



## King's Research Portal

*Document Version*  
Peer reviewed version

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

White, A., Whyke, T., Lopez Mugica, J., & Dean, L. (Accepted/In press). The Fluidity of Soft Power in YouTube's Broadcasting of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games. *Global Media and Communication*.

### **Citing this paper**

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

### **General rights**

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

### **Take down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact [librarypure@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:librarypure@kcl.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

# **The fluidity of soft power in YouTube's broadcasting of the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympic Games**

## **Abstract**

In an era of heightened geopolitical tension, marked by the dynamic power shift between the West and China, the 2022 Winter Olympic Games emerged as a focal point of diplomatic contention. Several Western nations signaled their dissent through diplomatic boycotts, while China, on the other hand, seized this platform to strategize its soft power. This paper, therefore, explores how the Chinese government utilized the 2022 Winter Olympic Games opening ceremony as a canvas for the portrayal of its national image, and how this portrayal resonated with the global audience. The opening ceremony provided China an unrivaled opportunity to express its cultural identity, political ideology, and aspirations to an international audience. Hence, this research delves into the intangible facets of media and image perception, with a specific focus on the role of YouTube as a reservoir for live streams from traditional broadcaster, Eurosport. It is of vital importance to understand that this depiction of national image and its perception by a global audience are not static, but fluid concepts, constantly molded by the socio-political context. This paper, therefore, contributes to a nuanced comprehension of the fluidity inherent in the construction and projection of China's soft power, shedding light on the intricate choreography of international diplomacy, media strategy, and national branding.

**Key Words:** Soft Power; Winter Olympic Games; Semiotics; Discourse analysis; YouTube audiences

## **Introduction**

We find ourselves in an increasingly precarious and politically divisive epoch, where the economic power dynamics are shifting between the United States and China, thereby escalating tensions between East and West (Akaev & Pantin, 2017; Lawrence, 2019). These geopolitical disputes have unfolded through mainstream news channels and have been echoed across social media platforms from both Western and Chinese outlets. China's international image, muddied by allegations of human rights abuses, was further impacted when several Western states diplomatically boycotted the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. Consequently, the Winter Olympics became a stage where these diplomatic tensions and China's strategy to disseminate its culture globally through soft power found a significant confluence. This paper aims to explore this unique nexus and address the two primary questions - How did China leverage the 2022 Winter Olympic Games to communicate its national image to the international audience; and what was the global reception amidst the prevailing political tensions with Western states?

The basis for this investigation is rooted in the unique role that large-scale sports events like the Winter Olympics play in shaping state narratives, sportsmanship, and cultural diplomacy, a dynamic interplay that garners more attention than any other global mediated event (Lee, 2021, p. 1494; Billings et al., 2018). Our focus, however, remains on the opening ceremony of the 2022 Winter Olympics. These ceremonies, being mega-events in themselves, are pivotal in portraying the host country's image, thereby stimulating soft power (Pang, 2008). Therefore, we intend to delve into the intangible aspects of media and image perception related to China's national image by global audiences. We also aim to understand the audiences' interpretations of visual semiotics of soft power culture as they engaged with the opening ceremony through live streams on

YouTube from the traditional broadcaster, Eurosport. By scrutinizing the live streams, we consider the symbolic and thematic repertoire, and audience engagement on social media, allowing us to examine the entire frame from both production and reception perspectives.

Our interdisciplinary methodology combines various approaches, including semiotics, textual analysis, and discourse analysis, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the opening ceremony of the 2022 Winter Olympics and the accompanying online comments found on platforms like YouTube. By employing this combination of methods, we can gain valuable insights into the symbolic meaning, cultural representations, and audience reception of the ceremony, as well as the public discourse surrounding it. This approach allows us to explore the intricate dynamics between the visual and textual elements of the ceremony, as well as the diverse perspectives and reactions expressed by online commentators. . However, prior to the exploration of our methodological approach and the presentation of results, we will engage in a comprehensive literature review. Central to this discussion will be Joseph Nye's (2011) conceptualization of soft power, and in line with Nye's identification of three core elements, we will analyze China's soft power strategies in the context of mega-events in modern history. This process will highlight the inherent instability in the dichotomy of a nation's self-perception and the perception of other nations.

### **Background: *Soft power and China***

In the domain of global scholarship, the most prevalent exposition of soft power originates from the work of Joseph Nye, spanning from the early 1990s to the present day. Nye's (2012) conception of soft power, originating from the discipline of international relations, emphasizes the potential

of transnational institutions and organizations to influence other international actors and regimes, drawing on a myriad of factors including their values, lifestyle, cultural image, and foreign policy. Contrary to hard power, which relies on coercion and military force, soft power thrives on attraction and persuasion. While Nye's exploration of the concept of soft power predominantly stems from the examination of U.S. foreign policy, he acknowledges its deep historical roots, underlining that the concept of soft power has a presence in China stretching back thousands of years (Nye, 2021:196). Regardless of debates surrounding the extent of China's embracement of Nye's version of soft power, our paper makes an evaluation of Nye's (2012) delineation of three key elements of the projection of soft power and how they align closely with the Chinese government's national image strategy

With regard to the first elements, a prominent facet of China's soft power strategy involves capitalizing on its culture to captivate domestic and international audiences. China has persistently engaged in various cultural diplomacy initiatives, striving to project a favorable image on the global stage. Initiatives such as the renowned panda diplomacy, promotion of Chinese martial arts, and the dissemination of Chinese medicine exemplify these efforts (Rosas, 2022). The 1970s witnessed a significant event symbolizing a pivotal shift in the geopolitical dynamics between two key players: Mao Zedong's Communist China and Richard Nixon's United States. The event involved a series of table tennis matches between American and Chinese players, collectively termed "ping pong diplomacy," which effectively bridged the chasm that had long separated these erstwhile rivals (Hong & Zhouxiang, 2012). Since then, China has strategically rebranded itself, both domestically and internationally, framing the success of its elite sports and emphasizing the importance of showcasing national grandeur (Giulianotti, 2015; Tan et al., 2016). Pupin (2021) emphasizes that prior to the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Chinese TV public broadcasters

