

# Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the softest of them all? Evaluating Japanese and Chinese strategies in the ‘soft’ power competition era

Yee-Kuang Heng

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*School of International Relations, University of St Andrews, St  
Andrews, UK*

*E-mail: ykh1@st-andrews.ac.uk*

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## Abstract

As states jostle to attract and entice others by deploying a range of innovative strategies, a ‘soft’ power competition era looms possibly in the Asia-Pacific. This paper argues that reflecting on this period of competitive policy innovation provides a valuable opportunity to re-assess the theory and practice of Joseph Nye’s ‘soft’ power, given its conceptual and empirical frailties: how theoretically precise are the policies commonly described as projecting ‘soft’ power? To do so, it undertakes a comparative evaluation of Japan’s and China’s ‘soft’ power strategies. By paying close attention to the theory–practice linkage, it illuminates the disparities in their understanding of Nye’s ‘soft’ power. Rather than a one-size-fits-all concept, ‘soft’ power strategies with distinctively Japanese and Chinese characteristics are emerging, bringing different advantages and weaknesses. The proverbial magic mirror would

conclude that by more closely matching Nye's formulations and displaying a less competitive streak, Japan appears the 'softer' power.

## 1 Introduction

In the age of globalization, policymakers and academics recognize that 'hard' power is insufficient for achieving foreign policy goals (Nye, 2004; Gates, 2007). Leading a Pentagon double act, Defense Secretary Robert Gates (2007) sought 'to make the case for strengthening our capacity to use "soft power", while Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen (2009) stressed the 'need to leverage every single aspect of national power – "soft" and "hard"'. The debate on how countries can best project 'soft' power is gathering momentum (Nye, 2005; Gill and Huang, 2006; Kurlantzick, 2007; Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2008). While the West has long-established mechanisms in the British Council or Alliance Francaise, it is 'worth looking beyond US experiences or the Anglo-phone world' (Melissen, 2005, p. xx), for Asia is becoming the most important future arena of 'soft' power (Watanabe and McConnell, 2008). In a rising China, as well as a Japan anxious about 'Japan-passing', leaders have extolled the presumed benefits 'soft' power brings to their respective national needs (Hu, 2007; Aso, 2009a, b). Nye further claims that despite his theory of 'soft' power being America-centric, it is 'general, and fits all countries, groups and individuals' (cited in Kang, 2008). This suggestion of uniform applicability, however, belies the variance in 'soft' power strategies as Asian powers engage in competitive learning.

The non-traditional dynamics of possible 'soft' power competition between Japan and China warrant more attention, as they maneuver for regional leadership. This matters for understanding the various possibilities a newfound emphasis on 'soft' power brings to the region. The two giants have employed innovative 'soft' power approaches to extend their reach and influence. Tokyo's initiatives, however, differ from Beijing's in several important aspects. These include the degree of adherence to Nye's theory, and whether 'soft' power projection is seen as competitive or cooperative. States wielding 'soft' power cooperatively can help lead in solving shared problems like climate change. A zero-sum perspective, however, could exacerbate pre-existing Great Power rivalry by generating new tensions over cultural and political competition.

After all, ‘soft’ power can potentially be highly prized, like ‘hard’ power resources. Nye (2008b, xiii) warns that ‘soft’ power still remains ‘a form of power. If legitimacy is seen as a power reality, competitive struggles over legitimacy can involve enhancing or depriving actors of “soft” power’. Chinese leaders, for instance, appear to be viewing ‘soft’ power as ‘*direct competition* in great power terms’ (Yoshihara and Holmes, 2008, pp. 134–135). President Hu (2007) suggested that ‘culture has become... a factor of growing significance in the *competition* in overall national strength’. Top Japanese officials too recognize that although ‘soft’ power is of benefit to Japan, the international cultural contest will be challenging (Monji, 2009). A clear case then exists for comparing how Japan and China formulate and implement their ‘soft’ power strategies.

Most existing secondary literature, however, analyses *individual* countries’ ‘soft’ power and limitations (Gill and Huang, 2006; Kurlantzick, 2007; Lam, 2007; Cho and Jeong, 2008; Li, 2008; Otmagin, 2008; Vyas, 2008). Besides being somewhat narrow in scope, these have not been particularly reflective on the relationship between theory and practice, as well as recent shifts in understanding the concept: do the ‘soft’ power policies commonly ascribed to China and Japan reflect Nye’s theoretical premises? White (2005) claims ‘the Chinese have proved better than the US at using the “soft” power of trade and diplomacy’, but how far should trade and diplomatic tools fall under the overarching banner of ‘soft’ power? This is not just a question of whether policymakers consciously subscribe to Nye’s ideas or not. Rather, it is about achieving more conceptual rigor. Noting how ‘this newfound fascination with “soft” power has generated more confusion than clarity’, Watanabe and McConnell’s (2008, p. xvii) comparisons between United States and Japan have addressed such problems to some extent. Likewise, Wang and Lu (2008) have usefully highlighted differences in Chinese and Taiwanese thinking about ‘soft’ power. Yet, even they have not been attentive to weighing up Japanese and Chinese ‘soft’ power strategies. Remarkably similar ideas describe the two Asian giants. Taking turns at being labeled ‘Fragile Superpower’ (Gibney, 1996; Shirk, 2007), both are simultaneously embarked on a ‘charm offensive’ (Kurlantzick, 2007; Beech, 2008). While ‘being Chinese is cool’ (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 118), concurrently Japan is ‘the coolest nation on Earth’ (Faiola, 2003). Although their ‘soft’ power is often referred to in a loose comparative

sense, an in-depth analysis remains to be undertaken. A broader comparative perspective, it is argued, can provide insights into how both states interpret and implement the theory of ‘soft’ power, which is often criticized as woolly and contested (Ogoura, 2006). Methodologically speaking, this paper analyzes the existing secondary literature (Western, Chinese, and Japanese), buttressed with an examination of primary documents, policy statements, landmark speeches, and field interviews with practitioners, diplomats, and cultural agents of ‘soft’ power. Useful policy lessons can be drawn, for ‘the question of how foreign ministries can instrumentalise “soft” power is testing their diplomats’ flexibility to the full’ (Melissen, 2005, p. 5). How Japan and China project ‘soft’ power bilaterally to influence each other within their respective countries is a fascinating issue, but the focus here is more broadly comparing their strategies on a regional and global scale.

Hence, with a close eye to the theory–practice linkage, the opening theoretical section reappraises Nye’s notion of ‘soft’ power, highlighting questions of agency, defining ‘soft’ power resources, as well as measurement of impact. Employing Nye’s writings regarding these issues as a common analytical framework, the paper then uses a comparative case study method to summarize and analyze how far recent Japanese and Chinese ‘soft’ power initiatives adhere to a strict reading of Nye: which state is theoretically ‘softer’? The last section evaluates the relative advantages and limitations of these initiatives, concluding with some policy and theoretical implications.

