

# Multipolar Magnetism: The Evolution of Soft Power & Global Cooperation

**Maya Attia**

Sciences Po Paris - Campus de Reims, France  
Bachelor of Arts

E-mail: [maya.attia@sciencespo.fr](mailto:maya.attia@sciencespo.fr)

Published: 27th January 2025

## Abstract

In the evolving multipolar global order, the role of soft power has become increasingly significant as nations strive to influence international relations and foster multilateral cooperation. This article explores how the rise of multipolarity reshapes the deployment of soft power by both major and emerging global powers. In response to military and economic dominance alone proving insufficient in achieving sustained influence, states increasingly leverage soft power to navigate the complexities of international diplomacy. In a rapidly evolving multipolar world, wherein the global political chessboard is shared by several key players, soft power has become a vital tool in shaping international relations and the perception of the general public. The paper examines the dual function of soft power as a legitimate instrument of global governance and a strategic tool for rebranding nations or diverting attention from domestic controversies. Through case studies including the United States, China, and South Korea, it analyzes how soft power strategies are employed to extend influence across political, cultural, and economic dimensions. The research highlights the ethical dilemmas of soft power, such as its potential to mask authoritarian practices or propagate selective diplomacy, and suggests that while soft power can effectively promote multilateralism and address global challenges, its sustainability depends on transparency, inclusivity, and adherence to ethical principles, with its overall success dependant on balancing national interest with international responsibilities.

Keywords: power, multipolarity, soft power, global powers, multilateral cooperation.

## I. Introduction

In the first volume of “The Sources of Social Power<sup>1</sup>” Mann demonstrates the continuity of the sources of power in human society– the ideological, economic, military, and political. Mann then implicates the process by which

power oscillates between various regions, empires, and nation states; dependent on various historical processes and miscellaneous advantages causing the perpetuation of one sort of power that results in the perpetuation and domination of all others. Ultimately, power, defined most ostensibly as an influence– the capacity or ability to direct the behavior of others or the course of events, takes on a larger body when applied to the global scene.

---

<sup>1</sup> Micheal Mann, “The Sources of Social Power: Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760” (Cambridge University Press, September 2012), [https://assets.cambridge.org/97811076/35975/frontmatter/9781107635975\\_frontmatter.pdf](https://assets.cambridge.org/97811076/35975/frontmatter/9781107635975_frontmatter.pdf).

Historically, it can be observed that the most powerful regions, nations, and empires, are those with dominion over the most relevant power variables of the time, with some more continually relevant than others, regardless of the time period. As the term “great power” was only first used in political science by the Congress of Vienna’s Lord Castlereagh, the British Foreign Secretary, in a diplomatic context in 1814 in reference to the Treaty of Chaumont, use of the term in earlier periods is therefore idiosyncratic to each author. Regardless, certain notable examples of historical superpowers can be observed to prove the aforementioned correlation. For instance, the Byzantines empire’s advances in military strength, religious influence, and the arts made it one of the most powerful forces in the world of the Middle Ages from the years 500-1050. Moreover, the most influential rulers in Dar al-Islam were those of the Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258). Under them, Islamic culture experienced a golden age, and a stable government allowed trade to once again prosper. The Abbasids helped China, then under the Tang Dynasty, reestablish a booming trade along the Silk Roads. They also facilitated the growth of trans-Saharan trade to West Africa and were major participants in the diffusion of ideas and goods throughout the Indian Ocean. Likewise, the Aztec Empire was able to maintain considerable dominion over the region utilizing military prowess, strong centralization of power and religion, all of which manifested into the tribute system of the strong and centralized capital Tenochtitlan. But perhaps most compellingly, European domination throughout the industrial revolution– the continent providing us with a notably tangible example of

owning the relevant power variable needed to establish dominion in a given era.

Evidently, while there are additional contributors to a state’s power, the most frequently utilized one seems to be that of the military. A pattern observed in more modern examples as well, such as the United States establishing an international reputation of domination ever since the Monroe Doctrine and along with other enactments of military superiority. However, the post-Cold War era of the modern world saw major powers slowly weaning off traditional practices of international political domination, with a decrease in military dependance and religious rhetoric as religion became more secular in most parts of the modern post-liberalism world.

Additionally, it is important to note that traditional powers like the United States and the European Union are now sharing the political chessboard with emerging global powers such as China and Russia. As military dominance and economic coercion alone are no longer sufficient to secure lasting influence, nations are turning to softer means of influence — soft power. Defined by Joseph Nye as the ability to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion,<sup>2</sup> soft power relies on cultural diplomacy, values, media, and international cooperation. In a fragmented global order, soft power has become essential not only for promoting national interests but also for cultivating alliances and fostering multilateral cooperation.

---

<sup>2</sup> Nye, Joseph. *Bound to Lead : The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York, Basic Books, 1990.

In this shifting landscape, countries are increasingly deploying soft power strategies to shape international perceptions, rebrand their image, and navigate a complex web of global relations. While soft power offers a non-coercive alternative to hard power, it also carries significant strategic weight, theoretically allowing nations to address pressing diplomatic challenges without resorting to the horrors of military force.

However, in the currently multipolar world, the use of soft power also raises important ethical and strategic questions. Nations with authoritarian governance structures or controversial policies may exploit soft power as a means of obfuscating or diverting attention from their human rights records or domestic issues. This duality of soft power—both as a legitimate tool for fostering international cooperation and as a means of constructing favorable narratives for public consumption—complicates the global community's understanding of these nations' true influence. The ability of states to use soft power to rebrand themselves, even in the face of internal controversies, challenges the arguably more “honest” traditional and historical measures of power and influence in international relations.

This paper seeks to explore how the rise of multipolarity is reshaping the use of soft power by both major and emerging global powers, focusing on how soft power strategies are employed to foster multilateral cooperation, while simultaneously serving as a tool for rebranding countries and deflecting international criticism. Through a combination of case studies and content analysis of media narratives, this research will examine the ethical

implications of soft power as both a legitimate diplomatic tool and a potential facade, offering a nuanced understanding of its impact on global governance and international relations.

## II. The Rise of Soft Power

The global political landscape has undergone a profound transformation over the past few decades, shifting from a unipolar world dominated by the United States to a more complex and fragmented multipolar and international scene. Meaning that in this new world order, power is distributed across a broader array of states. As power becomes more diffused and no single nation can dominate the global stage, traditional methods of influence,—chiefly military might and economic coercion—while far from disappearing, are proving less effective in achieving long-term geopolitical goals and maintaining public satisfaction. In this context, soft power has emerged as a crucial tool for states seeking to secure their place in the world and navigate the complexities of international diplomacy.

