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THE IMPACT OF CHINA'S SOFT POWER: THE ROLE OF THE CONFUCIUS INSTITUTE
IN ESTONIA

Master's Thesis

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

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Introduction

In today's changing landscape of international relations, China's rapid development has brought new attention to the concept of soft power. According to the American political scientist Joseph Nye, soft power is defined as the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2008). In the meantime, cultural diplomacy became a key tool in this strategy, where institutions or organisations such as the Confucius Institute (CI) play an important role in promoting language and culture abroad.

The CI is similar to the German Goethe Institute, the British Council, or the French Institute. It teaches language, promotes cultural exchange, and offers opportunities for student and staff exchanges (Confucius Institute, n.d.). As of October 12, 2024, there were 554 Confucius Institutes and Classrooms worldwide, which reflects the significant Chinese global presence and how soft power can be used as a tool of influence (DigMandarin, 2024). Nevertheless, their close connection to the Chinese government and rapid expansion have drawn both interest and criticism for controversial activities and for spreading Chinese influence abroad (Lum & Fischer, 2023).

Globally, China's soft power operates within the broader framework of its foreign policy. According to the Global Soft Power Index 2025 by Brand France, China has become the second-most influential country in terms of soft power, surpassed only by the United States (Jagodzinski, 2025). Chinese global soft power strategies, along with the Confucius Institutes, also include initiatives such as "One Belt, One Road" (Irfan, 2024) to influence countries through economic and infrastructural cooperation. Although such strategies have facilitated cultural and economic partnerships, concerns remain about their political implications. As a result, the Confucius Institutes began to attract attention due to scepticism about whether the Chinese Communist Party uses these educational institutions to spread its influence and propaganda (Einmann, 2021). Following these concerns, many countries around the world started to close the Confucius Institutes. For example, six universities in Australia have closed CI on their campuses during the last few years (Dziedzic & Duffy, 2025).

In this global context, the Baltic states provide a unique regional perspective on China's soft power impact. Their ties reflect a mix of economic collaboration, cultural exchange, and political caution. While Confucius Institutes remain active in the Baltic countries, they face growing scrutiny over their broader objectives. For instance, Lithuania's 2019 National Threat

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Assessment report noted that Chinese intelligence agencies also operate through the Confucius Institutes and attempt to ensure that Lithuania would not raise sensitive issues regarding the independence of Tibet and Taiwan (State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania, 2019, pp. 32-33). This example shows China's wider strategic intentions in the region and highlights the need to critically analyse Chinese soft power tools as a means of influence.

In Estonia, a small European country with strategic importance, the only Confucius Institute was established at Tallinn University on September 22, 2010 (Tallinn University, 2010). Since that time, the CI has offered Chinese language courses and organised different cultural activities, such as workshops on cooking, tea, and business culture (Tallinn University, n.d.). Even though the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University is still the official cultural representative of China in Estonia, its activities are closely related to a larger Chinese influence strategy, which includes soft power (Nitza-Makowska et al., 2023, pp. 24–26). Therefore, in order to understand the role of the Confucius Institute, it is necessary to briefly examine the overall context of the Chinese presence in Estonia.

Estonia's engagement with the People's Republic of China has been shaped by broader geopolitical factors. Since diplomatic relations were established on September 11, 1991, Estonia and China have steadily increased their trade, culture, education, and technology cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). In 2010, Estonia joined the "16+1" cooperation platform between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and China (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). Later, in 2017, Estonia officially joined the Chinese initiative "One Belt, One Road." Estonia signed two agreements as part of this initiative to foster collaboration: the Memorandum of Understanding on Economic Cooperation and the Agreement on the Digital Silk Road (Nitza-Makowska et al., 2023, p. 28). However, the Estonian authority decided not to continue its participation in this project after the memorandum expired on November 27, 2022 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2024). In addition, Estonia, like Lithuania and Latvia, withdrew from the "16+1" cooperation format in the same year (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). This decision was made by the Estonian government because of the inconsistency of the Chinese foreign policy agenda with the values of the EU, as well as concerns about Beijing's potential influence.

Despite Estonia's withdrawal from the above-mentioned initiatives, China continues to use its strategies and project its influence in Estonia through cultural and educational initiatives. It uses the tools of cultural diplomacy, education, and science. The Confucius Institute plays a

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significant role in this by providing Chinese language classes and workshops on Chinese culture and promoting academic cooperation with Estonian universities (Nitza-Makowska et al., 2023, pp. 24–26).

Beijing's influence strategies also include active involvement in various projects and their implementation in collaboration with local governments, companies, and the Chinese embassy. However, these projects, for example, the “Belt and Road” initiative, are met with diverse attitudes and concerns. A number of such projects could be used as a soft power strategy but include the elements of “sharp power” (Nitza-Makowska et al., 2023, p. 29). According to Walker and Ludwig (2017, p. 13), it is “sharp” because it is usually used by authoritarian regimes and is aimed to “pierce, penetrate, or perforate the political and information environments of targeted countries.” Moreover, Chinese technology giants such as Huawei and ZTE are of particular concern because of possible strategic influence, dependency, and cyber espionage (EFIS, 2020, pp. 74, 77).

As a result, such concerns directly impact the attitude towards China in Estonia. On the one hand, about 50% of Estonians see China positively, perceiving it as an economically and technologically advanced country. On the other hand, there is growing concern among young people, journalists, and the political elite, which is caused by criticism of China's foreign policy, its declared “neutrality” on the war in Ukraine, and Beijing's growing partnership with Moscow. Accordingly, although economic cooperation with China is important for Estonia, China's cooperation with Russia is increasingly raising concerns (Nitza-Makowska et al., 2023, pp. 34–35).

In general, China's activities, in particular the Confucius Institute's activity, are perceived differently in Estonia. Despite the fact that such institutions contribute to cultural exchange and strengthen relationships, they are often criticised by the media, politicians, and analysts.

This complexity draws attention to a broader issue in academic research. Previous research on China's soft power focuses on high-profile cases, such as the United States, while neglecting smaller countries like Estonia. This underestimation creates a gap in the understanding of how soft power works in different contexts. For example, there are different reports and articles that analyse the influence of China's soft power and Confucius Institutes on the education system of the United States (Portman & Carper, 2019; Lum & Fischer, 2023). At the same time, there are only a few studies dedicated to the issues related to China's soft power

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in Estonia, such as “The Rough Face of China's soft power in the Baltics – Investigation” (LRT, 2019) or “EFIS: Chinese intelligence increasingly a concern” (Einmann, 2021). Accordingly, this research is important because it can provide valuable insights into how foreign cultural institutions interact with and influence small states. Also, the research evaluates how Estonia portrays China and its soft power impact through Estonian media.

Hence, the primary purpose of this research is to analyse the impact of China's soft power and the role that the Confucius Institute in Estonia plays in this concept. The main research questions of this study are: *How do Estonian media portray China between January and March 2025? What is the role of Confucius Institutes in the impact of China's soft power in Estonia's media environment?*

The research period from January to March 2025 was chosen due to its significance in the geopolitical and cultural context. This time frame includes several important events that provide valuable perspectives for understanding the portrayal of China and the role of its soft power strategy. Primarily, the inauguration of Donald Trump for the second term as the US President on January 20, 2025, signifies another potential shift in global affairs. His unpredictable leadership style (McManus, 2025) can impact the interaction and perceptions of international relations actors of China's influence. Also, this period covers the Chinese New Year celebration (Borresen, n.d.), which provides the opportunity to analyse the cultural diplomacy activities of the Confucius Institute, and how they are shown in local media narratives. Moreover, February 24, 2025, marks the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war further heightens geopolitical tensions and highlights concerns about authoritarian regimes and their potential impact in the international arena (Nitza-Makowska et al., 2024, pp. 7-9). These factors make this research period particularly relevant for addressing the research questions.

In the first part of the research, the literature review, I will analyse the concepts of soft power and sharp power. Also, I will introduce the concept of cultural diplomacy as a tool of soft power and will present China's approach to using it. Then, I will explain how the soft power impact is conceptualised in this research. Additionally, I will provide information on Confucius Institutes and how China uses them as a tool of soft power.

In the second part of the study, research methodology, I will describe the research methods I used, explain the data collection process and analysis, the coding processes of the

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articles, and provide a more detailed rationale for selecting the January-March 2025 period and Estonia as the case study.

In the third part, I will analyse the Estonian media, specifically Postimees, Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR), and Delfi, on what news they have about China between January and March 2025. Afterward, I will divide that news into categories and analyse the common themes and patterns. Furthermore, I will examine the official website of the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University and the Facebook group to see what activities and events it provides and if they are mentioned in the above-stated media news.

This research will use qualitative research methods, specifically content and discourse analysis. Qualitative content analysis will be applied to evaluate the content from Estonian media such as Postimees, Estonian Public Broadcasting, and Delfi. It will help to identify the common themes to see how the Estonian media portrays the Confucius Institute and China in general. Also, discourse analysis, particularly critical discourse analysis, will be used to examine publications related to China and the Confucius Institute's activities and to uncover hidden meanings and assumptions 'behind' these publications (Fairclough, 2012, pp. 9-20).

Keywords: Estonia, China, soft power, cultural diplomacy, Confucius Institute

Research classification code(s) (CERCS): S170 Political and administrative sciences; S220 Cultural anthropology, ethnology

1. Literature review

1.1. The concepts of "soft power" and "sharp power"

Joseph Nye introduced the concept of "soft power" in the late 20th century to describe a nation's ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion or payment (Nye, 2008). According to him, "soft power is the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment" (Nye, 2008, p. 94). This form of power rests on a country's intangible resources, such as its culture, political values, and foreign policies, which, if seen as legitimate or appealing, can induce other actors to want the same outcomes (Nye, 2008). Soft power is thus associated with positive attraction and persuasion. For example, a state may gain soft power if its lifestyle and ideals are admired and emulated by others or if its policies are seen as moral and beneficial. Soft power should not be seen as merely passive or symbolic. In many cases, it actively shapes preferences, often more subtly than hard

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power does - through appeal, example, and normative influence. For instance, it can set agendas and frame narratives in international politics (Nye, 2008).