launched a campaign featuring Olympic public service announcements (PSAs) known as "Aoyun gongyi guanggao." This campaign marked an unprecedented display of propaganda, emphasizing core themes such as the achievements of the central government, Chinese civilization, harmony, and the improvement of safety, and quality of life. Pursuing sporting excellence thus serves as a powerful tool for projecting China's strength and aspirations on the international stage. This pursuit aligns with China's ambitions in football, presenting its most significant unfinished business for its transnational perception and global recognition (Li and Feng, 2021). The dream of transforming China into a powerhouse of football and other major sports as a symbol of their current and future reach in nation branding coincides with its national pride in organizing successful mega-events (Tan et al., 2016). The 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony and the 2010 Chinese pavilion at the Shanghai World Expo were grand endeavors, employing advanced visual displays to manage China's global image. These high-tech spectacles showcased not only China's impressive economic and technological progress but also its rich historical heritage (Chen et al., 2012; Wallis & Balsamo, 2016).

The second notable aspect of China's soft power strategy is tied to its political values and the extent of adherence to them, particularly concerning relations with democratic states. Mindful of its failed Olympic bid in 1993 following the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident, organizers were divided over whether to address the human rights issue to placate potentially hostile voting states (Brownell, 2013:71-72). Eventually, Beijing mayor Liu Qi stated during the IOC session in Moscow, where the host city for the 2008 Olympics was being decided: "I want to say that the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games will have the following special features: They will help promote our economic and social progress and will also benefit the further development of our human rights cause. They will promote an exchange of rich Chinese culture with other cultures" (Brownell,

2013:72). If intended to convey that awarding the Olympics to Beijing would enable reformers within the Chinese government to improve human rights, this statement appears to have succeeded in persuading IOC members to choose Beijing. Nevertheless, this approach risked raising unmeetable human rights expectations. Such realization likely informed the 2007 report entitled *Brand China* by Joseph Cooper Ramo for the European thinktank Foreign Policy Centre, which didn't mention human rights at all (Brownell, 2013:68-69; Ramo, 2007).

The third element of soft power, as per Nye's (2012, p.153), pertains to foreign policy. China portrays itself as a nation seeking not just internal, but global harmony, positioning itself against Western military adventurism. This narrative forms part of China's "peaceful rise," a slogan coined by the Chinese government in 2004 to counter allegations that the country's rapid growth would cause tensions with neighboring states and the United States (Ramo, 2007:8). However, China's self-image as a benign nation is challenged by its increasing involvement in territorial disputes in the South China Sea (Callahan, 2015, Creemers, 2015; Wallis and Balsamo, 2016).

Recent research has begun to explore China's new cultural, economic, and political influences in promoting regional connectivity and expanding its global influence. This exploration extends to public diplomacy, including internationalizing educational institutions, media, and new media outlets abroad, overseas Chinese students, and the attractive force of the Chinese diaspora (Hand and Yaobin, 2021). These initiatives are grounded in the Beijing Consensus, a counterpoint to the neoliberal Washington Consensus, which seeks to attract social and political actors from regions such as Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America by offering a different developmental model and economic incentives as additional resources of Chinese soft power (Kragelund and Hampway, 2015; Li, 2018; Zhu and Yang, 2020). This challenge to the Western socio-economic order has become deeply entrenched, as we will discuss further in the context of the Winter

Olympic Games. However, it is crucial to maintain a fluid perspective that acknowledges the continued significance of the West and the internal political opposition in some of those countries that China seeks to attract in the grand mediation of soft power dynamics.

In considering China's soft power initiatives within the broader context of the Beijing Consensus and its influence on various regions, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics and complex interactions in the 2022 Winter Olympic Games. While it is important to maintain a nuanced perspective on the multifaceted nature of soft power and its implications for China's global politics and international relations, Nye's typology proves beneficial in illustrating the extent to which China incorporates the three constituent elements in its soft power strategy. Having outlined the opportunities and challenges for China in advancing this approach, we will now discuss how soft power has played out in China's hosting of global mega-events.

### ***The Chinese government's use of global mega-events such as the Olympic Games to project its soft power***

From the vantage point of cultural identity, mega-events such as sporting or cultural projects serve as vehicles for enhancing and reinvigorating national prestige and brand (Tomlinson, 2005). Each iteration of the Olympic Games endeavors to market such an event as a unique cultural product of cross-cultural communication, capable of instigating narratives and discourses tailored to new global audiences (ibid, 2005). Both the Olympic Games and the accompanying opening and closing ceremonies have metamorphosed into mega-events in their own right, playing a crucial role in portraying the country's image and stimulating soft power

(Pang, 2008). Wenner (1998) coined this convergence of culture, ceremonies, sports, media, and politics as a shift towards "media sport."

Recognizing the immense value of diversifying communication channels, China strategically embarked on a successful media "going-out" project in 2009. In this endeavor, the country underscores the critical role of transnational media institutions in effectively conveying and endorsing its national image to a global audience. By establishing partnerships with international media platforms and creating engaging content for foreign markets, China actively shapes the global reception and perception of its cultural narratives (Hu and Ji, 2012; Flew, 2016).

The advent of the network society has expedited the connectivity and interactivity of global media sport, facilitating the exchange of media texts and promoting the Olympic Games as the "world's largest hypermedia event" (Girginova, 2016:243). A country's brand is a synthesis of various communication inputs and outputs, meticulously transformed into a structured information capital and disseminated through multiple delivery channels. This well-processed information is then woven into news narratives that ultimately present a national image in line with governmental aspirations (Bennett, 2012).

