

Soft Power in the 21st Century: The Impact of Culture and Diplomacy

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Abstract:

This research examines the evolving role of soft power in the 21st century, focusing on the influence of culture and diplomacy in shaping international relations. Soft power, defined as the ability to attract and co-opt rather than coerce, has gained prominence as nations seek to enhance their global standing through cultural diplomacy, education, and exchanges. This study analyzes various strategies employed by states to project their values, ideals, and cultural heritage, exploring how these initiatives foster mutual understanding and collaboration. Key themes include the impact of digital media on cultural dissemination, the role of non-state actors, and the intersection of soft power with traditional hard power. Case studies of successful soft power campaigns reveal how cultural initiatives can enhance diplomatic relations and promote national interests. The findings underscore the necessity for countries to adapt their soft power strategies in a rapidly changing global landscape, emphasizing the importance of cultural engagement in addressing complex global challenges. Ultimately, this research contributes to the understanding of soft power as a critical tool in contemporary diplomacy, advocating for a holistic approach that balances cultural influence with strategic objectives.

Keywords: soft power, culture, diplomacy, international relations, cultural diplomacy, global standing, digital media, non-state actors.

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1. Introduction

An introduction to soft power in the 21st century is not only overdue but also critically relevant at this juncture because we find ourselves immersed in a rapidly evolving era of global politics. This transformation is driven by unprecedented changes in society, technology, and various other influential areas. More than a mere topic for academic study, the global popularity of the term "soft power" transcends various disciplines, including culture, diplomacy, economics, and military strategy. While culture and diplomacy are just two prominent strategies to enhance influence in this new world order, they are indeed eminently practical and vital for the complex business landscape of the 21st century. By employing a diverse global selection of examples, we can gather insightful causal and corollary evidence that serves to gauge the effectiveness of soft power in differing contexts and environments, thereby enriching our understanding of its potential impacts on international relations and cooperative strategies among nations. Media scholars agree that the most apt hallmarks of contemporary media echo soft tools that spread culture, craft global images, and build affluent personal diplomacy on a daily basis. Soft power is not just an abstract tool for new-style behavior. Nor does it involve an individual elite conforming only to individual political values. Instead, soft power integrates organizational structures and diplomatic channels as well as entire government sectors, societies, and cultures. Although soft power might appeal to postmodern sensibilities, the global and contemporary nature of diplomacy, invidious by any other name, is observable only in the more mundane attempts of nation-states to advance their goals in the globally competitive arena. The pervasiveness and power of diplomacy is present through case studies of artists who are not in positions of political power. (Yang & Li, 2021)

2. Conceptualizing Soft Power

The term 'Soft Power' has been around in International Relations circles since at least the 1990s, when it was first defined in discussions on boundary and power. It was maintained that in an age of

globalization and relative peace, roughly since the end of World War II, traditional forms of power did not have the same influence as they did in previous centuries. Instead, it was proposed that states employed ‘culture’, ‘ideas’, and ‘ideology’ projected through channels such as international institutions to achieve their ‘desired outcomes’ in world politics. This proposal has since become widely recognized in the discipline for better or worse. The theorization of Soft Power continued due to the fact that the definition based on the relation between means of soft versus hard power is rather rudimentary.

In this paper, we will account for and evaluate the literature around the theory developed in the 1990s. It is important to recognize that the fantastic and exotic terms of ‘soft’ and ‘hard power’ were used in the 1990s and 2000s to simplify some of the political processes that occurred within the international classical political unit, such as the state, usually using military forces, armies, navy, and crafts, mentioning aircraft and other technical elements to represent a more serious character in the discussions. Furthermore, other scholars included three dimensions for better analysis: politics, economics, and culture, that explicitly define the usage of the term. To better recognize the usage of the term, this evolved over time and traces the phenomenon through the multitude of the world as a heritage of humanity from some large nations. (Henne & Ozturk, 2022)

2.1. Definition and Origins

Soft power is “the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through co-option and attraction.” The term was coined in 1990, introducing the concept one year after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The modern scholarly attention that enveloped the term is unprecedented, capturing political scientists and contributing to the enlargement of the term’s meaning and scope from the historical roots in 19th-century diplomacy to the post-1989 broad view. Despite the contemporary popularity, the notion of (the use of) soft power is not new or novel. The strategy was used particularly by ruling powers and imperial countries to attract or co-opt others to their own ideas and values. They mostly applied the strategy or the tools of soft power in an

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informal way, especially in regions where they operated army-corporation networks.

