

# Chapter 13

## The Confluence of Soft Power Diplomacy and Coalition Politics: A Comparative Analysis of China's Strategies in Africa and the Middle East

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### ABSTRACT

*China's growing influence through soft power diplomacy is a parallel storyline to Africa's current experience with coalition politics and electoral democracy, especially in the Middle East and East Asia. This chapter examines how China employs coalition politics to enhance its larger diplomatic efforts in Africa with the goal of connecting these two crucial storylines. This chapter uses examples from the Middle East and East Asia to explore the complexities of coalition governments in Africa and how they might help or hurt China's soft power ambitions. This study, which takes an interdisciplinary approach, will shed new light on the complex dynamics at play when coalitions of politicians, democratic governments, and foreign governments interact. The chapter finishes with concrete suggestions for policymakers, stressing the importance of a comprehensive knowledge of these overlapping domains for the development of effective and democratic approaches to government in Africa. Policymakers, academics, and practitioners in the fields of politics, international relations, development studies, and sociology are among the many who will find value in this chapter.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades, China has established itself as a major actor on the international stage, contributing to the development of international politics, economy, and culture (Falkner, 2016). Modern China has shown a subtle yet assertive stance in foreign affairs, emerging from a past marked by revolutions, reforms, and a period of isolation (Garver, 2015). Its contacts with Africa and the Middle East, two regions of strategic importance in terms of resources, trade, and geopolitics, have been particularly indicative of this policy. China's ascension to global power status, propelled by its economic and diplomatic capabilities, provides an interesting context against which to analyze its strategic moves in these areas.

The countries of Africa and the Middle East are as varied as their rich tapestry, and each faces its own set of difficulties and possibilities. Election democracy and long-term economic growth in Africa have been hampered by coalition politics (Le Van, 2011). These coalitions, whose durability and efficacy can vary widely, provide a testing ground for democratic administration but complicate international diplomacy. Similarly, the Middle East, which is widely regarded as a complex maze of religion, ethnicity, and politics, has emerged as a difficult but indispensable ally in international affairs (Jackson, 2013). The economic, social, and political policies, as well as the use of soft power, that make up China's engagement with these areas go beyond simple trade agreements.

Many of China's soft power projects in Africa have focused on fostering win-win cooperation models, fostering cultural interchange, and investing heavily in infrastructure and human development (Zreik, 2021a). China's financial support for infrastructure projects in Africa's key development areas—including transportation, electricity, and education—has been a game-changer (Rolland, 2017). China has taken a measured, nuanced approach to the Middle East, navigating the region's political intricacies in order to build economic partnerships, with an emphasis on the region's abundant oil resources (Kalantzakos, 2017). These initiatives are typically carried out in tandem with Western involvement, giving these regions new avenues for collaboration and throwing a wrench into the traditional East vs. West storyline.

This means that the complexities of local political environments, such as coalition politics, are essential to comprehending China's influence in Africa and the Middle East. This chapter's goal is to clarify this interface by providing an interdisciplinary understanding of the entangled nature of these linkages. Connecting these two important narratives, and learning how China uses coalition politics to bolster its bigger diplomatic efforts in Africa and the Middle East, will aid policymakers in developing successful and democratic responses to these troubled regions. This research is an important contribution to the fields of international relations, development studies, and political sociology, and should be read by academics, professionals, and policymakers in these areas.

The chapter's discussion of these topics not only adds to our knowledge of China's place in global politics, but also sheds light on the fascinating relationship between soft power diplomacy and coalition building. As China continues to increase its worldwide presence through a carefully calibrated blend of hard and soft power, this perspective allows the reader to grasp the multifaceted interactions and intricate dynamics at play.

China's soft power and Africa's coalition politics are generally discussed separately in academic and policy debates. There has been a noticeable lack of research into the intersection of China's soft power initiatives and the rise of coalition politics as a significant feature in Africa's governance landscape, despite the fact that there is a growing body of literature devoted to understanding the nuances of China's global reach through these initiatives. This split-brain thinking ignores the mutually beneficial

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