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Is Smart Power Leading the Way Forward? Reassessing its Importance in the U.S. and China's International Strategy

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Is Smart Power Leading the Way Forward?
*Reassessing its Importance in the U.S. and China's
International Strategy*



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International Affairs Capstone Project

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Table of Contents

Abstract	3
Introduction.....	4
Positionality	6
Literature Review.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	16
Methods	17
Critical Analysis.....	18
Limitations	34
Conclusion	35
Future Work.....	36
Bibliography	37
Figures	41

Abstract

Since the end of the cold war, the world of politics and international relations has seen China grow its power and influence tremendously. Much of this growth has been fueled by strategies and initiatives focused on *smart power*, a term coined by Joseph Nye in 2003,¹ through large economic projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Meanwhile, the backbone of the United States smart power is within institutions, most notably the United Nations (UN), which have begun to show their age and weaknesses. *1) Should smart power strategies be known as stronger power building initiatives than hard power strategies? 2) How much does the US and China's current international strategies for power rely on smart power vs hard or soft power initiatives?* This paper will address these questions with an increased focus and awareness on the legacy of the Trump administration and existence of the Belt and Road Initiative.

To properly answer these questions, this paper embarks on a multi-step process. First, critical theory is utilized to question academia's accepted definitions of smart power and to better understand the real benefits of hard power in a contemporary world. From this questioning, this paper presents a new more detailed and, perhaps, de-mystified definition of *smart power*. Next, this paper explores the benefits of smart power compared to hard power. Analyzing how hard powers, especially more traditional ones, operate in a contemporary context is an important aspect of this section. Then this paper analyzes what types of power the US and China's international power strategies have relied on. This section continues in its use of critical theory to question common narratives, most notably that surrounding which power is most important to the US.

¹ Nye, Joseph S. "Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power." *Foreign Affairs*, 88, no. 4 (2009) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20699631>, 160.

Introduction

Through the current international system of governance, political power is “the capacity of persons or collectivities ‘to get things done’ effectively, in particular when their goals are obstructed by some kind of human resistance or opposition,”² and is key to successfully pushing forth an international political agenda. There are many ways to create and exercise power. One of the most common categorization strategies breaks down different concepts of power into three types: hard power, soft power, and, more recently, smart power. Recognizing how various states utilize and value different forms of power is vital to understanding the current structures of international organizations and their futures. This paper looks into the argument that hard power strategies are quickly becoming outdated and overemphasized. In regard to power in general, it is no secret that the world has been leaving behind the more traditional interaction of warfare between two state actors. Increasing fear of economic backlash, new technologies, and increased dependence on other states play a major part in this. Additionally, this paper discusses how smart many smart power strategies have been implemented after World War II (WWII) and have, until recently perhaps, been undervalued.

This is a major factor leading towards the creation of this paper’s research question and the importance of the use of critical theory as a theoretical framework.³ With experts placing a high level of importance on soft power strategies⁴ and other experts, such as Kaufman,⁵ placing

² Parsons, Talcott. "On the Concept of Political Power." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 107, no. 3 (1963): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/985582>, 232.

³ More on the importance of the paper can be found within the Literature Review section and more information for critical Theory can be found within the Theoretical Framework section.

⁴ James Helicke, “Skidmore Faculty Offer Global Perspectives on the United States,” Skidmore College, March 31, 2021, <https://www.skidmore.edu/news/2021/0331-aftershock-panel.php>.

⁵ Crowley, P.J., Kaufman, Robert, Oliker, Olga, Wang, Jay, panelists. Panel Discussion: “Does Soft Power Really Matter?” A CPD-BBC Forum. Presented at the University of Southern California October 2, 2014. <https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org/sites/uscpublicdiplomacy.org/files/useruploads/u39301/Does%20Soft%20Power%20Really%20Matter%20-%20CPD-BBC%20Forum.pdf>, 6.

the importance on hard power strategies for the US, this paper aims to tackle the questions: *1) Should smart power strategies be known as stronger power building initiatives than hard power strategies? 2) How much does the US and China's current international strategies for power rely on smart power vs hard or soft power initiatives?* While these experts are surely not entirely wrong on the importance of soft power to the US, this paper will explore the hypothesis that experts throughout the country regularly undervalue smart power organizations, in particular the UN, and how these organizations may be the main enabler of US power projection around the world, not soft or hard power resources. Interviews with Pushkala Prasad, a professor of management at Skidmore College and Mahesh Shankar, the director of the international affairs program at Skidmore, show how the world is becoming ever more bi-lateral,^{6 7} focusing on these two states strategies is vital in understanding and preparing for the future.

To best answer this question the paper will seek to more clearly state the definition for what power is as well as an adequate definition of soft and hard power. From research and interviews it has become apparent that smart power is not only underdeveloped in academia but also lacks a proper definition.⁸ Within the critical analysis section, this paper will critique the most common definitions of smart power and suggest a more suitable definition. Further, this paper will go into the importance of states' soft and hard power initiatives throughout the world and compare them to their smart power initiatives. Focusing on the impact of the Trump Administration and the sheer size of China's Belt and Road initiative will be important to better understanding how the US and China create power.

⁶ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China. Personal, April 18, 2021.

⁷ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China. Personal, April 12, 2021.

⁸ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China.

Positionality

I am a Skidmore College Undergraduate majoring in International Affairs and minoring in Management & Business. I was born and raised in the United States and have not visited China. I consider myself to have a focus and passion in conflict resolution and multilateral diplomacy. Most recently, this has led me to take great interest in the rapid rise of China's political capabilities. I have therefore written this paper to get a better understanding of how that rise is occurring and why the United States is beginning to lag behind many of China's international initiatives.

Literature Review

Throughout the world political power and understanding how it is wielded has been a research topic that has undergone much scrutiny. Expectedly, many papers, books, interviews, and more have been developed regarding the definition of political power and the different types of strategies that can be used to build it. The three main strategies this paper will rely on are soft power, hard power, and smart power.

First, it is important to understand what the definition of power is. People define power and its various types very differently. The main definition of power this paper will be utilizing is found within *The Powers to Lead* by Joseph Nye and is the idea that power, at its core, is the ability to create your own outcomes.⁹ This is an essential term to define as it is the basis of soft, hard, and smart power. Expectedly, others go further than Nye's definition. For instance, in Parson's "On the Concept of Political Power" political power is defined as "the capacity of persons or collectivities 'to get things done' effectively, in particular when their goals are

⁹ Joseph Nye, *The Powers to Lead*. (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010.), 27-28.

obstructed by some kind of human resistance or opposition,”¹⁰ Parson’s definition expands on Nye’s and gives insight into the idea of “persons or collectives.”¹¹ Meanwhile, the RAND Company, a non-profit research firm, defines state power as “(1) resources or capabilities, or power-in-being; (2) how that power is converted through national processes; (3) and power in outcomes, or which state prevails in particular circumstances.”¹² For this paper, it is important to focus on Parson’s idea of the ‘collective’ as this paper discusses state goals, not necessarily individuals’ desires.

Throughout my research I found many definitions of power and they were all based on relatively similar thoughts and produced similar descriptions. Measuring power, however, is a much more complicated issue. Different researchers and organizations pick a plethora of different categories and even utilize different methods for measuring the same category. The RAND Corporation utilizes eight categories in “Measuring National Power”: Domestic Sociopolitical, International Political, Population, Economic, Agriculture, Energy, Technology, and Environment Resources and Quality.¹³ However, the calculations vary greatly. Beckley goes against the method of measuring power through “gross indicators” similar to what RAND utilizes as they “they are logically unsound and empirically unreliable, severely mischaracterizing the balance of power in numerous cases, including in some of the most consequential geopolitical events in modern history.”¹⁴ Instead of gross indicators Beckley argues for the use of “net indicators” that take into account both liabilities and the assets of a

¹⁰ Parsons, “On the Concept of Political Power,” 232.

¹¹ Parsons, “On the Concept of Political Power,” 232.