To augment our comprehension of the Chinese government's utilization of global 'media sport,' it is instructive to explore the employment of its cultural soft power mechanisms in both the Beijing 2008 and Beijing 2022 Olympic Games. The Beijing 2008 event was an attempt to project a more positive view of a country which at that time was perceived negatively in many parts of the world (Giulianotti, 2015; Ramo, 2007), while also showcasing its ascension to major world power (Hunter, 2009). This resonated with what other geopolitical powers perceived of China's apparent rebranded global image: "The American media has recently taken notice of

China's efforts to expand and diversify its access to sources of oil in the Middle East, Africa, Latin America and Canada. The world's industrial economies, including the United States, have felt the dual impact from the loss of domestic manufacturing jobs as well as the flood of Chinese exports into their markets. Meanwhile, analysts ponder the implications for global security in light of China's military modernisation effort, now over two decades long" (Berkowitz et al., 2007: 171).

By contrast, the narrative values of Beijing 2022 gravitated more towards the conduct of organizers and participants. Recognizing the critical role of volunteers and medical personnel in controlling the Coronavirus, the Chinese government highlighted their ethical behavior and support. As a result, media coverage of the games was replete with images of athletes, politicians, and the public adorned with face masks, symbolizing Olympic ideals.

Concurrently, the National Olympic Committee (NOC) emphasized the efforts of participants and workers as true sports ambassadors and carriers of the Olympic spirit. Like its predecessor, the Beijing 2022 event drew on the opening ceremony's audiovisual culture to underscore 'conventional' Confucian values, which in turn bolster global morals associated with the Olympic progressive crusade for inclusion and tolerance among nations (Chen et al., 2012).

However, the Beijing 2008 opening ceremony depicted China's rise and its economic ties with the rest of the world as key features, symbolized by a postmodern blend of traditional arts and Western technology (Ning, 2010). By contrast, Beijing 2022 used the opening ceremony as an opportunity to portray itself as a nation that had moved beyond the 'century of humiliation'

narrative that has marred its modern history. Indeed, as international relations enter a new era, China clings to its desires and is resolute in navigating its own path, undeterred by Western pressures (Lee, 2021).

This paper seeks to discuss the intangible perception of China's national image by global audiences, focusing on their interpretations of the visual semiotics of soft power culture presented in the opening ceremony. This analysis will be conducted on viewers as they watch the ceremony via YouTube, a live stream repository of traditional broadcaster, Eurosport.

### *Chinese soft power and its audience(s)*

China's endeavor to project its soft power through these events can be seen to have had a degree of success. Nye (2021, p. 201) postulates that the effectiveness of soft power strategies is heavily contingent on the target audience. It's a distinct possibility that one might deem their own ideas compelling and their culture attractive, yet such a belief does not guarantee success unless it is mirrored by the intended audience. The 2008 Beijing Olympics highlighted this dissonance between China's self-perception and the impressions held by other nations. The CCP's propaganda chief, Li Changchun, was convinced that this disconnect could be rectified by amplifying China's "communications capacity" (Brownell, 2013:77).

A pivotal shift materialized with China's escalated dissemination of its own media content, particularly through international TV stations, newspapers, and social media platforms from 2009 onwards (Brownell, 2013:78). This propensity for quantitative solutions to challenges is emblematic of China's evidential style of policy-making (Creemers, 2015:311). However, it

often neglects the underlying philosophical issues, in this case, the global audience's indifference or hostility towards China's international message.

It is important to note that surveys concerning attitudes towards China often concentrate on a select few of the world's most advanced economies. A comprehensive 2019 survey canvassing opinions from a broader range of countries emphasized the disparity in perceptions of China across different global regions (Silver et al., 2019). Populations in Africa, South America, the Middle East, and Russia and Ukraine generally held more positive views of China. Interestingly, it was observed that younger adults had a significantly more favorable view of China than their older counterparts. Therefore, it is feasible to posit that China's soft power strategy is beginning to resonate positively, despite criticisms of its strategic practices related to natural resource extraction and labor importation for infrastructure mega-projects, which have tainted its engagement with the global south (French, 2014). Notably, these studies highlight the effectiveness of direct interpersonal or people-to-people exchanges in South-to-South diplomacy, often proving more impactful than relying solely on heavily mediated media vehicles (Benabdallah, 2019).

There have been studies that assess the effectiveness and marketization of China's national image via social media, underscoring the importance of understanding the international audience's needs and desires. These studies propose that policymakers should aim to project an image congruent with preconceived notions about a country, instead of continually seeking to defy stereotypes. Capitalizing on existing impressions and reinforcing positive perceptions can engender favorable global responses (Dinnie, 2016; He et al., 2020). Through strategic online branding campaigns, Chinese government's cultural diplomacy can proactively convey a

persuasive, cohesive image of the nation, demonstrating an "ability to shape the preferences of others" (Nye, 2004:5).

## **Methodological Approach**

This paper leverages various concepts from media and cultural studies to decipher the nature of interactions on YouTube, focusing specifically on the opening ceremony of the 2022 Winter Olympics. Earlier research primarily examined the communication effects of Olympic broadcasting by analyzing segments of the ceremony through cultural studies and semiotics to map the coding of soft power (Arning, 2013). Consequently, there's a need for studying live streaming of the ceremonies, considering not only their symbolic and thematic aspects, but also the participation of online audiences (Fernández et al., 2011; Repnikova, 2022).

Our study aims to examine this phenomenon holistically, focusing on both production and reception. We have selected Eurosport's broadcasting of the opening ceremony on YouTube, which was one of the few platforms granted official rights to broadcast the Olympic Games in Europe by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Given YouTube's global reach and partnerships with broadcasters worldwide, including euronews.com (Fernández et al., 2015: 155), a limitation of our study is the potential ambiguity regarding the nationality of the commentators on the European news network. We acknowledge the potential participation of Chinese viewers given the global accessibility of the Eurosports.com YouTube channel, one of the official broadcasting services that streamed the opening ceremony.

The increasing prevalence of mega-events on global live streaming platforms and the narrative of nation-state image coupled with its visual culture "brings new urgency to questions

about the effects of social media on cultural convergence" (Park et al., 2014:336). Video-sharing content has emerged as a significant vector for transnational transmission and transcultural acceptance of social media content. Studies suggest that social network sites such as YouTube and Twitter can disseminate cultural values to both local and transcultural audiences (Park et al., 2017). This has enabled foreign audiences and domestic content producers to find a cosmopolitan translation of transculturality, fostering 'flexibility and affinity' (Eze, 2015:219).

