

*Review Article*

# China's soft power footprints in Africa: The case of Botswana

Nkobi Madziba\*

Department of Political Science, University of Botswana, Botswana

Received: 20-Nov-2023, Manuscript No. AJPS-23-120608; Editor assigned: 23-Nov-2023, Pre QC No. AJPS-23-120608 (PQ); Reviewed: 07-Dec-2023, QC No. AJPS-23-120608; Revised: 22-Jan-2025, Manuscript No. AJPS-23-120608 (R); Published: 30-Jan-2025

## ABSTRACT

This paper aims to identify the sources of China's soft power in Botswana and the objectives of its soft power diplomacy in the region. The conclusion drawn is that China employs traditional sources of soft power namely culture, political values, and foreign policy in its diplomatic efforts with Botswana. Through cultural diplomacy, non-interference political values, economic development, and foreign aid, China seeks to foster a positive relationship with Botswana. This strategy is intended to attract Botswana and help China further its national and foreign policy interests. The analysis is based on secondary literature.

**Keywords:** Cultivated, Policy, Political values, Public diplomacy

## INTRODUCTION

Soft power can be cultivated through various means. According to Nye (2006), the tools or sources of soft power generally revolve around three core pillars: culture, political values, and foreign policy. Due to its intangible nature, soft power can be projected through both state and non-state actors. State-controlled avenues include domestic and foreign policies, international cooperation, diplomatic relations, public diplomacy, cultural and educational exchanges, various forms of state broadcasting, trade opportunities, economic and humanitarian aid, developmental initiatives, and peacekeeping missions. While these are commonly used tools, states may also innovate and employ additional methods (Nye, 2004).

Fundamentally, a state's sources of soft power derive from the attractiveness of its culture, political values, and foreign policies—elements that other nations may find appealing and seek to emulate (Nye, 2004: 6-7). Building on Nye's framework, Glaser, Melissa, and Murphy (2009: 10) argue that the sources of China's soft power should be understood through a lens of

“Chinese characteristics,” which refers to China's use of economic incentives, particularly aid, to engage developing countries.

Men (2007) identifies two additional sources of soft power: an economic development model and an international image, positing that these are equally significant. Similarly, Li and Worm (2010) suggest that beyond Nye's traditional three sources, China's development model and economic appeal are crucial aspects of its soft power, with culture, development model, and economic temptation being particularly influential.

Barr (2011) adds media as another dimension of soft power. Heng (2010) emphasizes that China's soft power largely derives from its cultural diplomacy and economic investments. In contrast, Otmazgin (2012) asserts that culture alone does not constitute soft power; it becomes effective only when paired with diplomatic efforts. Thus, cultural diplomacy serves as a vital component in activating a country's soft power. Given the varied interpretations of soft power, there is ongoing debate about the specific sources of China's soft power, how it is

promoted, and when it is employed. This complexity allows researchers to develop diverse definitions and perspectives on the concept (Chon and Jeong, 2008).

The central question of this paper is: what tools or sources of soft power does China utilize to attract Botswana? Following an examination of these sources, the paper will also explore the objectives behind China's soft power initiatives in Botswana, specifically what China hopes to achieve through these efforts. Addressing these questions is essential for understanding China's projection of soft power in Botswana. Prior to delving into the core arguments, the paper will briefly examine the national interests and foreign policies of both countries to highlight their connection to soft power elements.

A nation's national interests often form the foundation of its foreign policy (Art, 2004). To analyze the foreign policy of a rising power like China alongside a smaller state like Botswana, one must first consider their national interests, as these factors help explain the foreign policies of both nations.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Botswana's foreign policy and national interests

National interests are influenced by a range of internal and external factors that impact a country's relations with its citizens and other nations. Botswana's independence during the Cold War era plays a significant role in shaping its foreign policy. Newly independent countries were often expected to align with either the Western bloc, which championed liberal democracy, or the Eastern bloc, which supported communism. This alignment not only affected ideological stance but also facilitated access to essential economic aid.