¹² Gregory Treverton and Seth G. Jones. *Measuring National Power*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005, IX

¹³ Gregory Treverton and Seth G. Jones. *Measuring National Power*, X

¹⁴ Michael Beckley. “The Power of Nations: Measuring What Matters,” *International Security*, 43, no. 2 (2018): https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00328, 9.

state.¹⁵ Measuring power is an extraordinarily complicated issue. To properly do so the utilization of quantitative and a wide view of qualitative data is necessary.

What then is soft power? Nye has become an authority regularly turned to for defining soft, hard and smart power. Within one of his articles, simply titled “Soft Power,” Nye defines *soft power* as the ability for “one country [to] get other countries to *want* what it wants.”¹⁶ Of importance here, the other countries must freely desire aspects of what another state has. The use of coercion is generally not associated with soft power and is more so reserved for hard power. Instead, it is seen as the power of attraction. Prime cases of soft powers for the US are examples that create a desire for another state to want an aspect of a different state, these could be democracy, ‘freedom,’ and human rights.¹⁷ These examples are recognized and discussed around the world and create a generally positive view for the US. This power takes a long time to build but can be cheaper to maintain than other forms of power. There are, however, those that look towards ‘rethinking’ Nye’s conceptualization of soft power. For example, Rothman disagrees with Nye’s clear distinction between hard and soft power and instead sees it being more of a scale. Within his article entitled “Revising the soft power concept: what are the means and mechanisms of soft power?,” Rothman utilizes a chart, seen in Figure #1, that explains the flow of power between hard and soft. This chart however, and Rothmans thought process, I would argue, is flawed as it ignores the existence of smart power – in fact, he does not mention it once. I have found this to be a common theme within academia, to ignore or altogether set aside smart power. This is an area I will explore more throughout the paper.

¹⁵ Beckley, “The Power of Nations: Measuring What Matters,” 9-10.

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye. "Soft Power." *Foreign Policy*, no. 80 (1990). doi:10.2307/1148580, 155.

¹⁷ Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin. “Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power.” *Media, War & Conflict*, 7, no. 1 (April 2014): <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635213516696>, 72.

Alternatively, hard power is really the power of coercion as described in many papers such as “Security and Smart Power” by Nye.¹⁸ And, within “Propaganda Isn’t the Way: Soft Power”, Nye defines hard power as “the ability to use the carrots and sticks of economic and military might to make others follow your will.”¹⁹ This distinction with hard power being the power of coercion and soft power being the power of attraction become central to the understanding of what smart power is. Prime examples of hard power are economic sanctions and military actions.²⁰ Hard power resources are generally expensive to maintain but are much faster to create than soft power.²¹ Additionally, in an interview, Shankar agreed that many traditional physical hard power resources are outdated and, while they are built for use in war, many of them may never see action;²² instead, cyber tools and unmanned aircraft may be a better investment.²³

Critiques of hard power, especially on Nye’s more realist view of the world, can be found throughout different writings. The most common critique can be seen in Bilgin and Elis’s “Hard Power, Soft Power: Toward a More Realistic Power Analysis.” They state how realist views on hard power are conceived as “unrealistic insofar as it over-privileges material forms of power and focuses on the visible dimensions of power relations to the neglect of the multiple processes through which power is produced and expressed.”²⁴ The paper directly cites Nye’s version of soft power as not offering “a theory of power that reflects upon its own moment(s) and site(s) of production and expression.”²⁵ Nye however may argue that smart power is the term that he has

¹⁸ Joseph S. Nye. “Security and Smart Power.” *American Behavioral Scientist*, 51, no. 9 (May 2008): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764208316228>. 1352.

¹⁹ Joseph S. Nye. “Propaganda Isn’t the Way: Soft Power.” *International Herald Tribune*, January 10, 2003.

²⁰ Nye, “Security and Smart Power,” 1352.

²¹ Nye, “Propaganda Isn’t the Way: Soft Power.”

²² Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 7:12.

²³ Prasad, Anushman. “US Presence in the Middle East.” Lecture, April 14, 2021.

²⁴ “Bilgin, Pinar, and Berivan Elis. “Hard Power, Soft Power: Toward a More Realistic Power Analysis.” *Insight Turkey* 10, no. 2 (2008): <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26328671>, 5.

²⁵ Bilgin and Pinar, “Hard Power, Soft Power: Toward a More Realistic Power Analysis.” 5.

coined to combat these positions. Indeed, this may be an example of how smart power is regularly left out of academia and the literature.

What then exactly is smart power? This power was coined later than soft and hard power by Nye. Nye's main definition of smart power is fairly simple and, in my opinion, too much so. Within "Security and Smart Power" he defines it as "a strategy that combines the soft power of attraction with the hard power of coercion."²⁶ A more detailed definition can be found by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) which goes as follows: "an approach that[...] invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions of all levels to expand[...] influence and establish legitimacy of[...] action."²⁷ This definition further explains the combination of hard and soft power resources and, interestingly, was at least in part, written in a report co-authored by Nye. Most importantly, one should appreciate that smart power is not necessarily a power of coercion or directly a power of attraction. Other actors are not forced to join smart power programs, however they may be manipulated into it. The nuance between attraction, manipulation, and coercion is small and relatively undiscussed in the literature. In fact, I could not find an example of any literature referring to and defining smart power as the power of manipulation; even though when I asked, Nye agreed that aspects of smart power do involve manipulation, with his response seeming to combine soft and hard power to facilitate manipulate.²⁸

With smart power lacking a regularly agreed upon definition and interviewees agreeing that it is under researched in academia, section VII will spend more time discussing the primary

²⁶ Nye. "Security and Smart Power," 1353.

²⁷ Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye. *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America*. (Washington, D.C., Maryland: CSIS Press, 2007), 7.

²⁸ Joseph Nye, Email regarding smart power questions, Personal, March 18, 2021.

research done into creating a more clear and precise definition for smart power.²⁹ Prime examples of smart power throughout the world today are the United Nations³⁰ and the Belt and Road Initiative.³¹ These are both good examples of soft power because they utilize and create desire from other states to have what another state has, as well as maintain the ability to create outcomes desired from the leaders of these projects. The Belt and Road initiative not only utilizes both hard and soft power for “the provision of public goods in the international system,”³² it also creates desires from other states to want economic success similar to China while also providing China with a system hand crafted to create the best outcomes for itself. The case with the United Nations is very similar: it effectively set up rules and guidelines for the whole world that were created to benefit the United States. Additionally, its “true strength[...] still lies in the norms embedded in its charter-values that greatly benefit the United States if pursued objectively.”³³

One critique to Nye’s idea of smart power, that is the combination of both hard and soft power resources, comes from Cammack in “Smart Power and US Leadership.” Cammack disagrees with Nye’s “uncompromisingly realist framework” and argues that Nye is out of touch with contemporary international politics.³⁴ Cammack continues to argue that Nye’s outlook and belief in the pre-eminence of the United States is wrong and that Nye puts too much stock in

²⁹ To expand, as this is a literature review and should simply be a section reviewing already published sources, I will explain smart power in greater detail further in the paper where the use of primary sources is more appropriate.

³⁰ Johanna Forman. “Investing in a New Multilateralism: A smart power approach to the United Nations.” *CSIS*. January, 2009. https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/media/csis/pubs/090128_mendelsonforman_un_smartpower_web.pdf, 1-2.

³¹ Mustafa YAĞCI. "Rethinking Soft Power in Light of China's Belt and Road Initiative." *Uluslararası İlişkiler /International Relations* 15, no. 57 (2018): <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26604994>, 69.

³² YAĞCI “Rethinking Soft Power in Light of China’s Belt and Road Initiative,” 69.

³³ Forman, “Investing in a New Multilateralism: A smart power approach to the United Nations,” 1-2.

³⁴ Paul Cammack, “Smart Power and US Leadership: A Critique of Joseph Nye”, *49th Parallel*, Vol. 22 (2008), <https://fortyninthparalleljournal.files.wordpress.com/2014/07/1-cammack-smart-power.pdf>, 6-9.

