



Soft Power and it's Dimensions: A Review

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Research institutions, Cultural organization, Online education, Virtual research collaboration, Artificial intelligence, Digital libraries.	The term soft power was coined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr., who felt that an incomplete understanding of national power was the reason for the term. The traditional realist perspective focused on the military power, economic strength, control of territory and strategic alliances as the main factors in determining international influence. States that use soft power are promoting cooperation because the other societies consider their ideas, institutions or values legitimate and worthy of emulation. Attraction is thus an important source of influence. In the Indian context, Yoga, Ayurveda, Buddhism, classical arts, cuisine, democracy and the Indian diaspora have been linked to the notion of 'soft power'. These sizes certainly have a part to play in India's image abroad. But cultural symbolism is not the only facet of India's soft power, its intellectual traditions, educational institutes, scientific accomplishments and knowledge networks have their own meaning which is not given due consideration. The present research, therefore, calls for Indian Knowledge Systems to be comprehended not only as cultural resources but also as knowledge diplomacy systems that can be a part of knowledge systems for education, research, innovation, public policy and sustainable development.

Introduction

The notion of soft power is one of the most significant theories in the field of international relations today. It was born in a time of radical change in world politics when the nature of international influence was no longer assumed to be in terms of military force and economic power. The end of the Cold War, the rapid globalization,

the development of international institutions, and the tremendous development of communication technologies all showed that states could influence international outcomes by attracting, convincing, and legitimizing as well as by coerce and material incentives.¹

Research Objectives:

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The present study aims to examine the concept and evolving dimensions of soft power, with particular emphasis on the role of education, research, digital technologies and Indian Knowledge Systems in enhancing India's international influence.

The specific objectives are:

- (i) to examine the conceptual foundations of soft power;
- (ii) to identify its major dimensions and changing forms;
- (iii) to examine the relationship between soft power, public diplomacy and knowledge diplomacy;
- (iv) to assess the emerging role of digital technologies in soft power; and
- (v) to explore Indian Knowledge Systems as resources for education, research, innovation, public policy and sustainable development.

Research Hypothesis:

H1: Soft power is increasingly multidimensional, and education, research, knowledge networks and digital engagement have become significant instruments of international influence alongside traditional cultural resources.

H2: India's Indian Knowledge Systems, educational institutions, scientific achievements and knowledge networks have the potential to strengthen India's soft power and knowledge diplomacy at the global level.

Review of Literature:

Recent policy and scholarly discussions, including UNESCO's work on education and India's National Education Policy 2020, underline the growing importance of knowledge, education,

innovation and international collaboration. This literature suggests the need to move beyond a purely cultural interpretation of India's soft power and examine Indian Knowledge Systems as potential knowledge-diplomacy resources.

Conceptual Understanding of Soft Power

The term soft power was coined by Joseph S. Nye, Jr., who felt that an incomplete understanding of national power was the reason for the term. The traditional realist perspective focused on the military power, economic strength, control of territory and strategic alliances as the main factors in determining international influence. Nye pointed out that these material resources were necessary, but not sufficient, to account for the influence some countries had beyond their military and economic power. He suggested that states too have the power to influence the choice of others by the allure of their culture, values, institutions and foreign policies.²

Soft Power and Attraction

Soft power is not force-based power, but rather one that is accepted willingly. States that use soft power are promoting cooperation because the other societies consider their ideas, institutions or values legitimate and worthy of emulation. Attraction is thus an important source of influence. This is not to say that military or economic power is not needed, but that soft power is needed as well. Instead, Nye says, successful states blend various types of power as needed to respond to international conditions, which he subsequently termed "smart power."³

Evolution and Expanding Dimensions of Soft Power

With the rise of soft power, there were also greater shifts in the wider international society. In the second half of the 20th century, the growing role of international media, higher education, tourism, scientific exchanges and multinational companies, as well as digital communication, led to an increase in the interactions between societies. In the second half of the 20th century, the development of international media, higher education, tourism, scientific cooperation, multinational companies, and digital communication has boosted the interaction between societies. The importance of public perceptions and cultural exchanges, as well as international reputation increased. As governments came to understand that universities, artists, scientists, filmmakers, sports stars and civil society groups were also responsible for international influence, they have increasingly embraced them as partners in achieving this goal.⁴

