

WINNING THE GLOBAL NARRATIVE WAR? CHINA'S SOFT POWER BETWEEN OPPORTUNITY AND CONSTRAINT

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The evolving dynamics of soft power competition between China and the United States have intensified in the wake of President Trump's return to office. As the United States scales back its global engagement—most notably by dismantling key public diplomacy institutions such as the United States Agency for International Development and the United States Agency for Global Media—China has seized the opportunity to expand its influence, particularly in the Global South, through strategic initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative. China's previous engagement has achieved some success in Africa and Latin America, but its soft power remains constrained in regions such as Southeast Asia and Europe, where scepticism persists due to geopolitical tensions and normative divergence.

Recent public opinion surveys highlight the limits of China's material-based approach to soft power, especially when contrasted with the United States' historically values-driven model. China's future influence will depend on its not only economic outreach, but also ability to cultivate shared values, build trust and establish normative legitimacy on the global stage.

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Chinese:

赢得全球叙事之战？中国软实力的机遇与制约

自特朗普总统重返白宫以来，中美之间软实力竞争的动态不断演变，并日益激烈。随着美国削弱其全球参与，使美国国际开发署 (USAID) 和美国全球媒体署 (USAGM) 几乎停止运作，中国抓住机遇，通过“一带一路”倡议等战略举措，特别是在全球南方扩大其影响力。中国以往在非洲和拉丁美洲的参与取得了一定成功，但其软实力在东南亚和欧洲等地区依然受限，原因在于地缘政治紧张局势和规范分歧所导致的怀疑态度。

最新的公众舆论调查显示，相较于美国历史上传统以价值观为驱动力的模式，中国以物质为基础的软实力策略存在局限。中国未来影响力的提升不仅依赖于经济对外拓展，更决定于其能否在全球舞台上培育共同价值观、建立信任和确立规范合法性。

French:

GAGNER LA GUERRE MONDIALE DU NARRATIF? LE SOFT POWER DE LA CHINE ENTRE OPPORTUNITÉ ET CONTRAINTE

La dynamique évolutive de la compétition pour le soft power entre la Chine et les États-Unis s'est intensifiée à la faveur du retour au pouvoir du président Trump. Alors que les États-Unis réduisent leur engagement mondial — notamment en démantelant des institutions clés de diplomatie publique telles que l'Agence des États-Unis pour le développement international (USAID) et l'Agence des États-Unis pour les médias mondiaux (USAGM) — la Chine a saisi l'opportunité d'étendre son influence, particulièrement dans le Sud global, à travers des initiatives stratégiques comme les Nouvelles Routes de la Soie (Belt and Road Initiative). L'engagement antérieur de la Chine a rencontré un certain succès en Afrique et en Amérique latine, mais son soft power demeure limité dans des régions telles que l'Asie du Sud-Est et l'Europe, où le scepticisme persiste en raison de tensions géopolitiques et de divergences normatives.

De récents sondages d'opinion publique mettent en lumière les limites de l'approche chinoise du soft power basée sur les moyens matériels, notamment en comparaison avec le modèle américain historiquement axé sur les valeurs. L'influence future de la Chine dépendra non seulement de ses efforts économiques, mais aussi de sa capacité à cultiver des valeurs partagées, à instaurer la confiance et à établir une légitimité normative sur la scène internationale.

Spanish:

¿GANANDO LA GUERRA NARRATIVA GLOBAL? EL PODER BLANDO DE CHINA ENTRE LA OPORTUNIDAD Y LA RESTRICCIÓN

La dinámica cambiante de la competencia de poder blando entre China y Estados Unidos se ha intensificado tras el regreso de Donald Trump a la presidencia. Mientras Estados Unidos reduce su compromiso global—particularmente desmantelando instituciones clave de diplomacia pública como la Agencia de los Estados Unidos para el Desarrollo Internacional (USAID) y la Agencia de Medios Globales de Estados Unidos (USAGM)—China ha aprovechado la oportunidad para expandir su influencia, especialmente en el Sur Global, a través de iniciativas estratégicas como la Iniciativa de la Franja y la Ruta. El compromiso previo de China ha tenido cierto éxito en África y América Latina, pero su poder blando sigue estando limitado en regiones como el Sudeste Asiático y Europa, donde persiste el escepticismo debido a tensiones geopolíticas y divergencias normativas.

Recientes encuestas de opinión pública ponen de manifiesto los límites del enfoque chino basado en recursos materiales para el poder blando, especialmente en comparación con el modelo estadounidense históricamente impulsado por valores. La futura influencia de China dependerá no solo de su alcance económico, sino también de su capacidad para cultivar valores compartidos, generar confianza y establecer legitimidad normativa en el escenario global.

Executive Summary

1. Donald Trump's second presidency marks a shift in soft power competition with China. His approach moves away from public diplomacy, offering China an opportunity to expand its influence, though challenges remain.
2. Under President Trump, defunding key institutions, such as the United States Agency for International Development and the United States Agency for Global Media, has reduced US ability to project values and build global goodwill, and created an influence vacuum in many regions.
3. China has capitalised on this vacuum by deepening engagement with the Global South with initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, focusing on infrastructure, development and non-interference. Latin America and Africa's receptiveness has boosted China's soft power rankings.
4. Despite its economic power, China's influence in Southeast Asia is complex. ASEAN countries worry about its assertive behaviour in the South China Sea, preferring US strategic alignment due to security concerns.
5. China thus aims to soften its image with President Xi's visits to Vietnam, Cambodia and Malaysia, emphasising peace. A joint statement with Malaysia on peaceful dispute resolution reflects China's bid to be seen as a stabilising power.
6. European surveys show unfavourable views of China, especially in Western and Northern Europe, like Germany, Denmark and the UK, where it is seen as a rival. The United States remains a vital partner despite negative views of Trump.
7. Southern and Eastern Europe show slight openness towards China, but limited alignment persists. This polarisation indicates China's weak soft power, constrained by political scepticism and cultural or ideological resonance.

8. The United States and China differ in foreign aid and public diplomacy: the United States links aid to democracy and human rights, while China emphasises its own development model, prioritising performance over values.
9. China's messaging has limited impact as its aid fails to boost public support or trust like US aid, showing a gap between outreach and influence.
10. China's performance-based appeal contrasts with the United States' principle-based model. While China's focus on infrastructure and economic resonates, it struggles to foster emotional or ideological alignment.