The CCP’s promotion of ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’ in The People’s Daily 2021-2022
A study concerning soft power and cultural heritage in China
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Abstract
Internationally, China’s promotion of its cultural heritage has gained much attention as a means to gain soft power and exert influence. In 2021, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), released the 14th Five-Year Plan stating the country’s overarching ambitions in the coming years. In contrast to previous plans, this year’s policy document contains strong wordings concerning enhancing soft power, socialist culture and for the Chinese people to ‘inherit and carry forward’ Excellent Traditional Culture, signifying that China’s approach to soft power and cultural promotion may be of increased importance also in the domestic context. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to explore the discourse used to promote ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’ within China.

By applying thematic analysis to articles from The People’s Daily seven dominant themes emerged regarding promotional efforts. Between the time interval of 2021-2022, the promotion of ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’ emphasized the following themes: Leadership of Xi Jinping, Integration of Marxism and Chinese Characteristics, Combining Tradition and Modernity, Cultural Self-Confidence and Nationalism, Creativity and Innovative Transformation, National Rejuvenation and Inheritance, and China’s International Cultural Soft Power. As previous research on soft power in the Chinese context suggests, discourse and narratives seem to build on the notion of building a united and cohesive nation. Instilling a cultural and ideological basis that should permeate all of Chinese society.
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1. Introduction

Internationally, it has been observed that China has attempted to exert influence by promoting its cultural heritage among other means of attaining soft power during the last decade. ‘Panda Diplomacy’ and the establishment of Confucius Institutes abroad have piqued much curiosity, but also controversy.¹ Both academia and media have shown much interest in the Chinese government’s approach to cultural promotion and related policy. UNESCO’s World Heritage is one of the most significant platforms where China has been aggressively active in promoting its cultural heritage. Apart from Italy, China has the highest number of cultural practices and sites acknowledged by the UNESCO site. This outcome is the result of diligent and intentional work by Chinese officials, which is also illustrated by the fact that China, among all member countries, is among the highest donors and sends a high number of delegates to the UNESCO body.²

Many of China’s UNESCO heritage applications and activities have passed uncontestably, but politicization is increasing. It has come to attention how China uses the platform to put forward the Chinese Communist Party’s narratives of ‘a unified China’ and as such, rewriting history. For example, regarding the areas of Xinjiang and Tibet; where the Chinese government is pushing for a Han-dominated narrative, pushing ethnic minorities and their heritages to the sidelines.³

Soft power, which can be channeled through cultural attractiveness – among many ways – has been of significance in shaping Chinese foreign policy since the early 2000s. Pushing for a vision of China’s “peaceful rise” and a “harmonious society”. Contrasting Western perceptions of China’s growing power as a threat to the existing international order.⁴

Having established the relevance of Chinese soft power and cultural heritage in the world, it is time to bring attention to China’s domestic context and soft power ambitions.

In 2020, ahead of the publication of China’s 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) the Chinese Communist Party (CPP) said in a statement: “China will strengthen efforts to develop cultural undertakings and industries and enhance the country’s cultural soft power”.⁵ Readings of the document in question also bring forth that cultural and soft power policy are regarded as central strategies to achieve national unity – creating a discourse that fosters a common cultural and national identity across China.⁶ As these aspects have not been explored largely

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³ ‘How China Uses UNESCO to Rewrite History’.
in previous research, investigating the domestic context and the CCP's promotion of cultural heritage at home provides an interesting angle to explore China’s soft power approaches. As cultural heritage “reflects a given society’s history and ideological and political system”, diving into the narratives promoted by the CCP towards the Chinese people, has the potential to bring insights regarding the CCP’s self-perceptions and national visions. In recent years, traditional Chinese culture has experienced an uprise internationally and domestically – illustrated also by an explicit section in the 14th Five-Year Plan emphasizing ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’. – A term which will play a central role in this paper and its research.

1.1 Purpose & Research Question

Under the assumption that the CCP aims to increase its national and domestic soft power and legitimacy, through the construction and promotion of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, this study aims to investigate the ways this is done by investigating communication directed to the Chinese people through The People’s Daily.

Question

What can be observed in The People’s Daily 2021-2022 concerning the ways the CCP is promoting its new policy from the 14th Five-Year Plan, regarding ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’?

Sub-question: How can the findings relate to China’s will to enhance soft power in the domestic context?

2. Background

2.1 The Cultural Revolution during Mao Zedong’s Era

Although China today seems to embrace its traditional cultural roots and have a strong will to share it, as well as fusing its heritage with modern Chinese society – this has not always been the case.

Under Mao Zedong’s leadership and the solidifying of the Chinese Communist Party, the attitude towards traditional Chinese culture and thoughts was completely oppositional. Initiated by Mao, the Chinese Cultural Revolution took place from 1966-1976. It was a socio-political movement which sought to break up with the ‘old ways’, reaffirm Maoist ideology and promote revolutionist socialist culture. A campaign that took place during this time was referred to as the elimination of the ‘Fours Olds’: Old Ideas jiu s missing xiang 旧思想, Old Culture jiu wenhua 旧文化, Old Customs jiu fengsu 旧风俗 and Old Habits jiu xiguan, 旧习惯. 8

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Traditional Chinese Culture was viewed as something to be eliminated to pave the way toward an ideal communist China. As a result of this ideological stance and its implementation, a significant amount of traditional cultural and historical artifacts, customs, art, and literature were destroyed and lost.\(^9\)

Alongside mass-mobilization, under the encouragement of the party, The Red Guards student movement, played a key role in the destruction of cultural heritage, the persecution and abuse of academics and officials, and other targets of the ‘Four Olds’. Besides the cultural destruction, the Cultural Revolution was a highly turbulent, brutal, and violent decade of Chinese modern history. Historians believe somewhere between 500,000 – 2 million people died as a consequence of the societal, economic and political turmoil.\(^10\)

### 2.2 Short history on China’s policy strategy: The Five-Year Plans

The Five-Year Plans were introduced during the Mao Zedong Era when China adopted elements from the Soviet Union’s political system. Since then, the development of China has diverged greatly from its command-economy roots. The Five-Year Plans, however, have continued to hold great importance for policy planning. Pointing out the future direction of the country and its priorities.

Initially, the Five-Year Plans were followed rigorously, often formulated as strict agendas and spelling out quantitative goals to achieve – for example, production quotas for steel and grain. In the 1980s, as the party started to loosen its control on the economy, the approach towards the Five-Year Plans began to ease up and turned more into manifestos for future direction. Implementations of Five-Year Plans during Mao’s era were almost exclusively focused on economic development. However, as of today, they have come to include all-rounded aspects of the development of China – setting a vision for nearly all dimensions of the Chinese nation.\(^11\)

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2.2.1 China’s 14th Five-Year Plan 2021 - 2025

China’s 14th Five-Year Plan outlines the Chinese Communist Party’s (CPP) policy priorities for the years 2021-2025. It covers a broad range of areas; economic, trade, political cultural, environmental and many more. The policy document was passed in March 2021 by the Chinese parliament and the National People’s Congress. As the policy document is central to this paper, this section aims to orientate the reader to its content, related to cultural heritage and the promotion of cultural soft power in China. The following excerpts are derived from the official English translation of the document by CSET Center for Security and Emerging Technology, Georgetown University.

Although the document’s official title is Outline of the People’s Republic of China 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and Long Range Objectives Zhonghua renmin gongheguo guomin jingji he shehui fazhan di shisi ge wu nian guihua he 2035 nian yuanjing mubiao gangyao 中华人民共和国国民经济和社会发展第十四个五年规划和 2035 年远景目标纲要, in previous publications of Five-Year Plans, the outlines have been proved to be the authoritative versions.12

The Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation zhonghua minzu weida fuxing 中华民族伟大复兴 is a guiding ambition that becomes apparent in many of the document’s sentence formulations and stated goals. Aspects of the core to its achievement lie in “holding aloft the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics”, and “deeply implementing the spirit of the 19th Party Congress and previous plenums”.13

A striking difference from the previously published policy documents, the 14th Five-Year Plan also includes an introductory section outlining long-term objectives for 2035.14 In this section the following text was determined to be of significance for culture-related policy ambitions:

The level of civility in society will rise to new heights. The socialist core values concept shehui zhuyi hexin jiazhiguan 社会主义核心价值观 will be deeply rooted in the people's hearts, and the people's ideological and moral quality, their scientific and cultural quality, and the quality of their physical and mental health will be improved significantly. The public cultural services system and the cultural industry system will be more robust, people's spiritual and cultural lives will be made continually richer, the influence of Chinese culture will rise further, and the cohesiveness of the Chinese nation will be further strengthened.15

As these aspects are mentioned in the section for long-term goals, it showcases the CCPs commitment and places value on shaping China and its people's cultural values and realities.

