

## **South Africa and Taiwan in the New Millennium: Building a Relationship Through Economic and Cultural Interaction**

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**Abstract:** *Soft power is becoming more significant in the transnational relations between small and middle powers. The exchange of goods, commodities and cross-cultural contacts are significant factors determining mutual interaction. This is the case between South Africa and Taiwan. In the post-diplomatic period the relationship shifted from state to state recognition to informal points of contact, focusing on trade and the exchange of knowledge and culture. Mutual visits by nationals of both countries are laying a foundation for increased attraction of what the other country has to offer. The exploring of business and employment opportunities are two factors that are indicative of this relationship. As a result both countries are broadening their horizons, changing perspectives and better understanding cross-cultural diversity, business ethics and the acknowledgement of mutual interaction. With this in mind, this work presents an overview of the events on the economic and cultural front that leads to a continuation of this healthy relationship.*

**Keywords:** Socio-cultural ties, Trading relationship, Soft power, Attractive medium, Knowledge sharing, Cultural acceptance.

### **1. Introduction: A Changing Relationship**

Since the African National Congress (ANC) became the first democratically elected government in 1994, one of its objectives was to alter foreign policy within the international community. The focus on Taiwan shifted to a more informal, trading-based relationship that promoted socio-cultural exchanges, but issues of high politics also enjoyed precedence, including regional and global security, law enforcement cooperation, effective immigration policies, and support in the war against terror. Although South Africa and Taiwan were not diplomatic allies, they vowed to respect the principles of diplomacy based on goodwill, cooperation, and

acceptance. But what principles laid the foundation for strengthening economical and cultural contacts? Two important points are identified: the enhancement of trade and business, and the promotion of cross-cultural diversity. The liberalization of economic policies and a better understanding of cultural diversity both provide insight into the economic and socio-cultural dynamics. Soft power focuses on the principle of getting other countries to want what you have; it incorporates the concept of attractability as its main point of departure. For example, countries that find the United States' (U.S.) culture attractive because of its global popularity aspire to follow its example. But can dimensions of soft power explain the strengthening of socio-cultural ties between South Africa and Taiwan after 1994? The argument is that the information revolution as a dimension of soft power creates virtual communities and networks that cross national borders, which South Africa and Taiwan benefits from. By looking at the increase in academic exchanges, tourism, and offers of employment opportunities, it appears soft power is at work, because the experiences are constructive and lead to a better understanding of cross-cultural diversity.

## **2. An Intention to Act**

The paper aims to highlight the significance of economic and cultural meetings between the two countries. What is the basis of underlying economic cooperation and cultural atonement? For example, work ethics and community ethos are distinctive in every society, but after 1998 interaction and sharing of information between subjects of both countries led to an increasing cross-cultural adaptation. If international relations theories or approaches are useful to explain why certain relationships are formed, is there one that can explain this relationship? The conclusion is that dimensions of soft power can shed light on the significance of cultural contacts. As an approach used by scholars to explain low politics between countries and why culture is an attractive medium to get other countries to

want what you have, it is necessary to search for reasons why dimensions of the third face of power have increased in scope between the two countries. Although the study is not concerned with behavioralism, personal accounts of citizens and their experiences are used as typical examples to highlight cultural diversity. The paper is divided into the following sections. First, a description is given on the relations before and after 1994, which provides a foundation for the discussion of soft power as a framework of analysis. It is necessary to look how the nationalist party government conducted relations with Taiwan, and how the relations changed after the ANC government came into power. The switch is especially important in the context of South Africa changing diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China (PRC). Second, an analysis of the economic significance provides insight into how trade is developing and shaping the future discourse between the two countries. In retrospect, trade is the only viable factor that keeps relations between South Africa and Taiwan going, and it holds tremendous promise for future points of contact. Third, the impact of cultural attractiveness is explained by way of soft power, for example, the inclusion of universal values; the transmission of culture through personal contacts, visits, and exchanges; and the significance of the information revolution. It is necessary to narrow down the time span for the research. During South Africa's formal diplomatic status with Taiwan dimensions of soft power played a less vital role. The two countries strived to maintain ties by respecting the principles of diplomacy, good governance, regional leadership, economic independence and international law. After the ANC took power in South Africa, China was recognized as the only legitimate, sovereign Chinese entity. This meant that South Africa had to reconsider its foreign relations with Taiwan. The emphasis moved to the liberalization of economic policies and a better understanding of cultural differences. Even with the diplomatic changing of sides, South Africa vowed to maintain strong trade and business links.