### *1.1 Defining Multipolarity & Global Power Distribution*

Simply put, multipolarity can be defined as a global order wherein power is distributed among multiple state actors, as opposed to the Cold War era of unipolarity led by the United States or the earlier bipolarity between the U.S. and the Soviet Union<sup>3</sup>. This term is characterized by nations that are both more interconnected and interdependent and consequently challenging the

---

<sup>3</sup> Krauthammer, Charles. “The Unipolar Moment.” *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 1 (1990): 23–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20044692>.

traditional dominance of Western powers<sup>4</sup>. While many states have truly tried, no singular one can dominate global affairs alone; one must realize the conditions under which soft power occurs. The aforementioned shift has made the global system more competitive, as countries increasingly vie for influence in a variety of arenas—from trade and security to culture and technology<sup>5</sup>. With this redistribution of power, states must find new ways to secure their interests and enhance their global standing. Enter soft power, initially coined by geopolitical scientist Joseph Nye in 1990 who characterized it as "the ability to seduce and attract."<sup>6</sup> It involves shaping the preferences of others via attraction and appeal, in contrast to violence and force<sup>7</sup>. Soft power, simply put, is the strategy of co-opting instead of coercion. In this modern world, military and economic power alone are insufficient. This is particularly true in an age where soft power—through cultural, diplomatic, and ideological means—has become just as important, if not more so, than hard power. Soft power is thus especially important in a multipolar world, where states are more likely to form shifting coalitions and alliances, and where global problems such as climate change, pandemics, and transnational terrorism require

---

<sup>4</sup> Charis Vloudos, Dimos Chatzinikolaou, and Badar Alam, "New Globalization and Multipolarity: A Critical Review and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Case," *Journal of Economic Integration* 37, no. 3 (September 15, 2022): 458–83, <https://doi.org/10.11130/jei.2022.37.3.458>.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Muggah, "The Role of Geopolitics in a Multipolar World," *World Economic Forum*, May 10, 2024, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/05/why-geopolitics-matters-more-than-ever-in-a-multipolar-world/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Soft Power (Puissance Douce)," *Géoconfluences*, 2023, <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/glossaire/soft-power>.

<sup>7</sup> "Soft Power (Puissance Douce)," *Géoconfluences*, 2023, <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/glossaire/soft-power>.

collective solutions. Conclusively, in a rapidly evolving multipolar world, wherein the global political chessboard is shared by several key players, soft power has become a vital tool in shaping international relations and the perception of the general public.

### *1.2 Soft Power as a Tool for Diplomacy & Influence*

Conclusively, soft power has become an integral variable of diplomatic strategy when we consider the definition and establishment of this multipolar world, along with states' considerations of how they may be perceived by other, more influential states, or otherwise people with the power to impose negative repercussions such as changing public perception, facilitating boycotts, protests, or even revolts. Countries deploy soft power in various ways—through cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, media engagement, and the promotion of values such as democracy, human rights, and rule of law. It is important to consider that this term does not insinuate the abandonment of its historically proven and ever reliable counterpart; hard power. In fact, it is the perpetuation of both, to varying degrees, that now dominates the international relations sphere<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, soft power relies on the essence of drawing on a country's culture, values, and image to influence the behaviors and perceptions of others, while hard power relies on the more direct means of military approaches and economic

---

<sup>8</sup> Richard Lee Armitage, *CSIS Commission on Smart Power: A Smarter, More Secure America* (Washington, Dc: Csis Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Ernest J. Wilson, "Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 110–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312618>.

sanctions. Therefore, hard power is naturally more tangible.

### 1.3 The Global Reach of American Culture: From 'Mean Girls' to the Military

For the purposes of clarification, one may consider certain examples. The United States, for instance, has long been a leading practitioner of soft power through the global reach of its culture—Hollywood, popular music, and fashion—alongside its educational and diplomatic exchanges<sup>10</sup>. While initially seemingly irrelevant, programs like the Fulbright Program, which are meant to promote cross-cultural academic exchange, are key tools through which the U.S. fosters long-term diplomatic relationships with other countries. Additionally, the United States uses media and technology to promote its ideals of democracy and free-market capitalism, which has helped maintain its position as a leading global power. This is obvious when considering U.S. media domination—social media, the film industry, and news are disproportionately U.S.-centric, with most popular social media apps, music and film producing companies with their influential musicians and actors, and news platforms either entirely owned by American companies or people, or inadvertently focused on the American sphere of news and entertainment. Remarkably, one of the most powerful vehicles of American soft power is its culture, which is omnipresent in global media. Hollywood, as the epicenter of global entertainment, has a far-reaching influence on public

perceptions worldwide. American movies, television shows, and music have shaped global narratives, not only entertaining audiences worldwide but also exporting the supposed American values such as individualism, democracy, and freedom. When asked to name a movie or series many would mention iconic Hollywood classics like *Highschool Musical* or *Mean Girls*, which have become cultural touchstones, framing how people from different countries see the U.S. and its way of life in all aspects. These cultural exports serve not only as entertainment but as subtle forms of diplomacy, promoting a positive or at least a generally controlled image of American society.

Conversely, one can not forget the impact of major American franchises, beginning with the Marvel Cinematic Universe. It is difficult to overstate the impact of the Marvel Cinematic Universe— not only within the U.S. but worldwide. With each earning over \$1 billion, four of the top ten highest-grossing films of all time are Marvel films<sup>11</sup>. Given the modern shift towards streaming culture and the sheer volume of Marvel releases during the previous 20 years—sometimes there are many releases in a single year—this is especially remarkable, since hordes of fans continue to swarm to see them on opening night. These movies rank among the most influential blockbusters of the previous 20 years; they are not obscure. The U.S. military has been closely associated with *Iron Man* within the Marvel series, both in terms of theme and production. Because *Iron Man* produces impressive and

---

<sup>10</sup> Armand Potier, "Hard Power et Soft Power Des États-Unis - Major Prépa," Major Prépa, 2024, <https://major-prepa.com/geopolitique/hard-power-soft-power-etats-unis/>.

---

<sup>11</sup> IMDb, "Top Lifetime Grosses," Box Office Mojo (IMDb, 2023), [https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top\\_lifetime\\_gross/?area=XWW](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top_lifetime_gross/?area=XWW).

expensive weapons, the Pentagon approved of the authorization of \$1 billion for the use of military resources<sup>12</sup>. In return, pro-military sentiment is ingrained in the very ethos of these movies, and there are a multitude of other films in the franchise that can be chosen as excellent illustrations of the so-called state-sponsored military propaganda film franchise<sup>13</sup>.

