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The use of “Sharp Power”
by China in Australia to
protect its interests

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Abstract:

The purpose of this work will be to investigate the use of 'sharp power' by China to protect its interests in Australia. Over the past decades, China has become Australia's largest trading partner, and it buys nearly 3/10 of its total exports. This relation makes Australia extremely dependant on China. This research aims to investigate how China is using key sectors such as education services to influence Australia's decision-making. In addition, the present paper examines examples of how China takes advantage of intangible resources to gain "sharp power." Moreover, it details how Australia is planning to resolve foreign interference by implementing new foreign veto laws and mechanisms to safeguard their democratic freedom. Additionally, it investigates the Institution of Confucius Institutes and how they differ from public diplomacy institutions from other countries.

Key Words:

Australia, China, Sharp Power, Soft Power, Hard Power, Education,

Abstracto

El objetivo de este trabajo será investigar el uso del "poder agudo" por parte de China para proteger sus intereses en Australia. En las últimas décadas, China se ha convertido en el mayor socio comercial de Australia, y compra casi 3/10 de sus exportaciones totales. Esta relación hace que Australia sea extremadamente dependiente de China. Esta investigación tiene como objetivo investigar cómo China utiliza sectores clave, como los servicios educativos, para influir en la toma de decisiones de Australia. Además, el presente trabajo examina ejemplos de cómo China aprovecha los recursos intangibles para ganar "poder agudo". Por otra parte, detalla cómo Australia planea resolver la injerencia extranjera mediante la aplicación de nuevas leyes de veto y mecanismos para salvaguardar su libertad democrática. Además, investiga la institución de los Institutos Confucio y cómo se diferencian de las instituciones de diplomacia pública de otros países.

Palabras clave

Australia, China, Sharp Power, Soft Power, Hard Power, Educación,

List of abbreviations

ACT- Australian Capital Territory

Hanban- Office of Chinese Language Council International

HELP- The Higher Education Loan Program

ICT- Information and communications technology

IP- International Politics

IR- International Relations

IoT- Internet of Things

NED- National Endowment for Democracy

NSW- New South Wales

QS- Quacquarelli Symonds

UNSW- University of New South Wales

UK- United Kingdom

US- United States of America

USSR- the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

UNSW- University of New South Wales

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1. Introduction

Australia is a country with nearly 26 million people located in Oceania. (ABS, 2021) It is part of the Commonwealth, and Australia's form of government is a federal parliamentary constitutional monarchy. It has obtained a very commendable reputation for having many of its universities among the best ones in the world, including the Australian National University, the University of Sydney, the University of Melbourne, and many more. (QS Top Universities, 2019) This reputation has attracted many international students to come and study in Australia, boosting both immigration rates and generating in 2019 \$36.5 billion in revenue from higher education institutions across Australia. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019) It comes as no surprise that it attracted many students from China, a rising superpower with the second largest GDP in the world. In addition, it has a population of 1,400,050,000, which amounts to 18.40% of the total population. (Expansion, 2021) This economic boom has resulted in many Chinese students studying abroad in places such as Australia. As Australia becomes more dependant on international students to fund its universities, the Chinese State becomes more influential in Australia because of its large number of students, investments, and resources deployed in Australian universities. This influence may pose certain risks, such as the deterioration of the freedom of academia in Australia to protect their interests. This paper will limit the scope of the investigation to the Education and academia sectors in Australia to understand how China uses “sharp power.”

2. Purposes and Motives

This research paper aims to investigate China's use of “sharp power” in Australia, whether directly or indirectly. Another goal of this work is to study the benefits and the risks of Australia’s overdependence in the education sector as it is a big part of the economy.

One of the motives for choosing this work is because the author is interested in how intangible resources such as power can influence international relations, particularly the relationship between trading partners such as Australia and China. At first, the author wanted to focus on the “soft power” of China in Australia. The author was later guided towards the concept of “sharp power” because it provides a better

understanding of China's public diplomacy abroad. It considers that China is not a democracy when evaluating the methods used by the country. This problem is difficult to tackle due to the resources being intangible.

This issue is relevant to scientific research because it is a pathway that has not been previously explored in-depth concerning Australia and China. More precisely, the use of "sharp power" in education and academia in Australia. Sino-Australian relations are at the worst level in years, and Chinese influence in Australia gathers attention from the public and political spheres. This investigation may cause a profound interest in people interested in how Australia deals with foreign interference. It also allows the reader to detect hidden motives behind the actions of states.

3. Status of the issue

China is Australia's largest two-way trading partner of goods and services, which sums up to 29% of Australia's total trade with the world. This trading relation means that exports from Australia to China reached \$168 billion. This economic relationship between the two countries positions China as an important player in Australian affairs. In December 2015, the China–Australia Free Trade Agreement got signed between the two countries. This historic deal will provide numerous benefits to Australia, as it will improve the competitiveness of Australian industries in China. It will also enable the creation of jobs, and it was going to boost economic growth. One example of this measure is the lower tariffs between the countries. (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021) China was investing heavily in Australia due to the cooperation between the countries. As a response, Australia was also investing in China. It appeared that things were going great between the two nations, but things quickly turned around.

First, it is essential to remark that Australia allowed the foundation of Confucius Institutes in their universities. These institutions function with the supervision of the Hanban, which in turn responds to the Chinese Department of Education. (Hanban, 2013) These institutions formed an association between a Chinese university and an Australian university. This association would permit these institutes on the campus. Benefits outweigh the risks at the moment, as they were teaching Australian students Chinese and fostering relations between the two countries, which had excellent ties. In addition, as presented during the analysis phase, 10,9% of higher education institutions students are from the People's Republic of China. This overdependence of students

from one country only puts pressure on Australian universities as they now realize that they need to maintain good relationships with their public. Still, in the meantime, they might be sacrificing their academic freedom and risk the threat of China gaining “sharp power.”

The interference from foreign states is nothing new in International Relations. It has happened before, and it functions as a tool to amass power. The issue with Australia is that it is already overdependence on China. Hence, they started to worry that China was already too present in Australia. The reader cannot forget that Australia and New Zealand are regional allies, but they are the only western countries in an area where China has nearly total hegemony. This fear has pushed the Australian government to strengthen its ties with the US, which is also a critic of China’s overstepping in other countries. An example of a possible state interference from China was the case surrounding Nick Zhao. The 32-year-old member of the Liberal Party was allegedly offered a million \$ by Chinese officials to run in the federal elections and infiltrate the parliament. He reportedly turned down the offer and told Australia’s spy agency. However, he was later found dead in a hotel room in Melbourne, sparking rumors that it might have been an assassination by the Chinese government. (Perper, 2019) The Australian government opened up an investigation surrounding this issue.

This event is just one example of many alleged state interferences. In 2017, the Australian government published its “white paper.” In this paper, there is a section called “Guarding against Foreign Interference.” Here they outline that Australia is deeply worried about repetitive and increasing efforts to exert inappropriate influence and to destabilize Australia’s sovereign institutions and decision-making. This is done by a foreign government or its proxies. Moreover, this foreign interference seeks to manipulate decision-makers and public opinion to achieve a favorable outcome for those foreign states. (Australian Government, 2017) Here they recognized the increasing influence of foreign state actors, and it is possible that China was one of them. In addition, this recognition can help the author of the study with his research because the government is officially stating what the theory of “sharp power” states

Before commencing with the Theoretical Framework, it is essential to remind that relations between the two countries are very tensed at the moment. In 2020, Australia requested to investigate the origin of the COVID19 pandemic in depth. This damaged the relationship, and the tension has been building up until this moment.

Moreover, in 2021, Australia announced foreign veto laws where the minister of Foreign Affairs can veto investments if they go against Australia's national interests. This has resulted in Australia canceling the Belt and Road agreement with China. This \$2.5 billion project in Victoria has harmed the relations between the two countries. (Visentin, 2021) At the end of 2020, before the veto was passed, the last two Australian journalists on Chinese soil were flown out of China because of the tensions. This is the first time Australia does not have any journalistic presence there covering news. (Khalil, 2020) This veto law is also detrimental for the education sector because all the agreements and investments made by foreign nationals may be reviewed if it opposes the Minister of Foreign Affairs ruling. This can also support the claim that there is, in fact, "sharp power" from China in the education sector of Australia.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Basic Elements:

Before exploring the different International Relations theories and the concepts surrounding "sharp power," the author of this research paper would like to revisit some essential elements surrounding Australia and China to understand how these countries are governed.

4.1.1 Democracy and representative democracy

Democracy is a complex concept which itself has been at the core of heated discussion throughout millennia and which significantly differs today from the same concept theorized by the Athenians a long time ago. The development of the notion of democracy in its various forms has benefitted from the progression of two separate concepts: liberty and equality. (Arenilla, 2010) Aristotle deals with the concept of liberty in "The Politics" as the basis of a democratic state. However, he did not separate the principles of liberty and equality. He believed that equality was a note of liberty. Nevertheless, Aristotle (350 B.C, 6, II) claims that one characteristic of democracy is "the claim of men to be ruled by none, or ..., to rule and be ruled in turns". His concept of democracy did not include liberty as the primary tenet because for Athenians, equality was not certain, and Aristotle (350 B.C., 1, IV) states that a slave belongs to the household as a "living possession" which serves as an instrument owned by a master and by natural law, a slave. (Aristotle, 350 B.C) Constant (1988) said during a speech in Paris that modern liberty "must consist of peaceful enjoyment and private

independence.” Thus, nowadays, liberty and equality are discerned because, under modern democracies, all humans are equals. Robert A. Dahl makes the distinction between modern democratic systems from ancient democratic systems and non-democratic systems. He asserts that the difference is that in a modern democracy, there is a collection of effective institutions within a country. (Dahl, 1995)

Once the basis of democracy has been explained, it has emerged the need to define what democracy is. According to the Oxford’s Learner Dictionary is (n.d) “a system of government in which the people of a country can vote to elect their representatives.” Whereas Popper describes democracy as the opposite in comparison to tyranny or dictatorship. (Popper, 1988) Lipset (1959:71) defines democracy as “a political system which supplies regular constitutional opportunities for changing the governing officials.” For this study, the definition of democracy that has been selected is the one made by Sartori (2003) “democracy is a political system in which the influence of the majority is assured by elective and competitive minorities to whom it is entrusted.”

