

China's Soft Power to Indonesia: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRAK

Debat tentang kebangkitan Cina biasanya berfokus pada kapabilitas ekonomi dan militernya. Namun, tren saat ini dalam Hubungan Internasional menunjukkan bahwa soft power adalah komponen penting dari status Great Power, seperti yang dapat dilihat dalam kasus Cina yang menggunakan soft power sebagai sebuah perangkat kebijakan luar negerinya di era modern. Posisi Indonesia penting bagi Cina karena perannya dalam Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) dan kekayaan bahan mentahnya yang dibutuhkan Cina. Tujuan artikel ini adalah menganalisa peluang dan tantangan bagi penggunaan soft power Cina terhadap Indonesia.

Kata kunci: *hubungan Cina-Indonesia, soft power, kebijakan luar negeri Cina.*

ABSTRACT

The debate concerning China's rise usually focused on its economic and military capability. However, the recent trend in international affairs shows that soft power is an essential component of Great Power status, as seen in the case of China who uses soft power as a tool of its foreign policy in the modern era. One of the countries that are subjected to China's soft power is Indonesia. Indonesia is important for China because of its role in Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and also its raw commodities that China needs. The aim of this article is to analyze opportunities and challenges for China's soft power to Indonesia.

Keywords: *China-Indonesia relation, soft power, China's foreign policy.*

INTRODUCTION

Discussing China's soft power will not be complete without looking back towards China's early establishment. During Mao's era, after ending the "century of humiliation," Beijing believed that it might utilize its power in the world, but not specifically looking at its soft power. After experiencing how Britain and other European powers conquered and disintegrated China, Mao decided not only to create a revolutionary society at home but also around the world. To help other countries free themselves from colonial masters and capitalist systems, Mao

announced his idea on the Opening Address of the Eighth National Congress of the Communist Party of China by saying "We must give active support to the national independence and liberation movements in countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America." This decision to export revolution, however, did not strengthen China's influence, especially in Southeast Asia. China's support for revolutionary movements, like in Thailand and Burma, has poisoned its relations with developing countries. Many of these countries cut off their relations with China

and established alliances with the United State of America (Kurlantzick, 2007).

Deng Xiaoping brought China's foreign policy to a different path. Deng understood how Maoism had impoverished and alienated China. To recover from that, China would require a peaceful external environment, massive foreign investment, and technology. On achieving this goal, Deng believed that China should "keep a low profile and never take the lead" on world problems (Lam, 2004). Beijing was not ready to bear a role as a world leader. Deng established closer relations with developing countries. He ended China's support for communist rebellion abroad and strengthens China's ties to the United States. He avoids multilateral organizations and barely involves on an important issue at the United Nations. During Deng's leadership, China focused itself on open and reform policy and did not give too much attention on its spread of influence (Kurlantzick, 2007).

The Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 became a turning point for China's influence in the world. For the first time, China was involved in major international issues. The United States failed to respond to the Asian Financial Crisis that opened opportunities for China. China made a symbolic move by refusing to devalue its currency. If China had chosen to devalue its currency, it would force further devaluations of other Asian countries' currencies. Even though what China did was not as big as International Monetary Fund financial bailout, but China "smartly advertised its decision as standing up for other Asian nations." This move seemed to work as the Singaporean ambassador to Washington Chan Heng Chee pointed out that China's decision not to devalue its

currency strengthened China's position in the region (Kurlantzick, 2007).

After the Asian Financial Crisis, China learned that hard power was not the only tools on spreading its influences. China began to see the effectiveness of soft power and try to develop it. This paper will look into China's soft power by discussing the resources, method, challenges, and opportunities for soft power in China. The last part of this paper will examine how China soft power affecting Indonesia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Sources of Soft Power

Before we discuss the sources of soft power, it would be best to have the same understanding of soft power. Joseph Nye defines soft power as "getting others to want the outcomes that you want-co-opts people rather than coerces them." It relies on the ability to make others have the same preferences as you. It is important to understand that soft power is not simply the same with influence and it is more than just persuasion. Soft power is attractive power, it needs the ability to attract others which leads to compliance. The assets that produce such attraction are the sources of soft power. Nye argues that there are three key resources to country's soft power: "its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)" (Nye, 2004: 5-6).

It's also worth to note that culture, values, and policies are not the only resources of soft power. Economic and even military can contribute to soft power. In reality, sometimes it is hard to differentiate what part of economic

relationship encompasses hard and soft power. At the same time, the military can also be a source of attraction when military cooperation and training program can establish networks that can be used to strengthen country's soft power (Nye, 2004). It also needs to take into consideration that relations between hard and soft power are often intertwined. Both of them are related because "they are both aspects of the ability to achieve one's purpose by affecting the behavior of others." The things that differentiate them are in the "nature of the behavior and in the tangibility of the resources." Hard power relies on coercion or inducement while soft power relies on "the attractiveness of one's culture and values" (Nye, 2004: 7).