Additionally, *Captain Marvel*, unique for standing as the first female-led film in the franchise, was promoted in conjunction with a recruitment effort for the Air Force that used its images and messaging, further implicating it as a propaganda tool. The need to challenge authority, especially in the military when other people's lives are on the line, seems to be one of the main themes of the movie. However, the audience is left with a completely conflicting perception of American military activity since this message is never implemented or even taken into account in the context of the Air Force itself, which is constantly praised without criticism. Even though Wendy Lawson is on the losing side of the conflict, she is represented as a force for pure good. She develops a potent instrument for change that will "end wars, not just fight them" using the resources provided by the US military. It is also noteworthy to acknowledge that the imagined alien struggle between the Kree and Skrulls is juxtaposed with the actual institution of the Air Force. It reinforces the idea of war as a

---

<sup>12</sup> David Saveliev, "New Marvel Film Puts Spotlight on Hollywood's Military Ties," *Responsible Statecraft*, November 5, 2021, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/11/05/new-marvel-film-puts-spotlight-on-hollywoods-military-ties/>.

<sup>13</sup> Mia Hardister, "Hollywood and the Pentagon: U.S. Military Funding of Popular Cinema in the Post-9/11 Era.," Clark Honors College Theses N/A, no. N/A (May 2023).

non-serious and alien object of entertainment, which was developed by the media's portrayal of the Gulf War and the War on Terror. It minimizes the actual bloodshed and devastation that the Air Force perpetuates.

The cartoonish violence in the movie is excused by the two groups' nonhuman status. The majority of fight scenes are made with computer-generated imagery (CGI), which means that the portrayal of violence lacks authenticity even when the Kree and Skrulls are using extraterrestrial technology. Instead of firing bullets, guns fire lasers. The Kree do not bleed red; they bleed blue. This supports Virilio's claim that the purpose of a military movie is to eventually accumulate viewers for the loss and suffering that come with conflict. As a result, the perception of American interventionism becomes distorted and sanitized<sup>14</sup>. A purposeful sanitation further sold to the public when layered with progressive messages such as that of feminism, with Carol's success in finding a place for herself in the Air Force depicted as a "breaking of the glass ceiling", and the action of joining a military institution empowering women overcoming the stereotype that women are inherently the "softer" sex<sup>15</sup>.

This phenomenon is, of course, not uniquely Marvel Cinematic Universe-specific. Both the FBI and the Pentagon have engaged in decades of direct intervention with television and film. Scilicet, as a de facto co-producer of the 1959 drama film *The FBI Story*, J Edgar Hoover, the

---

<sup>14</sup> Paul Virilio, *War and Cinema : The Logistics of Perception* (London: New York, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> Mia Hardister, "Hollywood and the Pentagon: U.S. Military Funding of Popular Cinema in the Post-9/11 Era.," Clark Honors College Theses N/A, no. N/A (May 2023).

original director of the FBI, even went so far as to play himself and insist on reshooting portions that he believed did not accurately represent the FBI. In order to protect his agency's reputation, Hoover spent the remainder of his life interfering in films like *Moon Pilot* (1962), when he pushed Disney to transform an incompetent FBI agent into a generic "federal security officer." Walt Disney even worked for the FBI as an informant, turning in suspected communists in exchange for permission to shoot inside the FBI offices. This phenomenon is not new either— it seems the blurred lines between hard and soft power have been long established by the United States government. *Wings*, a combat film produced with assistance from the US military in 1927, was the first Oscar winner for best picture. The Department of Defense has a number of departments that work closely with the film industry. Former Pentagon deputy director of entertainment media Phil Strub, who served as the agency's main point of contact with filmmakers, defined his position as: "encouraging entertainment media producers to create or increase positive and reasonably accurate US military portrayals in their projects while remaining mindful of their creative process. Continually seeks out new ways to capitalize on innovations in entertainment media to inform the American public about the military, and/or benefit military recruiting and retention<sup>16</sup>."

*Transformers*, *Pearl Harbor*, *War of the Worlds*, *Bones*, and *24* are just a few of the films and television series that

Strub worked on. In exchange for the use of a large amount of military hardware, movies grant the Pentagon complete script approval privileges. For instance, in exchange for access to fighter jets and aircraft carriers, the navy was allowed to alter certain elements of the original script for *Top Gun*, the highest-grossing film of 1986. The navy saw a 500% surge in enlistments the year it was released as a result of the positive representation<sup>17</sup>.

In addition to Hollywood and the entertainment industry, the rise of American-owned and internationally dominant social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, and YouTube has allowed the United States to maintain an unparalleled influence over global communication. These platforms facilitate the spread of American ideas, culture, and values to millions of people worldwide, contributing to the diffusion of U.S.-centric cultural trends and ideologies. For example, social movements like #MeToo and Black Lives Matter, which originated in the U.S., have gained global traction, influencing public debates on gender equality and racial justice around the world and kickstarting various movements internationally.

Moreover, American news outlets such as CNN, The New York Times, and The Washington Post have a significant global presence, offering a platform for U.S. political discourse and shaping global perceptions of international events. American politics then becomes a prime example of the power established by a collaboration

---

<sup>16</sup> Tom Secker, "Phil Strub Retired 6 Months Ago and No One Reported It | Spy Culture," *Spy Culture*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.spyculture.com/phil-strub-retired-6-months-ago-and-no-one-reported-it/>.

---

<sup>17</sup> Akin Olla, "Is WandaVision ... Pentagon Propaganda? | Akin Olla," *The Guardian*, March 9, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/09/wandavision-pentagon-propaganda-marvel-disney-fbi>.

between soft and hard power, as the omnipresence of American military and economic interventions and approaches in the international world, and the ubiquity of American newscasting combine to ensure that American politics are at the forefront of most of the world's minds, screens, and conversations.

#### *1.4 China's Sun Tzu Approach*

It can be observed then, that nations utilize soft power much like they would any other geopolitical tool— to address personal failures as perceived by foreign entities or the general public, if and when the foreign entities and general public's perception of that nation matters to that nation. Using Sun Tzu and *The Art of War* as a source of soft power for China's peaceful development policy has become popular in China in recent years. The Chinese Academy of Military Science's 2014 9th International Symposium on Sun Tzu's Art of War, "Sun Tzu's Art of War and Peace, Cooperation and Development," exhibited this tendency. "Sun Tzu's Art of War shows us that seeking safety through development, cooperation and win-win growth is the right way toward world peace," the conference description reads. It would be easy to envision Sun Tzu as a contemporary CCP official outlining China's strategy for peaceful growth based on this statement. In a 2012 speech to the U.K. Joint Services Command and Staff College, Chinese Ambassador to the United Kingdom Liu Xiaoming similarly aimed to establish trust by using *The Art of War* to describe Chinese strategic thinking, stating that "China has the deterrence and wisdom to win without fighting." However, China is capable and brave enough to

prevail in combat if necessary. This is the core of China's current military policy and the substance of *The Art of War*. Perhaps this picture was in mind when Hu Jintao presented a silk copy of *The Art of War* to President George W. Bush in 2006 or when Admiral Michael Mullen visited Beijing in 2011 and received a copy from Renmin University in Beijing. China is investing in infrastructure projects throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe through programs like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), establishing itself as a worldwide leader in development and gaining more political and economic clout. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is an illustration of how China blends cultural diplomacy with economic investment, employing massive projects to establish connections and long-term dependencies that are presented as advantageous to both parties. China has attempted to control the narrative around its ascent by portraying itself as a responsible global leader dedicated to sustainable development and international collaboration, in addition to being a major economic force. This is portrayed clearly on the official Belt and Road Initiative website<sup>18</sup>, with titles like "Chinese-funded geothermal project to boost clean energy access in Kenya", "Rashakai SEZ under CPEC begins to contribute to industrial development in Pakistan", and "China-Brunei joint venture launches solar energy project," being one of the first things you see. Additionally, China is also on the lead of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB); an alternative to the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund,