### **3. An Overview of the Diplomatic Status Before and After 1994**

During the rule of the National Party in South Africa, the relationship between South Africa and Taiwan was firm. This situation was ascribed to both countries' isolation and their desire to regard themselves as sovereign entities able to cooperate on matters of mutual concern. Because their international friendship was limited, diplomatic relations strengthened political and economic ties. Mutual trust and cooperation laid the foundations for a gradual increase in South African investments from Taiwan, and the establishment of development projects. During the early years of diplomacy and bilateral trade, the focus from Taiwan's side was on establishing an economic presence in Southern Africa and offering products difficult to obtain in the local market. For example textiles, electronics, and some industrial products had distinct Taiwanese brand names that were regarded signs of quality. The strategic position of Taiwan was also significant, because the island served as an economic gateway to the major economies of Japan, Korea, and since the middle of the 1990s China.

Taiwanese with their massive reserves promised to make substantial investment into training, infrastructure and trade. Many believed that diplomatic relations with Taiwan held more economic benefits for South Africa. This proved to be false as Taiwan held back on some of the major investments promised (Eades, 1999:2). At a strategic meeting arranged by the South African Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) to which all government departments were invited, it was established that South Africa had very little to lose. After an audit of the impact, it emerged that only the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) had serious reservations about switching diplomatic relations. There were two factions in the DFA: The first, mainly represented by the directorate for Asia and Australasia, understood the sensitivities and issues surrounding China and Taiwan. The other tendency naively believed South Africa could somehow arrange for an unprecedented form of dual recognition. The former were bullish about China's future and understood the importance of being in step with the rest of the international community regarding a permanent member of the Security Council. The

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latter were influenced by academics and other commentators who were being funded by the Taiwanese to promote dual recognition. This lobbying by the Taiwanese became quite intense and acrimonious at times with the Taiwanese Ambassador Loh I-Cheng accusing the Asia directorate of undermining the good relations between Taiwan and South Africa. Ambassador Loh also wrote a formal letter of complaint to Mandela naming certain diplomatic officers and in particular, the director and the assistant director of the Asia and Australasia Desk. In his book "Valiant but Fruitless Endeavours, Memoirs of I-Cheng Loh" he again singles out these two diplomats as having contributed to the breaking off of relations with Taiwan. However, the approach of the directorate was always to assess what is in South Africa's interests and not to become embroiled in the squabbles between other countries. There was no question of choosing sides. From the period after the ANC government came to power in 1994 until the historic shift by Mandela on 26 November 1996, there was infighting within the ranks of the South African Department of Foreign Affairs. Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo was captive to Mandela's position on the "two Chinas" issue and the deputy minister, who supported the immediate recognition of China, was at loggerheads with the director general, who backed Mandela's position on maintaining diplomatic relations with Taiwan. As a result, on more than one occasion, draft cabinet documents drawn up by the directorate for cabinet to consider regarding making the diplomatic switch, never reached the president's office or the agenda for cabinet's consideration (Botha, 2008). This impasse confused the Director of China's Centre for South African Studies, Ji Peiding (later assistant Foreign Minister) and Beijing. What was expected to be formality post independence had not happened after two and a half years. The director worked diligently behind the scenes to convince key decision makers in the ANC led government of the importance of abandoning the hope of a "two China's" policy and aligning itself with the rest of the world. Through continuous lobbying and persistently engaging the issue with Mandela, change happened suddenly and unexpectedly. On 27 November 1996 South Africa severed diplomatic relations with Taiwan effective as of 31 December 1997. Full diplomatic relations were only established between the

Republic of South Africa and the PRC on 1 January 1998 - more than a year after Mandela's announcement. (Botha, 2008) The decision came as a shock to the Taiwanese government and sectors within the South African business society. The loss of South Africa was a serious blow to consolidate ties with remaining African allies. After many attempts to gain entry in international organizations and the recognition it thoroughly deserved, Taiwan faced a big diplomatic crisis. (Taylor, 1997: 3) Taiwan only had a few African allies left, Swaziland, Burkina Faso, Sao Tome and Principe, Malawi and Gambia. In the African business environment these countries plays an insignificant role, but in the political arena they are members of the African Union (AU). This gives them credibility to make decisions that can influence the choices Taiwan make with its African allies. Although they are small in size with little or no regional influence they recognize the sovereignty of Taiwan and supports Taiwan's rightful integration in the international arena.

#### **4. Economic Significance**

It is important to mention the economic catalysts responsible for the establishment of trading policies between the two countries; for example, the Asian economic crisis of 1998 that necessitated the government of South Africa to review its economic policies with Asian countries. During the regime of the nationalist government in South Africa, demand for goods was not as high as it was at the start of the global technology and information age, and trading was obviously limited to a few import and export commodities. The previous government implemented an economic policy based on import substitution, high tariffs and subsidies, anticompetitive behavior, and extensive government intervention. (Eades, 1999: 6) This policy was inefficient in relations with Asian countries, where the economy encouraged competitive behavior to reduce high tariffs and subsidies, and where government intervention was limited. After the ANC came to power, the economic policies changed