## 2 ‘Soft’ power

Here, some key premises and critiques of Nye’s theoretical framework are re-visited to establish a common baseline for subsequent analysis. The issues singled out cannot capture adequately the complexity of Nye’s work. For instance, I do not discuss in-depth various instruments of public diplomacy such as university exchanges. The deployment of ‘soft’ power involves four stages: resources, transmission, reception, outcomes (Kondo, 2008). The following discussion loosely proceeds along these lines.

‘Soft’ power is ‘the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments’ (Nye, 2004, p. x). Distinguishing between attraction, coercion (threatening force), and inducement

(dangling incentives), ‘there are several ways to affect the behaviour of others . . . coerce them with threats, induce them with payments, or you can attract and co-opt them to want what you want’ (Nye, 2004, p. 2). Direct ‘hard’ power relies on ‘active command behaviour getting others to do what you want . . . indirect ‘soft’ power is more passive, co-optive . . . based on attraction of one’s ideas or the ability to set the political agenda that shapes the preferences others express’ (Nye, 1990, p. 181). Nye’s power spectrum may be presented as:

Command power	Co-optive power
Coercion - Inducement - Agenda-setting - Pure attraction	

‘Soft’ power stems from attractive values expressed in a state’s culture (e.g. Hollywood exports) and policies (e.g. human rights protection). The cultural industries especially are ‘powerful carriers and distributors of values and beliefs’ (Otmazgin, 2008). ‘When a country’s culture includes universal values and its policies promote values and interests that others share, it increases the probability of obtaining its desired outcomes because of the attraction it creates’ (Nye, 2004, p. 11). The most influential ‘soft’ powers possess ‘multiple channels of communication to help frame issues; whose dominant culture and ideas are closer to prevailing global norms; and whose credibility is enhanced by domestic and international values and policies’ (Nye, 2004, p. 32).

Despite widespread usage, ‘soft’ power arouses ‘conceptual confusion . . . it is distorted, misused and in extreme cases abused’ (Ogoura, 2006). It is also not very ‘soft’, containing instead ‘representational force’ as a coercive type of persuasion (Mattern, 2005). Furthermore, recent definitions in primary Western documents employ the concept rather elastically. The US Congressional Research Service (2008, p. 3) defines it broadly to include ‘international trade, overseas investments, development assistance, diplomatic initiatives, cultural influence, humanitarian aid, travel and tourism’. The Chicago Council on Global Affairs (2008) likewise interprets it as ‘the ability to wield influence by indirect, non-military means, whether by persuasion or attraction’. Such looser definitions might generate conceptual misinterpretations, but also policy choices that dilute what Nye might term the essence of ‘attraction’. This raises uncertainty about its operationalization as a policy tool. Any non-military action such as investment deals is branded ‘soft’, obscuring

theoretical differences between inducement and attraction. Additionally, although often seen to wield ‘hard’ power, ‘the military can also play an important role in the creation of “soft” power’ (Nye, 2004, p. 116). For instance, US naval vessels generated goodwill by providing post-Asian tsunami humanitarian operations.

When discussing transmission, a crucial theoretical issue concerns agency. Who/what is best positioned to project and generate ‘soft’ power: spontaneous creativity of the people, or governments (Ogoura, 2006)? Since many instruments of ‘soft’ power lie in the hands of NGOs and private entities, Nye realizes that ‘if governments become too heavy handed, their efforts are seen as propaganda and repel rather than attract others’ (cited in Kang, 2008). There is ‘confusion over who or what actually exercises this power’ (Ogoura, 2006).

Despite power being usually wielded by states, ‘soft’ power can also accrue to NGOs and private sector organizations. ‘Agents here create links between actors in different countries through which information and ideas can flow, thus allowing the “soft” power of one country to flow into another and affect it’ (Vyas, 2008). Therefore, this paper conceptualizes the agency of ‘soft’ power in more variegated tones beyond state-level actors. Likewise, Kondo (2008) envisions the state as a facilitator, creating environments conducive for others generating ‘soft’ power.

As for resources, ‘what exactly are the constituent elements that make up “soft” power and are there any precise indices for quantifying it’ (Ogoura, 2006)? Particular uncertainty surrounds economic influence. Nye initially excluded investment aid and formal diplomacy because they comprised inducements rather than attraction (2004, p. 5). He seemed to ‘focus purely on the attractiveness of a nation’s brand, of its values and ideals and norms’ (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 6). However, Nye also suggested that,

When it (economic influence) creates a positive environment that attracts, it also produces ‘soft’ power. The Marshall Plan is an example that produced both ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power (cited in Kang, 2008).

This theoretical issue highlights the imperfect correlative relationship between inducements, coercion, and attractiveness: ‘a strong economy provides resource not only for sanctions and payments but can also be a source of attractiveness’ (Nye, 2004, p. 8). Hence, Watanabe and

McConnell (2008, p. xix) suggest moving beyond an ‘either–or interpretation in favour of a more dynamic and contextual interpretation of the relationship between “hard” and “soft” power’. This means analyzing how and why certain tools are utilized, and the context.

While Nye (2008b) adopts an ‘agent-focused’ approach, it is equally important to understand reception and subjects’ susceptibility to ‘soft’ power. Yet, it remains impossible to directly trace observable cause–effect linkages and desired outcomes. Kim Jong Il’s fascination for Hollywood hardly brings American political influence. ‘Soft’ power tools can also be used to achieve ‘hard’ power goals such as energy security. Furthermore, short-term and long-term effects cannot be easily captured because ‘attraction produces a diffuse effect, creating general influence rather than a specifically observable action’ (Nye, 2004, p. 16). ‘Soft’ power, thus, might be more useful in achieving general ‘milieu goals’ like shaping the international environment, than ‘possession goals’ (Nye, 2004, pp. 16–17). Nonetheless, Nye (2004, p. 6) recommends that ‘whether a particular asset is a “soft” power resource that produces attraction can be measured by asking people through polls or focus groups... whether attraction in turn produces desired policy outcomes has to be judged in particular cases’.

### 3 Are Japanese strategies ‘softer’ than Chinese strategies?

#### 3.1 *Strategic context and agency*

For our purposes, the ‘softness’ of a state depends on how far its initiatives reflect Nye’s theoretical framework outlined above. Beginning with questions of agency/transmission, the secondary Western literature suggests that the Chinese state is the crucial agent projecting ‘soft’ power, as part of its ‘Peaceful Development’ grand strategy to refute the ‘China threat’ thesis (Gill and Huang, 2006; Kurlantzick, 2007). This reflects Nye’s claim that ‘soft’ power is particularly relevant to milieu goals of shaping an environment conducive for China’s goals. It also reflects the notion of *Daguo* (Great Nation) where ‘soft’ power and appealing ideals are something China should rightly possess, befitting its status as a world cultural power. The embrace of ‘soft’ power thus seems ‘mandated and supported from top leaders’ (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 37), who employ the

concept explicitly, having ‘internalised it to a high degree’ (Yoshihara and Holmes, 2008, p. 127). This has resulted in a long-term centrally directed, coherently generated, and coordinated approach (Melissen, p. 2005).