Despite its liberal democratic identity, Botswana chose a non-aligned stance under its first president, Sir Seretse Khama. His leadership emphasized unity and humanitarianism in foreign policy. In a speech at the Dag Hammarskjöld Centre in Sweden in 1970, Khama articulated Botswana's desire to align with positive, universal values, highlighting its commitment to principles deemed fundamental and humane (Carter and Morgan, 1980).

President Sir Seretse Khama laid the foundation for Botswana's foreign policy during his inaugural address to the National Assembly on October 6, 1966. He emphasized that his government's approach would be guided by reason and common sense rather than by emotional considerations (Carter and Morgan, 1980: 15). He firmly stated that Botswana would reject aid from countries that had ulterior motives, asserting that any nation attempting to influence Botswana for its own benefit would be disappointed, as his government would actively counter such intentions (Carter and Morgan, 1980: 14-15).

At independence, Botswana established key guiding principles, which included democracy, development, self-reliance, and

unity. These principles served as the basis for the country's socio-economic and political activities, as well as its foreign relations. Botswana's national interests were primarily shaped by the socioeconomic challenges it faced at the time. As a democratic nation, Botswana was founded on a constitution that guaranteed individual rights and liberties (Carter and Morgan, 1980).

In his 1966 address, President Khama reiterated that Botswana's foreign policy would prioritize the interests of its people (Carter and Morgan, 1980: 15). His Vice President and later President, Sir Ketumile Masire, echoed this sentiment by stating that it was essential to recognize and collaborate with any country that could be beneficial to Botswana (Masire, 2006: 300).

At the time, Botswana lacked a military until 1977, necessitating strong alliances to counter any potential aggression from neighboring countries, particularly the apartheid regime in South Africa. The country also sought partnerships to facilitate the education of its students abroad (Kwante and Manatsha, 2016). By fostering inclusive relations, Botswana adopted a survival strategy that allowed it to pursue economic interests across ideological divides (Kwante and Manatsha, 2016). Masire emphasized that Botswana's Four National Principles Democracy, Development, Unity, and Self-Reliance placed significant focus on economic objectives in addition to political ones (Masire, 2006: 146).

Botswana's foreign policy has consistently aimed at enhancing economic security, though this has been challenged by its geographical location and resource limitations. Kaplan (2012) asserts that a state's geographical position significantly shapes its identity, sometimes more than its governing philosophies. While acknowledging these geographical constraints, he also points out that human agency can play a crucial role in shaping events. Since its independence, Botswana has had to navigate significant internal challenges, including a small population, limited economic resources, insufficient human capital, and adverse climatic conditions. These factors necessitate a strong emphasis on regional and international cooperation in Botswana's foreign policy. Being landlocked has also made the country reliant on imports (Lekoa, 2019).

As a small nation, Botswana has prioritized multilateralism to safeguard and promote its national interests on the global stage. For small states, multilateralism serves as a vital strategy for survival in international relations, as individual countries often lack the material and political resources to influence global affairs effectively. Instead, their strength lies in solidarity with other nations. This approach has provided Botswana with various political, economic, and security opportunities internationally (Lekoa, 2019).

Evans and Newnham (1998) define multilateralism as a framework for coordinating relationships between multiple states based on shared principles and objectives. In essence, it involves the voluntary participation of several countries

working together to address common challenges for mutual benefit within a structured arrangement.

In the presentation of Botswana's first National Development Plan (1968-1973), Dr. QKJ Masire, then Vice President and Minister of Finance and Development Planning, noted that nearly all proposed expenditures in the plan depended on securing funding from friendly governments and international agencies. He warned that without successful negotiations for assistance, Botswana risked remaining dependent on international charity and would lack the self-sufficiency that is integral to true independence (Masire, 1968).

### **China's foreign policy and national interests**

To understand China's foreign policy and its national interests in Botswana, it is important to consider the broader category of "small states." This raises pertinent questions about whether China employs a distinct strategy toward small states within the international system. How do these smaller nations influence China's foreign policy? These inquiries are crucial for analyzing the relationship between Botswana and China.