drastically. These policies not only focused on accelerating trading links with China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, but also with the South East Asian countries of Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia. The ANC leadership reduced the government's role in the economy and promoted private sector investment and competition. It has significantly reduced tariffs and export subsidies, loosened exchange controls, cut the secondary tax on corporate dividends, and improved enforcement of intellectual property laws (Vardy, 2006) Taiwan, as an industrialized country with first world economic standards, welcomed the economic turn-about of South Africa. It meant that future economic policies would be based on mutual agreements and on the strengthening of trading ties. International trade is an integral part of Taiwan's economy, and it is increasing, because of a mutual demand for products, the exchange of business ideas, and the promotion of entrepreneurship. (Berger and Lester, 2005: 5) From South Africa's side, the demand for electronic and computer products has grown, and other areas of the economy are targeted for growth; for example, the textile and machinery markets. In many cases, consultants and students from South Africa not only focus on the immediate task at hand (for example, studying or educational instruction), but also explore business opportunities to see what kind of Taiwanese products are worth importing and exporting.

Entrepreneurs from both countries continually search for products, expand their services, and build formal transnational economic relationships. This is an area where the ties between the two countries are strengthening, and there is definitely a change of business attitude. This change came after the new government was established in South Africa, and it shows the way forward for the two countries. The implementation and execution of sound economic principles is an example of cooperation on economic policies. To a great extent, trading policies between the two countries focus on mutual imports and exports of authentic products that are a strong resource commodity; for example, natural resources from South Africa and high-tech products from Taiwan. Globalization is also a factor that influences economic cooperation between the two countries, because the removal and reduction of trade barriers facilitates the flow of goods,

capital, and services. Taiwan exports high-tech products to South Africa, for example, semiconductor, computer, telecommunication, and optoelectronics. Producing top of the range computer products is important to establish economic influence for the island country. A strong economic policy based on free market principles strengthens trading. South Africa as the biggest economy on the African continent also provides Taiwan with a platform in launching marketing strategies and economic incentive programs to its African allies.

## **5. Dimensions of Soft Power**

Nye (2004: 5) define soft power as the following:

‘Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals and policies. When our policies are seen as legitimate in the eyes of others, our soft power is enhanced.’

A country may obtain the outcomes it wants in world politics because other countries –admiring its values, emulating its example, aspiring to its level of prosperity and openness – want to follow it. This soft power –getting others to want what you want co-opts people rather than coerces them (Nye, 1990: 3). The US, due to its mass media entertainment and popular culture, shaped the cultural preferences of the world for a good part of the previous century and continued doing so in the new millennium. No other country after the Second World War has exerted such a strong cultural affinity on the international community. Its cultural attractiveness meant that everybody desired what the U.S. had. However, an international cultural revolution is changing the preferences of what world citizens like and want. The argument is that economic and regional powerhouses; for example, South Africa as economic leader on the Africa continent and

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Taiwan as one of the Asian tigers can shape the preferences of smaller economies in their regions as well as across borders. For this reason, dimensions of soft power can shed light on their relationship after 1998, mainly because of their citizen's interest to acquire mutual knowledge and broaden cultural horizons. An important question is whether citizens can identify with a common group of values that determines political, economical, or socio-cultural cooperation, because the two countries have distinct societies with equally distinct cultural and language barriers. A good starting point is to look at the foreign policies of the two countries, and ask whether they share any common values. As Nye (2004: 62) states, foreign policies produce soft power when they promote broadly shared values such as democracy and human rights. The foundation established by former presidents of South Africa, Frederik Willem de Klerk and Nelson Mandela, to promote democracy and international peace and harmonize relations between different ethnic, cultural, and religious foundations of society, serves as an example of where the two countries share a mutual interest in maintaining democracy. The visits by former president de Klerk to Taiwan on six previous occasions, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu's role in reconciling ethnic divisions among groups, strengthens the need to endorse democratic principles, both at home and internationally (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Republic of China, 2007).

Reconciliation of political values increases the chances for future cooperation and advances a positive image interaction. The countries agreement to share knowledge on common political objectives means that, in effect, points of contact are a tangible reality and that cooperation can be mutually beneficial. In the sense that cooperation increases political integrity and respect and brings about the aspiration to exchange information on the political, economical, and socio-cultural spheres, the contacts are mutually beneficial. Furthermore, cooperation gives credibility to the political systems of both countries, especially Taiwan, in the light of the international community's disregard for its sovereignty and whether it should become independent or not. Archbishop Tutu stated that the relationship between the two countries should be

characterized by openness and progression on issues of mutual concern, especially in the field of abolishing group inequalities. Harmonized group interests and reconciliation will bring about a multi-cultural Taiwan and secure a bright political future for the country. The acceptance of cross-cultural divisions and the need to assimilate such values into an established political framework will lead to a more open society, where citizens understand each other's needs and share a desire to build a Taiwan that incorporates the values of the whole society (Huang, 2007).

