

BOOK REVIEW:
ČÍNSKA MÄKKÄ MOC A SLOVENSKÄ SKÜSENOŠŤ
(CHINESE SOFT POWER AND THE SLOVAK
EXPERIENCE)

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Scholarly attention to Chinese influence in Central and Eastern Europe has tended to gravitate toward larger states such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, often leaving Slovakia at the margins. Tomáš Dvorský's monograph addresses this gap with a careful and well-organised study of how China deploys soft power in the Slovak Republic. Published in 2022 by the University of Pavol Jozef Šafárik in Košice, the book spans 235 pages and is structured into three substantive chapters moving from theory to global strategy to a Slovak case study (Dvorský, 2022).

The opening chapter offers a thorough grounding in the concept of soft power, drawing on Joseph Nye's foundational work and tracing its evolution over four decades. Dvorský also engages with the more recent notion of sharp power, the manipulation of information and institutions by authoritarian regimes that exploits the openness of democratic societies. This is one of the relatively few Slovak-language texts that explains this theoretical terrain in such accessible terms, and the chapter alone makes the monograph a useful teaching resource.

The second chapter examines China's soft power toolkit in a broader context. Dvorský opens with an intriguing historical thread, tracing elements of soft power thinking back to classical Chinese philosophy and Sun Tzu's emphasis on psychological dominance achieved through legitimacy rather than force. He then follows the trajectory of Chinese foreign policy from 1949 through the assertive turn under Xi Jinping,

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cataloguing the principal instruments: Confucius Institutes, state-controlled media, cultural diplomacy through sport and popular culture, and the Belt and Road Initiative. The discussion of COVID-19 vaccine diplomacy provides a timely capstone, capturing the tension between Chinese outreach and the international backlash it has provoked.

The third chapter is the monograph's most original contribution. It presents a detailed case study of Chinese soft power in Slovakia, tracing bilateral relations from the Czechoslovak era to the present and examining political, economic, security, cultural, and media dimensions of Chinese engagement. Particularly compelling is the analysis of the Chinese embassy's media strategy, which documents how successive ambassadors placed commentary in outlets ranging from mainstream business publications to fringe platforms classified as disinformation channels by Slovakia's own Ministry of Defence. The treatment of economic ties, including the Huawei controversy at the GLOBSEC forum, anchors abstract claims about influence in concrete and verifiable examples.

Perhaps the most striking finding is Dvorský's measured conclusion that Slovakia does not in fact rank among the priority targets of Chinese interest in the region. As he puts it, the activities of the Chinese embassy and cultural institutes do not substantially deviate from the standard framework of economic and cultural diplomacy. This sober assessment sets the book apart from more alarmist accounts of Chinese influence in Europe and lends the analysis considerable credibility. It also invites instructive comparison with neighbouring Hungary, whose deeper entanglement with Chinese infrastructure projects, vaccine procurement, and political alignment under Viktor Orbán is treated in the monograph as a useful contrasting case.

Among the book's clear strengths are its breadth of sources, its readable prose, and the way its three-level structure builds a coherent analytical arc from theory through global strategy to local application. Some sections of the Slovak case study lean more towards description than analytical interrogation, and the rapidly changing landscape of European responses to China means that certain assessments will inevitably need updating. These observations should not, however, detract from the book's value. They

simply point to directions in which future scholarship can build on the foundation Dvorský has laid.

The greatest disadvantage of this publication, however, is the lack of an English-language version. This significantly limits the reach of the study and represents a hindrance to the wider field, given that the monograph clearly has great potential to enhance further research and inform policy debates beyond Slovakia. A translation would allow comparative scholarship in CEE-China studies to draw fully on its findings.

Overall, *Čínska mäkká moc a slovenská skúsenosť* is a thoughtful, well-researched, and genuinely useful contribution to a literature that too often overlooks smaller European states. Dvorský's careful empirical grounding, his willingness to draw evidence-based rather than alarmist conclusions, and his fluent integration of theoretical and case-study material make this a book worth reading for scholars of international relations, Chinese foreign policy, and Central European politics, as well as for policymakers seeking a clear-eyed account of how external influence actually operates in the smaller member states of the European Union.

RESOURCES

Dvorský, T. (2022). *Čínska mäkká moc a slovenská skúsenosť*. Košice: Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2022, 236 p.