ANALYSIS

Chinese Soft Power

The discussion about Chinese soft power already becomes a hot topic among the scholar. Joshua Kurlantzick, in his book *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* argues that soft power has changed in the context of China. He suggests that for the Chinese "soft power means anything outside of the military and security realm." He believes soft power not only includes popular culture and public diplomacy but also "more coercive economic and diplomatic levers like aid and investment and participation in multilateral organizations." To put in Nye's carrots and sticks analogy, China can threaten other nations with sticks if they not comply, but it can give fairly large carrots if they do (Kurlantzick, 2007: 6). Kurlantzick statement is supported by a US Congressional Research Service report. The report stated that Chinese sources of soft power in Southeast

Asia largely came from foreign aid, trade, and investment. The report also mentions that China's growing soft power in Southeast Asian has brought new challenges to the United State foreign policy (Lum & Vaughn, 2008).

Michael Barr, in his book *Who's Afraid of China? The Challenge of Chinese Soft Power* has different idea with Kurlantzick. He argues that Kurlantzick's claim was a misconceived of China's soft power and not supported by evidence. Barr believes that this confusion happens for the reason that "giving Chinese soft powers an elevated status it does not deserve – does much to help create and sustain the notion of China as a rising and threatening power." Eventhough China's soft power is not omnipotent, it is also not powerless. China has made quite a deal in attracting others. Although it is still in the rudimentary stage, it already has impacts on the international level.

There are few questions that need to be answered regarding China's soft power, Where does it come from? What are the means? Is China's soft power effective? And the last, what are the challenges and opportunities of China's soft power? For the last two questions, we will focus our discussion on the effectiveness, challenges, and opportunities of China's soft power to Indonesia.

For answering the first question, it is important to recall the three main sources of soft power that Nye mentions; cultural, values, and policies. In terms of culture, China has always had an attractive traditional culture. The opening ceremony of Beijing Olympic which mesmerized and captivated people around the world was one of the examples. According to Nye, China is also entering the realm of global popular culture. Gao Xingjian who is

Chinese novelist won China's first Nobel Prize for literature in the year 2000. The Chinese film "Wolf Warrior 2" became the highest grossing non-English film in 2017. The enrollment of foreign students in China has increased greatly in the past two decades. According to data from China Scholarship Council, from 2007 to 2015 the number of international enrollments is more than double, making China the third most popular destination country for international students after the United States and the United Kingdom in 2016 (Schulmann & Ye, 2007). In an agenda to promote Chinese language and culture, Confucius Institute was established worldwide since 2004. As a non-profit public educational organization affiliated with China's Ministry of Education, Confucius Institute has been built in 142 countries with a total 516 in 2017 (Cho & Jeong, 2008).

President Hu Jintao stated the importance of culture as sources of soft power in his keynote speech in the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2007. He stated that the party must "enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests." Following the 17th Party Congress, China committed to expand its soft power. China spends a considerable amount of financial backing. Cai Wu, head of the Ministry of Culture, explained the support that Chinese government gave to Chinese culture industry. According to the National Bureau of Statistic, in 2016 China's culture industry had a market value of US\$456.4 billion accounting for 4.07 percent of China's GDP that year (Yan, 2017). Because the sector has become a significant engine for boosting China's economy, the government issued a

Plan to Reinvigorate the Culture Industry to promote the competitiveness of China's culture industry. This plan set out fund for supporting the animation and film industry, performance arts, television production, cultural exhibitions, and online media (Barr, 2011).

In terms of political values, Nye believes that the era of Maoism is already behind. Even though China remains as authoritarian regimes, the success of its economy has made many developing countries attracted to China (Nye Jr. *et al.*, 2009). China's model of development called Beijing Consensus has attracted many developing countries in South Asia, Africa, Latin America, Russia and former Soviet countries such as Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. The Beijing Consensus implied the idea "that an authoritarian political system can be maintained while also pursuing high economic growth" (Cho & Jeong, 2008: 466). The Beijing Consensus is an economic model development that stresses the importance of innovation, constant experiment, export-oriented growth, and state control. China offers a new model which is contrast to Washington Consensus that prescribes privatization, deregulation, and democracy reform (Barr, 2011). The Beijing Consensus might replace Washington Consensus in the future if China strengthens its economic assistance for and cooperation with developing countries mentioned above. This shows the importance of the Beijing Consensus in increasing China's soft power (Cho & Jeong, 2008).

