

**China's Quest for Soft Power: Analysis of Occidental Narrative and
Cultural Imperialism in Chinese Films.**

Dissertation submitted to Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam in partial
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Declaration

I, Martin Joy, hereby affirm that the dissertation titled *China's Quest for Soft Power: Analysis of Occidental Narrative and Cultural Imperialism in Chinese Films* is a genuine record of work done by me under the guidance of Dr. Rose Merin and Ms. Lissy Kachappilly of the Post Graduate Department of English, Bharata Mata College, Thrikkakkara and has not been submitted previously for the award of any masters or degree.

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Certificate

Certified that this is a bonafide report of the project entitled *China's Quest for Soft Power: Analysis of Occidental Narrative and Cultural Imperialism in Chinese Films* done by Martin Joy (Register No. 180011002137) for the fulfillment of the requirement for the M.A. degree in English under Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam during the year 2018-2020.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to certain critics, postcolonialism reached new milestones in the present period and numerous theoreticians argue that it already reached its zenith and fulfilled its purpose. Majority of students and people in academic circles consider it as old and outdated. Numerous critics prophesied the end of postcolonialism but the realities of the modern world force us to think otherwise. The postcolonial studies are indispensable in assessing similar trajectories of colonisation being traced around us in the political world. Colonisation is not an occurrence of the past that ended with Somaliland gaining its complete independence from Great Britain's rule in 1991. Colonisation has shifted shapes and spaces but it is very much in practice today. International relations and shape of the global system have changed dramatically since the end of the Second World War. In the decades after the war, ideological, economic and technological innovations have variously caused changes to the dynamics that exist between different countries, cultures and societies. Academics' ideas about the nature of power in international relations have, therefore, also changed according to these events; notably, scholars have again been rethinking about their ideas on power since the end of Cold War, particularly with the increasing pace of the phenomenon of globalization.

The term 'power' in international relations has, for the most part, been a realistic concept; the word suggests a rather negative image of an anarchic, zero-sum world where might is right and only the strong win. The intricacies of state interactions have usually been analysed in Machiavellian terms of which country will be able to control the other's actions in the end whether through direct force or non-direct coercion. Many politicians and leaders still think in these terms, as can be seen

through the direct military action taken by countries such as U.S.A and U.K in Afghanistan and then in Iraq in recent years.

It is within this context that the concept of 'soft power' was developed by Joseph Nye in an article in Foreign Policy in 1990 and later he fully developed this concept in his book of the same name. In this book, Nye postulated the idea of soft power, where countries' attractive resources enabled them to set political agenda, and so 'co-opt' other countries. In his exposition of the concept, Nye gives as examples of the US's soft power effects of Hollywood films, US ideals of freedom and democracy and other aspects of countries culture. Nye gives many examples of soft power resources and talks at length about the role of U.S.A in the global systems in terms of its soft power. According to him, soft power plays an important role in international relations. It seems to be assumed that if a country has soft power resources, this alone will be sufficient to help its relation with other countries and will help to dominate them. This refers to the subtler ways of achieving dominance of other countries without the implication of physical force upon it. The domination methods which promote usage of physical force is termed as 'hard power' by Nye. But soft power uses the methods of cultural attractiveness and enchantment of ideas and ideology of one nation over others to induce an aura of superiority and significance.

Thus it is clear that methods of colonisation shifted its shape and disguised it in the policy of globalisation and is very much in practice today. The old colonial tactics changed over time and the advent of neo-colonialism helped nations to find innovative methods of capitalism, globalization and cultural imperialism to spread their influence, instead of previous colonial models of direct military control or indirect political control. As mentioned earlier, the glorification of one nation's

culture is an exceptional method to assert superiority over other nations. Thus cultural imperialism becomes the latest and most effective weapon in the hands of neo-colonialists. In his 1976's work *Communication and Cultural domination*, Herbert Schiller defines cultural imperialism as:

The sum of the process by which a society is brought into the modern world-system, and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even to promote, the values and structures of the dominant centre of the system. (83)

Thus even renowned scholars accept the fact that the imposition of nation's culture upon others helps in the widespread enhancement of the dominating cultures. Through this argument may appear neutral or non-threatening at first, numerous minority cultures are on the verge of extinction due to this phenomenon. Thus by subtle cultural domination, one nation colonises the mind of others and gives psychological cues about the inferiority of the targeted nation when compared to the cultural supremacy of their dominators.

The 21st century is already being called the Asian century; a time for Asia to be culturally powerful. While Japan and Korea have become culturally significant beyond their borders, China has lagged behind. 'Gangnam Style' and 'Hello Kitty' are popular around the world but China has struggled to exert cultural influence globally and regionally. The Chinese government believes that their cultural influence is not strong enough to attract and dominate other countries. Thus in recent years, the term 'China's soft power' has been regularly mentioned in the Chinese policy statements and has appeared in news reports and scholarly works. Although the concept of soft

power was first proposed by Nye, the idea has always been embedded in ancient Chinese ideology and culture. The idea of soft power can be found in ancient Chinese philosophies; China's dominant ideology- Confucianism- encourages a country to achieve its leading role by setting itself up as an example rather than imposing its power on others. In Confucius' teachings, he hardly advocated the use of power, not to mention the war. The thought of 'culture winning over an enemy' and winning a battle before it is fought' is found throughout China's strategic culture. The great philosopher and thinker in ancient China Lao Tzu states in masterpiece *Daode Jing* that the softest under heaven will overcome the hardest (13). The greatest strategist of China's ancient military, Sun Tzu, in his famous masterpiece *The Art of War*, wrote that "not fighting and subjugating the enemy's army is the supreme level of skill" and "the best way is to attack the enemy's mind rather than to attack the fortified cities" (18). Influenced by these philosophies and realizing the need for cultural dominance in this century the Chinese government is currently employing certain tactics to project their 'image of superiority' to the global community.

China's understanding of soft power puts more emphasis on culture. Culture is the soul and frame of soft power in China, the trait of various elements of soft power depends on the corresponding cultural values and intellectual thinking. In fact, Wang Huning, one of the CCP Central Committee Secretariat members who delivered the first Chinese article on soft power in 1993, argued that culture is the main source of a nation's soft power (Li 292). When many Chinese scholars and politicians mention soft power, they are actually referring to cultural soft power. Some Chinese scholars have regarded traditional culture as "always the most reliable soft power source" (Li 29). For example, Cheng Yugang (qtd in. McGiffert) believes that not only will China's

ancient history and traditional culture attract those neighbours who share the same Confucian heritage in Asia, but they are also tremendous attractions for the Western countries. According to Nye, there are three main sources for a country to create soft power (attractiveness): its culture, its political values and its foreign policies (11). The Chinese government has been exercising its soft power through various strategies. These strategies include directly investing substantial amounts into Africa and Latin America, providing humanitarian aid around the world, promoting the idea of China model, supporting a variety of exchange programs; organising countless exhibitions, cultural programs, festivals, holding and funding multinational institutions and forums. But the greatest strategy of them is related to establishing global media and Cinema productions. Shambaugh notes that China has spent a reported \$8.7 billion from 2009-2010 on its 'external publicity work' mainly on the big four: China Central Television (CCTV), China Radio International (CRI), Xinhua News Agency and The China Daily newspaper (6). In recent years China is busy buying numerous film corporations all around the world but mainly focused on American companies. This phenomenon is due to their realization that media, most importantly, films are the most effective ways to achieve cultural imperialism and thus soft power.

The film provides a motion picture, a large image and a concrete impression. It has an ability to capture the imagination and it's a powerful medium. The viewers can sense the expression of all the characters visually. The film is a narrative style that depends on personal perception and discourse. It contains psychological messages and it's often a rhetorical device of social circumstances, political situations, real-life aspects, and so forth. The propaganda through the film is a powerful persuasive message and it can produce and spread a misconception. Thus, film with propaganda

has influential and effective consequences. The blending together of film and propaganda reflects a world of fiction; where the film is the fiction and propaganda is a message that has a purpose to convey the intention of its creator. Thus these films have a high capacity in catching the mind of the viewer, moulding and coordinating the feelings of what is genuine, real and ideal. Films, which are an integral part of today's culture can be used to create the ideals of culture in the minds of its viewers. It influences people, shaping the way they understand their social identities, their cultural communities, and in the wider world in which they live, think and act. Films do not reflect societies and cultures but, rather, construct the meaning of societies and cultures. Films are the most powerful and effective tool for soft power. As Gluszak argues:

Cinema is the most popular and universal medium of mass entertainment. It is through the film that we have learned to appreciate art, experiment with form, and communicate with spheres not usually available through direct contact. Cinema has allowed us to gain new ways of experiencing the world and obtaining information.(12)

World leaders throughout history have realized the ability of films to convey their political propaganda. Joseph Stalin once remarked "If I could control the medium of the American motion picture, I would need nothing else to convert the entire world to Communism', remarked Joseph Stalin" (qtd. in Zhu). Through Hollywood, American cinemas have become 'part of socialization process' for people around the world and a "prime mover in the formation of American ideals in the mind of audience" (Zoysa and Newman 189-201). It enabled them to project the image of 'American lifestyle' into the minds of its viewers. In a global information age "success depends not only

on whose army wins but also on whose story wins” (Nye 11). The film has traditionally been the best tool for telling global stories.

