infrastructure initiatives, this could be determined to be, as previously mentioned, a soft power escalatory dilemma.

One of the points stemming from the infrastructure debate specifically that does make the case for soft power coming from infrastructure initiatives is that if actors are no longer in need of additional aid for infrastructure due to it already having been provided by other actors, then the soft power gains for providing more infrastructure aid would either be much lower than before when the state was in need or will be extremely meager as compared to before. With this avenue for accruing soft power essentially being suppressed until the need for additional infrastructure arises, actors must attempt to reach any and all actors so that they can be the preferred partner assisting in infrastructure development. This need to cast a wide net for modest returns of potential soft power if the initiatives are conducted correctly and perceived positively by recipients can help show us why these infrastructure initiatives are global.

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[113] (Blair, Marty, and Roessler 2021, 1371)

[114] (Blair, Marty, and Roessler 2021, 1371)

With the quest to gain more allies through these global infrastructure initiatives, it

will be helpful to look at an excerpt from Yan Xuetong's book, *Leadership and the Rise*

of Great Powers, stating that,

> "When the coalitions headed by the rising state overwhelm those led by the dominant state in terms of capability, the dominant state will have no other choice but to relinquish its pole position to the rising state. Consequently, the dominant state can constrain the rising state from expanding international support by making more allies, thereby consolidating the alliance it heads."[115]

Utilizing this conceptualization of needing more allies to either help an actor rise or aid in

an actor restricting another from rising, a soft power escalatory dilemma can be seen

within the infrastructure debate between China and the EU, and the US as they both aim

to compile more soft power through more actors supporting and aligning with them and

joining onto specific initiatives.

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[115] (Xuetong 2019, 41)

Health Diplomacy

Healthcare diplomacy is not a new method of accruing soft power but is even more salient in a mid- to post-pandemic world as global leaders have come to the realization that even with modern medical advancements, global pandemics still exist and will continue to exist for the foreseeable future. Specifically within healthcare diplomacy has arisen the conceptualization of vaccine diplomacy, which Peter Hotez says

> "... refers to almost any aspect of global health diplomacy that relies on the use or delivery of vaccines and encompasses the important work of the GAVI Alliance, as well as elements of the WHO, the Gates Foundation, and other important international organizations."[116]

In another article, Hotez refers to vaccine diplomacy as having died down in the late 20th century from the United States.[117] Throughout the pandemic, vaccine diplomacy has continued to rise as states recognize that there is room for soft power gains to be made as they help the world transition to a path of recovery.[118]

The United States came to be the first actor that had successfully created a vaccine for Covid-19, which had then been authorized for emergency use by the Food and Drug Administration on December 11th, 2020.[119] While the United States had

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[116] (Hotez 2014, 2)

[117] (Hotez 2001, 867)

[118] (Aspinall 2021)

[119] (Mango 2021)

created this first vaccine to solve the global health crisis of Covid-19, it hoarded its vaccines to the point of millions of vaccines being discarded as they had expired or been spoiled from storage issues.[120] This waste of vaccines and overall "America First" attitude towards vaccines and healthcare products directly related to the pandemic that was in short supply throughout the world allowed China to step in and fill the central gap where the US traditionally would have been situated. With China entering the pandemic era of vaccine diplomacy, frantic actors attempting to secure vaccines for their citizens turned to China. China would ultimately frame this as an opportunity to receive concessions, such as actors no longer diplomatically recognizing Taiwan or allowing Chinese companies such as Huawei to do business inside their borders.[121] The lack of vaccine diplomacy by the United States had helped to serve as a gap where China could gain concessions and soft power for years to come as it served as a responsible actor within the global system.