The most significant section, related to the aim of this paper, consists of Article 10 in the policy document, titled “Develop advanced socialist culture and enhance national soft power”. This section covers the strategies of realization the CCPs express to implement – to develop an advanced socialist culture and enhance cultural soft power. Article 10 is divided into three main categories (which also have further sub-categories):

12 Murphy., p.1.
13 Murphy., p.4.
14 Murphy., p.1.
1) Raise the level of social civilization 提高社会文明程度.

2) Raise the level of public cultural services 提升公共文化服务水平.

3) Improve the modern cultural industry system 健全现代文化产业体系.

Out of these categories, the first one mainly touches upon cultural aspects related to the enhancement of soft power and Chinese heritage. Therefore, most emphasis and close reading have been of this section of the document, although Article 10 has holistically been taken into consideration and served as a foundation during the essay’s development. The article begins with a strong guiding statement of intent to develop an advanced socialist culture and enhance national soft power:

We will adhere to the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological arena, have firm cultural self-confidence, adhere to cultural construction led by socialist core values, and focus on the mission of raising our banner, rallying public support, fostering the new generation, revitalizing our culture, and presenting a positive image. We must also promote the meeting of people's cultural needs in unison with increasing the people's spiritual strength and promote the building of China into a socialist cultural powerhouse. 16

The third section of the first category is explicitly titled “Pass on and carry forward China’s Excellent Traditional Culture”. As this is also the most central part from which this paper has derived its research question, I have decided to include the excerpt of this section in its fullness:

We will implement projects to pass on and develop Chinese's excellent traditional culture, strengthen the systematic protection of important cultural and natural heritage and intangible cultural heritage, and promote the creative transformation and innovative development of China's excellent traditional culture. We will strengthen S&T innovation on cultural relics, implement projects to explore Chinese civilization and Chinese archeology, carry out a census of Chinese cultural resources, strengthen research on and utilization of cultural relics and ancient books, promote the protection of revolutionary cultural relics and Red ruins, and improve the recovery and return system for lost cultural relics. We will construct national cultural parks such as the Great Wall, the Grand Canal, the Long March, and the Yellow River, and strengthen the protection of world cultural heritage, cultural relic protection units, archaeological site parks, and historical and cultural cities, towns, and villages. We will improve the protection and inheritance systems of intangible cultural heritage and strengthen the protection and inheritance of the excellent traditional handicrafts of all ethnic groups. 17

By summarizing and showcasing relevant aspects of the policy document, related to Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, this section of the paper aims to help the reader orient the context surrounding the research question and intended analysis.

16 Murphy., ‘CSET Original Translation: China’s 14th Five-Year Plan’. p.82.
17 Murphy., p.84.
2.3 The People’s Daily in Chinese society – the ‘voice’ of the CCP Party

The research of this paper will center around written articles in *The People’s Daily*. The motivation behind this is because of the news source’s vital role in the CCP’s communications with the Chinese People.

*The People’s Daily* is considered the official newspaper of the CCP party in China:

On August 1, 1949, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China decided that *The People’s Daily* would serve as the official organ of the Party Central Committee, and the issue of June 15 1949 would be used.

*The People’s Daily* undertakes crucial duties of publicizing and disseminating the Party’s theories, guiding principles and policies, as well as publicizing the major decisions and arrangements of the Central Committee. It also publishes the party’s propositions, upholds social righteousness, communicates social conditions, public opinion, guides societal hot topics, effectively channels and supervises public sentiment and communicates information from various fields internally and externally of China, in a timely manner. Additionally, it reports and comments on significant worldwide events, among other important responsibilities.

As seen by the quote above from *The People’s Daily*’s self-description, the newspaper plays a central role in communicating the party’s and the government’s standpoints. It is considered the largest newspaper in China and is given high significance by party leaders. During their respective times, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping personally wrote and reviewed content. In recent times Xi Jinping has repeatedly given instructions to direct the work of *The People’s Daily*. The newspaper describes its mission as connecting “the hearts of the party at the top with the hearts of the people at the bottom”. It aims to lead the direction and keep an eye on public opinion.\(^\text{19}\)

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\(^\text{19}\) ‘People’s Daily：报社介绍’. 
3. Previous Research & Theoretical Framework

This part of the paper intends to give the reader an understanding of soft power, the development of the concept for international and domestic purposes, and finally the context of China and its cultural heritage.

3.1 What is soft power? – The Foundation

The concept of soft power was originally coined by Joseph S. Nye Jr., an American political scientist. First appearing in Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power in 1990, Nye developed the term to describe a nation’s ability to attract and persuade, focusing on The United States' power and role in international politics. Since then, as the concept has gained immense popularity and greatly impacted the theoretical understanding of world politics, it has been embraced by innumerable scholars and dissipated into various academic fields.

Joseph Nye first establishes that “the dictionary tells us that power is the capacity to do things. At the most general level, power means the ability to get the outcome one wants”. Power is the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcomes one wants. The two main ways to do this are divided into two categories; Hard power; through coercions and threats or soft power; through attraction and co-option.

As this paper does not intend to look at hard power in any significant way, the specifics of hard power will not be discussed at length. What is essential to know is that hard power rests on inducements and threats, often referred to as ‘carrots and sticks’ as ways in which a country or other actor exercises this power. These are commonly sourced from military and economic might.

Soft power, on the other hand, is in its simplest form described as “getting others to want the outcomes you want”. Essentially it is about shaping the preferences of others through attraction and persuasion. Nye further points out that although influence is an important aspect of soft power, it should not be viewed as equal to it, because influence can also rest on hard power. Behavior-wise, soft power is attractive power. In terms of resources, soft power rests in the assets available to produce said attraction.

“Hard and soft power are related because they are both aspects of the ability to achieve a specific purpose by affecting the behavior and wants of others”. The differences between them are a question of degree – both concerning their natures and the tangible resources to achieve them.

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21 Nye., p.2.
22 Nye., p.5.
23 Nye., p.5–6.
24 Nye., p.6.
26 Nye., p.7.
3.1.1. Sources of Soft Power

One of the most circulated aspects of what soft power entails, synthesized during the research process for this paper and extended exploration of the existing soft power literature, can be summarized in the following sentence formulated by Nye:

“The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: 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)”.

The cultural aspect, with culture being understood as “a set of values and practices that create meaning for a society”, is especially relevant to the purposes of this paper. However, political values and foreign policies, understood and promoted in the domestic setting, are also highly relevant for the holistic understanding of the meaning of soft power.

3.1.2 The origin and evolution of the concept of Soft Power

As research related to soft power has accumulated and grown within academic fields, so has the concept itself. Today, the concept of soft power has branched out immensely. New empirical and theoretical insights, from how soft power has been applied and understood in specific contexts, have contributed to the evolution of the concept. Over the years, Joseph Nye and other scholars have made several attempts to discuss and reassess the most defining features of what soft power entails. Interest has also been concentrated on measuring and mapping countries’ soft power resources and impact.

In his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, published in 2004, Nye attempts to further develop the components of the concept in depth, spurred by the shifting dynamics surrounding international relations - which arose in connection to the Iraq War and US foreign policy. As one of the most cited works in the literature regarding soft power, this book further outlines soft power resources of states, other actors, and the pillars it relies on – values, cultures, and foreign/domestic policies.

Among recent impactful publications addressing the concept of soft power include *Soft Power: the evolution of a concept* (2021). They provide a useful outline of the development of the concept, its expansion, and address the criticism it has faced over the years. Bakalov, whose criticism Nye addresses in his article, for example, points out “the ambiguity in the description of the role of resources in distinguishing between hard and soft power.”

Some key points brought up include the rise of China and its enthusiasm for integrating the soft power concept in policy formulations, strategies, and rhetoric. Criticism that Nye’s theory has faced concerns that the concept assumes and is built around liberal and western paradigms.

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27 Nye., p.11.  
28 Nye., p. 11.  
29 Nye., p.29.  
31 Nye., p.7.
3.1.3 Soft Power in the context of China

As previously discussed, the concept of soft power has been immensely influential in academic fields related to international politics and relations, but as the concept has broadened and been embraced by several scholars, policymakers, etc. across the world; so, have its uses and implementations. This is especially true in the context of China and regarding Chinese culture.