After the above approach to democracy, the concept of representative democracy will be analyzed in depth. It has been chosen to expand on due to it being the system in place in Australia. Firstly, Arenilla (2010: 12) states that: “Representative democracy is the application of the logic of equality to large communities, which profoundly transforms the significance and reach of that equality.” Direct democracy is near impossible, if not impossible, to be adapted to large communities because of their size. Hence, representative democracy has been introduced to resolve the difficulty of governing a large body of people. The author has selected Mark Bevir’s definition of representative democracy, which he proposes in his book ‘Key Concepts in Governance.’ Bevir (2009) stated that it “is a type of democracy in which the citizens of the state exercise their popular sovereignty through legitimately elected representatives.” These representatives are chosen in elections. On the assumption that no form of government is perfect, representative democracy has some disadvantages, such as the one mentioned by Mill. Mill (1861) asserts that it is: “a government of privilege, in favor of the numerical majority, who alone possess practically any voice in the State.”

4.1.2 Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is a political system that has not had the same level of research as democracies. This can be explained due to several factors; first, because many scholars were more interested in the literature of democratic consolidation with forward-looking analyses. They were more concerned in establishing the reasons why that nation became authoritarian and the study of democratic transitions than the actual period of the authoritarian regime. (Hagopian, 1993) This may also be because, in authoritarian regimes, policies were kept secret and not usually transmitted to the public. In addition, in many regimes, there was no freedom of expression or freedom of the press, thus limiting the amount of information available. Cambridge (n.d.) defines authoritarianism as: “the belief that people must obey completely and not be allowed the freedom to act as they wish.”

Linz is one of the most famous scholars to come up with a definition for authoritarianism. He tries to describe political systems as authoritarian from an array of nontotalitarian and non-democratic political systems. Linz (1964) wrote that this happened when:

Political systems with limited, not responsible, political pluralism, without elaborate and guiding ideology, but with distinctive mentalities, without extensive nor intensive political mobilization, except at some points in their development, and in which a leader or occasionally a small group exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones (p. 255)

Barbara Geddes (1999:122) classifies authoritarian regimes as “personalist, military, single-party, or amalgams of the pure types.” However, there are some critics of this concept, such as Marlies Glasius which states that this notion is just a negative class lacking an accurate description, that the research focuses too much on elections and that this structural occurrence only happens at the highest State such as in states or nations. (Glasius, 2018)

The concept of neo-authoritarianism will be defined below. This is relevant to the study because many scholars believe that China has been shifting away from the totalitarianism displayed by Mao Zedong during his time to a neo-authoritarian regime since the economic reform of 1979, which opened China to the West. This, in turn, has

granted limited political liberties and rights to the Chinese population (Cabestan, 2004). However, this claim has been refuted by others, which believe that China remains a totalitarian regime because of the extended grip that they have on its citizens. Guo suggests that the methods carried out by the post-Mao regime attempt to emulate totalitarian practices carried out before. (Guo, 2000) For example, there are claims that there are between 800,000 and 2 million Uyghur Muslims detained in re-education camps in Xinjiang. This is due to their beliefs and due to some of the Uyghur's aspiration to become independent from China because of their pan-Turkic roots. In addition, they are only ruled by one party. (Chinese Human Rights Defenders, 2018) Nonetheless, for this investigation, the author of this study is going to support the theory that China has shifted to a neo-authoritarianism regime.

Habermas argues that authoritarian states weaken civil society, which is the foundation of the public sphere. Thus, conditions for political life and a public sphere are both restrictive because of public law, which reserved the right to intervene. (Habermas, 1996). Nevertheless, Ya-wen sees signs of political commitment and conversation, which she believes would mean that China has an upcoming public sphere under this authoritarian regime, therefore approaching it to a neo-authoritarian government. (Lei, 2017) This concept was first discussed in China after the implementation of the open-door policy, which would promote foreign trade and economic investments. Some scholars argued that to gather together the social elite and the nation in that complicated environment after the reform, they would need an authoritative top unit. (Sautman, Beijing Young Economists' Association, & Chen Yizi's Institute for Restructuring the Economy, 1992) Other authors suggest that China must possess a solid authority to be able to defeat both social and economic crises. China's goal should be to maintain order instead of trying to give liberties to people or achieve democratization. Consequently, this has resulted in the need for a solid authority to ensure this order. The most important characteristics of a regime like this are: First, they should advocate for modernization. Next, they should educate the public in political education as neo-authoritarianism is based on nationalism and economic development to gain popular support. Thirdly, a strong military and bureaucracy. Lastly, the promotion of traditional culture. (Petracca & Xiong, 1990)

4.2 International Relations Theories

International Relations is a novel discipline in the sense that it was only granted status as a discipline in the 20th century. However, it has been discussed beforehand but did not achieve the necessary standing to become a discipline due to the disagreements circling the concept. Truyol revisits the main theories proposed by scholars, and he suggests a description of the idea of IR. On the one hand, he believes IR to be a theory of the international society, thus, international sociology. (Truyol, 1957) Holsti, on the other hand, believes IR to be the sum of all contacts between the members of different societies. It does not matter for him whether these societies have a formal government or not. (Holsti, 1983) This investigation is going to abide by the assumption made by Barbé that international societies are found to be the subject of study of IR. (Barbé, 1995)

It is essential to distinguish between different global IR theories. Realism and idealism have been the significant schools of thought in IR. Various ideas have been developed, such as Transnationalism and Structuralism, to analyze IR events. Moreover, after the Cold War, there has been a surge of new theories under the umbrella of IR, including constructivism. (Barbé, 1995) For this analysis, the following views which are more relevant to the study will be explained:

4.2.1 Realism

Realism has been the significant school of thought since the Second World War. The continuity of the conflict by the ex-allies, which leads to the Cold War, is the primary reason behind the surge in Realpolitik theory resurfacing in the global sphere. (Barbé, 1995) It was first introduced in opposition to utopianism. He was highly critical of the League of Nations and of the scholars who believed that it would lead to the elimination of power in IR and the breakdown of armies by the introduction of the liberal tradition. (Carr, 1941) Morgenthau is one of the first to come up with the concept of “political realism.” He is more known for his six principles of political realism. As it is relevant to the approach to the definition of the concept, the author will quote the second principle as written by Morgenthau (1978:5): “The main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics is the concept of interest defined in terms of power.”

Even if scholars tend to disagree about the exact definition of realism, there is consensus about the characteristics of realism. First, the unit of study is the State as it is the maximum exponential of power. Second, national security is vital for the survival of

the State, which is the main problem of the theory. Thirdly, it seeks an equilibrium of power as it follows the billiard ball model in mention to unitary states which are in constant conflict. Anarchy rules this system, and the balls exert external pressure to influence the other states. (Barbé, 1995)

4.2.2 Transnationalism

As decades went by, Puchala and Fagan found a problem with using the same mental maps as in realism during the 1970s. They suggested that they could not fully comprehend international politics as the theoretical development being made at the time, as it was quickly falling behind the new reality formed in the practice of IR. (Puchala & I., 1974) The same argument is Made by John A. Vasquez in his book *'The Power of Power Politics*, in which he comes up with the likelihood that the most vital hypothesis of the realism doctrine may be incorrect. (Vasquez, 2004) This theory was mainly based on the détente period, which meant the improvement of relationships between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A in the early 1970s.

Transnationalism seeks to explain global events. First, it is quite a critic of the realist approach of the State being at the center of relations. Instead, it indicates that there is a plurality of actors, including international organizations, multinational enterprises, individuals, and others, thus causing the State to lose its exclusivity factor and causing state relativism. Second, the problems that will be analyzed under this framework are derived from human action in their activity in a globalized world. Thirdly, the image of the world under this theory is linked with the notions of globalism or global society. This can be described as spiderweb because actors are interconnected, and they cooperate to advance their mutual interests in the international order. (Barbé, 1995)

4.2.3 Structuralism

Structuralism was founded in response to all the problems facing the realism school of thought in the 1970s. The purpose of this paradigm is to study the origins, characteristics, and consequences of the global capitalist system. As the economies developed after the second world war, it became clear that there were countries that were developed and others that were underdeveloped. The focus of the analysis in structuralism is the study of inequalities in International Relations. It does so by explaining the situations of marginality that some nations suffer and how some

mechanisms preserve this system. (Barbé, 1995)The image of the world is a conflictive one. R. Jenkins introduces the analogy of an octopus with various heads (centers) and many tentacles (periphery). The heads profit from work done by the tentacles in a system of a zero-sum game. Therefore, there is a winner (center) and a loser (periphery) because there are no common interests. (Jenkins, 1971) It also deals with the international political economy because the economy and politics, both at a national and international level, are integrated. Hence, they cannot be explained separately from the other. (Tooze, 1984) After the explanation of these paradigms, it has to be noted that each of them serves a particular purpose, and not one school of thought can be used to analyze every IR situation. (Barbé, 1995)

4.2.4 Constructivism

After the Cold War new theories emerged to try to explain the new situations involving IR, these new situations could not be explained with the previous theories. One of the main important assumptions in constructivism is the one made by Onuf in 1989 in his work *World of Our Making*. He explains that the social world is our making. Therefore, actors constantly shape the nature of IR through their interactions. (Oluf, 1989) Constructivism started to appear during the eighties and nineties, and it was made popular, as the concept is known today, by Alexander Wendt. His work in the constructivism tradition was fundamental in bridging modern and post-modern constructivism tradition. Wendt (1992: 394) stated this when he wrote: “to build a bridge between these two traditions...., on behalf of the liberal claim that international institutions can transform state identities and interests.” He places a huge emphasis on the institutions and the social constrictions which surround an issue that is always open to change. Moreover, constructivist authors suggest that agency and structure are jointly formed so they influence each other. In summary, constructivism seeks to understand IR by emphasizing the significance of mutual interests and values between actors on a global platform (Theys, 2017) Therefore as Wendt (1992:391) puts it “Anarchy is what States Make of it”. This paradigm can be frequently used in modern times to explain the IR and social constructions made by China and Australia during the past decades.