To Western eyes, China seems to ‘enunciate a broader idea of “soft” power than Nye did’ to comprise ‘anything outside of the military and security realm’ (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 6). These include economic, diplomatic, and commercial inducements, and investment agreements that Nye initially excluded. Even its mediation in North Korea’s WMD programs, or ‘good neighbor’ policy, is considered ‘soft’ power (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 22; Kurlantzick, 2007). Kurlantzick (2007, p. 66) further highlights how Chinese diplomats are ‘plugged in’, boasting extensive experience in their postings, as well as numerous high-level delegations sent abroad. But could these moves simply be smarter diplomacy? Some of the Western literature warning about Chinese charm also has an underlying agenda, presenting ‘a “soft” power version of the “China threat” school’ (Cho and Jeong, 2008, p. 460). Targeting both ‘high’ (elite) and ‘low’ (general public) audiences, it is claimed that Chinese leaders ‘merge diplomacy, economic and trade incentives, low-key shows of naval and military force, and cultural influence into a comprehensive outreach program’ (Yoshihara and Holmes, 2008, p. 132). Such wide interpretations of Chinese ‘soft’ power transmission underline Nye’s (2008b, p. i) concern about ‘misuse of the concept as a synonym for anything other than military force’.

However, examining Chinese sources and discourses, there does not seem to be the wide view of ‘soft’ power (for instance, including low-level displays of force) that Western analysts claim exists. Rather, Beijing’s focus on culture, political values, foreign policy, and institutions, as we shall see later, does largely conform to Nye’s analytical framework (Li, 2008). However, ‘soft’ power’s scope also extends to particular Chinese domestic contexts to which Nye paid little attention (Li, 2008). Furthermore, ‘Chinese analysts deviate from Nye’s core positions by attaching greater importance to the mass media’ (Li, 2008, p. 294). Launching television broadcasts in European supermarkets, spokesmen for state-run *Xinhua News* explicitly explain the state’s role, ‘China has recognised the importance of “soft” power, and through the medium of television and the internet, the Chinese government aims to strengthen its influence internationally’ (Luft, 2009).



Despite the state's leading position, Chinese 'soft' power agency is hardly monolithic. Sufficient variation exists since regions, organizations, enterprises, corporate governance, and individuals can also project 'soft' power in the Chinese view (Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 427). So too can semi-official think-tanks, local governments, and cultural communities. Official reports also delegate responsibility for promoting Chinese culture with scholars of philosophy, humanities, and social sciences, indicating an academic dimension to 'soft' power agency beyond the state alone (Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 304). Nonetheless, the Chinese state's competitive view remains central, with former Foreign Minister Li (2007) forecasting "'soft power' competition' among the 'big powers'.

Indeed, China's neighbor, Japan, possesses the greatest 'soft' power potential in Asia (Nye, 2005), but faces an entirely different strategic context. The world's second largest economy faced legal, constitutional, and public barriers on 'hard' power projection, making Japan 'a country skilled and experienced in the use of "soft" power due to these constraints' (Vyas, 2008). This has added importance since 'Japan's economic power has peaked out, and the challenge today for this country is how to polish and best its "soft" power' (*Asahi Shimbun*, 2007). Hence, then-PM Aso (2009a, b) recommended 'sending out Japan's vast and varied range of "soft" power' including popular culture and values. Targeting both elites and the general public, Japanese official and scholarly discourse generally echo Nye's schema: culture, values, institutions, policies, as we shall see.<sup>1</sup> Although 'Japan's international clout relies on "soft" power' (Beech, 2008), this remains under-appreciated: 'opinion leaders across Asia already believe that China's charm will eventually overwhelm Japan's fading influence' (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 207). Such views are premature because Japan's 'overseas influence is reaching new heights', through its very own 'charm offensive' (Beech, 2008). Her diplomats remain sensitive to 'Japan-passing' and a possible 'soft' power competition era with their rising neighbors. Japanese 'soft' power practitioners who contemplate such issues daily observe that as international media gravitate toward Beijing, the 295 Tokyo-based organizations in 1997 had declined to 199 in 2007.<sup>2</sup> Western observers (Nye, 2008a) suggest that one way to counter Tokyo's fears of marginalization is better

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1 Discussions with senior Japanese diplomats, Tokyo, July 2009.

2 Interviews in Tokyo, July 2008.

use of its own ‘soft’ power to tackle new shared trans-national threats, an idea the Japanese discourse embraces.

Whereas China’s ‘soft’ power is largely state-led, then-Japanese Foreign Minister Aso (2006) advocates a ‘public–private partnership’ to ‘selling the Japanese dream’. How animation is promoted highlights this difference. While Beijing funds 30–40% of production fees of Chinese animation studios (Martin, 2009), Japan’s Director-General of public diplomacy Kenjiro Monji recognizes state-level agents might not be best positioned to generate ‘soft’ power (Newcomb, 2008a). Tokyo’s diplomats on the ground implementing policy on a day-to-day basis argue ‘it is not public sectors but private sectors who should take the lead in promoting “soft” power’ (Japan Creative Centre, 2008). In America, *Anime Masterpieces* is a private initiative by New York-based Gorgeous Entertainment, supported by the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO). In Singapore, public relations companies (Singapore’s I-Promo Events Marketing, and Japan’s Dentsu) organized *Anime Festival Asia* 2008. This was backed by the Japan Foundation and Japan Embassy, together with toy company Bandai. This cooperative approach culminated in the joint establishment of the world’s first Japan Creative Centre (JCC) in Singapore, so it ‘could serve as the foundation for Japan to exert its “soft” power in Southeast Asia’ and ‘jointly produce television programs’ (MOFA, 2007). Then-JCC Director Kawamura declared to the Singaporean private sector he was ‘looking forward to working with you to disseminate Japanese “soft” power’ (Japan Creative Centre, 2009). Tokyo’s joint-venture approach implies that ‘soft’ power need not be competitive or confrontational; it might even generate regional agents of ‘soft’ power (Ogoura, 2008).