---

<sup>18</sup> BRI Official Website, "Belt and Road Portal," Yidaiyilu.gov.cn, 2018, <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/>.



which are notable Western-dominated organizations. This demonstrates how China is actively promoting a more multipolar world order that reflects its expanding influence by reshaping global governance structures through a form of mitigated/tweaked soft power layered with various aspects.

### *1.5 Cultural Influence from East Asia: The Calculated Export of Anime & K-Pop*

In the spirit of exploring a slightly more innocent looking case study, it is important to note that both Japan and South Korea have effectively leveraged cultural exports as part of their soft power strategies. Using now globally recognized symbols—anime in Japan and K-pop in South Korea—to project influence, generate substantial economic benefits, and, in some cases, successfully divert attention from controversial actions throughout history. Japan has long used its rich cultural heritage, especially through anime and manga, as viable vehicles of soft power. Internationally, anime has taken on an identity with Japanese culture, allowing both an entertaining yet deeply cultural look at the values, history, and social structure in Japan. Shows like *Naruto*, *Attack on Titan*, and Studio Ghibli movies are internationally recognized, strongly augmenting Japan's cultural footprint. This form of cultural diplomacy is not only successful soft power but is also lucrative. The anime industry is predicted to be worth USD 62.3 billion by 2031<sup>19</sup>, with huge spillover effects in everything from tourism to merchandise and video games.

On the other hand, Japan's cultural exports also have a strategic purpose in softening the country's global image regarding dark chapters of its past, whether that be purposeful or not. The legacy of Japan's wartime atrocities, most especially in World War II, including the Nanking Massacre and the treatment of "comfort women," has remained one of the sensitive topics in the region. While efforts to acknowledge and apologize for these crimes committed in the past have been made, tensions between it and neighboring countries, especially China and South Korea, still remain.

In this sense, Japan's cultural exports—from anime to technology—have diverted attention away from its troubled historical legacy and brought international focus toward the more positive aspects of Japanese culture, such as innovation, craftsmanship, and peaceful diplomacy. Such an image—a technologically savvy and anime-loving society—fades into obscurity Japan's historical disgruntlement. This "rebranding" via soft power has continued to boost Japan's diplomatic heft, not least in the West, where its cultural offerings remain very popular.

'Hallyu', or the Korean Wave, has become one of the most influential phenomena in modern soft power. The genre of K-pop in itself succeeded to become an internationally phenomenal pop genre, with groups such as BTS and Blackpink dominating charts and making huge cultural and economic impacts around the world. K-pop is not just music; it's an intensely choreographed mashup of fashion, beauty, dance, and technology, all put together into a very slick, approachable package that appeals to the world's youth. As the business of K-pop grew, it became

---

<sup>19</sup> "Anime Market Size, Share, Growth Analysis, by Type - Industry Forecast 2022-2028," [www.skyquestt.com](https://www.skyquestt.com), February 2024, <https://www.skyquestt.com/report/anime-market>.

central to the South Korean economic engine, bringing in billions of dollars in national economic revenue derived from merchandise, concerts, and digital streaming.

Like Japan, the cultural exports of South Korea also reshape global narratives about its history. South Korea has also faced criticism over historical instances such as mass killings during the Gwangju Uprisings and the Bodo League massacre. At the same time, this global success of K-pop and other cultural exports allowed South Korea to build a "cool" image; younger generations worldwide are more likely to relate to South Korea for pop culture and innovation rather than for past historical grievances. Such a possibility of reframing its identity through cultural diplomacy allows South Korea to keep its influence on the world arena, especially in the spheres of diplomacy and trade.

Admittedly, cultural products have been used in developing economic relations that quietly serve respective political and diplomatic interests of the two countries. For instance, the influence driven by South Korean K-pop keeps the country in good books with most of the countries in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the United States, hence giving it a lever in international negotiations. Meanwhile, the exportation of anime by Japan has helped create an image of that country as a leader in both technological and creative fields, making it very seriously considered in both soft power and economic terms as one of the most significant players in the world.

Anime and K-pop have permitted both Japan and South Korea to make use of their cultural exports in order to garner worldwide presence, strengthen soft power, and,

most importantly, generate economic wealth. These forms of culture have made them not only the cynosure of attention in the global entertainment market but also successfully enabled them to manage uncomfortable historical legacies and obscure them to a great extent. The attention of the international community is focused on the pop cultural scenes in both countries, projecting a much more positive image, masking the controversies of their past by framing their identities in light of modern successes in innovation and cultural export. This use of cultural diplomacy for a strategic purpose is not without its ethical connotations but shows how soft power can be used to mold global perceptions and develop economic and diplomatic ties.

#### *1.6 The Theoretical Understanding of Soft Power & its Applications*

The leading scholar on the subject, Joseph Nye, postulates that it is in a multipolar world that soft power is especially relevant, wherein no single nation can maintain dominance through military and economic means alone. According to Nye, there are three elements concerned with the concept of soft power: culture, political values, and foreign policy. Hence, countries which have a good global image and sound institutions have therefore the ability to attract others, increasing their sphere of influence.

This increasing polarity gives new importance to these pillars. Without dependence on a sole hegemonic power, cultural diplomacy, educational exchange, and values become more important tools for coalition building and the sustaining of influence. The EU has partly mobilized soft power up until this point by making human rights,

democracy, and environmental sustainability integral parts of its foreign policy program. Indeed, many of the programmes and partnerships the EU has entered into have tried to make it better placed in the global order while fostering multilateral cooperation on major issues.

But soft power has its nuances as well. With particular consideration to the multipolar world in which competing global narratives must coexist, the use of soft power would be informed by perceived credibility in actions and correspondence with other nations' interests. Messages, for example, of the model for economic development that is promoted in soft power initiatives are often pitched against criticism of its human rights record; this makes attempts at projecting an image of benign leadership with China as a critical player complicated.

The fact that power has presently shifted toward a diversified number of actors means states increasingly have to bank on non-coercive modes of diplomacy-through cultural exchanges and international cooperation-to forge alliances and mold global narratives. The induction of the concept of soft power in this new geopolitical reality creates portent for a more precise concept of global influence, along with a sense of how the states answer an increasingly interconnected competitive dynamic world.