American soft power capabilities that Cammack defines as “in crisis.”³⁵ Throughout this paper Cammack attacks Nye in many ways and depicts his views as “ironic,”³⁶ “bland,”³⁷ and “ill-founded”³⁸ among many other descriptors. What Nye considers successful US international smart power, Cammack, throughout the paper, completely disagrees with and argues that US power is essentially in shambles. Important to note, many consider initiatives that are hard power but create soft power or vice versa as a smart power. An example of this is seen within “Smart Power” by Coutu, who utilizes an example of America sending ships to Japan in an effort that she described was to exemplify a “soft power symbol.”³⁹ Nye may disagree with this as he defines smart power as the “combination[...] of both hard and soft power.”⁴⁰ Perhaps this is semantics, but this is a subtle yet clear distinction between Coutu’s idea of smart power that can rely on one power creating another, while Nye may argue that smart power is when both powers are utilized together.

One of the major aspects to this paper is understanding the Belt and Road Initiative and how it plays into China increasing its political power around the world. First, much of my primary work involves the understanding of how strong a relationship China is creating with other states through the BRI. This primary research will be discussed later in the Critical Analysis section. Huang classifies what the BRI is in three themes. First, he points towards the BRI as being China’s strategy to “sustain economic growth” to similar levels that it has been experiencing over the last couple decades.⁴¹ Some strategies that are being applied are the large spread

³⁵ Cammack, “Smart Power and US Leadership, A Critique of Joseph Nye” 15.

³⁶ Cammack, “Smart Power and US Leadership, A Critique of Joseph Nye” 15.

³⁷ Cammack, “Smart Power and US Leadership, A Critique of Joseph Nye” 13.

³⁸ Cammack, “Smart Power and US Leadership A Critique of Joseph Nye,” 15.

³⁹ Diane Coutu, “Smart Power.” *Harvard Business Review*, August 1, 2014.

⁴⁰ Nye, “Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power,” 160.

⁴¹ Huang, Yiping. "Understanding China's Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, framework and assessment," *China Economic Review*, September, 2016, vol. 40, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chieco.2016.07.007>, 315.

creation of oil and gas pipelines, shipping routes, high speed railways, telecommunication infrastructure development, and the building of roads.⁴² Figure #2 shows a well detailed explanation and mapping of the economic plans China has for the BRI. Second, he describes how China plans to use utilize the BRI as a means of “assert[ing] greater international influence.”⁴³ What exactly this means is still fairly contested as China is a very secretive country and some, such as Prasad⁴⁴, point out how there is not necessarily evidence to back up China’s claims regarding the “win-win” situation it says it is creating.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ Huang expands on this point by explaining the potential for China to take on a role of “active participation in the international economic architecture” of the world; with the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (essentially an Asian version of the World Bank or International Monetary Fund (IMF)) as the beginning of this process.⁴⁷ What further long-term large institutional changes China wishes to make in the future, however, are still unknown.⁴⁸ Lastly, Huang points towards the BRI’s aims at infrastructure development around the world. This goal deeply supports China’s first initiative of economic development as China has lent billions of dollars to states that regularly utilize Chinese companies to then build the infrastructure.

Huang also points to China’s support of infrastructure as an initiative to “foster regional cooperation and development.”⁴⁹ Un-noted by Huang are some of the important rules that come with accepting money from China. Most importantly, Shirk explains in her book *China: Fragile*

⁴² Huang, “Understanding China’s Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, framework, and assessment,” 315.

⁴³ Huang, “Understanding China’s Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, framework, and assessment,” 315.

⁴⁴ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 5:25.

⁴⁵ Yi, Wang. “Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation.” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples Republic of China*, July 1, 2016.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/wjbz_663308/2461_663310/t1376908.shtml.

⁴⁶ More on this in the Critical Analysis section.

⁴⁷ Huang, “Understanding China’s Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, framework, and assessment,” 318.

⁴⁸ Huang, “Understanding China’s Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, framework, and assessment,” 318.

⁴⁹ Huang, “Understanding China’s Belt & Road Initiative: Motivation, framework, and assessment,” 315.

Superpower how “Chinese investment in developing countries have one condition: acceptance of the “one-China” policy that requires recipient governments to sever diplomatic ties with Taiwan and recognize Taiwan as part of China’s sovereign territory.”⁵⁰ This is of extraordinary importance as it opens the door into concerning strategies that China is employing throughout the world, potentially furthering imperialist strategies. For instance, China has been accused of “using debt to gain geopolitical leverage by trapping poor countries in unsustainable loans” a process now known as ‘debt trap diplomacy.’⁵¹ One of the most notable results of these debt traps have seen Sri Lanka being forced to sign a 99-year lease for one of its ports to China.⁵² Adding important insight, in an interview, Emmanuel Balogun, a professor of political science at Skidmore College, was more hesitant than Shankar and Prasad on the BRI’s complete correlation to imperialism. He mentioned how states who join the BRI are doing so by their own sovereign will.⁵³ An article by Were suggests a similar notion that those supporting “the debt trap narrative underestimates the decision-making power of African governments.”⁵⁴ Only the future will tell if China utilizes these strategies imperialistically on a larger scale or holds true to its word of creating “a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation.”

While Huang’s three points may paint the picture of the BRI being a well thought out and detailed plan, the reality is actually quite different. At least from the international communities’ perspective, there is much confusion and a lack of clarity as to exactly which projects, especially

⁵⁰ Susan Shirk, *China: The Fragile Superpower*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) 3.

⁵¹ Anzette Were, “Debt Trap? Chinese Loans and Africa’s Development Options.” *South African Journal of International Affairs*, no. 66 (August 2018): https://media.africaportal.org/documents/sai_spi_66_were_20190910.pdf, 1.

⁵² Abi-habib, Maria. “How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port.” *The New York Times*, June 25, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>.

⁵³ Balogun, Emmanuel. Balogun Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China. Personal, March 31st, 2021.

⁵⁴ Were, “Debt Trap? Chinese Loans and Africa’s Development Options,” 1.

from Chinese companies, are part of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) plan or if a master plan even exists.^{55 56} In actuality, the CCP "has never provided an official definition of what constitutes a BRI project, nor has it issued a list of approved BRI participants."⁵⁷ While it is possible the Chinese government knows exactly what projects are part of the BRI it seems dubious that they have a completed plan for every economic project that is actually part of the BRI, an issue that has been exacerbated for me by the thin and often blurred lines between private and state owned companies in China. Lastly, through the BRI and a "community of states that have common interest" China is pushing forth goals for its currency use throughout the world.⁵⁸ Essentially, by utilizing the yuan as the primary currency in loans and economic projects, China looks to realize it's goal of "internationaliz[ing] the yuan."⁵⁹ Along these lines, China has also been using the yuan in transactions for oil with many countries and Matthews believes Saudi Arabia will be "induced to follow suit, ensuring that a significant proportion of global trade in oil is conducted not in the US dollar but in Chinese yuan."⁶⁰ This has massive implications for the United States as the dollar being the primary use of international transaction has given it immense power.⁶¹ Removing that and giving it to China places the US in a much different position. As the article discusses, this may be a prime example of smart power strategies.

⁵⁵ Ang, Yuen, "Demystifying Belt and Road." *Foreign Affairs*, June 20, 2019.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-05-22/demystifying-belt-and-road>.

⁵⁶ Balogun, Emmanuel. Balogun Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 2021.

⁵⁷ Ang, "Demystifying Belt and Road."

⁵⁸ John Matthews. "China's Long Term Trade and Currency Goals: The Belt & Road Initiative." *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 5, 17, no. 1 (January 1, 2019): <https://apjif.org/2019/01/Mathews.html>, 1.

⁵⁹ Matthews, "China's Long Term Trade and Currency Goals: The Belt & Road Initiative," 12.

⁶⁰ Matthews, "China's Long Term Trade and Currency Goals: The Belt & Road Initiative," 12.