Though soft power sometimes has direct effects on specific goals – it is more likely to have an impact on the general goals that a country seeks. Fifty years ago, Arnold Wolfers, (in Nye, 2004: 17) distinguished between the specific “possession goals” that countries pursue and their broader “milieu goals,” like shaping an environment conducive to democracy. Successful pursuit of both types of goals is important in foreign policy. Soft power for Taiwan may be less relevant than hard power in preventing attack from China and will have no effect for South Africa when it wants to protect its borders from illegal immigrants. However, soft power is particularly relevant to the realization of “milieu goals.” It has a crucial role to play in promoting democracy, human rights, and open markets. It is easier to attract people to democracy than to coerce them to be democratic. (Nye 2004: 14) observes that the values a government champions in its behavior at home (for example, democracy), in international institutions (working with others), and in foreign policy (promoting peace and human rights) strongly affect the preferences of others. Governments can attract or repel others by the influence of their example. Both countries respect the values of democracy and promote peace and human rights in foreign policy decision-making and this attract each other to lead by example. The concept of buying into the values of the other country is useful to explain how the two different cultures learn from each other. Although the work ethics of Asian and western companies are in practice different, similarities are found and values are interchanged. For example, in the computer industry culture

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shape the preferences of potential buyers and will persuade or dissuade them into buying certain products.<sup>1</sup> This does not mean that executives completely accept the other party's values, but for the sake of carrying out a trading deal and understanding business dynamics, a temporary displacement of values allows for a fuller comprehension of the trading parties' reasoning behind a business deal. Soft power enhances commercial trading links and the ability to establish legitimate preferences or moral authority makes it easier for a leader to represent values that others want to follow. It will then cost less to lead and others will be attracted to what you have to offer. (Nye 2004: 6). The credibility of the Taiwanese brand name in stores across the globe, and the sign of quality accompanying these products, is an intangible asset. This aspect has a significant effect on trading with private entrepreneurs in South Africa, who traditionally view quality as more important than quantity. Because soft power rests on the power of attraction, and attraction often leads to acquiescence, businesspersons praise the ongoing efforts of Taiwan-owned companies in South Africa to attract local buyers and strengthen economic and cultural bonds according to Mr. Wouter Zaayman, the deputy representative of the liaison office in Taipei in 2002 (Partridge, 2002). He further added:

'Indeed, I have been most impressed with the integrity, sincerity and unbending work ethic of the Taiwanese during my stay.' Horst Brammer, Representative of the Liaison Office concurred with his deputy. "The many SME (Small to Medium sized Enterprise) success stories here in Taiwan only serve to illustrate what can be achieved through collaboration and initiative." (Partridge, 2002: 2)

Mansbridge (1990: 13) observes that executives can appeal to a sense of attraction or duty in their relationship and appeal to shared values about the justness of contributing to those shared values and purposes. Soft power is at work when behavior determines an observable but intangible attraction. With the increase in trade between South Africa and Taiwan, businesspersons mutually exchange values,

lead by example and shape the preferences of each other. For example in 2001, the last Taiwanese ambassador to South Africa, Mr. I-Cheng Loh encouraged the South African government to send a high-powered trade delegation to Taiwan. The delegation had to serve a dual purpose: to develop bilateral trade on the one hand and to attract Taiwanese investment to South Africa. Mr. Cornelius van Niekerk Scholtz, head of the Liaison Office of South Africa in Taipei during the time agreed and said that a trade delegation could serve a useful purpose, provided it is a very high level one aimed at specific targets and possibly headed by a cabinet minister (Partridge, 2002).

The two countries uses a different type of currency (not force, not money) to engender cooperation – an attraction to shared values and the justness of contributing to the achievement of those values (Nye, 2004: 7) Co-optive power – the ability to shape what others want – can rest on the attractiveness of one's culture and values or the ability to manipulate the agenda of political choices in a manner that makes others fail to express some preferences because they seem to be too unrealistic. The reciprocal visits by leaders show that co-optive power is at work, because the behavior of the leaders on both sides of the spectrum ranges from agenda setting to attraction to co-opting. Soft power resources tend to be associated with the co-optive end of the spectrum of behavior, whereas hard power resources are usually associated with command behavior. Badal, (quoted by Rickards, 2004) observes that individuals visit the representative office in Taiwan on a regular basis, inquiring information on research projects, trade links and tourism. Contrary values attract people and this form the basis for a cooperative relationship or accompanying agenda setting. Co-optive power elaborates information and persuades others to go along without any explicit threat or exchange-taking place. Authorities on both sides have the ability to shape the preferences of others and arrange information in an attractive way. In the relationship between South Africa and Taiwan, the displaying of government and public information produces soft power that arises in large part