### 3.2 *The resource of culture*

Consistent with Nye’s focus on attractive cultures, Chinese leaders, including President Hu (2007), aim to ‘enhance culture as part of the “soft” power of our country’. Politburo member Jia Qinglin stressed ‘the importance of national “soft” power with cultural construction as the main task’ to meet domestic demands and enhance China’s competitiveness internationally (cited in Li, 2008, p. 289). Here, Chinese primary sources agree with Nye that its culture is a valuable ‘soft’ power asset. Some scholars even ‘see cultural competition as an increasingly vital part of international

competition' (Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 428). Beijing could 'increase its "soft" power by creating common imagined identities and values for Asians' (Cho and Jeong, 2008, 470), emanating Confucian messages of unity, frugality, and the notion of 'harmony'. Perhaps its most significant cultural initiative, Beijing has attached 295 Confucius Institutes to universities worldwide, promoting Chinese civilization to both general publics and elites. While Nye's framework stressed *contemporary* American pop culture, China emphasizes its *traditional* culture (Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 431). Recognizing the importance of language, China aggressively sponsors Mandarin in countries like Thailand, training a thousand teachers annually. The state-funded 'China National Office for teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language' has an impressive annual war-chest of \$200 million to quadruple the number of foreign learners by 2010 (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 18). To attract foreign students, Beijing offers scholarships and looser visa rules. The 2006 Planning Guidelines for Cultural Development also propose to cultivate international sales networks for Chinese cultural products and assist overseas-oriented cultural enterprises through pricing or funding support (Li, 2008, p. 303).

In terms of elite groups, there is increasing cultural exchange, hosting overseas scholars to maintain academic interest in China. Beijing also cultivates influential diaspora such as ex-Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra and prominent Filipino businessman Lucio Tan. While they previously provided investment and trade, 'diaspora Chinese have become vital to Beijing's global charm offensive' (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 77). The state-run Overseas Chinese Affairs Office works to boost relations between China and its diaspora. Government-run camps for diaspora children called 'Travel to China to Find Your Roots' aim to enhance China's attractiveness. Beijing also publishes history textbooks for diaspora schools, emphasizing humiliation by foreign powers. Historical narratives are weaved into its cultural strengths, notably through exhibitions and 'Zheng He<sup>3</sup> diplomacy' that portray China's rise as mutually beneficial compared with European colonialism (Yoshihara and Holmes, 2008, pp. 127–130).

However, in a 'major departure from Nye's analysis', Chinese cultural discourse 'frequently refers to a domestic context' (Li, 2008, pp. 288, 296).

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3 Zheng He was a Ming Dynasty admiral sent to East Africa and South-East Asia with his 'treasure fleet'.

'Soft' power here doubles as a 'national development strategy' to instill cultural pride, consolidate internal coherence against economic inequality, promote regime legitimacy through moral example, and create a 'harmonious society' to resist foreign cultural encroachment (Cho and Jeong, 2008, p. 458). Like Canada and France, Beijing tries to preserve a level of domestic 'soft' power by limiting cultural imports. While neither Japan nor China are historically immigrant cultures, this alone does not limit cultural flows in or out. For Beijing, regime legitimacy matters more.

Tokyo, however, does not exhibit the same level of concern about foreign cultural encroachment. Calling for greater cultural and intellectual exchange to share ideas with the world, its chief cultural diplomat, instead, argues that Japanese cultural strength has been its ability to absorb foreign influences, yet maintain traditional ways (Monji, 2009). First, Tokyo seeks to more effectively advocate its traditional culture. Here, there is some symmetry with centrally directed Chinese initiatives. Like the Confucius Institutes, the state-funded Japan Foundation is promoting the Japanese language by inviting 500 foreign teachers on fully paid courses, together with plans to establish 100 Japanese-language hubs globally by 2010. The Japan Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) also provides access to cultural norms, which teachers disseminate on their return home. Mirroring China's moves to increase foreign student intake, Tokyo plans to attract 300,000 foreigners. Just as China's CCTV has gone global in English, with Arabic versions planned, Japan too has launched its NHK 24-hour global news channel in English. But while China promotes its traditional culture, Tokyo also advocates its contemporary pop and sub-culture, through its public-private approach.

Besides long-standing images of Japan such as *geisha*, Tokyo now markets its 'cool' popular cultural appeal in music, cuisine, *anime*, *manga*, video games, and fashion (McGray, 2002; Newcomb, 2008a). This 'non-traditional extension of a country' (Otmazgin, 2008, p. 98) presents 'soft' power projection in a new light. Then-Foreign Minister Aso (2007) happily accepted advice from Council on the Movement of People Across Borders to utilize the growing popularity of *manga* to promote Japan, 'if the use of pop culture or various sub-cultures can be useful in this process, we certainly should make the most of them'. *Anime* and *manga* are integral to Tokyo's revamped 'soft' power strategies, judging by recent initiatives. *Anime* is described as an 'important

diplomatic tool' by senior officials (*Anime News Network*, 2008). An International *Manga* Award has been established, while robotic cartoon cat *Doraemon* was appointed *anime* ambassador in March 2008. *Hello Kitty*'s unveiling as tourism ambassador followed in May 2008. In February 2009, *Kawaii* (cute) ambassadors were designated fashion trend communicators. These were proactive strategically chosen initiatives, in consultation with private partners.<sup>4</sup> Even sub-culture events are gaining official blessing. The Annual World Cosplay Summit (where players dress up like their favorite comic characters) involves the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) partnering with TV Aichi and Central Japan International Airport. With dark-suited officials hosting outrageously dressed cosplayers, 'ironically, being "cool", "fun", and "hip" have now become serious business for the Japanese state' (Lam, 2007, p. 351). Just as sports fostered an image of America that 'is neither military hegemon nor corporate leviathan – a looser place, less rigid and more free' (Nye, 2004, p. 47), popular culture has altered impressions of Japan from economic titan to 'creative' and 'cool'.

### 3.3 Attractive values and norms

Crucial in Nye's formulation is how a state can better project 'soft' power, if its policies reflected or enhanced appealing international norms and values. China's newfound multilateralism burnishes its image as a benign power (Congressional Research Service, 2008, p. 7), having established the Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), and inking a non-aggression treaty with ASEAN. Its support for international institutions indicates a strong alignment with Nye's framework. Beijing has also been shoring up global financial stability with loans to the IMF and supporting the Korean *won*. To further demonstrate alignment with global norms, Beijing has highlighted efforts to curb pollution (successfully during the Olympics), environmental degradation, and food-safety issues that plague its image (Ogoura, 2007).

Western sources suggest China also attempts to 'project "soft" power by portraying its own system as an alternative model for economic development' (Congressional Research Service, 2008, p. 3). The Beijing Consensus, coined by Westerner Joshua Cooper Ramo, ostensibly

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4 Interview with senior Japanese diplomats, Tokyo, July 2008.

embodies values that appeal to developing countries. China's non-interference, political stability, economic growth, and no-strings-attached aid stand in contrast to Western conditions for political freedoms, deregulation, or human rights. Yet, Beijing does not officially endorse the Beijing Consensus, wary of challenging American values, fuelling the very China 'threat' debate that 'soft' power was meant to dispel (Cho and Jeong, 2008, p. 464). While many Chinese elites laud their economic developments, there is 'disagreement on whether or not the Chinese experience is or should be a source of "soft" power' (Li, 2008, p. 298). The social/environmental costs accompanying breakneck development are also not exactly attractive features. Given the absence of a clear underlying message, 'the lack of assertiveness in China's "soft" power discourse reflects that China has few political values to offer to a world still dominated by Western philosophies' (Li, 2008, p. 288).

