Contents

1
Unit

Media, Cultural and Soft Power in China

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Unit

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Warm–up: Be proactive

Direction: *MEDIA team are going to do warm-up activities by discussing, airing their views on the topic and discovering problems.*

Objectives: *To arouse students' interest, get a preliminary understanding of relevant knowledge and prepare for the following study.*

Edward: Hi, MEDIA group. We begin to embark on a new journey from today on. I am sure that your participation in the previous tasks in *Chinese Printing*, *Chinese Publishing* and *Chinese Painting* etc. must have accumulated a lot of experience for this mission. You will have a good job.

Maynor: Sure. You are definitely a well-organized group. But the mission may be full of landmines and will be quite challenging. You need to be well prepared. So, I'd like to remind you of why we want to inquire and clarify problems concerning Chinese media.

Irene: That's exactly what I hope to make clear. One problem I have been obsessed with is why media in many countries are state-owned. Once war happened, the side who occupied the media would be in an advantage…

Angela: That's because media can spread what had happened to the society and to the world.

Davis: In my viewpoint, dissemination of war information is just one aspect. The more crucial function of media is defeating the enemy from public opinion.

Irene: And inspiring their people to stand on their side. Take the current Russia-Ukraine conflict as example, Ukraine can take more advantage of media publicity than Russia.

Angela: The same as news broadcasting in the Iraq War in 2003. Iraq Minister of Publicity, Mohammed Said Sahaf, impressed

almost everyone in this world. He held on broadcasting how Iraq army bravely resisted the attack from American army until the TV station was totally occupied.

Davis: So, it is never too enough to stress the power of media. The image, culture, politics and entertainment etc. all release to the world through diversity of media including newspaper, TV, radio, and particularly internet-based new media.

Maynor: What if media didn't exist, what would the world look? So, let's start with a listening passage to get preliminary concept of Media Power.

All: Welcome. (Applause)

Task 1 ▶ **Listening activity**

Direction: *MEDIA team are going to listen to an introduction of key concepts so as to lay the foundation for later learning.*

Objectives: *To understand the main conception, practice and strengthen the ability of listening comprehension.*

Media Power

When discussing media power, we refer to the interconnections between social actors, institutional structures, and the larger contexts of society, which are all involved in the allocation of symbolic resources to format specific influence. According to Des Freedman Goldsmiths (Professor of media and communication studies in the University of London), the relational conception of media power is constituted by four dimensions of related media scholarship: consensus, chaos, control, and contradiction.

Figure 1.1 Media power. Source:《新媒体 —— 媒体形态的一种》, 科普中国 , Baidu Baike.

The consensus paradigm reflects liberal pluralism in advancing democracy. In this case, a free and open market is required for competition between different outlets and exchanges of various content to limit the administration power. The market-driven media weaken the dominant political voice and concentrated authoritative power, while the non-profit media serves the common interests of the general public, consisting of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

The chaos paradigm refers to the cultural chaos of ideological dissemination and fundamental indetermination, especially in the digital empowerment of decentralized power models. With the rise of digital media,

traditional order structures, from ideological control to production monopoly to consumer consumption attitude and behavior, have been tremendously dislocated and relocated. As the progressing technologies favour the audience with more choices and controls among what and when to access news and information, as well as chances to generate and publish content, the power in the digital age is operated in far less hierarchical ways. What is more, the popularization of social media and its significant promotion of online activism resulting in offline social-political actions around the world has proved the concept of media counterpower.

The control paradigm stems from the ruling authority's power of directing and determining symbolic resources to introduce hegemonic viewpoints and values. In other words, the privileged or powerful group regards the media as a cultural apparatus to exercise publicity and public relations, aiming for predictable outcomes. Consequently, mainstream media has then become an essential tool for state power to guide public opinions and actions.

Lastly, the contradiction paradigm refers to the contradictory relationships with the reproduction of existing relations of media power. Typical internal contradictions, based on Freedman, include structure and agency, contradiction and action, consensus and conflict, and producers and audiences. To provide a comprehensive approach to study the media, highlights of such contradictions from a wider social, political, economic, and cultural context are required.

