HOW SOFT POWER WORKS

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This paper will explore how soft power works. But before we can meaningfully discuss this question, we must be clear about what soft power is. The two questions, "How does soft power work?" and "What constitutes soft power?," are closely related. Before we can know how soft power works, we must know what makes soft power as such; and once we know what causes soft power in the first place, we will get a key to knowing the conditions under which and the mechanisms by which soft power is realized.

The central questions that I will ask in this paper is, "What causes soft power?" and "How is soft power caused?" These questions are where the two questions above, "What is soft power," "What constitutes soft power," and "How does soft power work," "What are the underlying mechanisms that generate soft power," meet. After a first part that deals with these theoretical questions, there is a second part in which I will survey the major policy tools of soft power and show, with the aid of the concepts developed in the first part, how these tools facilitate and produce soft power.

SOFT POWER IS MISUNDERSTOOD: WHY, AND HOW TO FIX IT

Coined by Joseph Nye some 20 years ago, soft power has become a popular concept both in the academic and the policy world, and both in and outside the United States. For example, the concept of soft power looms large in the 2007 volume *Power in World Politics*, which grew out of a forum, organized by the journal *Millennium* in 2005, that engaged with the concept of power in international relations.[1] Recently, soft power, along with smart power, has become an important part in the foreign policy thinking of the U.S. government. Well before Washington, Beijing has embraced soft power as a prominent

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[1] Felix Berenskoetter and M.J. Williams, *Power in World Politics* (London: Routledge, 2007). Out of fifteen individual chapters, three (by Steven Lukes, Janice Bially Mattern, and Joseph Nye) are devoted entirely to the discussion of soft power. A fourth chapter (by Richard Ned Lebow) deals with "the power of persuasion," which is a central aspect of soft power.

part of its comprehensive national power. There is a large-scale debate on soft power among the Chinese, and the term "soft power" has been formally adopted by top PRC leaders such as President Hu Jintao.[2]

Along with its popularity, as Nye points out in his article "Think Again: Soft Power," the term has been "stretched and twisted".[3] The popular understandings of the concept encompass a narrower sense and broader sense. In the narrower sense, soft power is similar to cultural influence. Prominent examples of this view include those of British historian Niall Ferguson and German publicist Josef Joffe.[4] The majority school of thought on soft power in China also subscribes to this narrower sense.[5] In the broader sense, soft power is synonymous with non-military power and includes both cultural power and economic strength. While these popular understandings are misunderstandings, the question arises as to why they are popular and persistent. It is noteworthy that the concept has been misunderstood not only by the lay public but also by experts in the study of international politics.

What are the reasons for this widespread misunderstanding? Scholars have argued that much of the confusion and misunderstanding of the concept of soft power is due to its being "under-theorized," "lack of academic refinement," and "analytical fuzziness."[6]

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[2] Young Nam Cho and Jong Ho Jeong, "China's Soft Power: Discussions, Resources, and Prospects," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (May/June 2008); Li Mingjiang, "Soft Power in Chinese Discourse: Popularity and Prospect," Working Paper No. 165 (Singapore: Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2008); Bonnie S. Glaser and Melissa E. Murphy, "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics," in Carola McGiffert, ed., *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States: Competition and Cooperation in the Developing World*, Report of the CSIS Smart Power Initiative (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2009).

[3] Joseph S. Nye, "Think Again: Soft Power," *Foreign Policy* (February 2006), web exclusive at http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3393

[4] Niall Ferguson, "Think Again: Power," *Foreign Policy*, No. 134 (January/February 2003), p. 21; Josef Joffe, "The Perils of Soft Power," *New York Times Magazine*, May 14, 2006.

[5] Glaser and Murphy, "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics," p. 13.