Japan though appears to be thinking seriously about norm-alignment and value-promotion. The Council for the Promotion of Cultural Diplomacy reported in 2005 that harmony, compassion, and coexistence are core values that Japan could use to bridge diverse cultures (Kondo, 2008, p. 201). Its experience of atomic warfare and subsequent peace diplomacy are appealing traits. Tokyo also derives 'soft' power from its liberal democratic government, as a 'civilian power' (Inoguchi and Bacon, 2006) with a Pacifist Constitution. Besides attractive domestic values, the *Asahi Shimbun* (2007) and Nye (2007) propose that Japan can play a 'leading role with "soft" power' to tackle global problems such as poverty, aging, climate change, and 'providing global public goods' including stabilizing financial institutions. Tokyo should also provide the 'catalyst for solving global health problems' (Kondo, 2009), having put malaria on the G8 agenda. Showing how to resolve these global problems, Japanese diplomats argue, would provide a great source of 'soft' power (Monji, 2009). Some recent initiatives illustrate this rationale. The 'Cool Earth Partnership' helps African countries manage climate challenges, while reconstructing Afghanistan 'symbolizes strength in "soft" power building' (Noguchi, 2008). A January 2009 \$17 billion aid package for Asian countries to avert protectionism reflects Japan's support for global norms 'that the flow of trade and investment not be prohibited' (BBC News, 2009a). Another \$100 billion loan to the IMF 'demonstrated Japan's leadership on a multilateral approach to global financial challenges', declared IMF chief Dominique Strauss-Kahn,

hoping Tokyo's example attracts 'other countries to follow suit' (Bangkok Post, 2009). While Strauss-Kahn's statement could be a rhetorical device to ensure continued Japanese support, primary sources such as the June 2009 annual report of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry too recommend Japan redefine itself as the world's troubleshooter on such global issues.

Consistent with Nye's argument that 'soft' power can attract others to cooperatively deal with trans-national challenges such as climate change, Japan is beginning to 'position itself as a leader in the world's urgent quest to live greener' (Newcomb, 2008b), while China is lambasted for lax environmental regulations. Providing 'environmental and sustainability education might be a global "soft power" niche for Japanese universities to fill' (Hesse, 2009). The Kyoto Protocol, 'green' technologies such as Prius hybrid cars, and recycling initiatives help make Japan attractive to others learning about environmentally sustainable development. These also demonstrate a long-standing Japanese ideal: the notion of *mottainai* (waste not). Launching the first ever satellite to monitor greenhouse emissions, the Japanese Space Agency will 'contribute to the international effort toward prevention of (global) warming' (BBC News, 2009b). This demonstrates Japan's alignment with global environmental norms, and Nye's (1990, p. 154) observation that 'a country that stands astride popular channels of communication has more opportunities to get its messages across and to affect the preferences of others'.

### 3.4 Economic resources

Although economic initiatives occupied an ambiguous position in Nye's 'soft' power pantheon, Beijing and Tokyo appear less ambivalent at first glance. Using commercial diplomacy and overseas development aid (ODA) from Latin America to Africa, China has signed numerous agreements to boost its image as a constructive actor, especially in nations possessing strategic resources (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 48). Its economic growth serves as a veritable 'promised land' for impoverished neighbors (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 56). Although Nye stressed political values, the Chinese discourse prefers the attractiveness of Chinese economic development (Cho and Jeong, 2008; Wang and Lu, 2008, p. 431). While most secondary Western literature equates Chinese commercial diplomacy with 'soft' power, Chinese sources are less clear-cut. Whereas Chinese

officials clearly present its cultural activities as ‘soft’ power, it has yet to do the same with its commercial diplomacy. This suggests that Beijing might not quite view its commercial diplomacy as tantamount to its cultural ‘soft’ power activities.

Furthermore, it seems difficult to maintain a strict theoretical distinction between attraction and inducement. China’s growth is undoubtedly attractive, but Beijing is also capitalizing on this underlying attraction by offering incentives to induce at the same time. For instance, doubts remain over whether Chinese ODA and trade agreements constitute attractive ‘soft’ power or merely another form of inducement. Since ODA is channeled to sympathetic rather than needy organizations, recipients realize that accepting aid means giving donor countries influence (Austin and Harris, 2001). Providing a *quid pro quo* rather than simply attraction *per se*, ODA can be a type of ‘carrot’ to ‘purchase’ power (Arase, 1995). Furthermore, Chinese economic tools seemingly emphasize ‘hard’ power needs (raw materials) over values.

While China refrains from explicitly and officially promoting values through its commercial diplomacy, Japan sees its’ economic influence reflecting attractive values. Ostensibly concerned about China’s activities there, Tokyo, in May 2008, doubled its aid targets to Africa by 2012. Then-PM Aso called ODA a ‘respectable means to export Japanese culture and to disseminate Japanese values’ (cited in Beech, 2008). These include the Japanese work ethic of meeting deadlines and manufacturing excellence, as well as helping countries like Cambodia draft legal and civil codes (Aso, 2009a, b). Japan’s Meiji-era modernization and post-WW2 economic recovery, reaching Western living standards while retaining its cultural identity, served as a model of attraction for other Asian states like Singapore, the so-called flying geese model. How Japan modernized without losing its soul is something that many Japanese are keen to promote (Ogoura cited in Beech, 2008).

### 3.5 Measuring impact

Critics argue that Nye neglects the interactive nature of persuasion, ‘viewing things from the perspective of the party exercising power’ (Ogoura, 2006, p. 49). But ‘soft’ power works indirectly by shaping the environment, sometimes taking years to achieve desired outcomes (Nye, 2004, p. 99). A causal relationship between inputs and outcomes cannot



be determined precisely. How could one, for instance, determine whether *Doraemon* has achieved his task to ‘deepen people’s understanding of Japan so they will become our friends?’ Nye would not be surprised that attempts to do so usually involve opinion polls (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 23; Kurlantzick, 2007). These range from the Pew Global Attitudes Project to BBC/Globespan polls.