⁶¹ Matthews, "China's Long Term Trade and Currency Goals: The Belt & Road Initiative," 5-7.

Overall, this paper uses a wide variety of sources to best explain certain terms, understand complex initiatives, question pervasive ways of understanding power today, and create a potential outlook at the future. It is clear from analyzing many articles, as well as confirmed in interviews, that smart power maintains an absence of a clear definition and path in academia. This paper will attempt to fill the gaps in literature that are present on smart power while answering the research questions *1) Should smart power strategies be known as stronger power building initiatives than hard power strategies? 2) How much does the US and China's current international strategies for power rely on smart power vs hard or soft power initiatives?* This paper will answer these questions with an increased focus and awareness of the legacy of the Trump administration and existence of the Belt and Road Initiative. The topic and contention of power between the United States and China is truly reaching a peak and understanding how these states are continuing to utilize soft and hard power strategies or changing to use smart power strategies is vital. Many aspects of life are impacted by these states, and their relationship. Whether it be clear political and economic aspects such as the BRI and international diplomacy or lesser obviously effected aspects such as physical effects to the world from construction projects or cultural changes from an increase in Chinese tourism.

Theoretical Framework

For this paper I have decided to utilize critical theory as my research's theoretical framework. Pulling from Prasad's book *Crafting Qualitative Research: Beyond Positivist Traditions* critical theory is regularly used for researchers studying "ongoing situations and events."⁶² This clearly applies to my research, as the issue of smart power strategies is happening

⁶² Pushkala Prasad, *Crafting Qualitative Research: beyond Positivist Traditions*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 168.

currently. Continuing from Prasad, critical theory is a “tradition of social inquiry”⁶³ and critical theorists can aim to critique “hegemonic” processes of thought and “pursue thoughtful and sustained critiques of [...] professional mindsets.”⁶⁴ This is important as much of the research I performed has followed this ideology; the belief that much of academic articles readily underutilize smart power due to a multitude of reasons. In addition, I oppose one of the most accepted definitions of smart power from Nye and attempt to offer a newer, less vague, version. In essence, critical theory enables me to write a paper that answers the research questions at hand while simultaneously tackling issues within the related political science community along the way.

Methods

This paper will heavily rely on the use of discourse analysis to determine if and how China and the United States are utilizing more smart power in today’s world. I have performed multiple interviews with experts in the field of international relations that will be critically analyzed to support a wide range of topics covered throughout the Critical Analysis section. Additionally, I have collected speeches as well as press releases from coveted government officials and institutions in the United States and China to understand messaging around certain issues. Furthermore, understanding that these speeches and press releases simply represent the frontstage of the United States and China’s strategies. This means taking these statements with a ‘grain of salt’ is necessary. Important to note, the case of understanding front vs backstage strategy is even more true for China and was a note from two interviewees. Lastly, I also utilize

⁶³ Prasad, *Crafting Qualitative Research*, 154.

⁶⁴ Prasad, *Crafting Qualitative Research*, 157.

newspaper articles as a primary source and material to collect information regarding what different areas of the world are thinking regarding certain international events and trajectories.

Critical Analysis

With a clear understanding of hard and soft power established in literature, the lack of clarity for smart power became evident. First, this paper is going to establish and begin to legitimize a more detailed definition of smart power and clarify what smart power is not. Nye's definition, the combination of hard and soft power resources⁶⁵, is broad and leaves many questions remaining. Other definitions, however, rely too heavily on hard or soft power resources. This can be seen in the CSIS's definition which states: "an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military, but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions of all levels to expand one's influence and establish legitimacy of one's action."⁶⁶ This definition slips in its reliance on military expenditures. In reflection to Nye's definition of hard power we know that factors such as economic sanctions can be considered as such, however in this definition they seem to have no place. Differently than his definitions of soft and hard power, Nye neglected to include a comparable one-word summary for smart power as there is for soft power (i.e., attraction) or for hard power (i.e., coercion). This is where I will begin the process of creating a more apt definition of smart power.

In a short email correspondence with Nye, I asked him what his thoughts were on looking at smart power as the power of "manipulation".⁶⁷ To this he replied "Yes,[...] the coercive[...] aspects definitely involve manipulation."⁶⁸ During an interview, Shankar and Prasad both agreed

⁶⁵ Nye. "Security and Smart Power," 1353

⁶⁶ Armitage and Nye, *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America*, 7.

⁶⁷ Joseph Nye, Email regarding smart power questions, Personal, March, 18, 2021.

⁶⁸ Joseph Nye, Email regarding smart power questions, Personal, March, 18, 2021.

with this new idea of analyzing smart power as the power of manipulation.^{69 70} The difference between coercion and manipulation is small and important. Coercion, especially in the use of hard powers, is utilized to push forth the concept that other actors do not have any say in the use of a certain tactic or initiative. Meanwhile, manipulation enables the understanding that one actor creates a situation that still relies on another actor utilizing their own free will to join in on an initiative. This is the first idea this paper relies on for a clearer understanding of smart power. Secondly, looking at Nye's definition of smart power, "the combination of hard and soft power resources," he puts equal weight on the role of soft and hard power. I would argue that, in actuality, soft power has much less of a role to play than hard powers in smart power initiatives. This is important and a major reason why this paper focuses on comparing hard and smart power instead of all three powers together.

With our understanding of soft power as "one country's [ability to] get other countries to *want* what it wants."⁷¹ it becomes clearer why smart power initiatives do not actually rely on soft power. Instead, smart power initiatives are created from one state's need of access to another state's resources. These resources can range from influence to raw materials. The state using smart power strategies is not relying on soft power tactics and it is not slowly using societal aspects as a reason to get other states to be more like itself. It is, instead, attempting to manipulate other states to join an initiative and better itself over all others. With these factors in mind, and utilizing parts of other definitions stated above, this paper proposes a new definition for smart power: "*An approach to international power building initiatives that looks to bolster and create new institutions aimed at expanding access to resources through the inclusion and*

⁶⁹ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 13:17.

⁷⁰ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 17:00.

⁷¹ Nye, "Soft Power," 166

utilization of other states and their own resources.” This definition elucidates a clearer understanding of what a smart power initiative is. Unlike Nye’s definition, which only works if readers previously understand what soft and hard powers are, this definition creates a demystification of smart power and enables a much wider selection of individuals who are interested to more readily understand the concept, an important aspect of critical theory.⁷² Additionally, it fixes the over-reliance on soft power that Nye, and much of the literature, attributes to smart power. With this definition, while soft powers can be used as an important part of convincing others to join an initiative, they are not equally as necessary as hard power resources. Here, hard power resources, especially those that are ‘coercive’ such as money, end up being a more important factor to building these new smart initiatives. Importantly, smart power initiatives have a large possibility of enhancing the states soft power capabilities. For instance, the impact of the new initiative may create a narrative that the state has increased its diplomatic ability or, looking at the BRI, the state is given recognition for its support in enhancing another states society. This increased soft power could then be used for in making future smart powers, but I believe is not necessary.

One modern phenomenon that improperly utilizes the term ‘smart power,’ that I believe is important to correct is, is the connection of Hillary Clinton’s strategies with her own version of smart power.^{73 74} Anshuman Prasad⁷⁵, in a guest lecture, attributes the reasoning for her strategies being described as “smart” to the fact that they are based heavily around the use of technology and minimal physical presence. He talked about how the heavy reliance on drones

⁷² Pushkala, *Crafting Qualitative Research: Beyond Positivist Traditions*, 157-158.

⁷³ James Traub, “The Hillary Clinton Doctrine.” *Foreign Policy*, November 6, 2015.

<https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/11/06/hillary-clinton-doctrine-obama-interventionist-tough-minded-president/>.

⁷⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/02/28/us/politics/hillary-clinton-libya.html>.

