

## The Mongolian Social Identity and The Limit of China's Soft Power in Mongolia

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### Abstract

Discussions about China has expanded in last few decades in line with its rise in power and influence, and now include a range of topics such as its implication for the world, its soft power and so on. Many note that embrace and application of soft power by China are concerned with its long and short term objectives in relations with other countries including Mongolia. However, with several observations exposing persistent anti-Chinese attitudes among the Mongolian public, effectiveness of China's soft power has been questioned. The study aims to clarify the limit of China's soft power in Mongolia and to find out factors causing the limit by assuming that the concepts of power, soft power, and a theoretical approach that explain interactions between social groups would help determine outcome of soft power. It finds that in order for China to get outcomes it wants relations with Mongolia, China's soft power has to consider the unique characteristic of relations, that is, context of soft power. It also argues that although China is aware of this fact, Mongolian social identity conflicts with the soft power policy promoted by public diplomacy, namely, cultural activities of China. The paper argues that success of soft power in making favorable behaviors such as attraction, persuasion, and agenda setting as suggested by Joseph Nye in a target country is contingent upon not only power resources, but also upon contextual factors such as social identities of those countries involved.

**Keywords:** Soft power, Social identity, China, Anti attitude, Group interaction

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## 1. Introduction

Due to globalization, the beginning of the twenty-first century witnessed major changes in international politics. While some countries are still struggling with poverty and underdevelopment, others led by China, India, and Brazil have steadily maintained economic growth and gained prominence in the world affairs. Gradual shift of power from West to East is determined by the fact that not only the UN, IMF, World Bank, and G8 has had a main role in shaping global affairs, but also, dominant economies comprised of G20 and - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa- BRICS has begun to play a bigger role in shaping what future the world will hold. China transforming itself the second biggest economy and the largest trading nation in the world in recent years became a hotly debated topic in global affairs. Even preponderant power, the U.S, had begun to consider China as its strategic competitor and to pay noticeable attention to the Chinese related matters including China's soft power (Friedberg, 2011). Since 1990 when Joseph Nye first coined the term of soft power, the concept has been embraced by the academic community and then by policy makers including those in China. Power of attracting, persuading and setting an agenda in order to get one's desired outcomes in interactions with the other countries in international politics, shortly called 'soft power', has appeared to deliver for China what it wants. Realizing the fact that it has ready-to-apply power resources in its disposal, China has invested a great deal such resources to become "major soft power" in the world. Such endeavors of China has shown an apparently positive

results. In mid 2000, public opinion poll conducted in several South East Asian, African, Latin American countries shows that even though its success varies from a region to region, China's overall image and popularity are positive (Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2009). With emphasis on good-neighbor policy, China has paid importance to Mongolia, and deployed a range of instruments to show itself as benign and non-threatening country. Because public opinion or attitudes toward China among ordinary Mongolian citizens might be a good approximation of both attractive a country might appear, it is assumable that China's found soft power as useful for in getting pro-China opinion of Mongolians. Then, one might wonder how China's soft power so far is effective in Mongolia.

In 2012, a survey conducted among twelve East Asian countries including China took place to explore East Asian view on the rise of China. It has found that all East Asian countries, but Japan and Mongolia, had a favorable view toward China in terms of China's influence in the region. Interesting finding is that Mongolia was the only country after Japan, which saw China's rise was harmful for the region and itself; as many as 60.9% of people hold adverse feeling toward China (Liu Kang, Min-Hua Huang, 2012). In the same poll conducted in 2009, 48.7% of Mongolian respondents saw the Chinese influence over Mongolia as negative, while 25.2% saw it positively (Mendee, 2011). Despite frequent high-level visits, growing the volume of trade and investment, expanding cultural exchanges, and considering official claims that there is no unresolved problem between the two countries