[6] Li Mingjiang, "Domestic Sources of China's Soft Power Approach," *China Security*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (2009), p. 37; Maiko Ichihara, "Making the Case for Soft Power," *SAIS Review*, Vol. 26,

While this is indeed part of the problem and my paper is an attempt to narrow the gap, there is another reason why soft power has been so often misunderstood. The culprit is the popular view that equates power with power resources. As Nye pointed out when he addressed and corrected some of the common misunderstandings of the concept of soft power, people tend to confuse resources with behavior.[7] Soft power is equated with some typical resources of soft power. This has been called the "vehicle fallacy." This approach has the advantage that it "makes power appear concrete and measurable."[8] We usually assess how powerful someone is by measuring how much power resources he or she possesses. But this is not the only major reason why power often gets defined in terms of its resources. Another driver of this tendency is the fact that power cannot be exercised without the use of some resource. Put another way, since power does not have its own legs to go, it has to ride on some vehicle.

With this, we arrive at the dilemma of the conception of power as resources. On the one hand, power is always realized with the use of some resource. Even a wink to signal friendship, as an attempt at exercising soft power, has to use something to realize it—an eye and the movement of some muscles that cause the facial expression that we call a wink. Or when you pay attention to someone, and as a result, wielding some soft power over this person, the paying of attention occurs through some concrete activities. These activities are power resources. But on the other hand, power is not identical with its resources. The same resource can produce both hard and soft power. For example, a military, which is usually thought of as a typical hard power resource, can both coerce some people and attract some others, when it achieves a victory. Also, a typical "soft power resource" such as a moral value can be used both to persuade someone, when the person privately agrees with it, and force another, when it is used to build social pressure.

No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2006), p. 197; Brantly Womack, "Dissecting Soft Power: Attention, Attraction, Persuasion," Paper for this Panel, p. 3.

[7] Nye, "Think Again: Soft Power."

[8] Joseph S. Nye, *The Powers to Lead* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 28. See also Steven Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds: On the Bluntness of Soft Power," in Berenskoetter and Williams, *Power in World Politics*, p. 84.

How to solve this dilemma? I argue that the key to a solution of this dilemma is a subtle distinction between *power resources* and *power currencies*. Both can be seen as sources of power, but power resource and power currency are two different kinds of sources from which power is derived. The delicate difference between power resource and power currency is comparable to the one between a structure and its architecture. A power currency is a property that causes power. Power currencies are usually properties of resources or activities. Aided by this distinction, I now turn to the question, "What constitutes soft power?"

WHAT MAKES SOFT POWER?

To answer this question, we must draw two distinctions. The first is a distinction between soft power and other types of power. The second is a distinction between the mechanisms by which soft power occurs.[9]

First, let's examine how soft power differentiates from the other types of power. Nye defines soft power as the ability to get others to want what you want.[10] We need to be a bit more precise about the word "want" here. Nye elaborates that soft power is "the

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[9] Steven Lukes also points out the need for these distinctions when asking similar questions. He criticizes both Nye's conception of power, which he calls the "agent-centered, strategic" approach, and Michel Foucault's, which he calls the "subject-centered, structural" view, for their failure or refusal to draw the second distinction. Lukes suggests turning our focus on both agents and subjects. However, this is because his questions are both agent-oriented and subject-oriented. I would argue that before posing partisan or bipartisan questions, we need to pose nonpartisan questions, which are centered on power itself, rather than on agents or subjects. Lukes does so, too, but he quickly confuses the two kinds of questions and turns directly to a focus on both agents and subjects, neglecting the focus on power. Cf. Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds," pp. 89-97.

[10] Joseph S. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power: Why the World's Only Superpower Can't Go It Alone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 9.

ability to attract, and attraction often leads to acquiescence."[11] Since acquiescence usually means passive assent, the word "want" must include both the "strong" sense of desire and the "weak" sense of a passive assent. Alternatively, we can add the word "accept" to the definition, and soft power is the ability to get others to want or accept what you want. However, there is still a problem with the word "accept" in the sense that you decide that there is nothing you can do to change an unpleasant fact and so you have to accept it or when you accept something unwillingly. Thus, the statement "soft power is the ability to get others to want, or accept, what you want" is not a precise definition but a first and useful approximation to a definition of soft power.