The last source to discuss is policies. There are three important foreign policy principles to discuss regarding the spread of China's soft power which is non-intervention, harmonious, and peaceful

development and community with shared future for mankind. The non-intervention policies that China implements are the opposite of United States foreign policy. China's respects for sovereign equality propels China to not intervene in internal affairs of other countries. In that spirit, China listens to other countries concern such as Cuba, Burma, and North Korea about sanctions and embargoes. During a debate about the embargo on Cuba, China's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations said at the UN General Assembly in 2001 stated that "the international community as a whole has a strong desire for a certain country to forsake its outdated practice of economic embargo." This messages can be captivating not only to authoritarian regimes but also many other countries (Kurlantzick, 2007).

Harmonious and peaceful development is diplomatic strategies during Hu Jintao era. In his keynote speech in the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, Hu stated "we must pursue peaceful development . . . We should develop ourselves by securing a peaceful international environment and uphold and promote world peace through our own development. We should expand common interests with all others and work to build a harmonious world of enduring peace and common prosperity." The threat concerning China rise is one of the reasons that cause Chinese government promoting this policy. A White Paper called *China's Path to Peaceful Development* issued by the State Council Information Office in December 2005, explained that China's development is being achieved by relying on its own capabilities and will accommodate the trends of globalization

and makes an effort to realize mutual benefits and common development with other countries or also called win-win strategy.

Another foreign policy to discuss is a community with shared future for mankind. This idea was put forward by Xi Jinping in 2013 (China Daily, 2017). But the full explanation of this concept was poured in his speech in the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China a few months ago. Xi appealed "on the people of all countries to work together to build a community with a shared future for mankind, to build an open, inclusive, clean, and beautiful world that enjoys lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity." He stressed the importance of cooperation to face the challenges of humankind and to throw away the old-school winner-takes-all mentality. Here we can see that China's policies changes in line with the power that China has right now. China acting as a responsible great power eventually will increase China's soft power not only in the region but also in the world.

Decades of reform and development not only influence China's hard power but soft power as well. From the explanation above, we can see the strengthening of China's soft power. Here, we already answer the first two questions about Chinese soft power. In the next part we will discuss the effectiveness and limits of Chinese soft power but only focusing on Indonesia.

Chinese Soft Power to Indonesia

China-Indonesia relations were not always going smoothly, there were ups and down. The lowest point was during the term of Indonesia's second President, Suharto. During Suharto era (1966-1998),

the relationship between China and Indonesia was deteriorated and full of suspicion. Jakarta suspended diplomatic ties and direct trade link with Beijing. However, after 23 years of 'frozen' relationship, China-Indonesia relationship was normalized in 1990 (Suryadinata, 1990: 684) but their relationship did not immediately changed into a bilateral one. The significant progress happened after the fall of Suharto in 1998. After the relationship between two countries improved, the cooperation began to establish. As the relationship continues, both of them realize that it is not only Indonesia who needs China, for the trade and financial aid, but China needs Indonesia as well. Indonesia is a home for one of the world's most strategic waterways which are the Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok Straits. These Sea Lines are crucial for China's energy security, trade and also strategic maneuverability because eighty percent of China's oil imports pass through the Malacca straits (Denmark, 2010). Indonesia is a source of important natural commodities to China such as palm oil, coal, and liquefied natural gas. Indonesia is also critical to China's economic integration with Southeast Asia nations given the fact that ASEAN in the fourth largest trading partner to China (Nabbs-Keller, 2011).

As we already discuss the importance of Indonesia to China, thus it is understandable why China tries to increase its soft power to Indonesia. During the 1998 riot in Indonesia,¹ Beijing upholds its

¹ The financial meltdown happened in Indonesia in the year of 1998, lead to a disastrous riot between Indonesian indigenous people and Indonesian Chinese minority. Chinese minority was demonized

non-intervention policy and did almost nothing to stop the riot. Beijing announced its concerned towards the suffering that Chinese Indonesians experienced but it did not put any pressure on Jakarta to protect Chinese Indonesians. This influenced Indonesian leaders' opinion towards Beijing. The suspicions toward Beijing decreased and Indonesian leaders believe Beijing was becoming more pragmatic and non-interventionist (Kurlantzick, 2007: 121-123). To increase its influence to Indonesia, Beijing also gives financial aid to Indonesia. Unfortunately, it is hard to find the exact number of the aid because China did not release any data towards its aid to other countries. However, according to a comprehensive analysis by Henry Yep of National Defense University, China's aid to Indonesia was nearly double the US aid by 2004 (Kurlantzick, 2007: 98).