in last few decades, persistence of anti-Chinese attitudes among Mongolians is perplexing. Therefore, it seems that despite of high resource volume that China poured into Mongolia, anti-Chinese attitudes expressed in negative perceptions, hate crimes, and public discourses limit China's soft power. Those facts have led to the question of why China's soft power policy is limited in getting positive attitudes toward itself and cultivating positive image among Mongolian people. In order to find the answer to above question, It needs to inquire into the concept of power in international politics; how power is perceived between an actor (sender) and target (receiver); the concept of soft power and how it works, and importantly what contextual factors determine limits of soft power with regard to Mongolia-China relations, given persistent anti-China attitudes among Mongolians. This paper explores China's soft power policy, its limit and implementation in Mongolia through literature reviews, existing researches, and gathered primary and secondary data within design of qualitative approach.

It consists of the following parts explaining the limit of China's soft power policy toward Mongolia. *First*, it deals with conceptual and theoretical frameworks which involve the general concept of power in international politics, the concept of soft power, and the social identity theory as developed by social psychologist scholars illustrating causal relationship between underlying factors and effectiveness of soft power. *Second* part will support the main argument of presenting historical background of bilateral relations of the two countries with special emphasis on how Mongolian social identity has been shaped by those developments

in historical interactions with China. In the *third* part, it moves on to examine the main characteristics of China's soft power policy by applying soft power context framed in the previous chapter. Also, this part shows how China applies its soft power policy in its relations with Mongolia as an empirical case study. Lastly, it depicts that despite China had taken many endeavors to build its soft power influence on Mongolia, China's soft power is limited in Mongolia in terms of its image building as evidenced by persistent anti-Chinese attitudes among Mongolian public. Assuming a causal relationship between underlying factors suggested by the concepts and the theory, the limit of China's soft power will be elaborated as conclusion.

## **2. The concept of power, soft power, and Social identity theory**

A phrase in the title -the limit of China's soft power- suggests, one might definitely wonder what power is and its limit. Both natural and social sciences have their own treatments of power: one is measured by energy-time ratio and other is ability to influence. Social power which is relevant for this study extensively is discussed by many political scientists including J. Morgenthau, Kenneth N. Waltz, Dahl, Robert Gilpin, Baldwin, Nye and Rothgeb, and they have often debated about what constituted power and suggested two different approaches, resource based and behavioral one. the latter which is also called relational approach has become more dominant since mid-20th century given the former's inadequate explanation of some aspects of social power. They emphasized that it is crucial to differentiate conception of

power which sees power as ability to achieve desired outcomes from resources used to extract such power. Resource based approach dictating that larger power resource means more power for state can be mistaken when small country with minimal resources wins big country with larger resources as exemplified by case of North Vietnamese victory over the U.S in Vietnam War. Therefore, according to many scholars, to overcome the paradox of defining power in terms of resources that is used to produce such power, it is the behavioral or relational concept of power that should be applied in examining the success of exercising power (Baldwin, 2013). In a behavioral approach, power is the ability of an actor to get others to do something they otherwise would not do (Rothgeb, 1993). Those countries can be actor and target depending upon who exercises and receives power influence. Rothgeb and others have proposed that context, particular social setting, is the key to limiting power. Traditional state power cannot solely derive from its military might and economic strength instead it began coming from its ability to shape other state's preference, to make positive attraction and to get support from them in achieving its goals.

Nye elaborates that state's power derives from such ways as coercion, inducement, and co-optation and that in getting the desired outcomes, actor can use hard power of 'carrot and stick' or soft power based on attractive behaviors that displayed by the target due to actor's influence. Nye defined "soft power is the ability to affect others through the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuading, and eliciting positive attraction in order to obtain preferred outcomes" (Nye, 2011). He suggested

three basic resources: culture, political values and foreign policy. Nye famously puts it "... what the target thinks is particularly important, and the targets matter as much as the agents". Appropriate use of soft power resources and initial behavior (preference) of a target are two *main context determinants* of successful soft power policy. It is said that international actors mainly resist external attempts whether is direct or indirect to control their behavior. Especially, if an influence is considered as a threat to or is conflicted with target's way of life, culture, and beliefs which is called as identity as a whole, target's resistance would be bold and thus limits efficacy of soft power policy (Rothgeb, 1993). Since soft power behavior is much more psychologically oriented, first step would begin with initial behavior of a target regarding its relation with an actor.