Soft power contrasts with hard power. Soft power is the ability to affect the behavior of others by influencing their preferences.[12] This implies that hard power is the ability to affect the behavior of others by changing their circumstances. In other words, as Lukes puts it, hard power refers to the changing of the incentive structures of actors whose interests are taken as given and soft power to the shaping of those very interests.[13] This distinction is useful, but not clear-cut. For example, is changing the moral incentive structures of actors the exercise of hard or soft power?

One way to avoid this problem is to construct a continuum with attraction, or soft power, and coercion, or hard power, at the two ends and some half-hard and half-soft power such as bribery in between. Nye has presented a "spectrum of behaviors" ranging from coercion at the hard end to inducement to agenda-setting and finally to attraction at the soft end.[14] Inducement, or payment, marks an ambiguous area. Sometimes, it is perceived as coercive, but sometimes, it is a way of cooptation.

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[11] Joseph S. Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), p. 6. In his earlier book *The Paradox of American Power*, Nye added "entice" to "attract" and "imitation" to "acquiescence" (p. 9).

[12] Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 5.

[13] Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds," p. 95.

[14] Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 8.

Walter Russell Mead proposes a three-fold distinction. While Nye puts military might and economic strength under the same heading of hard power, Mead contends that military force is "sharp" and economic strength is "sticky." He explains that "U.S. economic policies and institutions act as 'sticky power,' attracting other countries to the U.S. system and then trapping them in it." For him, "economic, or sticky, power is different from both sharp and soft power."[15] However, a closer look at Mead's sticky power reveals that, first, economic power alone cannot be sticky, and second, sticky power is no different than a form of smart power, the combination of both hard and soft power in effective ways. The historical examples from which Mead distills his "sticky power" concept are the international systems centered on British and American leaderships. In both systems, the freedom and functioning of world economy were propped up by a strong military and a web of liberal economic institutions, which in turn were provided by a hegemon whose behavior was largely perceived as acceptable. Why is military might important for sticky power? It was the British and then the U.S. navies that commanded the sea, thus facilitating and guarding international trade. Why is soft power indispensable for sticky power? Look at Nazi Germany. It also had a formidable military and admirable economic power, but its aggressive foreign policy turned its neighbors and the great powers into the enemy camp. Why can economic strength alone not translate into sticky power? An example is Japan after World War II. An economic superpower without military and institutional backup can attract others but ultimately cannot trap them.

In sum, different types of power can be located on a one-dimensional continuum, with coercion and attraction at the hard and soft ends, respectively. Economic power straddles the areas of hard and soft power. Depending on the context of its realization, economic power can be either hard or soft.[16] Stickiness is not produced by economic power alone

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[15] Walter Russell Mead, "America's Sticky Power," *Foreign Policy*, No. (March/April 2004), quotations pp. 46, 50.

[16] The power to attract is soft and the power to coerce is hard. Nye locates the power to set the agenda in the soft side and the power to pay in the hard side of the spectrum. With the continuum, we can say that the power to set the agenda is half-soft and the power to pay half-hard.

but by smart power, the combination of hard and soft power. A threefold schema is useful, but not in the way Mead constructs it. Nye's three main ways through which people can affect the behavior of others to get what they want—coerce, pay, and attract—[17] are more accurate than Mead's distinction of sharp, sticky, and soft power.

Since soft power is the power to attract, the question, What constitutes soft power? becomes, What generates attraction? To answer this question, we must look for the power currencies that cause attraction. There are at least three generic power currencies from which both power and its "softness" are derived. To make them easy to remember, I call them "beauty, brilliance, and benignity."

Benignity is an aspect of the agent's relations with others, especially with the client of soft power.[18] It refers to the positive attitudes that you express when you treat people, especially when you treat the client. Benignity as a power currency works on the tendency of reciprocal altruism that exists in most, if not all, organisms.[19] Among humans, it generates soft power through the production of gratitude and sympathy.

Brilliance is an aspect of the agent's relations with its work. It refers to the high performance that you accomplish when you do things. Brilliance as a power currency works on the tendency of human beings to learn from the successes of others. It generates soft power through the production of admiration.