China was also seen catering more to countries that were situated along major BRI routes throughout the pandemic with more healthcare supplies, including vaccines.[122] China had already been working on the "Health Silk Road," a sector of the overall Belt and Road Initiative, since 2016. This aspect of the overall initiative received more attention as it had already constructed the "world's largest basic medical security network" and had been building healthcare infrastructure which was only accelerated by

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[120] (Eaton 2022)

[121] (Locke, Iancu, and Kappos 2021)

[122] (Jakovljevic et al. 2021, 5-6)

the Covid-19 global health crisis.[123] While there have been mixed results stemming from China's health diplomacy, some nations have clearly taken on an appreciative stance toward China in this sector. One actor that had taken on this appreciative stance toward China was Serbia, where the Serbian President had even been noted as having kissed the Chinese flag.[124] Throughout the pandemic, China has produced, at the very least, some positive perceptions and soft power gains as it continues to fill in the gap left by Western actors throughout a global health crisis. China has continued to fulfill its obligations of delivering vaccines to countries that otherwise may not be able to afford or create them independently. By engaging with these countries, China has gained strategic credibility and would be viewed more positively than a state that has either not fulfilled its commitments or had taken a longer time in creating a response and instead followed China's leadership in vaccine distribution and donations.[125] Governments within the Middle East and North African (MENA) regions can be seen reacting positively to China's Covid-19 diplomacy even if there were small outbursts of anti-Chinese sentiments from isolated communities within a small number of MENA states.[126]

　　With a clear positive perception from even some countries, it would be reasonable to deduce that the United States and the European Union would view this positive affinity as more soft power gains from China. This can be exemplified as true with the renewed commitments to healthcare infrastructure and vaccines that can be seen in both the B3W
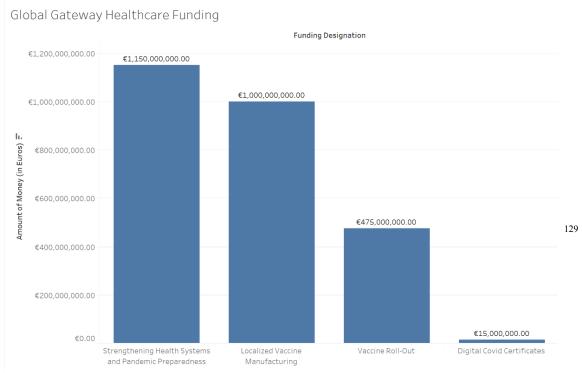
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[123] (Jakovljevic et al. 2021, 6)

[124] (Mardell 2020)

[125] (Zoubir and Tran 2021, 337)

[126] (Zoubir and Tran 2021, 346)

initiative and the Global Gateway. Specifically with the Global Gateway, the European

Union mentions supply chains for the health sector and local vaccine production.[127] One

of the first large-scale projects from the Global Gateway is being seen in Africa with the

Global Gateway Africa - Europe Investment Package that ultimately contains €150

billion in investments and specifically touches on helping to increase vaccination

coverage as well as focusing on regional manufacturing capacities to strengthen the

continent's pharmaceutical system.[128]

Figure 1 contains specific amounts of funding within the Global Gateway that are earmarked within the
   EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package. This information is cited from the European
   Commission Fact Sheet entitled "EU-Africa: Global Gateway Investment Package | European
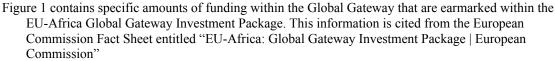   Commission"

Figure 1: Global Gateway Healthcare Funding

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[127] (European Union 2021)

[128] (European Commission 2022)

[129] (European Commission 2022)

Figures for highlighted specific health initiatives across the continent of Africa amount to €2.65 billion with at least €1.15 billion to help ensure better access to quality healthcare infrastructure and services, as well as €60 million earmarked for sexual and reproductive health and rights across the continent.[130] It is apparent that while the EU has traditionally been a large proponent of development and specifically health infrastructure-related initiatives, it has even more of a reason to up its contributions in pandemic-related areas such as vaccines. This can be seen as €1.44 billion going towards the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package focusing on health, helping to achieve the African Union's goal of manufacturing 60% of vaccines used on the continent locally.[131]