### **III. Case Studies in the Use of Soft Power**

A variety of soft power strategies has been increasingly employed to shape global perception, forge alliances, and attain strategic interests by states in differential positions of economic, military, and diplomatic influence in a multipolar world. Soft power is utilized both as a tool of

multilateral cooperation and as a conduit for the achievement of the national agenda of a country, often melding cultural diplomacy with strategic economic and political aims. We will analyze this phenomenon on how soft power may work in context through case studies drawn from key global actors, such as China, the United States, South Korea, and Canada, which highlight specific soft power strategies and how such efforts might be conceived as effective in remaking global relations.

#### *2.1 China: The Silk Road Reimagined*

Interlinked with the rapid rise of China into a world power is the strategic exercise of soft power. Notably, the BRI has gained credence as one of China's flagship foreign policy projects, where economic diplomacy and cultural exchange go hand in hand in their combined quest to leverage influence across Asia, Africa, and Europe, as aforementioned. In fact, the BRI has been referred to as the new Silk Road. The BRI is an ambitious infrastructure investment program, through which China aims to develop trade routes and forge economic dependencies by building roads, railways, and ports, as well as laying energy pipelines. With these investments, China pursues a twin objective: reinvigorating global trade while promoting its version of governance, which is based on state-led capitalism and long standing economic development.

The BRI epitomizes how soft power can reinforce hard power in reshaping the global order. China's investment in infrastructure projects creates some sort of economic dependency that makes it an indispensable economic partner for most developing countries. Many of those

projects, especially in regions peripheral to China, come hand-in-hand with a Chinese diplomatic package promoting Chinese culture, the Mandarin language, and Chinese norms. For instance, Confucius Institutes, founded under the patronage of the Chinese government, mushroomed all over the world and taught both language and cultural programs as a method of fostering a positive image of China overseas.

At the same time, soft power applied in the case of China is not devoid of criticism. While the BRI stimulates economic development, it has at the same time been criticized for debt-trap diplomacy, whereby developing countries fall into debt with China and thus become susceptible to its influence. Besides, China's soft power is often crippled by its record on human rights, especially with regard to its treatment of ethnic minorities like the Uighurs and its controversial policies in Hong Kong and Tibet. Despite all this, China has continued to project its soft power in the emerging multipolar world by mixing economic incentives with cultural outreach in order to shore up its position internationally.

### *2.2 United States: The Global Stage & the Hollywood Effect*

The United States is one of the forerunners in deploying soft power on the international scene through a set of cultural attractions, media, the education system, and diplomatic outreach to shape foreign perceptions. Indeed, some of the most significant instruments of U.S. soft power are its cultural exports: Hollywood, popular music, and technology that have become deeply ingrained in global consciousness. U.S. films, television shows, and

popular music both entertain and symbolize what the country wants to label as American ideals of individualism, democracy, and freedom of expression. Aside from these cultural exports, the United States invests in educational exchanges as a form of soft power. Opportunities such as the Fulbright Program and Peace Corps enable people from around the world to learn about American culture and ideals. Such exchanges help in nurturing long-term diplomatic relations in countries and regions where the U.S. would want to retain its influence. American universities attract students from other countries, serving as cultural ambassadors for spreading the values which the U.S. upholds: academic freedom and liberal democracy.

But domestic and foreign policy challenges came forth to further complicate the United States' soft power. Gun violence, racial inequality, and political polarization now come forward and beg the question of whether or not these ideals promoted abroad by the U.S. are in good faith. American culture promotes the code of democratic life, but U.S. foreign policies regarding military interventions in the Middle East and support for repressive regimes raise points of incongruity. Some might argue that the U.S.'s soft power has begun to crumble in recent years. Whatever setbacks, the U.S. is undeniably still the main global actor in soft power, using its cultural influence as a means of spreading its vision of the world combined with its national interests.

### *2.3 Canada, the Cool Neighbor: Diplomacy & Multiculturalism as a Mask*

Canada has built up its reputation in the world based on a few elements, such as multiculturalism, peacekeeping,

and diplomatic leadership-all those central parts of its soft power strategy. Acting typically as a middle power, Canada has used its image of a tolerant, peaceful nation in global diplomacy. International peacekeeping and participation in international institutions like the United Nations contributed to establishing the position of Canada as a facilitator of global cooperation and a resolver of conflicts.

Culturally, Canada has used its multicultural identity as a lever of soft power in promoting itself as a model of diversity and inclusion. Its multicultural policies have provided a specific image as to inspire other countries, especially regarding the integration of refugees, immigrant communities and social cohesion. This identity is further supported through the country's cultural exports in music, literature, and film, and even international portrayal of Canadians, which help project positive imagery of Canadian values to the rest of the world. Much like in the United States, Canada projects soft power through education using a combination of international scholarships and exchange programs to promote a network of longer-term relations. High promotion of human rights, democracy, and environmental sustainability places Canada again as one of the most important actors regarding global issues such as climate change and humanitarian aid. The soft power of Canada, however, has not passed with innocence, with continued issues concerning the treatment of Indigenous peoples and its role in historic injustices, like the residential schools system. Inasmuch as the country preaches an active, progressive, and inclusive image, these unaddressed issues complicate its soft power narrative to the extent that

continuous balancing for the righting of historical wrongs and the maintenance of standing globally becomes necessitated.

While soft power can be an effective means for nations to improve their image and diplomatic influence, it tends to be entwined with complex geopolitical and historical dynamics. Indeed, states have been using culture, economic initiatives, and diplomatic outreach more and more as means to further the national interest in relations with other nations within an evolving world order. How the use of soft power will serve to engender multilateral cooperation, resolve historical grievances, and influence global norms is related to the balancing act of these countries' cultural diplomacy with the political realities.

#### **IV. Ethical Implications & Challenges of Soft Power**

While soft power offers a great deal in terms of enhancing diplomatic influence, global cooperation, and cultural exchange, there are also some ethical concerns that are important in regards to the deployment of soft power. The use of soft power can be double-edged in application: where it provides for global engagement and reinforces positive international relations, it may also screen undesirable activities or mislead foreign audiences. Soft power dilemmas or ethical implications are fast turning complex as more influential actors come up in today's multi-polar world.

##### *3.1 The Velvet Curtain: Soft Power or Propaganda?*

Perhaps one of the major ethical dilemmas that has to do with the application of soft power is its potential to

degenerate into propaganda. Essentially, soft power involves influence by attraction and persuasion. Deliberate manipulation of cultural and diplomatic means for the purpose of projecting some idealized version of a country undermines authenticity itself. This may be the case with countries with poor human rights records or those with authoritarian leadership, as they often employ soft power to create an image more appealing to the public audience and take away attention from various criticisms by domestic and international groups.