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[17] Nye, *Powers to Lead*, p. 27.

[18] The two ends of a power process are usually called "agent" and "subject," or "wielder" and "target." However, these terms still reflect a view of power that is more or less hard-power-oriented—it implies that the subject or target is the passive or unwilling participant in the power process. In soft power processes, both parties are willing participants. To reflect this characteristic of soft power processes, I will use the word "client" in place of "subject" or "target". This use of words is also more in tune with the nonpartisan orientation of my approach—it is centered on power rather than agents and subjects.

[19] For reciprocal altruism, see Robert L. Trivers, *Social Evolution* (Menlo Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings, 1985); Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation,* Revised Edition with a Forward by Richard Dawkins (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

Beauty is an aspect of actors' relations with ideals, values, causes, or visions. It refers to the neat resonance that is evoked when you represent ideals, values, causes, or visions. On what human tendency or need does beauty as a power currency work? At this stage of my research, I can only propose some tentative candidates: the tendency to seek union with like-minded people, the tendency to join forces with those who pursue the same goal, the need for moral support and guidance (including the need for moral community and vindication), and the need for aesthetic experience. Beauty generates soft power through the production of inspiration.

THE PRODUCTION OF SOFT POWER

Benignity

Benignity comes in many forms. For example, when you are nice to others; when you are generous to others; when you do good to others; when you help them, support them, protect them; when you care about others; when you pay attention or listen to others; when you respect the rights, interests, or self-esteem of others; when you recognize the value or signification of others; when you behave in non-threatening or non-confrontational ways to others. You also appear benign when you are more harmless than your conditions suggest. Benignity is also present when you behave unselfishly. Selfless behavior signals that you are putting other people's interests before your own. The opposite of benignity is harmfulness, aggressiveness, and egoism. Benignity represents a wide spectrum of behaviors, ranging from doing no harm to others to actively protecting and supporting others. The promise of benignity lies in its kindness, its being nice. Kind people attract because they are unlikely to hurt you and they are likely to take your interests seriously.

How does benignity translate into power? Benignity produces gratitude and sympathy. It reassures others of the agent's peaceful or benevolent intentions, thereby inviting cooperation. Benignity works like a paradox: if you try to assert yourself, you will be perceived as aggressive and people will resist you. But if you put your ego in the

background and try to be nice, people will be more likely to get along with you. The mechanism is reciprocal altruism. Reciprocity can be bilateral or multilateral. In bilateral reciprocity, I will feel obliged to reciprocate when you are nice to me. In multilateral reciprocity, you must not provide a benefit to me directly. I can watch your behavior toward third parties and if I decide that you are nice, this will raise the chance that I will acquiesce to you. Of course, there will be people who do not reciprocate. But the agent itself or the international system as a collective can develop protective mechanisms against cheaters. In international relations, in order for benignity to produce soft power, it is usually embedded within a complex of protective mechanisms employing both hard and soft power currencies.

Brilliance

In international relations, brilliance manifests itself in various forms, for example, a strong and awesome military, a wealthy and vibrant economy, a rich and radiant culture, or a peaceful and well-run society. Brilliance also comes out from a country with advanced science and technology or a country that achieves military victory or economic success. More generally, brilliance, in this context, is the property of someone or something that is capable or successful. Success is the strong proof of capability. Successful people attract because they solve problems so well, because they have overcome challenges, because they are capable. Here lies the promise of brilliance. As you are more capable than me or if you are more capable than most people, it is safer not to resist you. As you are successful in doing something, learning from you is a way both effective and safe for those who are doing a similar job.

Brilliance generates admiration, which can lead to imitation, or emulation, and respect, or fear, or reverence. Brilliance can translate into soft power through a variety of ways. One way is to mobilize it to create myths of invincibility and inevitability. In another way, brilliance leads to imitation. The mechanism of this is as follows: If you have done your job successfully and I am doing a similar work, I will tend to learn from you and I will copy from you something that I think is at the roots of your success or your capability. In

international relations, other countries may adopt part or whole of the capable or successful country's practices, policies, institutions, ideology, values, or vision.