With the emergence of computer-mediated-communication and the rapid growth of the Internet since the millennium, many media scholars have highlighted that the decentralized communications of the Internet have the potential to enhance the public sphere and democratic deliberation. The interactivity notion of the Internet is not only social interaction, person-to-person conversation, or face-to-face communication, but also a special case of mediated social interactions where impersonal interactions with media content also occur. Further, the Internet offers a relatively positive and critical approach for individuals to find new ways to develop their freedom through participation and engagements. That is, online interactive practices enable users in controlling their information consumption through personalized functions and offer them opportunities to express ideas or experiences as well as to participate in public debates. At the same time, the Internet transforms people from information receivers into information providers, while anybody with minimal skills and access to a computer network can post information online without a license or government permission. Although it becomes possible for citizens to get their voice heard through online political participation, they

must still comply with the content guidelines set by either corporations or state authorities. As a result, new patterns of information flow have emerged where the power appears to be in the hands of the public, rather than the media corporations or state authorities.

Figure 1.2 Network-based media. Source: "Salt and Paper, Media and Its Power", July 3, 2018, https:// medium. com.

The Internet offers new modes of communication for people, as its global nature crosses national boundaries with affordable technologies, and increases potential access to a vast and diverse quantity of information. The many-to-many mode of communicative interaction online and the increasing interactivity of digital media both indicate the rise of a new form of public sphere regardless of linguistic, cultural and spatial differences. In the online sphere, unofficial and potentially unauthorized information can be quickly disseminated, and discussions of news events can take place in virtual-real-time. This leads to the return of social participation in which large groups of people are reading and commenting upon supposedly stable but questionable texts.

Task 2 ▶ Listening comprehension

Direction: *MEDIA team are going to have a topic-oriented discussion to exchange their views on the listening material and challenge each other with puzzling questions.*

Objectives: *To broaden students' horizon, develop their ability to sum up the skills of answering questions and strengthen language output ability.*

Davis:	Hi, guys. How do you understand the notion concerning media power mentioned above? I feel totally confused. I am anxious to get your help.
Irene:	Dear Davis, don't so worry about that. I assure you that I can offer you a hand even though it seems all tangled up. But I can first disentangle some of my thoughts to make an explicit explanation.
Angela:	I think the notion about media power is well elaborated in a clear logical way. It told us from whom the definition of media power was originated, and listed what were the four elements consisting of media power. And…
Davis:	Oh, wait, wait. What you said just enlightens me. The notion of media power was from Freedman. In his opinion, media power covered four dimensions of factors: consensus, chaos, control, and contradiction. Am I right?
Irene:	Perfectly right. It is a consensus that only a free and open market for various outlets and contents can make the public voice heard.
Angela:	And chaos appears because the market-driven media may break the original order and reorganize the discourse order. You know new technologies favour the audience with more choices and controls among how to access the useful content. Various voices can get involved in the making of the content.
Davis:	Media is a sort of power because government can use media to direct and influence people's opinions and actions. But market-driven media can provide alternatives to the public.
Irene:	From my perspective, market-driven media may spread some fake news though people can access diverse information. For those who are in short of judgement may be lost and completely carried away.
Angela:	Exactly. But market-driven media is extremely popular with those who are knowledgeable and quick thinking with excellent judgement. As the saying goes: "Every coin has two sides."
Davis:	No matter what kinds of media, market-driven media or state-owned media, we can safely conclude that media is

powerful. Its impact on society, individuals, organizations, or even politics is dramatic.

Irene: This is why we need to spend so much time exploring media history and evolution, discussing the relationship between media and society.

Angela: Three of us are not enough. We should design more questions and invite more students to join us.

Davis: So, let's make a list of problems we encounter to share with our peers or counterparts.

Irene: I'm always ready to do what you want, Davis. Well then, let me raise my questions first and then we'll go on to yours. To start with, what is media? My explanation is that media is the main source of information. It creates awareness among the common people and makes them enlightened. It also creates public opinion about the burning issues of the country or even the world, exposes scandals and builds the confidence of people.