Sharp power, by contrast, is a relatively new concept. It refers to the influence tactics of authoritarian states like China and Russia that go beyond the benign methods of soft power. The term was popularised by researchers at the National Endowment for Democracy, who argued that what had been misidentified as authoritarian “soft” influence is better understood as “sharp power” that “pierces and penetrates the political and information environments in targeted countries” (Walker & Ludwig, 2017). Whereas soft power operates via attraction and voluntary admiration, sharp power employs manipulation, censorship, and covert coercion. Sharp power techniques include leveraging disinformation, propaganda, and covert funding to shape narratives in favour of the authoritarian regime, often exploiting the openness of democracies while restricting information at home (Skoneczny & Cacko, 2021). As Walker and Ludwig (2017) describe, the features of sharp power are “subversion, bullying, and pressure, which combine to promote self-censorship” in foreign societies. Rather than winning hearts and minds through admiration, sharp power seeks to manipulate minds. It coerces behaviour by “engineering consent” or sowing confusion, often by projecting the authoritarian regime’s values (such as top-down control and censorship) outward under a benign guise.

Transparency and voluntarism are two features that distinguish soft power from sharp power (Nye, 2019). Soft power initiatives, such as cultural exchanges or truthful broadcasting, rely on the messenger's perceived credibility and authenticity, which fosters goodwill (Nye, 2008). In contrast, sharp power methods typically lack transparency. They mask the state's hand in influencing foreign publics, often through front organisations, paid proxies, or disinformation campaigns. Nye (2018) emphasizes that the “dividing line between soft and sharp power” in public diplomacy is one of truth and openness: if a country's media or cultural outreach operates openly (even if state-funded), it can be considered soft power. However, when influence efforts become deceptive or covert, for example, a state secretly controlling foreign media outlets, then “the boundary of sharp power has been crossed” (Nye, 2018). Thus, while democratic states typically rely on soft power tools consistent with open discourse and mutual exchange, authoritarian states may use sharp power methods that reflect their domestic values of control and often subvert the very openness that soft power requires.

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Generally, soft power and sharp power represent fundamentally different strategies. While sharp power relies on infiltration and manipulation-based coercion, soft power uses attractiveness and positive appeal to co-opt others. In the case of China, it is important to acknowledge this distinction. China's worldwide influence effort combines soft power tools with more sharp and opaque strategies.

1.2. Cultural diplomacy as a tool of soft power

Cultural diplomacy refers to the use of cultural interactions, including arts, education, language, and heritage, to promote mutual understanding and further a nation's foreign policy goals (Multicultural Journal, n.d.). Scholars widely consider cultural diplomacy a core instrument of soft power because it attracts foreign publics by showcasing a country's culture and values in a favourable light (Cull, 2008; Cummings, 2003). Nye (2008) notes that the resources which produce soft power often arise from a nation's culture and policies, and public diplomacy, of which cultural diplomacy is a core component, is the mechanism to project those resources abroad. For example, nations host cultural exchanges, language classes, art exhibitions, and even sports events to highlight their most attractive qualities and win goodwill among foreign audiences (Nye, 2008). In essence, cultural diplomacy is where soft power becomes visible and operational. Rather than direct persuasion, it appeals to shared meanings and cultural familiarity. When these efforts succeed, they create a reservoir of goodwill that governments can tap into later in international relations.

In the academic literature, cultural diplomacy is often attributed to creating a positive image and building long-term relationships that increase a country's influence. For example, according to Tsuprykova (2020), cultural diplomacy is described as a "key soft power tool" that allows states to cultivate a favourable reputation and trust among foreign publics. Unlike propaganda, which is one-way and often suspect, cultural diplomacy emphasises exchange and mutuality, such as student and scholarly exchanges, language teaching programs, and cultural institutes, which can generate credibility and people-to-people connections (Jora, 2013). Many countries have institutionalised cultural diplomacy through organisations like the British Council (UK), Goethe-Institut (Germany), Alliance Française (France), and Instituto Cervantes (Spain), which promote language and culture abroad. These institutions function on the premise that familiarity leads to favourability: as foreign individuals learn a country's language or enjoy its

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cultural products, they may develop more positive perceptions of that country (Snow, 2009, pp. 3-11).

The Chinese government, recognising that culture is both an asset and a narrative tool, especially in its engagement with smaller or geopolitically sensitive states like Estonia, has made cultural diplomacy central to its global strategy since the mid-2000s. President Hu Jintao declared at the 17th CCP Congress in 2007 that culture is integral to comprehensive national power and urged China to “enhance culture as part of the soft power of our country” (Xinhua, 2007). This high-level directive marked the beginning of China’s “going out” strategy for culture. Under Hu’s administration and later under President Xi Jinping, the Chinese government has doubled down on cultural diplomacy initiatives (d’Hooghe, 2015). In 2014, Xi Jinping explicitly called for boosting China’s soft power by “giving a good Chinese narrative and better communicating China’s message to the world” (Shambaugh, 2015). This statement outlined China’s drive to shape global perceptions through cultural appeal and highlighted the leadership’s resolve to invest in soft power.

Following these directives, China’s cultural diplomacy strategy and implementation have been expansive. A primary instrument has been the establishment of Confucius Institutes (discussed in detail in Subsection 1.4) worldwide to teach Chinese language and culture. Since the first Confucius Institute opened in 2004 (Confucius Institute, n.d.), the number has grown to hundreds, reflecting China’s commitment to cultural outreach. These Institutes are often described as fundamental to Chinese cultural diplomacy, analogous to Western cultural institutes, and signal the importance China places on language as a channel of influence. Additionally, China has increased cultural exchanges and events. It organises cultural festivals, art exhibitions, film weeks, and celebrations of Chinese holidays in foreign cities. Such events are designed to showcase China’s rich heritage and contemporary achievements, thereby improving its image abroad. For instance, Chinese cultural troupes touring abroad or the global broadcasts of events like the Beijing Olympics 2008 and the Shanghai Expo 2010 served to display Chinese culture to international audiences in line with soft power objectives (Fan, 2010).

Another facet of China’s cultural diplomacy is the internationalisation of Chinese media and pop culture, which complements its cultural institutes. China’s state media expansion – launching multi-language news channels (CGTN television, Xinhua news agency bureaus, China Radio International broadcasts, etc.) – is partly aimed at telling China’s story to the world and

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reframing narratives in a more China-friendly way. Meanwhile, Chinese cinema, literature, and television dramas are increasingly promoted overseas, sometimes through co-productions or cultural agreements. The goal is to enhance China's cultural presence globally and to build what Chinese officials term a "culturally powerful nation" (*wenhua qiangguo*) that is respected not just for its economic and military might but for its civilization and values (Li, 2009; Sun, 2015). Indeed, Chinese scholars often link cultural diplomacy to improving China's international image, reducing fears of a "China threat" by highlighting its peaceful culture, and winning friends abroad through charm (Maags, 2014).

As a result, China's implementation of cultural diplomacy has achieved significant visibility. By hosting and funding language programs and cultural centres overseas, China ensures that foreigners frequently engage with Chinese culture and language. Additionally, large-scale initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) include cultural and people-to-people exchange components (tourism promotion and educational scholarships), indicating that cultural outreach is synchronised with economic and diplomatic initiatives (Rolland, 2017). Chinese leaders often cite historical cultural icons (Confucius, the Silk Road) in international forums to invoke positive cultural resonance. This concerted effort has led some observers to speak of China's "charm offensive" (Kurlantzick, 2007) – a campaign to charm its way into global good graces through culture and diplomacy rather than force.

At the same time, the reviewed literature indicates challenges and criticisms of China's cultural diplomacy. One challenge is ensuring authenticity and avoiding the perception of propaganda. As Nye (2008) cautions, if the content of a nation's culture or values is not attractive, merely broadcasting it louder will not produce soft power. In the case of China, efforts to control the message tightly, for example, by avoiding discussion of controversial aspects of Chinese politics, can undermine credibility. Some critics argue that certain Chinese cultural diplomacy efforts blur into propaganda, which "cannot produce soft power" if audiences perceive it as one-sided or disingenuous (Nye, 2008, p. 99). This has been demonstrated in cases where cultural events or institutes were accused of censoring topics (such as human rights or Taiwan) to align with Beijing's political sensitivities (Jakhar, 2019).

Nevertheless, cultural diplomacy remains the basis of China's soft power strategy. When effectively implemented, emphasising genuine exchange, mutual learning, and respect, it has the potential to significantly build China's soft power by creating networks of cultural affinity.

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1.3. Soft power impact conceptualisation

Understanding the impact of soft power requires addressing how to define and measure an inherently abstract concept. Soft power's effects are often diffuse and long-term (changing attitudes, generating goodwill, or shaping preferences) which makes pinpointing cause and effect challenging (Nye, 2011). In the academic literature, researchers have proposed different frameworks to conceptualise and evaluate the impact of soft power. Nye's distinction between soft power resources and soft power outcomes is a common starting point. Resources refer to the assets that potentially generate attraction (culture, values, policies), while outcomes refer to the behavioural influence achieved (such as another country's public or government aligning with one's preferences because of that attraction). Nye (2008) suggests that one can gauge whether a particular asset is an attractive soft power resource through polls or focus groups (for instance, by measuring the attitudes of foreign publics). For example, global opinion surveys indicating a favourable view of a country's culture or leadership would signal the presence of soft power. However, whether that attraction "in turn produces desired policy outcomes" is context-dependent and must be judged on a case-by-case basis. There is often a gap between possessing soft power resources and realising influence, analogous to having military assets versus winning a war (Nye, 2008). Thus, a country may be liked abroad (with high soft power potential), yet it fails to translate that into support on specific international issues.

