



DOI: 10.22363/2313-0660-2026-26-2-340-351

EDN: HEUYZG

Research article / Научная статья

The Impact of China's "Soft Power" on the Consciousness of Russian Student Youth

Aleksander A. Grebenyuk¹ , Albert M. Kumukov²  ¹Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russian Federation²North-Caucasus Federal University (SCFU) Stavropol, Russian Federation almkumukov@ncfu.ru

Abstract. The rationale for this article can be explained through the intensification of bilateral relations between China and Russia, which rely not only on close political and economic ties, but also on the development and enhancement of humanitarian contacts. The People's Republic of China (PRC) positions itself as a state offering its own development model for the civilization-state, which has existed for over five millennia now. The period when China was among states striving to catch up has been left behind, so now it has every reason to be recognized as a global power. Having achieved economic success and going on with the "Belt and Road" global initiative, the Chinese leadership pays considerable attention to shaping a positive image of China in the countries Beijing is seeking to cooperate with. One of such countries is Russia, standing as a global power that opposes the neocolonial models of world development promoted by the collective West. The study of China's experience in implementing soft power methods is of particular interest since it allows considering the specific features of its national context, as well as its significance in pursuing goals related to global, regional and national foreign policy. The aim of this study is to reveal the effectiveness of soft power tools that the PRC is applying in Russia. The study is based on an approach to image building, which implies viewing it as a process of shaping the target group's opinion, whereas the main method employed within the research was sociological analysis. The authors, while relying on the research experience in defining "soft power," were able to identify the factors that are essential for presenting China's image among the Russian youth: public administration, culture, science and education, business, sports, environment, and digital technologies. The main target group involved in the sociological survey were students of Russian universities falling within the age group of 17–29. The authors employ the study outcomes to conclude that China has created a positive image among the Russian student youth. As reported by the respondents, the high level of influence that China has achieved in the international arena is due to its effective public management and technological advancements, which, are, in turn, based on an education system with a special focus on developing practical skills.

Key words: state image, Russia, soft power tools, discursive power, Russian youth, sociological analysis, public administration, education and science, digital technologies

Data availability statement. All data obtained during this study are included in the published article.

Authors' contributions. A.A. Grebenyuk: conceptualization, development of research methodology, work with software, preparation of the manuscript for publication. A.M. Kumukov: processing empirical data, preparation of a draft manuscript. Both authors have read the final version of the article and approved it.

Conflicts of interest. The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

For citation: Grebenyuk, A. A., & Kumukov, A. M. (2026). The impact of China's "soft power" on the consciousness of Russian student youth. *Vestnik RUDN. International Relations*, 26(2), 340–351. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313/0660-2026-26-2-340-351>; EDN: HEUYZG

© Grebenyuk A.A., Kumukov A.M., 2026



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>

Воздействие «мягкой силы» Китая на сознание российской студенческой молодежи

А.А. Гребенюк¹ , А.М. Кумуков²  

¹Московский государственный университет имени М.В. Ломоносова, Москва, Российская Федерация

²Северо-Кавказский федеральный университет, Ставрополь, Российская Федерация

 almkumukov@ncfu.ru

Аннотация. Актуальность исследования обусловлена интенсификацией двусторонних отношений между Китайской Народной Республикой (КНР) и Российской Федерацией, основанных не только на тесных политических и экономических связях, но и на развитии и углублении гуманитарных контактов. КНР позиционирует себя как государство, «презентующее» собственную модель развития государства-цивилизации, которое существует уже шестое тысячелетие. Исторический период, когда Китай находился в числе догоняющих государств, преодолен, и КНР с полным основанием может считаться глобальной державой. Достигнув экономических успехов и продолжая реализовывать глобальный проект «Один пояс, один путь», руководство КНР уделяет значительное внимание формированию положительного имиджа страны в государствах, с которыми Пекин заинтересован сотрудничать. В это число входит Россия как глобальная держава, противостоящая неокOLONиальным сценариям развития мира, предлагаемым коллективным Западом. Исследование опыта Китая в оформлении политики «мягкой силы» представляет особый интерес, поскольку позволяет рассмотреть специфику национального контекста и значение этой политики для реализации глобальных, региональных и национальных внешнеполитических целей. Цель исследования — показать эффективность инструментов «мягкой силы», применяемых КНР в России. В основу исследования положен подход к имиджеобразованию как процессу формирования общественного мнения целевой группы, а основным методом исследования был выбран социологический анализ. Опираясь на изучение исследовательского опыта в определении «мягкой силы», авторами были выделены факторы, ставшие базовыми для представления имиджа Китая в российской молодежной среде: государственное управление, культура, наука и образование, бизнес, спорт, экология и цифровые технологии. Основной целевой группой, участвующей в социологическом опросе, стала студенческая аудитория российских вузов в возрасте от 17 до 29 лет. По итогам исследования авторами был сделан вывод о сформировавшемся положительном имидже Китая в среде российской студенческой молодежи. По мнению опрошенных, высокого уровня влияния на международной арене Китай достиг благодаря эффективному государственному управлению и технологическим достижениям, основанным на практикоориентированной системе образования.