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from the values of business and socio-cultural connections. It is further of importance that recipients receive rules and values in an attractive manner. This helps to transfer and apply knowledge in a practical situation. According to Badal, (in Rickards, 2004) academic and student exchanges between the two countries are increasing, leading to a mutual interest in culture and knowledge sharing, for example at the end of 2004 more than 520 students from Taiwan were studying at tertiary institutions right across South Africa. Most of these students collected information from government information offices and decided to enroll for overseas study programs. The attitude and professionalism of officials are equally important to persuade the other group to buy into your values, because interested persons will either be attracted to a different set of values and accept challenges or view the disadvantages of the values and reject it in total<sup>ii</sup> (Nye, 2004: 9) states that countries sometimes enjoy political power that is greater than their military and economic weight would suggest because they define national interest to include attractive causes such as economic aid or peacemaking. The providing of scholarships to disadvantaged students in rural South Africa is a manifestation of Taiwan's economic aid to the subcontinent. For example in 2006, The Taiwan Migrants Community in South Africa (TMC) launched a scholarship program for local students to enroll at the North West University. This scholarship program was a gesture of goodwill by the Taiwanese people to identify needy pupils (Taiwan Ministry of Education 2007). On the positive side, recipients of the economic aid programs hold a positive view of Taiwan and regard the country as supporting the needs of disadvantaged communities. Generally speaking recipients of economic aid will develop a friendly and trustworthy relationship with the aid providing country if intentions are honest and sincere.

Richard Shih, the Taipei liaison office's representative in South Africa made the following statement in 2007:

'Taiwan would like to work with its African friends as partners to draw up development action plans that best suit African needs. Together we will find solutions to the continent's problems, and Taiwan will offer all the

assistance it can in the spirit of friendship.’  
(Milazi, 2007:3)

South Africa, as an economic powerhouse on the African continent, acts as springboard for Taiwan to launch development - action programs to its diplomatic allies and business partners. The government facilitates business transactions in a supportive capacity between African and Asian economies, because of both its influential power and its initiatives of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). (Cornwell, Melber and Wanjala, 2002: 6) Taiwan surely benefits from NEPAD’S cooperative agreements, because NEPAD introduces it to African business contacts and draws it into the bigger African business picture. The South African Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) also present business opportunities to potential partners (South African Department of Trade and Industry, 2009). Humanitarian assistance by the Taiwan Buddhist organization Tzu Chi has increased in scope over the last couple of years. The outreach of this religious group to poor, destitute, and AIDS infected individuals broadens the applicability of the soft power in the South African –Taiwan context. As early as 1992, a group of local Taiwanese businessmen began to promote the Tzu Chi missions in South Africa. They undertook emergency relief work and long-term aid for the poor. For example, at the end of 2006 the Tzu Chi Foundation had more than 1000 local Zulu members and over 80 dedicated volunteers visiting AIDS patients in townships (TzuChi Organization in South Africa, 2009). As Nye (2004: 94) observes, religious movements have possessed soft power for centuries. The Roman Catholic Church is organized on a global scale, and many Catholics around the world adhere to its teachings on issues like birth control and abortion because of attraction, not coercion. Other religious organizations – among them Protestant, Islamic, and Buddhist – have extensive missionary efforts that have attracted millions of people to adhere to their teachings, particularly in Latin America and Africa in recent decades.

## **6. Cross-Cultural Interaction**

The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others); - its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad); - and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority) (Nye, 2004: 11) Culture is the set of values and practices that create meaning for society. It has many manifestations. It is common to distinguish between high culture that appeal to elites, such as literature, art, and education, and popular culture, such as mass entertainment. In analyzing the cultural attractiveness of soft power, politics of high culture are more dominant than politics of low culture. The universal values shared in the promotion of education and business point to a high probability of sharing the desired outcomes. This is because of the relationship of attraction and the duty that it creates. The way in which the South African department of education is actively involved in recruiting foreign students for high-quality tertiary education is growing. 'South Africa is becoming a continental leader in the provision of high quality tertiary education relevant to the demands of a rapidly globalizing, competitive, information-driven world. The internationalization of education is viewed as a valuable means of advancing communication and respect among people of different cultures, of developing scholarship, and of strengthening South Africa's global position' (South African Department of Education, 2009).