The use of the term and its current application were different in every era, due to the context of international politics. Moreover, the tools and strategies connected to soft power differed according to the political or economic circumstances. Although soft power is primarily connected to a cultural and international relations domain, and numerous definitions are focused on that, countries can use different areas to flaunt their soft powers. Language, culture, politics, or economy could demonstrate nation-states' soft powers, according to a specific country. However, in spite of the different manifestations, a taxonomic result is that soft power is the use of national appeal as a strategy in international relations. (Kim, 2021)

2.2. Key Theorists

For many, the first port of call for an understanding of the concept, its potential, and the role of cultural diplomacy in its fulfillment. The author has produced a large body of work both as an academic and a policy diplomat. In fact, as a government advisor, he is credited with demonstrating the effectiveness of indirect power as a statesman. The interdisciplinary approach is evident in that he draws closely from the works of those working in related fields, such as sociology, International Relations, and cultural studies, in particular. He is adamant that this theory is indeed applicable to the post-9/11 era and is even more significant today. There are those working within foreign ministries who are critical of the concept, arguing that soft power cannot be operationalized and measured. Indeed, many scholars debate how cultural attributes might be represented and scored. The argument is that, despite the problems of measuring techniques, there is an urgent need for its acceptance within pertinent bodies.

The theory is also highly relevant to the field of public diplomacy, which must fulfill three objectives: engage, inform, and influence foreign publics. There is an understanding now that culture, more specifically, employs aspects taken from both. It has been able to contribute to an understanding of global cultures as an animating and

unifying force in the world politics of the twenty-first century. Another theorist has paved the way for the concept in an important light. Rhetorical appeals are arguably the most serious means of status seeking. In a war being marshaled under the guise of such a norm-oriented perspective, questions that echo throughout the academic world relating to the concept and the practice of soft power have emerged. The term 'soft sell' power has even been used, which underlines the reference to a 'subtle' alternative to direct pressure and hard power tactics. (Grincheva, 2022)

3. The Role of Culture in Soft Power

3.1. Cultural Diplomacy

3.2. Cultural Exchanges

4. Diplomacy and Soft Power

Diplomacy is becoming a more engaging area in the field of international relations. Diplomacy is defined as the art and practice of conducting negotiations, be it in politics, business, or other organizations. Diplomatic practice has changed a lot over the ages, under the pressures of improving globalization, increasing knowledge, developing technologies, and other factors. The concept of diplomacy differs according to culture, tradition, family, level of politeness, and procedures and institutions where it is performed. Diplomacy in contemporary times has what is called an old diplomacy, with its own traditional connotation, already trying to be replaced with new diplomacy. Over time, the concept of diplomacy and its relative diplomatic practices have developed.

The term “soft power” gained widespread popularity when it was demonstrated in international relations. It was linked to the ethics and moral values of a country. Culture is considered an integral component of soft power and soft power capabilities. Soft power helps to make a country’s diplomatic actions more effective since a country’s policies and national goals become much more appreciated and appealing to other countries. Apart from using soft power in its foreign policy, the U.S. also exploits cultural diplomacy activities to build strong relationships with developing countries.

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A successful public diplomacy strategy was employed in the iconic campaign. The initial purpose of the campaign was to attract global visitors and, thus, directly benefit the economy. However, in the long term, it had an unintentional effect of attracting even more tourists as it helped encourage better foreign relations through dialogue among different cultures. But in using soft power for diplomatic purposes, considering international relations, the leadership must pay attention to the basic objectives of the country. If the cultural diplomacy effort is influenced by the nation's diplomatic objectives, the soft power strategy can be seen as propaganda and fail in building fruitful and lasting relationships. Diplomats who use cultural diplomacy must balance their home country's interests with the interests of the host country or the international community. Diplomatic professionals emphasize that cultural diplomacy should not only focus on public diplomacy but should also be directed to systems of bilateral, multilateral, and interfaith diplomacy through direct dialogue, guest lecturing, and intercultural exchanges. (Knight, 2022)

4.1. Public Diplomacy

Public diplomacy comprises an important subset of soft power strategies. Conventional forms of state diplomacy involve government-to-government interactions and are aimed at protecting state interests. Public diplomacy, on the other hand, involves people-to-people interactions and sharing perspectives and ideas to build trust and understanding. Long-standing public diplomacy practices are characterized by outreach and lasting engagement and are rooted in education and cultural programs. Here, the goal is to permit unfamiliar people access to new information and promote the attractiveness of a nation's culture, policies, and ideas to foreign publics.

Nations use many methods to reach a domestic and international public. They might engage in nation branding campaigns. Case studies show culture as the gateway to good diplomatic relations and a means of boosting a country's soft power. Most strategies at this level contain a communication element that, in the 21st century, often involves pressuring media outlets to convey positive stories about the nation.