Soft power discussions really took off in the mid-2000s among Chinese scholars and have thereafter increasingly been emphasized within the Chinese leadership - through both foreign and domestic policy and strategic ambitions. A growing literature has begun to examine China’s internal discourse on soft power and its evolution.\(^\text{32}\) It has been found how Chinese scholars have moved beyond Joseph Nye’s theoretical framework of soft power, resulting in the concept of *Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics*. How ‘Chinese Characteristics’ are manifested is still relatively vaguely formulated and incoherent, however, it has been noted that this ‘new concept’ in many ways emphasizes the organic whole of domestic and foreign policy-aspects of soft power.\(^\text{33}\) This holistic view differentiates it from Nye’s concept by emphasizing the domestic aspects and use of soft power.

Since former party leader Hu Jintao’s first mention of enhancing Chinese soft power in 2007, Chinese leadership and academia have reached a consensus that soft power is critical for China. Within China’s soft power debate, the mainstream view, held by China’s leading sociologists and philosophers, is that “the core of soft power is culture”.\(^\text{34}\) This understanding of soft power has been embraced and promoted by China’s leadership, who recognizes its importance in achieving comprehensive national power. It has “reinforced the importance of building a socialist core value system that can create cohesion for the Chinese nation”.\(^\text{35}\)

3.2 The media, soft power and propaganda in China

Following China’s embrace of soft power, questions arise regarding how it relates to the party-state’s existing propaganda system, which also *The People’s Daily* can be considered part of.\(^\text{36}\)

The year 2007 former party leader Hu Jintao outlined the role of culture and the ambition to develop ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’. Early on he formulated the ‘three even more’; “to make the people’s fundamental cultural rights and interests even more protected, to make social and cultural life even more rich and varied, and to make the people’s spiritual landscape even more uplifting”. These are considered part of a broader objective by the CCP in their construction of cultural aims.\(^\text{37}\) In China, the propaganda authorities are responsible for cultural matters and ensuring party-state control. The CCP’s Central Propaganda


\(^{33}\) McGiffert., p.11.

\(^{34}\) McGiffert., p.13.

\(^{35}\) McGiffert., p.16.


\(^{37}\) Edney., p.908.
Department has a mandate over government organs regulating cultural products, as well as the Ministry of Culture. The Spiritual Civilization Offices also play an important role in promoting desired social values, and functions under the Central Propaganda Department.38

In the party-state’s application of the concept of soft power, it is tied to its ideological program of building ‘socialism with Chinese characteristics’ to create national unity and cohesiveness, through cultural construction in the domestic context. Through its existing propaganda system, the government attempts to intervene and shape the people’s opinions, values, and cultural identity to align with a narrative created by the party.39

### 3.3 Cultural Soft Power in China and National Security

To further our understanding of how soft power is understood in the Chinese context, this paper will make use of Jukka Aukia’s research on the soft power discourse in China’s domestic setting. In his article “The Cultural Soft Power of China: A Tool for Dualistic National Security”, he attempts to summarize the varying directions of soft power research. He also argues that the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and Chinese academia view cultural soft power as a tool in both the international and domestic arena to ensure national security.40

For the international and Western understanding of soft power, there are two main trajectories of soft power and in what dimensions it can be attained. Those who acknowledge that it has both international and domestic dimensions, and those who do not. Aukia uses the terms ‘Dualist’ and ‘Monotist’ to make a distinction between the two camps of scholarly understanding.41

Originally, as the Monotists stand by, soft power was a theory to understand state-to-state relations and the role of attraction. The dualistic view, which Aukia’s article argues for, is that the understanding of soft power has developed to be utilized in both the international and domestic context. Not only about external attraction but rather as a domestic policy tool in itself.42

In Chinese discourse, cultural soft power has been described to help solve a dualistic dilemma for the PRC government; the legitimization of domestic politics and reputation-building internationally, where it wishes to portray itself as a peaceful and responsible country.43 Main finding includes, through analyzing Chinese academia, that cultural soft power is being presented as “a tool for tackling challenges of modernization for the PRC state in search of itself using both the international and domestic arenas”.44 It is not only about image-building and gaining attraction abroad but also strengthening the basis of its leadership and cultural identity within the nation.45 Drawing from Borge Bakken’s work “The Exemplary Society”

38 Edney., 910.
39 Edney., p.914.
41 Aukia., p.71.
42 Aukia., p.71.
43 Aukia., p.71.
44 Aukia., p.71.
45 Aukia., p.72.
the power of ideas is linked to ethos in the society in which it operates: should the social fabric erode, so will the ideology.\textsuperscript{47}

China’s reassessment of national identity in the modern times began with the Western hegemony and its crossroads with the East. Following the defeat in the Opium Wars, China has had to reconsider its role and self-assessment in the world, resulting in the adaption of the Western system of sovereign states. The Opium War and China’s utter defeat against Western technological advancement led to the slogan “Chinese learning for essential principles, western learning for practical application \textit{zhong ti xi yong 中体西用}”\textsuperscript{48} to come to terms with disadvantages and pave their path toward modernization, although not without great struggles.\textsuperscript{49}

Since then, China has struggled with a sense of inadequacy and humiliation following historical Western dominance and in the international community. This has resulted in a kind of self-awareness and reflection for China.\textsuperscript{50} China, and the PRC, embracing the soft power concept can be seen as an extension of their quest towards modernization and re-defining their position internally and externally.

China localizing the soft power concept and branding it through ‘Chinese Characteristics’ has turned into a concrete policy ambition for the CCP. Aukia argues that it serves to create a cultural safety system for China. There is an idea that ideology, values, and morality held by the individuals of the nation - the culture embodied - are directly linked to the nation’s survival and strength. As such the CCP wishes to create a domestic cultural base which aims to support and legitimize the current leadership and its ideology.\textsuperscript{51}

Aukia, referring to work of other Chinese scholars, e.g. Wang Su Ya (2013) with his work \textit{Globalization of Chinese film and television industry, protection and dissemination of national culture}, have also expressed the idea that traditional Chinese culture is being threatened by globalization and Western forces. Referring to the spreading of American popular culture as a form of ‘cultural imperialism’, fearing that it would steer Chinese people towards American values. Domestic Chinese soft power strategies aim to defend the nation from heavy Western influences. For example, through growing the Chinese film and TV industries and defend “Chinese cultural security”.\textsuperscript{52}

Likewise, Aukia refers to Shen, Liu & Ni (2011) work, which further links cultural safety to the idea of soft power by claiming that “the prosperity and decline of a nation would be dependent upon the rise and fall of respective culture”:

National culture is also the symbol and basis of national identity, and more it is a source of strength for ethnic affinity and cohesion. Should there be no national culture, a country can lose its cultural soft power in competition with other countries. Again, if the character of national culture is not preserved in the pressures of globalization, a cultural crisis of a nation-

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\textsuperscript{48} Aukia., p.72.

\textsuperscript{49} Aukia., p.73.

\textsuperscript{50} Aukia., p.72.

\textsuperscript{51} Aukia., p.73.

\textsuperscript{52} Aukia.,p.81.
state is inevitable. Therefore, upholding and defending cultural traditions should lead to more reliable national security.\textsuperscript{53}

Cultural safety is seen as essential to national sovereignty. Through globalization and the dissemination of other (western) cultures, it is argued that China risks losing its national character of culture.\textsuperscript{54} This is seen as a threat to China as a nation as the cultural identity of Chinese people is viewed as equivalent to the Chinese state itself and its future survival.

From his analysis of previous research, Aukia creates a model of how cultural soft power has two functions in the domestic context of China. Firstly, it shapes the cultural industry which produces cultural products and profit. Secondly, it serves as a basis for the political ideology of the PRC. Through PRC’s focus on attaining cultural soft power domestically; it may then generate legitimacy for the party and national stability.\textsuperscript{55}

All in all, Aukia’s stance is that PRC’s notion and implementation of Chinese soft power is inseparable from its national security concerns and image. Domestically: to create a cultural base for national cohesion; internationally: to establish China as a country promoting harmony and peace.

3.4 Cultural heritage as soft power and the ways and motives behind its uses in China

As cultural heritage can be viewed as an integral aspect of Chinese traditional culture, and previous research has showcased how cultural heritage has been used as a ‘tool’ to gain soft power; in this section, we will explore how China has engaged with its cultural heritage for these purposes domestically and internationally. The ways and motives presented on cultural heritage as soft power in China build mainly on Ryoko Nakano and Yujie Zhu’s research paper Heritage as soft power: Japan and China in International Politics.