The BRI of China is indeed a perfect example of how soft power can be applied for positive development and strategic influence. Even though, beyond dispute, the BRI has upgraded infrastructure in many developing countries, it also came under criticism as an instrument of economic coercion—a place where China's investments in these regions build dependency. Critics say that quite often, the BRI diverts attention from the internal problems of China: human rights records, freedom of speech, and democratic freedoms. In this way, soft power obscures less-than-ideal domestic policies by representing a country as a benevolent global leader without being bound by contentious issues internally.

In a similar vein, Russia has been accused of resorting to soft power techniques in manipulating media narratives and cultural exchange programs with a view to projecting an image of strength and unity, while at the same time promoting divisive politics both at home and abroad. Such practices really blur the line between genuine cultural diplomacy and propaganda; they raise significant ethical

concerns about transparency and truthfulness in international relations.

### *3.2 Selective Diplomacy: A Double-Edged Sword of Influence*

Another ethical concern regarding soft power is that of selectiveness in application. In their pursuit of strategic goals, states may invest in soft power projects in selected regions or with selected actors, often at the expense of human rights and democratic values. For example, countries with questionable human rights records may concentrate their soft power policies more in regions where their image can be cleansed without receiving any direct censure. It is this selective diplomacy that can bring about a whole set of moral contradictions whereby, for reasons of economic or political benefit, countries may support repressive regimes or turn a blind eye to the violation of norms by a country. Another ethical dilemma in soft power involves its selectiveness in application. In the process of pursuing strategic objectives, states may invest in soft power projects in selected regions or with selected actors, which often comes at a cost to human rights and democratic values. For instance, countries with questionable human rights records may focus their soft power strategies more on regions where they can improve their image without receiving direct censure. It is this selective diplomacy that can bring about a whole set of moral contradictions whereby, for reasons of economic or political benefit, countries may support repressive regimes or turn a blind eye on the violation of norms by a country.

Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Gulf nations are a harsh example of this form of selected diplomacy. While the

kingdoms have been doing much work, through soft power, to present themselves as progressive, modern countries with such things as hosting major international events and investing in entertainment and sports, such as the acquisition of Premier League football teams, they simultaneously retain their reputation for broadly autocratic rule and human rights abuses, most of which is present directly in the building of these soft power events; such as the abuse and mistreatment of migrant workers. The Gulf tries, through soft power outreach, to divert international attention from its internal problems and to present itself as a large regional stabilizer, even modernizing. The moral issue here is in the great discrepancy between what this cultural diplomacy can create in terms of an image and the harsh realities on the political ground.

### *3.3 Cultural Diplomacy or Cultural Imperialism?*

On one hand, cultural diplomacy is one of the strongest instruments of soft power; simultaneously, it opens ethical issues on imposing the norms and values of one nation onto others. While such a cultural exchange program and international media outreach may support the understanding among the nations, these can also include the potentiality of cultural imperialism in which dominant cultures impose their values upon others in the name of propagating "universal" ideals.

The United States has long used Hollywood films, music, and educational exchanges to project its self-declared values of democracy, freedom of expression, and individualism. Although these values are likely to find

relatively positive resonance in many parts of the world, they can also be conceived of as an attempt to force-feed a kind of Western-centricity that does not consider local customs and traditions. In countries hostile to those values, especially in major parts of the world where historic or cultural contexts have been unlike those, American soft power is often viewed not as a form of benign cultural exchange but more as a form of cultural domination.

In its own way, the Chinese efforts to promote traditional culture with the Confucius Institutes<sup>20</sup> operating abroad have raised questions as to what cultural influence means and to what extent such influence correlates with the political values coming from China. While the Confucius Institutes are nominally established to promote Chinese language and culture, critics argue that they often serve as vehicles for the Chinese government to shape perceptions of its policies, especially regarding Taiwan and the Tibet issue. This then begs the question of whether or not cultural diplomacy compromises the integrity of the exchange when it is linked to state interests. This query was apparently also shared by the U.S government, as federal research money for colleges and universities with Confucius Institutes were withheld under the US National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021<sup>21</sup> and as of 2022, federal research funding was vastly threatened, leading to the closure of all SUNY

---

<sup>20</sup> "Confucius Institute," ci.cn, n.d., <https://ci.cn/en/gywm/pp>.

<sup>21</sup> Hongshan Li, *Fighting on the Cultural Front*, Columbia University Press EBooks (Columbia University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.7312/li-20704>.

campuses' Confucius Institutes<sup>22</sup>. Such actions then lead people to question whether such efforts by China were shut down by the U.S due to them truly being such a threat, or if the U.S itself is feeling threatened by Chinese soft power efforts.

### *3.4 When Soft Power Backfires: The Long-Term Risks of Deceptive Diplomacy*

Finally, there is a question of the long-term efficacy and durability of soft power strategies. Even as soft power may be effective for countries to win some influence in the short term, there is growing recognition that it can never replace political, military, or economic strength altogether. The soft power initiatives-particularly those that cover up the defects of a nation or divert attention from pressing issues-may even undermine a country's credibility in the end. Ultimately, however, soft power that is based on a substratum of lying or selectivity is one which is certain to result in erosion of trust and loss of international friendships.

For instance, Turkey has indeed consistently used soft power in the Middle East in a bid to be a leader in the domains of humanitarian assistance, Islamic culture, and regional peace. However, its actions in Syria, Kurdish territories, and internal political repression complicated its efforts at soft power. While its humanitarian outreach might prove effective in building influence, its inconsistent political behavior risks credibility on the world stage.

Similarly, India's ambitions to cash in on soft power through so-called cultural efforts-including Bollywood, yoga, and education exchanges-will equally have to wrestle with ethical questions about the treatment of religious minorities in general and Muslims in particular. While this form of cultural export has elevated India's image in the world theater, India's internal affairs that mar religious coexistence indeed question its soft power appeal, especially for countries that believe in human rights to their core. The truth, in fact, is that ethical considerations of soft power are multidimensional and cannot be fully comprehended without considering the bigger geopolitical context within which soft power becomes mobilized. While it can also nurture international cooperation and build positive relations, the prospect of diversion, selectivity in diplomacy, and cultural imposition raises significant questions about the issues of transparency, veracity, and human rights. In a multipolar world, where major powers are being put into question from every angle, the usage of ethical soft power will form the core for building the future of global relations. Any nation should work to foster its values and interests but not sacrifice basic principles of justice, respect, and transparency in order to be true to the fine line drawn between cultural diplomacy and propaganda.