Ключевые слова: имидж государства, Россия, инструменты мягкой силы, дискурсивная сила, российская молодежь, социологический анализ, государственное управление, образование и наука, цифровые технологии

Заявление о доступности данных. Все данные, полученные в ходе этого исследования, включены в опубликованную статью.

Вклад авторов. Гребенюк А.А.: концептуализация, разработка методологии исследования, работа с программным обеспечением, подготовка рукописи к публикации Кумуков А.М.: обработка эмпирических данных, подготовка черновика рукописи. Оба автора ознакомлены с окончательной версией статьи и одобрили ее.

Заявление о конфликте интересов. Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

Для цитирования: Гребенюк А. А., Кумуков А. М. Воздействие «мягкой силы» Китая на сознание российской студенческой молодежи // Вестник Российского университета дружбы народов. Серия: Международные отношения. 2026. Т. 26, № 2. С. 340–351. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313/0660-2026-26-2-340-351>; EDN: HEUYZG

Introduction

In a post-industrial society information dominates, “soft power” is becoming one of the central concepts of socio-political reality. Contemporary scientific knowledge defines “soft power” as an “indirect” means of exercising

power (Nye, 2002, p. 8), a tool for engaging countries in a specific foreign policy agenda. This is achieved through using an image strategy (Filimonov, 2012) to construct an attractive image of a state as a leader in global development (a subject of “soft power”) (Grebennyuk, 2022, p. 28; Soboleva & Krivokhizh, 2024, pp. 122–124).

At the same time, the potential of “soft power” extends significantly beyond the foreign policy agenda. An important feature of this social technology is the ability to change social norms and attitudes, shaping the populations of target countries’ “images of a desired future” based on values, socio-cultural and political practices, and socio-economic development characteristics of the target state.

The People’s Republic of China (PRC), having become a leading actor in global affairs, devotes significant attention to promoting national “soft power” in various regions of the world. In Chinese political thought, the concept of “soft power” is not universal. Two approaches to incorporating the concept of “soft power” into foreign policy practice can be identified.

The first, formulated by Wang Xinyang, the Chairman of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, assumes that Chinese culture and the Chinese language underlie China’s “soft” influence. A slightly modified version of this concept is the “Culture +” concept, described by many Chinese scholars, in particular Huang Rui and Wang Hongqiang (Huang & Wang, 2025).

The second approach, as described by Yan Xuetong, defines Chinese culture as one of the components, along with military, economic, and political power, that make up a state’s national power and shape its image in the international arena (Yan, 2011).

Nevertheless, the Chinese model of “soft” foreign policy was a “catch-up” model, based on proven Western practices, which, according to I.E. Denisov and I.Yu. Zuenko, consisted of tools consisting of the dissemination of the Chinese language and culture, Chinese education, the development of the tourism industry, etc. (Denisov & Zuenko, 2022, pp. 8–9). Beijing’s actions were often a direct copy of Western models and did not always have

a positive effect. Suffice it to note the emerging phenomenon of Sinophobia, recorded in the Central Asian states, where China was particularly active in the 2010s (Zuenko et al., 2020).

By the early 2020s, the Chinese leadership had concluded that the soft power instruments it had been using were not effective (Denisov & Zuenko, 2022, pp. 10–11). ‘Cultural soft power,’ based on introducing the world to the achievements of the great Chinese civilization, was replaced by ‘discursive power,’ the goal of which was to create new institutional tools for managing the external environment in which China operates as a rising power (Denisov & Zuenko, 2022).

