

NATION BRANDING OF A COUNTRY AS A SOFT POWER INSTRUMENT IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE: THE EXAMPLE OF CHINA

Purpose. The aim of this study is to explore the nation branding as an instrument of soft power, using the case of China, and to assess its impact on international trade in the context of rivalry with the United States.

Methods. The research methodology combines a review of theoretical research on soft power, nation branding, and hegemonic stability theories with comparative statistical analysis. The empirical study uses a regression model (OLS) based on data from five leading economies (the United States, China, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom) for the period 2020–2024. The model uses export performance as the dependent variable, and GDP, economic openness index, and nation branding value as exogenous variables, including dummy variables to distinguish between the effects for China and the United States.

Results. In contrast to the United States, which acts as an established hegemon defending the status quo, China is a rising challenger whose strategy is aimed at active expansion and reformatting international regimes. The analysis found that China's strategic strengthening of its nation branding is based on four vectors: economic (BRI and RCEP), cultural (Confucius Institute network), technological (Huawei, TikTok, Alibaba), and diplomatic. Although the positive impact of brand value on exports was found near the mean, the study found a nonlinear relationship characterized by a decrease in marginal profitability, especially for the US. For China, the marginal brand effect remains lower than in the reference group, as its export dominance is currently driven by production efficiency and price factors rather than brand equity.

Conclusions. The hypothesis that China's nation branding impact is statistically more significant than that of the US was not empirically confirmed. However, the study highlights the paradox of China's brand in global trade: while its brand value is currently secondary to its manufacturing capabilities, its importance is projected to grow as the PRC moves into high-tech niches and increases value-added exports. Ultimately, the nation branding serves as an important operational mechanism for integrating soft power into global trade.

Key words: international economy, intangible assets, brand value, competitiveness, country of origin effect, global leadership, geoeconomics, exports, trade openness.

JEL Classification: F10, F14, M31, O53, P45.

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Introduction. The modern international economic system is undergoing a large-scale transformation, in which the role of intangible factors of influence of states on international processes is increasing. Alongside traditional instruments of economic and political power, soft power is becoming increasingly important, one of the main manifestations of which is the nation branding. It forms the image of the country, the level of trust in its institutions and products, and affects the position of the state in international trade. The relevance of the study is due to the intensification of global competition between leading economies, in particular the USA and the People's Republic of China (PRC). Despite the dominance of material factors, such as production volumes and financial resources, the ability of the state to form a positive image and ensure the favour of international partners is becoming increasingly important. A significant number of scholars have paid attention to the concepts of institutional leadership in the world economy (J. Nye, C. Kindleberger, R. Gilpin, R. Keohane and others), but what has often been overlooked by researchers is the analysis of the indirect influence that both countries have on the formation of the world economic order. In this context, China's nation branding acts as an important tool for supporting its export positions in world markets.

The aim of the study is to reveal the country's nation branding using the example of China as an instrument of soft power and to

assess its impact on international trade in the context of rivalry with the USA. To achieve this goal, the following tasks have been defined:

- analyse the theoretical foundations of the concepts of soft power, nation branding and hegemonic stability;
- systematize the strategic directions of branding activity of the PRC;
- build a regression model of the influence of the brand on export indicators;
- assess the effects for China and developed economies.

The research methodology combines an analytical review of the theoretical literature, a comparative analysis of statistical series and OLS regression on panel data of the five leading economies of the world for 2020–2024.

Literature review. The theoretical basis of the study is three interrelated approaches, the first of which is the concept of soft power, introduced by the American political scientist Joseph Nye in 1990 (Rothman, 2011). The author defines soft power as the ability of a state to achieve desired outcomes through attraction rather than coercion or payments. Its main sources include the attractiveness of a country's culture, its political values when it lives up to them, and its foreign policies when they are seen as legitimate and morally authoritative (Nye, 1990, p. 166; Rothman, 2011). Further research has expanded this notion, with Akdağ (2022) refining the concept for China, arguing that China's soft power is exercised through cultural diplomacy, economic attractiveness, and participation in shaping international norms. At the same time, China's soft power instruments (Confucius Institutes, state-owned media) have faced increasing scepticism in host countries. The concept of "Sharp Power" (Walker & Ludwig, 2023) describes a manipulative authoritarian influence distinct from soft and hard power. Examples of Confucius Institute closures in Australia, Sweden, and Canada illustrate the regional heterogeneity of Chinese soft power effectiveness.