⁷⁵ Anshuman Prasad is not the same Prasad that has been referenced previously throughout this paper. The initial Prasad is in reference to Pushkala Prasad.

was a major aspect of Hillary Clinton's 'smart power' strategy around the world and how in reality her tactics still constitute hard powers.⁷⁶ Interestingly, there is evidence to demonstrate that she does comprehend what a smart power actually constitutes, as she defined it in a 2009 speech given to Senate Foreign Relations Committee as "the full range of tools at our disposal: diplomatic, economic, military, political, and cultural."⁷⁷

This paper can now use this new definition of smart power to analyze how and why the Belt and Road Initiative should be seen as a smart power. To do this we can analyze speeches by President Xi as well as other Chinese government representatives. First, the definition states that initiatives must be an "international power building initiative." There are many ways to show how China sees the BRI as an international project most notably quotes from President Xi's "Work Together to Build the Silk Road Economic Belt and The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road." Throughout this speech, President Xi regularly references international cooperation as an important aspect of the BRI: "We should strengthen international cooperation on production capacity and equipment manufacturing, and seize new development opportunities."⁷⁸ The next part of this definition states that a smart power must "looks to bolster and create new institutions aimed at expanding to resources." We can also prove this through analyzing President Xi's speech in which he regularly refers to rebuilding the "Silk Road Economic Belt."⁷⁹ Furthermore, President Xi references the building of the Asian Infrastructure Bank, an institution in the literal sense, as an important part of the BRI's plan.⁸⁰ Finally, we can address the last part: "the

⁷⁶ Prasad, Anushman. "US Presence in the Middle East." Lecture, April 14, 2021.

⁷⁷ "Hilary Clinton Advocates 'Smart Power'". YouTube. VOA News, 2009.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNQQyKBml04>.

⁷⁸ "Full Text of President Xi's Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum." Xinhua, May 14, 2017.

http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-05/14/c_136282982.htm.

⁷⁹ "Full Text of President Xi's Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum."

⁸⁰ "Full Text of President Xi's Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum."

inclusion and utilization of other states' resources." In a speech by Wang Yi, China's foreign ministry, he reiterates China's front-stage policy of wanting to create "a new type of international relations featuring win-win cooperation."⁸¹ President Xi has also attested that over 100 countries have "supported and got[ten] involved in" the BRI.⁸²

Throughout the interviews performed for this paper, there was a wide range of views regarding the actual implementation of President Xi's so called "win-win" diplomacy.⁸³ Many articles, such as one by The Interpreter titled "Belt and Road: colonialism with Chinese characteristics," have proposed a growing worry that the BRI is imitating many aspects of past western imperialism.⁸⁴ A major aspect furthering some individuals worry is debt trap diplomacy, as was discussed earlier in the literature review. Prasad, perhaps showing the most concern with the potential negative effects of the BRI, talks about the relationships China is creating as "complicated" and describes the use of debt and debt forgiveness as a "strategy."⁸⁵ She believes, specifically pointing to the example of China taking over a port in return for unpaid debt in Sri Lanka, that "debt diplomacy [may end up] entrapping some countries rather than empowering them."⁸⁶ In another interview, Shankar shows a similar, if perhaps marginally smaller, worry over the future of the BRI. He proposes the question:

"What happens once [China] builds that infrastructure, road, railroad, or parliament building?

Do the Chinese pick up and leave, because that's what I'm wondering, what the kind of long-

⁸¹ Yi, "Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation."

⁸² "Full Text of President Xi's Speech at Opening of Belt and Road Forum."

⁸³ Yi, "Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation."

⁸⁴ <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/belt-and-road-colonialism-chinese-characteristics>

⁸⁵ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 1:00.

⁸⁶ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 2:55.

term engagement looks like and if it is viewed in those countries as exploitative or as being stuck in a debt trap?”⁸⁷

He believes that it is too early to decide whether these loans will be viewed as imperial, specifically for actions such as Chinese importation of labor into other states and taking over of land such as in Sri Lanka, or potentially as the next Marshal plan.⁸⁸ Lastly, in discussion with Balogun, the possibility of success for global south nation was more important than the potential for imperialism. He believes, similar to the message pushed by Were,⁸⁹ that joining the BRI increases global south nations’ “agency.”⁹⁰ He also pointed to the messaging given by Chinese officials throughout speeches as proof of their commitment towards members of the BRI.⁹¹ Overall, it seemed to me that Balogun had a more positive outlook, if still cautious, on states joining the BRI than Prasad and Shankar. The perception and outlook of the BRI is immensely important to China. As Prasad aptly points out: “the whole world is watching” and that states are looking at events such as the leasing of the Sri Lankan port and questioning whether or not to increase commitment to China’s initiative.⁹²

The context from the previous section, most notably the new definition of smart power, is helpful with answering this paper’s research questions. Focusing on question number 1: “Should smart power strategies be known as stronger contemporary power building initiatives than hard power strategies?” While hard power strategies have been utilized for thousands of years, modern situations, especially due to nuances caused by evolutions such as state and non-state

⁸⁷ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 12:42.

⁸⁸ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 18:36.

⁸⁹ Were, Anzette. “Debt Trap? Chinese Loans and Africa's Development Options,” 1.

⁹⁰ Balogun, Emmanuel. Balogun Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China.

⁹¹ Balogun, Emmanuel. Balogun Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China.

⁹² Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 0:55.

actors, may have caused these traditional methods of power to struggle in adaptation. To answer this question I further relied upon the interview with Shankar and a lecture from Prasad. First, this paper is going to focus on hard powers and their effectiveness in the modern day and age. When asked, Shankar believed that “hard power resources in themselves have become less useful in the contemporary context.”⁹³ He attributes three aspects of modern international affairs to this reasoning. Specifically for great powers, interacting with traditional methods of hard power, such as physical invasions, are stamped down by the threat of the use of nuclear weapons.⁹⁴

Shankar additionally believes that “economic interdependence” creates a situation where “the prospect of war [is] much more damaging and much more costly.”⁹⁵ Economic interdependence has long been debated over whether or not it stops wars. For example, within “Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations” by Dale Copeland, I could not, however, find anything comparing it to hard powers decreasing usefulness. Because of this connection, I believe Shankar has given an important and innovative insight in regards to hard power in the 21st century. Lastly, Shankar discusses how interstate non-state actors also create a complication of using hard powers within one’s own state, potentially on its own civilians.⁹⁶ With these factors taken into account, Shankar made a point of explicitly stating that hard powers “have not become obsolete” and that “if you were fewer to push me on it, I would still say that hard power is probably the most important kind of, um, indicator of power still.”⁹⁷ However, this insight is followed by discussing the complicated combination of resources it takes to for China’s BRI. Shankar notes that, while China may “believe that the way of building

⁹³ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 7:27.

⁹⁴ Dale Copeland, "Economic Interdependence and War: A Theory of Trade Expectations." *International Security* 20, no. 4 (1996): doi:10.2307/2539041. 9.

⁹⁵ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 8:02.

⁹⁶ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 8:15.

⁹⁷ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 10:27.

up soft power is to pump in money all over the world,” he actually see that as a hard power.⁹⁸ This complicated narrative, however, is where I believe my new definition of smart power thrives. Instead of looking at money as growing China’s soft power or hard power, what China is doing is exchanging money for another resources: *influence*. Shankar’s discussion on money and China, demonstrates why straight hard power initiatives are becoming outdated and being transformed in smart power strategies. These strategies not only gain China influence but simultaneously build China’s soft power, albeit on a smaller scale as issues with the debts and internal struggles such as the Uighurs dampen this ability.

While Shankar may not disagree with Prasad, Prasad does have a slightly different take on hard power. In a lecture, Prasad seemed to be pushing a similar narrative that hard powers are here to stay, but traditional methods of its use are rapidly changing. Prasad splits military hard power resources into two categories, conventional and unconventional weapons. Examples of conventional weapons are manned planes, guns, and tanks; while examples of unconventional weapons are drones and other cyber related tools such as skilled hackers.⁹⁹ Prasad, with a large focus on fighter jets, seems to point towards a continued desire from states for these planes as a reason why hard power capabilities are perhaps less outdated than Shankar might believe them to be. The newfound and increasing use of private military contractors (PMC) is also, to Prasad, an example showing the transformation of traditional hard power resources. These PMC’s, which she essentially describes as having no national loyalty and working simply to make money, can enable countries to skirt around responsibility for more sensitive issues such as the discussions regarding nuclear weapons that Shankar discussed.¹⁰⁰ Prasad has also described, throughout this

⁹⁸ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 11:25.