Botswana is classified as a small state, which constitutes a significant portion of the global system, especially those that emerged during the post-war decolonization period. Despite their limited power and capacities, small states like Botswana can still impact international relations. Each small nation possesses equal voting rights in international organizations, collectively wielding considerable influence in global affairs. Moreover, certain small states may have strategic advantages, such as proximity to larger markets or abundant natural resources, which can elevate their international significance. For instance, Botswana's location near South Africa and its role as the headquarters of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) enhance its regional importance (Li, 2013).

Exploring the dynamics of China's relationship with small states can provide valuable insights into its foreign policy and interests in Botswana.

China's foreign policy is often described as an "independent foreign policy of peace." According to Jian (1996), this approach aims to create a stable international environment that supports China's economic modernization. It is significant to note that this independent foreign policy was formally adopted in 1982 (Anshan, 2007). The primary goal of China's foreign policy since 1949 has been to restore the country's respect and dignity on the global stage (Weissmann, 2015). Generally, China avoids involvement in international controversies and prefers not to interfere in the domestic matters of other nations, except when its sovereignty is perceived to be at risk. Notable exceptions include issues related to Taiwan, Tibet, Xinjiang, and the South China Sea (Weissmann, 2015). Mlambo (2016) observes that China's approach to Africa has evolved significantly since 2000, particularly with the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). This forum

was inaugurated in Beijing with great celebration and produced two pivotal documents: The Beijing Declaration and the Sino-African Cooperation Guidelines for Socio-Economic Development, which provide a framework for cooperation (Mlambo, 2016).

Corkin (2012) notes that FOCAC has created a diplomatic platform facilitating substantial investment agreements. China aims to base its relations with African nations on principles of independence, equality, mutual respect, and non-interference in internal affairs (China's Africa Policy, 2006). As Taylor (2006) argues, China's foreign policy is constructed to limit hegemonic influence while carving out a space for its own growth. Mlambo (2016) identifies four essential components of China's foreign policy objectives in Africa: access to resources, diplomatic support from African nations, market opportunities for Chinese goods and services, and investment prospects.

Pere (2008) emphasizes that China's core interests increasingly tie it to Africa: the country requires resources for its development, markets for its expanding economy, and political alliances to support its global ambitions. Sun (2014) outlines four broad national interests that guide China's actions in Africa:

- Politically, China seeks support for its "One China" policy and alignment with its foreign policy objectives in multilateral organizations like the United Nations.
- Economically, Africa is viewed primarily as a source of natural resources and market opportunities essential for China's domestic growth.
- From a security perspective, the rise of Chinese investments in Africa has led to increased security challenges, prompting a need for cooperation with African states to protect its economic interests.
- Ideologically, China's success in non-democratic African nations indirectly bolsters its political model and counters the notion that Western democratic ideals are universal.

Having explored the foreign policies and national interests of both Botswana and China, the following sections will examine the sources of China's soft power in Botswana, guided by the research questions posed earlier.

### **Cultural diplomacy as a source of soft power**

One prominent aspect of China's efforts to enhance its soft power is the establishment of Confucius Institutes (CIs) worldwide, aimed at promoting the Chinese language and culture (Zhou & Luk, 2016). Nye (2004) emphasizes the significant role of culture in soft power, defining it as the set of values and practices that create meaning within a society. The essence of Chinese culture, rooted in Confucian philosophy, Taoism, and Buddhism, promotes values such as peace, harmony, benevolent governance, and cooperation (Mingjiang, 2008). Confucian principles, which emphasize social harmony and compassion, contribute to an attractive cultural image for China (Nye, 2012). Individuals are naturally drawn to values like kindness and respect.

Nye (2008) further asserts that certain cultural qualities such as benevolence, morality, and credibility can foster positive sentiments.

Vuving (2009) argues that culture can build mutual understanding, which enhances a positive international image, serving as a bridge between different peoples.