The paper proposes that social identity approach which explains the particular context of intergroup relations would be applicable to relations between the actor and target. According to social psychologists, how individuals share group identity among themselves shapes their behaviors and attitudes in their relations with other groups. When studying behaviors of interacting groups and conflicting view that they portray in this interactions, Henri Tajfel and John Turner have revealed that simply dividing the people, who have no prior and future interaction, into random groups was sufficient to generate in-group positivity at expense of out-group discrimination. Being a member of a group, people satisfy their various social needs. A group is formed because it fulfills human needs exemplified above; their structures and processes are in part shaped by those needs.

At the higher level of the social group such as nation and state, the group satisfies economic, socio-cultural, political needs, giving the members a sense of security, a feeling of belonging, and prestige (Druckman, 1994). Once individuals join a group and identify themselves with that group, their self-esteem accumulates as collective self-esteem of the members of the group. According to the SIT, if people are motivated to have a positive self-concept over others, it is naturally that people should be motivated to think of their in-groups as a better group than other groups. This evaluation of better group could be presented as a notion of a superior race, high class, and elite etc which can be thought as positive characteristics for in-group. In other words, striving for social identity, group members tend to think and act in a way to achieve or maintain a positive distinctiveness between one's own group and the relevant out-groups. According to Henri Tajfel, social identity is "...part of an individual's self concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership in a social group...together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity of a group, therefore, is formed by self evaluating and comparing in-group with out-group which is thought to have contrasting identity. The comparison then results in competitive behaviors among groups, and this process would explain failure of soft power policy of some actors. Because a desire to maintain in-group positivity motivates intergroup social comparisons, this in-group positivity comes from in-group bias- that is, the tendency to favor the in-group over the out-group. This analogy is relevant for explaining

nationalism among countries. In-group bias is much more intense if those groups have historically (countries) engaged in conflict against each other to protect their positively defined identities. Thus, according to the concept of power and contextual factors in interactions between social groups, any attempts at changing the social identity of the target through soft power might be limited, and may face resistance.

### **3. Historical background of Mongolia-China interactions**

This part of the paper mostly discusses that Mongolia attempts to differentiate and sustain unique identity derived from Mongolian culture, uniqueness, and characteristics with special emphasis given to the process of identity differentiation in historical context. Mongolia-China relations have extended with four historical periods in which distinct identities were formed within two countries.

The first period of the ancient times when the Great Wall was built around 220 BC, separating agrarian and sedentary Chinese identity from that of herding and hunting of nomads' was initial stage identity differentiation. This period so called Pre-Independence Era of before-1911 extended from time when Yuan dynasty dictated policy of forming class based society aiming to keep Mongolian identity preventing it from assimilating into broad Chinese identity to time when Manchu policy of limiting Chinese flow into Mongolia thus preventing assimilation of Mongolia with China and 'new administration policy' directing toward assimilation of Mongolia with China. Those major developments clearly set boundary between Mongolian and Chinese identities and

shown resistance to any developments that attempted to break this limit. In second historical period called as Post Independence Era (1911-1950), permanent separation of Mongolian identity from that of China is helpful to understand historical developments in which current Mongolian identity as a statehood took its current shape. During this period following historical events that are crucial for identity separation and comparison occurred. Those are Mongolian declaration of independence from Qing Dynasty; subsequent suzerainty of Mongolia by the Republic of China; Mongolian endeavor for independence and its seek of support from Russia, that is not a group threatening Mongolian identity; and China's recognition of Mongolia and the establishment of diplomatic relations. The third historical period called as Cold War Era (1950-1990) is presided by friendly relations between two countries that existed under Soviet influence. But, this peaceful environment was suddenly collapsed as ideological difference between Soviet and China shadowed Mongolia. During this period, ideal conflict and realistic threat to Mongolian identity from China played defining role. Communist and socialist ideologies were common identities that enabled both countries to cooperate. Thus, this set of period of time illustrates that common identity disperses and soften contradiction of in-group and out-group identities. When Soviet-Sino split had emerged, China threat thesis was consolidated and intentionally used to show China as a threat to Mongolian identity. The present period expanding from Post Cold War in 1990 to present time considered with how Mongolia attempted to differentiate and newly define its identity from