When it comes to the US-led B3W initiative, the White House stated that one of the four areas of focus for mobilizing private-sector capital will be health and health security.[132] The B3W does intend to focus on vaccine distribution as well which differs from China's original conceptualization of the Belt and Road.[133] It is similar to the new conceptualization of the Health Silk Road component of the BRI. As the B3W has continuously faced setbacks and has not yet been officially launched with specific details, it remains to be seen how effective it will truly be in the arena of health diplomacy. We have, however, seen that the Biden-Harris administration had endorsed the idea of

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[130] (European Commission 2022)

[131] (European Commission 2022)

[132] (White House 2021)

[133] (Scull and Healy 2022)

temporarily waiving intellectual property rights for Covid-19 vaccinations.[134] Under this

direction, the US could potentially still aid other countries in their quests for vaccines and

help to alleviate the inherent capital risks that come along with vaccine development

without providing additional funding for vaccine distribution campaigns or

manufacturing facilities in countries abroad, seeing as the United States has better

vaccine capabilities than China does which in the case of Covid-19 was developing more

effective vaccines.[135] As there had been a clear desire for more support in developing

countries with no access to vaccines from any and all actors for more health supplies and

vaccines, the United States and the Western world, in general, had not been able to satisfy

this demand, especially as supplies of vaccines either expired or were slowly being

supplied to countries in need.[136]

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[134] (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2021)

[135] (Locke, Iancu, and Kappos 2021)

[136] (Aspinall 2021)

International Institutions

While international organizations (IOs) and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) have always been around in modern times, this was not always the case. The world's first intergovernmental organization, the Congress of Vienna, was held from 1814-1815 and led the way for other institutions, such as the International Telegraph Union or the Universal Postal Union, which then gave way to the formation of The League of Nations and ultimately the United Nations as we know today.[137] Studying IGOs through theoretical viewpoints is important to help show how actors may view others' participation in said IGOs. Examining IGOs through a realist lens, a hegemon would lead the world through various IGOs of its own creation which others would benefit from and go along with new norms, precedents, values, and overall ideologies to continue receiving aforementioned benefits.[138] When looking at the construction of IGOs through a liberal lens, liberals stress the importance of cutting overall costs to any specific actor since costs will inherently be lower to individual actors as more actors join the organization and help bear the costs associated with whatever the IGO is expending resources on.[139] Marxists view IGOs and specifically development as being gate-kept by

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[137] (Reinalda 2014)

[138] (Pease 2019, 56)

[139] (Pease 2019, 68)

the ruling class of actors as they control the system and benefit from a repressed class of developing countries.[140] Lastly, constructivists would argue that understanding an actor's ideas, beliefs, and identities is of the utmost importance and then looking at how these ideas, beliefs, and identities are influenced by IGOs and the actors within them as well as norms and values that are perpetuated by these IGOs into the global system.[141]

China being the first actor to come out with such a grand development initiative, can be viewed as the catalyst for states truly fearing China. The rise of China in the economic space had already been seen as a contentious fight for power between the Western-led economic order. With wealth being extremely important to be able to build a more powerful military in addition to a large population,[142] China rising in economic status is a fear that would inevitably agitate great powers or instill fear in them. As China continues to engage other actors and bring them into its economic orbit, this presents itself as a power struggle that may allow China to overpower current international norms and values to shift the system in its favor. With China already growing in power and taking on more leadership positions in international institutions and completely ignoring others in favor of their own systems and institutions, the West views this as a threat to their overall security as this allows China to hold more influence over these institutions and the norms and values that are part of them.