Before diving into the subject at hand, it is important to define the concept of heritage and how it relates to soft power. Here, the term will be used as “a grounded set of cultural practices, knowledge and history in a society”.\textsuperscript{56} It is heavily interlinked with culture but differs from it by putting more emphasis on the past, present and future and serves as a foundation sustaining individual and collective cultural identities over time.\textsuperscript{57}

In line with Nye’s understanding of soft power resources (culture, political values, and foreign policies) heritage as a soft power resource manifests in the following ways:

\textsuperscript{53} Aukia., p.82.
\textsuperscript{54} Aukia., p.82.
\textsuperscript{55} Aukia., p.85.
\textsuperscript{57} Nakano and Zhu., p.3.
1) Heritage can be seen as a cultural product as it embodies cultural norms and practices. It’s an expression of local and national communities' needs and values and can attract foreign audiences.58

2) Heritage as a form of nation-branding, the official promotion of cultural heritage represents political values. It expresses the values a nation wishes to be associated with. Nation branding is defined as “a form of coordinated communication and engagement to manage a nation’s image”.59

3) Heritage in terms of foreign policy manifests in a state’s decision to provide heritage conservation aid in other countries. UNESCO is an important platform for cooperation and international heritage conservation and management. This can be pursued to increase a state’s expert and moral authority and goodwill, in the eyes of both foreign and domestic audiences.60

The UNESCO World Heritage has been one of the most central platforms through which China has engaged in heritage diplomacy. The platform has been utilized to promote cultural and historical narratives—internationally as well as to win legitimacy at home. The UNESCO branding offers one of the most straightforward ways for nations to gain credibility and promote their culture through the status that is bestowed when aspects of national heritage are officially acknowledged. In the domestic context, it is used as a way of nation-building and creating cohesive and stable national identities.61 China has been found to have a rich heritage resource, e.g. cultural and historical sites, crafts, and practices, once it decided to use its heritage as a soft power.62

In the analysis of China’s case of cultural heritage and soft power, Nakano and Zhu especially point to how China has adapted heritage and culturally related policies, guidelines, and terminology to foster historical narratives that intermingle with aims to advance global and regional strategic interests.63

In East Asia, the adaption of national identities and identifying as sovereign states in today’s international order, began as a way to overcome the superiority of Western imperial powers. China has never been formally colonized by the West but has experienced semi-colonial periods and situations that left a long aftertaste of humiliation and erosion of national self-esteem. A notable mention includes the outcome of the Opium Wars in the 19th century, which shook China’s national confidence to the core.64

Nationalism in the contemporary sense and narratives surrounding it took root to escape unequal status and to compete with the West and their influence.65 Political motivation underlines the use of cultural heritage as soft power in China, and the Chinese government has actively used various soft power resources, from Confucius Institutes, Kungfu, pandas, and historical sites.

58 Nakano and Zhu., p.3.
59 Nakano and Zhu., p.4.
60 Nakano and Zhu., p.4.
61 Nakano and Zhu., p.4.
62 Nakano and Zhu., p.10.
63 Nakano and Zhu., p.63.
64 Nakano and Zhu., p.9.
65 Nakano and Zhu., p.4.
To further draw from Nakano and Zhu’s analysis:

Heritage is soft power, not merely because it is a commodified and commercialized version of culture that can sell, but because it can shape the meanings of a shared past as a way to unify diverse people as a nation and redefine the nation’s relationships with other nations. Because heritage curbs the boundaries and characteristics of nationhood – where nations come from and where they are going – state institutions control and regulate domestic heritage conservation and management. Heritage also serves for nation-branding by presenting national and cultural distinctiveness and/or shared values with other nations to both domestic and international audiences.\(^{66}\)

The heritage discourse used by China and its governmental initiatives has been implemented to reinforce an image of harmony, civilizational longevity, and modernization. Through doing so China tries to strengthen its position relative to other countries, secure legitimacy for the party, Chinese people, culture, and protect and preserve national self-esteem and memories abroad and at home.\(^{67}\)

4. Methodological Approach & Materials

4.1 A Study of News Articles

Essential for conducting the study is access to the Chinese edition of The People’s Daily renmin ribao人民日报. Through AsiaPortal, established by the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS). An electronic database was available throughout the research and provided full access to articles published in The People’s Daily from 1946 until present time.

4.1.2. How were relevant articles chosen for the study?

Taking off from the purpose of the study, which quintessentially was derived from policy formulations in China’s 14th Five-Year plan, the term ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’ zhongguo youxiu chuantong wenhua中国优秀传统文化 came to be viewed as a key term. The policy document was first published in March 2021. As I am interested in how promotion related to the policy, and its emphasis on soft power and cultural heritage, have been implemented - it was judged to be a good starting point while exploring articles. While it would have been interesting to investigate all relevant materials from the time of the policy’s publication until the present (2023), time, resource and space delimitations had to be taken into consideration. Thus, the time period of 2021 – 2022 was chosen as it includes the first launch of the policy of interest. The first year, while it was still brand new, was assumed to be the time of most heavy promotion and attempts of dissemination.

The choice of the keyword ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’ zhongguo youxiu chuantong wenhua中国优秀传统文化 proved to be very fruitful. A full search, where the word was included in both the headline and body of text, generated 264 articles. The materials found were deemed too extensive and a complementary search was conducted by searching for the keyword in the headlines only.

\(^{66}\) Nakano and Zhu., p.10.  
\(^{67}\) Nakano and Zhu., p.9.
This resulted in 38 articles relevant to the study. Aside from time limits that disable close reading and analysis of 264 articles, the investigation of the 38 articles generated from the second search can also be further motivated. By searching for the keyword in the headlines only, these articles can be assumed to be of high importance to the subject at hand. The articles can be expected to primarily focus on ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’, instead of perhaps being a sideline seeing to the article in its wholeness.

Other search words and combinations, first found in the policy document, would also generate a rich number of articles (sometimes in the hundreds or thousands) – illustrating the Chinese government's engagement in promoting the subject at hand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The number of articles accessed from The People's Daily 2021-2022.</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Search word: 中国优秀传统文化(Headline only)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total numbers of articles:** 38

### 4.1.3 How were the articles in The People’s Daily analyzed?

Once the articles for the study had been chosen and compiled, it was time to ponder the question of how to engage with the material to find meaningful answers to our research question. Although there has been research connected to the politicization of Chinese culture and heritage, the year 2021 was the first time such aspects were outlined explicitly by China’s Communist Party in their 14th Five-Year Plan. Thus, in the context of China, exploring the area of cultural heritage and policy ambitions can lead to many new insights.

As it’s a relatively new territory to be explored, a flexible qualitative method which allows for a non-presumptive mindset toward the material is preferred. The academic field of Sinology often draws on established methodologies from other research fields, none the least from the social sciences. After much consideration, the established method of using Thematic Analysis seemed like a suitable way to go forward. The main aim, as the name suggests, is to find themes in given material/data sets. In this case, the news articles. As we, at the beginning of our research, do not know what is written, in what ways and to what extent; through thematic analysis, it is possible to systematically find patterns and convey them through the creation of ‘themes’.

Thematic analysis is a purely qualitative research method, but as the research progressed it became interesting to also bring in a quantitative aspect to present and strengthen the basis for findings. To illustrate the frequency of occurring themes, a basic content analysis was performed. After having identified the themes in the material, it was then counted how many times each theme occurred in the 38 articles. To simplify counting, each identified theme was only accounted for once per appearance in articles.

To further orient the reader in the methodologies used for the paper, the following section will explain and motivate the analysis methods in more depth.
4.2 Briefly on Content Analysis

It is not the main method used for the research of this paper and will therefore only be described in short. An extensively developed research method, present in many multidisciplinary works – Content Analysis in this paper is primarily implemented as a frequency-count approach. Bringing a quantitative element to the analysis. Basic Content Analysis consists of “categorization with little or no interpretation of the coder”\(^{68}\) The interpretative work of this paper is executed during the thematic analysis process.

4.3 Thematic Analysis (TA)

The main analysis tool of this study, thematic analysis is used to code, categorize, and find themes in data sets (in this case written text) to bring forth patterns of meaning through qualitative research.\(^{69}\) The methodology allows for a way of seeing reoccurring ideas and making sense of collective and shared meanings. It is a way to identify what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about. Numerous patterns, or codes, may emerge throughout the research process and can usually not be pre-determined. Through a systematic review and evaluation of codes, the use of TA allows the researcher to summarize data into refined themes and sub-themes.\(^{70}\)

In qualitative research thematic analysis has been established as a method of great flexibility and accessibility. Originally developed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke within the academic field of psychology, due to its broad and open way of application it has had increased popularity in many academic fields, ranging from medicine, social work, and humanities.