The shift in Chinese policy toward the practice of discursive power is evident in the White Paper on China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era (January 2021) and the White Paper “Jointly Building the Belt and Road Initiative: An Important Practice for Building a Community with a Shared Future for Humanity” (September 2023).¹ In the Chinese research narrative (despite occasional refinements of interpretations), the concept of ‘discursive power’ has developed as the ability of a sovereign state to introduce into the international community—through official diplomacy, media, non-governmental exchanges, and other channels—a discourse containing certain cultural concepts, values, and ideological attitudes in such a way that other countries

¹ See: Gongjian “Yidai Yilu”: Goujian Renlei Mingyun Gongtongti de Zhongda Shijian Baipishu (Quanwén) [White Paper: Jointly Building the Belt and Road Initiative: A Crucial Practice in Building a Community with a Shared Future for Humanity (full text)] // Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. October 10, 2023. (In Chinese). URL: http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/zfbps_2279/202310/t20231010_773682.html (accessed: 08.12.2024); Xin shidai de Zhongguo Guoji Fazhan Hezuo Baipishu (Quanwén) [White Paper on China’s International Development Cooperation in the New Era (full text)] // Information Office of the State Council of the People’s Republic of China. January 10, 2021. (In Chinese). URL: http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/ndhf/2021n_2242/202207/t20220704_130669.html (accessed: 22.11.2024).

voluntarily accept and agree with them (Leksyutina & You, 2023, p. 372). Some Chinese researchers, in particular Ruan Jianping, define discursive power as a combination of the state's material power and cultural identity, referring to it as "cultural imperialism" (Ruan, 2003). Other scholars such as Han Pu Gen, Li Chao Xiang, and Xu Xiu Jun see discursive power as an opportunity for government bodies to convey cultural values as fundamental principles of state policy (Li & Han, 2019; Xu & Tian, 2019).

The distinctive feature of this study is not so much an examination of individual characteristics or development directions of China's "soft power," but rather an analysis of its impact on the Russian population, specifically on Russian youth, using empirical sociological methods.

Literature Review

Contemporary soft power research focuses on four areas.

The *first* area is devoted to analyzing the essence, characteristics, and features of soft power itself, which is viewed as a socio-political phenomenon, brand, quality, or ability of a state to influence both global political processes and domestic political processes in other countries (Lukes, 1974, p. 24; Nye, 2004b; Parshin, 2013; Leonova, 2013, pp. 29–32). This approach emphasizes the importance of studying the totality of a state's internal resources, the so-called resource base of soft power.

The *second* area develops methods for assessing the potential and influence of soft power, which are used to rank countries. One of the most significant studies in this area is The Soft Power 30 Rating, published until 2019 by the consulting company Portland in collaboration with the USC Center of Public Diplomacy,²

Global Soft Power Index by *Brand Finance*³ and Country Brand Ranking by *Bloom Consulting*.⁴

The *third* area focuses on studying the essential characteristics and regional distribution of soft power in specific countries: the United States (Nye, 2004a), the United Kingdom (Kharitonova, 2017), Türkiye (Benhaim & Öktem, 2015), Japan (Katasonova, 2017), France (Gomelaury, 2021), the Republic of Korea (Matosian, 2021), Spain (Borzova & Nikolashvili, 2020), Portugal (Borzova & Nikolashvili, 2021), and others.

Within this third area, a significant number of works in both Russian and international political science are devoted to analyzing various aspects of China's soft power. According to the scientometric portal *E-library*, over the past 10 years alone, more than 160 publications have been published on this topic, including articles in peer-reviewed academic journals and monographs.⁵

This study falls within the *fourth* area, which examines soft power as a *technology* for influencing political processes at the global level, employing non-violent instruments of influence and having clear mechanisms and implementation algorithms (Grebennyuk, 2022; Filimonov, 2012; Rusakova, 2010). One of the research objectives in this area is to develop systems of indicators and measure the direct impact of soft power on various social groups in foreign countries. This area is underdeveloped in current political science, which makes this work especially relevant.

com/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/The-Soft-Power-30-Report-2019-1.pdf (accessed: 11.12.2024).

³ Global Soft Power Index 2024 // Brand Finance. URL: <https://static.brandirectory.com/reports/brand-finance-soft-power-index-2024-digital.pdf> (accessed: 26.12.2024).

⁴ Bloom Consulting Country Brand Ranking // Bloom Consulting. URL: <https://www.bloom-consulting.com/en/country-brand-ranking> (accessed: 26.12.2024).

⁵ Calculated by the authors based on E-library data. See: <https://elibrary.ru/defaultx.asp> (accessed: 17.02.2025).

² McClory J. The Soft Power 30 Report 2019 // Portland Communications. URL: <https://portland-communications.com>.

The primary objective of the study was to collect and analyze sociological data on the subjective image of foreign countries among Russian students to determine the impact of foreign soft power on them.

To achieve this goal, the influence of foreign soft power was analyzed in various spheres, such as culture and art, public administration, science and education, business, sports, environmental protection, and digital technology. These areas correspond to soft power analysis methods and indicators validated in leading academic studies and international rankings, including the Global Soft Power Index, Elcano Soft Presence Rating, The Soft Power 30, The New Persuaders, and others. The data obtained allowed us to identify trends and characteristics of China's soft power influence on Russian youth.