⁹⁹ Prasad, Pushkala. “Endless Wars and Militarization.” Lecture, April 7-21, 2021.

¹⁰⁰ Prasad, Pushkala. “Endless Wars and Militarization.”

lecture and in other interviews, how states have begun increasing their reliance on the previously discussed unconventional methods.¹⁰¹

Even with slight differences for Shankar and Prasad, their inputs create a clear path demonstrating a degradation in the capacity for hard power resources to be used on a large scale into the future. This does not mean that they necessarily see hard power as being less useful than smart or soft power; for now, this issue seems to be at a tipping point. To specifically answer the research question, from the information provided by Shankar and Prasad, smart power evidently has more potential on the international field than ever before, especially with the increasing difficulties conventional hard powers have throughout the world today.

The second research question, that is “how much does the US and China's current international strategies for power rely on smart power vs hard or soft power initiatives,” more specifically focuses on the US and China’s international strategies. However, I believe that, in clarifying the US and Chinese strategies throughout this section can provide even more insight into supporting the answer for research question #1. To address this question, I am going to utilize a wide range of sources including interviews, newspapers, and speeches.

First, this paper will focus on what the US’s international power is actually based upon. A hypothesis I had going into this research paper was that the US’s smart power capabilities were undervalued, especially in comparison to its hard power resources. With the United States defense spending reaching \$714 billion in 2020,¹⁰² many such as Shankar,¹⁰³ point to it as one of

¹⁰¹ Prasad, Pushkala. “Endless Wars and Militarization.”

¹⁰² U.S. Government Accountability Office. “Defense Budget: Opportunities Exist to Improve DOD's Management of Defense Spending”, February 14, 2021. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-21-415#:~:text=GAO%20Contacts-.Defense%20Budget%3A%20Opportunities%20Exist%20to%20Improve%20DOD's%20Management%20of%20Defense.%24733%20billion%20in%20FY%202021.>

¹⁰³ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 10:27

the most important, if not the most important, aspect of America's international power. This budget is larger than the next 10 countries combined, which is an incredible statistic to contextualize.¹⁰⁴ With this power the United States is able to have a tremendous amount of influence throughout the world. In the South China sea, the US utilizes its navy "as a way of showing the disputed waterway remains open to international use rather than exclusive Chinese control."¹⁰⁵ In an interview, Wang Yi referred to the US Navy's presence as a "provocative action" that "breaches its [the US's] longstanding commitment of not taking sides, and blatantly interfere[ing] in the territorial disputes."¹⁰⁶ The US sees this differently. For the US, its "aircraft carrier's passage in the South China Sea was meant to counter Beijing's vast claims over the waters and signal to allies, such as the Philippines, that Washington was a 'reliable and capable treaty ally.'"¹⁰⁷ The US has used its military power to spread its influence in places all over the world and, even with President Biden creating stricter limits for methods such as drone strikes, this is unlikely to change in the near future.¹⁰⁸ Soft power, until recently, was considered one of the US's strengths around the world, especially, as Shankar points out during an interview, in comparison to China. However, with the legacy of the Trump Administration and the country's poor response to the coronavirus pandemic, this has taken a drastic turn. As President Biden put it in his 100-day speech to congress: America is now facing "a test of whether our democracy

¹⁰⁴ "U.S. Defense Spending Compared to Other Countries." *Peter G. Peterson Foundation*, May 13, 2020. https://www.pgpf.org/chart-archive/0053_defense-comparison.

¹⁰⁵ Ralph Jennings, "China Uses Money, Diplomacy to Push Back Against US in Southeast Asia." *Voice of America*, April 5, 2021. <https://www.voanews.com/east-asia-pacific/voa-news-china/china-uses-money-diplomacy-push-back-against-us-southeast-asia>.

¹⁰⁶ Yi, "Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation."

¹⁰⁷ Sarah Zheng and Lo Kinling. "China, US Send Warships into Disputed Waters amid Rising Tensions." *South China Morning Post*, April 6, 2021. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3128388/china-us-send-warships-disputed-waters-tensions-rise-over>.

¹⁰⁸ Charlie Savage, and Eric Schmitt. "Biden Secretly Limits Counterterrorism Drone Strikes Away From War Zones." *The New York Times*, March 3, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/us/politics/biden-drones.html>.

could survive.”¹⁰⁹ Democracy and freedom have been major aspects of American soft power and the fact that President Biden addresses the faults so clearly shows the extremity of the situation facing the nation. In a faculty panel held by Skidmore College entitled “Aftershock: Global Views of U.S. Democracy After Trump,” the focus was on looking towards the state of the “perceptions of the United States from abroad and the notion of American exceptionalism.”¹¹⁰ Shankar and Prasad were present in this panel, along with Dym, a professor of history and the director of Latin American and Latinx Studies, and Schneider, an assistant professor of economics. Notable statements published in the college’s article regarding the event include:

“What happens in domestic politics in the United States has real-world implications for the world and, for instance, how democracy is perceived - the credibility of something like a democratic political system at the global level.”¹¹¹ – Shankar

“Words really matter. The vocabulary that people, especially politicians, use has weight in the world”¹¹² – Dym

“What this translates to is a sense, in the long term, of the United States as an unreliable partner. This is making countries in Europe, Australia, Japan, India, South Korea and Singapore extremely nervous about long-term relationships and forcing them not only to recalibrate their relationships with the United States but also to recalibrate their relationships with other countries. In other words, they’re hedging their bets.”¹¹³ – Prasad

¹⁰⁹ “Remarks by President Biden in Address to a Joint Session of Congress.” *The White House*. The United States Government, April 29, 2021. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2021/04/29/remarks-by-president-biden-in-address-to-a-joint-session-of-congress/>.

¹¹⁰ Helicke, “Skidmore Faculty Offer Global Perspectives on the United States.”

¹¹¹ Helicke, “Skidmore Faculty Offer Global Perspectives on the United States.”

¹¹² Helicke, “Skidmore Faculty Offer Global Perspectives on the United States.”

¹¹³ Helicke, “Skidmore Faculty Offer Global Perspectives on the United States.”

From these particular quotes and other statements throughout the panel, it is evident that American soft power is in question throughout the world. Early in the panel, Shankar noted how this issue was “not necessarily caused by the Trump Administration but which was certainly magnified and made more apparent to the world by it.”¹¹⁴ The evidence showing a large decrease in American international soft power is rampant and evident not only by the interviews and faculty panel, but also in international news coverage of the US.

These, soft and hard power, are the two most traditional ways of viewing American power however I want to emphasize a much lesser discussed, third version: America’s smart power. Most notably, I want to point out the UN and its many lesser recognized benefits to the US. First and potentially most notably, the US’s position on the UN Security Council and possession of veto powers. These powers, as laid out by the UN, enable the US to “use the veto to defend their national interests, to uphold a tenet of their foreign policy or, in some cases, to promote a single issue of particular importance to a state.”¹¹⁵ From this power the US can block any measure going through the Security Council that effects itself or an ally. The US has used the UN to legitimize wars such as the occupation of Iraq.¹¹⁶ There are many other instances, however I believe it is best summarized by a CSIS report: “Today more than ever, the United States’ national interests[...] are best served by the existence of a rule-based international community. It is precisely this legitimacy of UN action that provides the United States with a vital foreign policy tool at a time when our recent efforts at working multilaterally have faltered.”¹¹⁷ While many do point to the UN as an important part of America’s toolbox, few

¹¹⁴ Helicke, “Skidmore Faculty Offer Global Perspectives on the United States.” 3:50.