Braun and Clarke have developed a model of using TA which outlines six phases during the research process. Starting off with the researcher familiarizing themselves with the data through multiple readings and note-taking to generate initiating codes. Sorting and rewriting codes, searching for themes, and then reviewing and redefining. The final phase consists of producing the report in which findings are summarized and examples from data are presented. The implementation of phases is often not linear, instead hopping back and forth, as the research process and its development is dependent on its context.\(^{71}\)

TA can be of both inductive and deductive nature. Inductive being a “bottom-up approach from what is in the data” and deductive being a “top-bottom approach, where the researcher brings to the data a series of concepts, ideas, or topics they use to code and interpret the data”.\(^{72}\) In terms of searching for themes, this study is mainly inductive. Themes or ‘what to look out for’ are not pre-determined beforehand and will develop from the material itself. However, it could be argued that there also is an element of the deductive approach as the

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\(^{70}\) Braun and Clarke., p.60.

\(^{71}\) Braun and Clarke., p.69.

theory of soft power and understanding of relevant aspects from the CCP’s 14th Five-Year Plan guide the reading and reflections related to the material.

Initially, TA has been criticized for being too poorly defined, however as the method, through extensive implemented use and efforts by the researchers, TA has developed to become increasingly refined and sophisticated. Today it is widely viewed as a valuable method, often viewed alongside other established qualitative methods common for text-analysis, such as grounded theory and narrative analysis.\(^{73}\)

### 4.3.1 Selected Themes

Grounded in TA analysis and its process, this paper found seven themes of relevance to the research question, and which had a strong presence in the material. The themes identified were quite broadly formulated and comprise a number of sub-categories. Of these, all have not been included as some sub-categories are more present than others. Due to the quantity of relevant aspects found in the articles, it is not possible to present and discuss all aspects, thus a delimitation had to be made. It should also be noted that many of the themes are intertwined in one way or another. It proved difficult to fully separate each theme from one another, as many aspects are deeply intertangled. For example, the construction of Xi Jinping’s leadership as supreme usually also goes hand in hand with the other themes. For example, whenever his leadership is accentuated, it is also followed by urgings to combine Marxism with Excellent Traditional Culture, the national rejuvenation of China etc.

**Presentation of Created Themes:**
1. Leadership of Xi Jinping
2. Integration of Marxism and Chinese Characteristics
3. Combining Tradition and Modernity
4. Cultural Self-Confidence and Nationalism
5. Creativity and Innovative Transformation
6. National rejuvenation and Inheritance
7. China’s International Cultural Soft Power

The interpretation of each theme will be found in the section Analysis & Findings.

\(^{73}\) Braun and Clarke, ‘Chapter 4, Thematic Analysis.’, p.57.
4.4 Methodological Criticism

This section discusses the limitations and challenges has faced, in terms of reliability, validity, interpretation and implementation of thematic analysis.

In general terms, validity refers to the extent which researchers claim about knowledge corresponds to the reality under study and reliability whether consistent results can be obtained when measures are used repeatedly.74

Regarding validity, quantitative researchers often bring concerns of subjectivity and interpretation to criticize TA as a method. To counter this, the interpretative perspective in qualitative research rejects the idea of a singular reality independent of our perception of it.75 It is impossible to conduct an interpretative analysis without taking subjectivity into account, as the coding and categorization to some degree will always be shaped by the prior understanding, values and worldviews of the researcher undergoing the process. However, the goal of TA is not to obtain objectivity, but rather to lay out a foundation of existing perceptions. According to the constructionist view, there is no objective independent reality and thus it is impossible to verify perceptions against a ‘real world’. Rather constructionism of reality is seen as a product of language, communication and shared meanings within a given social context, acknowledging the existence of multiple perspectives.76

Qualitative research is sensitive to being affected by personal values or beliefs by the researcher as they become “the measurement instrument, asking questions and making observations”.77 Unavoidably interpretation is subjective, however, there are considerations in the process design that improve the quality of research and avoid unwarranted bias. This mainly consists of the researcher’s ability to show critical thinking concerning the material, as well as showcasing self-reflection/reflexivity for how data has been processed.

Regarding reliability, focus is on presenting a detailed description of how the research fared and developed throughout the process. Improving the paper’s transparency and confirmability. High reliability is characterized by the research being done and communicated in such a way that it is easy to replicate and similar outcomes can be achieved.78

4.5 Research Ethics

No immediate sensitive information and sources have been used for the creation of this paper. Ethical responsibility and practices are of importance when conducting research. For example, when researchers gain access to sensitive data through interviews, questions arise about how the researcher handles possible negative repercussions participants may face.

75 Riger and Sigurjonsdottir, Handbook of Methodological Approaches to Community-Based Research., p.40.
76 Riger and Sigurjonsdottir., ‘Thematic Analysis.’, p.36.
77 Riger and Sigurjonsdottir., p.37.
78 Riger and Sigurjonsdottir., p.36.
In the case of this paper, data has primarily been gathered through official and public sources. Individual names mentioned all hold official positions and can be considered public figures, part of the public debate or academic community.

5. Analysis & Findings

5.1 Content Analysis

Table 1 summarizes in which articles respective themes have been spotted and their prevalence. For greater detail regarding the articles, see ‘Attachments’ at the end of the paper. Analyzed articles have been coded A1 – A38. The material used includes 38 newspaper articles from The People’s Daily.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Spotted in article no.</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership of Xi Jinping</td>
<td>2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 15, 17, 18, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 32, 33, 38</td>
<td>20/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of Marxism and Chinese characteristics</td>
<td>2, 3, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 23, 24, 25, 27</td>
<td>12/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combining Tradition and Modernity</td>
<td>3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 35, 37, 38</td>
<td>22/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Self-confidence &amp; Nationalism</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 23, 24, 32, 35</td>
<td>16/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity &amp; Innovative Transformation</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 33, 34, 35, 36</td>
<td>21/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inheritance and National Rejuvenation</td>
<td>1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 23, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 37, 38</td>
<td>22/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China’s International Cultural Soft Power</td>
<td>1, 2, 11, 16, 20, 26, 31, 32, 33</td>
<td>9/38</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.2 Thematic Analysis

In this section of the essay, findings in the analyzed articles will be presented. Seven dominant themes emerged from the material – showing how the Chinese Communist Party promotes ‘Excellent Chinese Traditional Culture’ within the country and the multiple reoccurring and intertwined narratives that are built around it. It should be noted that several more themes could be spotted in the articles, however, judged by the occurrence frequency and relevance to the research question, these seven themes were judged to be of most importance. Each theme will be exemplified with excerpts from articles and discussion on strongly present aspects, followed by how they relate to the policy document (The 14th Five-Year Plan).

Referencing to articles are made through assigning numbers for coding. Article 1 to 38: (A1), (A2), (A3) …. (A38).

5.2.1 Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture – A Connection to Everything.

Before looking at the respective themes, I will first present the overall impression of working with the articles in question and relation to the theoretical framework:

It becomes clear that excellent traditional Chinese culture is seen as something integral to the Chinese cultural foundation and of utmost importance to the development of Chinese society and identity in all aspects. The dissemination of traditional Chinese culture and how its ancient history and greatness make the Chinese people and nation extraordinary are strongly present as arguments to why China is destined to advance society and the world – when combined with Xi Jinping’s perspective on socialist values and Sinicization of Marxism in a New Era.

First of all, we need to deeply explore the various values contained in cultural heritage, including historical, artistic, technological, social, and cultural values, among others, and achieve substantial research findings. This forms the foundation for innovation. Through the transformation of these outcomes, we can provide the entire society with new knowledge and enlighten minds. (A2)

The citation above is an example of how cultural heritage – where traditional culture is a crucial part – is strongly encouraged to be deeply explored to provide present and future value in almost all fields of human activity. Moreover, in the reasoning of heritage to be of great importance, a central argument is how its dissemination gives spiritual strength, support, and a unison national foundation. All essential to advance the country into an enlightened New Era.