The second approach is the theory of nation branding, because a brand is a narrower concept that lies within the framework of soft power and acts as its tool. According to the interpretation of Kapferer (2008), there are two main paradigms in the context of defining a brand, where the first is focused on external actors and their relationships with the brand, and the second is aimed at obtaining a result in monetary terms, that is, the brand acts as an intangible asset. The researcher also distinguishes between micro- and macro-levels of the brand, where at the micro-level the brand provides additional value to the goods and services of specific enterprises; at the macro-level it forms a holistic image of the state in the global environment (Kapferer, 2008). Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism further operationalizes this framework, structuring national image through six facets: physique, personality, culture, relationship, reflection, and self-image, enabling systematic nation brand analysis. The connecting link between these levels is the Country of Origin Effect (COE), which describes the influence of the country of origin on consumer evaluations of a product.

The third approach is the theory of hegemonic stability, which appears to be an important factor at the macro level that determines the world order, and can also explain the positions of power of nation brands of China and the USA today. Together with the theory of international regime, it has been developed over a long period of time by representatives in international political economy, in particular C. Kindleberger (1973), R. Gilpin (1981) and R. Keohane (1984) (Keohane, 2020). The theory of hegemony has taken on different meanings within several conceptions. From a realist perspective (Gilpin, 1981, pp. 144–145), hegemony appears as a situation in which the world order is created by a dominant power and international regimes depend on its existence. Keohane challenged hegemonic stability theory through neoliberal institutionalism, arguing that international regimes can persist even after hegemony declines. He distinguishes weak regimes, where rules are interpreted differently by participants, from strong ones, which ensure predictable behaviour based on shared standards. (Keohane, 2020). According to these two types, power in an international regime will be fragmented or concentrated, with different consequences, with fragmentation leading to the fragmentation of the international regime, while concentration leading to stability. According to hegemonic stability theory, hegemons create strong international regimes by providing public goods (Keohane, 2020). When hegemonic and smaller states cooperate, the hegemon shapes the international environment by linking state capabilities with behaviour through power as a resource (Keohane, 2020). Gramsci's "ideological hegemony" expands this beyond coercion, incorporating cultural leadership, education, and values (Akdağ, 2022, p. 207; Keohane, 1984, pp. 32–33). Combining this theory with the concept of soft power allows us to consider the nation branding as a tool for indirect influence on international trade.

The synthesis of the three approaches considered forms an analytical framework where the nation branding appears as an operational mechanism through which the state accumulates and projects soft power in the field of international trade (Table 1). The logic of this mechanism is that the cultural attractiveness of a state and the legitimacy of its foreign policy form positive associations with the producing country, which translate into price premiums for export goods, reduced transaction costs in trade relations, and ultimately into increased trade volumes.

Table 1

Integrating the concepts of soft power, nation branding, and hegemonic stability into international trade

Theoretical approach	Concept	Mechanism	Significance for international trade
The concept of “soft power”	Cultural attractiveness, foreign policy values, legitimacy of international policy, diplomatic and cultural activity	Strengthening sympathy for the country and the attractiveness of culture, values, and politics instead of using harsh coercion	Expanding trade ties, increasing exports, facilitating access to markets
Nation branding	Brand as an intangible asset, reputational capital of the state (macro level), effect of the country of origin on prices	Creating added value for goods, reducing information asymmetry	Increasing export competitiveness, increasing export margins
Hegemonic stability theory	Impact on international trade regimes, hegemonic legitimacy, stability of world order.	Institutional support for the stability of the international system	Establishing and protecting global trade rules and regimes, strengthening leadership positions in global value chains

Source: created by the authors

How a country is perceived in the world directly affects its trade through the Country of Origin Effect, which describes the influence of a producing country’s reputation on the perception of the quality and price of its goods. A positive COE (e.g., “Made in Japan” or “Made in Germany”) allows manufacturers in the respective countries to receive a price premium and build consumer loyalty. For China, the COE remains mostly neutral or slightly negative in the premium goods segment, although in certain technological niches (e.g., smartphones, solar panels, telecommunications equipment) the situation is gradually changing for the better.