Su argues that the Chinese government recognized the film industry as the indispensable manifestation of soft power. She further argues that it purposely employs new strategies and represents a potential Chinawood that features kungfu movies and Chinese culture as “a part of exercising soft power in an attempt to counter the Western cultural hegemony” (321). The Chinese authorities found that it is far easier to inject a nationalistic and cultural narrative into its martial arts films. Even from the Age of Bruce Lee Chinese martial art movies has a wide acceptance rate all over the world. Thus they incorporated traditional Chinese cultural elements and Hollywood techniques to traditional Kung Fu movies in order to portray the ‘superior culture of China’.

The Chinese filmmakers who produced films on an international basis imbued the ideals of Chinese Culture and heritage in their movies in an alluring way to influence the minds of the viewers all around the globe. They projected an image of China- which contain a superiority in the notions of culture and ideology when compared to the rest of the world. This project tries to examine the film series named *Ip Man* by the Chinese director Wilson Yip to find out the intrinsic ways in which China tries to achieve soft power by means of showing the ‘attractiveness’ of its culture and ideology. *Ip Man* remains as the perfect example for China’s quest for soft power through cinema because it portrays the encounters between the protagonist, who represents Chinese culture, and representatives of various colonial powers. This film series purposefully portrays the people from other nations as violent, corrupt and amoral. Thus they are presented as a foil to the well ‘cultured’ and ‘civilized’ Chinese

people. China employs its own perspective on the lifestyles and ideologies of foreign nations and thus provides an occidental narrative, in which it dehumanizes the others. In this films series which portray the life of a renowned martial artist named Ip Man, the Chinese people and China are portrayed as the victims of colonization in the hands of imperial powers like Japan, America and Britain. The characters which represent those imperial powers are represented as one-dimensional villains who lack human qualities and moral code. They are juxtaposed with the Chinese characters, namely the protagonist, who is presented as the epitome of manners and wisdom. Thus, Ip Man, the titular character remains as a symbol of the superior Chinese way of life- its culture and ideologies. The greatest irony remains in the fact that China a riding colonial power purposefully portrays itself as a victim in the hands of other nations to get the sympathy of the international audience. This presentation also allows them to justify their current economic and political activities as the cruel victim of other nations especially its long rivals- Japan, USA and U.K.

The thesis examines how China imbues the notion of its cultural richness and superiority through these films. The occidental presentation of the West is also examined along with the Victim narrative of China. The thesis tries to prove that they are techniques used by China to earn soft power over the global nations by projecting an image of cultural superiority and attractiveness into the minds of the international audience. It also examines how other nations are presented as antagonists who lack proper moral and human values in these films.

Chapter 2

Theories of Soft Power

The concept of soft power was first proposed and defined by the political analyst and the Harvard University professor Joseph S. Nye Jr. at the beginning of the 1990s. When he first coined this concept, Nye was solely referring to the United States. But, it eventually gained momentum and other countries started to focus on their soft power as well. In recent years, the concept of soft power caught the attention of many political leaders as they have begun to give increasingly more importance to their countries' soft power and to mention it in their public speeches. According to Joseph Nye, power is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to get the outcomes one wants (Nye 160) In relation to this, Nye outlines two different types of power: hard power and soft power. Countries are more familiar with the concept of hard power rather than soft power as the recognition of the latter is quite recent in international politics. They both are the two sides of power; however, the two shouldn't be confused or understood as the same side of power. This is because, most of the time, these two concepts are intertwined with one another, hence, they might be perceived as one. By doing so, the important differences that characterise these two terms and powers are not taken into great consideration. Both hard power and soft power have the ability to achieve one's purpose by influencing the behaviour of others. But, the results of their competences and the means through which they can exercise their influence are completely different. As mentioned above, everyone is more familiar with the concept of hard power. Given the term hard power, and focusing on the words it is made up of, the means through which it can exercise its influence are quite strong. In fact, hard power focuses on the military and on the economic force in order

to influence the behaviour of others. Joseph Nye in his book *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics* (2004), gave a clear definition about hard power:

Command power can rest on inducements ("carrots") or threats ("sticks"). But there is also an indirect way to exercise power.... This aspect of power, that is, getting others to want what you want - might be called indirect or co-optive power behaviour. It is in contrast to the active command behaviour of getting others to do what you want. Co-optive power can rest on the attraction of one's ideas or on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences that others express... This dimension can be thought of as soft power. (181)

Soft power also emanates from the attractiveness of a country's identity. Identity in this case consists of countries' perceptions and knowledge of ideas and culture, their habits and practices (Hopf 2002, Wendt 1994) which have been transmitted through communication and discourse to other countries. In this respect, people in one country may be attracted to the lifestyles, practices and ideas of people in another country, and thereby try to obtain or emulate them. The attractive country's identity therefore can be said to influence the attracted country. The most often cited example of this has been the attraction of American lifestyles to many people around the world; these are seen as embodying individual freedom and choice, concepts which may be especially attractive to people living in circumstances where they are oppressed politically or economically. This kind of American soft power, however, is mitigated by other aspects of US policy; in areas of the world where the US applies unwelcome hard power, its soft power is diminished. Nye notes that:

Serbs eating at McDonalds supported Milosevic, and Rwandans committed atrocities while wearing T-shirts with American logos. American films that make the United States attractive in China or Latin America may have the opposite effect and actually reduce American soft power in Saudi Arabia or Pakistan. But in general, polls show that our popular culture has made the United States seem to others "exciting, exotic, rich, powerful, trend-setting - the cutting edge of modernity and innovation. (Nye 12)

Nye goes on to recount the case of a young Chinese activist who had the idea that going to court to complain was normal after watching those kinds of American films (Nye 12).

Soft power is therefore by definition, power which acts best in a gradual and subtle fashion. The use of this power is accepted in a natural manner; it cannot be pushed upon the receiver. A propaganda campaign pushed by an occupying power on to a non-accepting population is likely to be unsubtle, direct and received extremely skeptically by the target population. Unsolicited propaganda is unlikely to influence a jaded people to a great extent, and cannot be considered as soft power unless the receivers are actually receptive. However, a sustained image-building exercise carried out over many years and backed by concrete examples of genuinely cooperative intent is more likely to have a positive impact on the target, and ultimately to be accepted; this is an example of soft power (Chong 2004: 97). The attractiveness of the culture or lifestyle of a country affects its soft power resources intrinsically. People's ideas of a country's image are based on a myriad of factors, many of which are beyond control. People have romantic images of countries based on ancient historical events and

civilisations; the fact that present-day Greece has few vestiges of ancient Greek civilisations does not prevent people from associating them with each other.

Nevertheless, governments and tourist companies can and do play upon these legacies of the past in order to attract visitors. A thriving, dynamic cultural environment, which attracts foreign artists and other creative people and encourages domestic artists, creates an attractive atmosphere which also impacts on the health of the economy (Nye 52). In addition, people who come to see these new ideas then take them back to their own countries and try to use them. They may even go so far as to learn a new language in order to gain new ideas

Therefore, considering the tools used by hard power, it focuses its attention on tangible means. A country or a leader may prefer the use of inducements and threats against other countries in order to obtain the outcomes one wants. Hence, the outcomes are based on threats and obligations, and not because one wants to do it or feels attracted to it. On the other hand, the concept of soft power focuses on different tools in order to exercise its influence on others. These tools, indeed, are not the ones used by hard power. When one thinks about soft power, attraction and culture are the two things that should immediately come to mind. As Joseph Nye argued, soft power rests on the ability to shape the preferences of others (219). Therefore it is closer to the power of attraction and seduction

Nye further argued that a country's soft power is based 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) (307). Taking into consideration these three resources, culture is considered as the most important and effective manifestation of soft power.

Therefore, bearing in mind what characterises soft power, we can see that, unlike hard power, soft power focuses on intangible means. If a country has an attractive culture, true political values and good policies, other countries are more likely to admire its values, to be inspired by it and to imitate its example (Nye). When a country manages to achieve the outcomes it wants through its appeal and attraction, without threatening or forcing others, this means that a country's soft power is working. Moreover, soft power rests on co-optive power (the ability to shape what others want), meanwhile, hard power rests on command power (the ability to change what others want through inducement) (Nye 250).

For a country, it is fundamental to understand what are the resources available (that can be used as soft power resources), what are the channels or the tools through which they can be more efficient, identify the target and see if their response led to the outcomes one was expecting ("A Global Ranking Of Soft Power"). In the last few years, global debates and the attention on soft power have increased. Many countries have soft power resources, and each one of them might focus on different aspects of their resources in order to be attractive to others. Furthermore, it is important to outline that the concept of soft power may depend on the country and on the government because a country's soft power strategy can be more or less planned out by its government.