¹¹⁵ “The Veto: UN Security Council Working Methods.” Security Council Report, December 16, 2020. <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-security-council-working-methods/the-veto.php>.

¹¹⁶ Forman, “Investing in a New Multilateralism A Smart Power Approach to the United Nations,” 2.

¹¹⁷ Forman, “Investing in a New Multilateralism A Smart Power Approach to the United Nations,” 4-5.

describe it with the importance that I believe it deserves. Interestingly, as pointed out in the interview with Prasad, many seem to relate the UN to the creation of American soft power.¹¹⁸

While I agree that the UN does create an immense amount of soft power, I would argue, especially with this paper's definition, that the UN enables the creation of new initiatives, laws, and diplomatic relations that in actuality are more of a smart power.

Unfortunately for the US, due to issues such as the decade's long neglect and the legacy of the Trump administration, Shankar believes "the UN is struggling, as far as whether it's terminal, I think for now it is."¹¹⁹ With the increasing "democratic deficit" and the UN's inability to change and democratize itself, especially within the Security Council, Shankar calls into question the existence of the UN to continue its history of being an effective tool for the world, and in turn for the US. The deficit in America's ability to create successful smart power initiatives can be seen in President Biden's most recent international summit on global warming where a NYTimes podcast described its lackluster results as being due to "the world really[...]not feel[ing] compelled to follow that U.S. lead in this case. The rest of the world is exhausted of watching U.S. presidents come forward and say, we're the leader in this.[...] We're going to join a big treaty— and then doing a 180 and pulling out of this."¹²⁰ For the US, smart power is its "theoretical core" and is needed to maintain the US's "contextual intelligence".¹²¹ Nye defines contextual analysis as "the intuitive diagnostic skill to align your tactics with a

¹¹⁸ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 12:36.

¹¹⁹ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 39:00.

¹²⁰ Astead Herndon, and Coral Davenport. "Can the U.S. Win Back Its Climate Credibility?" *The New York Times*, April 27, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/27/podcasts/the-daily/biden-climate-change-paris-accord.html?showTranscript=1>.

¹²¹ Iskren Ivanov, "Reshaping U.S. Smart Power: Towards a Post-Pandemic Security Architecture." *Journal of Strategic Security* 13 (3). Henley-Putnam University Press: doi:10.5038/1944-0472.13.3.1829, 56

strategy that fits a given context.”¹²² To Nye, this is a necessary aspect to be a successful leader and is an ability the US has built to a uniquely high level.¹²³ ¹²⁴ Post-pandemic the US’s contextual analysis has failed, a smart power capability, which has therefore lead to the larger failures we see for the US around the world.¹²⁵ The lack of recognition, neglect, and now decaying of what I would argue is the most important aspect of US power, contextual analysis, is the main cause of the many failures the US is experiencing abroad.

Whether it be through hard, soft, or smart power initiatives, the US is struggling throughout every aspect. Post-WWII, the US was seen as a dominating force throughout the world, however since the second Bush administration, and frameworks such as ‘pre-emptive wars’ or the Bush doctrine, institutions that the US has relied upon for influence have struggled tremendously.¹²⁶ In summary, the US still has a significant physical presence on the world through hard powers, such as its military, however they are arguably becoming outdated. Regarding soft power, the most recent administration has left the US with less than ever before. And regarding smart power, the UN seems to be on its last leg and America’s ability to provide itself with contextual analysis is at an all-time low.

Moving forward, this paper will discuss China and the types of power underlying its international strategies, starting with a focus on soft power. For China, soft power has and continues to be an elusive power. Shankar states that he believes China’s method of building soft power is through “pumping money throughout the world.”¹²⁷ He continued to point out how he

¹²² Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs (CCEI). “Joseph Nye: Contextual Intelligence.” YouTube, October 13, 2008. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLLNHQ2T5_M, 0:00.

¹²³ CCEI, “Joseph Nye: Contextual Intelligence.” 0:10.

¹²⁴ Iskren, “Reshaping U.S. Smart Power: Towards a Post-Pandemic Security Architecture”, 56.

¹²⁵ Iskren, “Reshaping U.S. Smart Power: Towards a Post-Pandemic Security Architecture”, 56.

¹²⁶ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 11:20.

¹²⁷ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 11:17.

actually sees money as a hard power resource, which I would also agree. Additionally, he describes China's level of soft power to the US as "not even close at this point."¹²⁸ One theory I had was that China's internal affairs, especially regarding human rights abuses and the genocide of Uighurs in Xinjiang,¹²⁹ would dampen other states willingness to join new initiatives such as the BRI. However, Shankar interprets this differently. Instead, he sees China's external treatment of other nations that are partners in the BRI as the main factor impacting states deciding whether or not to join.¹³⁰ In a very similar way to Prasad,¹³¹ he believes that events such as China taking over a Sri Lankan port are more impactful: If states see other states "getting stuck in debt traps or becoming dissatisfied with how Chinese are conducting themselves, those things will impact how these countries are thinking."¹³² However, I also set to look for answers regarding how much China valued soft power. Prasad believes that "China is less concerned with soft power and more concerned with smart powers."¹³³ Keeping this paper's definition of smart power in mind, this makes complete sense as it is not a vital piece of creating successful smart power initiatives. With these statements in mind it becomes clearer that China is looking to expand the outward image of the nation and not the internal one. China's ability to support other nations is much more important as it is the factor other states are analyzing when deciding to join its initiatives. Internal issues for China, especially with its unrivaled ability to control narratives and information regarding different abuses,¹³⁴ are of much less concern as they do not impact other

¹²⁸ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 29:02.

¹²⁹ For further understanding whats happening the Uighurs throughout China I recommend this article as a good starting place: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/20/world/asia/china-genocide-uighurs-explained.html>

¹³⁰ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 28:27.

¹³¹ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China. Personal, 0:55.

¹³² Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 30:33.

¹³³ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 4:14.

¹³⁴ Amy Qin, and Javier Hernandez. "How China's Rulers Control Society: Opportunity, Nationalism, Fear." *The New York Times*, November 25, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2018/11/25/world/asia/china-freedom-control.html>.

states decisions. China's hard power resources are more thought out than its soft power resources and have a larger impact. They are, however, also affected by the same challenges that the US's hard powers face, especially by economic interdependency. Differently than the US, Shankar describes China as maintaining a more "base level of [military] hard power."¹³⁵ As discussed, this is because China values less tangible hard assets, such as money and diplomatic influence, over traditional or conventional assets. In-fact, in my Shankar and Prasad email, there was an agreement that China's soft power was not a power but a weakness.¹³⁶

China is investing its relatively small amount of soft power and much of its hard power assets into creating more smart powers. This can be seen from near constant speeches from government officials and from the messages that are being pushed within them. For example, in regards to the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), Wang Yi said that "China constructively participated in the whole process of negotiations[... with Chinese] launched highly effective cooperation," cooperation that the US may have been responsible for just a few years prior.¹³⁷ In another interview, Wang Yi heavily discusses China's involvement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), an economic union with 10 Southeast Asian states, and their involvement with the BRI.¹³⁸ A search for "belt and road" on <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>, one of China's websites that house state representatives speeches, returned over 850 individual documents mentioning it. The sheer number of resources, whether it be through diplomatic or monetary initiatives, that China is putting into the creation of the BRI throughout the world is

¹³⁵ Shankar, Mahesh. Shankar Interview on Hard, Soft and Smart power between the US and China, 15:23.

¹³⁶ To clarify, the remarks of China attaining a somewhat negative amount of soft power is correlated directly to the Chinese government, not the immensely long and deep culture of people throughout China and within the region.

¹³⁷ Wang Yi, "Wang Yi: China Is Willing to Build an Even Closer Community of Shared Future with the ASEAN." *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Peoples Republic of China*, June 12, 2018.

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zizj_663340/yzs_663350/dqzzywt_663588/t1568880.shtml.