Given the above issues, measuring soft power has always been debated. Qualitative assessments often involve case studies of impact, such as examining whether a state's cultural diplomacy efforts have led to improved diplomatic relations or changes in the target country's foreign policy. Quantitative approaches have also been attempted. Scholars and think tanks have developed composite indices to rank or score countries' soft power. One prominent example was the Soft Power 30 index by Portland Communications and USC Center on Public Diplomacy (2019), which, from 2015 to 2019, ranked countries based on categories like culture, education, global engagement, and polling of public perceptions. Similarly, the Global Soft Power Index (Brand Finance) and the Asia Power Index (Lowy Institute) include soft power measures. These indices combine objective indicators (such as the number of cultural institutes, international students hosted, UNESCO World Heritage sites, and the size of the diplomatic network) with subjective polling data on a country's attractiveness. For instance, the Soft Power 30 index considered the number of foreign cultural missions and the international popularity of a country's

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entertainment alongside survey data on global familiarity and favourability (McClory, 2018). Such measures can give a broad comparative sense of soft power assets and reputation.

At the same time, scholars caution that soft power measurement lacks consensus and precision. As Zhang (2022) observes, the diffuse nature of soft power and its emphasis on intangibles have meant “little consensus as to how soft power could be properly measured.” Each measurement scheme has pitfalls. For example, composite indices may arbitrarily weight specific indicators. Also, surveys may reflect short-term fluctuations in popularity rather than a more profound impact. Moreover, correlation is not causation. A country may be viewed favourably for reasons unrelated to another country's cultural diplomacy efforts. Some researchers focus on outcome-oriented metrics, such as whether states vote together in international organisations or form alliances (attributing soft power influence of persuasion, not coercion, led to alignment). Others propose experimental approaches, like evaluation of changes in the opinions of foreign participants before and after exposure to a soft power initiative (such as attending a cultural event or education exchange program), to isolate the impact (Ang et al., 2015).

Nye's own framework implies a conversion process: soft power resources lead to target responses, which then lead to outcomes (Nye, 2011). Along this chain, a breach can occur – for example, a country may invest in broadcasting (resource) and succeed in attracting a large audience (response), yet fail to change any policies (outcome) if political or security interests override public opinion. Scholars like Treverton and Jones (2005) advocate separating inputs, outputs, and outcomes of soft power to capture impact systematically. Inputs are the resources deployed (such as money spent on cultural programs and the number of cultural centres), outputs are the immediate reach (audience sizes, exchange programs realised), and outcomes are the eventual effects on attitudes or behaviour. Public opinion polls are a primary tool for measuring soft power outcomes in terms of attitudes. For example, the Pew Research Center and others conduct global attitude surveys that reveal how favourably foreign publics view countries. If a country's favourability rises over time in combination with active cultural diplomacy, one might infer a soft power impact. In the context of China, surveys of international perceptions (for instance, the BBC/ICM global survey or regional polls) have often been analysed to judge the success of China's soft power campaign. Regarding Estonia, a recent survey found that about 50% of Estonian respondents had positive views of China (Höbepappel, 2023), which could be

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an indicator – albeit a broad one – of China's soft power influence in that local context, possibly linked to increased cultural and economic engagement.

Another approach to conceptualising impact is looking at behavioural outcomes. Do countries imitate the soft-power-wielding country's model or support its positions? For instance, some scholars examine if participation in China's soft power programs (like Confucius Institute classes or scholarships in China) correlates with more sympathetic views on China's policies or a greater likelihood of business and diplomatic ties with China (Kurlantzick, 2017). In some cases, anecdotal evidence is cited: China's successful attraction of international students and tourists (pre-pandemic, China became one of the top study-abroad destinations and sources of tourism) is seen as both a result and a reinforcer of its soft power. These visitors often return home with nuanced impressions that can influence their communities' views. Similarly, at least temporarily, China's cultural mega-events (for example, the Olympics) were followed by surges in global admiration (Jeong et al., 2024).

Notably, the literature emphasises that soft power's influence is often indirect and difficult to isolate. As Nye (2008) highlights, measuring success in terms of behavioural change requires careful, case-by-case analysis. It is necessary to control for other factors, such as economic or military pressures and geopolitical interests, that may impact the outcomes. For example, if a small state aligns with China in the United Nations, is it due to China's soft power (cultural appeal, moral authority) or due to economic dependence or coercion (hard power)? Researchers sometimes look for outcomes that cannot be easily explained by hard power to strengthen claims of soft power impact. Narrative change is one: if the discourse about a country in foreign media or elite statements becomes noticeably favourable and invokes that country's culture or values positively, it suggests a soft power effect.

As has been demonstrated, while measuring soft power remains complex, scholars use a mix of perceptual indicators (public opinion and elite attitudes) and practical outcomes (foreign policy alignment, popularity of culture abroad) to measure the impact. There is broad agreement that credibility and attractiveness are at the heart of soft power impact. Thus, increases in a country's credibility (such as being seen as upholding international norms) and attractiveness (for example, rising foreign enrolment in its cultural or educational offerings) are proxies for soft power gain (Nye, 2013). In the case of China, mapping the scope of soft power impact involves tracking things like the spread of Chinese language learning, the sentiment of overseas

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populations (especially in regions of strategic interest), and any shifts in foreign policy stances that favour Chinese positions without coercion.

The effectiveness of soft power thus varies, and its measurement requires careful, context-sensitive interpretation of data. Therefore, based on the foundational definition of soft power by Joseph Nye (2008), this research conceptualises soft power impact through three key dimensions: awareness, perception, and engagement. In order to measure these dimensions, I analysed how often and in which way the Estonian media discussed China, the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University and its activities. Visibility and mentions of Chinese cultural activities were applied to measure awareness. Perception of China was assessed through the qualitative analysis of Estonian media articles to identify positive, neutral, or negative framings. Engagement was assessed based on interactions with the Confucius Institute's social media.

1.4. Confucius Institutes: history of development, mission and objectives

The Confucius Institutes (CIs) are a key initiative of China's cultural diplomacy and soft power strategy. The Chinese government initially oversaw the Confucius Institute program through the Office of Chinese Language Council International, known as Hanban, under the Ministry of Education. The first Confucius Institute was opened in 2004 in Seoul, South Korea (Confucius Institute, n.d.). Since 2004, the network of Confucius Institutes has expanded rapidly across the globe. As of October 2024, there were 554 Confucius Institutes and classrooms worldwide. This growth within a short period speaks to China's high priority on this instrument of soft power. In Estonia, for example, the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University was established in 2010 as the country's first (and to date, only) CI (Tallinn University, 2010). This local example fits into the global pattern of CI expansion as China reached even small European countries like Estonia in its soft power outreach.

The Confucius Institutes' stated mission, as officially described by Hanban, is to "provide Chinese language and cultural teaching resources and services worldwide" and to "contribute to the development of multiculturalism and the building of a harmonious world" (Liu & Zhao, 2016). In essence, CIs aim to promote Chinese language learning, enhance understanding of Chinese culture, and deepen educational and cultural exchange between China and other nations. This mission is comparable to other nations' cultural institutes (such as the British Council or Goethe-Institut), which seek to spread language and culture as a foundation for friendship and cooperation. Confucius Institutes offer courses in Mandarin Chinese (often for university credit

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or through community classes), organise cultural activities (such as calligraphy workshops, Chinese New Year celebrations, and cooking and tea clubs), and sometimes host scholarly events or lectures about Chinese history, art, and society. Through these activities, the CIs serve as a localised presence of Chinese culture and education abroad.

Strategically, Confucius Institutes are seen by Chinese policymakers as a way to address China's "discourse deficit" in the world. Historically, China's voice and perspective have been underrepresented internationally, and boosting language and cultural familiarity is one way to rectify that. In Central and Eastern Europe, for example, analysts note that Confucius Institutes have been tools for "promoting China's interests" by cultivating local elites who understand China and by increasing China's cultural visibility in the region (Przychodniak, 2019). The target outcomes of the CIs, in line with soft power theory, are long-term. They help improve China's national image, boost people-to-people connections, and serve as a foundation of goodwill that can transform into smoother diplomatic and economic relations.

In theory, CIs align perfectly with Nye's concept of soft power. They promote culture and language, which are key resources of attraction. Studies have generally viewed the proliferation of Confucius Institutes as a deliberate soft power strategy by Beijing. Sun (2023) states that CIs "function as agents of Beijing by promoting language and culture, fostering global recognition of China as a civilized society and cultural power, and improving its cultural connections worldwide." Through the Institutes, China presents itself as a nation eager to share knowledge and engage positively with the world, which contributes to an image of a benign great power.

However, the Confucius Institute initiative has faced controversies and contradictions that complicate its role as a soft power instrument. One frequently discussed issue is the question of academic freedom and influence within host institutions. Because CIs are funded and partly staffed by the Chinese government, critics argue that they could serve as a tool for Chinese political influence on campus. In some cases, host universities have faced pressure or self-censorship regarding events or discussions that China finds sensitive (such as Taiwan, Tibet, or human rights), raising the concern that CIs impose constraints inconsistent with liberal academic values (Hubbert, 2019; Sahlins, 2014). A 2019 report by the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations (2019) concluded that "Confucius Institute funding comes with strings that can compromise academic freedom," noting that the Chinese government retains

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control over teacher selection, curricula, and topics and that hosting agreements sometimes require adherence to both Chinese and local laws. The Senate report characterised CIs as “a propaganda tool” to shape perceptions in favour of China. It recommended their rebuilding or closure if transparency and academic freedom could not be ensured. The Chinese government openly expects Confucius Institutes to help “correct” China’s image abroad by countering narratives that portray China as a threat (Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, 2019).