As previously mentioned, culture is one of the most important soft power tools and one of China's latest assets. As a matter of fact, Chinese leaders acknowledged the increasingly important international role that the country has achieved in the last few years, becoming a major power. Therefore, they decided to adopt a soft power strategy and to focus more on creating a more positive international image of the

country. This is because the Chinese government wants the rest of the world to perceive China under a new light, as they should start seeing it as a culturally powerful, as well as a good and trustworthy country. Consequently, in order to achieve the goal that the government and its leaders have in mind, they have started to take small steps towards it. In the last ten years, China has been engaged in many investments in different fields as a way to boost its soft power. On the one hand, the country has started to benefit from these investments, and they managed to help China's position on the international stage; on the other hand, China's cultural soft power still lags behind one of its western rivals, especially the United States ("A Global Ranking of Soft Power").

As already mentioned, the concept of soft power may depend on the country, and its strategy may be (more or less) planned out by the country's government. As far as China is concerned, its soft power strategy is not independent of the government, but rather, its strategy and the necessity to foster it is planned out by the State. Therefore, taking this into consideration, many may see the Chinese government as too controlling that pulls the strings from behind the curtains. The role of culture as the core of soft power is still mainly understood as being dominated, directed, and controlled by the government; and as we will see in the case of film writers, filmmakers, artists and so forth, they may be more or less willing to offer their support (Hui and Voci 6). However, China has many aces in the hole; meaning that, it has many cultural tools that can be used to promote and screen its soft power. Knowing that China has a rich, unique, attractive culture and national heritage, all of this can be exploited to the benefit of the country's image, as a way to export its culture around the world and to show China's positive features that can appeal to

other countries. In fact, Chinese traditional culture has always had the power to attract. Joseph Nye further argued that in the West people have always had an interest in Chinese traditional culture and that in a few years from now the influence and spread of modern culture might further boost this interest (“Soft power of China in the Chinese dream”). He also refers to when, in 2012, the Chinese novelist Mo Yan won the Nobel prize for literature, emphasizing the fact that this not only can be seen as a positive impact but also as an additional development of modern culture and the value of soft power (Huat 7).

Around the middle of the 1990s, the Chinese government felt the need to change China’s world image and the way it was perceived by other countries around the world. Many countries saw China under a bad light. In fact, this is the main reason that led China to start working on its international image by changing its facade and going from the China-threat theory to a country that wants a peaceful rise, and where there can be opportunities for others (Kurlantzick 5). In fact, the Tian’anmen incident in 1989 and the aftermath, were a troublesome period for China and a substantial part of its image and appeal didn’t benefit from it. A few years after the Tian’anmen incident, China started rolling up its sleeves and decided that the time to do something about its world image had finally come. Therefore, Beijing began to focus on its peaceful rise and strove to be accepted by other countries. China wanted to show and to reassure other countries that it is a peaceful and harmonious country, and its development shouldn’t be seen as a threat. In the first chapter of his book, Joseph Nye quoted Niccolò Machiavelli when more than four centuries ago advised princes in Italy that it was more important to be feared than to be loved, but in today’s world, it is best to be both. He argued: “winning hearts and minds has always been

important, but it is even more so in a global information age” (151). Accordingly, this is what China has been struggling to do. In the long run, China has understood that a country not only has to be feared (hence the china threat theory) by others, but it also has to be loved and respected. Acknowledging that a country’s image on the international stage matters, China is trying to find the right balance between fear and love. Furthermore, the Chinese government realized that western media don’t portray a real and objective image of China. Their representation is usually inaccurate and depicts China under a bad light (Hui and Voci 38). Thus, China has been investing many energies and money in promoting its image through its soft power tools but also has started to develop projects that involve cooperation in the country’s foreign policy, began to help other countries when they were in need without interfering with their domestic affairs. This demonstrates that China wants to be more and more involved internationally, and shows that it is a country you can count on.

In the long run, Chinese political leaders embraced the importance of culture and tradition as important aspects for its soft power strategy, and as a way to get the People’s Republic of China (PRC) back on track again. At the same time, this is pivotal for China’s going out strategy. People shouldn’t imply that just because the concept of soft power has the word “soft” in it might not measure up to the outcomes achieved by hard power. But rather, since that soft power implies attraction, seduction, they eventually lead to acquiescence. As the ancient Chinese philosopher, Sun Tzu said: “To win one hundred victories in one hundred battles is not the acme of skill. To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill” (Holden 23). Thus, if its tools are used properly and wisely its outcomes can be mind-blowing and can determine the success on the international stage as well. In fact, in the 1990s, Wang

Huning already understood the importance of soft power and culture. He argued: “if a country has an admirable culture and ideological system, other countries will tend to follow it....It does not have to use its hard power which is expensive and less efficient” (Glaser 12). In order to be successful, this strategy shouldn’t be limited to China’s neighbouring countries, but it also has to be extended to countries all over the world. Therefore, by focusing more on its soft power rather than hard power, by adopting the right development, environmental and economic initiatives, by showing the world that China has a positive aura and wants the same outcomes as other countries, this can be a turning point for the PRC, and an additional reason for other countries to see the latter in a different, and perhaps, more positive light.

Ever since the Hu Jintao era, discussions and debates about soft power have increased. Even top leaders of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) have started to become increasingly more interested in the subject and in strengthening the country’s soft power. They soon became aware of the fact that they don’t have to focus only on the economic or military aspect to become a global power and to achieve the outcomes they want, but that a country’s image is just as important. The former Chinese President Hu Jintao acknowledged this importance. In fact, in this regard, in October 2007, he gave a powerful speech at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, where he further argued the importance to enhance China’s cultural soft power; and that the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will be linked with a prosperous Chinese culture. He stated:

In the present era, culture has become a more and more important source of national cohesion and creativity and of growing significance in the competition in overall national strength, and the Chinese people

have an increasingly ardent desire for a richer cultural life. Enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country to better guarantee the people's basic cultural rights and interests. The great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation will definitely be accompanied by the thriving of Chinese culture. We will give full scope to the principal position of the people in cultural development, arouse the enthusiasm of cultural workers, promote vigorous development and prosperity of culture more conscientiously and actively. ("Promoting Vigorous Development")

Hereof, Hu further outlined some arrangements to achieve this goal. He proposed to increase the development of the press, publishing, radio, film, television, literature and art, to develop the cultural industry, launch major projects to lead the industry as a whole and to foster its international competitiveness ("Promoting Vigorous Development"). To achieve these goals, China decided to start gradually and to develop more sophisticated cultural and entertainment tools to increasingly spread its international presence, and to show the country's latest achievements.

The promotion of China's cultural soft power is one of the main policies and goals of President Xi Jinping. In fact, ever since his election, he has been trying to boost the promotion of soft power, the use of its cultural resources, and more modern and technological means. In 2014, President Xi Jinping gave an important speech regarding the promotion of the country's soft power. Besides introducing the concept of the China dream, that, as we will see, has an important correlation with the concept of soft power, he stated the importance to "promote China's cultural soft power by disseminating modern values and showing the charm of Chinese culture to the

world”(China to Promote Cultural Soft Power). He further argued the importance to deepen the reform in its cultural system, and push forward the cultural industry; the country also needs to build its capacity in international communication, better use of the new media and increase the creativity, appeal and credibility of China’s publicity. Xi Jinping further argued: “The stories of China should be well told, voices of China well spread, and characteristics of China well explained” (“Headlines From China”). Therefore, it is important to tell Chinese stories, show Chinese values and communicate China’s message to the world.

What better tool than an international and worldwide loved, widespread and appreciated medium, such as films, to tell a Chinese story? Allmendinger states that “society created the media and through the predominance of signs the media is increasingly influencing and creating society” (52). Nowadays, media messages influence every individual aspect of the way we live and consume, the religion we follow and the policy or politicians we support. Zoysa and Newman note that “film and television are an integral part of American soft power, effortlessly extolling virtues attributable to the American way of life, including its downside” (199). The film, of all kinds of media, is traditionally recognized as the most powerful and effective tool for soft power. As Gluszak argues: “cinema is the most popular and universal medium of mass entertainment. It is through the film that we have learned to appreciate art, experiment with form, and communicate with spheres not usually available through direct contact. Cinema has allowed us to gain new ways of experiencing the world and obtaining information”(Gluszak). ‘If I could control the medium of the American motion picture, I would need nothing else to convert the entire world to Communism’, remarked Joseph Stalin (qtd. in Zhu). Through

Hollywood, American cinemas have become ‘part of the socialization process’ for people around the world and ‘a prime mover in the globalization of consumerism and image-making’ (Zoysa and Newman 189-201).