China and Russia given the changed external and internal circumstances. Post communist, transitioning to democratic Mongolia whose identity becoming more Western oriented is the key development of the recent period despite the fact that China possessed much power over Mongolia in terms of political and economic influence.

Mongolian nationalism based on the strengthening of its identity became forceful factor determining public attitudes toward China. Although Mongolia became much dependent of China, its identity differentiation from China in terms of socio-cultural sphere is strengthened. Lack of mutual understanding between Mongolia and China, lingering mistrust and anti-China attitudes of Mongolian public are problematic issues that are frequently drawn attention from and discussed by scholars from both sides. Final thought on a historical background of Mongolia-China interaction is that, in words of some scholars, ties between Mongolians and Chinese from ancient times to the present have been essentially political and [economic] relations. Chinese relations with other countries of North East Asia such as Japan, Korea, however, were mainly cultural relations, encouraging the spread of Chinese culture, religion, the language and even lifestyle patterns (Bayasakh, 2002). It is so, because Mongolian in-groups identity positively maintained with clear boundary limiting cultural interactions between two groups of Mongolia and China. Given the fact that there is no present threat from China to its existence and unresolved issues between the two nations, puzzling question that may be asked is why there is anti-China attitudes exist among

Mongolian public, which detailed in later chapters. The answer led to theoretical discussions of inter-group relations based on process of in-group's positive identity differentiation at expense of out-group disfavor, and to the analysis of efficacy of China's soft

power attempt to cultivate good image among Mongolian public which seemingly limits such endeavor of China. Following the some scholars view, overview of Mongolia and China relations can be seen as indicated in table 1 (Mendee, 2011).

**Table 1** Overview of Mongolia-China relations

Pre-Independence Era	Post Independence Era	Cold War Era	Post Cold War to Present
220BC-1911	1911-1950	1950-1990	1990-Present
hostile	hostile	Friendly, hostile	Neutral, friendly

#### 4. China's Soft Power in Mongolia

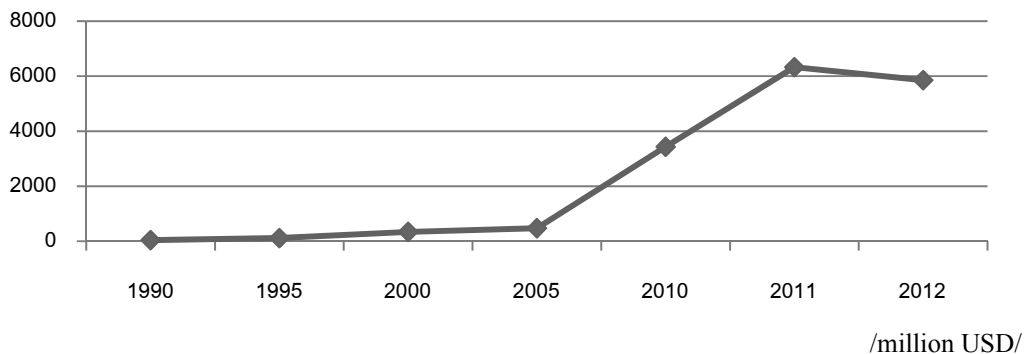
From late 1990s, Chinese political leaders and academic scholars alike realized China's increasing material power and transitioned its foreign policy toward active engagement with the outside world. They asserts that China is a developing country transforming slowly itself into major power; therefore, it needs to secure favorable external and internal environment that enables its development to advance further. Such issues as its deteriorated international image, spreading China threat theory, lack of friendly environments were all taken into consideration of Chinese decision makers and scholars. China understood that active engagement with the outside world in a balanced manner would be a solution to the problems it faced. Improving understanding of China and its image, dealing with a negative frame of China by foreign media, facilitate favorable condition for its economic development became priorities of China's foreign policy (Li, 2009). All above conditions and factors can determine China's unique characteristics of soft power as follows.