Materials and Methods

From 2021 to 2023, a team of researchers from the Higher School of Modern Social Sciences at Lomonosov Moscow State University and the Center for the Prevention of Religious and Ethnic Extremism at Moscow State Pedagogical University conducted a study of the influence of foreign states' "soft power" on young people in the Russian Federation, based on a nationwide sociological survey, as part of three⁶ waves of research. The field portion of the study was conducted by the Romir research holding company, whose specialists interviewed students (men and women aged 17–29) studying at Russian universities in 2023. A total of 630 respondents were surveyed. The sample included 60 universities reporting to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation and 12 universities reporting

to the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. At each university, at least 10 and no more than 40 students were interviewed. The sample included faculties of various fields (humanities, engineering, etc.).

The research instrument consists of a questionnaire consisting of three main sections: a screening section, the main section (questions on the research objectives), and a socio-demographic section. A snowball sampling method was used to collect the research data (after recruitment, respondents received a link to the questionnaire posted online and answered the questions themselves). The average time to complete the questionnaire was approximately 10 minutes. Respondents were asked to select up to five countries (in open-ended responses) that they considered leaders in various areas of political, socio-economic, and technological development.

The primary objective of the empirical study was to gather sociological data from respondents who, on the one hand, are not experts in international relations, the global economy, technological development, etc., and on the other, may have their own subjective perceptions of a foreign country based on the information they consume. Therefore, we were not interested in the correspondence of the data obtained from respondents to the actual state of affairs, but rather in the virtual image of foreign countries constructed by respondents based on the influence of these countries' "soft power" through the consumption of various information content from various sources (classical media, social media, cinema, literature, etc.).

The sociological study aimed to obtain data on the impact of the "soft power" of a number of countries. In addition to China, data was collected on the "soft power" of the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, Japan, and other countries. Therefore, questions

⁶ For more details on the first (2021) and second (2022) waves of the study, see: (Grebenyuk, 2022).

directly about knowledge of the Chinese language and about visiting China itself were not included in the questionnaire (Grebenyuk, 2022).

Research Results

The data obtained during the 2023 survey clearly demonstrates the trend of increasing influence of China's "soft power" on Russian youth. For the overwhelming majority of indicators (10 out of 12), the values of the People's Republic of China are in the top three of respondents' answers (Table 1).

According to young people surveyed, China is one of the top three most influential countries, contributing significantly to global developments. In this regard, it is second only to Russia (91%, 1st place), ahead of the United States (64%), Germany (39%), Japan (31%), the United Kingdom (27%), India (13%), France (13%), Belarus, and Türkiye (8% each). China is also one of the leaders in terms of having the best system of public administration, ranking second with 30% (2nd place).

Despite a large-scale campaign in the global media to create a negative image of China regarding human rights, Russian respondents (19%, 2nd place) identified China

as one of the countries with the most developed human rights record. Among foreign countries, China ranks second only to Sweden and ahead of the United States. In the "Judicial System" category, China ranks 4th, cited by 19% of respondents. China's positive image in science and education is also notable. China ranks third (49%) in the "Science and Organization of Scientific Research" indicator, second (27%) in "School Education," and second (47%) in "Higher Education."

China's economic and technological development has also been reflected in respondents' responses. For example, China ranks first (58%) among countries with the most developed digital technologies and second (26%) in the "best conditions for starting and running a business." However, it is significant that no Chinese representatives were named among the "world's most famous successful businessmen" or "world's most famous IT entrepreneurs, owners of large digital businesses."

The most problematic aspect of China's "soft power" is the "Environment" indicator (12%, 9th place). Respondents do not consider China to be among the countries that best protect the environment or pay sufficient attention to environmental issues.

Table 1. Key Parameters of China's Global Influence According to a Survey Conducted in 2023

No.	Parameter	Share of respondents, %	Place among the proposed countries
1	Global processes	77	2
2	Public administration system	30	2
3	Human rights	19	3
4	Judicial system	19	4
5	Science and organization of scientific research	49	3
6	School education	27	2
7	Higher education	47	2
8	Starting a business	26	2
9	Environment	12	9
10	Digital technologies	58	1

Source: compiled by A.A. Grebenyuk.

The survey also asked respondents to list their favorite musicians and films that had a deep impact on them. None of the Chinese media products were mentioned in the responses. Furthermore, Russian students did not list China among the countries they would like to live in permanently or where they would like their children to live.

Over the study period (2021–2023), the impact of China’s “soft power” social technology on Russian youth demonstrated a steady upward trend. Positive trends were observed across all the study parameters (Table 2).