Films and media can be considered as tools that can exploit soft power at its best. They are the perfect means to employ to foster a more positive image of the country. The application of soft power in films helps to publicise, to carry and to spread culture, ideas (or even policies); it helps to disseminate values and cultural concepts with a more open, innovative attitude and cultural entertainment as well. However, films, and this is something the Chinese government is well aware of, can be a double-edged sword. Because besides creating appeal and positive outcomes, they can also portray a country under a bad light, jeopardize its status or reveal a country’s “skeletons”. This is one of the main reasons why Chinese films lack freedom, and, consequently, this factor has repercussions on creativity. The State Administration of Press, Publication, Radio, Film and Television, controls films and makes sure that these productions don’t damage the country’s image and are in line with all the regulations outlined. In fact, the SAPPRFT usually applies rigorous censorship that ends up being a significant limit to the creativity and the freedom of Chinese filmmakers (“China to Promote Cultural Soft power”). These two issues above-mentioned are one of the reasons why the PRC has to increase its efforts in trying to produce films that can go beyond its borders and trigger the interest, the attraction and the charm on the international stage. Nonetheless, at the same time, China needs to be seen as more credible and truthful.

Anyhow, to wholly fulfil this, Chinese films and soft power need to include two important factors: credibility and appeal. (Hui and Voci 50). These two factors

were emphasized by President Xi Jinping in his speech, where he stated the importance to increase the creativity, the appeal and the credibility of China's publicity. Hence, he recognizes that these are essential ingredients and are the keys to the accomplishment of soft power. As previously mentioned, Chinese soft power has a strong bond with the government as its strategy is promoted and carried out by it. When it comes to the United States' soft power strategy, this country doesn't have a strategy like China has, and it doesn't give much importance to it. However, regardless of this situation, the United States' soft power is very strong; its success is probably related to the fact that it is separated from the American government. A successful soft power strategy should try to help foreign audiences to get closer to and attracted to China, its culture and its way of life (just the way Hollywood did with its films).

More importantly, foreigners should stop seeing the PRC through an international lens, but rather, through China's lens. Concerning this, besides enhancing its soft power, the promotion of its media platforms is also aimed at giving audiences a different perspective and point of view. This attitude is very important to slowly understand the Chinese standpoint, as a way to eventually build a different behaviour towards it. Whether it is culture, history, cuisine, and so on, the seventh art not only can give the spectator a closer approach to the factors already mentioned films can also be considered as an interactive, amusing and entertaining tool that can introduce and trigger the interest of the Chinese language. Therefore, if the spectator feels attracted to the content of the film, this appeal can give a huge contribution to the promotion of soft power and trigger the interest of foreign audiences towards it. By following this logic, films can export a country's culture and language through the

big screen. Hence, spectators can learn and even get attached to a culture or a language that is perceived as distant.

This is the light that sparks curiosity among spectators, as they might feel the need to break the language, the cultural barrier and get closer to China. Because, sometimes, what spectators want is to be a part of a good story. Also, the showcase of China's wonders and cultural heritage can be a further attraction to foreigners, to the extent that they can boost the country's tourism, just as what happened with the success of the South Korean TV drama.

The power of films shouldn't be underestimated because they can create new modes of thinking, doing and learning. They have the capacity to seduce, induce and lead to approval, praise and acquiescence, but, above all, they can influence or shape people's opinions and behaviours as well. Thus, considering the power and the kind of influence films can have on audiences, great attention has to be paid to the way the story is told. Otherwise, the content projected doesn't really match the one that the government or Chinese filmmakers had in mind, with the content eventually perceived by spectators.

Although the application of soft power is not as immediate as it seems, China is moving in the right direction and its focus on and investments in the film industry are increasing. It demonstrates that Chinese leaders have found the right tools to introduce Chinese culture to the outside world. Moreover, the industry is becoming more and more important economically, hence, it proves China's increasingly significant international role. Films can help the Chinese government to achieve its soft power strategy and to put into effect its objective to improve China's global

image, and to outline the increasingly important role of the country as cultural, political and economic power.

Furthermore, in close relation with films, film festivals, for instance, the Beijing International Film Festival and the Shanghai International Film Festival, can be considered as another powerful channel that can boost the country's soft power. In 2016, the BJIFF hosted 2,329 exhibitions from 105 countries, while the SIFF hosted 2,403 exhibitions from 114 countries ("The Economic Contribution of Film"). It is a great opportunity and advantage to host film festivals because at that moment China is standing in front of millions of people from different countries. This is a moment that can create new opportunities for improvement for the Chinese domestic film market, and a further occasion to establish new relations with other countries. Thanks to this opportunity, Chinese filmmakers might be able to establish and to develop new collaborations with other countries and filmmakers. Therefore, film festivals can be considered as further promotion of the country and can increase the appreciation of the latter.

The government believed that the adoption, the spread and the influence of Western culture in China were the main causes that led to the chaos in society. As a consequence, films became a source of criticism and began to be seen under a more negative light; hence, this was the moment when the government and Chinese film authorities turned the tables regarding this matter. This was the moment when, somehow, films began to lose their entertainment feature and slowly started to be more politically and historically centred. As previously mentioned, films were a significant tool in the government's hands since that, through the projection of these film productions, their goal was to reinforce the position and the positive image of the

Chinese Communist Party (CCP), of its leaders, and last but not least, the validity of the Chinese government (Zhang 35). These films were (and still are) carefully chosen since their content had to follow some crucial regulations, such as having positive content. Indeed, main melody films emphasize Chinese values and the loyalty of the Chinese people towards the government. At the same time, these films might be focused on telling the story and the actions of the present and past leaders, and they also highlight the country's important historical moments. Therefore, due to their stress on historical and political themes, these movies started to become more rigid and more of an educational tool rather than an entertainment and artistic tool. In fact, in a way, the last two disappeared.

In the first half of the twentieth century, China experienced the collapse of the Qing Dynasty, invasion by foreign countries, internal conflicts, occupation by Japan, and civil war. After half a century's storm and stress, the People's Republic of China was established in 1949. In the second half of the century, the PRC was involved in several international conflicts, while internally the Chinese people suffered greatly from the economic and cultural upheavals of Mao's Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution. This turbulent history has had a profound impact on China. The government now employs soft power more for 'defensive purpose[s]' (Li 21-44), to positively build a stronger cultural image both within and outside China and to assert media power to contest western dominance. The level of control exerted over media and cultural production reflects the weakness felt by the state in the international media sphere.

In the past decade, huge amounts of money have been invested in developing national champions to counter global giants like News Corporation and Time Warner. It is said

that the ‘Chinese film industry is also expected to play its role in this effort, with the official China Film Promotion International (CFPI), established under the China Film Group in April 2004, taking the lead’ (Rosen). CFPI is committed to providing assistance and service for the promotion and commercial distribution of Chinese national films overseas.

Su argues that the Beijing government recognized the film industry as an indispensable manifestation of soft power (317). She further argues that it purposely employs new strategies and represents a potential Chinawood that features kung-fu movies and Chinese culture as ‘part of an exercise in soft power in an attempt to counter the Western/American cultural hegemony’ and also to maintain its legitimacy and a stable society full of conflicts (321). These strategies, according to Su, include ‘redefining film as market-oriented cultural industry to be part of soft power’(318)

The Peoples Republic of China uses a double-edged strategy in its films to promote soft power: it uses its films to exalt the cultural richness of China and at the same time Juxtaposes it with the ‘deteriorated’ culture and values of other countries. In other words, it uses its films to produce propaganda which validates its cultural superiority and undermines the values of other nations. China uses the concept of Occidentalism, which is the theoretical antithesis of West’s orientalism to fuel the impact of this propaganda. According to Burma and Margalit “the dehumanizing picture of the west painted by its enemies is called Occidentalism” (23). Perhaps more often in academic texts the word Occidentalism means ‘anti-westernism’, or movements or ideologies that reject the ideas, political processes, or material objects labelled as western (Woltering 5). It should be noted that unlike traditional Occidentalists China also projects Japan as its adversary and bearer of a rather

dehumanized culture. Thus China successfully presents all nations, which pose a challenge to its position as a global power in a negative light through its films.

Chapter 3

Rise of the Grand Master

How does one country's nationalism achieve popularity among foreigners who don't share the same historic heritage? As Joseph Nye said it is by employing the employment of soft power – or the capacity of a nation to achieve its ends in the international platform through attraction and enticement. The basis of the soft power functions of the concept that in international relations, projecting a certain 'image' or reputation by way of media and marketing can gain a country as much - or even more - influence over other countries than military or economic strength. And indeed, this elusive idea of soft power holds a natural appeal to the China of the twenty-first century. Jiang Wang argues in his introduction to *Soft Power in China: Public Diplomacy through Communication* that "China believes it not only has a story to tell to the world, but it is imperative for the country to do so more effectively... It's a question of their collective identity, prestige and, arguably, China's face in the increasingly connected global society" (Wang 2). Chinese culture's stringent emphasis on maintaining "face" makes Nye's theory of soft power - with its fundamental dependence on the image above all else - an ideal diplomatic strategy. Moreover, according to Robert Gries, "The zero-sum nature of face and China's history of victimization at the hands of the West combine to make many contemporary Chinese view diplomacy as a fierce competition between leaders who win or lose face for the nations they embody"(Melissen and Lee 125). As such, in terms of attitude, China is well situated to approach the game of soft power with an eye toward "one-upping" the former imperialist powers that had subjugated China in previous eras. Thus we see the emergence of the twenty-first century Chinese martial

arts film: marketable, culturally relevant, and filled to the brim with shamelessly nationalistic rhetoric walking hand in hand with violent postcolonial commentary.