Public Diplomacy and International Engagement

The idea of soft power slowly evolved from its initial definition. Researchers started to study the impact of educational exchange programmes, international radio and television, development cooperation, cultural festivals, science cooperation and humanitarian cooperation on international perceptions. Public diplomacy became an important tool to enable states to communicate directly with foreign societies in a manner not just through government-to-government negotiations. The developments showed that the exercise of influence was more often based on credibility and transparency, institutional quality and on-going engagement than on short-term persuasion.⁵

Scholarly Debates and Criticisms of Soft Power

Although it is widely accepted, there has been a lot of scholarly discussion on the concept of soft power. One criticism is on the issue of conceptual ambiguity. Others have suggested that the term has been used at times in such a general way that anything that affects non-military aspects of a nation's influence has been called soft power. This propensity can often lead to the blurring of key differences between cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, educational cooperation, scientific collaboration and knowledge diplomacy. Modern research thus focuses on the importance of developing an accurate definition of these concepts, but also on their complementary nature.⁶

Measurement of Soft Power

The other debate is about the measurement of soft power. Attraction cannot be measured in just one single indicator, as there is no universally accepted measure of attraction, like military spending or economic output. Several factors like media presence, innovation, governance, cultural influence, tourism, and diplomacy are also included in the international rankings. These indices offer valuable comparative data, but do not fully reflect the processes that are more likely to lead to the development of trust, legitimacy, and intellectual leadership over a longer period of time. Soft power is therefore, a multi-dimensional concept and its impact can only be seen in the longer term.⁷

Soft Power, Governance and Foreign Policy

A second criticism is about the link between soft power and foreign policy action. A nation's cultural accomplishments can inspire admiration, but if that

admiration is undermined by a lack of effective governance within the country or by questionable foreign policies, then it can be lost. Soft power cannot be taken for granted or guaranteed, therefore. Rests on the coherence of national values, institutional performance and international conduct. This observation is especially applicable to knowledge diplomacy as a long-term relationship between academic institutions is built on trust in long-term reliability and academic integrity.⁸

Digital Transformation of Soft Power

In recent years, the rapid expansion of digital technologies has further transformed the operation of soft power. Digital platforms enable states, universities, research institutions, and cultural organizations to communicate directly with global audiences.⁹ Online education, virtual research collaboration, artificial intelligence, digital libraries, and open-access scholarship have expanded opportunities for international engagement while simultaneously increasing competition for intellectual influence. The digital environment has therefore broadened the sources of soft power beyond traditional cultural diplomacy and strengthened the importance of knowledge as an instrument of international cooperation.¹⁰

India's Soft Power and Indian Knowledge Systems

In the Indian context, Yoga, Ayurveda, Buddhism, classical arts, cuisine, democracy and the Indian diaspora have been linked to the notion of 'soft power'. These sizes certainly have a part to play in India's image abroad. But cultural symbolism is not the only facet of India's soft power, its intellectual

traditions, educational institutes, scientific accomplishments and knowledge networks have their own meaning which is not given due consideration. The present research, therefore, calls for Indian Knowledge Systems to be comprehended not only as cultural resources but also as knowledge diplomacy systems that can be a part of knowledge systems for education, research, innovation, public policy and sustainable development.¹¹

Conclusion:

The above discussion shows that the concept of soft power is still a necessary one in order to comprehend the international relations in the modern world. However, as higher education becomes ever more relevant, as research is a larger part of the attraction, as digital innovation and transnational knowledge networks become more prominent, the nature of international engagement is changing, and this is not only due to attraction.

Endnotes:

¹ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).

² Nye, *Soft Power*.

³ Joseph S. Nye Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011).

⁴ Jan Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

⁵ Nicholas J. Cull, *Public Diplomacy: Foundations for Global Engagement in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019).

⁶ Knight, *Knowledge Diplomacy in International Relations and Higher Education*, esp. the discussion distinguishing knowledge diplomacy from soft power.

⁷ Joseph S. Nye Jr., "Soft Power: The Evolution of a Concept," *Journal of Political Power* 14, no. 1 (2021).

⁸ Keohane and Nye, *Power and Interdependence*.

⁹ Sharma, Shailendra Kumar, Contributions of Indian Knowledge Systems to Science, Mathematics, Medicine, Astronomy and Technology: A Study

¹⁰ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Reimagining Our Futures Together: A New Social Contract for Education* (Paris: UNESCO, 2021).

¹¹ Ministry of Education, Government of India, *National Education Policy 2020*; B. Mahadevan, Vinayak Rajat Bhat, and Nagendra Pavana R., *Introduction to Indian Knowledge*

System: Concepts and Applications (New Delhi: PHI Learning, 2022).