Angela: Wow, profound interpretation! I've got a question: Is there any relationship between media and government? I hold that the main duty of media is to disseminate news, knowledge, and information.

Davis: Just as we talked above, media is a powerful tool. It acts as a link between government and people because the different policies of the government are forwarded through the media.

Irene: I cannot agree more. Media is vast and we get all the pieces of information in a single touch either in any electronic gadgets or in newspapers. It is media that helps bringing the true facts in front of us. Just imagine if without media, what would the world be?

Angela: Without media, the world would have remained ignorant with no accurate knowledge to guide ahead. However, one of the limitations of media is that it will elaborate everything in such a way that even the false accusation may be believed.

Davis: And nobody tries to find out the truth since everything is discussed in media itself.

Irene: You did great in clearing up some questions. But I still hope

to add that it would be unfair if I did not include the media as a critical thinking source either. The media plays a vital role in education because it helps adolescents and youth like us improve critical thinking skills. So, let's open up our discussion and welcome more contribution to the notion of media power.

All: Okay, Welcome and let's move ahead together.

Task 3 ▶ Pre-reading activity

Direction: *This part serves as connecting link between the preceding task and the following task. MEDIA team are required to ponder over some questions concerning the whole unit, reflect on them and then find solutions. The answers are open-ended.*

Objectives: *To cultivate students' capability of exploring questions, develop critical thinking ability and improve expression ability.*

1. How do you understand soft power?
2. What is the core of China's soft power?
3. How many kinds of thoughts on China's soft power are there? And what are they?
4. How do you understand the characteristics of China's soft power?
5. How important is soft power? Please exemplify it.
6. What do you know about media? How much do you understand Chinese media?
7. Please explain the role of media in enhancing national and international influence.
8. Please compare soft power with media power. Try to explain them.
9. Why is it important for China to carry out media construction?
10. Please explain the relationship among media, culture and soft power.
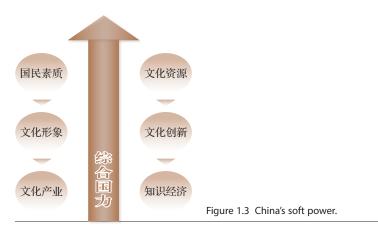
Task 4 ▶ **Reading activity**

Direction: *MEDIA team are required to read the following excerpt to obtain information, expand vocabulary volume, increase knowledge reserve, comprehend between lines, appreciate the writing style and evaluate the article.*

Objectives: *To cultivate students' capability of reading and absorbing information in a way that "eyes see quickly and brain processes quickly" to enhance reading comprehension, build up logic thinking, learn writing through reading and improve students' comprehensive quality.*

The Interpretation of China's Soft Power

The awareness of soft power in China

In the 1990s, Harvard professor Joseph Nye first coined the term "soft power" in his book. Nye's basic hypothesis regarding a state's capacity to exercise both hard and soft power found a receptive audience in China. Publications in this field began to emerge in large numbers. Some evaluated Nye's theory regarding the resources of soft power: culture, political values and ideas, and foreign policies. It is noteworthy that, given the central role subsequently accorded to culture in the exercise of China's soft power, back in 1993, many scholars focused on culture as the main source of a state's soft power. An admirable culture and ideological system should be as important as the expensive and less efficient hard power.

Figure 1.3 China's soft power.

Discussions about soft power really took off in China in the mid-2000s. As the issue moved beyond academic explorations of Nye's theory, Chinese theorists expanded upon Nye's original conceptual framework to formulate soft power with Chinese characteristics, which captured the attention of China's leadership as well as the general public. Soft power is currently a hot topic in China, a search of both academic databases and popular websites yields a plethora of articles, leadership speeches, polls, and blog entries on the subject. In the lively debates, soft power has featured prominently in building China's comprehensive national power, referring to the combined weight of economic, diplomatic, and military power necessary to guarantee China with appropriate influence on the world stage. Soft power has been a range of common threads from the reevaluation of Chinese traditional culture and socialist core value system to following the scientific development concept and establishing a harmonious society, and from the debate over keeping a low profile versus getting something accomplished to combating the Western "China threat" theory and establishing a harmonious world. Then the question arises as to why it achieved such popularity in China. One possible explanation is that the theory resonates with traditional Chinese concepts. For example, Confucianism extols a king who relies on moral force not physical force, believing that the kingly way will triumph over the hegemon's way. Another explanation is propitious timing. Nye's theory was introduced into China as people were reflecting on the rise and fall of great nations. Chinese intellectuals and the Party leadership believe that China need to build both hard and soft power in order to achieve or indeed recover great-power status and transform China into a great power. As one expert of think-tank explains: The consensus now is that soft power is critical for China, which has made strides in enhancing its hard power, while it is lagging behind soft power. China's soft