If soft power bases itself on the construction of an image, then arguably, the most obvious starting point is the image itself: in other words, the creation of an icon. The ideal icon, if it is to win soft power currency for the country it represents, must, therefore, command massive popular appeal across different nations and cultures while simultaneously embodying the culture and values of its own country, a sort of easily translatable patriotism. Better yet is a living icon - someone human and relatable, but nonetheless capable of being a role model and idol to the populace.

Enter Ip Man - also known as Yip Kai-Man - the old master who most famously taught the world-renowned Bruce Lee. Bruce Lee as an actor and martial artist represents the bridge between East and West; his performances are undoubtedly a product of Chinese cultural traditions, yet he has also achieved an iconic status in Western nations, having perhaps the biggest hand in remaking American action cinema in the image of the Chinese martial arts genre. He has, in short, come to represent the image of a strong and positive China that nonetheless retains favour among non-Chinese. Bruce Lee the man may have died in the 1970s, but his legend remains alive even in the midst of the twenty-first century - and is therefore still ripe for soft power cultivation.

However, a fresh take on that legend would, of course, be necessary to court audiences - and Bruce Lee's old master Ip Man represented the exciting and untouched territory. No director before Wilson Yip had chosen to tell Ip's story, which would grant it a new angle on the tried and true Hong Kong action film genre, even while retaining the all-important connection to Bruce Lee. Indeed, promotional

posters for the film most frequently advertise the movie as ‘the story of Bruce Lee’s legendary master’. However, Ip Man himself also carries a unique potential for popular appeal. Donnie Yen, who portrays the fictionalized Ip in the films, claims in an interview, “I think people only knew him as the teacher of Bruce Lee, so you only saw the character in films about him, kind of a supporting character. When you learn more about Ip Man, you realize that he had a really incredible life, and a huge influence on the martial arts world, in his own right. Maybe the right combination of elements didn’t come together until now to tell his story” (Cheang). Yen’s statement highlights the ripeness of Ip Man’s potential as a compelling hero and paints Ip as an ideal symbol for Chinese wushu.

The aesthetic presentation of Ip’s character on screen also carries weight, for the film opens with Ip dressed in traditional garb, practising wushu alone in his studio, rather than battling enemies outside. The scene then pans into his stately Chinese home, which is decorated in a mixture of Chinese and western furnishings that were typical of educated elites during the Republican period. In his interactions with other people, Ip is soft-spoken and courteous - indeed, the very first scene of the film sees him inviting a rival and challenger to join his family for supper and tea. This opening serves as a character establishing moment, showcasing not only Ip’s class and wealth - for instance, the very fact that he can even afford to feed unexpected guests a good meal whenever he pleases - but also his generosity of spirit, in that he does share his wealth gladly, and puts on no airs about it. Ip, in essence, performs as the epitome of a traditional Chinese gentleman. Furthermore, early in the film, he mentions several times that he “does not work,” having inherited old money from his highly placed family, which cements his place in society as an established member of the Chinese

upper crust. (*Ip man* 10:25). He represents a traditional image of China - and more specifically, China's prized gentry class. Like real-life folk heroes before him, such as the scholarly doctor and warrior Wong Fei Hung, Ip Man combines the image of wealth, class, and high culture with the reality of dangerous proficiency in battle. He performs as a paragon of Confucian virtue, the best of all that China's ancient intellectual and physical traditions have to offer. Such a juxtaposition allows the character of Ip Man to assume a role as a figurehead that combines the most desirable and impressive elements of Chinese identity while remaining accessible and likeable to the audience.

Moreover, the real-life Ip came of age in southern China at the crux of the Japanese occupation, building in automatic villains for the would-be hero to face (Ching and Heimberger 2). According to Yen, "Ip Man did fight these challenges matches, he did have to survive in Fo Shan during the Japanese occupation, and he did move to Hong Kong to establish Wing Chun there. I think we did justice to him, and to his real story" (Cheang). The real-life Ip gains automatic credibility for living through relatively recent and traumatic events in China's modern history, which means that the fictional Ip can, in turn, build his legend of a veritable treasure trove of culturally and politically relevant material. An Ip Man biopic therefore already has all the makings of a recipe for popular appeal both in and out of China. Thus, the stage is set for the film to tell its story to the world: a story that promotes the image of a China that can transcend the colonial humiliations suffered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Ip Man, through one man's narrative, tells the story of a China that, simply put, fights back, and fights back with dignity.

Therefore, in a film about the presence of foreign imperialists on Chinese land, martial arts naturally function as the primary language of the narrative. The first Ip Man instalment centres around the Japanese invasion of China during the early twentieth century, focusing on the character of Ip Man, a Chinese martial arts master and expert in the Southern style of Wing Chun. The very first scene of the film shows his training and practice of wing chun, the native martial art form of China. It is a symbolic way of giving a glimpse into the national heritage and culture of their country because martial arts entwine itself with the culture of China and has become an ideal rallying point for rousing nationalistic sentiment among their natives and foreigners alike. Thus the process of attracting others by subtly expressing the cultural supremacy of China starts at the very beginning of the film. Thus the beginning of the film itself provides a direct hint to its ulterior motive – to promote and propagate Chinese culture. Unlike western combat sports like boxing and kickboxing, wing chun is presented as a much more serene art and it transcends the realm of a mere combat sport and attains a state of spirituality and wisdom. During his combat with Mr Liu, a martial artist who comes to spar with Ip Man, the protagonist shows his serene and friendly manner. He invites Mr Liu to his dinner table and provides him with food before the start of combat. Thus Wilson Yip shows that his hero is different from the traditional macho hero of the west, who ruthlessly slaughter his opponents. Ip man is kind, compassionate and generous even to the people who provoke him. Moreover, he chooses a defensive stand and only applies strength to thwart the attack of his opponents. The film is careful to show the early confrontations between Ip man and certain Chinese martial artists in a light-hearted and comedic manner, to contrast it with brutal combat with the upcoming Japanese imperial powers. After all, the early

fights between Jin and Ip are unmistakably light-hearted in nature. Jin arrives at Ip's house to challenge him, and although he poses little challenge to Ip in terms of actual skill, he does succeed in accidentally breaking several of Ip's more expensive material possessions. Each time he smashes a vase or cracks a table, he sheepishly insists that he will pay after the fight, lending the scene a comedic tone, which is further highlighted when Ip's young son interrupts both combatants by cheekily informing his father, "Mother says that if you don't start fighting seriously, everything in the house will break" (*Ip man* 15:24) Moreover, Ip eventually triumphs over Jin by using his wife's feather duster as an improvised weapon, at one point stuffing Jin's mouth full of feathers. For all that Jin is meant to play the villain in this scene, he is nonetheless a buffoon, most certainly not to be taken seriously.

After the combat, a defeated Jin laments that his "northern style" was defeated by Ip's "southern style" (*Ip Man* 24:36). He is trying to take it to the realm of regional division and rivalry but Ip calmly assures him that "it is not a matter of northern or southern style" and 'the problem lies only in your heart'. Thus Ip becomes the proponent of the national unity of Chinese people and condemns the regional rivalries.

It isn't until the invasion of the Japanese imperial army that we see the Chinese characters begin uniting, for regional differences presumably seem insignificant in the face of a truly insidious - and truly foreign - threat. Furthermore, as Jin's violence against the townspeople of Fo Shan escalates, it changes tenor from the light-hearted sparring with Ip during the first half of the film to something more serious. Even as this shift occurs, Jin's violence becomes less an expression of his own foolish but ultimately harmless arrogance and painted more obviously as a by-

product of Japanese imperial rule in China - once again reemphasizing the idea that the true villains of the piece are the Japanese, not fellow Chinese. After his initial defeat at the hands of Ip, Jin returns a second time to attack a cotton mill, where he demands monetary tribute. When Ip steps in to defend the factory workers, Jin furiously asks, "Ip Man, have you ever been hungry? ... The first day I came to Foshan, I told myself that I would never be hungry again. I will never be hungry again!" (*Ip Man* 1:00:36). Ip's measured response to Jin's rant is simply that "Everyone is hungry these days," which alludes to the widespread poverty that has taken hold of the country in the wake of the Japanese invasion (*Ip Man* 1:01:34).