Given Mongolia's proximate geographical location to its northern border which is the longest land border of China with one particular country and its prolonged vibrant historical relations with Mongolia, China sees Mongolia in broader geopolitical and strategic perspective. Thus, building solid and peaceful relations with Mongolia, which is the closest neighboring country, is crucial for China's foreign policy goals of maintaining peaceful external environments, ensuring beneficial economic relations and reassuring the neighbors about its benign intentions (Batchimeg, 2005). Those outcomes that China wants can be divided into two parts: general and specific. Creating peaceful external environment, reassuring its benign intention and peaceful development and promoting a positive image and understanding of China abroad are those general or broader goals of China's long-term strategy in dealing with bilateral, regional, and international issues. On the other side, ensuring access to overseas market and securing supply of energy and raw materials, getting support in immediate issues such as voting for China and making favorable

agreement are regarded as short-term specific goals. There are goals that China pursues particularly in its relation with Mongolia as well. China's soft power can serve both types of objectives.

Even though China's engagement with Mongolia in political fields increased substantially since the normalization period, ordinary Mongolian people saw it rather different view or disregarded it with a high degree of hesitation. As one Mongolian scholar was asked whether expanding political relations would help to promote understanding of China, he affirmed that despite of improvement in political relations between Mongolia and China, it would

be difficult to ease anxiety and suspicions of Mongolians toward China (Jia, 2009). As for effectiveness of soft power, China, therefore, seemed to find itself in need to improve its image among Mongolians through economic activity and public diplomacy. China's economic growth has created an opportunity for landlocked Mongolia since it provided Mongolia with a favorable external environment, much needed capital and cheaper consumer and manufacturing products. As Mongolian economy is much dependent on foreign trade, China became the largest trading partner of Mongolia. Below table and figure illustrate increasing trade volume between Mongolia and China from 1990s to 2012.



**Figure 1** Bilateral trade volume 1990-2012

**Source:** Mongolia's foreign trade review, Bank of Mongolia ([www.mongolbank.mn](http://www.mongolbank.mn))

China leads the countries that invested in Mongolia since 1990s, holding 48.8% of total investment that Mongolia received. China has been topped the ranks of foreign investment by countries for successive 10 years. China's foreign aid to Mongolia has increased in recent years as well. China has provided Mongolia with grants, interest-free loans, concessional

loans and foreign aid in forms of complete projects, goods and materials, technical cooperation, human resource development, medical teams and emergency humanitarian aid. In contrary, Mongolia has become increasingly dependent on China, giving China with asymmetrical economic power over it. Some cases clearly illustrate potential exploitation of



such power over Mongolia by China as a response to unwelcome development in Mongolia. Thus, lack of equal mutual gains and asymmetrical economic relations would have a detrimental impact on China's soft power endeavors.

As Mongolia redefines itself as free democratic country and people's view evolved over time due to increased exposure, especially, to the West and East Asian democratic countries such as Japan and South Korea, Mongolian society has witnessed the emergence of Westernization. China seems to realize that it lacks soft power in cultural aspects, and began to employ cultural instruments in cultivating better image and improving its soft power. From the mid-2000, China has embraced cultural tools to promote itself among ordinary Mongolians. A range of instruments that China employs include public diplomacy such as the establishment of the Confucius Institute and the Chinese Cultural Center, cultural exchanges and events, other communication tools based on broadcasting, mass media, satellite television, and radio channels. As contents of Chinese public diplomacy efforts suggest, traditional Chinese culture ranging from Chinese language, custom, and arts is considered as the basis of Chinese cultural soft power. Chinese cultural programs in Mongolia mostly focus on Chinese language teaching, and are implemented through Confucius Institute, Chinese Cultural Center, and partly owned private schools. The Chinese Cultural Center was opened in Mongolia in 2010 when Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao visited the country. Activities at the center include teaching Chinese language, organizing cultural and public events, and it serves as an information desk and library service to Mongolian publics.