This critical perspective ties back to the soft versus sharp power discussion. Critics contend that when Confucius Institutes actively avoid certain topics or present a filtered view of China, they stop being purely soft power instruments and instead partake in sharp power–influencing discourse by omission or distortion. Walker and Ludwig (2017) describe Confucius Institutes as examples of how authoritarian influence can penetrate educational systems. While many CI activities are innocuous cultural events, the institutes are ultimately under the “guiding hand” of a one-party state that does not tolerate certain ideas. They point out cases like a Confucius Institute in Slovakia allegedly pressuring its host university to disinvite a speaker who was a Dalai Lama supporter or institutes in the U.S. described as discouraging discussions on Tiananmen – actions that align more with information control than open cultural exchange (Gunia, 2019). In recent years, such incidents have led many universities in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Australia to reassess or shut down their Confucius Institutes. By the early 2020s, dozens of Institutes in the United States had closed amid legislative and security concerns (Lum & Fischer, 2023). Several European countries, for example, Sweden in 2020, closed all CIs and Classrooms in their countries because of potential Chinese government influence in the freedom of hosting universities (Flittner, 2020).

Overall, Confucius Institutes exemplify both the effectiveness and the challenges of China's soft power. The CI's rapid development has significantly increased global exposure to the Chinese language and culture. This achievement has likely reinforced China's soft power by educating and engaging people worldwide. They illustrate China's rise not only as an economic power but also as a cultural actor aiming to influence others through ideas and language rather than through force. However, these controversies demonstrate that soft power tools can be viewed differently. The Chinese state involvement that provides Confucius Institutes with resources and support also raises questions about influence and intentions abroad, especially in democracies that protect academic freedom. Many researchers argue that Confucius Institutes

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can only fulfil their soft power potential if they operate with transparency and reciprocity. Such practices foster trust rather than suspicion. In a small European country like Estonia (where the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University operates under close local oversight and on a small scale), the Institute can focus on its educational mandate and potentially yield positive cultural ties. Even though experts and researchers continue to debate how much impact these institutes truly have. In many ways, they serve as a compelling example of soft power in action in today's system of international relations.

2. Research methodology

2.1. Research design

This research employs qualitative research methods, including qualitative content and discourse analysis. Qualitative research design is suitable for this study as it allows for in-depth analysis of meanings, narratives, and representations across different contexts (Schreier, 2024). Also, qualitative approaches are especially suited to capturing the subtle and frequently complex ways in which influence is exerted through educational and cultural tools such as the Confucius Institute (Nurhusna & Sakinah, 2023, p. 205). Estonia and Confucius Institute at Tallinn University represent valuable and understudied examples that advance our knowledge of how soft power strategies are adapted and interpreted in various geopolitical contexts since China's influence in smaller EU countries has received limited scholarly attention.

The theoretical framework of this research is based on Joseph Nye's concept of soft power, which he defines as the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion (Nye, 2008). In this context, cultural diplomacy is described as one of the key soft power tools (Tsuprykova, 2020, pp. 20-24) that allows countries to create a positive image and build long-lasting relations. Confucius Institutes, like the British Council or the Goethe-Institute, are official instruments of cultural diplomacy through which China promotes its language, history, and values (Przychodniak, 2019). Thus, they function both as educational actors and as an extension of Chinese foreign policy. However, considering the affiliation of the CI with the Chinese government, these institutions are sometimes viewed not only as instruments of soft power but also as "sharp power." A term that, according to Walker and Ludwig (2017, p. 13), is used to describe not transparent or manipulative influence tactics employed by the authoritarian regimes.

To understand how China's soft power works in Estonia, this study relies on two different but complementary data sources. At first, qualitative content analysis was applied to

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examine the English and Russian-language articles from three leading Estonian media outlets, Postimees, Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR), and Delfi, from January to March 2025. These media were selected due to their popularity in the Estonian media environment and their impact on political and public discourse. For example, Delfi has more than 600,000 readers per month (Ekspress Group, n.d.). The analysis of the published articles focuses on representations of China and the Confucius Institute to find common themes and patterns and identify the tones (positive, neutral or negative) of the related articles. The following Data Collection and Analysis section provides an explanation of the coding processes of the articles.

This research also includes qualitative content analysis combined with critical discourse analysis. This approach was used to examine publicly available materials from the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University. The analysis covers the content from their official website, Facebook posts, and promotional or event-related materials such as language course descriptions, social media posts, and visual materials. This analysis helped to investigate how the Confucius Institute portrays itself, its goals and cultural mission, and how it is reflected or not in Estonian media. Furthermore, it provided the possibility to see how language and visuals are employed to create narratives about China and its soft power.

The time frame for this research, January-March 2025, was chosen due to geopolitical tensions and changes in the global order, which provide valuable data for the research on the Chinese portrayal and the role of its soft power.

Primarily, on the 20th of January 2025, Donald Trump took office as the 47th President of the United States of America, whose current policies have already been criticised (Dickinson, 2025). Trump's previous administration often questioned the Confucius Institute's activities, claiming that they were a part of Beijing's propaganda and a tool to influence operations in the USA (Riechmann, 2020). As a result, since 2019, most Confucius Institutes in the USA have closed, from approximately 100 to less than 5 (Clark, 2023). Donald Trump's second term signifies another potential policy shifts and global changes. His unpredictable leadership style (McManus, 2025) can reshape the perception and interaction of smaller countries like Estonia with global powers, including China. Hence, analysing Estonian media narratives about China and its soft power tools during this time frame provides valuable information for this research.

Furthermore, this period of research includes the Chinese Lunar New Year celebration (January 29 – February 12, 2025), (Borresen, n.d.). Usually, it is time for Confucius Institutes to

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organise different cultural activities and promote a positive Chinese image worldwide. In Estonia, the Confucius Institute used this possibility to host non-formal activities and workshops such as tea ceremonies and dumpling making and Chinese lucky bag making (TLÜ Konfutsiuse Instituut, n.d.). This event provides an opportunity to analyse how Chinese cultural diplomacy works and how it is portrayed in local media narratives.

Finally, February 24, 2025, has marked the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The war has increased concerns regarding authoritarian regimes, particularly China's neutral position and unwillingness to condemn Russian aggression and continuing cooperation with it (Nitza-Makowska et al., 2024, pp. 7–9). In this regard, China's cultural initiatives, organised by the Confucius Institute, may be viewed not only as a soft power tool but also as a tool of propaganda (Lo & Pan, 2014).

Therefore, this comprehensive methodological approach allows a thorough examination of China's portrayal in Estonian media and its soft power strategies through the Confucius Institute within the chosen time frame.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

As previously mentioned, the qualitative research methods were used to understand how China is portrayed in Estonian media and what role the Confucius Institute plays in China's soft power in the Estonian media environment. Therefore, this section will further explain why I chose to study the Estonian case and how the data was collected and analysed.

Estonia represents a unique and underestimated example of how China's soft power, including through the Confucius Institute, works in a small European country. Usually, the focus of researchers lies on frequently studied and well-known cases, such as the United States or Germany. Therefore, this research allows us to explore the impact of China's soft power from another angle. Also, Estonia is particularly responsive and sensitive to external influences, considering its historical and geopolitical context (Noreen & Sjöstedt, 2004). Even though Estonia has had growing relations with China since establishing diplomatic relations in 1991, it decided to leave Chinese cooperative initiatives in 2022, such as the 16+1" cooperation platform and the "One Belt, One Road" project (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022; 2024). This decision shows Estonian caution and concern about China's impact. Additionally, the functioning of the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University also raises concerns (Einmann, 2021) despite its stated primary mission and objectives (Tallinn University, n.d.).

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Reflecting this intricate context, the survey commissioned by the University of Tartu Asia Centre on the perception of China among Estonians during winter-spring 2023 indicates the complex public stance. Half of the respondents in Estonia have a generally positive opinion of China, although Xi Jinping's role has been viewed unfavourably. 42% of the respondents answered that they view China as "mostly positive" and 8% as "very positive." Estonians see China in a broader sense than just the Chinese political image. They also highly value China's history, culture, and nature (Höbepappel, 2023), showing openness to cultural engagement.

Furthermore, on October 24-26, 2024, Tartu hosted the first Europe-China Knowledge Forum in the ReConnect China project framework (ReConnect China, 2024). The project aims to investigate the potential fields of collaboration between China and the European Union and to raise awareness on China among the European youth and the public (ReConnect China, 2024). The organised conference "ReConnect China Dialog? Bridging Gaps, Charting Futures with Europe" in Tartu was devoted to decoupling and derisking from the Chinese influence (University of Tartu, n.d.). For these reasons, I have decided to focus on Estonia to fill a gap in academic research by analysing the impact of China's soft power and the Confucius Institute's role in this concept.

For the purpose of the research, I decided to collect data from media articles and information from the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University. I used qualitative content analysis to examine published articles about/related to China and the Confucius Institute to find common themes and patterns. The qualitative content analysis combined with critical discourse analysis was also applied to study official sources from the Confucius Institute.

I chose three significant Estonian media outlets, Postimees, Estonian Public Broadcasting, and Delfi, to search for articles that could be applied to my research between January 1, 2025, and March 31, 2025. These media cover different topics and present valuable information on recent events and changes in international relations. Then, I started to search for articles that were related to my research objectives, using the search bar with specific keywords. As I selected articles in English and Russian, I used keywords such as "China," "Chinese," "cultural diplomacy," "soft power," "sharp power," and "Confucius Institute" for English-language articles and "Китай" for China, "китайский" for Chinese, "культурная дипломатия" for cultural diplomacy, "мягкая сила" for soft power, "острая сила" for sharp power, "Институт Конфуция" for the Confucius Institute for Russian-language articles.