The transition from the serene and blissful nature of the film to the chaos created by Japanese invasion becomes evident from the scene which shows the clear and calm sky of Fo Shan turning into dark and thunderous filled with fighter jets. There is no voiceover but the screen shows the texts like "On July 7, 1937, the Marco Polo incident broke out. Japan invaded China, robbing its people of their livelihood and causing rampant starvation all over the country" (*Ip man*). The screen then focuses on the streets of Fo Shan where people are mercilessly slaughtered by the Japanese troops. The pile of dead bodies and brutality of Japanese soldiers adds to the impact of China's Soft Power. It is portrayed as a victim in the hands of Japanese militia and the audience are forced to sympathise with it. Thus the film portrays the Japanese as the 'other'- or as mentioned in the film 'foreign devils'- which is the epitome of cruelty and savageness. The on-screen texts show that "In October Fo Shan was occupied by the Japanese army, who destroyed factories and buildings. The population of FO Shan shrunk from more than 300,000 to just over 70,000" (*Ip Man* 35:56). These on-screen texts provide a dual purpose- it adds to the credibility of the film and at the same time

enables China to twist the depiction of history to suit their needs. Thus the anti-Japanese tone of the film is justified by masking the narrative with the so-called historical facts. The brutal impact of the Japanese invasion is shown by focusing on the impact it blows upon the life of the Protagonist. Ip Man and his family are forced to abandon their home since it was confiscated by the Japanese army. They are forced to live in an abandoned building with a limited supply of food. Ip Man who was portrayed as a member of the elite class Chinese society is forced to search for a job to earn his daily bread. After pawning everything in the house he is forced to work in a coal mine. Thus the film shows how the Japanese Invasion wreaked havoc upon the peaceful and serene lifestyle of the people of China and fosters a dislike to the policies of Japan during the colonial time.

The arrival of Japanese soldiers in China is furthermore heralded by a series of sparring matches between the Chinese martial artists of Fo Shan and the karate practitioners of the Japanese army. To win rice to feed their families, the Chinese fighters must defeat Japanese opponents at martial arts matches in the ring. In a situation where food, money, and paying work are scarce, these organized combat games quickly become popular among the Chinese kung fu masters. These games are the very embodiment of Fanon's theory: violence begets violence, and in this case, the undisputed root of it is the invading Japanese army, for they are the ones who impose such brutal means for mere survival in the new world they have created (35).

However, Ip soon resorts to violence. Provoked by the death of a fellow Chinese in the ring, Ip asks to fight ten of the Japanese karate black belts. Previously, Ip's fighting style had - true to the character's own morals and personality - remained relatively pacifistic, with Ip often holding back from any truly vicious or aggressive

attacks, regardless of provocation. This scene, in stark contrast, sees Ip unleashing a merciless beat down on all ten of his opponents. True to the core of his martial philosophy, he still refrains from ever making the first attack; however, when attacked, he parries with uncharacteristic brutality. The soundtrack to this section of the film contains almost nothing except the smack of fists against the flesh, aborted cries of pain, and even the tell-tale crunch and twist of bones snapping. Near the conclusion of the scene, only one Japanese karate fighter remains standing; he is noticeably younger than many of his fallen peers and is shaking, terrified of Ip Man. As Ip slowly makes his way over to the boy, the latter begins to tremble, before throwing a sloppy kick that Ip easily counters. Neither the boy's youth nor his obvious fear earn any mercy from Ip, who proceeds to knock the lone karateka to the floor and beat him across the head until blood streams down his face. This scene pans almost immediately to a close-up of Ip's own swollen and blood-stained hands, which curl into fists. The merciless, almost mechanical brutality of this act on the protagonist's part, punctuated by the literal blood on his hands at the end, represents a sombre departure from Ip Man's established characterization as a gentleman prone to showing kindness and courtesy to even his most dogged opponents. The brutality of this fight is justified in the film because he is portrayed as avenging the death of a friend and hence gives a morally higher ground to Ip Man's violence and anger. Thus it subtly hints that the Chinese people, represented by Ip, only resort to violence when it is absolutely necessary. The film thus tries to justify the military and political tactics of The Republic of China till the date with this subtle suggestion.

Sound is tremendously important in setting that tone. In earlier portions of the movie where Ip spars his fellow Chinese, he merely "mimes" his more devastating

techniques, such as the “chain punch,” where an opponent is literally pummelled to the ground by a blur of full force, rapid-fire punches. In this sequence, however, Ip unleashes the full force of the chain punch - which sounds like nothing so much as the shots fired from a soldier’s Gatling gun, and accompanied by audible blood spatter to boot. By evoking the noise of a real battlefield, this moment serves as a reminder to the audience that the film has reached its turning point: this is no longer merely a martial arts adventure story, but a war movie. Similarly, the sheer level of violence portrayed in this scene - through both its visual and audio components - represents a shift in the narrative, for where martial arts was previously a game of sorts, a matter of winning or losing personal acclaim, it has now become something far more significant. From this scene onward, fights between martial artists are fights not only for the survival of the individual but survival for a nation itself.

In keeping with that theme, the film culminates in a final exhibition match between Ip and the main villain of the piece, the Japanese general and karate expert Miura. As was the case of Ip’s fights with the bandit Jin, the language once again plays an important symbolic role, this time during the conversation between Ip and Miura before their fateful duel. Ip has been arrested by Japanese soldiers, and Miura has offered him a bargain: he will spare Ip’s life in exchange for Ip’s cooperation in teaching his prodigious martial arts techniques to the Japanese army. “I’ll give you one chance to be loyal to the Japanese emperor,” says Miura, speaking in Japanese (*Ip Man* 1:36:21). He does not phrase his offer not as a method to curry favour with the general or his soldiers, but as a service to the emperor of Japan, the human representation of the nation itself. Miura, with his phrasing, makes his bargain one rife with questions of nationalism - for he is effectively asking Ip Man to use something

Chinese in origin to serve China's conquerors, the Japanese. When the translator conveys the offer to Ip, the latter refuses immediately, responding in his native Chinese, "If you want to see me fight, I'll fight with you" (*Ip Man* 1:38:33).

The two next meet at Ip's prison cell. No translator is present, and the two men are alone, but as Miura seats himself across from Ip, he says, still in Japanese, "I want you to teach us instead of killing you because I appreciate your talent. But I don't think that Chinese martial arts can surpass Japanese martial arts. So, you and I will fight in front of everybody. That's why we need a tournament" (*Ip Man*). Once again, Miura makes the subject of martial arts emblematic of the relationship between two nations. Miura believes that Ip Man, for all his potential usefulness to the Japanese army, can never defeat the general himself; along similar lines, Miura implicitly believes that China may provide certain resources for the Japanese empire, but remains fundamentally inferior. The tournament, therefore, becomes far more than a match between two men; it is a clash of nations, ideologies, and cultures. For Miura, it is a chance to justify Japanese imperialism. For Ip Man, it is a chance to avenge his countrymen - and indeed, for his entire nation in a single symbolic gesture.

And indeed, Ip answers in Chinese, "You invaded our country and killed our people... Stop being hypocritical (*Ip Man* 1:54:12). The behaviour of the two men in the absence of a translator force the audience to remember that Ip and Miura most likely do not actually understand one another's words. When reading through that lens, their conversation is not a conversation at all - rather they are two separate statements, each meant to embody their respective national alliances. The language

barrier further emphasizes the disparity between the Japanese viewpoint and the reality of the Chinese situation.

Ultimately, of course, Ip Man triumphs over Miura. As the two fight one another on a raised platform before a crowd of both Chinese and Japanese spectators, the film juxtaposes the actual events of their match with Ip's memories of practice sessions with a wooden training dummy. As Ip begins to gain the upper hand over Miura, he literally reimagines the Japanese general as the training dummy; each blow he lands on Miura echoes a blow he landed during a training session at home. By equating his great enemy with a mere training exercise, Ip effectively brings his great moment of nationalistic bravado back down to the simplest origins of his passion. In fighting Miura, he remembers the serenity and unassuming joy of his art in the days before the Japanese invasion twisted martial arts into an instrument of war. The film furthermore couples this juxtaposition with Ip's declaration that the Japanese with their "abuse of military power, turning martial arts into violence to suppress others" will never understand the "benevolent" spirit of Chinese martial arts. These factors converge in a moment that symbolizes the driving message of the film: that Chinese martial culture - and by extension, "Chinese-ness" as a whole - stands stalwart and uncorrupted in the face of any obstacle. When Ip defeats Miura, the former "talks back" to the latter; he reclaims pride, nation, and agency through the conversation of literal physical combat. The film itself highlights that moment in its epilogue, which declares in the narration that China ultimately defeated Japan after many long years - of course never bothering to mention the involvement of the other Allied nations. After all, the function of the film is not to give a particularly detailed - or even a particularly accurate - account of history; the function of the film is to use Ip Man and

his Chinese martial arts to make a statement about China's enduring strength and spirit. The action of the film is, simply put, a function of nationalism.