## **V. The Future of Soft Power in a Multipolar World**

While global power continues to shift decidedly toward multipolarity, the role of soft power in international relations is ever technical and multi-dimensional. In a world without the undisputed global primacy of any one

---

<sup>22</sup> Pete DeMola, "SUNY Campuses Quietly Close Chinese Government-Backed Programs," Times Union, February 28, 2022, <https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/SUNY-campuses-starewide-quietly-close-Chinese-16942259.php>.



country, states are exploiting cultural, diplomatic, and economic influence to shape a nuanced and competitive global order. This section attempts to describe the direction in which soft power is going by drawing upon its evolving nature, its capability for multilateral cooperation, and the challenges that it would face in an increasingly interconnected world.

#### *4.1 Digital Diplomacy: The Tweet Heard Around the World*

Perhaps the most profound change in the exercise of soft power came with the emergence of digital diplomacy. Social media, digital platforms, and online content have transformed how countries project their values, reach foreign publics, and compete in the struggle for shaping global narratives. Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have created a new domain where states, corporations, and citizens may exercise soft power on a scale and at a speed hitherto unimaginable.

Digital diplomacy democratized the ability of both state and non-state actors to shape international perception by providing them with unparalleled access to the global audience. For example, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has used Twitter to take his message directly to the international community, bypassing traditional media. More notoriously, so has U.S.'s Donald Trump, specifically towards the end of his first term. Similarly, China also increasingly utilized digital platforms for the promotion of its image, using state-backed media outlets and grassroots campaigns as megaphones to amplify its narrative, especially on initiatives such as BRI and the Chinese Dream. Yet great power carries great challenges. The rise of

digital diplomacy goes along with growing mis- and disinformation and cyber diplomacy. Where is the thin line that differentiates cultural exchange from political manipulation in this virtual space? With the proliferation of fake news, echo chambers, and state sponsored trolls, digital soft power cuts both ways. If countries do not want to lose credibility and damage the very ethical values on which their soft power initiatives are based, they will need to act responsibly on digital platforms.

#### *4.2 The New Global Order: Soft Power as the Glue of Multilateralism*

As the world moves into a configuration of multipolarity, traditional forms of diplomacy vested in a few large powers are increasingly giving way to multilateral frameworks in which several countries play a role in shaping global norms, rules, and governance. An environment which requires soft power is one in which relationships will have to be established, consensus built, and thrusting cooperative action on such issues as climate change, health crises, and economic disparity.

For example, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change demonstrated soft power dynamics whereby countries relied on their diplomatic powers of influence to convene cooperation for the solution to some urgent world problems. The European Union has, in particular, shown how soft power can be used to further promote multilateral cooperation. This is by embedding its emphasis on diplomacy, human rights, and environmental sustainability within forms of global governance that astutely embed soft power within institutional settings in a

manner that paces the multilateral moment of the 21st century.

Another emerging power using soft power in multilateral contexts is India. It has asked to be perceived as a bridge between the developed and developing worlds, while it uses its status as the largest democracy in the world and its growing economy as leverage to forge international partnerships in such areas as digital innovation, sustainable development, and peacekeeping operations. India's role in the BRICS—a short form coined by Goldman Sachs for Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa—epitomizes the more general trend of countries making use of their soft power to create multilateral platforms for dialogue and cooperation, even as they vie for geopolitical influence.

#### *4.3 From Cultural Exports to Global Solutions: Soft Power's Expanding Horizon*

In the unfolding future of soft power, its scope is likely to go further than traditional forms of cultural exchange, media, and diplomacy. The 21st-century global challenges, from climate change to pandemics, through geopolitical instability, mean that nations will need to reset their soft power strategy toward collaborative problem-solving and global leadership.

Soft power in the future might flow into global health diplomacy: nations would increasingly work with international organizations and NGOs on pressing health concerns like pandemics or antimicrobial resistance. That is why the COVID-19 pandemic has made it crystal clear that what is most needed to fight health emergencies is global cooperation. For example, Germany, South Korea, and Taiwan have exercised their soft power by providing

medical know-how, direct aid, or health diplomacy in the COVID-19 pandemic. In years to come, too, those countries which perform well in managing international problems, whether climate change or public health, will find a way to use their reputation as a problem solver as a means of boosting their soft power. More generally, CSR and sustainable development will become even more important weapons in the soft-power armory. As awareness among global audiences grows with each passing day, pertaining to questions of human rights and the environment, countries championing sustainability and corporate ethics will see their global standing go up. For example, Scandinavian nations such as Sweden and Norway have developed soft power by aligning their diplomacy and business with high standards of environmental sustainability and corporate accountability in human rights.

This also presupposes multilateralization of the soft power of the countries, which includes finding new alliances and forging closer relationships with emerging powers such as India, Brazil, and South Africa. It is in this kind of environment that regional powers will have more say in setting global norms, while their influence on the international scene will be considerably enhanced through mechanisms of soft power.

In this new multipolar order, countries will have to increasingly use soft power in the future to come towards a common understanding with different voices and interests if global governance is to have any future. This will be required for countries to take soft power as an enabler of collaboration needed in solving many of the global

challenges faced by all nations, ranging from climate change to health, trade, and security concerns.

#### *4.4 The Tug-of-War for Influence: Navigating the Battle for Soft Power Supremacy*

Despite the bright future for soft power, a number of serious complications may blur how effectively it will work in a multipolar world. There will likely be friction over which values, norms, and systems of governance will move to the forefront of global discourse amid fierce rivalries among rising powers such as China and India along with the United States. As this is an era of unprecedented increase in the use of soft power to promote one's model of governance and development, somewhere down the line, there may be a flare-up of ideological conflicts on issues like human rights, democracy, and freedom of expression.

The competing models of development - an increasingly loudly propagated Chinese alternative through the BRI and a U.S. liberal democracy - are likely to be one of the nodal points of international ideological contestation in the near term. Countries, especially those in Africa and Latin America, where both the U.S. and China have invested dearly in soft-power initiatives, may often find themselves in the awkward position of having to play off complex webs of influence, balancing economic partnerships with competing political ideologies. Furthermore, the increasing trend of populism and nationalism in many countries may challenge the effectiveness of soft power. In a world where global cooperation is increasingly difficult and where countries increasingly look inward to focus on national interests, soft power initiatives may become more

domestic-agenda-focused, at the possible expense of the global cooperative spirit that soft power traditionally fosters.

In a nutshell, soft power in the future of a multipolar world is defined by its adaptability, ethical deployment, and the ability to promote common collaboration on shared global problems. While facing an increasingly interconnected yet fragmented international system, soft power will remain one of the essential tools in the building of relationships, the addressing of global problems, and in securing influence in the 21st century. Success will, however, be secured by a country's ability to balance its domestic interests with the demands of multilateral cooperation, guaranteeing that its soft power strategies are transparently ethical and directed towards the handling of the broader global good.

With the new nature of global power come a series of opportunities and challenges for practitioners of soft power. It also means, however, that integrity, sustainability, and responsibility will increasingly play a leading role in shaping the future of international diplomacy. In this sense, as the world moves toward a more multipolar system, it is those countries that will learn to master the art of cooperative influence and know how to use soft power to the benefit of not only their interests but also the global community that will play the leading role in shaping the future of international relations.