### **Semiotics and discourse analysis**

We have adopted a similar approach to Arning's (2013) semiotic analysis of various Summer Olympics' opening ceremonies, including Beijing 2008. This will enable us to analyse the motifs, symbols and other aural and visual representations through the lens of soft power cultivation.

In essence, we explore how the representation on YouTube.com of the opening ceremony and its semiotic symbols depict participants and actions. We aim to identify the ideological codes that the public broadcaster seeks to establish, naturalize, and legitimize. Additionally, we examine whose interests the discussed visual representations of the opening ceremony reinforce or disregard.

Where we extend our work beyond Arning's is in our focus as well on the reception of China's messaging. For this reason, in this study we employed Barthes's (1986) semiotics theory to conduct a comprehensive analysis of various visual symbols featured prominently in the 2022 Winter Olympic Games opening ceremony. The symbols, encompassing colors, numbers, patterns, music, proverbs, outfits, words, technology, and other modes of communication, were subjected to audience interpretations via YouTube discussions and reviews. Drawing from Barthes' concept of 'polysemy,' the wide spectrum of viewer responses, both laudatory and

critical, illustrates the varied interpretations or meanings that such spectacles can generate for each individual. These reactions, driven by individual biases, geopolitical leanings, and personal experiences, underline the intricacies involved in leveraging soft power in a global context, as suggested by Nye (1990). Thus, the discursive analysis centered on both denotations and connotations of the selected visualizations of the ceremony, leading to the emergence of key themes including: China as environmentally responsible; China as a peaceful nation; and diversity and harmony within Chinese society. These themes, extracted from our semiotic analysis, were identified as significant contributors to the overall messaging and perception created by the ceremony.

Barthes's semiotic analysis of discourse is applied to a sample of online discussions pertaining to Eurosports's coverage. This sample comprises 746 messages, from 14:24 on 4 February 2022 to 17:22 on 19 May 2022. Our discussion section focused on the posts that made direct references to the events taking place during the ceremony. They invite and necessitate continued critical engagement and dialogue, reinforcing Girginova's (2016) assertion of the standing of the Olympic games as an 'hypermedia event', which can facilitate public discourse, and thus, illuminating the complexities and nuances of international image crafting and public diplomacy.

## **Thematic Discussion**

### ***China as environmentally responsible***

The 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics commenced with a poetic countdown, coinciding with the onset of "Lichun", the first of the traditional 24 Chinese solar terms. In the contemporary global

political and economic system, while the Gregorian calendar demarcates common world standard time, the traditional calendars of each civilization, with their rich histories, bear unique cultural significance. The Chinese traditional calendar, exemplified on the world stage of the Winter Olympic Games, conveys the essence of agricultural civilization and showcases the unique Chinese approach to life (Tiquia, 2012).

A symbolic drop of ink descends from the heavens, gradually creating the Yellow River, echoing Li Bai's poem *Please Drink Up*. This motif, denoting a river as a continuous body of water flowing towards the ocean, was quickly recognized and praised by a small number of commentators: "the countdown, and the water pouring down from heaven... just beyond imagination! so beautiful, so creative and so culturally rich![sic]" (juristicpig2426, YouTube, 2022). "Great ceremony! Love the Winter Olympics love from Norway [sic]" (Ariana Ayra Lionwood, YouTube, 2022). "This is really a great job to give the world such a magnificent opening especially under the conditions of covid19 and the interfering from the shameless US politicians [sic]" (XXY, YouTube, 2022). These comments not only laud the aesthetic aspects of the ceremony but also the government's pandemic management efforts.

China's aggressive public relations strategy, termed Wolf Warrior diplomacy, might be at play here, with Chinese nationals striving to deliver a positive image and foster an understanding of how to interpret the cultural diplomacy of the opening ceremony (Repnikova, 2022). Simultaneously, China's stern measures in combatting the COVID-19 variants in Shanghai faced scrutiny, reflecting a global competition over pandemic management strategies.

Organizing the tangible (infrastructure and transportation) and intangible (national image in the media) aspects of the Olympic Games is a monumental endeavor. China invested heavily in this mega-event: "China budgeted \$1.5bn (...) but the documents show the project's cost at least

\$3bn. Authorities also spent significantly to avoid any potential blemish to the spectacle and ward off a Covid-19 outbreak. This included Rmb32mn to finance pollution studies and monitoring systems to ensure blue skies and Rmb4mn to buy dividers for use in canteens” (Financialtimes.com, 2022).

Despite these efforts, Western media remained highly critical of China throughout the Games, blaming it for global warming. Certain elements, such as the earth, water, air, and seasons, seemed to signal the advent of spring, which did not go unnoticed by the non Chinese audience.

China's promises of sustainability and 'green' and 'clean' Olympics were also met with skepticism by a small number of viewers: “They just spend several months on spraying fake snow on a whole mountain in a region where there is no snow usually, it seems quite stupid to make the flame that small because of carbon emissions don't you think?[sic]” (Ken Kobayashi Rasmussen, YouTube, 2022). This comment, along with a few others, signals a deep-rooted rejection of China’s environmental practices, reflecting a selectively negative image of the nation's environmental policies. The ambition of the "China Dream" to transform Olympic locations into elite leisure destinations echoes Roche's (2003) perspective on the dual role of the Olympics as a showcase for sporting prowess and an engine for infrastructure development. Yet, the disparity between this aspiration and the reality, as perceived by the global audience, sets forth the complexities of deploying mega-events for soft power, influenced by geopolitical tensions, media narratives, and global socio-political contexts.

Such perceptions reflect the influence of media in shaping international public opinion and constructing social realities around China's alleged environmental shortcomings and infrastructural issues. This criticism undermines the political legitimacy of the party, bringing to

light other issues such as evictions, population displacement, and corruption scandals related to making the Olympic facilities profitable. As part of the China dream, the Winter Olympics aimed to position these locations as leisure destinations for the upper-middle classes in China to enjoy traditional sports associated with the West. However, it seems clear that the reality was met with varying degrees of acceptance and rejection on the global stage.