4.2.5 Chinese International Relation’s Theories

Western supremacy in IR theories and discourse is holding back the consolidation of IR theories from a Chinese point of view. (Kim, 2016) If this is appended to the fact that some of these theories lose the connotation of the word

international and that a durable theoretical core is needed, the reasons why they have not been consolidated or gained international recognition can be understood. Nevertheless, this is destined to change, as Chinese IR theories are emerging because of the social and economic revolution taking place in China in recent times. (Yaqing, 2007) One of these approaches is the theory of *Tianxia* proposed by Zhao Tingyang, a renowned Chinese philosopher. He recovers the notion brought by the Zhou dynasty around 3,000 years ago, and he also bases his research on Confucius' works. It uses relational rationality to pursue an all-inclusive world coexisting in harmony via hospitality between states. (Tingyang, 2018)

Liang Shoude was fundamental in the research as he elaborated the first IR theory with Chinese features. He states that self-interest was crucial and that it should be founded on the socialist nature of China aligned with their best national interests in mind. (Shoude, 1997) Moreover, Yan Xuetong believes that the traditional culture, values, and thoughts of China should guide the approach taken in the IR field. (Xuetong, 2011) Lastly, Yaqing Qin is dissatisfied with the two previous scholar's works as he believes their methods are incomplete. Instead, he introduces the 'Chinese school' and a collaborative process that unites both Chinese social thinking with Western IR theories by using the concept of relationality. (Kim, 2016) (Yaqing, 2007) It is essential to remind that although they strive to create a Chinese IR theory in contrast to the central western and centric theories previously exposed, they still nurture their approaches from concepts associated with these western theories. For example, Yaqing Qin incorporates various ideas from the realist school of thought. (Yaqing, 2007)

4.3 Power

The mere assessment of power in terms of International Relations is a complex procedure that cannot be quantified adequately due to the difficulty of the task itself. Some authors have attempted to establish correlations between different indicators to build power indexes and classify nations in hierarchical order in terms of their power. This is difficult to fulfill because to classify states in terms of their power, they need to consider both tangible resources, such as the size of the army or territory, and intangible resources, such as the efficacy of diplomacy, which is much more difficult to value. Furthermore, power is often associated with (Barbé, 1995)

From the perspective of the idea itself, power has had many descriptions varying on who the writer is. Joseph Nye mentions this when he defends that each author

chooses their connotation depending on their values and concerns. (Nye, 2011) Morgenthau deals with this concept in two different ways in his book *Politics Among Nations the Struggle for Power and Peace*. Morgenthau (1948:13) first states that power is: “man’s control over the minds and actions of other man.” He consequently follows with his definition of political power. Morgenthau (1948:13) states that political power is “mutual relations of control among the holders of public authority and between the latter and the people at large.”

Political power can now be the influence exerted by a group, not just an individual. (Cohen et al., 2001) In addition, he distinguishes political power from the actual execution of force, such as armed force. For Morgenthau in IP, using armed force as a threat is a crucial element making to obtain power as a nation. He also highlights the psychological factor of power between the people who influence it and those who are impacted by it. (Morgenthau, 1978) On another note, Jack H. Nagel talks about the effects and causes of power in his book *The Descriptive Analysis of Power*. He links effect measures with the power used, whereas he states that cause measures are reserved to predict power potential. (Nagel, 1975)

For this inquiry, the concept of power which has been chosen is the one given by Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall. Barnett and Duvall (2005:39) State: “Power is the production, in and through social relations, of effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their circumstances and fate.” They further develop their theory of power in different ways. First, to understand power, they position the relationship between those who wield power and those to whom power has been exercised. However, they also consider the structures and processes in a globalized world which facilitate and hinder the capability of actors to form their future actions. Lastly, they are aware that to analyze power in IR efficiently, they must incorporate the know-how of how social structures and procedures may produce distinct social dimensions for actors to pursue their goals (Barnett & Duvall, 2005).

4.3.1 Hard, soft, and sharp power

After having clarified the definition and characteristics of power through different authors, it is time to distinguish between the concepts of hard, soft, and sharp power.

“Hard power,” as it is referred to by Nye, is what academics were usually accustomed to previously. Nye (2011: 11) states that “hard power” is: “the ability to get others to act in ways that are contrary to their initial preferences and strategies” This is usually in the form of coercion from either military or economic influence. As has been mentioned before, this is more expensive than “soft power” because it involves investing in tangible assets. Nye states that the U.S.A government spends 400 more times on “hard power” than on “soft” power. (Nye, 2004) The metaphor of the sticks and carrots allows Nye to demonstrate this theory easily.

Firstly, the concept of “soft power” or co-option power is conceived by Joseph Nye (1990: 166) in contrast with “the hard or command the power of ordering others to do what it wants” He further develops this concept in his book *Soft Power the Means to Success in World Politics*. Nye (2004, X) states that “soft power” is: “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.” (Nye, 2004) It derives from the desirability of a nation’s culture, policies, or political ideas in an external state. It is enhanced using persuasion and the capacity to attract others. According to Peter Landelius, the originality of Nye’s claim is that he quickly understood that military power was not enough anymore after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the power was going to shift after the end of the Cold War. (Landelius, 2012)

Public diplomacy plays a huge role in “soft power” as it is used as the vehicle to promote this “soft power.” It was vital during the Cold War for the US as it granted the US the victory. (Nye, 2008) According to Britannica (2017), public diplomacy is: “any of various government-sponsored efforts to communicate directly with foreign publics. This public diplomacy includes legitimate attempts made by a government to persuade targeted segments of foreign opinion that the strategic objectives from the government are genuine and reasonable. Hence, it seeks the support or toleration of foreign nationals. (Munro, 2017)

Additionally, he places the same importance on the management of “soft power” as the administration of “hard power.” An international actor can attain their global policy objectives if another actor wants to model themselves because they respect their values, culture, economic success, or others. This interaction arrives by cooperating, and it excludes threatening from their modus operandi. Moreover, it is also much cheaper than “hard power” and can also be free because it is an intangible thing. Meanwhile in “hard power,” there is a cost associated with gathering power through the investment in

guns, etc. Agenda setting is an essential task in “soft power” and to their global policy objectives. (Nye, 2004) It is often associated with liberalism instead of realism. In its opposition to realism, it does not believe in the never-ending prospect of war but the ability to cooperate through “soft power.”

Furthermore, Nye recognizes that “soft power” does not always have the best intentions in mind. Nye (2011: 81) states: ‘It is not necessarily better to twist minds than twist arms’ Here, he realizes that it can also be used for their gain without the spirit of cooperation regularly associated with it. For instance, propaganda can be a form of “soft power”. Contrarily to Nye’s theory, Clifford Geertz states in his book *‘The interpretations of cultures’* that culture cannot constitute a power since it is a context. (Geertz, 1973)

On the other hand, Robert Cooper sees various challenges and weaknesses to the concept of “soft power.” In his analysis, he stresses the significance of legitimacy when conducting “soft power” because it would not work without the proper authority. In addition, he foresees three main weaknesses to “soft” power. First, he rejects the idea that the strength of, for example, from culture as a “soft power” resource has the same value as political power. Second, he believes that some scenarios escape out of State’s control and which “soft power” attempt to manipulate. Third, he confronts the supposition that agenda setting provokes beneficial results. If it does happen, it is also likely that this is not the result of a causal relationship. It could be a result between the strategy and the implementation. (Cooper, 2004)

To introduce the concept of “sharp power,” the author of this study is first going to reveal other classifications surrounding power. On the one hand, Susan Strange introduces structural power in her book from 1988 *States and Markets*. At this moment, Strange declares that structural power is the power to influence and establish the structures of the global political economy within which other actors operate. It grants the power to decide how things will be carried out. It is based on the control over production, credit, security, and knowledge/values/ideas. (Strange, 1988) On the other hand, Nye introduces the concept of ‘smart power’ to describe the equilibrium between “hard” and “soft power” in the foreign policy of a State. It seeks to learn how to mix both powers to be able to produce intelligent procedures, which can be used to diminish tensions of reality. (Nye, 2004)

“Sharp power” is a concept of recent creation on a group report published by the *National Endowment for Democracy* in December of 2017. Hence, why it is still a premature concept as it is still in its early stages. It is founded as the response to the practices employed by countries such as China and Russia, where they had spent billions of dollars in shaping public opinion and perceptions across the world. They have done so by the promotion of a vast array of cultural events, people-to-people exchanges, the inception of media companies with a global reach, and educational courses. (National Endowment for Democracy, 2017)

By way of the Cold War ending, these authoritarian regimes were using their influence through the utilization of “soft power.” These actions looked similar to other activities by a western power but different because of the authoritarian nature of the regimes. They were neither “hard” as in if they were threatening, nor were they “soft.”