Geoeconomic dimension of soft power. The transition from an industrial to an information economy has modified the structure of competitive advantages in the global market. To visualize this mechanism, we have developed a conceptual diagram (Figure 1).

As illustrated in Figure 1, a country’s soft power translates into tangible trade advantages through a four-level mechanism. At the initial state institutional level, the government generates the “raw material” of its soft power through concrete actions, such as establishing favourable legislation, funding cultural diplomacy, and advancing free trade agreements. Moving to the nation branding level, these disparate efforts are consolidated into a targeted marketing strategy via export agencies and global PR campaigns, transforming abstract influence into a measurable economic asset. Once formalized at the market level, this strong national brand acts as a global quality mark that inspires institutional trust among foreign buyers and mitigates transaction barriers. Finally, at the performance level, this enhanced trust increases the elasticity of foreign demand, ultimately driving the steady expansion of the country’s macroeconomic export flows.

Within the competition between Beijing and Washington, their approaches to the use of soft power differ radically, which is due to the different stages of the life cycle of their global hegemony (Table 2).

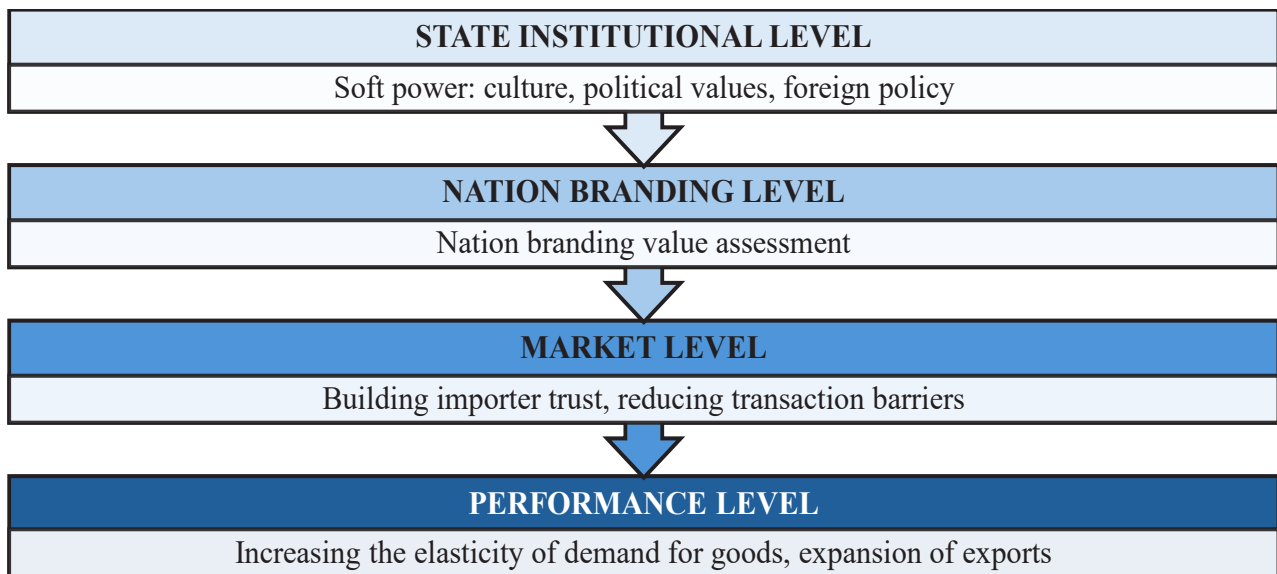


Fig. 1. The mechanism of influence of the nation branding on macroeconomic export flows