A difficulty when outlining the themes has been that they all have been greatly intertangled in one way or another. As such, it should be noted that similar elements will be spotted under the
respective themes. In one way the themes can be seen as different aspects of the same overall argumentation – which essentially culminates in that Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture has a connection and should permeate every aspect of Chinese society; the individual’s life, institutions, academia, media, entertainment and more. Articles found in The People’s Daily had a very ‘propaganda-like’ writing and although the 14th Five-Year Plan often was not explicitly mentioned, one could distinguish that many of the terminologies and sentences present in the article came directly from the policy document.

Regarding relating the theoretical framework on soft power to the Chinese cultural heritage context, the themes that emerged highly reflect findings and theories from previous research. Concerning national security, narratives that promote national cohesion, advancement of modernization and aims to instill sentiments of nationalism are strongly present. A big portion of the articles seems to primarily be concerned with establishing an ideological and cultural basis intended for dissemination among the Chinese people. Some also focus on encouraging and exemplifying mediatory channels through which ‘Excellent Traditional Culture’ and associated CCP ideology can gain a stronger hold. In addition, to find new ways to do so – focusing primarily on digitalization.

Traces of nation-branding and image-building are also very present, both directed at ‘assembling’ all of China under a common historical origin, for example by emphasizing Chinese civilization’s long history and instilling cultural confidence, as well as an angle to promote China and the Chinese identity as unique from an international perspective.

5.2.2 T1: Leadership of Xi Jinping

Perhaps the most present element, in almost all articles, is the role of Xi Jinping’s words and thoughts in guiding China and the people. Phrases in the articles often highlight how ‘Xi Jinping Thought’ provides strategic and ideological direction, suggesting that his vision and leadership are of the highest priority. Many of the phrases emphasizing Xi Jinping’s point of view, touch upon the subject of how Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture combines well with upholding Chinese Marxism – although without further elaborations to prove its truth, instead referring to the authority of Xi Jinping’s as the supreme leader of the nation.

In the report of the 20th Party Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: “To uphold and develop Marxism, it must be integrated with Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture. The ancient Chinese sages studied heaven and humanity, observed changes through time, examined the origins of all things and derived many ways of governing the country, learning from people and about self-cultivation, possessing value transcending time and space.” The crystallized wisdom embedded within excellent traditional Chinese culture is highly compatible with the values of scientific socialism. History and practice have fully demonstrated that the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, that we have taken, carries the inherent genetic code of the spirit of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture. We must deeply understand and implement General Xi Jinping’s important statements: “with confidence and pride, engage in excavating and integrating excellent traditional Chinese culture. (A3)
习近平总书记在党的二十大报告中指出：“坚持和发展马克思主义，必须同中华优秀传统文化相结合。”中国古代先贤究天人之际、通古今之变、察万物之源得出的许多治国之道、为人之学、修身之法具有超越时空的价值，中华优秀传统文化蕴含的智慧结晶同科学社会主义价值观主张具有高度契合性。历史和实践充分表明，我们走的中国特色社会主义道路，其内在的基因密码就蕴含中华优秀传统文化精神。我们要深刻领悟和贯彻落实习近平总书记的重要论述，“理直气壮、很自豪地去做这件事，去挖掘、去结合中华优秀传统文化”。(A3)

Above is a typical example of a phrase referring to Xi Jinping. Starting with “Xi Jinping pointed out…”. Highlighting the need for a combination of traditional Chinese culture and Marxism, as well as their ‘undeniable’ compatibility. In line with the policy document, there is heavy promotion of the writing ‘Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics’ and Xi Jinping’s leadership is highlighted as the source of ideological and strategic direction of China. Xi Jinping often points out the ancient and rich history and culture of China that goes back over 5000 years. Chinese people should feel proud and strengthened in heart, mind and spirit by traditional culture and an ideological Marxist base. He and the party insist on how basic principles of Marxism are to be combined with Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture. This provides a great framework for China’s future development and civilization. These combinations are promoted to successfully be able to address the Chinese people’s evolving needs and national rejuvenation. (A18)

Relation to policy:

This theme primarily relates to the following excerpts in the policy document: The intention to intensify study and education on Xi Jinping’s Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. The strengthening of holistic publication, dissemination, propaganda, and interpretation of Xi Jinping Thought. The promotion of the Sinicization, modernization and popularization of Marxism.79

5.2.3 T2: Integration of Marxism and Chinese Characteristics

How Marxism can be combined with traditional and modern-day culture and society is heavily emphasized. Furthermore, how Marxism has come to be adapted to the unique context of China and Chinese thought – e.g. the Sinicization of Marxism is of significance. Marxism with Chinese Characteristics is promoted as one of the foundational elements of the Chinese nation, future development, and modernization ambitions. It is argued that the ideology has an inherent logic which can serve as a scientific base, a basis for socialist core values and ignite morality.

General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasizes: "Adhere to combining the basic principles of Marxism with the specific reality in China and combining them with Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture." The "two combinations" represent the intrinsic requirement and valuable experience as our party continuously pushes for the Sinicization and modernization of Marxism. In-depth understanding of the inherent logic that connects Marxism with excellent traditional Chinese culture is the foundation for combining the basic principles of Marxism with excellent traditional

79 Murphy, ‘CSET Original Translation: China’s 14th Five-Year Plan’. p. 82-88.
Chinese culture. The philosophical and social science communities should make the necessary contributions to this ambition. (A18)

习近平总书记强调：“坚持把马克思主义基本原理同中国具体实际相结合、同中华优秀传统文化相结合”。“两个结合”是我们党不断推进马克思主义中国化时代化的内在要求和宝贵经验。深入把握马克思主义与中华优秀传统文化相贯通相契合的内在逻辑，是坚持把马克思主义基本原理同中华优秀传统文化相结合的基础，哲学社会科学界应为此作出应有贡献。（A18）

Marxism with Chinese Characteristics is depicted as an ideology that must and should permeate all dimensions of Chinese society and life. However, except for insisting on its greatness and how it combines well with China’s Excellent Traditional Culture and modernization, it has been hard to follow – in concrete implementation – how the CCP sees that it can do so. Desired results from stronger integration of Marxism include that Chinese people cultivate and adhere to socialist core values and Marxism as a scientific outlook and method can revitalize traditional Chinese culture. Strong propaganda can be spotted regarding how the CCP insists on how they have always seen a connection between Marxism and China’s long history and culture. (A2, A11)

Relation to policy:

This theme primarily relates to the following excerpts in the policy document: The publication and dissemination of the theory of Socialism with Chinese characteristics, Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and History of Socialist Development. The promotion of the Sinicization, modernization and popularization of Marxism. 80

5.2.4 T3: Combination of Tradition and Modernity

Throughout the articles, Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture is encouraged to be explored and applied to pave the way towards further modernization and development of Chinese society. It is not simply a relic of the past to be preserved, but dynamic and possible to adapt to contemporary times and needs. By encouraging the dissemination of traditional culture, with conventional and novel approaches, the integration between tradition and modernity is seen as a way to create a compelling Chinese narrative that can shape and unify the Chinese people’s cultural and national identities – as well as promote morals and values relevant to shape contemporary life in the desired direction.

In the process of creating a new form of human civilization, the vitality of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture is being stimulated. Over the past century, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese people have successfully undertaken a path of modernization with Chinese characteristics, creating a new form of human civilization and expanding the pathways for developing countries to modernize. This new form of human civilization is rooted in Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture. It vigorously promotes revolutionary culture and socialist advanced culture and insists on the coordinated development of material civilization, political civilization, spiritual civilization, social civilization, and ecological civilization. (A9)

80 Murphy., p. 82-88.
Through building a socialist cultural powerhouse, rooted in both traditional culture and Chinese Marxism, the great rejuvenation of China and civilization is taking place. The combination of tradition and modernity is brought forth as vital to pave the way toward a New Era, and the Party further argues that there has always existed a natural way to combine these. As an example, Chinese philosophical thought is mentioned. The way of Tao, unity between man and nature as well as advocating for filial piety, honesty, righteousness, and other morals, are promoted as gateways to living under good values in modern times. (A38)

Combinations and investments in tradition and modernity are also taking place in a physical sense. For example, cities and villages across China has implemented Red Place Names hongse diming 红色地名 for multiple village areas, revolutionary sites and buildings. The ambition behind the change is to hinder the names of historically significant spaces from being changed at a whim. Through the creation of a naming system, these places - considered to be of historical and cultural significance – are to be protected. Through name-keeping, Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture can be inherited and lead to emotional, economic, and social value and development. (A8)

The guidance of Xi Jinping Thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a New Era is also a central aspect of this theme. Rejuvenation and a new form of human civilization can 'take root, blossom and bear fruit in the land of China' because he and the Communist Party insist on the combination of the basic principles of Marxism with the modern reality of China and the excellent traditional Chinese culture. In the process creating new glory for Chinese culture. (A9)

Relation to policy:

This theme primarily relates to the following excerpts in the policy document: Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, History of Socialist Development, the strengthening of the history of the party, and the Chinese Dream. The implementation of projects to pass on and develop excellent traditional Chinese culture. The promotion of new ideological concepts, mental attitudes, cultural currents, and behavioral norms.81

81 Murphy., p. 82-88.
This theme deals with aspects of how there is a strong narrative, surrounding building a strengthened cultural Chinese identity and nation. Concerning these, notions such as cultural self-confidence, cultural heritage being the root and soul of the Chinese nation and the Chinese Dream are emphasized.