### **Confucius institutes as cultural emissaries**

Confucius institutes, funded by the government, play a crucial role in disseminating Chinese culture globally (Suzuki, 2009). These institutes act as "cultural emissaries," encouraging global audiences to develop a favorable view of China (Liu, 2012). This strategy is especially important given the negative portrayal of China by Western media regarding issues like its one-party system and human rights records (Li and Liu, 1996). More recently, China has faced criticism for its handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and treatment of Uighur Muslims (Cabestan, 2022; Anand, 2022). The portrayal of China as a "threat" in Western narratives necessitates the use of soft power tools to counteract these perceptions and enhance its international image (Zhang, 2017).

Wuthnow (2008) explains that through cultural exchanges facilitated by Confucius Institutes, China aims to cultivate respect and understanding among foreign actors. Over time, this can create an international environment that is more conducive to China's growth and aspirations.

Critics of Confucius Institutes (CIs) argue that these organizations often fail to enhance China's soft power, as many nations perceive them as instruments of propaganda and threats to academic freedom. Concerns about their educational integrity arise due to their close ties with the Chinese government, leading to suspicions that they may serve as tools to advance hidden political agendas (Lampton, 2012). As a result, the independence of CIs from the Chinese government is frequently called into question.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The role of Confucius institutes in Botswana**

The Confucius Institute at the University of Botswana (CIUB) was founded in 2009 through a partnership between the university and Shanghai Normal University (SNU). Its primary goal is to promote the Chinese language and culture among the Batswana, emphasizing that culture is often transmitted through language (Youngman, 2014). The CIUB organizes various cultural events and facilitates visits from delegations from Shanghai Normal University, fostering an appreciation of Chinese culture throughout Botswana. This institute plays a vital role in strengthening community relations by providing opportunities for Batswana to learn Chinese and gain insights into Chinese traditions. As such, the CIUB serves as a significant instrument for China to enhance its soft power and

improve its image in Botswana. This aligns with Zhou and Luk's assertion (2016) that since 2004, promoting an understanding of Chinese culture and language has been a key strategy in advancing China's soft power. In addition, the Botswana University of Science and Technology (BIUST) established a Confucius Institute in collaboration with Yanshan State University in 2021, further expanding the reach of Chinese language courses to students and the public. This initiative highlights China's intention to promote its culture and enhance its image in Botswana, reinforcing its soft power.

### **Political values and soft power**

A state's political values significantly influence its international perception. These values are shaped by both domestic and international politics. When a country demonstrates appealing political principles, it tends to foster positive perceptions abroad, leading to admiration and a desire for emulation (Nye, 2004). China's political values are closely intertwined with its cultural principles, characterized by cultural attractiveness and distinctive norms (Fijalkowski, 2011). China positions its diplomatic relationships on the foundation of equality, mutual benefit, and respect for the sovereignty of other nations (Chan, 2013). This sense of equality fosters a perception that China views itself as a developing country alongside African states, further enhancing its appeal (Chan, 2013). The principle of mutual benefit, rooted in Confucian teachings, is crucial to China's political values. Historically, China promotes itself as a fair and non-exploitative partner, differentiating itself from the colonial and imperial experiences faced by many African countries. By emphasizing respect, friendship, and assistance in its diplomatic dialogues, China cultivates a friendly image aimed at African nations that have historically felt marginalized (Fijalkowski, 2011).

China's non-interference stance is another vital component of its political values. According to Mingjiang (2008), China's emphasis on cultural, political, and ideological diversity is a cornerstone of its diplomatic approach. China seeks to maintain relationships with various regimes, including those regarded as pariahs by the West, by upholding a policy of non-interference in domestic affairs (Anshan, 2007). This not only legitimizes China's stance but also facilitates political alliances, insulating it from criticisms regarding its domestic human rights record, often raised by Western nations (Anshan, 2007). One aspect that endears China to developing countries, including those in Africa, is its relatively relaxed stance on human rights. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) prioritizes economic development over individual rights, contrasting sharply with Western emphasis on human rights advocacy. Since the era of President Deng Xiaoping, China has resisted Western critiques on this front, advocating that economic stability is essential for overall development (Lifeng, 2014). Deng viewed economic welfare as the primary human right and believed that stability was a prerequisite for progress. Thus, China prioritizes collective rights over individual freedoms, arguing that sovereignty and economic development take precedence (Ming, 2001).