There are different ways in which imitation by clients generates soft power for agents. For example, as you are capable or successful, I will adopt something from you. Others may also do the same, so you get reputation, you become influential, and it will be harder to resist you. Here, brilliance produces power with the aid of the pressure of the large number. Brilliance may generate imitation, but imitation does not always and not automatically lead to acquiescence. However, the admiration, the adoption, and the affinity after that may act against suspicion and hostility and facilitate understanding and cooperation.

Beauty

Beauty in world politics is not about sexual attractiveness but about the resonance that draws actors closer to each other through shared ideals, values, causes, or visions. It gives actors a sense of warmth and security, hope and self-extension, identity and community, and vindication and praise. Actors can discover this beauty when they are jointly pursuing their shared ideals, values, causes, or visions. Opposite values and causes provide a firm ground for regimes to see each other as ugly; and shared values and causes provide a push toward the perception that the other regime is beautiful, which in turn will encourage confidence, friendship, and cooperation.

A stronger form of beauty can be found in those who represent their ideals, values, causes, or visions in a compelling way, with strong confidence and convictions, and high energy and perseverance. Beauty can come from a country that acts as the agent of a value, a country that is perceived as the avatar of an ideal, a country that champions a cause, or a country that articulates a vision compellingly. When it holds fast on a cause, champions a value, devotes itself to an ideal, compellingly articulates a vision, it gains credibility as a representative, a torch, or a firm supporter and guardian of the cause, the value, the ideal, or the vision. From here comes credibility, legitimacy, and even moral authority.

The basic mechanism through which this strong form of beauty translates into soft power can be described as follows. Your strong conviction, compelling articulation, unselfish devotion and unmoved perseverance for an ideal, value, cause, or vision may inspire that very ideal, value, cause, or vision in others and that is a first step toward making you the representative or personification of that ideal, value, cause, or vision. If others perceive you in this role, they will adhere to you and look at you for guidance, example, encouragement, and inspiration. Here lies the promise of beauty. Because you represent our shared ideals, values, causes, or visions compellingly, I trust that you will advance our causes, protect our values and set a good example or provide good guidance for those who share the same ideals and values and pursue the same causes and visions.

Beauty is the pivotal power currency that makes charismatic leaders. This holds true for both individuals and states. In the 20th century, the United States, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China were arguably the most charismatic countries, each finding resonance among a specific group of states and individuals.

THE TOOLS OF SOFT POWER

Although power currencies reside in the state as well as society at large, states can and often use policy tools to deploy power currencies to achieve goals. More generally, agents can outsource power currencies that other agents possess to get what they want in a third party. Military alliances present a conspicuous example of power outsourcing. Of course, the outsourcing itself is a power process and the initial agents have to possess some power currencies themselves in order to be able to get the second agents to do what they want. States usually possess a whole bunch of hard and soft power currencies that they can use to outsource societal agents, which in this first phase of the entire power process become the clients for the states. Conversely, societal actors can also outsource states and become the first agents in a two-stage power process. For example, human right NGOs in democratic countries urge their governments to undertake humanitarian intervention in a foreign country that is suffering from domestic war. Below, I will assemble a list of policy tools that governments usually employ in soft power processes.

By pointing to the power currencies the tools carry, I briefly explain why and how they mediate soft power. The list is, of course, not exhaustive.

Cultural events, exchange programs, broadcasting, or teaching a country's language and promoting the study of a country's culture and society are often seen as a tool of soft power. However, these activities do not produce soft power directly. Rather, what they can do is promote understanding, nurture positive images, and propagate myths in favor of the source country. In doing so, they provide a first but important step in the translation of benignity, beauty, and brilliance into soft power.