### *China as a peaceful nation*

The "Micro Fire" main torch, set in a snow platform, symbolically reinforced China's image as a peaceful nation. Utilizing an LED screen as a canvas, the spectacle created the illusion of a block of ice being shattered by skaters. These athletes glided through a magnificent scroll unfurled on the ski track, bearing the slogan "Faster Higher Stronger Together" in both English and Chinese. This performance conceptually represented the dynamism of unity and paid tribute to ordinary global citizens for their significant contributions.

Beijing 2022, like its 2008 predecessor, relied on the unified efforts of volunteers and performers. These events catered to the Western imaginary, transforming sports into an element of soft power through grand parades (Arning, 2013). One instance involved 4,000 men wielding giant LED green sticks, which drew a few mixed reactions, as the following example illustrates: "If you take a close look at the green men at the beginning, it looks like they are waving their sexual parts....[sic]" (Findecanor, Youtube, 2022). Just a couple of viewers expressed their discontent about the "Micro Fire" main torch and the extensive use of LED screens, perceiving it as lacking sophistication and appearing somewhat ridiculous.

However, a huge quantity of YouTube viewers expressed their admiration for the performance, agreeing with the idea that China was focusing its efforts on promoting peace and

stability. Each snowflake, symbolizing individual countries, reinforced this message. The opening ceremony's song, titled “Thousands of Snowflakes”, was a nod to the nation's ongoing efforts to promote 'China's peaceful rise' under the leadership of Hu Jintao in 2008 Olympics (Li & Worm, 2011).

The giant snowflake motif served as a cauldron that juxtaposed East and West, tradition and modernity, within the same spatio-temporal axis. Unfortunately, many remarkable negative remarks tied to the pandemic and war surfaced: “Hope nobody will die from vaccines [sic]” (Disnac Disnac, YouTube, 2022), along with fear of global conflict: “I hope we don't see a war after end of this Olympics...[sic]” (IUSCR3GOD, YouTube, 2022).

Yet, the stunning digital light and snowflake-designed cauldron showcased the Chinese poetic aesthetics of harmony between humankind and nature. This echoed Li Bai's poetic descriptions of the vast snowflakes and landscapes of the Yan Mountains (Liu, 2011). By incorporating distinct Chinese cultural elements, the ceremony evoked a sense of identity, belonging, and resonance among Chinese communities worldwide. A few comments reflected this, as one post from Singapore read: "Snowflakes" is such a heart-warming scene, moved to tears. Love, Singapore.[sic]” (Preppy\_Aesthetic\_Girls, Youtube, 2022). Thus, the symbolic use of snowflakes and the homage to Li Bai's poetry firmly root the narrative in the nation's rich cultural past, aligning with Bhabha's (1994) idea of 'cultural translation,' where elements of the past are reinterpreted in the present. By near unanimity, most of posts about this section were making those reinterpretations between past and present.

### **Diversity and harmony within Chinese society**

The opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics 2022 crafted a compelling tableau of unity and equality, as evidenced by the selection of flag bearers representing 56 ethnic groups. Xinjiang athlete Dingier took the main torchbearer's role, echoing the global spectacle's symbolism and imbuing the ceremony with a sense of collectiveness among nations (Anderson, 1983; Hogan, 2003). This vivid portrayal of ethnic harmony was further underscored in the torch relay's final leg, featuring Zhao Jiawen, a Han Chinese, and Dinigeer Yilamujiang, a Uyghur. Their joint participation echoed the International Olympic Committee's commitment to balance, gender parity, and inclusive representation. There were a great bulk of comments, such as those by Mira and Beyza, that highlighted the importance of acknowledging and supporting the rights and well-being of ethnic minorities like the Uyghurs in Xinjiang, with an emphasis on promoting a "long life for Turkey." However, there were relatively fewer comments defending China's position or downplaying the conflicts surrounding non-Han territories within mainland China "Classic USA propaganda in EU colonized media [sic]" (Vladimir Kezic, YouTube, 2022), with an important number of viewers accepting China's message. Moreover, the choice of a female and a non-Han minority torchbearer signifies the role of gender and ethnicity in formulating Chinese national identity, despite Western allegations of genocide in Xinjiang (Ingle, 2021). The Beijing Games showcased the highest number of women's events ever (olympics.com, 2022), mirroring China's efforts to align with Western values and shape a nuanced international image (Puppini, 2021). Furthermore, the ceremony effectively showcased China's policy of integrating Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia supposedly as semi-autonomous states, demonstrated through the flag-raising by children and representatives of minority groups in traditional attire. There were also many comments showcasing nationalist fervor was reflected in comments such as "Deeply touched by and proud of the warmth, harmony, and ingenuity of the Chinese people and the Nation![sic]"

(Barryliu4596, YouTube, 2022). This significant influx of messages expressing positive sentiments raised suspicions of potential fake accounts possibly created by Chinese publicity authorities or individuals with an excessive patriotic sentiment. Indeed, the calculated orchestration appeared to be aimed at generating a particular narrative and shaping public opinion, receiving a mixture of positive and negative responses.

Yet, the inclusion of Chaoxianzu (Korean Chinese) stoked controversy among a few apparent South Korean nationalists, who do not view them as a minority ethnic group. A YouTube comment illustrated this tension: “The pink attire the woman is wearing is Korea's traditional clothe called 'Hanbok'. It's not Chinese. China used a lot of Korea's traditions in their Olympic opening[sic]” (Anonymous, YouTube, 2022). This reflects the complexities involved in recognizing Chinese Korean minority groups in both Chinese and South Korean contexts, thus raising questions about their identity and role in China's history and socialist development under the Chinese Communist Party (Fan, 2016).