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In total, I selected 93 articles that are relevant to my study among 1968 English-language media publications in Estonian Public Broadcasting, 11344 media publications in Postimees, and 5623 Russian-language media publications in Delfi during January-March 2025. All the selected articles were saved as separate documents, organised by date and source, so they could be reviewed easily during the analysis. Postimees document includes 12 English-language articles, which are a total of 45 pages. The Estonian Public Broadcasting document has 38 English-language articles, which are a total of 127 pages. Delfi's document includes 43 Russian-language articles, which are a total of 75 pages.

After finishing collecting articles, I started to analyse them and make research notes for each Estonian media. They were also saved as separate documents. The research notes include the analysis of each article to identify key moments and patterns referring to China. Postimees research notes have 5 pages, Estonian Public Broadcasting – has 18 pages, and Delfi – has 20 pages.

Thereafter, I analysed the content from the Confucius Institute website at Tallinn University and the Confucius Institute Facebook page “TLÜ Konfutsiuse Instituut” and collected information about the activities it organises. For example, it offers Chinese language courses from beginner to advanced level, as well as different trainings and workshops on Chinese tea culture, a cooking club, etc. Then, I created a document with a total of 5 pages with a list of such events from January to March 2025, organised by date and source. The document with the research notes about Confucius Institute activities was also created¹. Afterward, I checked if these events and activities were mentioned in the articles to see if they drew the attention of Estonian media.

After collecting data, 93 articles were analysed and divided into five thematic categories to see which aspects of China are most discussed in the Estonian media environment: politics and governance, security and defence, economy and resources, society and culture, and technology.

Politics and governance include articles related to foreign policy, diplomatic relations, and political influence, such as “Rodion Krupin: US-China conflict unavoidable” (Krupin, 2025). The security and defence category includes articles about security concerns, espionage, and cybersecurity threats, such as “Tsakhna: Europe should also discuss banning TikTok” (Delfi,

¹ All source materials and research notes are available upon request

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2025). Articles about economic cooperation, trade, investments, and resource management, such as “Usual bankruptcy wizards and dream merchants parading their supposed mega-investments” (Harju & Stranberg, 2025) were included in the economy and resources category. The next category, “Society and Culture,” presents articles related to cultural exchanges, Chinese culture, and societal interactions, such as “Don’t miss it! The Rotermann Quarter will welcome the Year of the Snake with a grand show” (Delfi, 2025). The last category, “Technology,” includes articles about digital infrastructure, innovation, and technology companies; for instance, “Estonia gives Meta to 4 billion words for large language model development” (Kiisler, 2025). Some of the articles could be included in more than one category. However, I categorised them by the most dominant theme.

Apart from categorising articles, I also employed qualitative content analysis with sentiment coding to examine each article’s tone. This approach is suitable for identifying patterns and meanings in textual data (van Atteveldt et al., 2021) and addressing the thesis’s research questions. Then, the articles were divided into negative, neutral, or positive portrayals. I used ChatGPT as a tool to assist in the initial sentiment coding process (OpenAI, 2025). It has a high level of accuracy and fluency in comprehending and generating human language. Also, it understands the subtleties and complexities of human language (Mao et al., 2024, p. 11). Nevertheless, I manually reviewed and finalised the results to guarantee consistency and accuracy with my qualitative framework.

The following definitions were used to operationalize the coding: negative news includes articles presenting critics, concerns, or scepticism regarding China and its actions. For example, the article “Foreign minister: The purpose of soft power is to create division,” in which Estonian Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna denounced the Chinese-sponsored New Year’s celebration in Kohtla-Järve as a soft power strategy that weakens Estonia and causes social division (ERR, 2025).

Neutral means that articles have no judgments about China and present factual or balanced information without explicit bias. For instance, in the article by Alexander Levchenko, “US sanctions are working: Russian oil tuck off the coasts of China and India,” it states that China is Russia’s economic partner, but it avoids direct confrontation with the West (Levchenko, 2025).

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Positive news represents articles that recognise Chinese achievements, praise its contributions and culture, and highlight positive interactions and outcomes. For instance, one of the articles is devoted to the opening of the exhibition of works by Chinese artist Feng Li in the art museum in Tallinn, "Fotografiska" (Delfi, 2025). This exhibition is an example of China's soft power through culture, without a direct political component. (See Appendix A, B, and C for the complete list of articles' assigned categories and tones).

Finally, I analysed the Confucius Institute's official website at Tallinn University and its Facebook page to check if its activities are mentioned in the Estonian media environment (Postimees, ERR, or Delfi). I created a table with the list of activities during January-March 2025 (see Table 4 in the Analysis and Discussion section) and made research notes to understand Chinese cultural presence through the Confucius Institute in Estonia. The table of activities was categorised into Chinese language courses and exams (such as the Chinese Proficiency Test and Youth Chinese Test); cultural workshops (Chinese tea culture, cooking club); movie and media events (movie nights); games and informal learning (Chinese board game nights); and seasonal celebrations (Lunar Chinese New Year). I also analysed the frequency of the posts about the events on the Confucius Institute Facebook page and the engagement level on this Facebook page (reactions, shares, and comments). It helped me to see if the CI and its activities are mentioned in Estonian media, how they are portrayed, and what the role of CI is in the impact of China's soft power in Estonia.

2.3. Scope and limitations of the research

This research was originally designed to compare the Confucius Institute in Estonia with South Korean, and then Central Asian Confucius Institutes instead of South Korean. However, due to some unforeseen issues, such as the lack of consent from participants to fill the questionnaire out or undergo semi-structured interviews, the scope of the study had to be narrowed down to focus only on the Estonian case. To overcome this limitation, I decided to focus on Estonian media content as a way to understand how China is presented there and how China's soft power, particularly through the Confucius Institute in Tallinn, is working or not working in Estonia.

Moreover, the research is limited to analysing three main Estonian media – Postimees, Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR), and Delfi, between January and March 2025. As a non-native Estonian speaker, articles in the Estonian language were not included in this research.

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Hence, this study focuses exclusively on articles that are published in English and Russian. As a result, this research might not include some viewpoints or locally framed narratives that are exclusive to the Estonian environment. Nevertheless, the chosen English and Russian articles provide enough valuable information about the portrayal of China in Estonian media and how China's soft power is conveyed to the target audiences in Estonia who speak Russian as well as those abroad.

Additionally, the process of coding articles and their interpretation involves some subjectivity. Even though the clear criteria to overcome potential biases (for example, criticism reflects negative connotations) were defined, it might still include subjectivity. As Bumbuc (2016) states, subjectivity in qualitative research methods is often an unavoidable aspect. However, qualitative research helps find answers to questions that quantitative research cannot answer (Mwita, 2022).

3. Analysis and discussion

Considering the theoretical and methodological framework mentioned above, this section provides a qualitative analysis of selected Estonian media – Postimees, Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR), Delfi, and the Confucius Institute official page on the Tallinn University website and its Facebook page (“TLÜ Konfutsiuse Instituut”) between January and March 2025. This section will use qualitative content analysis combined with critical discourse analysis to examine how China and its soft power are portrayed across these platforms and to uncover the meanings and narratives embedded in the selected articles.

3.1. Postimees

Postimees is an Estonian daily newspaper published in Estonian, English, and Russian, covering various topics, including politics, economy, culture, and sports (Postimees, n.d.). For this research, I selected and analysed English-language articles published between January and March 2025 that were exclusively about China or explicitly referenced China. In total, I selected 12 articles: three published in January, four in February, and five in March. Notably, the Confucius Institute's activity in Estonia was not mentioned in any of the examined articles. Table 1 demonstrates the summary of China's portrayal in Postimees English-language articles during January-March 2025.

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Table 1

China's portrayal in Postimees English-language articles by category (January-March 2025)

Category	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Politics & governance	5	0	0
Security & defence	3	1	0
Economy & resources	2	1	0
Total	10	2	0

Source: Compiled by the author

As demonstrated in the Table 1, 10 out of 12 English-language articles published on Postimees between January and March 2025 primarily portray China negatively and as a competitor rather than a cooperative partner (see Appendix A for detailed article data). For instance, Peeter Koppel criticizes Europe's climate policy while pointing to China's aggressive geopolitical behaviour and unchecked coal expansion as undermining Western ideals. (Koopel, 2025). Another example portrays China as a threat to public health and safety. In the investigative piece on Estonia's synthetic opioid crisis, China is directly linked to the global illicit drug trade, with Chinese companies named as suppliers of nitazenes (Murakas & Moens, 2025).

Also, English-language articles on Postimees reflect broader Western concerns about China's growing power. China is mentioned as one of the major global challenges along with Russia and Iran in the report covering a phone call between US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission Kaja Kallas (AFP/BNS, 2025). Rubio underlined “the need to strengthen transatlantic security, called for Europe to increase defence spending, and highlighted the challenges posed by China” (AFP/BNS, 2025).

Only 2 out of 12 selected articles were neutral, such as “Estonian defmin: No discussions about US troop withdrawal from Baltics,” which discussed European security, in which China is mentioned in passing without any explicit evaluation (Postimees & BNS, 2025). No articles were found to have a distinctly positive tone toward China. Importantly, there were no articles that mentioned the activities of the Confucius Institute. It indicates either a lack of public interest or an editorial focus on hard security rather than soft power topics.

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Generally, Postimees contributes to shaping a national discourse in Estonia where China is primarily associated with competition and threat. This framing likely reflects both Estonia's historical sensitivity to authoritarianism and external influence as well as its strategic alignment with the West.

