

Chinese Soft Power in Africa: Case of Senegal

Ousmane Sall

School of Journalism, Information and Communication, Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Wuhan, China

Email: ousmanesall941@yahoo.com

How to cite this paper: Sall, O. (2016)

Chinese Soft Power in Africa: Case of Senegal. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 4, 133-142.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/jss.2016.411011>

Received: October 8, 2016

Accepted: November 22, 2016

Published: November 25, 2016

Copyright © 2016 by author and Scientific Research Publishing Inc.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0).

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

Beijing political system in Africa has ostensibly made China a major leader throughout this continent. The different elements that link Africa to China have traditionally been embedded in the discourse of cooperation, mutual benefit and political equality. Then, we can notice that China is building a positive image throughout Africa. Let's take the example of Senegal where, between 2006 and 2011, approximately 26 Chinese official development finance projects are identified. These projects are estimated around 100 millions USD financed by China's Exim Bank [1] This endeavor not only spotlights how China is creating a favorable international environment but also it's close to the concept of soft power. However, soft power is about dynamic relationships between an agent and the subject of attraction. China's foreign policy and strategy is highly influential, because China's main target is to lead the world in all fields. Two important issues within this are whether the relationship between the two parts of the world is symmetrical or asymmetrical and the exact role of soft power in this constellation. This paper is going to focus on these arguments and proposes that prominent economies on the African continent such as Senegal have an inescapable role to play in ensuring a symmetrical relationship between China and Africa.

Keywords

China, Soft Power, Africa, Senegal

1. Introduction

Coined by Nye in the late 1980s, the term "soft power" (Nye, 2004) is the ability of a country to persuade others to do what it wants without force or coercion [2]. This concept is now widely invoked in foreign policy debates. Soft power is also the ability to shape the preferences of others through appeal and attraction. A defining feature of soft power is that it is non coercive; the currency of soft power is culture, political values, and foreign policies. For Nye, power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes you want. There are several ways one can achieve this: you can coerce

them with threats; you can induce them with payments or you can attract them to want what you want. This soft power getting others to want the outcomes you want influences people rather than coerces them. Soft power is not merely the same as influence. After all, influence can also rest on the hard power of threats or payments. And soft power is more than just persuasion or the ability to move people by argument, though that is an important part of it. It is also the ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence. Simply put, in behavioral terms, soft power is attractive power. Soft power resources are the assets that produce such attraction. Throughout this paper, we are going to bring some responses to these following questions:

Why does China run one of the world's largest short-term training programmes, with plans to bring 30,000 Africans to China between 2013 and 2015?

Why does it give generous support to 31 Confucius Institutes teaching Mandarin and Chinese culture at many of Africa's top universities from the Cape to Cairo?

Why is China one of the very few countries to increase the number of full scholarships for Africans to study in its universities, a total of 18,000 anticipated between 2013 and 2015?

2. Chinese Soft Power in Africa

2.1. Economic and Political Attraction

The precise number of overseas Chinese is uncertain and we have to use estimation, although the number of Chinese in Africa is not huge. In his book published in 2000, *Li Anshan* predicted that there would be a rapid increase in the number of Chinese in Africa in the 21st century [3]. With 136,000 in 1996, 240,000 in 2000, 550,000 in 2006-7, the number reached 1.1 million in 2012. This represents a big increase, although the number is insignificant compared with the number of Chinese in other continents. Reliable estimates of the number of Chinese overseas in 2013 suggests 30 million in Asia, 7.9 million in America, 2.5 million in Europe, and around 1 million in Oceania. The figure for the US alone in 2010 was 4.02 million, three times of that living in the 54 countries of the African continent (Li Anshan, 2000).

Nobody doubts then the huge economic power China wields in Africa, as the largely impoverished continent's 54 nations look for a partner to help them build their economies and Beijing seeks a share of their massive natural resources.

The principal source of China's soft power in Africa is the strength of its economy and its economic engagement. China's expanding trade and investment with the continent and the proliferation of Chinese-led infrastructure projects reflect a fundamentally more optimistic view of Africa's future than Western engagement, which remains driven primarily by humanitarian programs and, to an increasing extent, security interests.

China's respect-for-sovereignty rhetoric still resonates for many Africans. China's often expressed respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity and its policy of noninterference resonate for obvious reasons with many African leaders. But they resonate too with many Africans who view Western lecturing on human rights, economic libera-

lization, and democracy as condescending and hypocritical. The lack of conditionality or broad consultation attached to Chinese assistance and loans allows projects to be implemented quickly, with visible and often immediate results.