The CCP's fundamental goal is to create favorable conditions for economic growth, maintain its political structure, ensure social stability, and protect its territorial integrity (Suettinger, 2004). In this context, human rights are seen as a developmental goal rather than a universal obligation. China's perspective fosters admiration from several African nations that share similar political climates, illustrating that economic success can be achieved outside the framework of liberal democracy (Tizzie, 2017).

China's appeal as a non-liberal democracy adds another layer to the discussion surrounding its sources of soft power. While Joseph Nye asserts that elements such as democracy, human rights, and individual liberties contribute to soft power (Nye, 2004), non-liberal states can also hold a degree of attractiveness. This is particularly evident among illiberal regimes that learn from each other how to maintain their grip on power and governance.

In alignment with many African nations excluding South Africa China does not recognize same-sex marriage (Guo, 2007). Consequently, its aid programs are largely unconditional, allowing African countries to avoid pressure to adopt pro-LGBTQ+ policies. Additionally, China's strong support for capital punishment mirrors the practices of several African nations. China remains the world's leading executioner, demonstrating its steadfast commitment to the death penalty (Qin, Li, and Jiao, 2021), without attempting to impose its values universally in Africa.

### **China's political values and its relationship with Botswana**

China's interactions with Botswana, similar to its dealings with other African nations, are framed by the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which include mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in domestic affairs, equality, and mutual benefit (Kalusopa, 2009). Over more than five decades of diplomatic relations, China has consistently respected Botswana's territorial integrity and refrained from criticizing its treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals contrasting sharply with the approaches of the USA and various European nations.

Notably, Botswana's High Court decriminalized homosexuality on June 11, 2019, ruling that related laws were unconstitutional, though the government has appealed this decision (Mokwape, 2021). Post-independence, Botswana has executed individuals primarily convicted of murder, carrying out 52 executions between 1966 and 2019 (Dube, 2019). Despite international criticism, especially from the European Union, which has urged Botswana to impose a moratorium on the death penalty, China has refrained from condemning these actions.

This non-interference aligns with China's political values and contributes to its soft power, fostering amicable relations with Botswana. Moreover, Botswana's own foreign policy emphasizes non-interference, creating a shared understanding between the two nations.

### **Foreign policy as a source of soft power**

Beyond political values, a nation's foreign policy serves as a critical source of soft power. The manner in which a country engages with others on the global stage reflects its responsibilities as a member of the international community. Compliance with international norms and laws signals respect for global authority. Nye (1990) argues that foreign policy is a more direct expression of a nation's soft power compared to cultural and political values, as it directly influences how countries are perceived internationally.

Chinese officials have recognized soft power as a strategic tool to enhance their influence and build alliances that further their foreign policy goals (Siow, 2010). The primary aim of China's foreign policy is to safeguard its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, while fostering a supportive international environment for its modernization (Ding, 2008). The guiding principles for China-Africa relations are characterized by sincerity, equality, mutual benefit, solidarity, and common development (Liang, 2012). This framework reflects China's commitment to political equality and non-interference, appealing to African nations.

China's foreign aid, encompassing donations, development assistance, debt relief, and low-interest loans, significantly bolsters its soft power across the continent. Many African nations are drawn to the financial support China provides, which includes essential infrastructure projects such as hospitals, schools, and power installations (Dollar, 2016). While aid is a common instrument in the global competition for influence (Blair, 2019), it is also integral to China's foreign policy strategy. As noted by Davies et al. (2008), aid packages typically serve specific foreign policy objectives, and China's initiatives are no exception. Shambaugh (2015) emphasizes that financial assistance is a crucial element of China's soft power arsenal, with debt cancellation also playing a role in cultivating favorable relations with African countries. Brautigam (2009) observes that China's motivations for providing aid mirror those of the USA, focusing on strategic diplomacy, commercial interests, and ideological alignment.