3.2. Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR)

ERR is an Estonian Public Broadcasting which was established on the 1st of June 2007. It offers wide range of content which is presented in different thematic columns: politics, defence, economy, culture, sports, opinion and science. The ERR website is available in three languages – Estonian, English and Russian (ERR, n.d.). In general, I selected and analysed 38 English-language articles: twenty published in January, eleven in February and seven in March. Table 2 demonstrates the summary of China's portrayal in Estonian Public Broadcasting English-language articles during January-March 2025.

Table 2

China's portrayal in ERR English-language articles by category (January-March 2025)

Category	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Politics & governance	12	5	0
Security & defence	4	3	0
Economy & resources	1	4	0
Technology	4	2	1
Society & culture	0	2	0
Total	21	16	1

Source: Compiled by the author

Based on the information above, Estonian public broadcasting mainly portrays China negatively. 21 out of 38 English-language articles between January and March 2025 depict China as a threat and a rival actor (see Appendix B for detailed article data). For example, the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service annual report highlights that since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, China and Russia have significantly increased their cooperation. China indirectly supports Russia's war in Ukraine by helping to avoid sanctions and supplying Western drone components.

Also, it is stated that the Chinese Communist Party uses economic investments strategically to increase its political power and possibly build dependencies that support China's

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geopolitical goals (ERR, 2025). The strategic risks of China's economic influence are brought up by Foreign Minister Margus Tsahkna. He suggests that Estonia should be prepared to shift its rare earth metals toward Western allies rather than risk becoming even more dependent on China. Tsahkna stated that efficient management of these resources is essential to preventing an increased reliance on other countries (Hindre, 2025).

Additionally, there are a few articles about the Chinese New Year celebration in Kohtla-Järve that reveal scepticism among Estonian officials. Minister of the Interior and chair of the Social Democratic Party, Lauri Läänemets, mentioned that such events might be more for political or strategic purposes than for true cultural exchange (ERR, 2025). The celebration proceeded in spite of warnings from the Estonian Internal Security Service or the Estonian Foreign Intelligence Services about China's attempts to change the world order and its use of embassies to impact public opinion. In another article, "Foreign minister: The purpose of 'soft power' is to create division" (ERR, 2025), Minister of Foreign Affairs, Margus Tsahkna, highlighted that so-called academic or cultural exchanges are not neutral gestures, but rather deliberate strategies employed by governments such as China to influence public opinion and divide democracies (ERR, 2025).

Nevertheless, there is one positive example in ERR's coverage among all articles. In March 2025, Chinese scholar and curator Dr. Sophie Qiaoyun Peng, photographer Dawa Yangchen, and assistant Hildegard Reimann organised a photography exhibition in Haapsalu. In this article, Dr. Peng's academic and cultural involvement with Haapsalu lace traditions is portrayed positively, emphasizing soft power at the grassroots level and cross-cultural appreciation (ERR, 2025). However, it is a rare example of a Chinese-Estonian cultural exchange among the Estonian public broadcasting published articles. ERR's English-language articles do not focus on this kind of soft power or cultural diplomacy. Also, there are no articles solely related to the Confucius Institute's activities. The lack of discussion of these topics implies that China is primarily viewed through the lens of security concerns, not culture.

3.3. Delfi

Delfi is a daily news website covering different topics: politics and gardening in the Baltic States - Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. The Estonian Delfi website is available in two languages – Estonian and Russian (Delfi, n.d.). For this research, I selected and analysed 43 Russian-language articles during January-March 2025: twenty-three published in January,

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fourteen in February, and six in March. Table 3 demonstrates the summary of China's portrayal in Delfi Russian-language articles during January-March 2025.

Table 3

China's portrayal in Delfi Russian-language articles by category (January-March 2025)

Category	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Politics & governance	4	4	0
Security & defence	7	2	0
Economy & resources	6	4	0
Technology	3	1	0
Society & culture	2	6	4
Total	22	17	4

Source: Compiled by the author

Based on the analysed Russian-language articles published in Delfi, China's presence in Estonia and the broader European realm is complicated and frequently contradictory. The articles in Delfi capture both local and global geopolitical concerns about China's rise and its impact in the international arena. 22 out of 43 articles portray China negatively, 17 have neutral connotations, and only 4 articles present China positively.

Western security institutions frame China as the primary geopolitical threat. For example, the United States Department of Defense views China as its primary strategic priority, with Taiwan mentioned as a major potential flashpoint (Medusa, 2025). In this framework, European allies are primarily responsible for containing Russia. It will allow the American military to plan and allocate resources in order to concentrate on the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, the EU Commission expressed concerns regarding China's and Russia's "massive digital arsenal" that they use to manipulate Western democracies. High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Kaja Kallas argued that Moscow and Beijing are coordinating disinformation efforts against elections, demonstrations, and key occasions such as the war in Ukraine, the Paris Olympics, and the elections in Moldova (Delfi, 2025). Even though China is not mentioned as a participant in these operations, but its information positions coincide with Russia's.

Simultaneously, China uses cultural diplomacy to present its softer image in international relations. One notable example is a Chinese New Year celebration in Kohtla-Järve that was organised by the Chinese embassy. As a result, it led to Estonian officials accusing that such

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events can be indirect political messaging or image management on behalf of an authoritarian regime (Võhma, 2025). Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Estonia Lauri Läänemets emphasised that such events should be handled carefully. Given that China strategically uses soft power to restore its international image after controversies surrounding its alliance with Russia during the war in Ukraine (Võhma, 2025).

Another evidence of the Chinese cultural diplomacy strategy is presented in the article “An exhibition of works by Chinese artist Feng Li opened at Fotografiska” (Delfi, 2025). Feng Li's works are surreal depictions of ordinary urban life. They offer a complex, humanistic view of contemporary societies, particularly China (Delfi, 2025). This exhibition can serve as a visual soft power tool. It highlights the intricacy and inventiveness of Chinese society, which starkly contrasts the prevalent narratives of surveillance and threat in Western media.

Moreover, digital infrastructure and artificial intelligence are two more areas in which China is becoming more influential. The rise of the Chinese AI model DeepSeek is a notable example. DeepSeek's development raised questions and concerns regarding long-term strategic risks, transparency, and data privacy despite being commended for the quality of its free services. The model's low cost and high output make it appealing to users worldwide. However, concerns about its source code integrity and possible abuse by the Chinese government still exist (Tamm, 2025). Additionally, Estonian cybersecurity experts raised concerns regarding the proliferation of cheap Chinese smart devices such as routers and air fryers. These devices could be used for cyberespionage or gathering data, threatening personal privacy and national security (Delfi, 2025).

In summary, the Russian-language articles published in the Estonian media “Delfi” show two different perspectives. While China is a strategic and digital threat, it also uses cultural diplomacy and technological innovation that appeal to various actors in the international arena.

3.4. Confucius Institute at Tallinn University (CITU)

Confucius Institute at Tallinn University (CITU) was established in 2010 (Tallinn University, 2010). It is part of a more extensive network and is coordinated by the Chinese International Education Foundation. Usually, the universities where the Confucius Institute is established have Chinese partner universities. Shanghai University of Finance and Economics is the partner for the CITU. Confucius Institute at Tallinn University provides many cultural events in Estonia and offers Chinese language classes. It also provides a range of cultural events and

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workshops in addition to different language courses such as traditional Chinese medicine, business culture, etc. (Tallinn University, n.d.).

The Confucius Institute has its official page on the Tallinn University website and a Facebook page, “TLÜ Konfutsiuse Instituut,” with 2400 subscribers (TLÜ Konfutsiuse Instituut, n.d.) to disseminate information about its activities. The official webpage of CITU includes separate pages where you can get familiar with the Chinese language course in Tallinn for the spring term 2025 (Tallinn University, n.d.), cooking club, trainings and workshops (Tallinn University, n.d.). TLÜ Konfutsiuse Instituut Facebook page has 33 posts during the January-March 2025 related to different activities such as cooking club, Chinese tea culture course, movie nights, board game nights, Chinese New Year celebration, Chinese medicine and classical health practices, etc. (TLÜ Konfutsiuse Instituut, n.d.). Table 4 demonstrates the activities of the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University as the instruments of Chinese soft power.

Table 4

Overview of the TLU Confucius Institute's activities (January-March 2025)

Category	Description of the Activity	Frequency/Dates	Engagement (reactions/shares/comments)
Chinese Language Courses and Exams	Chinese language courses from the beginner to the advanced level are offered in Chinese and English; HSK (Chinese Proficiency Test) and YCT (Youth Chinese Test) exams	8 course options for spring semester 2025; 2 exams in April 2025	Shared in course listing on the CITU's official website; 4 Facebook posts (4 reactions on average)
Cultural Workshops	Chinese tea culture (“Rain Water,” “Beginning of Spring”), Chinese medicine, cooking club (“Taiwanese Cuisine,” “Chinese Tea Kitchen”)	January-March 2025	9 Facebook posts about Chinese tea culture workshop and cooking club, 2 Facebook posts about Chinese medicine; mostly 4-12 reactions each; some shares; vegan dumplings popular (~7-9 reactions, 1-3 shares)
Movie & Media Events	Movie nights (Zhang Meng's “The Piano in a Factory” (钢的琴), Shen Jie's “The Reading Boy” (念书的孩子))	4 movie nights for spring semester 2025	4 Facebook posts; 2–10 reactions, 1–2 shares

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Games & Informal Learning	Chinese board game nights (Mahjong), Chinese table manners sessions	1-2 per month, January-March 2025	4 Facebook posts; 2–4 reactions each
Seasonal Celebrations	Celebrations of Lunar New Year with workshops, tea, dumpling and Fudai (Chinese lucky bag-making)	January-February 2025	3 Facebook posts; up to 18 reactions, 3 shares

Source: Compiled by the author

An analysis of the activities of the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University from January to March 2025 shows the systematic and diverse use of Chinese soft power tools in Estonia. The Confucius Institute creates a sustainable presence of Chinese culture in the local educational and social environment through language courses, cultural workshops, seasonal festivals, movie nights, and informal events.