Source: created by the authors

Table 2

Comparison of soft power strategies of the USA and the PRC

Criterion	United States of America	People's Republic of China
Geoeconomic status	Established hegemon (protecting the status quo, supporting the liberal trade order)	A growing contender (partial revisionism, desire to reformat regimes)
The main vector of the country's brand	Innovation, technological leadership, cultural globalization, the dollar as a reserve currency	Production efficiency, infrastructure projects, state capitalism
Soft power tools	Hollywood, universities, international institutions, financial system	Belt and Road Initiative, public investment, production chains
Stage of soft power development	Saturation (the effect of diminishing marginal returns to a brand)	Active expansion (increasing marginal branding efficiency)
International trade integration model	Support for premium segments and high-tech exports	Scaling presence in medium and low-tech segments with a gradual transition to high-tech ones
Function in international trade	Maintaining leadership in global value chains	Expanding participation in global value chains and diversifying markets
Type of impact on trade regimes	Institutional control through international organizations and standards	Parallel creation of alternative institutions and financial mechanisms
Expected long-term effect	Maintaining stability, but increasing competition	Strengthening positions and gradual shift of centres of trade influence

Source: created by the authors

A comparative analysis of soft power strategies indicates an asymmetry in their marginal effectiveness at different stages of the hegemonic cycle. While the United States is characterized by a saturation effect and a decline in the marginal returns to branding in global trade, China observes increasing returns from the integration of branding with production and infrastructure expansion.

China's nation branding strategy is implemented in four interconnected directions (Figure 2), encompassing macroeconomic expansion through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), as well as growing diplomatic influence in international institutions. At the same time, China's cultural and technological presence is being scaled up through a network of Confucius Institutes, global media (CGTN, Xinhua), and powerful digital ecosystems of corporations such as Huawei, TikTok, and Alibaba.

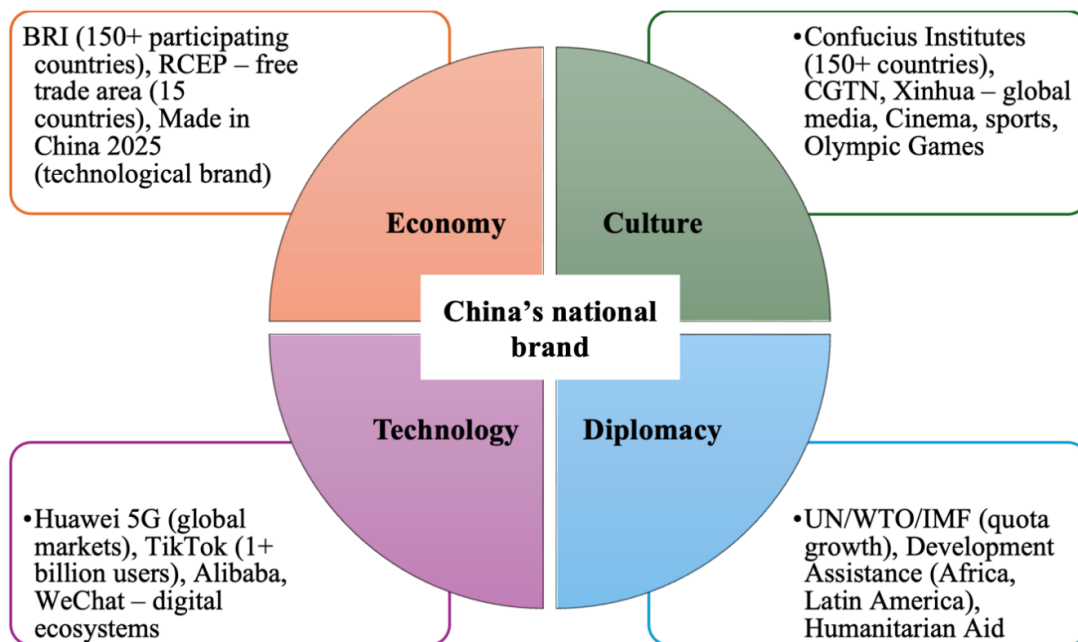


Fig. 2. Strategic directions for strengthening China's nation branding

Source: created by the authors

Assessment of the impact of a nation branding on world trade indicators. Currently, there are several main examples of assessing the nation branding of a state and its leadership on the world stage, which are expressed in the Nation Brand Value, Country Brand Index and the State Acceptance Research Methodology developed by CFC Consulting (Varibusova, 2018, pp. 6–7). In this work, Nation Brand Value is considered as the main indicator of the influence on the state's activities in international trade.