Interestingly, no similar reactions were observed from Kazakhstan, Mongolia, or Russian sympathizers lobbying for recognition of their ethnic identities during the Chinese minorities' parade. The entire event highlighted the potential of social media as a powerful geopolitical tool, revealing how digitalized public diplomacy, through live streaming, could measure soft power by determining if “others want what you want” (Nye, 1990:31–32).

In the context of the Beijing 2008 Olympics, the bundle of Chinese Children and music served as a powerful symbol of collective belonging, highlighting the unity and shared identity of the Han-Chinese ethnicity. It resonated deeply with the notion of a “great Chinese family,” emphasizing the interconnectedness and solidarity among the Chinese people. A child trumpeter played “I and my motherland,” and forty-four children from the Hebei Fuping mountainous area

sang the Olympic anthem in Greek. There were also children interacting with dove props and feet glittering and translucent snowflake props. As some of the comments seem to act as indirect coverage of China's soft power envisaged by Chinese nationalists, which also complements and amplifies the glorified views of China in state media. A small number of viewers felt awkward with the idea of locating children on stage: "Everything was great and beautiful, except the children singing the Olympic Anthem, it should be played instrumentally. No singing, definitely no kids!" (Susanne Brunberg, YouTube, 2022). However, this notion of not wanting to be involved in any form of criticism about how children are used as political pawns for achieving cultural soft power is signaled by a live streaming spectator who posted: "How about you shut up and stop commenting while the children sing" (strumfXx3, YouTube, 2022). Some of the comments seem to act as indirect coverage of China's soft power envisaged by Chinese nationalists, which also complements and amplifies the glorified views of China in state media. The children were not only standing for hope and cuteness, but for inspiring future athletes in the decades to come. Ultimately, the iconic use of children and delightful merchandising constructs a desired national image for communicating with the internal public, whose primary message can be inferred as an endless relay of rejuvenation to prospective generations (Lane, 1981).

The songs in English had several commentators in appreciation, and one even posted the titles. China's intention to use classical and popular Western music was a clear message to the national and international audiences of its projection as an international player that does not necessarily want to insulate itself from the West. This was well received by many commentators, which in a few cases were also interested to know more about the song's titles "Can you please give me the name of the music that starts from 28:30 to 29:00?" (Cem dinaser, YouTube, 2022).

A few viewers from the Chinese diaspora based in the US beheld this benign view of the music, which corresponded with what China was carefully constructing throughout the opening ceremony: “The singer for ‘Imagine’ is a young Chinese singer: Li, Chen Xi (李宸希). He was born in a village in Inner Mongolia, China. He loves music but went on to study public health in college because that is what his parents want him to do. However his passion for music eventually led him to musical. He played lead roles in some Chinese musical productions. He found out his voice was selected when he was watching the opening ceremony. His journey is so inspirational[sic].” (annewang3126, YouTube, 2022). The bilingual display of unity audiovisual messages aligns with Goffman's (1974) theory of 'framing,' signaling a twofold intent. It serves not only to reassure the global community of China's commitment to peace and unity but also to signify China's openness and willingness to foster connections with the global population.

However, in the opening ceremony, there were explicit acknowledgments of the politicization of Chinese ethnicity abroad, which can be seen as symbolic representation influenced by ideological considerations that overshadow the true spirit of the games. This has raised concerns and sparked discussions about the presence of Hong Kong and Taiwan among many of the viewers: “Athletes from Chinese Taipei were asked by the Taiwan government to look gloomy, and that's what they did. I m not kidding.” (johnnyq4260, YouTube, 2022). “Hong Kong, China - Hong Kong, China.[sic]” (Brick-life, YouTube, 2022) and “Xi Jinping after Chinese Taipei and Hong Kong.[sic]” (Moyuru, YouTube, 2022). These views resonate with how China wants to see itself and should be seen inside and outside of sports competitions. However, an important number of viewers do not buy this projection of national unity: “China falsely claims Taipei and HONKONG aren't CHINA!!![sic]” (Moyuru, YouTube, 2022) and “CCCP propaganda[sic]” (Onlynerds, YouTube, 2022). Mainland China's portrayal of Taiwan as just another province or

region under its control reflects its ongoing efforts to diminish Taiwan's sovereignty and international recognition. The dispute over Taiwanese representation in the Olympics has become a significant source of tension and controversy between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan. Such political conflict between the PRC and Taiwan has extended beyond the realm of politics and spilled over into the world of sports. This has had a direct impact on the opportunities and visibility of Taiwanese athletes on the international stage. These issues raise concerns about the neutrality and fairness of the Olympic Games (Monroe and Dayan 2011).

## **Conclusion**

In our analysis, we established that the Chinese government crafted a message underpinned by Confucianism, with the underlining subtext promoting the host as a nation of peace, innocence, and togetherness and that seeks to live harmoniously with the natural environment. This symbolic message, accomplished through the visual representation of the opening ceremony, is revealing, and Eurosport's social media comments made no mistake in attempting to peel away this so-called masquerade performed by China.

However, as noted, political charges directed from the West were ignored by China, suggesting the government is confident about the future. In light of this, and in combination with teasing out the message communicated in the opening ceremony, it is reasonable to postulate that the Chinese government is acutely aware that a global shift in power is unfolding. This shift could ultimately see China succeeding the USA as the leading global economic powerhouse (Lawrence, 2019). In terms of geopolitics, much is at stake because if China secures this position, then a pathway to becoming the number one global influencer will likely present itself. If valid, the message conveyed through the opening ceremony can be deciphered as China

attempting not to placate any potential anxiety and resistance from international governments and civilians about their intentions and suitability as a global front-runner. However, it supports Nye's idea that Chinese soft power can also be interpreted as deploying cultural diplomacy to address its internal audiences without the domestic public opinion being placated either, but enchanted by what the CCP aims to sell, as the China dream.