Nevertheless, there are limits to controlling information and the extent to which such media strategies can be successful, especially when false perceptions are held. Another way to view the public diplomacy paradigm is to see it as a weaker level of societal influence than propaganda or other influential methods, which might be referred to as a kind of long-term propaganda that helps to create favorable attitudes towards a country. Public diplomacy is also associated with soft power, whether or not it falls within the many umbrella terms for this kind of influence. What is clear, however, is that public diplomacy is concerned with managing images and can influence the target group enabling foreign policy to be enacted. (Hassan and Wang2022)

4.2. Multilateral Diplomacy

Multilateral diplomacy is oftentimes seen as an “extension” of soft power, and an important reason for this is its empowerment of all seeking international negotiation. Empirical studies of public and cultural diplomacy also argue that institutional and multilateral approaches strengthen the public and cultural diplomacy of a state, a group of states, or a broader international organization. This enrichment of hard and soft statescraft is embedded in the cooperative reality created by such agreements and institutions, and is also explicitly formalized or noted in some of the most important annual reports and strategies elaborating upon and expanding this world of soft power. Shared institutional environments reflect the increase in collective thinking relevant to soft power cultivation, since each agreed or imposed-upon state or international institution is encouraged to treat all related members’ cultures seriously and respectfully using day-to-day interactions, long-term collaborations, or formalized meetings, statements, projects, and initiatives.

Multilateralism and its institutions and traditions extend these personality and cultural diplomatic relationship networks across a century and the globe, finally embracing collectively more than half the humanity of nearly two hundred today. With all these intertwined, multilateral personality or cultural “what is” (assemblages, research

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projects, exhibitions) are envisioned across a surprising variety of sub-regional, regional, inter-institutional, and global regions and institutions covering a range of topics such as blue economy or silk routes – and more notably on the highest, most generalized fields of air, ocean, health, peace, or climate. Facilitated by both foreign and domestic concentrations in multi- or bilateral partnerships, there is an ironclad need built into such environments for diplomatic officers, local government and administration, and their handmaidens in representative dialogue and cultural societal engagement. Much more than follow or represent national lines, cultures, and civil societies, these can find targeted expression, energy, and new consensus through a “cultural diplomacy” means long worked and reworked in cultural studies frames as a match to “national” diplomacy in almost as many spellings. Such involvements, originating in formal/cultural diplomacy events and leading into off-hours officer/volunteer partnerships, eventually through outreach to locals from the lowest representative staff in fields and cultural organizations and ethnic or religious “select” networks to the very voluntary sectors pursuing these, find widespread, variable reaffirmed pride in what each cultural agent must renew continually in empathetic applications and adaptations to cultural “others.” Such political participation via culture, known from contemporary armed peace conclaves, is doubly enhanced and required more by the multilateral context that we study herein. (Nye, 2021)

5. Case Studies in Soft Power

Case studies provide an opportunity to not only illustrate soft power, but also to analyze the methods used and reflect upon the realities and consequences of the strategies adopted. Each of the following stories demonstrates the power of cultural diplomacy in action and the effects that popular culture and tradition have on global publics – effects that have their own tensions, complexities, and limitations.

Case Study 1: The UK and the Global Gaze: Art, History, and Heritage
Heritage sites, it seems, make a significant contribution to the perceived value of a country. Case Study 3: Universal Semifabrication:

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Soft Power in Escapist Culture from South Korea. The state and the South Korean Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism actively promote their cultural exports. While South Korea is known for its media and entertainment, its exports take many forms, from K-pop bands to high-end television and film. Case Study 4: Soft Power of Scandinavia: Nordicness and International Relations Overall, Nordicness has been fairly easy to manipulate due to its light, effervescent “fluffiness.” Scandinavia (in particular Denmark) has engaged in a global branding exercise. The decision made in the 1990s by the Foreign Ministry’s Campaign Department is now consistently embedded within a strategic framework of cultural foreign and domestic relations. Nordic productions have gained traction in the global market with powerful co-productions like Wallander.