One of the significant distinctions between the “soft power” exercised by other countries and the so-called “sharp power” is that their primary objectives were not related to attracting other countries or pushing their culture through think tanks, academia, media, etc. According to the NED (2017:6): “it centers on distraction and manipulation.” The report observes that the same countries which systematically repress human rights at home, such as political rights, maybe pursuing similar principles internationally to secure these interests. (National Endowment for Democracy, 2017)

This phenomenon has been defined as “sharp power” to avoid using “soft power” in authoritarian practices. NED (2017: 6) labels it “sharp power” because it: “pierces, penetrates, or perforates the political and information environments in the targeted countries.” They consider the new competition between democratic and autocratic countries, and they compare the use of “sharp power” by countries like China to Laswell’s needle theory. (National Endowment for Democracy, 2017)

This report stresses that there are specific implications due to the activity of this exercise. Moreover, many of the authoritarian sway practices in certain countries may seem innocuous but, when all their actions are englobed together, a looming image can be formed. Furthermore, it warns the readers that they should be cynical regarding judging the activities performed by these countries. It might seem as if they are advancing noble objectives when they might be pushing their authoritarian political narrative, which helps support the regime. In addition, they acknowledge the difference between countries in the shape and form of their actions, but it underlines that they

branch off from ideological paradigms which positions the state power over individual rights. They benefit from the reliability of democratic systems. (National Endowment for Democracy, 2017)

Lastly, the author of this study will mention the key steps that they say in the report that can be taken to tackle the obscure efforts perpetrated by countries to influence and manipulate democracies.

- First, they should address the limited amount of information of the authoritarian regimes. As these countries limit freedom of the press in some cases, it is tough to obtain valuable information concerning these states' IR or policies.

- Second, they should uncover the influence exerted by authoritarian regimes. These actors tend to act in the shadow using propaganda or the use of media, so it should be remarked that they should investigate their activities.

- Third, they should protect democratic societies against this foreign authoritarian influence. Once schemes have been discovered, they stop affecting. They do so by building relationships with politicians, gatekeepers, etc. to try to win allies in these democratic countries to prevent criticism of their regimes

- Fourth, they should reiterate their commitment to democratic values and ideas in opposition to these authoritarian administrations.

- Fifth and last place, they should motivate think tanks, politicians, and journalists to think about the ill effects provoked by these actions and challenge the current concept of "soft power" being used in this situation to adapt to present circumstances. (National Endowment for Democracy, 2017)

Public diplomacy has been used as a means to advance "soft power" in the past and is credited to being paramount to the ending of the Cold War. As "sharp power" derives from the concept of "soft power," it can also be said that public diplomacy can play a role when an authoritarian state seeks to amass "sharp power."

5 Objectives and research questions

The specific objectives of this research paper are:

- Investigate the use of “sharp power” by China in Australia.
- Investigate the impact of Chinese funding on Australian Higher Education Institutions.
- Examine the purpose and actions of Confucius Institutes in Australia.
- Analyze the use of ThinkTanks in Australia and their independence.

These objectives will be achieved during the analysis and conclusion phase, which follows. In addition, this research paper poses the following research questions to be answered throughout the analysis:

- How does China use “sharp power” to advance its authoritarian regime’s agenda?
- Is Australia heavily dependent on Chinese students and funding?
- What role do Chinese technological companies play as “sharp power” instruments in Australian universities?
- How are think tanks and media used concerning “sharp power”?
- Is “sharp power” relevant in present times? Or is it a social construction concept with an expiration date?

6 Methodology of the study

This research has been carried out in several stages:

First, to elaborate on the State of the question and the theoretical framework, the author proceeded to compile historical articles, books on democracy and authoritarianism. The author also looked at various definitions of power in different books to distinguish between the concepts of “soft, hard and sharp power.” “Sharp power” is a very recent concept, so it followed the definition and critical steps provided by the *National Endowment for Democracy* to complete the theoretical frame. Different sets of data and articles were used to introduce the paper and the status of the question. Moreover, it can be said that the author used the deductive method, which establishes a reasoning strategy that works to determine conclusions based on principles. It can be said that it goes from the general to the particular issue.

Throughout the dissertation, the author has compiled different sets of data provided by the Department of Education, Skills, and Employment from Australia. This quantitative analysis helps determine the influence and the number of Chinese students in higher education institutions. In addition, numerous documents have been consulted to support the investigation. It can be stated that throughout this paper, one of the most frequent techniques used was documentary analysis which helped the author dissect documents to use them in his work. For instance, and Australian universities by Babones has been used to understand the relationship between Chinese students and Australian universities.

In addition, both primary and secondary sources have been used in this analysis. Pertinent authors have been cited, and the author has added a bibliography at the bottom of the paper. Primary sources included relevant authors such as Joseph S. Nye, and secondary sources include newspaper articles and other websites. It also has investigated acts of public diplomacy such as the Chinese Government Bureau of education warning.

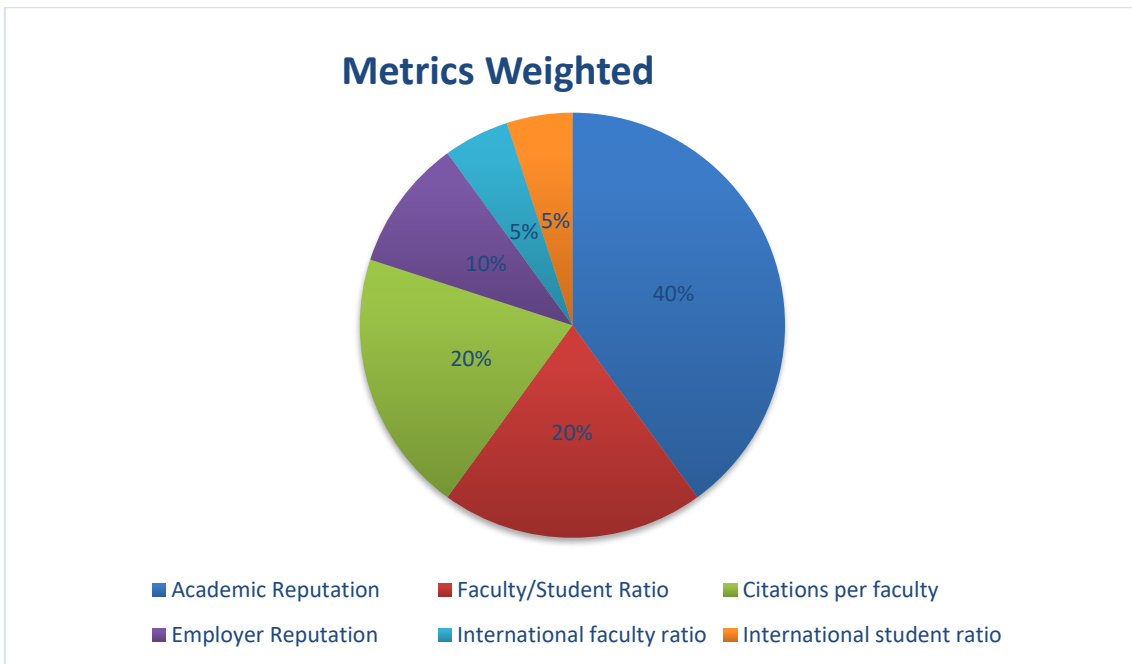
Comparative analysis has been used in this paper. Yet, it was not a big part of the paper. It has been used to compare how Australia deals with the Chinese influence in education differs from other countries. Moreover, various articles have been consulted to analyze whether the concept of “sharp power” is present in the Chinese impact in Australia. As this is a novel concept, there are not many other sources to determine what is or what is not “sharp power.” Therefore, the theory of “sharp power” has been used in conjunction with the articles to provide support to the findings. This paper also investigates how universities get funded by student contributions and partnerships. It has screened through articles to discover the impact of Chinese technological firms in Australia.

In addition, to further develop this analysis, the author has investigated the role of Australian think tanks as a tool of “sharp power.” Moreover, it has used documentary analysis to explore the part of Confucius Institutes in Australia. Additionally, amounts written in dollars in the following commentary are Australian dollars unless indicated otherwise.

Last but not least, The QS World University Ranking has been used to measure the universities’ ranking. This methodology weights six factors to elaborate their classification. It looks at academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty/student

ratio, citations per faculty, international faculty ratio, and international student Ratio, and it is weight as the following pie indicates. (Staff Writer, 2021)

Figure 1



Prepared by the author Source: QS World University Rankings

This methodology is used to measure universities across the globe and is the one this study is going to abide by because although there are others, this one is the most complete. It must be noted that although they measure these metrics and these are the most frequently used in other studies, the decision to establish these parameters is subjective to the interests of the publisher, which is QS.