China continued its effort to be one of the biggest economic contributors to Indonesia by giving Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). According to data provided by the Investment Coordinating Board China Investment to Indonesia increased by years. In 2015, China's foreign direct investment was at US\$600 million and triple in 2016, contributed almost US\$1.6 billion investment to Indonesia (Dacanay, 2016). Not only in the economic sector, China also increased its education fund for Indonesian students. During his visit to Indonesia, Xi Jinping

because the wealth that they have. The mobs began attacking, robbing, and burning Chinese own shop. These incident make thousand Chinese Indonesians fled the country, and many more escaped Jakarta.

delivered a speech to Indonesia's parliament proposing "to set 2014 as the year of China-ASEAN cultural exchanges. In the coming three to five years, China will offer ASEAN countries 15,000 government scholarships." China seems to be committed toward this goal because there is a significant rise in the government's fully-funded scholarships. The amount of student was increased significantly from 15 in 2015 to 187 in 2016 (Yosephine, 2017).

It is difficult to know precisely whether China's soft power resources automatically resulted into a desired outcome for China, but there is some evidence that China's soft power has influence Indonesia's policy choices. In terms of the dispute between Taiwan and China, Indonesia chooses to recognize only one China, respect China's national unity and territorial integrity (One China Policy). Indonesia is also willing to crack down on Falun Gong, a spiritual movement views as a potential threat to China security, after China requested it. Indonesia banned the march by Falun Gong supporters and sentenced Falun Gong activists to jail (Kurlantzick, 2007). Another major choice is when Indonesia chooses China over Japan to build Indonesia's first high-speed railway. It took weeks for Indonesia to reach decision to choose China to build 150 KM high-speed rail line to connect Jakarta and Bandung (Tiezzi, 2015).

Further influence China has on Indonesia is the student preference of place to study. Indonesians interest in Chinese education has increased in the last 15 years. Since the year of 2010, the number of Indonesian students in China has increased 10 percent annually (Jegho, 2015). According to Mr. Sun Weide,

Chargé d'Affaires of the Chinese Embassy in Indonesia, China is the second largest overseas education destination for Indonesians with over 14,000 students currently pursuing academic degrees in China (Minister of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2018).

Challenges and Opportunities for China's Soft Power to Indonesia

As described above, China has channeled its soft power to Indonesia and it is influencing the way the Indonesian government carries out its foreign policy towards China. Thus, the relationships between the two countries are in good condition up to now. Nevertheless, some new opportunities emerged and expected to have good impacts on the China-Indonesia relationship.

The first opportunity arises from the change of American foreign policy. In the Obama administration, the United States pursues foreign policy pivot to Asia. President Obama was aware of the increasing influence of China in the Asian region. However, with the election of Trump as the US President, the policy changed to America first, which means that the United States will prioritize domestic affairs rather than foreign ones. The changes in the United States policy can be seen in the first year of President Trump's administration. United States withdrawal from Paris agreement and Trump decided not to join Trans-Pacific Partnership and even threatened to leave of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). This change also affected US and Indonesia relationship. During his visit to Asian countries, President Trump did not include Indonesia in the list of countries to visit in the Asian region. This condition can be seen as an opportunity for

China to expand its influence in Asia especially to Indonesia (Smith, 2017; Shear, Landler, & Kanter, 2017; Bonasir, 2017).

The second opportunity comes from Indonesia's plan to develop domestic infrastructure. In his keynote speech on the Second Seminar of 100 Indonesian Economists, President Joko Widodo explained the need to conduct infrastructure development aggressively to create higher economic growth (Indonesia Secretariat Cabinet, 2017). With this condition, China has a chance to continue to play an active role in Indonesia's infrastructure development. Especially when some of China's infrastructure cooperation with Indonesia was considered quite successful. In 2009, China helped Indonesia finishing power plant projects that were suspended because of lack of financing. Bank of China and China Export Import Bank agreed to finance the project that cost US\$1.061 billion. China also participated on the construction of Suramadu Bridge that connects Surabaya and Madura Island as long as 5.4 km. Indonesia's plan to develop its infrastructure can be China's opportunities to increase its soft power to Indonesia through joint cooperation on building the infrastructure or even give a financial aid or investment for Indonesia's infrastructure plan (Simbolon, 2009).