According to some report, there are 60 schools, which are mainly private entities, opened Chinese language classes, and the number of enrollments has increased to 8000 students who learnt the Chinese language (Indra, 2013). According to various sources including China Radio International, News.mn Chinese Cultural Center, China has expanded its reach in Mongolia in following fields such as education, mass broadcasting, and public exhibitions. In order to promote understanding of China among young people in Mongolia, Chinese government provides a scholarship program in which it receives 400 students from Mongolia at its expense in a yearly basis. In so far, there are around 5000 Mongolian students in China. Chinese cultural soft power also is present in Mongolian mass media- broadcasting. Chinese invested "Sansar" satellite television currently operates in Mongolia with a focus on promotion of Chinese culture and understanding of China. It was estimated that 60% of the capital's urban population has subscribed the 64 television channels in 2008. China Radio International (CRI) also has Mongolian language channel, and is expanding its content and outreaches. Mongolian language section of the radio was established in 1964, and its operation has expanded in recent years as China's public diplomacy gained momentum. The radio delivered through traditional short-wave station, FM, and Internet in daily basis with 6 hours and 16 hours, respectively. FM station of the radio was opened in 2000, 2006, and 2009 in Ulaanbaatar, Darkhan, and Erdenet cities respectively. Contents of the radio mainly focus on current news, special program, listening Chinese literatures, and teaching of the Chinese language.

Since mid 2000's, Chinese cultural events and days frequently have taken place in Mongolia. In 2009, as Mongolia and China observed the 60th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, "Chinese movie days" were organized in the central cinema of Ulaanbaatar city. Moreover, Chinese cultural month took place from August to September, 2012. During the event, Chinese cultural performance and concerts, photo exhibition took place, and some widely known famous actors Chinese movies, which were appeared in Mongolian TVs in mind 1990s, arrived in Mongolia and greeted by Mongolians. Furthermore, in addition to teaching Chinese language and cultural events, those institutions have staged speech contests, festivals, concerts, and other competitive events based on Chinese culture among young Mongolians and students.

## **5. The limit of china's soft power in Mongolia**

China's soft power based on cultural instruments such as public diplomacy aiming to spread Chinese culture through Confucius institutes, the Chinese cultural center, and mass media could not be able to alter prejudiced view of "What China is" among Mongolians. Increasing material power of China might lead to mistrust among Mongolians, of course; but, this explanation does not touch underlying causes that lead to such mistrust and persistent anti-Chinese attitudes, even when China has shown good posture to Mongolia in recent two decades. Therefore, answer lies in unique features of bilateral relations between Mongolia and China, defining their particular social identities from those relations. As discussed

earlier, historical evidences suggest that Mongolia and China had interacted for extended periods with no other comparison for Mongolia. For ethnicity, origin of Mongolians is Asian yellow skin- race identical to other Asians including Han Chinese. Therefore, soft power interactions between Mongolia and China and peoples' attitudes could be better explained from the perspective of inter-group relations advanced by social psychologists. In the study of international politics, each state is a country, a community of people who interact in the same political system and who have some common values (Baylis, et al., 2008). Considering proximity, similarity, and a prolonged history, Mongolian interactions with China should, therefore, definitely determine the Mongolian identity. With regard to history, the Mongolian social identity has been determined by its conflicting interactions with China rather than cooperation which might give way to shared values and common grounds among the two nations. Thus, anti-Chinese sentiments have been for centuries the identity-makers that distinguish the pastoral nomads in Mongolia from sedentary agrarians in China for centuries.