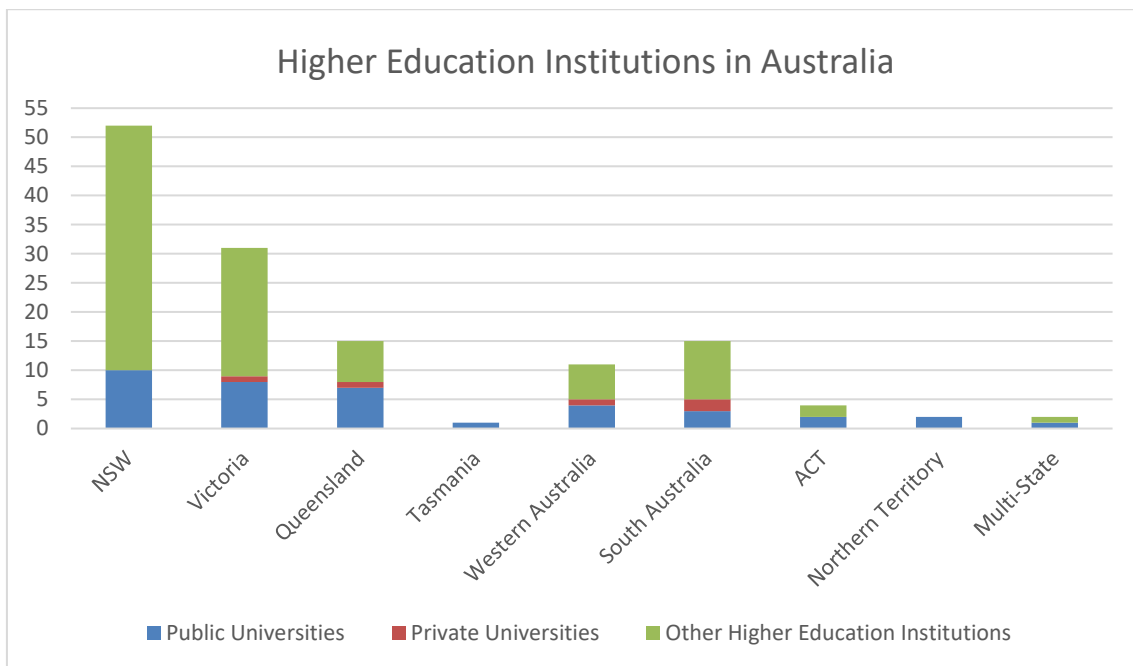
7 Analysis and Discussion

7.1 An overview of Higher Education Institutions in Australia

Higher education Institutions in Australia are one of the foremost vital assets for the Australian government. The author is going to focus on Australian universities when referring to Chinese “sharp power” in tertiary education in Australia. However, for data analysis purposes, other information can be included. There are currently 133 higher education institutions across the six states and three territories which form Australia. These institutions include public universities, private universities, and other approved

Higher education institutions. Two institutions are based in more than one state, and it has been accounted for below. Furthermore, it can be observed that the highest number of universities concentrate on the most densely populated states such as NSW and Victoria. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019) This can be better noticed in the following graph.

Figure 2



Prepared by the author

Source: Department of Education, Skills, and Employment

As has been mentioned before, there is a vast array of institutions concentrated on the different states and territories depending on their respective population numbers. As we have said before, the focus is going to be on Australian universities, whether they are public or private. Nonetheless, public universities greatly outnumbered private universities, as can be seen above. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019)

The author is going to examine the data from the QS World University rankings. The best Australian university in this ranking is the Australian National University located in Canberra, ACT, with the 24th overall position in the world. 4 other Australian universities make the World's Top 50 universities. These are the University of Melbourne, the University of Sidney, UNSW, and the University of Queensland. Moreover, it should be noted that the best universities placed in the ranking are all public universities. There are 22 public universities above the first private university, which is Bond University at top 443rd overall. (QS Top Universities, 2019)

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As public universities are the most numerous universities and can be a subject of the influence exerted by “sharp power” from China, it is necessary to explain how public universities are funded before analyzing the number of international students. There are three main ways. First, they receive the vast amount of its budget from the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, which is granted by the Australian Government up to the value of the sum of full-time domestic students through the Commonwealth Supported Places. Second, they receive money from student contributions in the form of tuition and loans. Domestic students can take these loans such as HELP to fund their studies and start paying them once they have entered the workforce and in proportion with their salary. Third, they are financed by research funding. This funding can come from the Australian government and the state and territory governments. (Universities Australia, 2021) In 2015, the Australian government funding for R&D was equivalent to \$10.2 billion, which is a third of the R&D funding during that year. 84% of that total expenditure went to businesses and higher education institutions.

Now that it has been discussed how Australian universities are funded, this study is going to focus on how China can influence decisions at universities based on the funding provided by Chinese actors in the form of student contributions, services, and student housing, research grants established by Chinese technology companies and others.

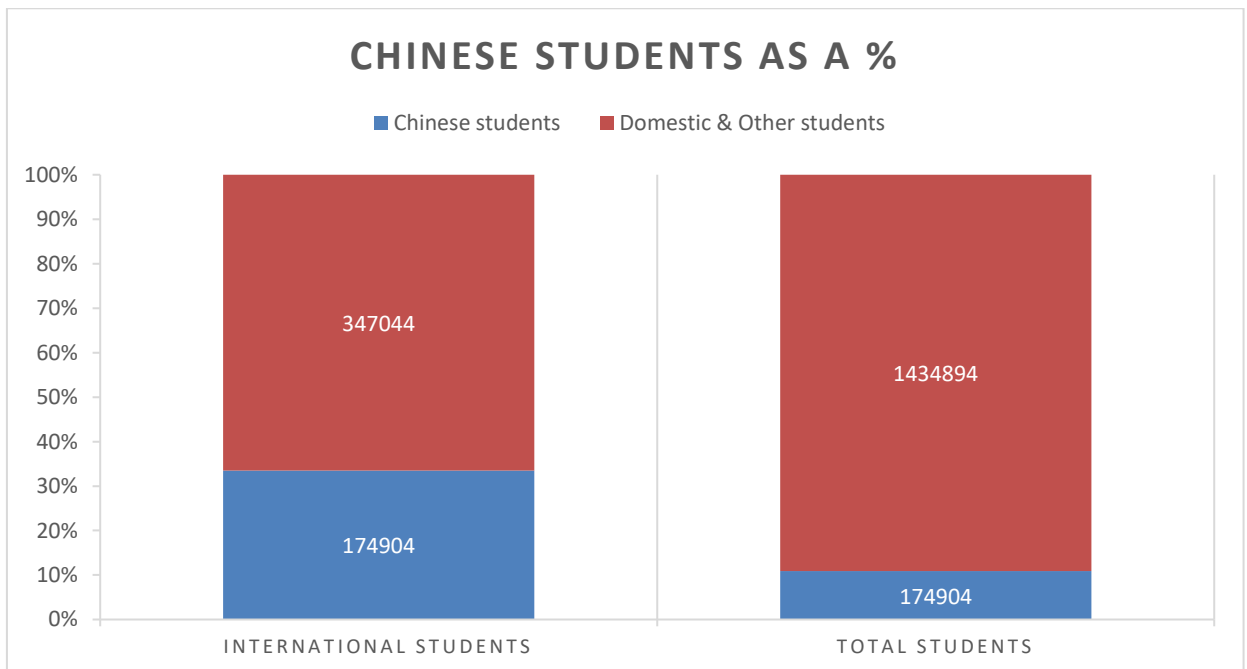
First, it is essential to remember that although they are public universities, they still get part of their funding through other means. One of the ways which have been discussed is by student contributions. In Australia, if a foreigner wants to study in any of their public universities, they need to pay non-domestic fees, which can total up to 270% more than domestic students, as reported in 2013. This can be further explored on any of the universities’ websites. (Yew, 2013) In 2019, there were 1,609,798 higher education students. Out of this figure, 521,948 were international students. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019) This indicates that nearly 1/3 of the student body was born overseas. This leads to an overdependence of international students because they are the ones that provide the massive profit margins, also known as “cash cows.” (Four Corners, 2019)

It might seem that this is not an isolated occurrence and that it happens in pretty much every country with good academic institutions. Yet, that is not the case. Australia, with 1,559, has the most significant number of international students per 100,000 population in the world. Countries such as the U.K and the U.S.A have 653 and 304,

respectively. The only one which came close was New Zealand with 1119. (Universities, 2019) This dependence on international students can have many consequences, such as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused a hole in the universities' pockets due to the prohibition on foreigners to enter Australia.

According to the findings, there were 521,948 international students in Australia. The subject of this research paper is to investigate the “sharp power” used by China in Australia. In 2019, there were 174,904 Chinese from the People's Republic of China. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019) Therefore, the author of this paper will analyze the number of Chinese students in the following graph in relation to the international students and the overall students.

Figure 3



Prepared by the author

Source: Department of Education, Skills, and Employment

As the data presented above suggests, the impact which Chinese students have in Australian Higher Institutions is tremendous. It can be extrapolated from the graph that the Chinese constitute one of the most prominent students' bodies in Australia by nationality. This is true. The reality is that it is the largest body of students by nationality after Australian students. In contrast, the third-largest nationality in Australian higher education is represented by the Indians, with a total of 89,018 students which is nearly two times less than the Chinese students. In terms of the international students, they represent 33,5% of international students in Australia. They also account for 10,9% of the total students in Australia. There are similar proportions when

considering only universities' students as a whole and the share of Chinese students in the total percentage of total students. Consequently, the impact of such a large amount of Chinese presence in Australia has various risks and implications for universities and Australia in general. It must also be considered that the average undergraduate bachelor's degree cost for an international student per year is between 20,000 to \$45,000. Therefore, it is also true that there are advantages such as that there are large profit margins in allowing international students to attend Australian universities for the universities' budget. (Study in Australia, 2021)

Further data from the balance sheet provided by the Department of Education, Skills, and Employment supports this assumption. As of 2019, the total revenues from continuing operations in Australian public universities was \$36.52 billion. This surpasses the total expenses from continuing operations which was \$34.23 billion. Hence, public universities are profitable overall. The exciting part is looking at the amount of money contributed by overseas students. They gained \$9.98 billion during 2019 by the fees paid by international students. It must be accounted that this is only from public universities, and it excludes other higher education institutions. (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019) This revenue is much higher for Australia as a whole if additional goods and services are added, such as student housing, food, and leisure. According to Australia's Minister for Education in 2019, international students supplied \$37.6 billion to the Australian economy, and educational services consolidate itself as the largest export-based industry in Australia, creating and maintaining up to 240,000 jobs. (Tehan, 2019)

7.2 Technology company partnerships with Australian universities

Australian universities are recognized internationally for their innovation and research quality. It comes as no surprise that these establish partnerships with large businesses such as biomedical companies, technological companies, or many others. The author of this research is interested in discovering the relationship between Chinese technology firms and Australian universities. And if so, whether these relationships may involve hidden interests behind them that could be recognized as "sharp power."