In order to empirically test the role of the nation branding in international trade, we put forward a hypothesis, namely:

H_0 : *The impact of the nation branding as an element of soft power on China's export performance is statistically more significant than the corresponding impact of the US nation branding.*

In accordance with this hypothesis, a macroeconomic model was constructed, where the endogenous variable is the export indicator, and the exogenous variables are the GDP level, the economic openness index, and the Brand Value indicator, which is published annually by Brand Finance as part of an international study of nation branding perception (Brand Finance, n.d.).

Separately, dummy variables were introduced that, in interaction with the nation branding index, help to identify differences in the impact of soft power on the export performance of these countries compared to other sample states. A non-linear model was previously formed in the following form:

$$y = a_0 + a_1 \times x_1 + a_2 \times x_2 + a_3 \times x_3 + a_4 \times x_4 + a_5 \times x_5 + a_6 \times x_6,$$

where in addition to the coefficients of the model ($a_0, a_1, a_2, a_3, a_4, a_5, a_6$) there are also:

y – dependent variable, country's export indicator (billion USD);

x_1 – indicator of the value of the nation branding as an element of the country's soft power (billion USD) (its linear impact on the relationship with the country's export volumes);

x_2 – indicator of the value of the nation branding as an element of the country's soft power (billion USD) (its nonlinear impact on the relationship with the country's export volumes);

x_3 – an indicator of the combination of the value of the nation branding with the dummy variable of China, which demonstrates how the brand impact for China differs from the base effect of the nation branding (billion USD);

x_4 – an indicator of the combination of the value of the nation branding with the dummy variable of the USA, which demonstrates how much the impact of the brand on exports for the States differs from the base effect of the nation branding (billions USD);

x_5 – GDP level (billion USD);

x_6 – country's economic openness index (%).

The sample included the following countries: China and the USA as the main objects of the study, as well as Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom as the reference group (Table 3). The time period includes the period from 2020 to 2024, as complete data for 2025 for individual indicators was not published at the time of the study.

Table 3

Panel data for econometric modelling, 2020-2024

Country	Year	Export indicator, billion USD	Country brand value, billion USD	GDP, billion USD	Country openness index, %	Dummy variable (China)	Dummy variable (USA)
USA	2020	1370,00	23738,34	21400,00	23,08	0	1
	2021	1680,00	24811,19	23700,00	25,21	0	1
	2022	1980,00	26472,20	26000,00	26,89	0	1
	2023	1900,00	30309,11	27700,00	24,90	0	1
	2024	2063,80	32271,14	29200,00	24,89	0	1
China	2020	2660,00	18764,30	15000,00	34,04	1	0
	2021	3350,00	19851,30	18200,00	36,52	1	0
	2022	3640,00	21528,24	18300,00	37,44	1	0
	2023	3410,00	23085,11	18300,00	36,11	1	0
	2024	3576,54	19960,02	18700,00	37,20	1	0
Germany	2020	1340,00	3812,94	3940,00	72,99	0	0
	2021	1570,00	4335,17	4350,00	80,16	0	0
	2022	1600,00	4503,87	4160,00	89,06	0	0
	2023	1620,00	5075,97	4530,00	82,80	0	0
	2024	1630,71	4985,35	4660,00	80,34	0	0
Japan	2020	659,00	4261,27	5050,00	31,34	0	0
	2021	775,00	4424,45	5040,00	36,74	0	0
	2022	778,00	4284,35	4260,00	46,81	0	0
	2023	737,00	4448,78	4210,00	45,15	0	0
	2024	707,39	4406,09	4030,00	45,20	0	0
Great Britain	2020	390,00	3314,56	2700,00	58,78	0	0
	2021	428,00	3729,49	3140,00	58,58	0	0
	2022	461,00	4115,33	3110,00	68,88	0	0
	2023	452,00	4796,83	3370,00	65,03	0	0
	2024	508,69	4036,79	3640,00	62,41	0	0