¹³⁸ Yi, "Wang Yi: China Is Willing to Build an Even Closer Community of Shared Future with the ASEAN."

truly staggering. Wang Yi puts the direct investment at over \$30 billion,¹³⁹ with loans from the AIIB reaching over \$10 billion,¹⁴⁰ and, according to the American Enterprise Institute, invested or received contracts for more than \$300 billion dollars into Sub-Saharan Africa alone.¹⁴¹

China's main power of focus is smart power and almost every ounce of that focus is being funneled into the expansion of its economy and worldwide influence through the Belt and Road Initiative.

Limitations

While I was fortunate enough to have access to several professors to interview and receive advice from, there were some limitations that could be remedied in future work. First, I lacked direct access to politicians and was thus not able to further understand their back-stage intentions. While I attempted to remedy this by evaluating speeches, the speeches often only demonstrate front-stage attitudes. In my opinion, this was even more prominent in the case of China which stringently controls the narrative not only of its official government releases, but also its representatives throughout the world. Furthermore, if given additional time, I would have liked to interview more representatives and professors from many of the global south nations, especially those from nations that are participating in the BRI.

¹³⁹ Rachel Zhang, "China Increases Belt and Road Investment despite Coronavirus and Doubters." *South China Morning Post*, December 21, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3114824/china-sells-confident-message-its-belt-and-road-initiative>.

¹⁴⁰ Karen Yeung, "Lending Won't Create 'Debt Trap' for Countries, Bank Chief Says." *South China Morning Post*, February 18, 2020. <https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3046063/china-backed-asian-infrastructure-investment-bank-wont-create>.

¹⁴¹ "China Global Investment Tracker." *AEI*. The American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation, n.d. <https://www.aei.org/china-global-investment-tracker/>.

Conclusion

This paper evolved to answer not only the research questions but also to provide a new and more demystified definition of smart power: “*An approach to international power building initiatives that looks to bolster and create new institutions aimed at expanding access to resources through the inclusion and utilization of other states and their own resources.*” This definition enabled a critique of Nye’s equal reliance of soft and hard power. Additionally, this paper identifies an appropriate one-word descriptor of smart power as “manipulation.” This helps comparatively with the one-word descriptors used for soft and hard powers.

After re-defining smart power, this paper provided information and sources to answer the first research question: *1) Should smart power strategies be known as stronger power building initiatives than hard power strategies?* While it proved difficult to concretely answer this question, I am confident in reporting two findings. First, smart power strategies have gone relatively unnoticed for their impact. And second, smart power strategies are of equal influence to hard power strategies. Additionally, because of this paper’s new definition of smart power, specifically because of the lesser reliance on soft power for it, I do not see the comparing of smart power strategies with soft power ones to be of importance as they do not easily substitute each other.

The second research question, *how much does the US and China's current international strategies for power rely on smart power vs hard or soft power initiatives*, was able to be answered in a much more concrete manner. For China, with the evidence from interviews and speeches, I concluded that China has put much of its plans for its development of worldwide influence into smart powers. While China does maintain a large army, its traditional weapons capability is much lesser than the US’s and instead, China is investing most of its resources in

the BRI. As for the United States, its hard power is by far the largest in the world, however it is also running into problems regarding its usefulness in a contemporary context. In regard to its soft power, the legacy of the Trump Administration has revealed the decades of neglect that US soft power has faced. Smart power, meanwhile, is an incredibly important aspect of the US's power. Contextual analysis from smart powers is not the "theoretical core,"¹⁴² as some of academia puts it, but instead the actual core that enables proper use of its other powers. The US, however, has not properly supported the many institutions, most notably the UN, that have made its smart powers possible.

For the future, it is of little doubt that smart powers will continue to play an increasingly important role. To preserve its hegemonic presence throughout the world, the US will need to not only re-invest in its old institutions in a hope to save them but re-invest in new smart power strategies to re-assert itself on an international scale. China, due to the Trump administration and its incredibly ambitious BRI, have not only exposed the US as a currently unstable ally, but enabled China to reposition as a global economic player that will rival the US's initiatives post WWII. Through its smart powers, China has a strong possibility, if not certainty, of over-taking the United States on a world scale and replace the very written and unwritten rules of the international relations.¹⁴³

Future Work

While this paper has critiqued other academia for leaving out smart power due to its ambiguity, there is another, more precise power that has also been left out: sharp power. Prasad

¹⁴² Ivanov, "Reshaping U.S. Smart Power: Towards a Post-Pandemic Security Architecture," 56

¹⁴³ 60-minutes. "Secretary of State Antony Blinken: The 60 Minutes Interview." *YouTube*. 60 Minutes, May 2, 2021. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6in8fx1Tc38>.

defined Sharp power as one state using other states strengths against itself.¹⁴⁴ This is clearly a hard power but, similarly to smart power, is under-researched and under-discussed in academia. Sharp power has an important part in further efforts to understand how states wield power in the 21st century.

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¹⁴⁴ Prasad, Pushkala. Prasad Interview on miscellaneous + Sharp power. Personal, April 28, 2021.

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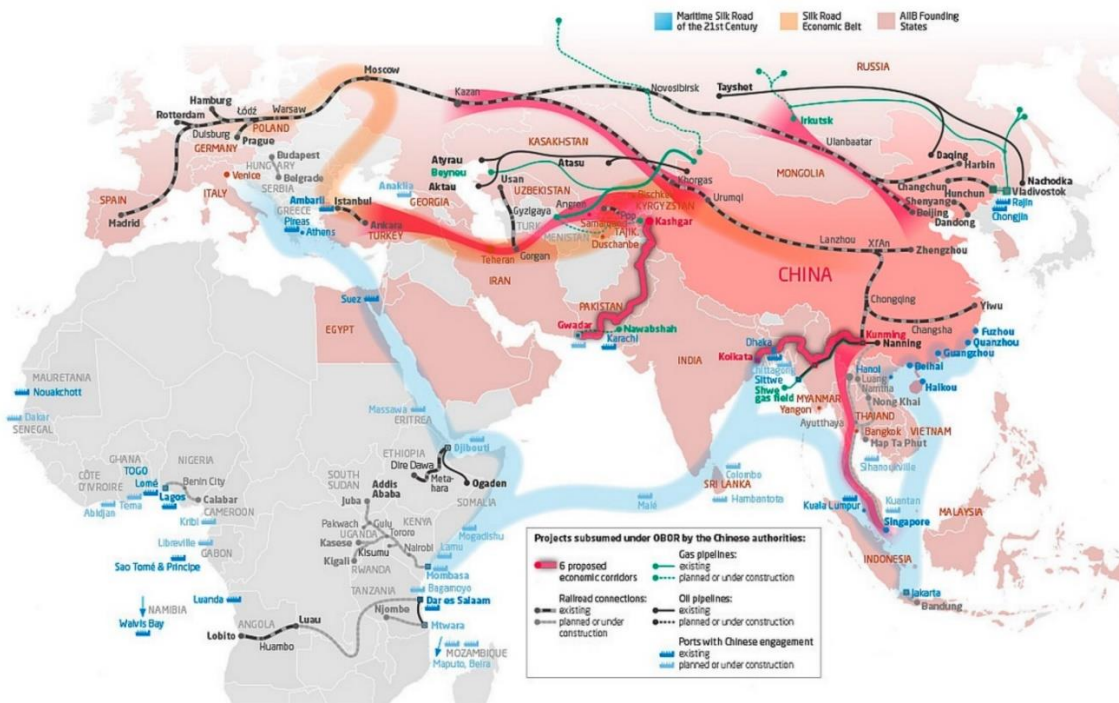
Figures

A. ¹⁴⁵

Dichotomous	Hard power (command)		Soft power (co-opt)	
	Coercion	Inducement	Agenda-setting	Attraction
Continuous	Harder powers		Softer powers	
Resources	Military	Economic	Institutional	Rhetoric/success

¹⁴⁵ Rothman, Steven B., Revising the Soft Power Concept: What are the Means and Mechanisms of Soft Power? *Journal of Political Power*, March 30, 2011, Vol. 4, No. 1, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1799601>, page 51.

B. 146



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