In this new expanded phase of engagement in Africa, China has placed special emphasis on soft power aspects of its engagement, playing both to African audiences and to a broader international stage, where it seeks to portray itself as a non-threatening, responsible global power. The jury is out on how this strategy will play out. Multiple audiences require a complex mix of strategies, and as China's engagement on the continent goes forward, it may have to recalibrate some of its soft- and hard-power approaches. This will be most challenging in African countries with weak and unpopular governments, particularly as countervailing nongovernmental forces become increasingly powerful.

2.2. The Case of Education and Training in Senegal

Most of China's support for education and training in Senegal is at the higher education level. Senegalese students are clearly a key foreign policy issue for China. Indeed, exchanging students between China and Senegal is one of the oldest forms of China-Senegal cooperation. An increasing number of young Senegalese come to China for further study. The first reason is to know more about China, especially after witnessing the Olympic Games in 2008 provided a totally different image from that previously reported in many international media. Rapid development in China represents a great opportunity for many African students in general, with the ability to study advanced technology in many sectors from transportation to aerospace. The Chinese government also offers favorable conditions; including fellowships or free technological training. Tuition and living conditions are cheaper than in the west. Chinese language and experience prepare them a good way to a better job when they return back home in Chinese companies in such as Huawei and ZTE.

Many traditional donors do not appreciate China's role as a development partner in Africa; then China does not want to be part of the donor club or the very large number of donor working groups found in Africa [4]. This was thought because China did not want to be taken for example as donor to Senegal. China preferred to see itself much more as the largest developing country helping. Dealing with the theories of soft power and higher education internationalization we truly notice that China aims to facilitate a more nuanced appraisal of a global power and influence it. That's why a Confucius Institute is based at Cheikh Anta Diop University of Dakar (Senegal) as a new distinctive model of international exchange and cooperation in higher education. That spotlights how Chinese universities interact with their international peers, in a context where China wants its universities to rival the best in the world and invests heavily in its universities.

Education has come to play a much more prominent role in China's international relations. This is reflected in part in China's relatively recent position as the third leading destination for international students globally, after only the United States of

America and the United Kingdom It reflects as well in the growing global footprint of Chinese universities, both in international ranking tables but also in the form of off-shore campuses [5].

In 2007, then-President Hu Jintao developed the idea of soft power at the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party, arguing that China needed to invest more heavily in a soft power strategy.

And indeed it has. China has spent billions of dollars in the years to promote its soft power initiatives. These investments appear in the form of high-profile aid programs for Africa and Latin America. But also by way of the extravagantly staged Beijing Olympics in 2008, a feat the country will aim to repeat in 2022 when it will also host the Winter Olympics.

And especially, education has come to play an important role in the country's soft power strategy as well. The government funds hundreds of Confucius Institutes around the world for the advancement of Chinese language and culture. And as we have noted often, China has, in a relatively short period of time, become an important study destination in [6].

In 2011, there were about 300,000 foreign students in China, the very great majority of whom were actually self-supported. Exactly the same is true of African students in China; while the China scholarship numbers in 2011 were just over 6000, the self-supported students were more than double, at over 14,000. In other words, China is evidently an attractive destination for international study, including by Africans, quite apart from its scholarship provision.

3. Chinese Obstacles for Spreading Its Soft Power throughout Senegal

3.1. Shock against Western Culture

When it comes to soft power obstacles in Senegal, China believes that the problem begins with China's intellectual disadvantage throughout the country. In the Chinese view, prevailing political norms and public opinion in Senegal are heavily influenced by those of its former colonial powers. For example, Chinese intellectuals point out that many, if not most, of the Senegal political and business elites receive their education in the West, causing them to identify more closely with Western culture, ideology, and interests. Therefore China faces enormous psychological, cultural, educational, and communications problem to prevail its discourse in Senegal

In a country where the major cultural industries like film, television, music and food chains are already dominated by Europe and America, the establishment of Chinese Confucius schools threatens to frustrate the continuing efforts to resuscitate Senegalese's sense of self-belief and identity, their confidence in themselves and the world around them, and to unify the country in a way that is perhaps best captured by the vision of the African Renaissance. Most importantly, a new, more subtle and dangerous form of colonialism different from Western interventionism is quietly settling, and with deleterious consequences that will only become clear with time. The imperialism of the

21st century is cultural, soft, digital, less conflictual and effected in spheres where the West lacks the moral high ground to disparage China's actions. By infusing the institutes into existing national educational institutions, the Chinese are investing and securing the spread of their culture into the minds of Senegalese leaders of tomorrow.