The promotion of culture and language became one of the important means to spread a country's soft power. In recent years, Indonesian students showed growing interest in learning Chinese resulting in a higher demand for Mandarin Chinese teacher in Indonesia (Xinhua, 2014). Indonesia needs approximately 100,000 Chinese-language instructors because the demand has

become so high (Kurlantzick, 2007). This condition opens opportunities for China to spread its culture to Indonesia. One of the instruments of China's cultural expansion is Confucius Institute. Confucius Institute established around the world to spread Chinese language and culture. According to Confucius Institute Headquarters, until 2017 there are only six Confucius Institutes in Indonesia. Thus, China has the opportunity to open more Confucius Institute because of increasing demand for learning Chinese language. The increasing number of Confucius Institute in Indonesia will improve people-to-people connection and open the access for Indonesian people to learn more about Chinese culture and its people. This is an opportunity for China to increase its soft power in Indonesia.

Despite the improvement of the relationship between China and Indonesia, there is no guarantee that the relationship will continue to go smoothly. China will face some challenges in imposing its soft power influence in Indonesia.

First, the revival of anti-communist in Indonesia. The spread of Communism has been a dark history in Indonesia. The Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was allegedly to be behind the execution and torture of six Indonesian military generals. Even though PKI was already destroyed and banned since 1965, the paranoia about its revival still lingers until today. The anti-communist paranoia has surged significantly during Joko Widodo's presidency. On 29 September of 2017, an anti-communist demonstration happened in Jakarta. Thousands of Indonesian Muslims rallied outside Indonesia's House of Representatives to protest the revival of PKI (Maulia, 2017). The fact that China is known for its communist ideology will not help China's image in the future.

Especially during the presidential election in 2019, where the sentiment of anti-communist will be used for political gain. According to BBC World Service pool in the year on 2017 itself, China's favorable view has dropped from 52 to 28 percent in Indonesia. This indicates that a majority of Indonesian have negative view towards China.

Second, sentiment towards Chinese workers. Altering perceptions and suspicions towards Chinese may take times. Even when the relations between two countries is in good term, there were reports that there are resentments toward workers from mainland China in Indonesia (Sukma, 2009). The situation gets worse when rumors and conspiracy theories related to the Chinese workers swarm Indonesian news and social media. In 2016 "chili conspiracy" accusing China of using a biological weapon against Indonesia flooded Indonesian news outlet. After four Chinese nationals were arrested for planting imported chili seeds contaminated with a bacteria. Even though this bacteria is harmless to human but it can cause failure in crops (Reuters, 2016). Another false rumor that spread is about 10 millions of Chinese workers in Indonesia. This rumors spread fears among local people that think that Chinese workers will take away much-needed jobs that local people count on for their livelihood (Cocounut Jakarta, 2016). The sentiment towards Chinese workers was getting worse after not long ago, one Chinese worker had to be deported after insulting Indonesian state symbol. His action sparked anger from local people who saw him when he unplugged the flagpole which has Indonesian flag tied in it and threw it to the ground (Perdana, 2017).

Then, the perception of how the Chinese government treated its Muslim society can be judged as a challenge of channeling China's soft power in Indonesia. Indonesia is a majority Muslim country and some Muslim Indonesians are concerned about the problem faced by Muslims in other countries. For example, Indonesian Muslims are very active to protest human rights violations towards Palestinians, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, and Moro Muslims in the Philippines. Chinese government's policy towards Muslim Uyghur Muslims has been discriminatory, which potentially change Indonesians perception toward China.

The Human Right Watch World Reports 2017 stated that China committed human rights violations to its Uyghur Muslim communities living in the country (HRW, 2018). Muslim Uyghur has been banned for wearing face veils and growing long beards. Uyghur parents also ban for naming their children with dozens of 'extreme' Islamic attributes, like Jihad, Islam, and Quran (Chen & Connor, 2017). Local authorities also banned civil servants and anyone drawing a salary from the state for praying or fasting during Ramadan (Sulaiman & Finney, 2016). If the Chinese government did not do anything towards this issue, it can bring negative impacts on China's image, and eventually reduces its soft power toward Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

China has been actively applying its soft power since the open reform policy begins. Culture, values, and foreign policies are the key elements of China's soft power. When it comes to channeling its soft power to Indonesia, China uses economic means such as financial aid, trade and investment, also a scholarship

fund for Indonesian students. It is quite hard to figure out precisely the effectiveness of China's soft power to Indonesia, but there are some evidences that China's soft power has influence Indonesia's policy choices. However, it did not rule out the opportunities and challenges for the application of China's soft power to Indonesia. Opportunities come from the economic assistances provided by the Chinese government toward Indonesia's much needed infrastructure development. While challenges might come from the issues of Chinese workers in Indonesia and discriminatory treatment of Moslem society in China which frequently ignite critical response within Moslem society in Indonesia toward China.

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