Figure 1.4 The core of Confucianism.

power should become proactive and aim largely at improving the country's image. Discussion on what is the main source of China's soft power is still going on.

Main thought on China's soft power

Two main schools of thought have emerged, around which the discourse on China's soft power is centered. The mainstream view, held by China's leading sociologists and philosophers, is that the core of soft power is culture, echoing the opinion first domestically advocated in the 1990s. The minority view, held by some experts on international relations, does not deny the importance of culture, but focuses instead on how soft power resources are applied, concluding that political power is the core of soft power. The culture school has had the greatest impact on policymaking: The central role of culture in the exercise of soft power has been embraced by China's leadership as well as the public. The detailed analysis will be as follows.

For the leading proponent of the culture school, soft power includes thoughts, ideas, and principles as well as institutions and policies, all of which operate within the context of, and cannot be separated from, a nation's culture. Some scholars believe that the more fashionable the ideology is, the more people will accept it and the greater the possibility to build the country's soft power is. China's ancient history and traditional culture are viewed by most scholars as a valuable source of soft power for attracting not only East Asian neighbours with whom China shares a Confucian heritage but also the wider international community. One leading analyst believes that China's modern-day emphasis on development, stability, and harmony has common appeal. Other scholars go even further and hold that traditional Chinese values, such as giving priority to harmony between humankind and nature, and harmony but difference, should be all revalued as the concepts of harmonious society and harmonious world.

With this in mind, some scholars warn of the deficit in China's "cultural trade" with the West, and others emphasize the importance of using cultural media to promote China's image and raise its profile on the international stage. In so doing, China can resist the image and values imposed on it by the West and assert its own discourse rights. The view that "the competition of cultural power is the core of soft power contention" remains dominant among many Chinese.

Soft power with Chinese characteristics

As elaborated above, many Chinese scholars have developed the conceptual framework of soft power forward. They believe that the theory needs to be enriched with Chinese practice. In contrast with Nye, who viewed soft power primarily as a means of improving the international standing of the United States, the Chinese approach to soft power is holistic: The domestic and foreign policy aspects of soft-power development are conceived as an organic whole. For example, the idea of establishing a harmonious society domestically and establishing a harmonious world internationally is seen as providing a comprehensive framework for the ongoing development of China's soft power. Most Chinese scholars agree that soft power must be developed not only internationally through the promotion of Chinese culture overseas, public diplomacy, and pursuit of peaceful development, but also at home through making China's culture, as well as economic and political values, attractive to both Chinese and international audiences.

The ultimate goal of the concept of scientific development is to establish a harmonious society. That is seeking to balance China's quest of economic growth with paying equal attention to resolving social welfare issues and putting the people's needs first. Hu Angang, a professor at Tsinghua University and an adviser to the Chinese government, opined that China's harmonious society undertaking is more influential and appealing. This begs the question, What is soft power? Indeed, This represents China's greatest instance of soft power.

In summary, it is imperative to build China's soft power, but this raises the question: To what ultimate goal? For those who believe that soft power is something that can be deliberately cultivated, its development is seen as necessary to build China's comprehensive national power, to rebalance China's growing hard power, and to refute the so-called "China threat" theory. They believe soft power can foster a stable and peaceful international environment and pave the way for the global acceptance of China's rise. To actively participate in the international competition and protect and promote Chinese interests, China needs to consistently and substantially augment its soft power.

Task 5 ▶ Reading comprehension

Direction: *MEDIA team are going to launch a discussion about the reading*