One example of this technological partnership between Chinese technological companies and Australian universities is the "Seeds for the Future" program in cooperation with Huawei as well as the NB-IoT lab in Australia and other research

projects. This mixture of involvement is an excellent way of showcasing how the company uses its resources in different ways to advance its goals.

Huawei is a multinational technology company founded in China and with headquarters in Shenzhen. This company is involved in many sectors, but it is more known for producing consumer computer electronics and telecommunication systems. An image of the logo can be seen below.

Figure 4

Huawei's Logo



Note. Adapted from Huawei. By Design Your Way, (2021)

There are, however, allegations and suppositions that it has ties with the Chinese Communist Party. For example, at the beginning of June of 2021, Joe Biden continued to ban US investment in Huawei and other 58 companies which appear to have ties with the Chinese Communist Party. (Michail, 2021) This has been an ongoing struggle between the US and China since 2019. In 2019, Donald Trump classified Huawei inside “The Entity List,” which is an inventory of foreign companies which suffer consequences because of this practice. Thus, these corporations are prohibited from maintaining a relationship with US companies. Therefore, it restricted the company’s ability to function in the US. This restriction was imposed on Huawei because there were allegations that it was owned by the Chinese Communist Party and that it was using its smartphones to spy on citizens and share its data with the party. (Brown, 2021) Christopher Balding and Donald C. Clarke presented a paper stating that 1% of the company is owned by Huawei’s founder and the other 99% is owned by a trade union committee. According to their publication, if this trade union functions as a typical trade

union in China, it can be considered state-owned. (Balding & Clarke, 2019) It must be noted that no definite proof has been found that connects the organization to the Chinese Communist Party.

Huawei has been quick to dismiss these allegations, although many critics doubt the veracity. In April of 2019, the chief secretary of Huawei, Jiang Xisheng, gave a 90-minute press conference to some journalists to shed some light on the issue of ownership of the company. Xisheng explained that the company is owned by a labor union that collects money from employees to cover the expenses of other employee's health problems and such. It has many more layers to the question of ownership. The chief secretary explained that it is entirely owned by employees. They have never sold any shares to the public, so detractors suggest that might be far from the truth because they are not forced to maintain the same standards of scrutiny as publicly traded companies. The organization also stated that no outside group has any shares in the company, shutting down allegations that this might be the case. They have even gone as far as showing a compilation of 10 volumes where they state they have written the names of the employees that hold shares. However, detractors are still unsure that this is true and that there is someone in the back pulling strings. The Chinese State wields power in unknown ways as it is very secretive, and not many policies are made public. To combat "sharp power," more information should be made public to dismiss the State's opaque practices. In addition, there are reports that China is forcing companies to aid them in national security concerns. Thus, the impartiality of the company and its independence from the State is questioned. (Zhong, 2019)

Having just debated about the impartiality and independence of Huawei has not helped the author to determine whether the allegations were true or not. However, it does suggest that states should be careful with the involvement of foreign companies that might serve a hidden agenda because the organizations are so opaque and lack scrutiny from independent experts. Coming back to the Huawei partnership with Australian universities, it is time to enquire about the purpose and objectives of examples of these projects, such as the "Seeds for the Future" project. First, this project is defined by Huawei as a Corporate Social Responsibility project as it seeks to cultivate trained, local ICT talent. It also helps in building bridges between countries and cultures. Students are allowed to travel to mainland China where they will discover the cultural values and traditions of China with cultural activities. In addition, they are allowed to work closely and learn from researchers at Huawei's laboratories. This is an

excellent opportunity to discover how advanced technologies in ICT function from the supervised guidance of experts. (Huawei, 2020) Students from universities such as the University of Melbourne, the University of Queensland, the Australian National University, and others can participate in it. From 2017, they have been able to allocate more resources and are now able to offer 30 places per year to these students, indicating the strong ties which unite the concept and the university. The program boasts that it has been able to host 10,000 students from across the world since its inception in 2008. (Huawei, 2020) This could be a form of “sharp power” because there is no certainty that Huawei is not involved with the Chinese Communist Party. In “sharp power,” people-to-people exchanges are a form of “sharp power.” So, it cannot be ruled out that there might be some other implications to these trips. Moreover, they could be using this to manipulate and advance their authoritarian values by influencing young students in Australia to build support for their cause on foreign soil.

Second, Huawei invests in research as part of one of its continuous goals to investigate. They have now signed collaborations with multiple universities across Australia. One example of this collaboration is the announcement of the development of the first NB-IoT lab in Australia at James Cook University. This will help research Internet of Things technology and can be used to develop new sensors and equipment. This project enables James Cook University to rank itself at the forefront of technological research and can have a positive impact on Australian society with its findings. Nonetheless, it also pressures the university to maintain an amicable position towards Huawei and China in general as it may fear retribution.

Third and last, an example can be seen on how other universities decided to cut ties with Huawei after the allegations. As an example, Stanford University in the US has cut ties with Huawei (The Daily Telegraph, 2019), and Oxford University in the UK has suspended donations coming from Huawei due to espionage accusations. (BBC, 2019) Meanwhile, UNSW defended its partnership with Huawei as Huawei is one of the founding partners of a new \$100 million hi-tech park. They ensure that they are complying with the law and see no threat in collaborating with that specific company. (The Daily Telegraph, 2019) This further develops the claim that Huawei, even if it is or is not strictly related to the People’s Republic of China, exerts tremendous influence through their investment and could be manipulating universities through their funding.

7.3 Risks of the use of “sharp power” by China in Australian universities

As has been discussed before, the Chinese student body holds significant power in Australia’s higher education institutions. First, according to Salvatore Babones, there are certain risks associated with having 10,9% of the student body from a single country, especially an authoritarian regime like China. He mentions that in countries such as Canada or the US, the percentage of international students is much lower, with 3% and 2%, respectively. (Babones, 2019) A political conflict or bad international relations between the two countries may pose a risk to the Australian higher education sector as they heavily rely on Chinese students for funding. For example, China’s Education Bureau made a statement alerting Chinese citizens that they should be prudent whether returning to Australia to study or choosing Australia to study because of a surge of racist attacks against Chinese citizens in Australia. This happened in 2020 during the COVID pandemic. (Birtles, 2020) This can affect Australian universities negatively as the State is revered by many Chinese, and it is also an example of “sharp power” because they are criticizing Australia and making it seem inferior to China.

Second, the influence of the “sharp power” from China can be seen in universities when they can restrict their activities and their academic freedom to please the Chinese students and, therefore, the Chinese government. The disadvantage of having a large percentage of the student body from one nationality in particular is that they can organize and exert pressure or demand changes in the public universities. A perfect example of this was the case in which UNSW was involved in July of 2020. All this began with a tweet from the main account of UNSW. They tweeted the link to an article on their website in defense of human rights and critiquing the situation in Hong Kong. This article quoted Elaine Pearson, the director of Human Rights Watch’s Australia and law lecturer at UNSW, bringing light to the issue of the worsening situation in Hong Kong, although it was not written by her. This incident caused a considerable backlash among the Chinese community, which was quick to organize across social media via platforms like WeChat. They wrote emails to the university condemning this article, and they also wrote to their consulate to ask for explanations. (Walden, 2020)

The troublesome part which makes the author wonder if the proposal of “sharp power” as a “soft power” for authoritarian regimes is more accurate than he previously

thought comes next. The media team from UNSW decides to delete the tweet. They follow it by tweeting two new tweets where they remark the excellent relationship that UNSW has with Mainland China & that they are proud to cater to more than 100 nationalities. They also deleted the articles from their website, and because of the public backlash from the Australian population, they brought them back but not on their main page but as an article of opinion made by the author. They responded that this was the opinion of an academic and not the view of UNSW. Consequently, the damage was already done. This caused Pearson to question the academic freedom of UNSW. Dan Tehan, the Minister for Educations, Skills, and Employment, also got involved and demanded UNSW to protect its academic freedom and freedom of speech. (Walden, 2020) (See annex 1) In response, the vice-chancellor of UNSW, Ian Jacobs, wrote an email to the teachers promising his pledge to both freedom of opinion and academic freedom and admitted that the tweets should not have been deleted. (Zhou, 2020) As has been mentioned previously, “sharp power” pierces the political and information ecosystems of the host receiving this influence. This scandal is a perfect example of how in a democratic society such as Australia, China

Then again, it does not come as a surprise that the Global Times, a Chinese state allegedly aligned newspaper with global outreach, wrote about this issue. The Global Times is an English-speaking newspaper with an international scope of action. It can be considered a “sharp power” tool because it influences people by the articles written there, and it may have Chinese national interests in play instead of being a vehicle of free speech and objectiveness. They can advance the posture of the regime. It is similar to the Russian RT. In this article, they framed it from the perspective of Chinese students who were outraged by the publication of this article. It also critiqued the posture of the university by stating that they took it down because of the overwhelming critiques. (Yusha, 2020)

Regarding the previous issue of the incident at UNSW, it is still perplexing that a top university of that caliber would feel coerced to take down an article condemning human rights violations. Other interests and motions were in place for that kind of response. First, they hold a Confucius Institute. I will justify them in the next section of the analysis as they are a big part of China’s so-called “sharp power.” Second, UNSW is home to the first Torch Innovation Precinct outside of China. This Torch Innovation Precinct was created in 1998 to establish the necessary infrastructure, resources, and environments to nurture innovation and act as engines of economic growth. This was set

up at UNSW in 2016 by the former Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull and the Chinese Premier. On the website of the precinct, it states that The Torch Innovation Precinct and the businesses, start-ups, and enterprises caused by it sum up to a total of 11% of Chinese GDP. It also claims that in host cities of a Torch Innovation Precinct, it can go up to 20% of the local GDP. (The Torch Innovation Precinct, n.d.)