Different cultures joining hands, bridging cultural divides, and working together to create a multi-cultural educational environment is a universal educational goal and applied with great effect for students from Taiwan, because they take the knowledge to their employer. Former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell made the following remark: - 'I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders, who have been educated here' (Powell, 2001). The remark also applies to students from Africa and Asia, because they affect the policy outcomes that are important to the country where they obtained their qualification. (Johnson and Dale, 2003)

mention the third dimension of public diplomacy, which is the development of relationships with key individuals, lasting many years through scholarships, exchanges, training, seminars, conferences, and access to media channels. Students return to their home countries and portray either a positive or negative image of the country where they studied. Promoting a positive image of one's country is not new, but the conditions for projecting soft power have been dramatically transformed in recent years. An example of the role cultural exchanges play in enhancing a country's soft power is the Cathay Pacific Airways International Wilderness Drive, where young people from Asia, including Taiwan are flown to South Africa for a unique cultural and educational program. This highlights the importance of high- culture exchanges between Western and Asian students (Chang, 2005). What has made this wilderness drive more successful since its inception is the annual interest by students from Asia who want a real life experience in the African wild. In the last three years, Taiwanese students have qualified to take part in the event and act as ambassadors for their country, which shows that soft power is at work in promoting a mutual interest in nature conservation and shared universal values. The promotion of socio-cultural ties that focus on the mutual exchange of knowledge, culture, and education has improved considerably since 1998. A large group of South Africans, university graduates, business people and individuals periodically find themselves in Taiwan, looking for employment, for travel purposes, business opportunities or escaping the perils of their own country.<sup>iii</sup> In a sense it is true that expatriates develop their own lifestyle and does not really care about the political situation in their home countries. The assumption is that expats can create a self-supporting soft power that makes them survive in a new country. They establish a kind of soft power that prevails over borders, since there are ex pats living in almost every corner of the earth and inter subjectively they interact, because they share the same norms, values and culture. In Taiwan the South African expat society look after their own needs and is seldom

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dependent upon representations from their own country. The advantage for the Taiwanese society is that expats connect with locals and present distinctive qualities that give Taiwan the edge in the global information age. Taiwan offers short term employment for educational consultants and many citizens grab this opportunity to work for one or two years, save money, travel in Asia and as is the fashion in the last 10 years, stay for longer periods and maybe settle down permanently. Actually, the number of South Africans staying in Taiwan for a period of more than 10 years has increased considerably. Many consultants sign agreements for a one year period, only to find that institutions offer them a renewal of terms after the agreement expires. It is also interesting to note that cross-cultural marriages in Taiwan is on the rise and South Africans are no exception to the group of foreign nationals, which enter into matrimony with Taiwanese nationals.<sup>iv</sup> High culture exchanges between Taiwan and South Africa were created from nothing in some cases, for example; the establishment of annual tourism fairs, arts and craft exhibitions, and seminars on higher institution learning. Visitors from each country also bring a vast array of cultural identity with them, which broadens horizons and changes prejudices of the country they are visiting. Even though Taiwan's culture is in many ways remote from the culture in South Africa, South Africans visit Taiwan to experience the richness and fullness of its society. President Dwight Eisenhower once argued for the need:

‘To work out not one method but thousands of methods by which people can gradually learn a little bit more about each other. Indeed, high cultural contacts often produced soft power for the United States during the Cold War. Scores of nongovernmental institutions such as theaters, museums, and opera companies performed in the Soviet Union’ (Richmond, 2003: 123-124)

The launch of the first South African -Taiwan arts week in February 2009, as a high cultural event, also produced soft power for both countries. Although the function was held to introduce the work of three prominent Taiwanese artists, what was unexpected in their work and ideas, was their

creation of a genre wherein tradition and innovation meet. This resulted in a cross-cultural fusion of Chinese and Western styles, ideas, and approaches (Taipei Liaison Office, 2009). Popular culture, or features of mass entertainment, is an important dimension of soft power. Even though high culture in the form of literature and art is, at the moment, more appealing to citizens of both countries, in recent years there has been a new focus on attracting cross-cultural audiences by screening cultural films and documentaries. The productions of these entertaining features and clips are popular attractions, especially for persons interested in learning what the other culture has to offer. According to Wattenberg (1991: 213) popular entertainment often contains subliminal images and messages about individualism, consumer choice, and other values that have important political effects. American culture includes glitz, sex, violence, vapidness, and materialism, but that is not the whole story. It also portrays American values that are open, mobile, individualistic, anti-establishment, pluralistic, voluntaristic, populist, and free. It is that content, whether reflected favorably or unfavorably, that brings people to the box office. That content is more powerful than politics or economics. It drives politics and economics. The Taiwan film festival that was held in South Africa in September 2008 provided locals with the opportunity to experience the rich texture of Taiwan's unique filmmaking style. This event raised an awareness of Taiwan and encouraged mutual interaction. A positive outcome of the film festival was the presentation of new insights into the culture and lifestyle of countries in the East. Many locals were not aware that the island of Taiwan has a rich and full culture and that similarities in values exist, for example the preservation of art in the form of paintings, sculptures, and literature. During the event, academics and anthropologists also learned from each other and exchanged ideas, (Kruger 2009). Tourism plays a role in communicating values and promoting soft power between countries. Since 2001 visitors from Asia to South Africa have increased by 20, 7%. And a good deal of these visitors comes from Taiwan (Partridge,