It can be assumed that the Chinese authorities’ support for Russia’s position on the global stage, the constant exchange of visits by heads of state and government officials, the entry of modern Chinese technology and automobile companies into Russian and global markets, and other factors have had a significant impact on China’s image, as reflected in respondents’ responses. However, this assertion requires further empirical verification, including identifying additional factors driving China’s growth (such as, for example, the influence of the Russian ‘information field’).

The only area in which China’s scores declined was the assessment of the public

administration system (–4%). Also, in the 2021 survey, China did not make it into the top 10 for human rights protection, while in the 2023 study, 19% of respondents named it the leader in this area.

The greatest positive trend over the period under review was observed in respondents’ responses regarding higher education in China. The share of respondents who believe the country is a global leader in this area increased from 19% in 2021 to 47% in 2023.

According to survey data from 2022 and 2023, most respondents consider China to be a leader in digital technology (Table 1). Meanwhile, the scores of the other countries that ranked in the top 10 for the period 2021–2023 significantly decreased: the United States by 12%, Germany and the United Kingdom by 6%, and France has virtually ceased to be associated with digital leadership among Russian youth (Table 3).

It is important to note that the increasing influence of China’s “soft power” on Russian youth is happening simultaneously with a decrease in the influence of leading Western countries (the United States, Great Britain, Germany, and France). In this regard, a comparison of the dynamics of the U.S. and

Table 2. Dynamics of China’s Indicators in the Survey Waves Conducted in 2021–2023, % of Respondents

Parameter	Year			Difference between 2023 and 2021 indicators
	2021	2022	2023	
Global processes	73	77	77	+4
Public administration system	32	29	30	–2
Human rights	0	14	19	+5
Judicial system	18	19	19	+1
Science and organization of scientific research	48	47	49	+1
School education	22	21	27	+5
Higher education	19	16	47	+28
Starting a business	19	23	26	+7
Environment	8	0	12	+4
Digital technologies	52	58	58	+6

Source: compiled by A.A. Grebenyuk.

Table 3. Countries Leading in Digital Technology Development According to Respondents, % of Respondents (2021–2023)

Страна	2021	2022	2023
The United States	68	55	56
China	52	58	58
Germany	17	13	11
The United Kingdom	12	6	6
France	4	–	–

Source: compiled by A.A. Grebenyuk.

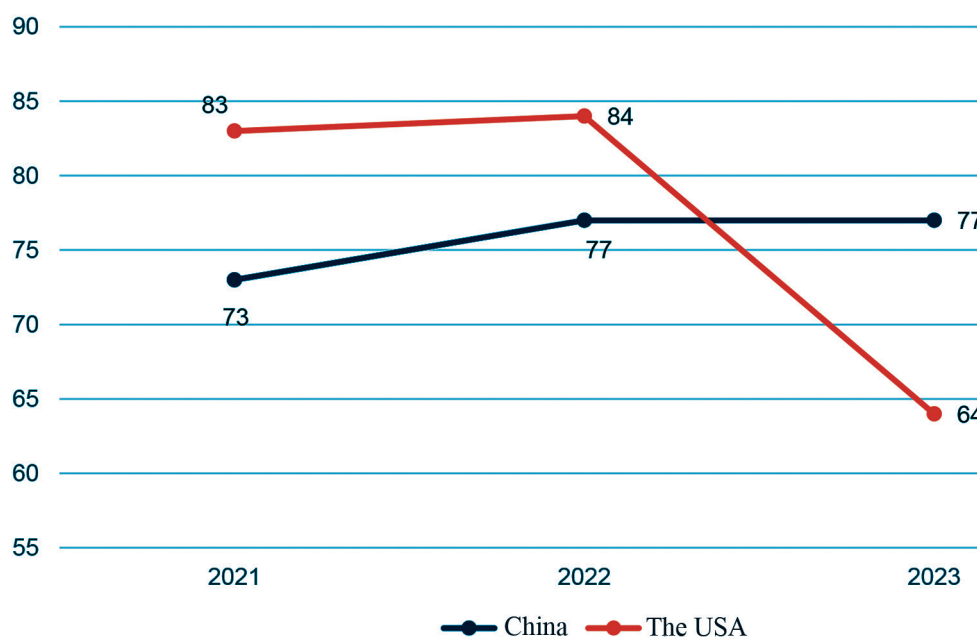


Figure 1. Share of Respondents Who Noted the Influence of the United States and China on Global Processes in 2021–2023, %

Source: compiled by A.A. Grebenyuk.

China's indicators, particularly in terms of leadership in influencing global processes, is of interest from the perspective of this study (Figure 1). In terms of an important indicator such as "the country that makes the most significant contribution to the development of global processes," China has recently significantly outpaced the US. The proportion of respondents who cited China is 13% higher than the proportion of those who cited the United States.