Chapter 4

Ip Man versus The Western Self

The film *Ip Man 2* begins with certain scenes from its prequel and thus assures that it is the continuation of the narrative and subtly hints that the themes of cultural superiority and Occidentalism prevailed in the first film will be continued in it. This time the villains of the day are British Imperialists in Hong Kong, where Ip and his family have fled due to the aftermath of Japan's invasion of their homeland. As mentioned, the film starts with certain scenes from the prequel which portray the cruelty of Japanese troops; thus, the juxtaposition with the virtuous Chinese culture and monstrous foreign culture is inevitable. Thus, the portrayal of the 'Other' through the lens of Chinese nationalism is imminent in the narrative and is an essential aspect of Chinese Soft Power and propaganda. Like its predecessor, the films show the chaos and mayhem created by the colonial occupation of Hong Kong. This time the culprits are the British, and they are held responsible for the cultural and economic destruction of Hong Kong. The impact of colonial rule on the life of the common people is portrayed by showing the misfortune suffered by Ip Man's family. They are forced to live in a narrow apartment and struggle to make the ends meet. Ip decides to start a martial art school to earn some money to provide for his family. It should be noted that in the first film he was reluctant to accept anyone as his disciple in martial arts, but now he has no other option to earn money. He creates handmade brochures for his wing chun school and pastes them all over the town. The poverty and economic difficulties experienced by common people are featured by showing Ip's family's financial difficulties. They struggle to pay the rent and to provide school fees for their son.

But amidst this financial situation, Ip is not ready to sacrifice his beliefs and his convictions. He is the embodiment of the Confucian ideals which uphold the rich cultural heritage of China and this part of his character is essential for the attainment of soft power to the Chinese. As mentioned by the protagonist himself the art of wing chun contains the tactics of ancient Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu and philosopher Confucius. He states that “in wing chun, we attack and defend at the same time to disable an opponent in the shortest time” (*Ip Man 2* 11:27). When a student asks about his ability to fight ten men at the same time, Ip replies that “the best thing is not to fight at all” (*Ip Man 2* 12:23). These are direct references to the theory developed by Sun Tzu in his book ‘The Art of War’ and the makers of the film makes it clear that they intend to display the cultural heritage of China to a global audience. This encounter between Ip and his students shows the warm and tender nature of the Master. The Japanese Invasion of china which was portrayed in the previous films returns with its stigmas when Ip encounters his old friend Quan. Quan a reputed industrialist in Fong Shen goes insane after suffering severe traumas of the invasion. The portrayal of these type of characters represents the collective victimhood of Chinese people in front of an international audience.

The films attain a shift in tone and pace when Ip’s students fight with the students of another Kungfu master named Hung. Master Hung and his students represent the native Chinese who are dependent on the British authorities and are forced to work for the imperial masters. Arrogant, quick-tempered Hung dislikes Ip Man’s presence in Hong Kong and he serves to act as a foil to Ip. Hung justifies his interactions with the British as a necessary action to protect the martial arts schools and demands money from Ip Man as a ‘fee’ to protect his school from further

troubles. But Ip Man, who represents the nationalism of Chinese people, vehemently opposes this act of collecting fees by Hung. He refuses to give money for protection because that money eventually reaches the hands of the colonisers. But Hung is not entirely portrayed in a negative character but rather portrayed as a puppet in the hands of colonial powers. This is very clear in his conversation with the Police Superintendent who collects bribe from him. The Superintendent is the representative of the evil colonisers who are portrayed as greedy men who have contempt and hatred towards Chinese people. He smells the money given by Hung and says “your money stinks but I like it” (Ip Man 2 29:30).

It should be noted that all the foreign characters mentioned in the film are portrayed in a one-dimensional evil manner with no capacity to grow morally. They act as instruments to feature the occidental narrative of the filmmakers. Superintendent Wallace and the British boxer Twister represent such one-dimensional evil characters and feature the corruption in British rule and condescension towards all Chinese people. Wallace forced Hung to organise a British boxing match and Hung reluctantly agrees to organise it to prevent a fallout with Wallace. He and his students work for the successful organisation of the boxing match and get no payment for their efforts. A lot of his students left their jobs at the fish market to work for the event. But when Hung asks about his share of the revenue generated from the boxing match Wallace becomes angry and states that he is not ready to talk about it. The Chinese inspector who acts as a translator assures Hung to sort things out. Later in the film, the British officials along with the Boxer named Twister comes to visit the boxing arena to check the progress and Wallace is boasting about the arrangements he made for the match. Twister humiliates Master Hung by refusing to shake hands with

him and hands Hung his coat to further add to his embarrassment. The native inspector consoles Hung by saying “ignore him. The foreigners like to leave things around” (*Ip Man 2*). The relationship between Hung and Wallace deteriorates when the former asks Wallace for his share to provide a salary to the workers who are engaged in the organising. Wallace shows his true colours and wields his power as the colonial master. His colonial mentality and his hatred towards Chinese people are evident from his exchange with Hung where he states that “we don’t share the money with you. You only collect the money”. He continues to insult the natives by saying “do as I say, you are not qualified to make deals with me” (*Ip Man 2* 50:21-51:13). The filmmakers use these scenes to feature the hypocritical nature of the colonial masters who consider their subjects as servants and use them for their selfish gains. This gives a revelation to master Hung who threatens to back out from the task of organising. To this threat Wallace replies with another threat which has much more impact, he threatens to disrupt Hung's business in the fish market. Hung realises that his workers will become jobless due to Wallace and half-heartedly agrees to continue to the task. But Twister, the British boxer overhears their arguments and shouts at Hung “Will somebody get this yellow piece of fat out of here. You are making too much noise” (*Ip Man 2* 1:00:54). Thus the character represents the foreigners who have deep-rooted hatred to the Chinese people and their prejudiced notions about the natives. But the curious case about this scene is the resistance shown by Master Hung against the arguments of the Colonisers. He tries to make his point clear with Wallace without fearing his anger and he counters Twisters insult by saying “You should speak Chinese, not English” to argue (*Ip Man 2* 1:02:01). This shows an awakening of

national pride and patriotism in Hung and this compels him to take a stand against the imperial powers.

The boxing match is the most important scene in *Ip Man 2* and remains a crucial point in changing the pace of the movie. Hung uses this as an opportunity to promote the martial arts schools in front of a British audience. Under his guidance, numerous schools of martial arts, including Ip Man's wing chun, prepared themselves to show a display of their technique as an inaugural ceremony on the boxing match. A reformed Hung who took pride in his countries martial arts found it necessary to display the beauty and technique of Chinese Kung Fu in front of an international audience. He symbolically represents the makers of the film who also share the same pride and motivation. The conflict arises when Twister mocks and ridicules the performances by the Chinese martial artists. He considers it as a “pantomime” and ridicules the ceremonial shouts as “screaming”. The British officials also join in his ridicule and show their contempt towards the Chinese. They are portrayed as a group of evil men who constantly undermine the cultural values and heritage of Chinese people. They have their prejudiced notion about the Chinese and oriental approach is evident in their dialogues. Twister enters the arena and beats all the Chinese fighters, without any provocation, to show his might and the English people in the audience encourages him to do so. This results in a commotion and forms a rift between the British and Chinese audience in the arena.

Twister is featured as an egoistic and arrogant character who openly shows his hatred toward the native people. He is portrayed in accordance with the traditional Chinese concept of Foreign Devil who comprises greed, hatred and evilness. He attacks the culture and heritage of Chinese martial arts by saying “Is this Chinese

boxing. You should just stick to dancing” (*Ip Man 2* 1:05:09). In order to diffuse the situation, Hung intervenes and asks Twister to apologise to the injured fighters. But Twister scoffs at this and asks Hung to fight him to get an apology. Hung who finds it his duty to preserve the cultural heritage of his art agrees to the combat. The combat is shown in such a way that it inspires respect towards Chinese martial arts. During the fight, Hung successfully defends many striking blows of Twister but his lung problem causes him to slow down and he eventually falls in the ring. Even when everyone encouraged him to quit he continued to fight for the sake of his nation. Despite Ip Man’s advice to concede, master Hung said, “I can’t let that foreign devil insult us...I won’t let him insult Chinese martial arts!” (*Ip Man 2* 1:12:45). Master Hung’s moral re-recovery stems from his nationalistic pride but was previously suppressed to survive. Master Hung becomes a martyr to prove the inherent moral strength in the Chinese people. The filmmakers make sure that Hung loses due to an inherent disease which coupled along with his old age made him weak after the tiresome fight. Thus the filmmakers protect the supremacy of Chinese martial arts without featuring it as inferior to western boxing. To add to the impact of Hung’s death the British spectators are shown to be applauding and cheering for Twister. Thus the film features them as cold-hearted populace who doesn’t show shock and sympathy in the unfortunate tragic death of a Chinese man. This sharpens the weapon of Occidentalism employed in the movie.