On the one hand, this project seems a step in the right direction for better cooperation between the two nations. It should be able to boost investment in the region and foster innovation. In addition, it supports Australian research by providing funding as well as stimulating entrepreneurship. (The Torch Innovation Precinct, n.d.) On the other hand, this can be used as a form of “sharp power” by China as it influences the university at its very core with a direct relationship with the People’s Republic of China. As it has been mentioned in the theoretical frame, “sharp power” combines elements of persuasion and attraction of “soft power” with obscure interests and practices by the perpetrator state. Actions that might seem inoffensive and which advance noble objectives might not be. The foundation of the precinct might hide other interests in mind. It is feasible that one of the consequences of the establishment of this institution is that it pushes the university to maintain a more cautious approach to conflictive interests and stances. However, although this can be a result of “sharp power,” there is no evidence supporting the claim apart from the understanding of scholars as in power, both soft and sharp power are intangible resources in the first place and difficult to measure. Yet, if we follow the term proposed by the *National Endowment for Democracy*, it can be seen as a form of manipulation to attain its objectives and protect its values abroad. Therefore, it can be considered “sharp power.”

Another instrument that risks Australia’s universities’ academic freedom is the creation of an online reporting portal that is accessible in Australia. This portal can be used by anyone in Australia to report acts that diminish China’s influence. Moreover, it is a state portal which means that it is under the control of the Chinese Communist Party and its authoritarian doctrine. It is a frightening tool as it allows people to report on a comment made by a Chinese friend for example and it could be investigated and have adverse effects back in China. The part which concerns Australian universities is that students can report on the universities’ professors if they criticize the regime. This attempt at gaining international influence is hazardous for Australia as it effectively threatens their freedom of speech and freedom of academia at these universities. This portal also strives to build an international team of experts responsible for standardizing

the portal in other languages to be able to gather more information as people who speak other languages can now participate. In theory, it strives to promote Chinese knowledge and Chinese answers, but it is a form of “sharp power” because it is meddling in Australian affairs and poses a risk to the freedom of academia at those universities while masquerading itself on another pretext. (Bagshaw & Hunter, 2020) A proposed solution has been given to solve this issue and tackle this attack in democracy by some authors. An interesting point of view suggests the use of the Counter Foreign Interference Taskforce created in 2019 with an \$87.8 million investment to investigate reporting made in Australia to this policing system. (Anderson, 2020)The explication for the creation of this task force was started by Scott Morrison, current prime minister of Australia, in a media release. Morrison (2019) stated that the goal was “to protect Australians from foreign interference better.” They also asserted that they would combat disinformation activities occurring globally and which damages democratic processes and poses a security risk. (Scott Morrison, 2019) Therefore, recognizing the threat of activities that could form part of an authoritarian country’s “sharp power.”

It has been discussed throughout this analysis what are the risks of the use of “sharp power” by China in Australia, whether directly via an institution or indirectly, due to, for example, the vast number of Chinese students at Australian universities. Now, this analysis will try to answer if Australian universities have acted because of this “sharp power” and whether they have inhibited the freedom of opinion rights of students at universities. In 2020, a student activist at the University of Queensland was suspended due to 11 claims of misconduct because of his activism work. He was very critical of the University’s ties with China and was charged with organizing protests to protect human rights in Hong Kong. One of these protests ended in altercations. The troublesome part is that the severity of the penalty. The university imposed him a 2-year suspension from the university, which some argue may be a result of the strong ties that the University of Queensland has with financial partners in China, thus limiting his freedom of opinion by the own university. This penalty was deemed too harsh even by the own University of Queensland Chancellor. Peter Varghese (2020) “There are aspects of the findings and the severity of the penalty which personally concern me.” This was investigated by him, and he assembled an out-of-session senate meeting to discuss this issue. At the end of the procedure, two findings of serious misconduct were filed against him by the senate of the university instead of the previous 11 claims. Moreover, they also emphasized that it had nothing to do with the student’s personal or

political point of view. This reassured the university's protection of freedom of opinion by their students. Nonetheless, it is troubling that if it had not been a public opinion crisis for the university, they might not have proceeded with the due diligence and punish him for his actions. In addition, it makes people question whether the first and harsher suspension followed the guidelines or if it was a tactic to serve the best interests of one of its contributors in the form of the Chinese students or partnerships with the Chinese State. It must be noted that the University of Queensland hosts a Confucius Institute, which is in direct control of the Chinese State. I will explain the purpose of this organization in the following section. The student in question is bringing this issue to the Supreme Court as he is suing the university for breach of contract and defamation. (Withey, 2020)

7.4 Confucius Institutes in Australia

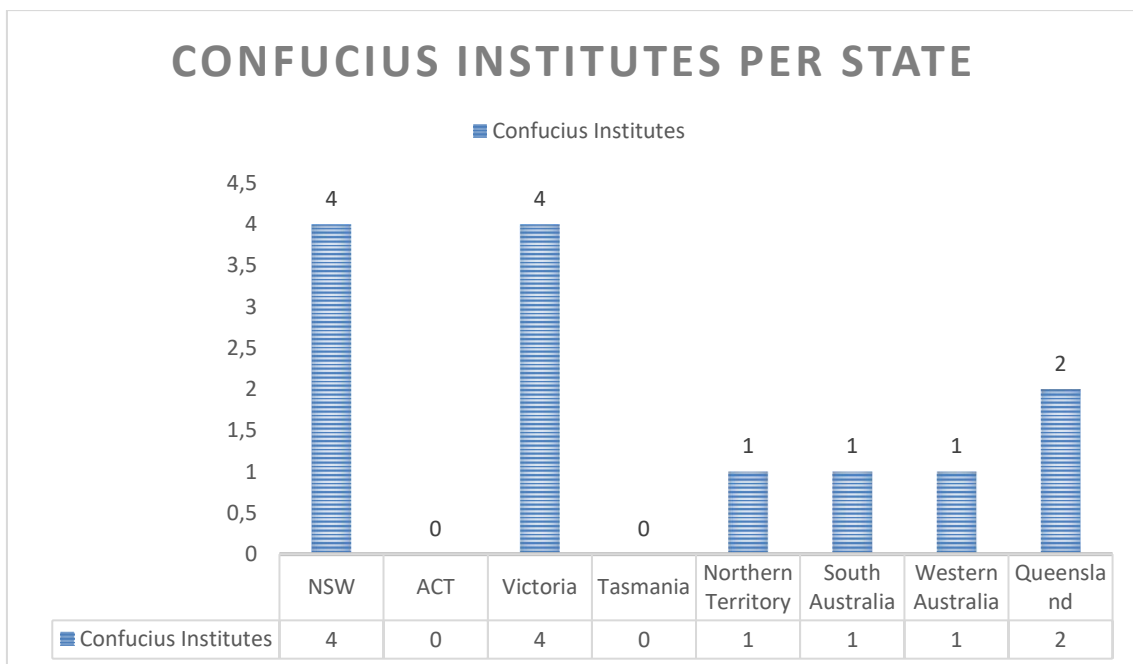
Confucius Institutes have been recognized as a form of “soft power” from China to the world. This is similar, although with some significant structural differences, to other institutes or councils which foster the learning of languages, traditions, and values of the institute's home country. It also promotes cultural programs and language exchanges to build bridges between the recipient's country and, in this case, China. The Cervantes Institute, the British Council, and the Alliance Française are examples of this type of institution. They are used as tools of “soft power” across the world to spread the cultural values and traditions of the democratic country. It can be said that the Confucius Institutes have the same objectives in theory, but hereby it will be discussed how they go beyond an institute's scope of action and can be considered part of the “sharp power” exercised by China in the world, and especially in Australia.

First, what are the Confucius Institutes? These institutes are a collaboration between Chinese universities and host universities. Therefore, they are based at universities' campuses. That is one significant structural difference from other types of institutes administered by other countries. These institutes are administered by the Office of Chinese Language Council International, also known as Hanban, with headquarters in Peking. Hanban is a non-governmental organization under the supervision of the Chinese Ministry of Education. (Hanban, 2013) Hanban is responsible for the development and upkeep of both Confucius Institutes and Confucius classrooms. Confucius classrooms follow the same principles as the

Confucius Institutes, but they teach mandarin Chinese and promote their culture in primary and secondary schools.

From 2008 until 2017, Hanban reportedly spent 2 billion US dollars in the establishment of Confucius Institutes and classrooms across the world. (United States Senate, 2019) This can explain how rapidly they have grown in presence over the world. As of 2021, there were 541 Confucius Institutes at universities and 2000 classrooms around the globe. (Sands, 2021) In Australia, you can find Confucius Institutes at the University of Western Australia, the University of Melbourne, the University of Adelaide, the University of Queensland, the Queensland University of Technology, the University of Sydney, the University of New South Wales, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, the University of Newcastle, at Charles Darwin University, at the New South Wales Department of Education, Business Confucius Institute at Victoria University and La Trobe University. (Dig Mandarin, 2021) This can be classified into states and territories as the following graph shows:

Figure 5



Prepared by the author

Source: Dig Mandarin

It could be said that these institutes are gathered in NSW and Victoria in concentration. This is mainly due to 2 factors. They have the most significant number of universities in Australia, and they also have the largest population size. Therefore, it is an intelligent measure as they are going to be able to cater to more people. These institutes focus on teaching Chinese culture and language to students at the universities. However, it also offers language courses for people across the region. Moreover, it can

be noted that 6 out of the great eight research universities have a Confucius Institute on campus.