Myths are a powerful tool in shaping the views and desires of others. Myths can be created and utilized to communicate benignity, brilliance, and beauty. For example, while economic success and military victory are not policy tools in the first place, the brilliance they convey can be used to create myths of inevitability and invincibility.[20]

Governments can set up incentive programs for foreign students and youth in particular and foreign citizens in general. Benignity is the main power currency these programs generate, but beauty and brilliance can also be a product. Benignity can be even more strongly signaled when a government spends time and energy and money to cultivate foreign partners, keeping frequent and close contact with them, whether in their personal or official capacity. Another form of benignity is carried out in diplomacy. For example,

> Beijing frequently hosts leaders of smaller countries, especially from Africa and South Asia. Showered with attention, these leaders are often flattered by Beijing's hospitality. China's top leaders frequently travel to developing countries to discuss bilateral relations. Today, diplomats from China are more amiable and skilled at engaging local communities.[21]

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[20] Nye, *Paradox of American Power*, p. 10.

[21] Denise E. Zheng, "China's Use of Soft Power in the Developing World: Strategic Intentions and Implications for the United States," in McGiffert, *Chinese Soft Power*, p. 5.

States can express their benignity simply by paying attention to others, listening to them in international forums, or engaging with foreign states in dialogues, whether bilateral or multilateral. Seen in this light, multilateralism is a form of benignity that states can use to project soft power. States can also signal their benignity by promoting peace. In fact, aggressive states often engage in the rhetoric of peace to promote their benign images and create the myth of benignity.

Although benignity can be expressed rhetorically, its signal will be stronger when carried out by actions. Some common acts of benignity—not necessarily genuine benignity but first of all benignity signaling—include a variety of forms of economic aid, humanitarian assistance, and diplomatic support.

Economic assistance can be transmitted through ODA and FDI. But states can project soft power through the provision of economic benefit to foreign countries in many other ways. For example, China's decision not to devalue its currency during the 1997 Asian financial crisis is seen by many commentators as an act of benignity toward the regional states, a decision that enhanced China's soft power in the region. One of the pillars of U.S. global power during the Cold War, as Mead notes, was America's willingness to open of its domestic markets—even on a nonreciprocal basis—to foreign products, a policy that helped consolidate support for the U.S.-led international system.[22] Mead credits this to the sticky power of economic strength, but in combination with the large size of the U.S. domestic markets, there was also America's generosity as expressed through its "willingness to open its markets even on nonreciprocal basis" to exports from others. Recently, China's policy of economic aid "without strings attached" is perceived by authoritarian regimes in the developing world as a clear sign of benignity. Certainly, assistance from the PRC is not without strings, but its conditions—say no to Taiwan and say no to the "China threat" theory—are seen by many countries as harmless, while the conditions that Western countries attach to their offer—respect of human rights and democracy—represent a challenge, if not threat, to authoritarian regimes.

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[22] Mead, "America's Sticky Power," p. 50.

The provision of humanitarian assistance is another way to express benignity and project soft power. Humanitarian aid can be provided not only through civil societal actors using economic resources but also by troops using military resources. One of the major motives behind the engagement of some advanced industrial states in UN peacekeeping operations and in mediating peace negotiation is to cultivate the image of them as a responsible, peace-loving, and generous member of the international community, thereby enhancing their soft power in general.[23] Also, the relief operations provided by the U.S. Navy after the 2004 tsunami in Indonesia and other affected countries helped improve the image of the United States as a nice country, an image that suffered large damages in the invasion of Iraq the year before.

While humanitarian assistance often mediates soft power in an indirect way, diplomatic support provides a more direct channel of soft power. For example, China's adherence to the principle of nonintervention in domestic affairs and its votes in favor of authoritarian regimes in international organizations have helped it gain more and easier access to the natural resources and domestic markets of these countries.[24] Also, although states often support controversial candidates for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council—candidates such as India and Japan—based on their strategic rather than opportunistic calculations, but their supports are likely to be rewarded by these ambitious candidates.