China has been trying to change and shape the discourse in Africa through various channels. For example, the famous "Beijing Consensus" (China's unique economic development model) has been cited as a powerful example of China's soft power influence in many African countries. Intellectual exchange and soft power also calls to mind the Confucius Institutes, which are largely seen as a direct application of cultural influence. So far, China has established 42 Confucius Institutes in 29 African countries, providing thousands of fellowship opportunities to African youth. These institutes have generated far less controversy in Africa than in the West.

Socio-culturally, US soft power is waning in Africa whereas China's soft power is increasing. The use of English in Africa is no longer an example of American soft power, but the increasing learning of Chinese an instance of growing Chinese soft power. Young people in Africa don't think well of America as a land of milk and honey when they open their mouths to speak English, but young people in Africa learning Chinese do think of China as a land of opportunity with which they hope to trade or engage in other ways after successfully learning the language at the 5 Confucius Institutes springing up everywhere in Africa great symbols of Chinese soft power around the continent.

Hollywood films and popular music have often been mentioned as example of American soft power in Senegal for example but this is getting anachronistic. Senegalese people are not looking at Hollywood and seeing good things in the American socio-cultural system and getting impressed by it. They are looking to Hollywood to emulate good examples from their fellow Africans, from their brothers and sisters there, even if Hollywood itself appears to be tone-deaf about diversity. There are many successful Africans in America and Europe and Senegalese people look to these people for inspiration, not to the racist socio-cultural constellation that is called America, where a Black man is gunned down every day and everywhere. On the contrary, Chinese socio-cultural soft power aspects are rising in Senegal. When young boys practice Bruce Lee Kungfu styles, they think positively of Chinese culture, this is soft power at the socio-cultural level.

3.2. Comparison between Chinese Soft Powers and Western Soft Power in Africa

If we compare the US and China, the two most prominent soft power brokers in the world we will claim that the US used to have a strong soft power in Senegal but it is waning while China is beginning to register a rising soft power all around Africa. Socio-politically, the American political system does not seem to inspire as many people in Africa as it used to do, say in the 1980s and 1990s, especially under Presidents Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. Washington now appears to be supervising over a dysfunctional democracy [7]. On the contrary, China is having positive socio-political influ-

ences in Senegal. Many Africans now realize that the Chinese way of handling its political economy is far better than that of the fiscally irresponsible American and western governments in general. China and other prudent Asian economies bailed the world out of the banking disaster induced by some greedy western leaders and businessmen that caused untold hardships on Africans since 2008.

China, along with Russia, India, and Brazil, is behaving towards Africans in a far better way than the US and its western allies, some representatives of which are often arrogant and haughty at international meetings within the UN system and beyond. America, Britain, and France often resort more to hard power, more to military invasion and gunboat diplomacy, than soft power to convince Africans at international fora whereas China uses more of pragmatic and mutual self-interest diplomacy—more of soft power—to convince Africans at international fora, though of course we must mention that the rumored building of a military base in Djibouti is an unfortunate attempt to emulate the hard power options used by western powers—and a step in the wrong direction by Beijing, if this rumor is proven right.

Africans in the Diaspora are beginning to enjoy Asian popular music, particularly the cultural consumption of the Asian wave items like music and especially African Students really appreciate KTV and Chinese TV drama series. When Africans consume these they consume Chinese and general Asian soft power products. Asian soft power is rising faster in Africa than American and general western soft power. Chinese herbal medicine, particularly herbal tea in the middle-class African living room, is fast becoming a popular Chinese cultural consumption item in Africa by the middle class.

4. China's Strategy to Promote Soft Power in Senegal

4.1. China's Media Strategy

China's expansion into Senegalese media is clear to see. As many of these strides were first being made, many on the continent and beyond raised concerns about what they saw as the rise of Chinese Soft Power [8]. Chinese journalists have been present in Senegal for a long time through China Radio International, but as the China-Africa relationship has flourished, there has been a concerted effort from Beijing to build its media agencies in Africa and around the world so they can compete with the BBC, CNN and Aljazeera to create a more positive view of China in Africa.

That's why Zhang Yanqiu director of the Africa Communication Research Centre at the Communication University of China to illustrates the importance of Chinese media in Africa, argues that western media adopt a "watchdog" role while Chinese media practice what she calls "constructive journalism". She then explains the difference:

"Constructive journalism can be both positive and negative, but the purpose is to find solutions".

"The idea is to give a new kind of balance and shine a new kind of light on the continent. Instead of just reporting on the situation, it asks 'how can we help them?'".