At UNSW, for example, they offer a wide array of activities such as the ‘Weekly Chinese Corner’ events which provides the opportunity of practicing their native language in the city they are settling in as well as serving as an opportunity for Chinese students to get to know people and expand their circles. This service allows Chinese students to adapt quickly to their new home as they will be meeting new people who can help them out. In addition, one of the most popular programs is the study tours to China, where students from the university can learn and discover Chinese traditions and values while they learn Chinese in the meantime. (Confucius Institute, 2021) Another interesting side of this Confucius Institute and which can also be found at many others in Australia, is that they offer scholarships to UNSW students to study in China. These can go from 4 weeks to a semester and up to a year. It is also a desirable scholarship because it gifts the recipient with a series of perks, including medical insurance, tuition fees, lodging, and a living stipend. The main requirement to be eligible to apply is to pass one of the accepted Chinese exams. (Confucius Institute, 2021)

These are all harmless initiatives with the best interests of society at heart. At least, that is the pretext. They benefit the students because they can learn a new language and develop strong ties with a rich country in traditions and culture. This is also a form of public diplomacy because although Hanban is a non-governmental organization, they are supervised by the Ministry of Education in China. This public diplomacy exerted by the State allows it to gain “soft power.” However, as it has been mentioned before, the proposed term of “sharp power” is what Authoritarian regimes such as China use because they perforate the political and social environment. These practices may seem inoffensive, but they hide the true intentions of China. In addition, they advocate for their non-democratic traditions and cultures. For example, it has been mentioned before the case where UNSW deleted an article advocating for human rights and critiquing the situation in Hong Kong in 2020. In this case, the university felt compelled to delete it because of the pressure applied by the Chinese community at UNSW. It cannot be ruled out that the Confucius Institute had some part in it because they are an independent organization inside the university. And if not, part of the community which attends activities organized by the Confucius Institute could have felt

influenced to pressure the university because of the values and traditions which they learn at the Confucius Institute.

In the US in 2017, 29 out of 100 Confucius Institutes have been closed by the universities. (Legerwood, 2020) First, investigations carried out by the Human Rights Watch have found that the Chinese government attempts to restrict academic freedom abroad. As a result, they propose a series of measures to limit the influence of the Chinese government on foreign soil. They ask universities to get rid of Confucius Institutes on campus because it is irreconcilable with the defense of academic freedom. As it has been covered before, Confucius Institutes are the expansion of the Chinese government, and these institutes have been found to use hiring practices that take political loyalty into account and that they censor issues in course materials. (Human Rights Watch, 2019) Soon after this report, a new bill was passed called the *2019 National Defense Authorization Act*. This forced universities to choose from having these institutes or from receiving funding for language programs from the US Defense Department. This was a response from Trump as he did not want China controlling the university sector in the US. A similar and more recent example can be seen in Australia on the government trying to limit the influence of foreign powers. As they have recognized the meddling and the impact of foreign powers in Australia, the government has introduced a foreign veto law. This grants the power to reject and cancel agreements between foreign countries if the minister of Foreign Affairs believes that it is inconsistent with Australia's foreign policy. This can overrule Australian states and territories' agreements with foreign countries as well as universities. (Visentin, 2021) This poses a significant risk to Confucius Institutes as the universities' agreements must be reviewed to be able to renew them. If they find anything inconsistent with Australia's foreign policy, such as the use of "sharp power" practices, it could lead to the closure of Confucius Institutes. The negative consequences of a possible closure of these institutes are that the loss of these institutes will also damage the capacity of universities to teach Chinese and foster cooperation between countries.

One more example of how Confucius Institutes can help China gain "sharp power" can be found at the University of Queensland. Hereby, they have found that the Confucius Institute sponsored four courses at the University of Queensland. One of them is a course that taught about China's role in responding to global security challenges. These challenges include human rights, counterterrorism, etc. (Four Corners, 2019). This is the most blatant example of the use of "sharp power" by the

Confucius Institutes and by association with the Chinese regime. It is very hypocritical to sponsor a course at a public university with supposedly academic freedom when the course is being adapted to support the Chinese narrative, thus being a precise use of “sharp power.”

It is also strange that they would have done so circa 2019 when the story of the Uyghurs and the human rights violations in Xinjiang started gaining traction in the media. This peak of interest can be demonstrated with the use of Google Trends. (See annex 2) The term Uyghur started becoming popular in 2018 and 2019. The author of this study supports the claim that at least this institute was a tool for “sharp power” as it meddled with the academic integrity of the university and the students. Salvatore Babones gives his opinion on this issue. Babones (2020) stated: “The reality is that Confucius Institutes are not so much designed to indoctrinate the students who take their courses as to influence the administrators of the universities that host them.” He later distinguishes between the practices of public diplomacy done by other countries such as the British Council and which are independent, with the Confucius Institute, which poses a risk to Australian society because it pressures the universities. (Babones, 2020)

7.5 Thinktanks

Thinktanks’ mission of interdisciplinary research and aims to advise on different policy issues. This research is done through networking and expertise combined. They differ from nature to governments, but they can provide their work to commercial clients and governments. In addition, many of them are non-profit. (Ladi, 2015) Think tanks can be a tool of “sharp power” because although they focus on an area of research, they depend on funding to operate. If this funding comes from questionable sources, it could impact the objectivity and the independence of the research done by these Think tanks.

However, there is very little evidence that the Chinese government is controlling a think tank in Australia. There were allegations against the Australia-China Relations Institute because part of his founding money came from two Chinese millionaires. 2.8\$ million, to be exact. (Leibold, 2017) This allegation has not gone any further, and the only claim detractors can make is that The Australia-China Relations Institute has a positive attitude towards Australian-Sino relationships. On June 16th of 2021, they published a report titled “*Australian views on the Australia-China relationship.*” In this

report, they surveyed people. They asked about the benefits of this relationship, their concern with it, their degree of distrust of the Chinese government, and a harder Australian government line on China. This survey makes the author believe that they are genuinely an unbiased independent research institution like they boast on their website. (Collinson & Burke, 2021)

On the other hand, there is a Thinktank based in Canberra very critical of the Chinese government. This Thinktank is called the Australian Strategic Policy Institute. It has ties with the Department of Defence and other military contractors. Therefore, it can also be true that these investments influence the think tanks' points of view. They benefit from the disagreements between countries because one of their goals was to increase military expenditure. Tensions between countries lead to these kinds of results.

Nonetheless, academic integrity is respected. The ThinkTank is very critical of the Chinese Regime. For example, they have mapped out Xinjian's re-education camps. An interesting report published by this think tank is titled "*Australia must protect its Chinese-language media.*" It investigates the objectiveness of Australian media that publish content in Chinese. It also highlights whom they have found to have ties with the Chinese Communist Party, such as the media company called Nan Hai. (Joske, Li, Pascoe, & Attrill, 2020) Media can be a way to use "sharp power," especially considering the large number of Chinese citizens who live in Australia and seek reliable information in their language. Media should not have ties with a foreign government, especially an authoritarian regime, because they restrict freedom of the press and freedom of opinion. If this is the case, media is part of China's "sharp power" mechanism in motion. Last but not least, although this institute may seem a bit alarmist, it serves the purpose of warning and bringing issues to light that the authorities can later investigate.

8 Conclusion

In response to this study, this section will present various conclusions from the research paper.

First, it is challenging to measure "sharp power" and if it exists because it is an intangible resource. China does use "soft power" but with a different structure than democratic countries. Therefore, it is called "sharp power" because it aims to manipulate Australia and advance its national interests. The Thinktank ASPI has allegedly found evidence that some media companies work with the Chinese

Communist Party in Australia. Moreover, the reporting portal accessible from Australia is another tool that perforates Australian society and must be monitored. These examples demonstrate that “sharp power” is a social phenomenon because they benefit from amassing that power.

Second, in general, Australian universities and higher education institutions are overrepresented by international students and Chinese students. On the one hand, this benefits from using them as “cash cows” and strengthening relations between the countries. On the other hand, this puts enormous pressure on universities which might feel threatened to restrict their freedom of opinion to maintain a good relationship with their public.

Third, the analysis’s findings indicate that technological companies influence Australian universities. In the case of Huawei, it is difficult to distinguish if the Chinese government is behind it or not. If it is, it can be an example of “sharp power” because they have been applying pressure indirectly to universities which benefits the Chinese regime.

Fourth, the results indicate that Confucius Institute plays a dual role. On the one hand, it offers excellent resources such as language courses and scholarships. On the contrary, it can be a tool of “sharp power” because it is an extension of the Chinese Communist Party as Hanban is dependant on the Ministry of education. Moreover, the location of Confucius Institutes at universities poses a severe threat to Australian universities because it coerces them to change a course material or function as a pressure tool by the Chinese government.

Last but not least, after the above-mixed findings of this investigation, the author would recommend Australia to try to reach an agreement with China to change the location of Confucius Institutes. These Institutes do a great job promoting the languages and traditions of Chinese culture, but they threaten universities when they have them on campus. It would also be recommendable to use the Counter Foreign Interference Taskforce at universities to prevent the reporting portal or investigate other allegations of foreign interference in Australian campuses.

Answering the last question from the research paper, the author believes that the concept of “sharp power” is here to stay and can be differentiated enough between the

idea used for democracies. Hence, “sharp power” can be used to silence, pressure, and manipulate, as shown during the analysis by an authoritarian regime like China.

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10 Annex

Annex 1

UNSW scandal Twitter thread

https://twitter.com/badiuca/status/1289337058104881152?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1289337058104881152%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.abc.net.au%2Fnews%2F2020-08-03%2Funsw-under-fire-for-deleting-china-social-media-posts%2F12517306

Annex 2

Google Trend. Uyghur



Source: Google Trends