### **China's foreign policy and its impact on Botswana**

In the current global landscape, small states like Botswana play a critical role in the ambitions of rising powers such as China. The interconnected nature of today's challenges requires not only the leadership of larger nations but also the collaboration and support of smaller ones. The backing of these smaller nations is essential for legitimizing the policies of major powers and achieving their broader systemic goals (Boon & Charles Ardy, 2017). According to Li (2013), China's foreign policy is geared towards harnessing the collective strength of small states to help shape the international order, thus facilitating a more favorable environment for its peaceful ascent. Since the establishment of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the relationship between Botswana and China has flourished across various sectors, including trade, economic

development, cultural exchange, and international cooperation (Huanxing, 2010). Notably, in 2020, China waived the remaining balance of a US\$3 million interest-free loan originally provided for the construction of a youth center in Gaborone, highlighting its commitment to fostering Botswana's development (Nkani, 2020). As Taylor (1998) observes, China's aid strategy in Botswana has solidified its presence and bolstered diplomatic relations.

China continues to provide various forms of assistance to Botswana, as evidenced by its donations through the embassy in Gaborone. Recent contributions include:

- **2020:** Medical supplies (value unspecified) to the Ministry of Health and Wellness.
- **2023:** Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and reproductive health products (value unspecified) to the Ministry of Health and Wellness.
- **2023:** 3,000 blankets donated by the Charity Association of Chinese in Botswana to the Office of the President.

As a small nation, Botswana has historically relied on aid from donor agencies and friendly governments to support its development. Consequently, nations that extend assistance tend to maintain their attractiveness to Botswana (Lekoa, 2019).

### **Economic development as a source of soft power**

Beyond the traditional pillars of foreign policy, culture, and political values, economic development can also serve as a form of soft power. While economic power can sometimes translate into hard power through sanctions or dominance, it can also manifest in softer forms that promote a positive image of success worth emulating. China's impressive economic growth since the late 1970's positions it as a strong source of soft power (Wang and Lu, 2008). Xi and Worm (2010) note that China's economic success offers valuable lessons to other developing nations still grappling with effective development strategies.

China's economic narrative resonates with various countries, particularly those in Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America, where there is interest in its model of development that achieves significant economic growth without the extensive liberal political reforms often promoted by Western nations (Jiang, 2010). The 2008 financial crisis further enhanced China's image, as it was one of the first countries to recover, boosting its confidence as a global player (Jiang, 2010).

### **China's economic engagement with Botswana**

Following the initiation of its modernization efforts in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping, China sought to strengthen trade relations with Botswana. This effort was first signaled by a visit from Botswana's then Vice-President Quett Masire to Beijing in 1980, where discussions centered on sharing experiences in economic development (Xinhua, June 24, 1980). As one of Africa's notable economic success stories, Botswana was

viewed as a valuable model for China, leading to subsequent delegations aimed at enhancing agricultural and economic collaboration (Xinhua, December 12, 1980).

China admired Botswana's development principles, particularly its focus on democracy, self-reliance, and unity, which aligned with China's aspirations (Xinhua, September 30, 1981). This sentiment was echoed by Xi Zhongxun, who highlighted the potential benefits of learning from Botswana's development strategies (Xinhua, June 9, 1985). Botswana's second President, Sir Ketumile Masire, noted the mutual business potential, stating that the Chinese were "the type of people we can do business with" (Daily News, Gaborone, September 16, 1991).

Despite the somewhat modest scale of trade, China's ongoing commercial interests in Botswana serve to strengthen bilateral relations, reinforcing its role as a strategic partner in the region (Taylor, 1998).

### **Economic engagement between china and Botswana**

Motivated by admiration for China's remarkable economic growth, the Government of Botswana has implemented several measures to liberalize various sectors of its economy to attract foreign investment, particularly from Chinese enterprises (Chen, 2009). Recognizing the proficiency of Chinese firms, especially in construction, Botswana sought their expertise to bolster its infrastructure development, drawing on their successful track record in building China's infrastructure.