Specifically, looking at the United Nations, we can pinpoint where China is taking on more leadership roles within the institution and its many branches of committees and

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[140] (Pease 2019, 82)

[141] (Pease 2019, 100-103)

[142] (Mearsheimer 2014, 61)

specialized agencies. Starting with Hu Jintao shifting Chinese foreign policy to engage

more heavily with the United Nations, there have been more and more leadership

positions throughout the institution being held by Chinese diplomats.[143] As China has

continued this trend of asserting more influence over the United Nations, it has done so

by continuing to appoint Chinese diplomats to head specialized agencies, China has also

raised its contributions to the UN's budget as well.[144] China has utilized these positions

and contributions to also move its own global infrastructure development initiative into a

more positive light by aligning the BRI with the Sustainable Development Goals put

forward by the UN.[145] Throughout this new rise in leadership, China has gained

significant power over the direction of the UN which was previously unable to achieve.

With this new power, China aims to create new norms and values.[146] This would, in turn,

increase China's own soft power as it continues to abide by these norms that it has set up

and becomes more legitimized as other states engage with and start to practice these new

norms and values themselves.

As China continues to finance the United Nations budget and help create more

norms and values that go along with its own ideology and global interests, this is carried

on by financing the system so that it can wield power within the institution. For example,

we can use the World Bank to essentially showcase the potential to buy influence among

United Nations organizations. The United States holds the single largest number of votes

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[143] (Coutaz 2021, 8)

[144] (Cheng-Chia and Yang 2020)

[145] (Cheng-Chia and Yang 2020)

[146] (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.)

which is then followed by Japan, China, Germany, the United Kingdom, and France, which are all large contributors to the organization.[147] Seeing as how four out of the six top contributors to the World Bank are Western actors and Japan holds strong alliances with the United States, these states see that financing does buy influence within the global system. When China had eliminated a large amount of debt owed by the government of Cameroon and the Cameroonian nominated candidate for the director-general of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN withdrew his bid, a Chinese diplomat ultimately took up the position.[148] With this very clear leveraging of finance serving as a component of influence within the United Nations, China has helped Western actors actualize their fears of China attempting to become a node that possesses centrality. These fears have gone to the point that the EU and the US must now intervene or view this direct threat to soft power as aggressive and dangerous.

Just as China's engagement with international institutions has raised concern from Western actors, China's lack of engagement with international institutions has also led to fear and worry from Western actors. As the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines the term, "The Paris Club is a forum of official creditors for negotiating debt restructuring. It is an informal intergovernmental group convened to renegotiate debts to official creditors."[149] As this institution is comprised of democracies with market-based economies,[150] China is not included but does work with the institution

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[147] (Shalin 2022)

[148] (Cheng-Chia and Yang 2020)

[149] (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2005)

[150] (U.S. Department of State, n.d.)

at times.[151] With China not being directly involved with the Paris Club, this means that debt-restructuring would be done in a more bilateral manner, especially when there are strict non-disclosure agreements and "No Paris Club clauses" in place within contracts for BRI projects per Chairman Himes referencing the paper by Gelpern, Horn, Morris, Parks, and Trebesch.[152] In the study conducted by Gelpern et al., China had utilized "No Paris Club" clauses which bar countries that are lending from China to take their debt elsewhere to be renegotiated for them.[153] As this type of clause would commit the actor to China in the case of needing to restructure debt, the clause allows China to dictate further the terms of any future debt restructuring, which threatens other actors' places in the global economic hierarchy. This clear aversion to the Paris Club is often utilized in the "Debt Trap" argument against the Belt and Road Initiative that has been touched on earlier as a ploy to decrease China's soft power.