The study hypothesized that, in the Far Eastern and Siberian Federal Districts of the Russian Federation, the proportion of respondents who would identify China as a leading country in various fields would be higher compared to other federal districts and in Russia

as a whole due to geographic proximity. The 2023 survey data generally refute this correlation. It was found to be true only for the indicator "country as a leader contributing to the development of global processes."

It is also worth noting the significant potential for further enhancing the effectiveness of "soft power." Current indicators could be significantly improved by further promoting the concept of starting and developing a business. As our three-year survey reveals, China practically does not promote the names of its businessmen, including in the IT sector. Russian students are unaware of successful Chinese business owners. They are not represented in the top 10, despite the presence

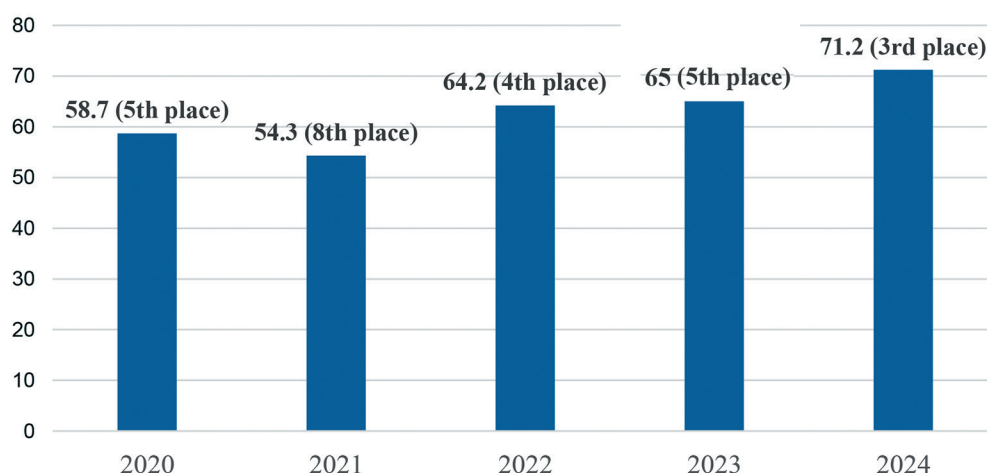


Figure 2. Dynamics of China's Performance in the Global Soft Power Index in Points in 2020–2024

Source: compiled by A.A. Grebenyuk on the basis of: Jagodzinski K. *Global Soft Power Index 2024 — A World in Flux* // Brand Finance. February 29, 2024. URL: <https://brandfinance.com/insights/global-soft-power-index-2024-a-world-in-flux> (accessed: 12.03.2024).

of a large number of successful high-tech projects originating from China.

Furthermore, information support for China's environmental agenda is insufficiently developed. In 2022, China didn't even make it into the top 10 countries in our study for this category. Chinese patterns are also virtually absent in sports: not a single Chinese athlete appears in the top 10, and major international competitions are poorly represented. For example, only 2% of respondents mentioned the 2022 Winter Olympics. Intensifying efforts to enhance the effectiveness of soft power in these areas could provide additional leverage for China, including on a global scale.

China's Place in Global Soft Power Rankings: A Comparative Analysis

Let's take a look at the data on China's soft power rankings in the Global Soft Power Index rankings of the consulting company Brand Finance and the Soft Presence Rating of the Royal Elcano Institute (Spain). The methods of these rankings allow for a comprehensive, systemic assessment of a country's soft power based on a combination of both statistical and sociological analytical tools.

According to the Global Soft Power Index rankings, China, having achieved a significant improvement in its overall soft power score in 2024 (+6.2 points), continues to steadily strengthen its position. Based on these results, China moved up to third place, ahead of Germany and the Republic of Korea. The Chinese soft power has become dominant among countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Notable progress in almost all areas reflects China's growing global influence (Figure 2). China is 0.6 points behind the UK, which ranks second. If this positive trend continues, China's soft power could further strengthen its position and move closer to the United States. China currently ranks second in the Soft Presence Index, also behind the United States, but ahead of the United Kingdom (Table 4).

The key soft power components that contribute most to China's progress are "business and trade" (3rd place) and "education and science" (3rd place). These components are the primary drivers of China's growth.