Under the strategic initiative known as 'Going Global,' the Chinese government actively promotes foreign investments by its firms, supported by favorable financial mechanisms such as concessional loans. As a result, Chinese companies have become increasingly involved in underdeveloped regions like Botswana, where substantial investment opportunities exist. With domestic markets becoming saturated, Chinese companies are increasingly seeking new avenues for growth, with Botswana emerging as a viable option (Chen, 2009). These companies often employ low-profit-margin strategies, allowing them to outbid local competitors by significantly lowering their project bids. Furthermore, as the world's manufacturing hub, China enables its construction firms to import materials and machinery at competitive prices, enhancing their appeal in Botswana's market.

China's expansion into Botswana aligns with its broader objective of generating market opportunities globally, particularly in Africa, to sustain its domestic economic growth (Sun, 2014). Sekakela (2016) notes that China has become Botswana's fastest-growing trading partner, ranking as the 12th largest export market and the third-largest source of imports. The trade relationship is a key factor driving the bilateral ties between the two nations. Hen (2009) emphasizes that infrastructure development has been a priority for the Botswana government since independence, essential for connecting its vast territories and supporting a growing population. This need has created a conducive environment for Chinese firms, which

provide competitive bids compared to traditional construction companies, leading Botswana to save approximately 25% to 33% on infrastructure projects (Chen, 2009).

Notably, there are around 16 Chinese State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) and an estimated 10-20 privately-owned Chinese construction companies actively operating in Botswana (Chen, 2009). For example, the China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) initially came to build the Chinese Embassy but has since secured additional contracts in the country. As Botswana prioritizes infrastructure development to attract foreign direct investment and boost trade, its foreign policy aligns closely with China's interests.

### **China's strategic objectives in Botswana**

This section explores the objectives underlying China's soft power strategy in Botswana. China's diplomatic engagements are largely driven by its national interests. Mlambo (2016) identifies four critical foreign policy interests that help explain China's approach in Africa, which can also be applied to Botswana: access to raw materials and natural resources, political support both domestically and internationally, markets for its finished goods, and opportunities for investment by Chinese businesses.

In the context of Botswana, China's first soft power objective is political: securing Botswana's backing for its 'One China Policy' and minimizing the influence of Taiwan (Shirk, 2007). Economically, China aims to utilize Botswana as a base for sourcing raw materials while also seeking a market for its finished goods and construction services. Yangyong (2008) highlights that by the early 2000s, China had nearly exhausted its domestic energy and resource reserves, prompting a critical need for external resources to sustain its economic growth. Given Africa's vast, untapped reserves, China views the continent as a key supplier of essential materials.

Additionally, China seeks Botswana's support in international organizations. Thrall (2015) notes that China aspires to enhance its global influence and seeks the backing of African nations in international forums like the UN and the WTO, contributing to its ambition to cultivate a robust global leadership image.

### **Political objectives: China's pursuit of support for its one china policy in Botswana**

China's engagement with Botswana through soft power aims to secure the latter's endorsement of the One China Policy. By leveraging its influence through foreign aid, economic partnerships, and cultural diplomacy, China expects Botswana to distance itself from Taiwan and other entities that challenge its territorial integrity, such as Tibet.

This diplomatic relationship faced a significant strain when Botswana issued a visa to the Dalai Lama, which China viewed as a betrayal of its One China Policy (Dintsi, 2019). Given

China's substantial investment in aid and development assistance to Botswana, this decision was perceived as a serious misstep by a nation that had been a consistent benefactor.

### **Economic objectives: China's resource needs and trade relations with Botswana**

China's economic ambitions necessitate access to Botswana's rich natural resources, particularly in light of its growing demand for raw materials. Botswana, renowned for its diamond production, plays a critical role in China's resource strategy. According to Sekakela (2014), between 2000 and 2012, Botswana's exports to China primarily comprised raw materials, including non-industrial diamonds, copper, and nickel. Notably, since 2004, China has accounted for 92% of Botswana's non-industrial diamond exports, highlighting the interdependence of their economies as China's diamond-cutting and polishing industry thrives on these imports.

The bilateral trade dynamic is evident: as of May 2021, Botswana's exports to China reached approximately US\$95.55 million, predominantly consisting of raw materials. This relationship illustrates how China utilizes its soft power to secure economic objectives, ensuring a steady supply of essential resources for its industries.