2002). The South African government benefit from the annual travel fairs held throughout Taiwan, because the country is displayed as a holiday and business destination. According to a remark by a representative at the travel fair in 2008, people not only asked for travel information, but also inquired about institutes of higher learning and language centres (South African Liaison Office in Taiwan, 2008). Nye (2004: 13) is of the opinion that commerce is only one of the ways in which culture is transmitted. It is also transmitted through personal contacts, visits, and exchanges. The ideas and values that America exports in the minds of more than half a million foreign students who study every year in American universities and then return to their home countries, or in the minds of the Asian entrepreneurs who return home after succeeding in Silicon Valley, tend to reach elites with power. What is the effect on Taiwanese students studying in South Africa? Figures released at the end of 2005 show that 3, 7% of all foreign students studying at language schools in South Africa originated from Taiwan. The number appears insignificant in comparison to China's 9.5%, but is a promising outlook for a country that is hugely outranked in the number of Chinese students that enrol at language centres all across the globe. The broadening of Asian student's perspectives on the African learning environment, and the attraction Africa holds for study is an important milieu goal for many of these learning institutions, due to the fact that students from China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan together constitute 24, 2% of total foreign students. And the numbers can really increase if marketing is focused on capturing the hearts and minds of the younger generation (Language Travel Magazine, 2005). Popular sports in one country can play a role in communicating values and lead other countries to want what they have. South Africa's presentation of the 2010 World Cup Soccer will be an example of a time and place that athletes' values and spectator's behaviors will be interchanged. Fans who are not accustomed to the lifestyle, sport ethics, and general values of either locals or visitors will have an opportunity to learn from each other and communicate new values to fellow compatriots when they return home. Richard Shih, the Taiwan representative to South Africa, commented that while South Africa's economic boom is set to continue, Taiwanese

companies should avail themselves of the opportunity to explore this market and also benefit from the Fifa Soccer World Cup that will be hosted by South Africa in 2010 (Taipei Liaison Office, 2006). Power plays an important role in the global information age. Bell (1999: 30) asserts that power today is less tangible and less coercive among the advanced democracies than it was in the past. At the same time, little of the world consists of advanced democracies, and that limits the global transformation of power. For example, South Africa only became a fully-fledged member of the international community after 1994 and is still in the transition period to a democracy. Taiwan, on the other hand, has achieved more in terms of realizing its democratization goals. The information revolution and globalization of world economies are important factors in bringing the two countries together. They can now create their own virtual communities and networks that cut across national borders. The role that educational institutions play in attracting future students shows that the ability to share information becomes an important source of attraction and power. This sharing of information is, in part, a social and economic by-product rather than solely a result of official government action. Ogoura, the president of the Japan Foundation is of the opinion that soft power also has its limits. Some regard the number of foreign students that come to study at a country's universities as an indicator of that country's soft power, but this is not convincing. The weakness of the argument becomes quite apparent when we consider the large number of people educated at U.S. universities who are nonetheless anti-American, and the fact that many of the terrorists who have carried out attacks in the U.S. in recent years were also there. Regarding scholarship and culture as one of the sources of soft power implies approval of both the commercialization of culture and linking culture with the power structure. Yet scholarship and culture are, by rights, independent of political power. Very often, in fact, they are a means of resisting authority, and the idea that this is their rightful role is well established. Therefore, even if the arts or scholarship had the potential to serve as one face of power,

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there remain serious doubts as to whether it would be acceptable for governments to actually use them.

## **7. What Does the Future Hold?**

The relationship between South Africa and Taiwan under the ANC government is characterized by a less informal and softer approach. Due to the fact that no diplomatic relations exist, bilateral contacts are maintained by establishing and promoting trading ties and social-cultural connections. Formal governmental ties on levels of high politics exist, for example, both countries acknowledge the importance of security and strategic issues in their respective areas, but national security issues directly affecting the execution of foreign policy is insignificant. Both countries realize that the safe passage of their citizens for travel and business purposes are important, and therefore security issues mainly focus on effective immigration policies, combating the trafficking of both illegal substances and humans, international police investigations, and respect for international maritime boundaries. In their respective regions, South Africa and Taiwan are status quo countries and enforce law and order to keep stability. The ideals and values attached to democracy make cooperation between South Africa and Taiwan a real significant factor, and these mutually shared points of contact on a higher level indicate that future relationships will increase rather than decrease. The following factors show that the relationship is economic and socially constructed: a humanitarian approach to solving poverty and dealing with development issues, for example, the work done by the Taiwan Tzu Tsi (Buddhist Organization) in South Africa; Taiwan's concern over educating previously disadvantaged pupils by providing scholarships; Taiwan's interest in South Africa's elections over the last 10 years; the increasing number of students enrolling in academic programs; and, the promotion of tourism.