The 2008 Anholt-GfK Roper Nation Brands Index measures a country’s appeal in six dimensions using public opinion data: exports, governance, culture, people, tourism, immigration, and investment. Ranked 28th, China scores lowly on governance and consumer safety. However, with polls indicating that Asian countries see China’s rise favorably (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 24; Cho and Jeong, 2008, p. 454), the reason might well be ‘soft’ power allowing Beijing to shape opinions. The tripling of foreign students in the past decade is also viewed favorably, though the assumption that these return home as pro-China elites cannot be reliably quantified. Lack of data on overseas aid, multiple agencies with little oversight, and uncertainty over follow-up action further complicate attempts to ascertain Beijing’s influence (Congressional Research Service, 2008, pp. 1–2). Overall, China’s ranking has slipped ‘despite strong economic relationships in Asia and the world, and concerted efforts to leverage the Olympic Games to bolster its image’ (Chicago Council on Foreign Affairs, 2008).

Japan by comparison rates highly. Officials often cite a 2008 BBC/Globespan survey placing Japan’s global image at No. 2.<sup>5</sup> Recent 2009 BBC/Globespan data suggest Japan has fallen to fourth, but still surpassing China. Otmazgin (2008, p. 88) and Sugiura (2008) also utilize market surveys and export data to quantify the impact of Japanese cultural products. These show how 65% of the world’s animated series are made in Japan or how young people in Hong Kong preferred Japanese over American dramas (Otmazgin, 2008, p. 95). Although such data provide some sense of Japanese ‘soft’ power influence, these do not provide observable cause–effect relationships generating desired policy outcomes. The Japan Foundation itself is hampered by ‘lack of meaningful forms of evaluation of its activities’ (Vyas, 2008), such that attempts are ongoing to systematically develop questionnaire surveys.<sup>6</sup>

5 Interview with senior Japanese diplomats, Tokyo, July 2008.

6 Discussions with Japan Foundation officials, Tokyo, July 2009.

Thus, [Watanabe and McConnell \(2008, p. xxiv\)](#) argue for a more sustained concern with ‘indigenisation of “soft” power’ beyond the ‘blunt instrument of polls’. For instance, [McConnell \(2008\)](#) interviews JET participants on why they have not constituted a pro-Japan faction when they return home. [Nakano \(2008\)](#) surveys Chinese students on why their attraction to Japanese pop culture failed to sway perceptions of the state.

#### 4 A ‘soft’ power balance sheet

Having outlined Japanese and Chinese initiatives on ‘soft’ power, this section evaluates relative strengths and weaknesses, beginning with policy-making models. A top-down competitive approach pushed vigorously by the state might appear coercive, rather than attractive. Yet, ‘the debate over how directly or indirectly the government should try to control its “soft” power instruments can never be resolved because both sides make valid points’ ([Nye, 2004, p. 103](#)). Chinese experiences vividly illustrate this debate.

China ‘excels in central coordination of public diplomacy activities and is a leader in this field’ ([Melissen, 2005, p. 8](#)). Its autocratic regime faces few constraints for centrally directed deployment of assets in strategic priorities, conferring ‘competitive advantages’ ([Congressional Research Service, 2008](#)). The disbursal of \$6.6 billion to state-owned *Xinhua* and CCTV to expand abroad illustrates how government-sponsored programs can ‘mobilise resources to a level inconceivable in the private sector’ ([McConnell, 2008, p. 31](#)). While China smacks of a top-down ‘state-centred hierarchical model’ ([Hocking, 2005, p. 29](#)), this also contains limitations. Beijing cannot ‘shake off old habits, hiding information and its highly centralised, state-controlled model of “soft” power is caught between image projection and lack of openness, a form of modernised propaganda’ ([d’Hooghe, 2005, p. 102](#)). Its anti-satellite test and incursions into Japanese waters raise additional questions over coherence of its ‘soft’ power strategy ([Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 30](#); [Gill and Kleier, 2007](#)). There is also a growing backlash against Chinese imports and migrants, especially in Latin America and Africa.

The limits of state direction too plague Japanese efforts. The state-funded Japan Foundation faces hurdles, because being ‘identified with the state... its ability to tap into the “soft” power of wider Japanese culture may be limited’ ([Vyas, 2008](#)). [McConnell \(2008\)](#) also harbors

doubts over the much-touted JET program, as participants separate their interest in Japanese culture from the state. Furthermore, unresolved debates remain between the Japan Foundation and MOFA regarding which image of Japan to promote.<sup>7</sup> Ancient *ikebana* or contemporary *manga*? Bureaucratic turf wars have similarly hampered the JET program in the past (McConnell, 2008).

While China's competitive 'soft' power benefits from state largesse, Japan is driven by the opposite: budgetary constraints make partnerships a cost-effective way to do more with less. Rather than Beijing's 'state-centric model', Tokyo's use of non-hierarchical flexible actors could represent what Hocking (2005, p. 37) termed a 'network' model. MOFA's Overseas Exchange Council now comprises 'wise men' from its cultural industries that 'frankly speaking, the Ministry has not interacted with much in the past' (Aso, 2006). Kondo (2008), thus, envisions the government serving as a 'network hub' for low-visibility efforts to facilitate private-sector creations. Using cultural media (e.g. *manga*) provides subtle means of lessening identification with the state. Japan's cultural appeal appears fun, non-political, and demand-driven from overseas consumer interest, rather than supply-driven by state bodies (Kelts, 2008). As Nye's (2004, p. 16) theoretical formulation suggests, "'soft" power depends more than "hard" power upon the existence of willing interpreters and receivers'. Attraction depends on acceptance by receiving audiences, which is why Japan's cooperative approach perhaps works best.

Yet, a private–public approach carries its own limits: projecting 'soft' power 'was not the original intent of the producers of *manga* and *anime*' (Lam, 2007, p. 351). While politicians may swoon over it, cultural agents that actually produce 'soft' power, such as Director Miyazaki Hayao, have criticized official promotion of *manga*, arguing it should remain a private activity. *Manga* artist Ishizaka Kei has lampooned the proposed National Centre for Media Arts, '*manga fans would not come and look at original drawings hung in frames using government money*' (Corkrill, 2009). Other *manga* artists, however, welcome the injection of government resources. Tokyo's and Beijing's experiences reaffirm Nye's (2004, p. 17) observation that 'soft' power is not something a state can generate on its own, 'much of American "soft" power has been produced by

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7 Interviews in Tokyo, August 2008.

Hollywood, Harvard, Microsoft, and Michael Jordan... indeed, the absence of policies of control can itself be a source of attraction.’ Many sources of ‘soft’ power ‘spontaneously emerge and are largely beyond the reach of state guidance’ (Otmazgin, 2008, p. 97). Speaking to digital content animators, then-Foreign Minister Aso (2006) acknowledged that ‘what you are doing through your work is something that we over at the Ministry couldn’t do if we tried’. It is significant that Aso, perhaps the most ardent Japanese ‘soft’ power advocate, recognizes the limits of excessive governmental involvement.