The fear of not being involved in debt restructuring as they often have been has created a sense of fear from Western actors as they are no longer able to exert the same amount of power on the global economic order as they had previously done. The lack of ability to exert power over the global economic order ultimately costs more power, and specifically soft power, when these developed countries are unable to use their economic status to help developing countries. As this source of power dissipates from the international system, China steps in to take on the role of financier and also as the

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[151] (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2022)

[152] (Subcommittee on National Security, International Development and Monetary Policy of the Committee on Financial Services U.S. House of Representatives One Hundred Seventeenth Congress and Himes 2021, 5) and (Gelpern et al. 2021)

[153] (Gelpern et al. 2021)

debt-restructurer if the opportunities call for it. By assuming both of these positions, this allows China to hold not only a source of economic and hard power but also another source of soft power in the eyes of the EU and the US. This new identity of China may be viewed by constructivists as a place of power where China is becoming more and more of a legitimate actor within the global system who follows through on commitments to help restructure debt when it is necessary. This can be seen with China using mechanisms normally utilized by Paris Club members. By utilizing the Paris Club countries can be offered better terms for debt restructuring than otherwise available, and this can be seen in the case of Kenya and the Standard Gauge Railway project which was a BRI project.[154] The case of Kenya restructuring their debt had been due to struggling to repay debts for projects that had included the Standard Gauge Railway project and had gone to the Paris Club to receive debt restructuring where they had negotiated for 6 months of a debt suspension for $300 million USD but when negotiating with China a week prior, Kenya had negotiated for the same terms but for $245 million USD.[155] Even while receiving criticisms of behaving in a predatory fashion when it comes to lending, China instead places conditionality on loans and utilizes collateralized loans[156] just as private Western institutions also utilize or even public institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, which requires specific austerity measures and policy conditions to lend any finances.[157]

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[154] (Devonshire-Ellis 2021)

[155] (Devonshire-Ellis 2021)

[156] (Rieffel 2021)

[157] (International Monetary Fund 2021)

Analysis

       Acknowledging that the network and global system have evolved, we can examine how the actors in the network are actively perceiving and responding to these changes. By creating a new norm, i.e., China becoming a central actor within certain networks, China has become an impactful actor within the system. Actors will feel insecure, triggering a soft power escalatory dilemma. The United States and the European Union will attempt to reach a greater sense of security by escalating soft power competition between themselves and China. This comes first in the form of creating rival global infrastructure initiatives, second by attempting to reduce the credibility of China that it has accrued through varying initiatives such as healthcare diplomacy, and third by attempting to gain more leadership positions within international organizations in order to hold more power over the entire system. As the United States and the European Union have attempted to gain power back within the international system, China has only become more entrenched in feeling that it must compete to even greater lengths to be an equal and acquire advantage within the network.

       When there is an attempted shift in power dynamics within the network, it creates a feeling of insecurity from other actors, prompting a response. As nodes and their ties shift within the network, actors must find a way to feel secure in their new positions within the network. This will traditionally come from strengthened ties to create more

positive norms that will help to reinforce an actor's sense of self and subsequent security.

China is attempting to create a new sense of security for itself through a strengthened

network of ties, as it has seen the United States and the European Union do for centuries.

China recognizes that it must create and maintain its network to not repeat the 'Century

of Humiliation' it had endured which was categorized by invasion and negative cultural

impacts.

Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China has created a position for itself within

the global system to serve as a broker and central node within a network, as "Connecting

actors with different viewpoints via brokerage creates a different dynamic."[158] China can

create a different dynamic within the global system by being able to connect actors,

which elicits fear and insecurity within the United States and the European Union. This

fear from the US and EU stems from a lack of routine in the social network that would

help to ensure a sense of ontological security.[159] By building on this network that it has

cultivated, China now has the ability to position itself as a central actor or node within the

system. Since China has created a hierarchy within this self-made network, it must be

paired with a reputation of responsibility so that other actors within the network feel

comfortable and not threatened by its centrality. China cements this reputation of being a

responsible actor by engaging in vaccine diplomacy, where China appears to be

conducting a policy based on the common good and the desire to be a legitimate and

responsible actor within the system. As infrastructure could be viewed by others as

ultimately benefiting China so that it may accrue more material resources and expand its

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[158] (Avant 2016, 127)