Culture is a crucial force for the survival and development of a nation. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: "Civilization, especially ideological and cultural aspects, is the soul of a country and a nation. Regardless of what country or people, if they do not cherish their ideological and cultural heritage, if they lose the soul of ideology and culture, that country and nation cannot stand upright.” In the long process of historical development, the Chinese nation has faced numerous challenges and hardships, but we have overcome them, and walked through them. One significant reason is that generation after generation of the Chinese people have nurtured and developed unique and profound Chinese characteristics, providing powerful spiritual support for the continuous development and growth of the Chinese nation. Chinese civilization is the only civilization in the world that has not been interrupted and has developed to this day, making significant contributions to the progress of human civilization (A7).

First of all, with the idea of having and promoting cultural self-confidence, in the articles, one can distinguish an intention to draw a link between the sense of individual cultural identity and its contribution to a strong national and collective cultural identity. It is heavily argued that immersion in and development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture leads to self-improvement and a sense of pride for the individual, as well as to new glories of socialist culture. (A1)

Illustrated by the citation above, ideological and cultural civilization and the heritage they contain are viewed as the “root and soul” of the country, providing spiritual strength and unity. (A7) The Chinese people are urged to stand tall and have cultural self-confidence because of the nation’s long and profound history, which also has contributed extensively to overall human civilization. A concrete example, that should instill confidence and national pride, is the Chinese Civilization Exploration Project, which has involved research by over 400 researchers from more than 50 scientific research units since 2001. Through excavating and investigating archaeological and urban spaces of Chinese civilization, theories of the origin of human civilization have been enriched. These achievements should become spiritual and cultural motivation and nourishment for the Chinese people. (A4)
Another similar idea is that of the Chinese Dream. By highlighting the outstanding achievements, ideological and moral values found in China’s cultural heritage and civilization, it today provides a basis for how China and the people can reach a higher level of socialist society and reach a New Era. Through the unique spiritual identity of the Chinese nation and unique Chinese characteristics, the path toward prosperity has begun and will gain further power in the future. (A10)

**Relation to policy:**

This theme primarily relates to the following excerpts in the policy document: Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, History of Socialist Development, the strengthening of the history of the party, and the Chinese Dream. The implementation of projects to pass on and develop excellent traditional Chinese culture. The promotion of new ideological concepts, mental attitudes, cultural currents, and behavioral norms. The intention to edit and publish theoretical readings of Xi Jinping: The Governance of China.82

**5.2.6 T5: Creativity and Innovative Transformation**

In relation to the other themes presented, creativity and innovation is urged to develop new mediums to promote, transform and disseminate excellent traditional Chinese culture. New technology is central to peak the public’s interest in traditional art forms, literature, crafts, and heritage sites. For example, through TV and cinema adaptions and the creation of new digital platforms.

In order to promote the creative transformation and innovative development of Excellent Traditional Culture, that aligns with modern society and the spiritual and cultural needs of the people, efforts focusing on finding innovative forms of expression are necessary for finding ways people may inherit excellent traditional culture in ways that appeal to them.

In one way, it involves making sure that forms of expression and communication channels keep up with the evolving times. This includes meeting cultural needs and demands, aesthetic preferences and lifestyle habits of the masses through various forms such as literature, art, music, and film and making use of mediums like newspapers, radio, television, the internet, and other type of carries. Also, with the help of cultural institutions such as museums and art galleries, excellent traditional Chinese culture will be fiercely carried forward, effectively attracting the masses, and let them subtly be influenced by the essence of traditional Chinese culture. (A38)

推动中华优秀传统文化创造性转化、创新性发展，使其与现代社会相协调、与人们精神文化需求相契合，需要在创新表达形式上下功夫，以人们喜闻乐见的形式把中华优秀传统文化推广开来、传承下去。一方面，让表达形式和传播渠道跟上时代发展。适应群众的文化需求、审美情趣、生活习惯，通过文学、美术、音乐、电影等各种形式，运用报刊、电台、电视台、互联网等各种载体，借助文化馆、博物馆、群艺馆、美术馆等各种机构，大力弘扬中华优秀传统文

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82 Murphy., p. 82-88.
Throughout the articles, it becomes clear that the newspaper and the Chinese Communist Party share the view that Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture is beneficial for the individual and China in various ways. Thus, an important question and ambition becomes finding and developing suitable medium channels that people enjoy engaging with. The call for innovative and creative development reoccurs constantly and becomes keywords to both spread excellent traditional Chinese cultures and as desirable effects of absorbing the culture itself for improving Chinese society and civilization overall.

In the mass dissemination of cultural heritage, investments in digital adaptations and TV-programs stand in the center. There is a wide range regarding the contents, from showcasing archaeological findings, to traditional dance and music performances in new creative settings. All with the help of technology. Some TV-programs that has gained attention and are said to be successful in revitalizing traditional Chinese culture include “National Treasure” guojia baozhang 《国家宝藏》, “Encountering Civilization” yu jian wenming 《邂逅文明》 and “New Sound of Ancient Rhymes” guyun xin sheng 《古韵新声》. (A4)

Another key aspect of where innovative and creative development is urged to take place is through education, with slogans such as “Let Excellent Traditional Culture take root in children’s hearts”. Readings of classics and ancient poems have fluctuated in primary and secondary school over the years. In 2019 the Ministry of Education compiled new Chinese textbooks to increase readings of ancient poems and prose. The increase in readings is particularly large for elementary school, with 129 ancient poems and essays included in textbooks from year 1-6. Further, schools are encouraged to carry out projects where students explore the contemporary values of traditional culture. (A37)

Relation to policy:

This theme primarily relates to the following excerpts in the policy document: aims to implement cultural industry digitalization strategy, accelerate the development of cultural consumption, and expand industries such as digital creativity and online audiovisual. Promote the transformation of TV-channels.83

5.2.7 T6: Inheritance and National Rejuvenation

This theme showcases how ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’ is something deeply embedded in the individual and nation, having been passed on for thousands of years, it is now of utmost importance to bring out its essence – which can serve as enrichment for future national, social, and economic development. This theme is very similar and touches upon similar arguments and narratives found for the theme ‘self-confidence and nationalism’, however, the judgement of turning it into a separate theme lies in that a distinct storytelling linked to drawing parallels to genetics and inheriting traits over centuries emerged in the

83 Murphy., p. 82-88.
readings. These are promoted as an intrinsic strength and value of the Chinese people, which will serve the ambitions of national rejuvenation; also meaning renewal or rebirth.