"The western media may be telling the truth, but if you are telling the truth and things are just getting worse and people are afraid of travelling to Africa, for whose good is this?".

Zhang Yanqiu continues to claim that constructive journalism is at the heart of CCTV Africa's ethos:

“When you look at western media, a lot of the time their strategy is to be combative. But what we want to do is say ‘this is the issue, this is the challenge, and this is how it's being solved’ rather than getting people to argue.” [9].

That shows, there is a lot that Africa and China can learn from each other such as media policies and regulations in China and Africa. China is reinforcing international transmission capacity in Africa using the capacity of newly-emerging media to raise the creative strength, charisma, and credibility of its external discourse, telling Chinese stories well, transmitting China's voice well, interpreting Chinese characteristics well [10].

China has more of a strategy that we would call public diplomacy than soft power, they basically have taken their domestic propaganda template and tried to go global with it. China has also spent a lot of money on broadcasting and papers, turning Xinhua and CCTV into global media outlets. For years, China has been pumping dollars across Africa to build large-scale infrastructure projects and grant cheap loans in exchange for access to the continent's natural resources and growing markets.

And lately, along with its economic and political engagements, Beijing has also been making significant strides in expanding its media engagements in Africa.

Over the last decade, China, Africa's largest trade partner, has quietly invested significant sums in building communications infrastructure across Africa, providing technical upgrades for state broadcasters and training journalists from across the continent.

At the same time, it has been rapidly expanding its presence on the continent's media landscape. Xinhua, China's state-run news agency, is leading Beijing's inroads with more than 20 bureaus in the continent. In 2008, it launched the China-African News Service while in April last year it teamed up with telecommunications firm Safaricom to start a mobile newspaper in Kenya.

And now, China's media strategy in Africa has taken a step further by providing customer-oriented news offerings and poaching some of the best journalistic talents to bring African news to the continent and to the world. But analysts say that CCTV's expansion in Africa is a way for Beijing to change the narrative of China's involvement in Africa from one of exploitation to one of opportunity. China's deepening engagement with Africa is often portrayed as pillaging the resource-rich continent, giving very little in return.

For Yu-Shan Wu, a researcher at the South African Institute of International Affairs, the efforts by the Chinese state-owned media to increase their influence in Africa and other parts of the developing world are part of a bigger soft power drive. Such initiatives, she says, are aimed at building a positive image in areas where Beijing is economically and politically active [11].

4.2. How Confucius Institute Affects African Culture?

Infrastructure development and economic cooperation will probably dominate discussions during the first ever Forum on China-Africa Co-operation on African soil. But

education also features on the agenda. This is an important opportunity to reflect on the role and purpose of China's global Confucius Institutes and Classrooms. These are set up by China's government to promote the country's language, culture and intercultural exchange [12]. There are currently 495 such institutes and 1000 smaller classrooms affiliated to primary and secondary schools in more than 130 countries. The latest available figures for Africa, from late 2014, show there are 60 institutes and classrooms across the continent. The institutes give foreigners the chance to learn more about China. Indirectly, at least, they are a way for China to counter the generally negative images about the country by foreign media. For many, if not most universities in Africa, Confucius Institutes are the first and often only contact point for people who want to learn the Chinese language or more about China in general. Two sides will continue to promote the establishment and development of the Confucius Institute and Confucius Classrooms in Africa. China will extend active support in terms of teaching staff, personnel training and teaching materials and equipment.

The founding of these centres also represents an admission, perhaps learnt from the West, that economic and nuclear power alone does not go so far in terms of effective control of the world. To truly and fully control a people, the powers that be must also influence their cultural habits, their language, and belief systems. This has been routinely referred to as soft power. This strategy of conquest has been previously deployed in Africa by France, Britain and the United States expressed through the creation of enduring institutions of cultural dominance like Alliance Francaise, the British Council and the American Cultural Centre with considerable success and a devastating effect on the African psyche, akin to what renowned African writers like Okot Bitek and Chinua Achebe wrote about regarding the colonial condition. It is also quite telling that the Confucius Institutes have been presented as "gifts" to Africa and as a way of "strengthening" Sino-Africa relations by making the latter understand China "better". It is not surprising that development aid arose in Africa just after the formal end of colonialism. In the short term, the Chinese use these institutes to mark their territory on the African landscape and this becomes a visible, symbolic marker of their power and presence on the continent in a way that is not as politically or socially sensitive as the creation of, military barracks or the Africom. A school also becomes a medium of propagating ways of seeing the world and it is an exceedingly effective way for a state to build and extend its cultural capital internationally.