Despite the relatively low level of engagement on social media (an average of 4–7 reactions per post), the constant activity and wide range of events topics (from traditional medicine to board games) indicate a strategic orientation towards creating long-term cultural impact. The regular holding of the HSK and YCT exams and the particular focus on language learning emphasize the educational vector as a crucial component of Chinese soft power.

As a result, the TLU Confucius Institute actively engages in Chinese cultural diplomacy in addition to its educational role, helping to disseminate Chinese values and foster a favourable perception of China in Estonia.

Conclusion

This thesis analysed the impact of China's soft power and the role of the Confucius Institute in Estonia, addressing two research questions: How do Estonian media portray China between January and March 2025, and What is the role of the Confucius Institute in the impact of China's soft power in Estonia's media environment?

In order to answer these questions, the qualitative content analysis combined with the discourse analysis was used for the articles published in three major Estonian media outlets: Postimees, Estonian Public Broadcasting (ERR), and Delfi. The research revealed that Estonian media primarily portrays China negatively. 53 of 93 collected and analysed articles express concerns, scepticism, and highlight security threats concerning Chinese politics. China is seen as a competitor and one of the global challenges rather than a partner. Neutral (35 articles) and

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positive (5 articles) portrayals are less frequent. China is discussed either without concrete positive or negative judgments or portrayed as a beneficial partner.

Meanwhile, the analysis of the Confucius Institute at Tallinn University and its Facebook page showed that it actively promotes a positive Chinese image in Estonia. Nonetheless, despite the organisation of various activities, such as Chinese language classes, cooking clubs, and workshops, it receives no attention from the Estonian media outlets during the analysed timeframe. This indicates that the Confucius Institute's activities are not the focus of these media outlets, or it is the Confucius Institute's strategic choice not to seek media attention to avoid unnecessary criticism about its potential impact on society.

Also, this research acknowledges certain limitations. The Estonian-language articles were not the focus of this study because of the language barrier. Future studies can include them in the research process to capture the locally framed narratives that could be omitted. Additionally, the study examines only three significant Estonian media outlets, Postimees, Estonian Public Broadcasting, and Delfi, between January and March 2025. The number of Estonian media outlets can be expanded to capture diverse perspectives on China and its policies in future research. In addition, the timeframe of the research can be extended to understand the changes in China's portrayal in the media environment over time. Lastly, the coding process of the articles might involve some subjectivity. To mitigate these limitations, I, for example, focused on English-language and Russian-language articles and clearly defined criteria for coding the articles. Nonetheless, the above-mentioned recommendations could enrich future studies on the impact of China's soft power and the role of the Confucius Institute.

Overall, the research findings contribute to filling a gap in understanding China's soft power strategies in smaller European countries like Estonia and highlight the complex dynamics between media narratives and cultural diplomacy. Policymakers and government officials can use this study to create a balanced approach toward Chinese cultural diplomacy and its influence. Additionally, Tallinn University, which hosts the Confucius Institute, might benefit from this research by understanding how their cooperation is perceived and how such perception might affect public trust or future relations between Estonia and China.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Portrayal of China in Postimees English-language articles (January-March 2025)

Date	Author(s)	Article Name	Category	Portrayal of China
09.01.2025	Erkki Koort	“Security forecast 2025: How will the future of Russia and NATO affect Estonia?”	Security & defence	Negative
20.01.2025	Margus Hanno Murakas & Jonathan Moens	“Estonia's Battle with Deadly Synthetic Opioids Reveals Global Drug Trade Links to China”	Security & defence	Negative
29.01.2025	AFP/BNS	“Rubio, Kallas agree to exert maximum pressure on Russia”	Politics & governance	Negative
13.02.2025	BNS	“Estonian intelligence: Russia spending heavily to deploy drone technology on large scale”	Security & defence	Negative
18.02.2025	Postimees, BNS	“Estonian defmin: No discussions about US troop withdrawal from Baltics”	Security & defence	Neutral
25.02.2025	Taavi Madiberk	“Estonia has always been a nation of winners—and we must believe it”	Economy & resources	Neutral
28.02.2025	Tommas Kiho	“We thought we had already witnessed the new end of history, but that too was false”	Politics & governance	Negative
04.03.2025	Erkki Koort	“London pulled off an unbelievable blunder”	Politics & governance	Negative
10.03.2025	Ülle Harju, Marek Strandberg	“Usual bankruptcy wizards and dream merchants parading their supposed mega-investments”	Economy & resources	Negative
12.03.2025	Peeter Koppel	“Sorry, climate change isn't our biggest concern”	Politics & governance	Negative
14.03.2025	Andrey Kuzichkin	“There's a fairly clear principle behind Trump's behavior”	Politics & governance	Negative
28.03.2025	Vladimir Jushkin	“The future of the Russian economy is growth without development”	Economy & resources	Negative

Source: Compiled by the author

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Appendix B

Portrayal of China in ERR English-language articles (January-March 2025)

Date	Author(s)	Article Name	Category	Portrayal of China
07.01.2025	Helen Wright	"Estonia's foreign policy prioritizes Ukraine in 2025"	Politics & governance	Neutral
09.01.2025	ERR	"Diplomatic efforts brought Estonian private security operative home from Myanmar"	Security & defence	Negative
11.01.2025	ERR	"Lithuanian FM: Russia's hybrid attacks are not the new normal"	Politics & governance	Negative
13.01.2025	ERR	"Former ISS head: The Baltics are not of special importance to Russia"	Security & defence	Negative
14.01.2025	Helen Wright	"Researcher: Hybrid tactics likely spreading from Taiwan Strait to the Baltic Sea"	Security & defence	Negative
14.01.2025	Kristi Raik	"Kristi Raik: Security in 2025 or what doesn't kill you makes you stronger"	Politics & governance	Negative
16.01.2025	Priit Kuusk	"Expert: Possible that bombing will resume in Gaza in 42 days"	Politics & governance	Neutral
16.01.2025	ERR	"Estonian FM: US' decision to limit chip exports to allies 'thoughtless, harmful'"	Technology	Negative
17.01.2025	ERR	"Baltic states' foreign ministers issue appeal on US AI export chip restrictions"	Technology	Negative
20.01.2025	Helen Wright	"Ambassador: What happens in the Baltic immediately affects the High North"	Security & defence	Neutral
20.01.2025	ERR	"TalTech professor: AI chip restrictions on Estonia won't make much difference"	Technology	Negative
20.01.2025	Marko Mihkelson	"Marko Mihkelson: Russia's Ukraine defeat will save us from World War Three"	Politics & governance	Negative
21.01.2025	Janek Luts & Kirke Ert	"Businessman: Global economy might change during Trump's term"	Economy & resources	Neutral
23.01.2025	ERR	"Estonia's politicians keenly interested in Trump's plans, defense spending"	Security & defence	Neutral
27.01.2025	Arp Müller	"Green transition like washing socks here but pouring dirty water into neighbor's yard"	Economy & resources	Negative
27.01.2025	ERR	"Kohtla-Järve mayor questioned after hosting New Year event with Chinese embassy"	Society & culture	Neutral

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27.01.2025	ERR	“Foreign minister: The purpose of 'soft power' is to create division”	Politics & governance	Negative
27.01.2025	ERR	“Läänemets: Unclear why Kohtla-Järve's Chinese New Year event was necessary”	Politics & governance	Neutral
30.01.2025	Rait Piir	“Estonian computer scientists surprised by capabilities of China's DeepSeek”	Technology	Positive
31.01.2025	Madis Hindre	“Livestock farmers dependent on Chinese feed additive want EU duty repealed”	Economy & resources	Neutral
04.02.2025	Barbara Oja & Merilin Pärli	“Majority of parcels arriving from Asia exempt from customs duties”	Economy & resources	Neutral
04.02.2025	ERR	“Chinese intelligence can easily access Estonian residents' data via apps”	Technology	Negative
06.02.2025	Indrek Kiisler	“Estonia gives Meta access to 4 billion words for large language model development”	Technology	Neutral
11.02.2025	Margus Tsahkna	“Margus Tsahkna: We should fear the aggressor's success, not its defeat”	Politics & governance	Negative
12.02.2025	Kaupo Rosin	“Kaupo Rosin: Direct military attack on Estonia remains unlikely in 2025”	Politics & governance	Neutral
12.02.2025	ERR	“10 takeaways from Estonia's Foreign Intelligence Service report 2025”	Politics & governance	Neutral
12.02.2025	ERR	“EFIS 2025: Russia's drone development threatens Estonia's security”	Security & defence	Neutral
12.02.2025	ERR	“EFIS 2025: China-Russia ties deepening, influence expanding”	Security & defence	Negative
12.02.2025	Madis Hindre	“Minister: US has been interested in Estonia's rare earth metals for years now”	Politics & governance	Negative
19.02.2025	Harri Tiido	“Harri Tiido: On the report underlying the Munich Security Conference”	Politics & governance	Negative
25.02.2025	Huko Aaspõllu	“EU diplomat: The Ukraine war will end when one side can no longer afford it”	Politics & governance	Negative
01.03.2025	ERR	“Reform MP: Oval Office drama could mark start of western alliance's demise”	Politics & governance	Negative
05.03.2025	ERR	“Exhibition exploring lace making opens in Haapsalu”	Society & culture	Neutral
12.03.2025	Anna Pihl	“Innocent-looking balloons in the service of a hostile neighbor”	Technology	Neutral