[159] (Mitzen 2006, 348)

economy further, vaccine diplomacy by China regarding the Covid-19 pandemic was seen to be an act of service from the Chinese government because the vaccines were very accessible for countries well before Western vaccines.[160] China uses this new reputation to help maintain the structure as networks do not have a formal hierarchy and "... are strictly self-enforcing governance structures disciplined mainly by reputation and norms of reciprocity."[161]

Since the Belt and Road Initiative meets the core characteristics of a TGN, security concerns stem from the presence of a TGN in which neither the United States nor the European Union are not the central actor. As the United States and the European Union each hold core policy stances regarding issues that involve China, such as Taiwan, a TGN may serve as a diplomatic threat to these policy stances. Taiwan remains a key policy issue for China and is able to utilize the TGN of the BRI to its advantage seeing as how,

> "By confining cooperation to a small "coalition of the willing," "insiders" may be able to set benchmarks for cooperation that "outsiders" are subsequently compelled to observe … In this way, initially excluded states may find that network externalities compel them to accept cooperative standards that they would not have willingly contracted into as parties to formal multilateral negotiations."[162]

China draws additional actors into the BRI with the promise of economic benefits to new member countries. China capitalizes on these network externalities by requiring that potential new members recognize Taiwan as a Chinese territory rather than a sovereign

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[160] (Suzuki and Yang 2022, 8-9)

[161] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 136)

[162] (Eilstrup-Sangiovanni 2016, 153)

nation-state for a benchmark to be accepted into the BRI. This is a key incentive for China to continue on with the BRI and to ensure its centrality within the network itself. China is able to continue capitalizing on strong ties formed through the BRI and vaccine diplomacy to then propel itself, with the help of others, into leadership positions within international organizations such as the United Nations. By securing these leadership positions in large multilateral institutions such as the UN, China can potentially shift norms by engaging in agenda-setting. As China continues to cement its position of centrality within the global system primarily through the BRI network, the United States and the European Union have continually grown more concerned about their own centrality.

Through securing leadership positions in global institutions and imposing conditions that must be met to join the BRI, China shifts norms within the network. This norm shift instills a sense of insecurity within the United States and the European Union based on the system's changing routines and normative understandings. While this is non-violent and non-kinetic, the insecurity felt by the United States and the European Union is met by a desire to feel more secure and create a routine and norms they are comfortable with. The United States and the European Union have previously enjoyed being either the central node of the system or close second to one another. By attempting to create their own infrastructure initiatives, the two actors are seen as escalating rivalry against China within the soft power escalatory dilemma in order to compete with China and ensure a sense of security for themselves.

The escalation of the power competition between the United States, European Union, and China signals a unique shift in power competition between powerful actors that is not able to be summed up as simply global competition. In centuries prior, there was the desire to be a central node, but this was done through force and would now be perceived as a negative interaction that would harm ties with others. The new emphasis on gaining a strong and positive network of connections formed through positive interactions and trust is something that has not been prevalent within the global system until recently. Globalization has created an incentive-based system that favors positive relations between one another rather than brute strength and the ability to invade. Strong ties become a large reason to engage in relation-building with one another so that actors can remain within the system's center and not move to the outskirts or outside of the system altogether. These strong relationships help to keep central nodes in their powerful location by allowing them to enact norms that will ultimately benefit themselves and ensure their centrality within the network.

More nodes are added to a network when new relationships are formed and subsequently form new ties as well dependent on relationships between nodes. As China expanded its Belt and Road Initiative it interacted with new actors on a large-scale, resulting in China's growth of new ties and additional nodes within the global system. China could not do this previously due to the subdued nature of its foreign policy under leaders prior to Xi Jinping. Once the Belt and Road Initiative was well underway, the United States and the European Union saw China as a formidable competitor in foreign policy and diplomacy. While this does not create a physical security concern, concerns

regarding diplomacy and potentially forming new relationships with other actors are plausible. As the United States and the European Union have traditionally been central nodes or brokers in the past, the addition of China as a third party has created a sense of insecurity – the routine has been broken. To recreate the routine and decrease this feeling of insecurity, the European Union and the United States created foreign policy to limit the newcomer.