At the same time, data from Brand Finance also reveals disproportionately low scores for China's "People and Values" index. Based on the "Friendly" and "Fun" dimensions, China

Table 4. Top 10 Countries in the World According to the Global Soft Power Index and Soft Presence Rating in 2024

Place	Global Soft Power Index	Soft Presence Rating
1	The USA	The USA
2	The United Kingdom	China
3	China	The United Kingdom
4	Japan	Germany
5	Germany	Japan
6	France	France
7	Canada	India
8	Switzerland	Canada
9	Italy	Italy
10	The United Arab Emirates	Türkiye

Source: compiled by A.A. Grebenyuk on the basis of: Jagodzinski K. Global Soft Power Index 2024 — A World in Flux // Brand Finance. February 29, 2024. URL: <https://brandfinance.com/insights/global-soft-power-index-2024-a-world-in-flux> (accessed: 12.03.2024); 2024 Ranking // Real Instituto Elcano. URL: <https://www.globalpresence.realinstitutoelcano.org/en?years=2024> (accessed: 13.10.2025).

ranks 122nd in both categories, which confirms the limitations of the cultural and ideological foundation of China's soft power, as discussed above. This clearly highlights areas for potential growth if the Chinese government properly adjusts its global information positioning.

Conclusion

The study results demonstrate the presence of a well-established positive perception of China among Russian young people. Respondents view China as a global power politics pole and as a leader in technological development, with advanced science and education. According to Russian students, these components are underpinned by an effective public administration system.

However, it is important to emphasize that when analyzing the formation of China's image among Russian youth, it can difficult to differentiate the influence of China's "soft power" from the domestic information agenda of Russian media, which extensively cover China's development and Russian-Chinese political and economic cooperation. At the same

time, Russian media largely rely on the same patterns and concepts characteristic of China's "soft power" (its economic, geopolitical, and technological components), serving as additional channels for disseminating positive information about China. Therefore, the findings of the sociological survey regarding the growing influence of China's "soft power" are justified. While China's "soft power" largely shapes a positive perception of the country and its image, it does not shape a vision of the future or a desired tomorrow. Russian youth do not aspire to live in China or to live "like China." This is evidenced by the respondents' immature migration intentions to move to China and their lack of desire for their children to live there. This fact distinguishes the influence of Chinese "soft power" from, for example, American soft power. It is also important to note that respondents from the Far Eastern and Siberian Federal Districts of the Russian Federation, due to their geographical proximity, more often identify China as an influential player in global political processes. However, in other respects, their responses differ only slightly from those of respondents from other federal districts.

A weak point in China's soft power resource base is its socio-cultural component. The presence of successful music and film products in the global information space would further enhance the potential and effectiveness of China's soft power. Traditional Chinese cultural practices are also not universally applicable globally. Furthermore, China's relatively developed elite sport produces virtually no global media stars comparable to renowned

Russian athletes such as Alexander Ovechkin, Maria Sharapova, or Khabib Nurmagomedov.

Data from three waves of empirical research (2021, 2022, and 2023) demonstrate a clear trend toward increasing the impact of China's soft power on Russian youth, despite a number of limiting factors (primarily in the area of cultural policy). These factors also hold the potential for strengthening China's influence on this reference group.