## **VI. Conclusion**

In that respect, this is increasingly applicable in a world that has come to be recognized as multipolar, wherein

power does not remain with one state but rather an increasingly broad variance of actors; a world in which soft power has become an indispensable part of countries trying to navigate complex global dynamics. The ascent of the new powers-China, India, and Brazil-alongside incumbents like the United States and the European Union has made soft power from a dimension of cultural diplomacy to one of strategic competition, multilateral cooperation, and international influence.

The range of the case studies discussed-from the Belt and Road Initiative of China, the K-pop phenomenon of South Korea, right to Hollywood exports of the United States-points toward a fact that soft power has indeed turned into a multi-tool with which one can shape and mold global perceptions, influence diplomatic relationships, and even create economic and cultural ties. While each of them might deploy its soft power differently, arguably the common feature for all of them is projecting a favorable image and building alliances that help in framing the global narrative in a fashion favorable to advancing their respective interests.

Yet, as soft power becomes increasingly central to global diplomacy, it also poses significant ethical challenges. The possibility that soft power may also serve as a vehicle for propaganda, cultural imperialism, or selective diplomacy opens significant moral questions about the use of non-coercive influence. Such a fact was amply demonstrated in the cases of China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, where soft power is at times used to camouflage authoritarian practices, human rights abuses, or controversial policies by dressing them up as something

benevolent, thereby muddling the global perception of such nations. Its use, therefore, should be made in an ethical way if soft power is to remain a legitimate and transparent tool in the process of international cooperation and not a manipulative device camouflaging deeper governance flaws.

In other words, soft power in the light of an increasingly digital global communication landscape, a growingly multilateral world, and other pressing global problems of the 21st century-such as climate change, pandemics, and political instability-is going to have a different function. Digital diplomacy has expanded exponentially during the last years and opens up new avenues for influence, but there are accompanying risks in the spread of misinformation and manipulation. A soft power practice within an interconnected world will have to transcend into new technologies and new platforms that permit states to reach global audiences in real-time, but also need ethical frameworks for better use in the digital age.

Meanwhile, the future of soft power increasingly depends on global cooperation in solving pressing issues that are of common concern. As countries face a growing set of challenges, soft power will figure increasingly in building consensus and in developing multilateral solution paths. Those countries that can balance their national interests with global responsibility-be it combating climate change, promoting human rights, or protecting public health-will be well positioned to take a leadership role in this new age of diplomacy.

Conclusively, in the multi-polar world, soft power is going to remain a critical foundation of international

relations. Its effectiveness will depend, however, not only on how the strategies are employed but also on ethical commitment in terms of transparency, equity, and respect to global norms. While the global setting keeps on shifting, greater attention would be focused on soft power, and nations would have to work their ways through this area of care to ensure that influence and cooperation promises are pegged on the principles of justice, cooperation, and mutual respect. The future of soft power is one that ultimately should be in service not only to the interests of individual states but also to the common good of the international community toward a stable and inclusive global order.

## VII. Bibliography

- BRI Official Website. "Belt and Road Portal." Yidaiyilu.gov.cn, 2018. <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn/>.
- ci.cn. "Confucius Institute," n.d. <https://ci.cn/en/gywm/pp>.
- DeMola, Pete. "SUNY Campuses Quietly Close Chinese Government-Backed Programs." Times Union, February 28, 2022. <https://www.timesunion.com/news/article/SUNY-campuses-statewide-quietly-close-Chinese-16942259.php>.
- Géoconfluences. "Soft Power (Puissance Douce)," 2023. <https://geoconfluences.ens-lyon.fr/glossaire/soft-power>.
- Hardister, Mia. "Hollywood and the Pentagon: U.S. Military Funding of Popular Cinema in the Post-9/11 Era." *Clark Honors College Theses* N/A, no. N/A (May 2023).
- IMDb. "Top Lifetime Grosses." Box Office Mojo. IMDb, 2023. [https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top\\_lifetime\\_gross/?area=XWW](https://www.boxofficemojo.com/chart/top_lifetime_gross/?area=XWW).
- Krauthammer, Charles. *The Unipolar Moment*. 92, 1991.
- Li, Hongshan. *Fighting on the Cultural Front*. Columbia University Press EBooks. Columbia University Press, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.7312/li--20704>.
- Mann, Micheal. "The Sources of Social Power: Volume 1: A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760." Cambridge University Press, September 2012. [https://assets.cambridge.org/97811076/35975/frontmatter/9781107635975\\_frontmatter.pdf](https://assets.cambridge.org/97811076/35975/frontmatter/9781107635975_frontmatter.pdf).
- Muggah, Robert. "The Role of Geopolitics in a Multipolar World." World Economic Forum, May 10, 2024. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/05/why-geopolitics-matters-more-than-ever-in-a-multipolar-world/>.
- Nye, Joseph. *Bound to Lead : The Changing Nature of American Power*. New York: Basic Books, 1990.
- Olla, Akin. "Is WandaVision ... Pentagon Propaganda? | Akin Olla." The Guardian, March 9, 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/mar/09/wandavision-pentagon-propaganda-marvel-disney-fbi>.
- Potier, Armand. "Hard Power et Soft Power Des États-Unis - Major Prépa." Major Prépa, 2024. <https://major-prepa.com/geopolitique/hard-power-soft-power-etats-unis/>.
- Richard Lee Armitage. *CSIS Commission on Smart Power : A Smarter, More Secure America*. Washington, Dc: Csis Press, 2007.
- Saveliev, David. "New Marvel Film Puts Spotlight on Hollywood's Military Ties." Responsible Statecraft, November 5, 2021. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2021/11/05/new-marvel-film-puts-spotlight-on-hollywoods-military-ties/>.
- Secker, Tom. "Phil Strub Retired 6 Months Ago and No One Reported It | Spy Culture." Spy Culture, December 11, 2018.

<https://www.spyculture.com/phil-strub-retired-6-months-ago-and-no-one-reported-it/>.

Virilio, Paul. *War and Cinema : The Logistics of Perception*.

London: New York, 1989.

Vlados, Charis, Dimos Chatzinikolaou, and Badar Alam.

“New Globalization and Multipolarity: A Critical Review and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Case.” *Journal of Economic Integration* 37, no. 3 (September 15, 2022): 458–83.

<https://doi.org/10.11130/jei.2022.37.3.458>.

Wilson, Ernest J. “Hard Power, Soft Power, Smart Power.”

*The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616, no. 1 (March 2008): 110–24.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716207312618>.

www.skyquestt.com. “Anime Market Size, Share, Growth

Analysis, by Type - Industry Forecast 2022-2028,”

February 2024.

<https://www.skyquestt.com/report/anime-market>

.