The conduct of domestic and foreign policies on normative principles provides a way to project soft power through beauty, and to some extent, also benignity. The universalistic culture and liberal norms prevalent in Western countries can presumably enhance the attractiveness of these societies in the eyes of most ordinary citizens around the world. While a number of elites in developing countries keep criticizing liberal democracy as a decadent form of life, the world-wide currents of migration suggest that more people prefer life in a liberal democracy than in an authoritarian society. This Western beauty, which resonated neatly with the people in Eastern Europe, was a major power currency

[23] Nye, *Soft Power*, pp. 9-10.

[24] See, for example, Congressional Research Service, *China's Foreign Policy and "Soft Power" in South America, Asia, and Africa* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2008).

that helped demolish the Iron Curtain in 1989 and extend the border of the political West to that of Russia in the following period.

Similarly, during most of the 20th century, the USSR and the PRC, with their firm ideological posture in opposition to the West and their active support for anti-Western activities, were seen by numerous individuals, groups, and governments around the world as the natural leaders of the oppressed and exploited people. Today, China's and Russia's advocacy for a more "democratic and just" world order and their championing for the primacy of state sovereignty over human rights make them the natural choice for many authoritarian regimes in their search for foreign allies.[25] Admittedly, the close relationship between an authoritarian major power and a smaller authoritarian regime is not always motivated by "beauty" (the resonance of shared norms and purposes). In some cases, it is the benignity of actual nonintervention and political support from the major power that is the key motive. In some other cases, the major power does intervene in the domestic affairs of the smaller regime—but not for the sake of human rights and democracy. Instead, it intervenes in support of the incumbent rulers—yet another form of benignity although to a select partner rather than a wider population. But, many people would perceive selective benignity as more valuable than indiscriminate kindness.

The conduct of foreign policy through international institutions and organizations is another channel through which states signal benignity and beauty, and as a result, project soft power. In institutions, you are expected to keep the norms agreed by others, thus reducing the chance of going alone. In international organizations, you are also expected to listen to others, take the interests of others seriously, and be constrained by collective actions. Thus, international institutions and organizations provide an arena in which states can generate benignity and exert soft power collectively. As institutions set the agenda, they can also help gratify in a non-coercive way the interests of the actors that have originally shaped the institutions. International institutions often reflect the values, causes, and visions genuinely embraced by some of the member states. For these countries, international institutions provide a tool of soft power based on beauty.

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[25] These regimes include, but are not limited to, Iran, Myanmar, North Korea, and Sudan.

CONCLUSION

This paper has made an initial look at how soft power works. I argue that how soft power works depends on what causes soft power. As a final thought, let me address this topic in more detail.

In his seminal book *Power: A Radical Approach*, a book that marked a major contribution to the debates over power since Max Weber, Steven Lukes identifies "three faces of power." The first face is the power to make and implement decisions, a face that is basically what Max Weber saw. The second face is the power to set agendas and thus limit what is being discussed, a face that Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz discovered. The third face, which was Lukes' own development, is the power to manipulate what others think they want. [26] Nye has acknowledged Bachrach and Baratz's influences on his concept of soft power, saying soft power "builds on but differs from" this second face of power.[27] Lukes, however, remarks that Nye's soft power is similar to his third dimension of power—the power to shape desires.[28] In fact, Nye's soft power includes both the power to set agendas and the power to shape desires, although, as Brantly Womack has noted, agenda-setting power has "faded into the background" in Nye's later works.[29] Before coming to a final remark, let me mention another "three faces of power," those of Kenneth Boulding. The first is destructive or the power to destroy, the second is productive or the power to pay, and the third is integrative or the power to bring people together by getting others to care for you, respect you, or identify with you. [30]

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[26] Steven Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974).

[27] Joseph S. Nye, *Powers to Lead*, fn. 6, p. 156.

[28] Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds," p. 90.

[29] Womack, "Dissecting Soft Power," p. 3.

[30] Kenneth Boulding, *Three Faces of Power* (London: Sage, 1989).