Each of these countries has used different aspects of their culture, from heritage to media, to extend their global reach. Culture is a reflection of local identity, and soft power is the universal appeal of that identity. Every society will therefore bring unique aspects of culture and use select strategies to communicate with citizens of other societies. This means that no two countries’ approaches to soft power will be the same, but some strategies and considerations are likely to be generally applicable. So, while you cannot simply import soft power like a finished product, the experiences of others can be useful for considering how best to meet the challenges their strategies have faced. (Islam2021)

5.1. Hollywood and American Soft Power

Hollywood had been one of the most important sources of American soft power for all of the 20th and 21st centuries. American films and media are seen not only by the largest audiences around the world but also by the most diverse audiences, from Congo to China. In various films and music videos, the world has engaged with American culture, aspiring to its values, and even trying to imitate the American way of life. Hollywood and West End musicals have helped to project an image of the 'American way of life,' which does not just mean shopping and consuming but is also based on a whole lifestyle that

goes along with it, including its positive features, such as global friendliness towards the world and its citizens, and a certain optimism about the future. Cultural forms have become a greater vehicle for diplomatic communication. One would think it's enough to attempt to influence the cultural tastes of one's citizens via public subsidies, but it's increasingly fashionable to market culture to the world. Yet, there have also arisen a number of troubling concerns over the effects of Hollywood exports. Many European intellectuals are suddenly hostile toward American culture, claiming some of its films and TV shows exemplify American cultural imperialism and stand for the homogenization of global culture. Hollywood's global success happened through public relations strategies from the very beginning of the American film industry, as it did in all other areas of American society. Although European cinema is the most censored of all media produced, many of the restrictions on foreign films being shown were lifted by Hollywood's marketing efforts in foreign countries. One technique Hollywood used was to produce films that incorporated positive images and values and presented them in a favorable light in the country portrayed. A realistic portrayal of American society and the exploration of new themes had also proven to be successful and made inroads in popular foreign cinemas. Early American films had explored the plight of American Indians, addressed the problems of class, racism, and heroism, all of which were issues of concern to other nations' citizens, thus providing a ready-made international audience for American films. Already in professional circles and among the highly cultivated, politically literate film audience, American action films began taking an interest in the portrayal of the Nazis in the early 1930s. Individual productions were serious dramatic indictments of Nazism. (Çiçek, 2022)

5.2. K-Pop and South Korean Soft Power

Given the difficulties of measuring the Global Age, K-Pop has been considered one of the most important factors contributing to South Korea's national image as a cultural magnet. According to its most

widely accepted definition, K-Pop is a comprehensive term used to describe the South Korean idol genre of popular music. Yet K-Pop influences far exceed those of the South Korean idol wave. The genre comprises various thematic structures and is open to the global pop music market. Many K-Pop groups sing in languages other than Korean and come from all over Asia. What unites music of such diversity is its South Korean origin and its exposure to Korean culture. By introducing K-Pop, the country not only promotes its own music but also penetrates the soul of different countries and transcends the uniqueness of different ethnicities.

This burgeoning form of cultural diplomacy was initiated through sincere attempts to succeed internationally. After failing to engage a domestic audience, a South Korean entertainment company turned to the global media market. The government and diversity institutes of the Republic of Korea continue to promote K-Pop internationally today. Yet the success of this group was not achieved overnight, underlining the importance of responding accurately to local culture. The widespread use of video-sharing platforms has contributed to K-Pop's appeal, making it easier for K-Pop fans to share the music that they love. In fact, after K-Pop, other genres such as Zambia's contemporary urban music and Latin and Ukrainian folk music have also become popular in China. K-Pop's popularity has brought numerous benefits to South Korea, from song royalties and tourism to contributing to national image. In 2012 alone, South Korea's music exports accounted for more than \$22 million, 62.4% of which originated in Asia. In 2015, South Korea experienced a 28.9% boost in music exports, largely due to the popularity of K-Pop.

6. Conclusion and Future Perspectives

The present century has been shaped not only by progress in technological development and altering global alliances, but also by accelerations in international relations, where culture and the arts play as essential a role as diplomacy. As part of its strategy of influence, a rising power initiates cultural dialogues as a new mechanism in the pursuit of blending soft power with hard power of any nation. The

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focus of nations has also moved from unilateral policies to the pursuit and execution of multi-dimensional and multi-pronged strategies, leveraging their strengths. Formerly termed cultural diplomacy, the options outweighing the purpose are numerous, and it has thus shelled out newer terminologies.

In the given context and the stance of global developments and technologies, public diplomacy has greatly assumed the role along with some of the other terms including Ping Pong diplomacy, elite diplomacy, and ethno diplomacy, among others. The festive and partial build is made by the rulers' agencies, artists, arts administrators, and kindred spirits in creating an expanding network of friends for cultural activities that are crucial for shared and peaceful human existence and survival. Digital technologies require re-forming and re-crafting of cultural sectors and heritage in the 21st century, and what needs to be seen would be the ways and means selected to respond to the new ventures in the domain of public policy. It is also expected that such reformation strategies need sound ethical considerations and decisions that allay the fears of the objectors and subjects of such new public policies. Further research is always required in this regard. In the end, it can be safely concluded that such strategies in the interest of soft power initiatives would go a long way in forming an inseparably knit world community in global peace and solidarity and not in a separative world.

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