As the United States and European Union continue to attempt to rival China for strong and positive relations with other actors in the network, there will be a continuation of escalation. This may manifest itself in the future through more educational concerns, reputational slandering, or even through cultural deterioration by utilizing gray-zone tactics and disinformation campaigns. By requiring a positive perception by other actors to receive centrality within a system, a central node will prioritize positive interactions with other nodes in the system in order to better their own image. As a node elevates to a higher image in the hearts and minds of other nodes, it can then enjoy the benefits that come along with being a central node.

Alternative Explanations

As with any study, limitations exist, and this is no different. The main limitation of this study, in particular, would be the lack of literature as this study does aim to define a concept that has not been discussed or acknowledged prior or, if it was acknowledged, not within this capacity. As was discussed within the literature review portion of this study, Linus Hagström had eluded to a security dilemma stemming from Chinese and Japanese soft power campaigns that ultimately produce a security dilemma concerning hard power as the soft power campaigns within each state have essentially spilled over and pushed each state to utilize hard power assets against one another. This conceptualization of soft power campaigns leading to security dilemmas of hard power nature does not align with this study's perception or creation of the concept of a soft power escalatory dilemma for this reason, as was discussed in the creation of definitions for a security dilemma and a soft power escalatory dilemma in the introduction section. This lack of study within the specific area limits the study in the attempt to prove an ongoing soft power escalatory dilemma, as the concept has never been defined or noted to date.

The next limitation of the study is trying to be able to quantify soft power and measure soft power relating to specific initiatives or policies. Some scholars, such as

Irene Wu, say that soft power can be measured,[163] while others, such as Margaret Seymour, say that while there is some quantitative data that can help measure soft power, "Ultimately, the qualitative nature of foreign relations negates a clean quantitative approach to measuring performance or effectiveness."[164] With there not even being an agreeable concept of how to measure soft power, any quantitative measurements of soft power may be considered erroneous. With this limitation, this study cannot conclude specific soft power gains that may be made across specific initiatives. This limitation of attempting to quantify soft power presents a unique limitation and ultimately calls for further study into a potential solution for how to adequately measure soft power and find a measure that is accepted by the vast majority in the field.

The third major limitation of this study is that the concept of a soft power escalatory dilemma may be somewhat restricted to great powers. This restriction of soft power to some of the most powerful actors in the system comes from the understanding that soft power initiatives tend to be costly. While we see extremely poor developing countries such as North Korea able to develop nuclear weapons to compete within a security dilemma, a soft power escalatory dilemma would tend to be much more expensive to compete in, not only due to the actual cost of the initiative but also with domestic constraints of populations. If a country is struggling to provide for its citizens at home, it will already be unlikely to afford soft power initiatives, and if it did attempt to do so, this would likely lead to extreme backlash from its domestic population as the country's own citizens' needs are not being met. This will also be a limiting factor in

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[163] (Wu, n.d.)

[164] (Seymour 2020)

regards to countries that are struggling and will likely be less poised to even consider soft power initiatives since it could be expected that they would be focused on the immediate issues pressing the country internally before it can worry about external issues. This limitation calls for further study to examine how and if smaller actors engage with soft power and if they create their own soft power initiatives and policies.