Confucius schools are therefore nothing but China's vehicles for global dominance, effected in the cultural sphere through the promotion of the Chinese language, tastes, education, architecture, music, food, movies, beliefs, banks, dressing, art, history and lifestyle, to be continued until such a time that these would have supplanted existing cultural precepts and raised local agents who would become the defenders of the new imposed order themselves.

5. Conclusions

Countries that can successfully raise their national power are able to affect other politi-

cal actors. China first started to get interested about soft power in the early 1990. But China's soft power truly began in 2007; when President Hu Jintao pronounced a speech in the 17th congress of Chinese Communist Party in which he dwelled on the ability of China to spread its soft power around the world. China is developing several strategies to release its soft power in Africa through culture, music, traditional medicine, Confucianism and specially mass media. That's why CCTV and China International Radio can be seen in Senegal and many parts of Africa to build a beautiful image of China politically, culturally, and socially.

China is actively introducing its culture and values, and distributing favorable images through its media to achieve its goals of reducing fears of its military strength, developing its education and creating closer relations with developing nations [13] like Senegal and expanding its international influence and CCTV's expansion in Africa is mainly one step of this whole national engine into Africa.

All of this is very important but we can deduce that it's not what African people need. Renowned Kenyan literary giant Ngugi wa Thiong'o once wrote that, "*our lives are a battlefield on which is fought a continuous war between the forces that are pledged to confirm our humanity and those determined to dismantle it; those who strive to build a protective wall around it, and those who wish to pull it down; those who seek to mould it and those committed to breaking it up; those who aim to open our eyes, to make us see the light and look to tomorrow and those who wish to lull us into closing our eyes*". (Ngugi Wa Thiongo, 1987).

The question is: when will Africa wake up and free itself from clinging on to the adopted false consciousness of an ideological worldview which legitimizes the power and privilege of the very forces that are committed to dismantling it.

References

- [1] Biggeri, M. and Sanfilippo, M. (2009) Understanding China's Move into Africa: An Empirical Analysis. *Journal of Chinese Economic and Business Studies*, 7, 31-54. <http://Chinapower.csis.org/>
- [2] Nye, J.S. (2004) *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics*. Public Affairs, New York.
- [3] Li A.S. (2000) *A History of Overseas Chinese in Africa*. Chinese Overseas Publishing House, Beijing.
- [4] Chapman, D.W., Cummings, W.K. and Postiglione, G.A. (2010) Transformations in Higher Education: Crossing Borders and Bridging Minds. In: Chapman, D.W., Cummings, W.K. and Postiglione, G.A., Eds., *Crossing Borders in East Asian Higher Education*, Springer, Hong Kong, 1-22. <http://Chinapower.csis.org/> http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0446-6_1
- [5] Nordtveit, B.H. (2011) An Emerging Donor in Education and Development: A Case Study of China in Cameroon. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 31, 99-108.
- [6] Pan, S.-Y. (2013) Confucius Institute project: China's Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power Projection. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 2, 22-33.
- [7] Yao, W.M. (2014) The New Middle Kingdom: The Symbolic Power of the Confucius Insti-

- tute's Pedagogical Approach. *China Media Research*, **10**, 4-12.
- [8] Yang, R. (2010) Soft Power and Higher Education: An Examination of China's Confucius Institutes. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, **8**, 235-245.
- [9] Lai, H.Y. and Lu Y.Y. (2012) China's Soft Power and International Relations. Routledge, New York. <http://newafricanmagazine.com/>
- [10] Wekesa, B. (2013) Emerging Trends and Patterns in China-Africa Media Dynamics: A Discussion from an East African Perspective. *Ecquid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, **34**, 62-78.
- [11] Wang, Jiang (2010) Soft Power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.
- [12] Kurlantzick, J. (2007) Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power Is Transforming the World. Kindle Edition. <http://allafrica.com/>
- [13] Wa Thiongo, N. (1987) Devil on the Cross. Pearson Education Limited, Harlow.



Scientific Research Publishing

Submit or recommend next manuscript to SCIRP and we will provide best service for you:

Accepting pre-submission inquiries through Email, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.

A wide selection of journals (inclusive of 9 subjects, more than 200 journals)

Providing 24-hour high-quality service

User-friendly online submission system

Fair and swift peer-review system

Efficient typesetting and proofreading procedure

Display of the result of downloads and visits, as well as the number of cited articles

Maximum dissemination of your research work

Submit your manuscript at: <http://papersubmission.scirp.org/>

Or contact jss@scirp.org