Source: created by the authors based on (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, n.d.a-e; TheGlobalEconomy.com, n.d. a-e; TRADING ECONOMICS, n.d. a-e)

Table 3 shows the main input data used in building the model. Before conducting regression analysis, they required several modifications, so at the first stage, export indicators, brand value, and GDP level were logarithmized, which allowed smoothing out data asymmetry and interpreting the results in relative values. Separately, the logarithmic brand value variable was centred by subtracting the mean, which allowed it to be interpreted as a deviation from the mean in the sample, and this further allowed us to estimate the linear effect of the brand on exports and answer the question “what happens to a country’s export activity when the nation branding occupies a stronger position.” To consider the possible nonlinear effect of the influence of brand value on the dependent variable, the square of the cantered logarithmic variable was included in the model. The processed data are collected in Table 4.

Table 4

Logarithmic transformations of variables for model

Country	Year	ln (y)	ln (x1)_c	(ln (x1)_c)^2	ln (x1) * Dummy variable (China)	ln (x1) * Dummy variable (USA)	ln (x4)	Country openness index, %
USA	2020	7,22	1,12	1,26	0,00	10,07	9,97	23,08
	2021	7,43	1,16	1,36	0,00	10,12	10,07	25,21
	2022	7,59	1,23	1,51	0,00	10,18	10,17	26,89
	2023	7,55	1,37	1,86	0,00	10,32	10,23	24,90
	2024	7,63	1,43	2,04	0,00	10,38	10,28	24,89
China	2020	7,89	0,89	0,78	9,84	0,00	9,62	34,04
	2021	8,12	0,94	0,89	9,90	0,00	9,81	36,52
	2022	8,20	1,02	1,05	9,98	0,00	9,81	37,44
	2023	8,13	1,09	1,19	10,05	0,00	9,81	36,11
	2024	8,18	-1,36	1,84	7,60	0,00	9,84	37,20
Germany	2020	7,20	-0,71	0,50	0,00	0,00	8,28	72,99
	2021	7,36	-0,58	0,34	0,00	0,00	8,38	80,16
	2022	7,38	-0,54	0,29	0,00	0,00	8,33	89,06
	2023	7,39	-0,42	0,18	0,00	0,00	8,42	82,80
	2024	7,40	-0,44	0,19	0,00	0,00	8,45	80,34
Japan	2020	6,49	-0,60	0,36	0,00	0,00	8,53	31,34
	2021	6,65	-0,56	0,31	0,00	0,00	8,53	36,74
	2022	6,66	-0,59	0,35	0,00	0,00	8,36	46,81
	2023	6,60	-0,55	0,31	0,00	0,00	8,35	45,15
	2024	6,56	-0,56	0,32	0,00	0,00	8,30	45,20
Great Britain	2020	5,97	-0,85	0,72	0,00	0,00	7,90	58,78
	2021	6,06	-0,73	0,53	0,00	0,00	8,05	58,58
	2022	6,13	-0,63	0,40	0,00	0,00	8,04	68,88
	2023	6,11	-0,48	0,23	0,00	0,00	8,12	65,03
	2024	6,23	-0,65	0,42	0,00	0,00	8,20	62,41

Source: calculated by the authors based on (The Observatory of Economic Complexity, n.d.a-e; TheGlobalEconomy.com, n.d. a-e; TRADING ECONOMICS, n.d. a-e)

During the work, the following model was obtained:

$$\ln(y) = -11,28 + 0,05 \times \ln(x_1) - 0,17 \times \ln(x_2) - 0,11 \times (x_3) - 0,21 \times (x_4) + 2,03 \times \ln(x_5) - 0,02 \times (x_6) + \varepsilon,$$

where:

y – export indicator;

x_1 – a centred indicator of the value of the nation branding, which demonstrates a linear relationship between the brand and the country's export volumes;

x_2 – centred squared nation branding value indicator, demonstrating the nonlinear relationship between the brand and the country's export volumes;

x_3 – an indicator that demonstrates how similar the impact of China's nation branding on its export capacity is to the reference group;

x_4 – an indicator that demonstrates how similar the impact of the US nation branding on its export capacity is to that of a reference group;

x_5 – GDP level of countries;

x_6 – country's economic openness index.