The second part of this study centered on international viewers' responses to China's symbolism of its national image. Perhaps the success among an important number of viewers, was related with the profound portrayal of unity and cooperation, which was cleverly woven into the spectacle through music and performances with impressive technology like the skaters breaking through the illusionary ice block and the homage to Li Bai's poetry very much connected with China's rich cultural past. However, many other comments pertaining to the opening ceremony indicate that civilians outside of China are largely suspicious and not entirely convinced about the country's intentions, especially as a nation of peace and a leader in combating global warming along with the use of children to foster a sense of cuteness - the comments specific to the South Korean girl, dressed in an ethnic Hanbok outfit, were telling. There appears to be an opposing dichotomy between what China wanted to convey and what viewers, in fact, thought. It should, however, be pointed out that, whilst more frequent than expected, there existed comments in support of China. We cannot know for certain, but we suspect that given the grammatical tense of the remarks and their strong opposition to the US government, many of these commenters were likely of Chinese origin. In this sense, even if China's soft power strategies could be starting to take shape, we cannot ignore that there is always the possibility of many fraud accounts set up by the Chinese publicity authorities (Repnikova, 2022.)

We, therefore, encourage further scholarship which assimilates an approach that identifies both the country of origin and age of commentators. It would facilitate a more accurate portrait of who is commenting and whether China's soft power strategies are beginning to alleviate perceived anxieties about their status amongst specific regions, nations and/or demographics.

**Conflict of Interest:** The authors can confirm that there is no conflict of interest

## References

- Akaev A and Pantin V (2017) Central Asia as the economic and geopolitical tension nexus: Some implications for the world futures. *World Futures: The Journal of New Paradigm Research*, 74(1), 36–46.
- Barthes R (1986) *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics* (87-98). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Bhabha, Homi K (1994). *The Location of Culture*. Routledge,
- Benabdallah L (2019) Explaining attractiveness: Knowledge production and power projection in China's policy for Africa. *Journal of International Relations and Development* 22(2). 495–514. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41268-017-0109-x>.
- BennettW (2012) The Personalization of Politics: Political Identity, Social Media, and Changing Patterns of Participation. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 644(1), 20-39.
- Berkowitz P Gjermano G Gomez L and Schafer G (2007) Brand China: Using the 2008 Olympic Games to enhance China's image. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, 3(2), 164-178.
- Billings AC Angelini JR and MacArthur PJ (2018) *Olympic television. Broadcasting the Biggest Show on Earth*. London: Routledge.
- Bräutigam D (2015) *Will Africa feed China?* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Brownell S (2013) “Brand China” in the Olympic Context. *Javnost – The Public*, 20(4), 65-82.

DOI: 10.1080/13183222.2013.11009128.

Caffrey K (2011) *The Beijing Olympics: promoting China: soft and hard power in global politics*. Oxon: Routledge.

Callahan W-A (2015) Identity and security in China: the negative soft power of the China dream.

*Politics*, 35(3-4): 216-229. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/1467-9256.12088>

Chinadaily.com (2022, March 3) *How can China and the US get back their original vision of breaking the ice?*

Chinadaily.<https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/202203/03/WS62203254a310cdd39bc8a0d0.html>

(accessed 11 July 2022).

Christine H and Yaobin T (2021) Students at the nexus between the chinese diaspora and internationalization of higher Education: The Role of Overseas Students in China’s Strategy of Softpower, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 69:5, 579-

598, DOI: [10.1080/00071005.2021.1935446](https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2021.1935446)

Creemers R (2015) Never the twain shall meet? Rethinking China's public diplomacy policy.

*Chinese Journal of Communication*, 8(3), 306-322. DOI: [10.1080/17544750.2015.1046187](https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2015.1046187).

Dinnie K. (2016)*Nation branding: Concepts, issues, practice* (2nd ed.). London, England: Routledge.

Eze C (2015) Transcultural affinity: thoughts on the emergent cosmopolitan imagination in South Africa. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 27(2), 216-228.

Flew T (2016) Entertainment media, cultural power, and post-globalization: The case of China's international media expansion and the discourse of soft power. *Global Media and China*, 1(4), 278–294. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2059436416662037>

French H-W (2014) *China's second continent: How a million migrants are building a new empire in Africa*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Euronews (2022, June 16) *Beijing Winter Olympics: IOC chief Thomas Bach calls for peace as 2022 Games close*. Euronews. <https://www.euronews.com/2022/02/20/beijing-winter-olympics-ioc-chief-thomas-bach-calls-for-peace-as-2022-games-close>.(accessed 10 May 2022).

Fan K (2016). Representation of ethnic minorities in socialist China. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 39(12), 2091–2107. doi:10.1080/01419870.2016.1179774.

Gerbner G (1969) Toward “cultural indicators”: The analysis of mass mediated public message systems. *AV Communication Review* 17(2), 137-148.

Giulianotti R (2015) The Beijing 2008 Olympics: Examining the Interrelations of China, Globalization, and Soft Power. *European Review*, 23(2), 286–296.

<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S106279871400068>

Girginova K (2016) New Media, Creativity, and the Olympics. *Communication & Sport*, 4(3), 243–260.

Goffman, E. (1974) *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. New York, NY et al.: Harper & Row.

He Lan Rongdang W and Mingshan J (2020) Evaluating the effectiveness of China's nation branding with data from social media. *Global Media and China* 5 (1): 3–21.

Hogan J (2003) Staging The Nation. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, 27(2), 100-123.

Hong F & Zhouxiang L (2012) China's sports policy and politics in the post-Beijing Olympics era. *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 29(1), 184–189.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2012.634992>

Houlihan B and Zheng J (2013) The Olympics and elite sport policy: Where will it all end? *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 30(4), 338–355. DOI:

10.1080/09523367.2013.765726.

Hu Z and Ji D (2012) Ambiguities in communicating with the world: the 'Going-out' policy of China's media and its multilayered contexts, *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 5(1), pp. 32-37.

Hunter A (2009) Soft Power: China on the Global Stage, *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Volume 2, Issue 3, Summer 2009, Pages 373–398, <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjip/pop001>

Ingle S (2021, March 1) *Boycott questions over Beijing Winter Olympics eerie echoes of 1936.*

*Guardian*.<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/blog/2021/mar/01/boycott-beijing-winter-olympics-berlin>. (accessed 10 June 2022).