The tragic death of Hung infuriates Ip and the film provides him with the morally righteous anger to seek revenge for his friend’s death. He is thus forced by circumstance to fight Twister to avenge the death of Hung. To increase the effectiveness of the final fight between Ip and Twister the director portrays Twister in

a much darker shade. He is shown as a character without remorse about the death of Master Hung and his hatred of Chinese culture is further featured in the press release scene where he continues insulting Chinese people. Thus the audience is manipulated to sympathise with the Chinese people and to hate the 'evil' British antagonist. Even the British authorities are portrayed in a much more negative fashion to appeal to the emotion of the audience. They openly twist the facts and covers the truth in their official press statement regarding the death of Master Hung. According to them "The Chinese boxer overestimated himself and challenged the champion "and they justify the actions of Twister by saying that he "reluctantly accepted the challenge' and fought too easy on Hung (*Ip Man 2* 1:26:12). According to them Hung 'was weak' and was unable to withstand the fists of Their World Champion. They portray Twister as an unfortunate victim and desires to 'give justice' to him by organising another match between twister and any Chinese martial artists. According to them, no Chinese fighter can withstand the blows of their world champion. Twister continues his series of verbal harassment on Chinese people during this press release and he even mocks their customs and practices regarding fighting. He challenges chines people to fight him in the ring and even boasts that "there will be no more Chinese boxers" after he starts his fight (*Ip Man 2* 1:27:12). Ip comes to the press release and challenges Twister to fight him.

The fight is arguably a moment for vengeance for Ip man but it is also one of the longest and most difficult battles depicted on screen. The entire scene is choreographed in a way to force the audiences to support the protagonist-the Chinese hero and to condemn the antagonist- British imperial villain. The stadium is filled with people chanting the name of Twister and that makes Ip the underdog of the fight.

This tactic which is used in the Hollywood movies is copied by the Chinese filmmakers to ensure the support of the audience to Ip. Moreover, by portraying Twister and the British officials evilly the filmmakers succeed in ensuring it. In this final fight, Twister is featured in his aura of egoism and racial bias itself. He humiliates Ip Man during the very beginning of the match by stating that he can finish him with two blows. He even breaks the most common rules in boxing to fight Ip and resorts to dirty tactic. The referee and the match officials do nothing about it. This is not much surprising because it is essential for them to behave in such a manner which will suit the occidental narrative of the film. Moreover, they make it really hard for Ip to win by constantly changing the rules of the game to give the upper hand to Twister. They even schedule the duration of the rounds to ensure the victory of Twister. They prohibit Ip from employing kicks because Twister found it difficult to defend his lethal kicks. Although Ip Man ultimately triumphs over Twister, as the narrative demands that he must, he must earn his victory through an onslaught of unfair rules and overwhelming unfamiliar physical force unseen in the series. The boxing match represents a moment of vengeance on the part of the Chinese, a reclaiming of pride, and by extension, symbolic sovereignty- but within the microcosm of that single fight the film also depicts the superior forces, unequal treaties, and blatant racism visited upon the Chinese by the British In an unflinching symbolic representation.

The Rich Chinese heritage is praised throughout the film and is shown in contrast with the corrupt values of the colonisers. Ip Man stands as the icon of Chinese culture and presents a narrative appealing to all sorts of global audiences. His message or rather China's message to the world about their culture is evident from his discourses on the philosophy of wing chun. His long philosophies about martial arts

are in fact a discourse on the superiority of Chinese cultural heritage. In a conversation with his students Ip states that the fighting technique is not important he wants them “to understand the spirit in Chinese martial arts” and according to him “it embodies the Chinese heart, mind and soul” (*Ip Man 2* 24:14). The makers of the film used the final speech of Ip Man in the film to increase the reach and popularity of China in the international audience. In his winning speech, Ip says the messages of mutual respect between both nations. He conveys his message to a foreign audience via a translator who translates his message as “he didn’t come here today to prove which is better- Chinese or western boxing. Although people have different statuses in life he doesn’t believe that one person’s integrity is worth more than another’s. He hopes that we can start to respect each other” (*Ip Man 2* 1:41:05-1:42:04). The film shows that all the foreigners hear his message eagerly and gives him standing applause at the end of it. This applause employs a dual purpose, it assures the audience to sympathise with this message and to love the ideals represented by Ip man and at the same time, it symbolically shows China’s ulterior motive- the wide-scale reception of its ideals among world nations.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

As the methods of conquest changed over time nations across the world tried to adopt new methods to dominate the rest of the populace. This led to the rise of several neo-colonialist methods which utilised the ideals of globalism, consumerism and cultural imperialism. The technological advantages helped the world to create a global village which provided interconnectedness across the globe. This helped in the blooming of new trends in trade and economy. But when world nations realised the power of this new era and its possibilities they tried to invent new methods to dominate others. Thus the old ghost of colonisation came in new garbs; as neo-colonial trends. These trends consisted of a new form of world domination via subtle and psychological methods of injecting the notions of superiority. The nations changed their whole equation of power dynamics. The old methods of exertion of physical force via wars and invasions faded away and gave rise to a new method of domination- soft power.

The concept of soft power was first proposed by the Harvard University professor Joseph S. Nye at the beginning of the 1990s. It was in the mid-2000s that this concept started to be discussed on a large scale and to be increasingly intertwined and involved in political leaders' speeches, goals and strategies. As Nye proposed great powers try to use culture and narrative to create soft power that promotes their national interests which will attract numerous other nations toward its ideologies and policies.

For many years now, China has been trying to create an image of global power. Even though they were able to forge itself into a global economic power they always felt that their image and impact on all over the world in terms of culture and

ideology were low. Consequently, for a country to increase its soft power it has to be perceived as attractive and superior in terms of its ideologies. The Hollywood film industry helped the west to imbue their ideal into the minds of the global audience. Thus they were able to create the images of the 'American lifestyle' and 'American Dream' into the minds of the world populace. But China found it difficult to achieve such type of Popularity and acceptance. Even though widely accepted as a world economic power they felt it necessary to reinforce their superiority by projecting the richness of their culture into the psyche of others. The Chinese government deployed a variety of soft power strategies in recent years. These strategies include promoting its political values by directly funding educational and commercial projects in Africa and Latin America, to establish global news agencies and television channels (Xinhua and CCTV) and academic centres. China's soft power push and its effectiveness, or lack thereof relative to its other successes in economic and military growth, has received both political and academic attention worldwide.

Even from the time of Mao, Chinese politicians were conscious of using the media especially Television, Newspapers and Radio to aid their propaganda. In this modern scenario, they realised the roles of film production as a vehicle for promoting their culture and ideology. It has become more of a focus for both the government and film industry in recent years as a highly ambitious and counterweight mechanism to resist the popularity of American ideals through Hollywood films. They started to engage in numerous investments and acquisitions both in the domestic and international film market. The film has traditionally been regarded as a tool for building soft power through its entertainment industry complex. When they realized that their martial arts films gained immense popularity around the world they tried to

use it as a vehicle for the propaganda of their cultural superiority. Earlier these martial arts films were much focused on the fighting aspects in it but presently they focus much more on creating a nationalistic narrative in favour of China's cultural superiority. They mainly try to project an image of China which is attractive to the international audience. This image will be focusing on 'cultural superiority' and Richness of 'heritage of China.

The thesis analysed the Ip Man series by the director Wilson Yip in order to find the underlying nationalistic narrative in it. This film received international acclaim for its depiction of the life of Ip Man, who was the master of the legendary action figure Bruce Lee. They promoted this film all around the world by advertising that it contains the untold life of Bruce Lee and his master. Thus they were able to incite the curiosity of the international audience and were successful in marketing it. The film contains beautifully choreographed action sequences and brilliant portrayal of Chinese sceneries. But the ulterior motive of China and its quest for cultural dominance is visible in the closer examination of the movie.

The strategy employed in this film helps China to build a positive image in front of the international audience. They employed certain specific techniques to ensure it. A critical analysis of the film showed how they portrayed the greatness of their culture through the narrative and at the same time degraded the cultures of other nations. The world nation like Japan, America and Britain are portrayed in a dehumanising way in the film. They are presented as antagonists in the film and are projected as foils to the titular character, who is the embodiment of Chinese ideals and culture. They are deliberately presented as one-dimensional villains who are incapable of exhibiting any human and moral values. According to the filmmakers- they are

corrupt, greedy and lacks a moral compass to direct their actions. Thus they present an occidental narrative when compared with Said's orientalism. They are portraying an image of the west and other countries from their perspective and pure imagination. Thus this occidental narrative contains two aspects – it simultaneously praises the cultural richness of china and degrades the culture of other nations. Thus their ideas are portrayed as rich and noble whereas the others are shown as total barbarians. As mentioned earlier films influence the mind of its viewer and it changes his perceptions about various things. By this strategy, China is able to spread its notions of cultural superiority and dominance across the world. It should be noted that they presented themselves as the victims in the hands of other nations. By presenting the cruelties they faced during colonial times, they try to grab the sympathy and support of the international audience. This image of victimhood helps them to justify their present actions in the social and political realm. Since they are portrayed as victims of the cruel colonialism, their violent and offensive tactics can be presented as a survival mechanism of the old colony. But the irony lies I the fact that China has established its dominance over African nations and Latin American countries by various strategies related to political and economic support. This actually makes them real colonial power in the present world scenario. But to attain soft power and cultural dominance they are projecting themselves as the colonised by showing films which portray their struggles in the hand of the colonisers.

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