Conclusion

When looking at both China's and the West's history, it is imperative to remember that historical context is important in determining modern viewpoints of not only the global system but the other actors within the system. China had not only gone through an excruciatingly shameful era in which it is determined never to repeat, but it had also gone through a period of mourning over how great it once was and acknowledged that it had been brought down by the West. As China has grown, it has aspired never to be forced down to endure another century of humiliation again. On the contrary, the West had historically suppressed other actors within the international system. As the United States and Europe have advanced and maintained their dominance within the international system, they are fearful of what would ever happen if it were to be suppressed in a similar fashion to how they had done with so many other states while forcing ideology onto others. Acknowledging these historical points and applying them to how modern states and regimes conceptualize the global system is extremely important in determining how they view others' actions and conceptualize their own desire for security.

As actors become concerned when other actors make gains in either hard or soft power, these gains threaten their perceived security and they must develop more powerful capabilities to again feel secure. As this vicious cycle continues, an escalatory dilemma comes into play with both sides fearing for their respective security only to bolster their

capabilities to feel secure. With acts of aggression and war becoming less normative within the system, new norms form within the international system. As these new norms are formed, actors must find new ways to feel secure and be able to quell potential threats. As China, the US, and the EU all fear being suppressed within the international system, they must find new resources to feel secure from one another. One of these resources would be soft power and connections with others to become a central actor of the system.

As the world has continued to feel smaller due to globalization, a "popularity contest" will help decide leadership and centrality within the system and who is to be respected and viewed as the legitimate steward(s) of the system. With soft power relying on attraction, powerful actors have recognized, whether they formally acknowledge it or not, that this avenue for power satisfies both the normative changes within the international system and the desire to accrue more power and influence. Soft power accumulation does ultimately benefit actors, but they must be willing to play the long game with soft power strategy. Actors must also acknowledge that soft power is difficult to wield as its effects take an extended time to be seen and initiatives are costly which leads to the possibility of them taking much longer to achieve desired outcomes.[165] If a country is to shift strategy quickly, this will nullify any future soft power gains that may have been accrued by continuing the initiative.

As China, the EU, and the US all attempting to draw more actors into their own spheres of influence to help create and cement soft power gains for themselves, the soft power escalatory dilemma becomes clearer to see. As the soft power escalatory dilemma

[165] (Nye 2004, 99)

becomes more prominent, the concept then helps to analyze why these blocs would spend such exorbitant amounts of money and resources on other actors and not themselves. To rise in power yet still achieve positive perceptions from other actors, a state must behave in a peaceful and lawful manner to ensure others that its leadership would be legitimate, as mentioned by Yahia Zoubir and Emilie Tran when they reference Yan Xuetong.[166] Yan Xuetong specifically mentions that strategic capability, which refers to the legitimacy of leadership and the capability of the leadership as well, is important to leading states to gain allies as well as international support for itself.[167] Yan Xuetong also tells us that "When the coalitions headed by the rising state overwhelm those led by the dominant state in terms of capability, the dominant state will have no other choice but to relinquish its pole position to the rising state."[168] This logic feeds into the fear of both the United States and European Union in which they fear losing their centrality within the global system to an actor like China who holds contrasting ideologies. As infrastructure is vital for a state to develop and raise its capabilities, the understanding when applying this logic to global infrastructure development initiatives is quite simple in that an actor who raises a coalition with newly formed capabilities may pose a threat to the dominant actor's centrality within a system.

As actors view one another as competition for being able to rule over the system, it is imperative that they gain enough allies to help support their leadership. Once again, this "popularity contest" of sorts helps us to see how valuable it is for actors to be viewed

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[166] (Zoubir and Tran 2021, 337)

[167] (Xuetong 2019, 41)

[168] (Xuetong 2019, 41)

as legitimate and credible as these actors who are perceived by others to embody these traits are often the leaders of the system. Through these soft power initiatives, actors can onboard more positive perceptions of themselves from other actors within the system. These positive perceptions will inevitably enhance an actor's feeling of security when pertaining to soft power. While norms of violence fade, and norms of non-violence take their place, soft power escalatory dilemmas will increase in prevalence within the global system. Soft power escaltory dilemmas will become a new norm as positive perception becomes one of the greatest resources an actor could possess.

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