### **Market access: Chinese goods and construction investments in Botswana**

Botswana represents a burgeoning market for Chinese finished products, particularly in light of the significant influx of Chinese entrepreneurs establishing retail businesses in the country (Youngman, 2017). This migration has sparked some local resentment as Chinese shops have begun to dominate certain market sectors (Kalusopa, 2009). By May 2022, China's exports to Botswana were valued at US\$221.34 million, primarily consisting of finished goods.

In 2018, bilateral trade between the two countries reached US\$296 million, with Chinese investment in Botswana recorded at US\$23.24 million. Although these figures are modest compared to China's broader investments in Africa, Botswana's liberal economic policies such as a reduced corporate tax rate of 15% for foreign factories make it an attractive destination for Chinese investment. Additionally, Botswana seeks to diversify its exports to China, aiming to include products like beef and other agricultural goods (Wang, 2019).

Chinese construction firms are also capitalizing on Botswana's infrastructure needs. Major tenders have been awarded to Chinese companies for significant projects, such as road refurbishments in Gaborone. Despite criticisms regarding the limited creation of local jobs due to the importation of Chinese labor, it is worth noting that Chinese companies created over 20,000 jobs for Botswana citizens in 2010 (Yuanhang, 2010).

## International support: Leveraging soft power for diplomatic alliances

China strategically utilizes its soft power to cultivate support among African nations at international forums. Nye (2004) suggests that China should leverage its membership in global organizations to promote rules that align with its interests. Mohan and Power (2008) point out that China seeks backing from allies within the UN General Assembly, Security Council, and Human Rights Council.

With 54 member states, Africa holds significant voting power in the UN, which China recognizes as critical to advancing its agenda. Historical instances, such as the 1972 UN vote that favored China's permanent membership in the Security Council, underscore the importance of African support in achieving its diplomatic goals (Sun, 2014). Giry (2004) argues that China is strategically "cultivating" relationships with African leaders to strengthen its global soft power.

In conclusion, China's multifaceted approach in Botswana reflects its broader strategy of securing political support, accessing vital resources, and expanding its market reach, all while fostering a network of alliances that bolster its influence on the international stage.

In alignment with its belief that economic growth should take precedence over human rights, China sponsored a resolution at the UN on June 20, 2017, titled "Promoting Development over Human Rights." This resolution called on nations to recognize how development contributes to the enjoyment of human rights and stressed the importance of state-to-state cooperation for sustainable and inclusive growth. It argued that development is a critical pathway to achieving human rights and urged countries to actively foster partnerships that lead to mutual benefits and shared progress.

China's persuasive soft power was evident as Botswana, along with several other African nations including Burundi, Congo-Brazzaville, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South

Africa, Rwanda, and Tunisia voted in favor of this resolution (UN General Assembly, September 26, 2017). This voting pattern highlights China's strategic objectives in its soft power initiatives. By providing aid, purchasing raw materials from Botswana, treating the country as an equal partner, and promoting cultural exchanges, China seeks Botswana's backing in international organizations like the UN and the Human Rights Council. This dynamic is supported by the findings of Flores-Maci'as and Kreps (2013), who argue that countries in Latin America and Africa are more inclined to support China in human rights-related votes as their trade relations with China grow stronger.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the sources of China's soft power in Botswana and the objectives underpinning its diplomatic efforts. It is evident that China employs traditional elements of soft

power such as cultural influence, political values, and foreign policy—to engage with Botswana. Through cultural diplomacy, a commitment to non-interference, and economic development initiatives tied to foreign aid, China aims to build a strong rapport with Botswana. The overarching goal is to secure Botswana's support for its national interests, particularly the One China Policy, while also gaining backing at international forums where discussions of China's human rights record are prevalent.

Conversely, Botswana has generally been receptive to China's soft power approach, recognizing potential benefits from this partnership. Overall, this relationship exemplifies the intricate interplay of diplomacy, economic interests, and cultural exchange in shaping international relations.

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