Kellner D (2003) Cultural Studies, Multiculturalism, and Media Culture. In G. Dines and J.

Humez (eds.), *Gender, Class in Media: A text Reader* (pp 9-20). New York Sage.

Kragelund P and Hampwaye G (2015) The Confucius Institute at the University of Zambia: a new direction in the internationalisation of African higher education?, In: Hanne Kirstine

Adriansen Lene Møller Madsen, and Stig Jensen (eds.) *Higher Education and Capacity Building in Africa*, London: Routledge, pp. 101-122.

Lane C (1981) *The rites of rulers: Ritual in industrial society, the Soviet case*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Lawrence L J (2019) The China-US Trade War and Future Economic Relations. *China and the World*, (2)2, 1950012.

- Lee J W (2021) Olympic Winter Games in Non-Western Cities: State, Sport and Cultural Diplomacy in Sochi 2014, PyeongChang 2018 and Beijing 2022. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 38(13-14), 1494–1515. DOI: 10.1080/09523367.2021.1973441.
- Li C H (2018) *Analysis of assertive ideological sources of China's soft power: How the China Model is presented to challenge Western values*, MPhil dissertation, The Education University of Hong Kong.
- Li Sh (2017) *Mediatized China-Africa Relations*. Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Li X and Feng J (2021) Nation branding through the lens of soccer: Using a sports nation branding framework to explore the case of China. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*.
- Li X and Worm V (2011) Building China's Soft Power for a Peaceful Rise. *Journal of Political Sciences*, 16(1) pp. 69-89. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-010-9130-2>.
- Ling Y Song Z Yu and Y Jiang T (2021) Dealing with an aging China—Delaying retirement or the second-child policy? *Plos one*, 16(1), e0242252. DOI: 10.1371/journal.
- Liu N (2011) Is Li Bai a romanticist? —Understanding an old poet through a new concept. *Frontiers of Literary Studies in China* 5(1), 90–114. DOI: 10.1007/s11702-011-0120-3.
- Mullaney E P: and Dayan D (2011). *Owning the Olympics. Narratives of the New China*. The University Michigan Press.
- P Gros S and Bussche V E A (2012) *Critical Han Studies (Volume 4) (New Perspectives on Chinese Culture and Society)* (First ed.). London: University of California Press.
- Nye J S (1990) *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Basic Books.
- Nye J S (2012) *China and soft power*. *South African Journal of International Affairs*, 19(2), 151–155. DOI: 10.1080/10220461.2012.706889.

- Nye J S (2021) Soft power: the evolution of a concept. *Journal of Political Power*, 14(1), 196–208. DOI: 10.1080/2158379X.2021.1879572.
- Olympics (2022, February 4-20) *Beijing 2022 Facts and Figures*. International Olympic Committee. <https://olympics.com/ioc/olympic%20games/upcoming%20olympic%20games/beijing%202022/beijing%202022%20facts%20and%20figures>.
- Pang Z (2008) *The Beijing Olympics and China's soft power*. Contribution for the Brookings. [www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0904\\_olympics\\_pang.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/opinions/2008/0904_olympics_pang.aspx).
- Park M Park J Baek Y M and Macy M (2017). Cultural values and cross-cultural video consumption on YouTube. *PLOS One*, 12(5), e0177865. DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0177865.
- Park W Robert E and Chang K S (2020) China's ethnic minority and neoliberal developmental citizenship: Yanbian Koreans in perspective. *Citizenship Studies*, 24(7), 918-933.
- Puppini G (2021) China's 'CivilOlympic' Performances and (Re)Gained Global Visibility. Fantasising about a New Brand China through Olympic Public Service Announcements. *Annali di Ca' Foscari. Serie orientale*, 57, 2385–3042.
- Ramo JC (2007) *Brand China*. Foreign Policy Centre. <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/827.pdf>
- Repnikova M (2022) *Chinese Soft Power*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roche M (2003) Mega-events, time and modernity: On-time structures in a Global society. *Time and Society*, 12(1), 99–126.
- Rosas C-M (2022) Olimpiadas De Beijing 2.0: Diploma Publica Y Poder Suave. *Globaitika*.1-23. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358443575\\_Beijing\\_2\\_0\\_diplomacia\\_publica\\_y\\_poder\\_suave](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358443575_Beijing_2_0_diplomacia_publica_y_poder_suave).(accessed 18 June 2023).

Tan T-C Huang H-C Bairner A and Chen Y.-W (2016) Xi Jin-Ping's World Cup Dreams: From a Major Sports Country to a World Sports Power. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 3367(November), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2016.1243103>

Tiquia R (2012) The 1911 Revolution and the Traditional Chinese Calendar *Li Fa. Chinese Studies*. Vol.1, No.3, 23-36.

Tomlinson A (2005) Picturing the Winter Olympics: The Opening Ceremonies of Nagano (Japan) 1988 and Salt Lake City (USA) 2002. *Tourism, Culture & Communication* 5(2), 83-92.

Youtube (2022) Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony, Eurosport. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usQ8pVRqd5U> (accessed 22 January 2022).

Wallis C and Balsamo A (2016) Public interactives, soft power, and China's future at and beyond the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. *Global Media and China*, 1(1-2), 32–48. DOI: 10.1177/2059436416646258.

Wenner L (1998) Playing MediaSport. In L. Wenner (Eds.), *MediaSport*. (pp. 3–13) Routledge.

Wu Y Thomas, R and Yu Y (2021) From External Propaganda to Mediated Public Diplomacy: The Construction of the Chinese Dream in President Xi Jinping's New Year Speeches. In: *Public Diplomacy and the Politics of Uncertainty* (pp.29-55).

Zheng J and Chen S (2016) Exploring China's success at the Olympic Games: A competitive advantage. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 16(2), 148-171.

DOI: [10.1080/16184742.2016.1140797](https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2016.1140797)

Zhu K and Yang R (2022) Emerging Resources of China's Soft Power: A Case Study of Cambodian Participants from Chinese Higher Education Programs. *High Educ Policy*.

<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41307-022-00278-w>.