#### 4.1 Norms and values

If one abides by Nye’s definition of values as a source of ‘soft’ power, ‘Beijing’s domestic political values stand out as a major handicap’ (Yoshihara and Holmes, 2008, p. 134). With deplorable human rights records, ‘China cannot offer people a comprehensive and inspiring vision’ (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 229), not to mention rural–urban inequality, rampant corruption, and environmental degradation. Closely linked to the state, Chinese ‘soft’ power is constrained by policies toward Sudan, Zimbabwe, Tibet, and Taiwan that create a real ‘legitimacy problem’ (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 28). Overall, China’s ‘soft’ power is built around a ‘narrow base of achievements’ (Congressional Research Service, 2008, p. 11). A BBC/Globespan (2009) poll concludes, ‘China has much to learn about winning hearts and minds in the world. It seems that a successful Olympics has not been enough to offset other concerns that people have’. Despite the Chinese discourse insisting that appealing values are strongly reflected in foreign policy concepts such as ‘Peaceful Development’, ‘harmonious world’, and ‘responsible power’ (Li, 2008; Wang and Lu, 2008), how exactly this ‘harmonious’ view could reshape the world has not generated specific policies or ideas emanating from Beijing. Chinese scholars also rarely discuss political ideology in promoting ‘soft’ power, emphasizing culture over political values. ‘This is key evidence of the absence of a grand Chinese “soft” power strategy’ (Li, 2008, p. 306).

Compared with China, ‘Japan is benefiting because of what it isn’t’ (Beech, 2008). It is not an authoritarian power curtailing human rights and exporting poor environmental regulations. Instead, Japan embodies best-practice environmental standards, while recent administrations emphasize its place in the ‘arc of democracy’ linking Australia and India.

The spread of freedom of information in Japan also could inspire admiration elsewhere (Repetta, 2008). Tokyo's policies are broadly aligned with global norms including climate change, and supporting global public goods such as financial stability. More explicitly articulated than the Chinese discourse, underpinning these policies are ideas emanating from Tokyo, such as the 'Spirit of *Wa*' (harmony) and co-existence with nature (Monji, 2009). Japanese lawmakers themselves argue that 'because Japan's financial system is the least tainted at the moment, we have the opportunity to help save the world and spread a message of social responsibility' (Beech, 2008). However, corruption scandals and political disarray undermine the attractiveness of its liberal democracy. Japan has had seven defense ministers since 2007.

#### 4.2 *The private sector*

In terms of transmitting attractive norms, NGOs can 'transcend national boundaries and reveal global characteristics based on universal values' (Kuroda and Imata, 2008, p. 275). They are more readily accredited by receivers than state agencies (Vyas, 2008). But China's authoritarianism not only repels rather than attracts, it also stifles the NGO sector and creativity of its people (Nye, 2005). This amounts to a flaw in Chinese strategy: what the Congressional Research Service (2008, p. 12) calls neglect of 'the private sector calculation'. Since diplomats may not be the best vehicle of 'soft' power, 'using non-governmental agents of the sending countries' own civil society and employing local networks in target countries might be more effective' (Melissen, 2005, p. 16). Tokyo's private–public partnership could prove a comparative advantage, since Japanese 'soft' power is increasingly in the hands of NGOs and the business sector (Ogoura, 2008). But, although Tokyo has strengthened NGO–government dialogue, budgets allocated to NGOs remain low, perhaps due to a failure to 'see the "soft" power that can be exerted by NGOs in influencing foreign relations' (Kuroda and Imata, 2008, p. 270). This potential role is illustrated by the Nippon Foundation and Sasakawa Foundation injecting £2.5million for new lectureships to stem a slide in Japanese studies in the UK.

#### 4.3 *Culture and history*

Despite contemporary cultural appeal, its past history constrains Japanese 'soft' power (Kurlantzick, 2007; Lam, 2007). The *Asahi*

*Shimbun* (2007) observes, ‘When the Prime Minister or leading politicians make provocative remarks that stir mistrust or anger, Japan quickly loses its attractiveness to other countries’. Furthermore, since ‘soft’ power is derived from values, ‘for Japan to be perceived as a legitimate proponent of democracy and human rights, it must clearly and irrevocably cut ties to its imperial past’ (Fouse, 2007). China though derives considerable benefit from history, employing themes of past victimization. Its longer history of deep-grained engagement with Asia also implies broader cultural reach. Although its popular cultural impact is growing, with basketball star Yao Ming and Academy-award director Zhang Yimou, Chinese cultural industries still lag behind in generating ‘soft’ power (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 27). Besides internal debates on whether Chinese traditional culture has anything to offer the world, doubts also exist over an essentialist understanding of ‘Chinese culture’, given China’s regional ethnic diversity (Li, 2008, p. 293). Nonetheless, China has global cultural aspirations. Hu Jintao has proclaimed ‘Chinese culture belongs not only to the Chinese, but also to the rest of the world’ (cited in Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 19).

What exactly to project outward has also caused some debate in Tokyo over a highly stylized traditional cultural core of ancient traditions like *kabuki*, as opposed to the everyday mundane routines of contemporary Japanese lifestyles including *manga*.<sup>8</sup> While Tokyo’s determination to promote Japanese is constrained by lack of global appeal of its universities and language (Lam, 2007), Japanese popular culture might change this. As Senior Vice-Minister Onodera (Anime News Network, 2008) remarked,

years ago, business was the main motivation for foreigners to learn the Japanese language. But nowadays, people learn Japanese because they want to read Japanese manga, play Japanese games and read books on games before they are translated.

Whereas learning Mandarin is related to commercial opportunities in China, people studying Japanese out of curiosity engage deeper with that culture (Vyas, 2008). Thus, ‘the Japanese language is also a form of “soft” power’, declared Aso (2009a, b).

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8 Discussions with Japanese diplomats, Tokyo, July 2008.

Where Beijing has courted kinship ties abroad, Japan is ‘hampered by the lack of a sizeable diaspora overseas’ (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 204). Yet, despite Beijing targeting its diaspora, ‘ethnic Chinese in Indonesia go to China and find they don’t like China... they are disappointed in how different they are from the Chinese’ (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 232). This constrains ‘soft’ power predicated on ethno-cultural ties. Japanese popular cultural efforts by comparison are ‘decentered’ (*mukokuseki*) (Iwabuchi, 2002). *Hello Kitty*, for instance, is surnamed White, living in London with parents George and Mary. She does not take a ‘great cultural leap’ to embrace, with her ‘national ambiguity’ (McGray, 2002). In obscuring nation-state boundaries, such icons present ‘the non-nationalistic and non-dogmatic side of Japan, reflecting positive and friendlier aspects’ (Otmazgin, 2008, p. 96). These remain ‘distinctively Japanese in style, yet have universal appeal among the young’ (Lam, 2007, p. 350). *Anime* such as Miyazaki’s *Spirited Away* contains no explicit Japanese references, seeking to transcend country-specific cultural identities in favor of post-modern global ‘soft’ power based on universal values (Ogoura, 2008). Even the ‘everyday’ lifestyles of ‘ordinary’ Japanese which routinely emphasize convenience, cleanliness, comfort, sophistication become ‘an irresistible attraction’ rooted in a ‘universal lifestyle culture’ (Wang, 2007).