The results of the econometric evaluation of the proposed model confirm its high explanatory power and statistical reliability, which is reflected in the summary regression indicators (Table 5).

Table 5

General statistical characteristics of the regression model

Indicator	Value
Multiple R	0,9806
R Square	0,9616
Adjusted R Square	0,9487
Standard Error	0,1639
Observations	25

Source: calculated by the authors

High values of multiple correlation and determination coefficients confirm the general adequacy of the constructed model, which allows us to proceed to a detailed analysis of the influence of each individual variable (Table 6).

Table 6

Estimation of regression model parameters

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	P-value
Intercept	-11,2758	1,7361	$4,1572 \times 10^{-6}$
X Variable 1	0,0486	0,1268	0,7056
X Variable 2	-0,1698	0,1849	0,3704
X Variable 3	-0,1087	0,0454	0,0276
X Variable 4	-0,2087	0,0592	0,0024
X Variable 5	2,0314	0,2083	$1,3124 \times 10^{-8}$
X Variable 6	0,0198	0,0025	$2,7445 \times 10^{-7}$

Source: calculated by the authors

The main results show that the model is statistically significant and characterized by high explanatory power, the coefficient of determination indicates the explanation of about 95% of the variation in export indicators. A statistically significant positive effect of the value of the nation branding on export volumes was obtained near the average level of the variable, which confirms the presence of a positive impact of soft power on the state's trade positions. At the same time, the square of the centred logarithm of the brand value received a negative coefficient and showed low statistical significance, which, in combination with a positive linear component, may indicate the nonlinear nature of the relationship between the strength of the nation branding and exports. From the statistical data it is noticeable that when a nation branding shows stable growth from year to year, the export activity of the state is more influenced by external factors of the international environment, leaving room for error in this model, therefore it is not excluded that there is a certain threshold of brand value, after which the direct connection with the country's export capacity disappears. Describing the synthesis of brand value with fixed variables of China and the USA, it can be noted that for China the marginal effect of the brand is smaller compared to the reference group, while for the USA the additional growth of the strength of the nation branding is accompanied by a decreasing return in exports. Control variables, including GDP and the trade openness index, demonstrate the expected positive and statistically significant effect on exports. The results indicate the presence of a nonlinear effect of the nation branding on export performance and highlight the difference in the role of soft power for countries with different levels of international visibility.

The hypothesis that the impact of the nation branding on China's export performance is statistically more significant than the corresponding impact for the United States has not been empirically confirmed, i.e. it is impossible to claim the superiority of the brand effect for China compared to the United States. However, the results of the regression analysis allow us to draw an important conclusion about the nature

of the paradox of China's brand in world trade: a larger volume of exports with a lower Brand Value is explained not by the weakness of the brand, but by the dominance of production and price factors. However, as the added value of Chinese exports increases and China advances into technological niches, the role of Brand Value as a trade determinant will increase.

Conclusions. Thus, amidst the transformation of the international economy, the nation branding becomes a full-fledged instrument of soft power and a strategic competitive advantage in international trade. Empirical analysis has proven that the nation branding does indeed contribute to strengthening the export positions of the state, however, its impact is nonlinear and significantly depends on the conditions for the formation and development of the state's soft power, accordingly, the stage of development of the nation branding plays an important role in competitive conditions. In the context of the confrontation between the USA and China, for the first state, which already occupies a leading position in the world and has significant influence, additional strengthening of the brand is accompanied by a decreasing return on exports, which indicates the effect of saturation of soft power, and also further highlights its intangible nature, which is difficult to fully assess. At the same time, for China, the nation branding remains an important tool that increases its potential.