Let us compare Lukes's, Nye's, and Boulding's views of power. There are striking similarities in the three approaches. Lukes's decision-making power is rooted in Nye's coercive power, whose key capacity is to destroy—Boulding's first face of power. Lukes's second face of power is Nye's agenda-setting power. Boulding's second face of power is the economic dimension of Nye's hard power. Lukes's third face of power is similar to Nye's attractive power, which in turn is comparable to Boulding's integrative power. Nye's conception of power, therefore, can be seen as a coherent view that has successfully integrated the insights of both Lukes's and Boulding's and is more comprehensive than either of the two.

Nye's approach also provides an alternative view to both Lukes's and Boulding's three faces of power. First, by putting the various types of power on a continuum, it opens the opportunity for discovering more nuanced faces of power. Second, while Lukes's three faces of power look at what they control, Boulding's three faces look at what they cause, Nye's types of power are disposed to look at what causes them in the first place.

Lukes calls Nye's approach as the "agent-centered, strategic" view of power and criticizes it as a "blunt instrument." As he notes, Nye has failed to make a "distinction between different ways in which soft power can co-opt, attract and entice those subject to it, between different ways in which it can induce their acquiescence. In short, he draws no distinction between modes of persuasion or ways of 'shaping preferences'."[31] I do not know if Nye's view is agent-centered and if Nye's failure is rooted in his "agent-centered, strategic" approach. But Nye has pointed to a pivotal concept that, as can be seen in this paper, is instrumental in drawing a distinction between the different ways of shaping preferences. This is the concept of power currency. As Nye has argued, soft power differs from hard power in that it "uses a different type of currency (not force, not money) to engender cooperation."[32] He identifies force and threats as two power currencies that cause military power, and payment and sanctions as two power currencies

[31] Lukes, "Power and the Battle for Hearts and Minds," pp. 90-92, 95.

[32] Nye, *Soft Power*, pp. 6-7.

that cause economic power. For soft power currencies, his candidates are culture, values, policies, and institutions, but he also mentions attraction as a currency of soft power.[33] But with a more nuanced and explicit distinction between power currencies and power resources, some of these items, especially the soft power ones, turn out to be resources rather than currencies. I would argue that Nye's failure to draw a distinction between the mechanisms by which soft power is produced is rooted in the failure to draw a distinction between power resources and power currencies. But this is not a failure of Nye alone; the entire literature on power currencies has hitherto used the two terms interchangeably.[34]

Without an explicit distinction between power currencies and power resources, there is a strong tendency to look for what distinguishes soft from hard power in the ontology of resources. In China, where soft power is more enthusiastically adopted than in the West, there is an ongoing debate over what makes soft power. Two major schools of thought are contending in this debate. More in line with the tendency above, the "culture" school, which makes the majority, maintains that "the core of soft power is culture."[35] The "politics" school argues that it is not what you use but how you use it, not the softness of resources but the soft use of them, that is the "key to whether a certain power source becomes soft or hard."[36] In light of the "three Bs" as I develop in this paper, we can say that each of these schools is talking about a different part of the elephant. The "politics" school is talking about benignity, while the "culture" school is touching brilliance and beauty with their undifferentiated hands. Viewing the elephant from a more comprehensive perspective, we can see that it is not resource ontology, nor is it power usage, but it is power currency that makes soft power different from hard power. While it

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[33] Nye, *Soft Power*, pp. 31, 63.

[34] For brief summaries of different views on power currencies, see Deborah S. Ballard-Reisch and Daniel J. Weigel, "Communication Processes in Marital Commitment," in Jeffrey M. Adams and Warren H. Jones, eds., *Handbook of Interpersonal Commitment and Relationship Stability* (New York: Kluwer Academic, 1999), p. 412; Tricia S. Jones and Ross Brinkert, *Conflict Couching: Conflict Management Strategies and Skills for the Individual* (New York: Sage, 2008), p. 125.

[35] Glaser and Murphy, "Soft Power with Chinese Characteristics," p. 13.

[36] Li, "Domestic Sources," p. 37.

is inaccurate to talk about "soft power resources," we can identify three soft power currencies—benignity, or the kindness of behavior and attitude; brilliance, or the shine of capabilities and successes; and beauty, or the resonance of shared norms and goals.