However, while Japan’s popular culture is ‘effective in reaching individuals in a trans-national encompassment’ (Otmazgin, 2008, p. 98), its effects vary. What attracts young adults might not attract policymakers, hampering the ‘conversion of resources to diplomatic power’ (Otmazgin, 2008, p. 75). Fundamentally, there remains the contradiction of globally popular products such as *Hello Kitty* which do not embody any intrinsic Japanese values (Iwabuchi, 2002), besides the item being consumed. Confucius Institutes too do not articulate any clear overriding political values (which we have already seen is a weakness of Chinese ‘soft’ power), besides showcasing traditional Chinese culture. By comparison, American popular culture conveys more explicit political ideas and philosophies. Similarly, if Japanese cultural exports are primarily confined to *kawaii* (cute) consumer items, does this meet Nye’s theoretical requirements for ‘soft’ power?

Furthermore, Otmazgin (2008) claims that Japan’s promotion of its cultural industries is driven by economic profit, contradicting Nye’s focus on appealing values. Although *Doraemon* was to share globally ‘what

kind of future Japanese want to build' (Newcomb, 2008c), JETRO figures also indicate that the US market for *anime* products was \$4.35 billion in 2007. *Hello Kitty* generates \$1 billion in global annual sales, while *cosplay* costumes rake in an estimated 35 billion Yen in 2008. Critics suggest that despite 'wide usage of "soft" power terminology, the term has been given a meaning that is very different from Nye's original definition... the economic value of the Japanese cultural export is considered a first priority' (Otmazgin, 2008, p. 82). Then-PM Aso (2009b) himself considered cultural 'soft' power crucial to Japan's 'future development strategy... by utilising this "soft" power to create a new range of industries and jobs'. Hence, a purist understanding of 'soft' power with self-contained cultural dimensions might be unrealistic.

#### 4.4 Publicity/impact

'Soft' power emphasizes attraction but what if receiving audiences fail to realize the source of attraction through lack of awareness? Japan's reserved form of presentation lags behind Chinese publicity blitzes (Kurlantzick, 2006). 'The Japanese indirectly and quietly present a value system through creation of objects or artistic expression, but struggle to present their philosophy forcefully through words and ideas' (Kondo, 2008, p. 194). The International *Manga* Award was 'rolled out with virtually no effort to publicise it in the global media' (Kelts, 2008). Even fewer locals realize that Tokyo funds and maintains lighthouses in the Straits of Malacca. Engaging Saatchi & Saatchi might help market its image better.<sup>9</sup> Ogata admits, 'Japan's reticence and modesty has not been very helpful in terms of information about what it does in the world' (cited in Beech, 2008). Whereas 'in true Japanese style the point is made without fanfare' (Newcomb, 2008a), Beijing trumpets its activities. After resisting pressure to devalue its currency during the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, its Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2000) declared that, 'The Chinese Government, with a high sense of responsibility, decided not to devalue its currency the *renminbi* in the overall interest of maintaining stability and development in the region. It did so under huge pressure and at a big price.' The Chinese style emphasizes symbolic relationships, high-profile gestures, such as rebuilding the Cambodian

9 I thank Dr. Ralf Emmers, Singapore, August 2008.



Parliament or Mozambique Foreign Affairs Ministry (CRS, 2008, p. 11). A novelty factor also explains why China receives more attention. Recipients are accustomed to Japan's presence; China is a relative newcomer (Kurlantzick, 2007, p. 100).

## 5 Conclusion

In the 21st century, 'success depends not only on whose army wins, but also on whose story wins' (Nye, 2005). 'Soft' power is crucial in telling that story: 'the way a country is perceived can make a critical difference to the success of its business, trade and tourism efforts, as well as its diplomatic and cultural relations' (Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index, 2008, p. 5). Furthermore, the nature of strategic contention has changed such that 'competition in "soft" power has become more and more important in international relations' (Wang and Lu 2008, p. 435).

Reflecting the basic premises of Nye's theoretical framework, Japan seems to have developed a well-rounded foundation of 'soft' power built around its attractive popular and traditional culture, together with values and norms embodied in its policies. Tokyo is deploying its multifaceted 'soft' power as a potential 'global leadership niche' (Newcomb, 2008c). Although intertwined with economic gain rather than attractive values *per se*, Japanese support for global public goods such as financial stability and poverty reduction reflects prevailing global norms. Ironically, facing declining budgets, Tokyo's revamped 'soft' power now stresses attractive cultures and norms in its policies, rather than a previous reliance on ODA. While its higher education and NGO sectors are under-utilized, its war-time past remains the biggest elephant in the room. Japan's cooperative approach though holds potential for making 'soft' power a plus-sum game (Kondo, 2008; Ogoura, 2008). Indeed, a 'challenge for Japan and East Asia in the 21st century is to transcend parochial nationalism and jointly produce East Asian cultural products which can appeal to the West and the rest' (Lam, 2007, p. 360). 'Soft' power need not be a zero-sum game. Countries can cooperatively increase their 'soft' power for solving trans-national challenges (Watanabe and McConnell, 2008, p. xxiii).

While recognizing Japan's constraints, China too has its fair share of shortcomings, despite ticking many boxes with its cultural appeal, political values of non-interference, policies of multilateralism, and economic

growth (Ogoura, 2007; Yoshihara and Holmes, 2008, p. 126). China ‘has not yet developed an ideal mix of “soft” power resources to achieve desired foreign policy objectives . . . there is an imbalance between the three pillars of “soft” power: cultural attractiveness, examples set by domestic policies, and values expressed through foreign policy’ (Gill and Huang, 2006, p. 30). Furthermore, a range of interpretations exists, ‘some of which do not correspond with Nye’s definition’ (Wang and Lu 2008, p. 427), especially the domestic context of ‘soft’ power. Through its cultural appeal and Confucius Institutes, China has cultivated a more benign image and its popular cultural industries are growing, although there is a danger of Beijing over-playing the diaspora card. There is also movement toward alignment with global norms on the environment, financial stability, and terrorism. The greatest stumbling block remains the competitive state-led model and its authoritarian political system, which repels more than attracts. Recent rhetoric about an aircraft carrier and naval stand-offs in the South China Sea can undo all the charm Beijing has acquired. While the magic mirror replies that Japan is currently the ‘softer’ power, there is not yet a handsome prince in sight to facilitate China’s transformation into Snow White.

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