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13.03.2025	ERR	“Economist: Effects of Trump trade war not initially felt in Estonia”	Economy & resources	Neutral
17.03.2025	Andres Reimann	“Defense college lecturer: Regional alliance would help Estonia survive war”	Politics & governance	Negative
21.03.2025	Rodion Krupin	“Rodion Krupin: US-China conflict unavoidable”	Politics & governance	Negative
29.03.2025	Meelis Oidsalu	“Meelis Oidsalu: Trump's fingerprints all over US annual threat assessment”	Politics & governance	Negative

Source: Compiled by the author

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Appendix C

Portrayal of China in Delfi Russian-language articles (January-March 2025)

Date	Author(s)	Article Name	Category	Portrayal of China
02.01.2025	Sergey Gushcha	“Chinese hackers broke into US Treasury Department”	Security & defence	Negative
02.01.2025	Delfi	“Temu Representative: We do not sell user data!”	Technology	Negative
05.01.2025	Delfi	“Gloomy outlook: Euro falls to two-year low against dollar”	Economy & resources	Neutral
05.01.2025	Delfi	“Metapneumovirus is spreading in China and the world”	Society & culture	Neutral
05.01.2025	Delfi	“Tesla’s annual electric vehicle sales fell for the first time in a decade”	Economy & resources	Negative
08.01.2025	Delfi	“Increased demand for oil has led to an increase in prices on the world market”	Economy & resources	Neutral
14.01.2025	Delfi	“Chinese horoscope for January 14: Snakes - suffering, Roosters - doubts”	Society & culture	Neutral
19.01.2025	Delfi	“Tsakhkna: Europe Should Also Discuss Banning TikTok”	Security & defence	Negative
19.01.2025	Delfi	“TikTok Decides to Reopen in the US Following Trump’s Promises”	Politics & governance	Negative
20.01.2025	Lev Kadik	“Trump’s Old-New People. Who Will Take Key Positions in the New US President’s Team”	Politics & governance	Negative
21.01.2025	Oleg Samorodniy	“Oleg Samorodniy: I wonder when TikTok will bring right-wing radicals to power in Estonia?”	Politics & governance	Negative
21.01.2025	Alexander Levchenko	“US Sanctions Are Working: Russian Oil Stuck Off the Coasts of China and India”	Economy & resources	Neutral
22.01.2025	Delfi	“Panama Appealed to UN Over Donald Trump’s Threats”	Politics & governance	Neutral
22.01.2025	Aleksander Pihlak & Jevgenia Parv	“The Woman Who Spied for China: I Didn’t Want to Act Against My Country”	Security & defence	Negative
23.01.2025	Delfi	“Trump: ‘I want to meet with Putin as soon as possible to end the war’”	Politics & governance	Neutral
23.01.2025	Delfi	“Trump said in Davos that he will seek to reduce oil prices: ‘This will lead to the end of the Russian-Ukrainian war’”	Politics & governance	Neutral

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24.01.2025	Konstantin Bury	“TikTok and the USA: Has the countdown begun for the app in the country of victorious Trump?”	Technology	Negative
24.01.2025	GLOSS.ee	“From Tokyo to Bangkok: TOP 10 Asian Restaurants in Tallinn for True Gourmets”	Society & culture	Positive
27.01.2025	Delfi	“Don't miss it! The Rotermann Quarter will welcome the Year of the Snake with a grand show”	Society & culture	Positive
29.01.2025	Ron Louwischuk	“Ron Louwischuk: Chinese AI DeepSeek is Gagarin 2.0, the winner of this race will become the world hegemon”	Technology	Negative
29.01.2025	Katre-Liis Võhma	“Chinese New Year was celebrated at the Kohtla-Järve Cultural Centre: a scandal occurred”	Society & culture	Negative
30.01.2025	Delfi	“Fotografiska opens exhibition of works by Chinese artist Feng Li”	Society & culture	Positive
31.01.2025	Delfi	“Chinese horoscope for January 31: Oxen - success, Goats - power”	Society & culture	Neutral
01.02.2025	Lev Kadik	“Delfi at the Arctic Frontiers Forum. Trump, India and the Shadow Fleet: The Baltic and Arctic in a Sea of Instability and Threats”	Security & defence	Neutral
03.02.2025	Arina Arepjeva & Oskar Kelk	“How much will the Estonian president earn this year? Why is the car tax on an expensive McLaren lower than on an old Nissan? Why did the Chinese New Year celebration in Kohtla-Järve turn into a scandal? The main news of the week”	Society & culture	Negative
04.02.2025	Delfi	“White Nights in Wonderland”: New exhibition at Fotografiska invites us to succumb to the surreal charm of everyday life”	Society & culture	Positive
04.02.2025	Aleksander Pihlak	“Gerli Mutso, who collaborated with Chinese intelligence, will remain behind bars”	Security & defence	Negative
05.02.2025	Delfi	“The European Commission is tightening import controls through AliExpress, Shein, Temu and other foreign marketplaces”	Economy & resources	Negative
07.02.2025	RusDelfi	“The global oil market is expected to experience unpredictable fluctuations in the near future”	Economy & resources	Negative

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08.02.2025	Perti Rahnell	“What have the first weeks of the Trump administration brought to pension funds?”	Economy & resources	Neutral
10.02.2025	Delfi	“Scandal at the Asian Games: Turkmenistan hockey players attack Hong Kong team”	Society & culture	Neutral
11.02.2025	Lev Kadik	“How Trump is destroying the unipolar world and why this should worry the Baltic states”	Politics & governance	Negative
12.02.2025	Andres Suimets	“Can You Get Rich by Investing in Chinese Companies? Expert Talks About Benefits and Risks”	Economy & resources	Negative
14.02.2025	Konstantin Eggert	“It won't be easy for Putin in negotiations with Trump in Riyadh”	Politics & governance	Neutral
16.02.2025	Delfi	“Estonian E-Commerce Union representative on Chinese goods: low price should be a warning sign”	Economy & resources	Negative
16.02.2025	Delfi	“Cybersecurity Program Manager: Any device connected to the internet is potentially at risk!”	Security & defence	Negative
21.02.2025	Delfi	“Chinese horoscope for February 21: Rats - stress, Roosters - worries”	Society & culture	Neutral
04.03.2025	Delfi	“Trump Launches Tariff War Against China, Mexico, Canada. Higher Import Tariffs Take Effect”	Economy & resources	Negative
19.03.2025	Delfi	“EU: Russia and China have a large digital arsenal for disinformation”	Security & defence	Negative
23.03.2025	Delfi	“WAR DIARY (Day 1124) Trump's Special Envoy: I Take Putin at His Word”	Security & defence	Neutral
23.03.2025	Anna Tamm	“Chinese DeepSeek to Defeat GPT Chat and Threaten Nvidia Stocks? Is It Safe to Use?”	Technology	Neutral
26.03.2025	Delfi	“Chinese horoscope for March 26: Rats - disappointments, Goats - conflicts, Roosters - communication”	Society & culture	Neutral
30.03.2025	Medusa	“WP, citing a secret document: The Pentagon considers China a priority threat, while Europe must contain Russia”	Security & defence	Negative

Source: Compiled by the author

Resümee**HIINA PEHME JÕU MÕJU: KONFUCIUSE INSTITUUDI ROLL EESTIS**

Serhii Nasadiuk

Hiina kiire arengu ja pehme jõu tööriistade kasutamise kontekstis uurib käesolev lõputöö Hiina pehme jõu mõju Eestis, eelkõige Tallinna Ülikooli Konfutsiuse Instituudi kaudu. Tavaliselt keskendub akadeemiline kogukond tuntud ja sageli uuritud juhtumitele, nagu Ameerika Ühendriigid või Saksamaa. Samal ajal alahindavad nad Hiina pehme jõu mõju väikeriikidele, luues tühimiku, mida see uuring püüab täita.

Selle uuringu eesmärgi saavutamiseks käsitleti kahte peamist uurimisküsimust: Kuidas kujutab Eesti meedia Hiinat ajavahemikus 2025 aasta jaanuarist märtsini ning milline on Konfutsiuse Instituudi roll Hiina pehme jõu mõjus Eesti mediakeskkonnas?

Uurimistöös kasutati kvalitatiivset sisuanalüüsi koos diskursusanalüüsiga artiklite kohta, mis avaldati kolmes suuremas Eesti meediaväljaandes: Postimees, Eesti Rahvusringhääling (ERR) ja Delfi. Samuti analüüsiti Tallinna Ülikooli Konfutsiuse Instituuti ja selle Facebooki lehte, et määratleda, kuidas Konfutsiuse Instituut propageerib Hiina kuvandit Eestis.

Analüüsist selgus, et Eesti meedia kujutab Hiinat peamiselt negatiivselt. 93 kogutud ja analüüsitud artiklist 53 tõstavad esile muresid, skeptitsismi ja julgeolekuohte seoses Hiina poliitikaga. Saadud tulemused näitavad, et Hiina kuvandit ja selle pehme jõu strateegiaid kajastatakse Eesti mediakeskkonnas negatiivselt. Need paljastavad ka skeptitsismi ja ettevaatlikkuse mustreid Hiina poliitika suhtes. Samas ei pälvinud Tallinna Ülikooli Konfutsiuse Instituut ja selle tegevus analüüsitud ajavahemikul Eesti meedias tähelepanu. See viitab sellele, et Konfutsiuse Instituudi tegevus ei ole nende meediaväljaannete fookuses. Samuti võib see olla Konfutsiuse Instituudi teadlik strateegiline valik hoiduda meedia tähelepanust, et vältida asjatut kriitikat seoses võimaliku mõjuga ühiskonnale.

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