For the nation branding to become a real driver of Chinese exports, several prerequisites must be met: 1) an increase in the share of goods with high added value in the export structure (transition from "Made in China" to "Created in China"); 2) an increase in the global ranking of Chinese universities and research institutions, which forms the reputation of an innovation centre; 3) successful positioning of technology brands (Huawei, Xiaomi, BYD) in the premium segments of the markets of developed countries. The implementation of these conditions will turn the nation branding into a full-fledged driver of Chinese exports.

The significance of the GDP and openness index variables in the econometric model confirms that the established hegemon position is currently firmly occupied by the United States. At the same time, as the technological development of the Chinese economy and the growth of the share of high-value-added products increases, the role of Brand Value as a trade determinant of the PRC will inevitably grow. The practical significance of the results is that strategic investments in nation branding are more effective for countries at the stage of technological transition than for established hegemonies, where the marginal efficiency of such investments is decreasing, which outlines a promising direction for further research with an expansion of the geographical and sectoral coverage of the sample.

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НАЦІОНАЛЬНИЙ БРЕНД КРАЇНИ ЯК ІНСТРУМЕНТ М'ЯКОЇ СИЛИ В МІЖНАРОДНІЙ ТОРГІВЛІ: ПРИКЛАД КИТАЮ

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Мета. У статті досліджується феномен національного бренду як інструменту м'якої сили держави в контексті міжнародної торгівлі на прикладі Китайської Народної Республіки. На тлі загострення геоекономічного суперництва між США та Китаєм нематеріальні фактори впливу набувають особливого значення, проте залишаються недостатньо вивченими в науковій спільноті. Метою цього дослідження є виявлення впливу національного бренду Китаю у підтримці позицій країни в міжнародній торгівлі в умовах домінування США та кількісна оцінка цієї ролі.

Методи. Методологія дослідження поєднує огляд теоретичних досліджень з теорій м'якої сили, національного брендингу та гегемонної стабільності з порівняльним статистичним аналізом. В емпіричному дослідженні використовується регресійна модель (МНК) на основі даних п'яти провідних економік (США, Китай, Німеччина, Японія та Велика Британія) за період 2020–2024 років. Модель використовує показники експорту як залежну змінну, а ВВП, індекс економічної відкритості та цінність національного бренду – як екзогенні змінні, включаючи фіктивні змінні для розрізнення ефектів для Китаю та США. **Результати.** На відміну від США, які діють як усталений гегемон, що захищає статус-кво, Китай виступає зростаючим

претендентом, чия стратегія спрямована на активну експансію та переформатування міжнародних режимів. Аналіз виявив, що стратегічне зміцнення національного бренду Китаю базується на чотирьох векторах: економічному (ініціатива BRI та зона RCEP), культурному (мережа Інститутів Конфуція), технологічному (Huawei, TikTok, Alibaba) та дипломатичному. Хоча позитивний вплив вартості бренду на експорт був виявлений поблизу середнього значення, дослідження виявило нелінійний зв'язок, що характеризується зменшенням граничної прибутковості, особливо для США. Для Китаю граничний ефект бренду залишається нижчим, ніж у референтній групі, оскільки його експортне домінування наразі більше зумовлене ефективністю виробництва та ціновими факторами, ніж власним капіталом бренду.

Висновки. Гіпотеза про те, що вплив національного бренду Китаю є статистично більш значущим, ніж вплив США, не була емпірично підтверджена. Однак дослідження підкреслює парадокс бренду Китаю у світовій торгівлі: хоча цінність його бренду наразі є вторинною порівняно з виробничими потужностями, його значення, за прогнозами, зростатиме, оскільки КНР переходить у високотехнологічні ніші та збільшує експорт з доданою вартістю. Зрештою, національний бренд служить важливим операційним механізмом для інтеграції м'якої сили у світову торгівлю.

Ключові слова: міжнародна економіка, нематеріальні активи, вартість бренду, конкурентоспроможність, ефект країни походження, глобальне лідерство, геоekonomіка, експорт, відкритість торгівлі.



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