An example of this is an excerpt on the discourse connected to the notion of cultural genes and DNA:

Continuation of cultural genes. General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out: “Chinese culture permeates the marrow of the Chinese People; it is the DNA of culture. Over several thousand years of changes, various ideological and cultural aspects emerged in the formation and development of the Chinese nation. These have documented the spiritual activities, rational thinking and cultural achievements carried out by the Chinese nation in its long-term struggles, reflecting the spiritual pursuits of the Chinese people. Among them, the most central content has become the fundamental cultural genes of the Chinese nation. (A24)

通过借用科学和生物遗传学的术语，优秀传统文化的传播被推广，并试图通过建立与‘科学’的联系来获得合法性的(24)。类似的构造也可以在将马克思主义与中国特色和科学的前景相结合时找到。(A23)

Concerning the promotion of inheritance, accentuation is put on the longevity of Chinese civilization and cultural heritage – traditional as well as revolutionist. Through long-term achievements and struggles, over the course of China’s 5000-year long history, the Chinese spirit shaped from all experiences – ready to be absorbed and provide nourishment for the nation and people today – to strive for national rejuvenation and a new era. The knowledge and wisdom contained in traditional cultural heritage brings insights into how to face contemporary challenges. (A24)

A concrete example brought up is classic literature and the learnings of Chinese thinkers. Sun Tzu’s “Art of War” sunzi bingfa《孙子兵法》 is one of these classics – said to have propelled attention to excellent Chinese culture in China and internationally. The essence of Chinese Excellent Traditional Culture is said to reflect the life practices of Chinese people spanning over thousands of years. Embedded values and concepts have been inherited in one continuous line. The charm of Chinese stories (in extension heritage) is mentioned as a type of cultural expression made possible thanks to unique cultural genes. (A26)

Regarding inheritance and national rejuvenation, the Party also emphasizes the need for all ethnic groups to work together, especially mentioning Xinjiang. Stating that Chinese culture is the culmination of the culture of various ethnic groups and has shaped the consciousness of the Chinese national community. Continuously enhancing the recognition of all ethnic groups is seen as vital for the protection and development of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture. (A29)
Relation to policy:

This theme primarily relates to the following excerpts in the policy document: Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, History of Socialist Development, the strengthening of the history of the party, and the Chinese Dream. The implementation of projects to pass on and develop excellent traditional Chinese culture. The promotion of new ideological concepts, mental attitudes, cultural currents, and behavioral norms. The strengthening of cultural and natural heritage and intangible cultural heritage.84

5.2.8 T7: International Cultural Soft Power

This theme concerns the aspects of excellent traditional Chinese culture that are described to have an international attraction power or soft power. Overall, Chinese traditional heritage is described as rich and profound, and Chinese culture holds both tangible and intangible culture that deserves to be known and shared – both among the Chinese people and internationally. By creating a well-told story about Chinese culture and its values to foreign audiences.

The charm of Chinese stories is not only built on beauty and emotion but also on wisdom in handling relations among the world, society, and people. This kind of cultural expression, with special oriental genes, undoubtedly contributes to the enhancement of China’s image when conveyed effectively. To tell Chinese stories well, it is a must to build a communication system with distinctive Chinese characteristics and strive to improve international communication influence, the appeal of Chinese culture, the affinity of China’s image and the persuasiveness of Chinese discourse and guidance of international public opinion. (A26)

As the citation above illustrates, when it comes to the international allure of excellent traditional Chinese culture – enhancing the image of China stands in the center and influencing international discourse. (A26) Many aspects of Chinese culture could be spread to the world: art, music, crafts, ideology, science, technology, food etc. Often mentioned are also the contributions to human development and exchange that Chinese culture and people can offer. For example, Chinese traditional Culture is promoted as containing ideals of personal improvement and harmony among people. No matter if it’s within personal friendship groups, people or between nations and nature. (A16)

Throughout the articles, for this theme, there is a focus on how China is sharing its cultural heritage through different types of international and national forums: conferences, exhibitions, crafts workshops, cultural exchange, and academic collaboration being the most common ones.

84 Murphy., p. 82-88.
One concrete example is the cultural heritage of Dunhuang Art dunhuang yishu 敦煌艺术 and related cultural heritage. Highlighted as a cultural treasure, Dunhuang culture is described to provide value worldwide and related exhibitions have already been held in more than 20 countries around the world. It is described as showing the history of exchanges and mutual learning between Chinese and foreign civilizations. Innovative and creative ways to spread and develop Dunhuang culture furthermore serve as means to create cultural products and spiritual food. (A2) Overall, the main narrative being promoted is that Chinese culture is of positive significance in today’s era as it provides both spiritual stuff for Socialism with Chinese characteristic and Chinese stories have endless possibilities in their contribution to the international community. (A26)

Relation to policy:

This theme primarily relates to the following excerpts in the policy document: Strengthening of foreign cultural exchange and multi-level civilizational dialogues. Innovation and promotion of international communication, telling the Chinese story well and spreading the voice of China. Promote bonds between people and carry out the activities of ‘Perceiving China’ ganzhi zhongguo 感知中国.85

6. Discussion & Conclusions

Under the assumption that the CCP aims to increase its national and domestic soft power and legitimacy, through the construction and promotion of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, this study aimed to explore the ways this is done by investigating communication directed to the Chinese people through The People’s Daily.

The following research question and sub-question guided the selection of themes that were derived from the text material: What can be observed in The People’s Daily 2021-2022 concerning the ways the CCP is promoting its new policy from the 14th Five-Year plan, regarding ‘Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture’? How can the findings relate to China’s will to enhance soft power in the domestic context?

In the end, seven dominant themes emerged from the material, chosen due to their frequency of appearance in the chosen articles and with the help of the theoretical framework and previous research linked to the overarching concept of soft power, the context of China, policy plan and the historical context and attitude towards traditional cultural heritage.

85 Murphy., p. 82-88.
The constructed themes were the following:

1. Leadership of Xi Jinping
2. Integration of Marxism and Chinese Characteristics
3. Combining Tradition and Modernity
4. Cultural Self-Confidence and Nationalism
5. Creativity and Innovative Transformation
6. National Rejuvenation and Inheritance

An unexpected challenge was the degree of entanglement in the argumentation and promotion of excellent traditional Chinese culture. With this, I mean that although the attempt has been to create separate themes, they all still interlink in one way or another. The notion of national rejuvenation is used to support the integration of Marxism and combining tradition and modernity, or vice versa. The identified themes can very much be described as slogans present in the texts, often mentioned in close proximity to one another. Overall, the same phrases, ideas and prompts are present in much of the material. Very little explanatory basis for repeated statements can be found, especially for the promotion of ideological and moral aspects. For example, regarding the integration of Marxism with Chinese characteristics. It is urged as great for the future development of China and combines well with traditional culture – however exactly how this manifest is not explained in clear terms.

Although it’s been possible to separate themes, overarching ambitions related to creating a unified, cohesive, and strengthened China in all societal fields and levels can be traced in all of the themes. The hearts, minds and spirituality of the people must align with the traditional and socialist culture, the party state and the vision of China in a New Era. The statements and guidance of Xi Jinping are of utmost importance to understand and embrace traditional Chinese culture for its intended aim and value. The overall discourse, found across themes, also heavily emphasizes China’s long rich history, achievements and overcoming common struggles as a foundation for national pride and confidence, as well as there is a unique ‘genetical’ component to the richness of Chinese culture and the practices of its people. Hence the term ‘Chinese characteristics’ is used to differentiate the Chinese way of being and doing things.

In relation to the theoretical framework, the findings and discourse in the articles align with ideas presented regarding soft power, Chinese characteristics, and the framing of culture as a component in national unity – and in extension national security. The dissemination of Excellent Traditional Chinese Culture, Xi Jinping Thought, and the different ways it is promoted to connect it with history and future ambitions creates a narrative very fitting with the concepts of nation-building and image-building presented in the literature.

Both in the domestic context and how China wants to reach foreign audiences, there is a focus on improving communication mediums through ‘creativity and innovation’. Intended to aid in the dissemination of culture and ideology. This is mainly in connection to digitalization and television, but also regarding the arrangements of conferences, exhibitions, and other types of outreach projects. All means are useful to increase domestic and international soft power.

Finally, regarding International Cultural Soft Power and how it is presented in the domestic context, there is a focus on highlighting tangible and intangible cultural heritage as worthy of spreading across the world. Directed at the Chinese people, statements repeatedly deal with
how China’s traditional and socialist culture has contributed to human development, ethics, philosophy, and advanced civilization. Again, creating a narrative aiming to instill national pride, self-confidence, and the idea of ‘One China’.

7. Further Research

This paper has mapped out interesting themes in a broad manner and contributed investigating the discourse surrounding promotion of Traditional Chinese Culture in official Chinese media – which furthermore represents the perspective of the Chinese Communist Party and Xi Jinping. As the data found was very rich and plentiful, there is potential in using the themes found as a starting point to dive deeper into sub-themes and implications for Chinese society.

A couple of improvements to this specific paper could be made regarding research design: Discussion and a second attempt at theme creation could be made. As there were some difficulties with identifying and separating themes from one another, it would be a useful step to confirm the decision on chosen themes. Researchers in fields using thematic analysis agree that having another set of eyes on the data is valuable when creating themes, in part because of the subjective nature of conducting TA. As the author of this paper handled the material alone, having others attempting to recreate the analysis and insights from this process would be beneficial to strengthen the findings of this paper.

For further research, there is also the possibility to extend the range of material examined. For example, plenty of new articles in The People’s Daily emerged in 2023 and the policy document set ambitions until 2025. A more refined analysis of how discourse or narratives are changing over a specified period could be an insightful contribution.
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