Because diplomatic relations between countries are primarily established for the purpose of cooperation and recognition of sovereignty, South Africa and Taiwan can hardly do more than find common ground by cooperating on mutually concerning issues through soft power diplomacy. It is a flexible concept that can be adjusted to specific needs, and it is not coercive or based on power play. Soft power can set the trend for future cooperation and exchanges, because it enhances Taiwan's credibility with South African role-players and lays down the platform for agenda setting. The difference Taiwan can make by providing economic aid and assistance to impoverished regions of South Africa sets the agenda. In the last few decades, the world has come to know Taiwan as a leader in certain economic sectors, and this leadership is a direct result of the attractiveness and quality of its products. No matter which country the students hail from, the intention is to go abroad and learn more about the other culture. In the academic interaction between South Africa and Taiwan, attraction definitely plays a role. Students wish to experience the lifestyle and culture of the host country and usually share knowledge that is mutually beneficial. Although interaction presently occur on an informal level between schools and pupils, the governments of the two countries are becoming increasingly involved by identifying student's needs and improving education programs to attract more foreign students. The focus is more on cultural diversity and how to assimilate different values into flexible and coordinated programs. For this reason the contribution citizens make in acting as ambassadors change stereotypes and portray a positive or negative outlook. Finally, as discussed in the paper, the economic-cultural dimension of soft power will be instrumental in determining the future relationship. Interaction between both countries will be based on a solid understanding of what goods, commodities, expertise or knowledge can be exchanged and if it will be beneficial. It is not a case that only one-country exercise soft power on the other country. Both countries should realize that soft power present them with the freedom and leverage to cooperate and build a long lasting

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relationship. Commenting on the research questions, it is now a well-known fact why the ANC government switched diplomatic recognition to China. Not only was it because of internal political pressure and support of the 'One China Policy', but also to build a strategic relationship and increase business and trade. But the change of diplomatic status in actual fact benefitted private entrepreneurism with Taiwan and encouraged two-way economic interaction. For this reason, South Africa's recognition of China from a business perspective did not adversely affect its relations with Taiwan. Mutual imports and exports are consistent and destined to accelerate in the future. The collapse of global financial markets from 2006 continuing until the present however impacted the overall trade figures. But this situation is on the reverse trend with a renewed interest by South Africa to purchase computer and high technology products. It is undeniable that the sign of quality attached to these products spur on further interest to observe what the Taiwanese market offers. Taiwan, on the other hand keeps on importing South African natural resources, for example coal and minerals, because the supply is consistent and the market price is reasonable. The conclusion is that dimensions of soft power explain cultural attractiveness and this also answers the integral research question. Although, the soft power interaction is not as significant as for example between middle powers such as Australia, Canada and their international allies, cultural and economic attraction is laying a foundation for reciprocal interaction. However, there are limitations in using soft power to analyze the relationship. Taiwan is a de facto government that does not enjoy international diplomatic recognition. This questions the validity of the approach and if soft power can be measured between a sovereign and non-sovereign middle power in international politics. If this is the case, the analysis is that the relationship is build on the maintaining of goodwill, respect and acknowledgement.

## Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> An executive in the information technology industry signed a trading deal with a well-known computer company. They agreed on basic work ethics and not so much on terms and conditions. He was pleased with the sincerity and professionalism of the company and working culture.
- <sup>ii</sup> An overseas Taiwanese student which completed her undergraduate studies at an institution in South Africa collected information from the representative office in Taiwan. At first she was afraid that adjustment to a new academic environment will be difficult, because of the diversity in cultures. She however remarked that there were more similarities than obstacles, for example the forming of study groups and teaching styles of academic staff made her feel well at home.
- <sup>iii</sup> Information collected from expatriates over a period of three years. The precise number of expatriates interviewed is not known, since the results are based on random sampling. The opinion in general is that Taiwan offers temporary employment and the opportunity to live in a safe environment. The political situation in their country of birth also influenced the decision to come to Taiwan.
- <sup>iv</sup> Cross-cultural barriers are fast disappearing in many Asian countries and Taiwan is no exception to the rule. The opinion has changed from a decade ago where Taiwan was viewed as an Asian country with strong, traditional culture and where over the border marriages were hardly imaginable. Some foreigners still hold the view that such marriages present a multitude of obstacles, but with international workforce migration, globalization and tourism eastern and western cultures are becoming more harmonized. Expats still keep close ties with family members and don't necessarily estrange from their roots. Asking the question why choose Taiwan? A common answer under South Africans is the friendliness and hospitality of the people and the freedom to move around and enjoying natural beauty and splendor. Apart from the obvious reasons why couples get married, South Africans feel that cross-cultural marriages open doors into the Asian business world and present the opportunity to reach a vast group of business people. An exercise difficult to perform alone, since Asian and Western work

culture and ethics differ in degree and not so much in style.

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