Received / Поступила в редакцию: 03.04.2025

Revised / Доработана после рецензирования: 24.10.2025

Accepted / Принята к публикации: 27.03.2026

References

- Benhaim, Y., & Öktem, K. (2015). The rise and fall of Turkey's soft power discourse: Discourse in foreign policy under Davutoğlu and Erdoğan. *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, (21), 2–22. <https://doi.org/10.4000/ejts.5275>
- Borzova, A. Yu., & Nikolashvili, N. D. (2020). "Marca España": Development of Spanish government policy on the implementation of "soft power". *RGGU Bulletin. Series: Political Science. History. International Relations*, (2), 77–93. (In Russian). EDN: KAHLS
- Borzova, A. Yu., & Nikolashvili, N. D. (2021). Comparative analysis of the Spanish and Portuguese "soft power" models. *Contemporary Europe*, (3), 38–49. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.15211/soveurope320213849>; EDN: EANCNS
- Denisov, I. E., & Zuenko, I. Yu. (2022). *From soft power to discursive power: New ideologemes of China's foreign policy*. Moscow: MGIMO MID Rossii publ. (In Russian). EDN: FOPVCB.
- Filimonov, G. Y. (2012). The actual problems of forming of Russia's potential of soft power. *RUDN Journal of Political Science*, (1), 67–82. (In Russian). EDN: OOBTRJ
- Gomelaury, A. S. (2021). French "soft power" in the context of the pandemic: Limiting traditional ways of influence. *Lokus: Lyudi, Obshchestvo, Kul'tury, Smysly*, 12(3), 115–121. <https://doi.org/10.31862/2500-2988-2021-12-3-114-121>; EDN: PNNHI
- Grebnyuk, A. A. (2022). *Social technology "soft power": Concept, measurement practice and effectiveness assessment*. Moscow: Nestor-Istoriya publ. (In Russian). EDN: BUOYMF.
- Huang, R., & Wang, H. (2025). How is the development of industrial digital-real integration progressing?—Evidence from China's cultural industries. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-025-04743-w>; EDN: KAEIOH
- Katasonova, E. L. (2017). Japan and the problems of "soft power". *Trudy Instituta Vostokovedeniya RAN*, (3), 56–70. (In Russian). EDN: XSHZHN.
- Kharitonova, E. M. (2017). "Soft power" in British politics: The struggle for target audiences. *Pathways to Peace and Security*, (2), 28–36. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.20542/2307-1494-2017-2-28-36>; EDN: YLWYCM
- Leksyutina, Ya. V., & You, Yu. (2023). The concept of international discourse power in China's foreign policy ideology. *Russian and Chinese Studies*, 7(4), 367–380. (In Russian). [https://doi.org/10.17150/2587-7445.2023.7\(4\).367-380](https://doi.org/10.17150/2587-7445.2023.7(4).367-380); EDN: PFSLWE
- Leonova, O. G. (2013). Soft power as a resource of the state foreign politics. *Observer*, (4), 27–40. (In Russian). EDN: PXVNT
- Li, C. X., & Han, P. G. (2019). Guo ji hua yu quan de san chong wei du he ji ben gou cheng [Three dimensions and main components of international discursive power]. *Xue Xi Yu Tan Suo [Study and Research]*, (5), 14–18. (In Chinese).
- Lukes, S. (1974). *Power: A radical view*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Matosian, A. E. (2021). The key components of South Korea's soft power: Challenges and trends. *RUDN Journal of Political Science*, 23(2), 279–286. <https://doi.org/10.22363/2313-1438-2021-23-2-279-286>; EDN: ANCXZM

- Nye, J. S., Jr. (2002). *The paradox of American power: Why the world's only superpower can't go it alone*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nye, J. S., Jr. (2004a). Soft power and American foreign policy. *Political Science Quarterly*, 119(2), 255–270. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20202345>
- Nye, J. S., Jr. (2004b). *Soft power: The means to success in world politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- Parshin, P. B. (2013). *The problem of "soft power" in Russia's foreign policy*. Moscow: MGIMO MID Rossii publ. (In Russian). EDN: DWKIFL
- Ruan, J. P. (2003). Hua yu quan yu guo ji zhi xu de jian gou [Discursive power and the construction of international order]. *Xian dai guo ji guan xi [Modern International Relations]*, (5), 31–38. (In Chinese).
- Rusakova, O. F. (2010). The concept of "soft" power in modern political philosophy. *Research Yearbook of the Institute of Philosophy and Law of the Ural Branch of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, (10), 173–192. (In Russian). EDN: NRVJNB
- Soboleva, E. D., & Krivokhizh, S. V. (2024). China's strategic narrative about international system and its adaptations to different national audiences. *World Economy and International Relations*, 68(6), 119–128. (In Russian). <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2024-68-6-119-128>; EDN: FDBYSF
- Xu, X., & Tian, X. (2019). Quan qiu zhi li shi dai xiao guo jian guo ji hua yu quan de luo ji — yi tai ping yang dao guo wei li [The logic of small states in the construction of international discursive power in the era of global governance: The case of the Pacific Island states]. *Dang Dai Ya Tai [The Modern Asia-Pacific Region]*, (2), 95–125. (In Chinese).
- Yan, X. (2011). *Ancient Chinese thought, modern Chinese power* (D. A. Bell & S. Zhe, Eds.; E. Ryden, Trans.). Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Zuenko, I. Yu., Kulintsev, Yu. V., Mukambaev, A. A., & Rakhimov, K. K. (2020). Anti-Chinese protests in the post-Soviet space. *Rossiya v Global'noj Politike*, 18(6), 174–186. (In Russian). EDN: SVQMBC

About the authors:

Grebenyuk Aleksander Alexandrovich — PhD, Dr. Sc. (Economics), Deputy Director for Research, Higher School of Modern Social Sciences (Faculty), Lomonosov Moscow State University; bldg. 1, 13 GSP-1 Leninskie Gory, Moscow, 119991, Russian Federation; e-Library SPIN-code: 4007-9651; ORCID: 0000-0001-9003-4551; e-mail: gaa-mma@mail.ru

Kumukov Albert Musabievich — PhD (History), Vice-Rector for International Cooperation, North Caucasus Federal University; 1 Pushkin St, Stavropol, 355017, Russian Federation; e-Library SPIN-code: 5924-2798; ORCID: 0009-0009-9715-8843; e-mail: almkumukov@ncfu.ru