Mongolian social identity is also mainly determined in cultural terms rather than ideological terms. Scholars in international politics assert that the identity of the state is closely connected to nation's culture. Culture includes ways of thinking as well as patterns of behavior (Andersen & Taylor, 2011). Endorsed in 1992, the new constitution of Mongolia dictates that Mongolian people should inherit the traditions of national statehood, history, and culture. Thus, preserving the unique identity and differentiating it from other powerful culture or

civilization is an important aspect of formation of the Mongolian social identity.

As Huntington puts it, comparison and competition can only occur between the entities that are in the same universe or arena. Why China would be comparable out-group for Mongolian social identity differentiation can be explained by this simple fact suggested by Huntington. Huntington offers several key

elements or criterions that would emerge when identities distinctly emerge among groups or people. A geographical location, racial origin, culture and prolonged interaction could be possible criterions of intergroup comparison in the context of Mongolia and China relations. Following table illustrates those determinants that make China as reference out-group for Mongolia.

**Table 2** Determinants of Intergroup Comparison and Identity Differentiation

Determinants		Similarity		Identity differentiation	
	Groups	Mongolia	China	Mongolia	China
	Race	Asian yellow skin	Asian yellow skin	Khalkha Mongolian	Han Chinese
	Geographical location	East Asia	East Asia	Mongolian territory	Chinese territory
	History	Since 209BC	Since 221BC	Great Mongolian state Chinggis Khan	Middle Kingdom Imperial dynasty ancient civilization
	Political Institution	former Communist regime	Communist regime	Multiparty democratic system	Single party authoritarian system
	Economic institution	former planned economy	former planned economy	Free market economy	State controlled Free market economy
	Language	-	-	Kalakh Mongolian	Chinese Mandarin
	Traditional way of life	-	-	Pastoral nomadic tradition	Sedentary agrarian tradition
	Value	-	-	Nomadic values	Confucianism
	Religion	-	-	Buddhism and Shamanism	Buddhism, Taoism, Shamanism

This section of paper elaborates interactions between China's soft power and Mongolian social identity which emerged at expense of China's disfavor in conflicted manner. As shown before, while China's soft power emphasizes cultural instruments based on the unique characteristics of Chinese culture such as Confucius, Chinese language, and Chinese arts, Mongolian social identity was formed in the conflict with China and differentiated from China through the struggle for independence and uniqueness. Overcoming the anti-Chinese attitudes among Mongolians shaped by Mongolian social identity would be a daunting task for China's soft power based on cultural resources, given three factors that related to social identity: nature of soft power; persisting negative attitudes-psychological tendency toward China among Mongolians; and Mongolian national interest, that is, to keep its identity separate from China.

First, as relational concept of power dictates, influence derived from soft power is much dependent on a target than actor's effort. In other words, soft power behaviors of attraction, persuasion, and agenda setting are more in control of the target. Attraction and persuasion are socially constructed. He further asked what generates positive attraction. According to psychologists, as quoted by Nye, people like those who are similar to them or with whom they share group membership, and people are attracted to others if there are shared attitudes and beliefs (Nye, 2011). Therefore, shared values and shared identities between states are crucial determining factor of success of soft power. One scholar, studying China's soft power, underlines that soft power applies

only to states that have some underlying shared set of values, norms, and rules of behavior. He further questions that China's soft power and asserts that China's soft power is limited because of heterogeneous and culturally diverse nature of the Asian region, with its troubled history (Kearn, 2012). Although this assumption about diversity of culture in Asia may exaggerate the true facts, however, it is truly the case for Mongolia where two nation's cultures are distinct from one another. As if Rothgeb and others put objective of soft power, soft power aims to establish a degree of group consciousness, mutual identification, in which the target comes to see itself as sharing values and interests with the actor (Rothgeb, 1993). Since normalization of the relations, Mongolia and China collaborated in political and economic fields witnessed by high level of visits and numbers of agreements and increased volume of trade and investment, there are not institutional arrangements which set common ground for establishing shared values and identities. Common ground in which convergent interests synthesized is a fundamental determinant for success of soft power. Therefore, lack of such identities among China and Mongolia, in fact those are conflicted, necessary for soft power to operate limits China's soft power in Mongolia.

