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China's soft power and its strategy in West Asia

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Abstract

The dramatic growth and sudden rise of China's economy on the one hand has increased its national power and on the other hand has strengthened "China-phobia" and presented a threatening image of it by the world powers. On the other hand, in order to counter this threatening image and neutralize the wave of "Sinophobia", the Chinese tried to present a peaceful and cooperative image of their country to the world by using the soft power strategy. . By relying on the capabilities and capacities of their country in various fields, the Chinese have given their soft power a "Chinese character" and tried to rebuild their image inside China and in international circles by applying soft power strategies. The main question of the article is what is the position of West Asia in China's soft power strategy and what resources does it use to achieve its goals in this region? In response to the main question, the paper's hypothesis is

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that soft power in its Chinese version had significant differences from Joseph Nye's original idea. In fact, the Chinese have imported the American version of soft power and adjusted, strengthened and, in other words, internalized it with their abilities, capacities and political philosophy.

The current research, by adopting the descriptive-analytical method and relying on library data, to understand and explain China's software presence in West Asia, traces China's efforts in three areas: 1) In the cultural area: through the examination of strategies such as "use of educational tools and methods", "media methods" and "tourism industry"; 2) In the political field: through the examination of the policy of "balance of influence" and the policy of "mediation" and relying on the "ideological foundations of Confucianism" and 3) In the economic field: through the examination of the three tools of "energy exchanges", "Foreign Investments" and "Belt-Road Initiative".

The region of West Asia, which has long been a platform for competition between great powers, has been heavily focused on by Chinese policymakers in the last two decades. China has a special view on this region for various reasons, such as ensuring its energy security in order to maintain sustainable economic growth, and the special position of the West Asian region in the "Belt-Road" initiative. Therefore, China is seriously seeking to expand diplomatic relations with the countries of the region, and one of the most important tools for facilitating these relations is the use of soft power strategy and its tools in this region.

In West Asia, China's cultural soft power strategy is realized in three ways: 1) the use of educational tools and methods, 2) media methods and 3) the tourism industry. In line with the application of educational diplomacy, since the beginning of 2004, the Chinese government has made extensive investments in the creation of cultural and linguistic centers known as Confucian institutions in the world. These institutes, which operate in major universities around the world, are managed by Hanban (Office of the International Chinese Language Council, a branch of the Chinese Ministry of Education). Today, China has 17 Confucius Institutes and 5 Confucius Classes in West Asia. In line with media diplomacy, since China's goal is to gain fame and popularity and portray the world through soft power and confront the Western portrayal of this country, it has also internationalized its media. In 2009, China's state television started broadcasting news in Arabic with the launch of the International Arabic Channel (CCTV), which is now called CGTN. In addition, China Today publishes its Arabic edition in West Asia, which informs its readers about world affairs, news related to China, and China's organized activities in the region.

During the last few decades, America has been the most important foreign

interventionist power in West Asia. Therefore, reducing American influence in the West Asian region is a priority for China. The intensification of the competition between China and America at the global level also makes this goal more prominent in China's foreign policy. But China's approach to achieve this goal is different from the approach of America and other great powers in the West Asian region; Instead of using military power and trying to expand the military base or deploying its troops in the region, China prefers diplomatic and economic means. In other words, China is trying to balance the influence of other powers in the region without a direct and extensive military presence and define its role in West Asia by using diplomatic and economic tools. Examining China's approach to the Syrian war, Libyan war and nuclear negotiations with Iran confirms this issue. To put it more clearly, China has replaced the balance of influence using economic and diplomatic tools with the "balance of power" using military tools. The most important advantage of this approach for China is to avoid direct conflict with America and its exorbitant costs, while advancing its goals in the region. China tries to indirectly reduce American influence in the region and adjust the balance of power in the region to the detriment of the United States without military conflict in two ways: First, by supporting those regional actors. that their political system has an anti-western nature and secondly, by using existing regional and global institutional arrangements.

China's average economic growth of 10% and, as a result, the use of economic diplomacy, led to the expansion of this country's economic presence in the world. Based on the geo-economic strategy, the main duty of the government was to develop economic links with other governments. In West Asia, the relationship between economic development and the application of soft power strategies for the Chinese has been two-way. This means, on the one hand, the Chinese used soft power tools to facilitate the establishment of economic ties with the countries of the region, and on the other hand, high economic exchanges and exchanges have become the basis for the soft influence of China in the culture and politics of the countries of the region. is Therefore, the Chinese have turned their economic diplomacy into sources of soft power and increasing their regional influence in West Asia in three ways, which are: "energy exchanges", "foreign investments" and the project "Belt-Road Initiative".

The investigations of this research showed that China's software presence in West Asia can be traced in three areas. The first source of China's soft power in this region of West Asia is cultural in nature and is achieved through strategies such as "use of educational tools and methods", "media methods" and "tourism industry". The second source is related to the political soft power, which is ap-

plied through the policy of "balance of influence" and the policy of "mediation" and relying on the "ideological foundations of Confucianism". The third source also refers to China's economic soft power and is achieved through three tools: "energy exchanges", "foreign investments" and "Belt-Road initiative".

Key words: Soft power, Collaborative power, China, West-Asia, Soft power with Chinese characteristics.