Second, lingering mistrust and anti-Chinese attitudes among Mongolians shaped by Mongolian identity result in a biased view toward Chinese intention to build benign and good image through cultural instruments of China's soft power. Psychological study reveals that people tend to interpret new information in accordance with their belief of whether the message confirms their existing prejudiced view or not.

So-called confirmation bias is a psychological phenomenon that explains why people tend to seek out information that confirms their existing opinions and to overlook or to ignore information that refutes their beliefs. Confirmation bias occurs when people filter out potentially useful facts and opinions that don't coincide with their preconceived notions. Since Mongolian public holds preconceived anti-China attitudes before the application of cultural resources of China's soft power in Mongolia, message aiming to display China as benign and non-threatening country contradicts with the prejudiced view of Mongolians.

Third, one of core elements of Mongolian national interests is preserving Mongolian distinct culture and identity from China. According to Huntington, national interests of any states are becoming to be defined in cultural terms. One Chinese scholar puts it that underlying effect of soft power influence would be to assimilate one's culture and identity with that of others. In intergroup relations' terms, because soft power is directed to change or set preference of the target group, it will have assimilative effect on a target (Li, 2011). As one Mongolian observer points out that Mongolia, as a small country between Russia and China, is suspicious about Chinese traditional view of the hierarchical world and is wary about the rise of China might have a detrimental effect on Mongolia. Also, the fact that some in Chinese society regard Mongolia as "lost" territory has given warning signal to Mongolia; thus, keeping Mongolia anxious about China as far as historical views concerned (Indra, 2009). Moreover, as Rothgeb points out in the concept of power, in order to get expected results, soft power attempt must

consider target's perception of benefit from those relations with the actor (Rothgeb, 1993). It is conceivable that China's soft power which mainly employs cultural tools in Mongolia contradicts Mongolian national interest in preserving distinct identity discussed above. Even though many would argue that a number of Chinese learners in Mongolia have increased substantially in the last decades, it is mainly driven by expected economic gains from business relations with China rather than admiration and respect of Chinese culture or willingness to share common identities and cultures. If it is assumable that such cultural differences and identities would have sustained for prolonged time, according to Nye, cultural barriers are likely to distort what the actor sends to the target (Nye, 2011).

## 6. Conclusion

To sum up, it is argued that the influence of China's soft power is limited in the Mongolian context. Mongolian social identity determined by its historical interactions with China, thus, limits China's soft power which is based substantially on cultural resources. Therefore, anti-Chinese attitudes among Mongolians cannot be easily overcome by China's soft power. For China's side, having in mind various objectives in its foreign policy, soft power policy is expected to play a greater role in changing Mongolian public perception more positively toward it and in assuring its benign intention. But, deeply rooted from the historical legacy (historical memory), Mongolian social identity has great impact on public attitudes of Mongolians toward China, and thus hindering

China's soft power policy to build more positive image of China among Mongolian public. How historical interactions or national interest based on cultural factors have shaped the Mongolian social identity was dealt in this paper. China's soft power may not easily alter deeply rooted anti-Chinese attitudes among Mongolians through introduction of traditional Chinese culture to Mongolian society.

Finally, given the China's limited soft power in Mongolia, the social identity theory can be a powerful approach in explaining attitudes of general public in one country with relation to other countries, thus, making it applicable for further studies on efficacy of soft power of countries in this multi cultural world in attempting to cultivate positive image of them in other foreign countries. The limit of China's soft power caused by Mongolian social identity as shown in the persistent anti-Chinese attitudes among Mongolian public has also confirmed the idea of the relational concept of power which dictates the success of power depends on particular social context.

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