

Soft Power Internationalism

The last decade of the 20th century started with a tingling anticipation – and foreboding – about the opening of a new world. The dismantling of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the resulting reforms of communist regimes all indicated that the threat of a cataclysmic confrontation between two global alliances was over. The unpredicted fast forward to peace yielded joy, along with extreme speculation about what the post-Cold-War era would look like. Despite the obvious triumph of capitalism over communism, even Americans were apprehensive about owning their so-called victory. As journalist William Schmidt, after interviewing everyday Americans across the country, concluded in 1990, “while there was a strong sense that the Soviet Union had probably lost the cold war, few were willing to say the United States had won.”ⁱ

One reason surely was that U.S. foreign policy has a long history of interweaving American interests and values, but this diplomatic deftness always depended on a clearly marked enemy. With the end of the Cold War and the disappearance of that opponent, the country’s policymakers recognized an opportunity to shape, rather than react to, the rest of the world. “The problem for the United States will be less the rising challenge of another major power than a general diffusion of power,” Joseph S. Nye, Jr. proclaimed in 1990, while calling for a re-evaluation of foreign policy strategy.ⁱⁱ The unraveling of the Soviet Union without a military conflict and the growing attraction of democratic ideals around the world offered the glimpse of a more stable, less militarized peace — but also of multiple countries attempting to stake out a role in shaping international politics. Nye coined the term *soft power* as a response to the emerging new world. His simple definition of the concept, “getting others to want what you want,” aimed to provide a liberal blueprint for keeping a U.S.-led international

system in place. Rather than military might or economic sanctions, Nye suggested, it was cultural attraction, ideology, and international institutions that could align a multipolar, multi-civilizational world with the American imperium.

Soft power was an attempt to define a new capacity for U.S. foreign policy analogous to military and economic power, one that would make the highly visible American leadership more palatable to the rest of the world. Very much bound up with re-building the U.S.-led liberal international order, the concept was offered as a supplement to military force and economic control, not a replacement for them. Soft power would aim to reinvigorate the U.S.'s ability to engage, assist, and communicate with a variety of states and non-state actors. The effectiveness of this new power would derive from promoting democracy and human rights, collaborating with civil-society actors and international institutions and using information technologies to support cultural programs. In that sense, far from a radical revision of U.S. diplomacy, the U.S. aimed to mobilize its seemingly irresistible accumulations of symbolic capital and connect them to the surge of democratic feelings and institutions around the world, in tandem with American foreign policy and in the interest of legitimating American global primacy.

Possibly beyond what Nye originally intended, the concept soon took on a life of its own, evolving into a plausible foreign-policy agenda outside the United States. Countries engaged in what they called soft strategies to enhance their cultural influence and make it commensurate or even superior to their economic, political, and military weight. Inside the European Union, the agenda called for promoting "normative power." As new economic powers began to emerge in the early 2000s, they invested significantly in cultural diplomacy and expanded its toolkit of cultural programs,

humanitarian and development aid, public diplomacy and information technologies to project their ambitions into the world. Academic and business consultancies began to draw up soft power indices to establish new global hierarchies among nation-states. Civil society organizations and corporations also adopted the idea of soft power in their quest to assert influence worldwide and establish horizontal counter-power against governments. In the process, the term has become a marker of a new kind of global inter-state political competition, and potentially, a new model for multilateral global governance in the early 21st century — even as the U.S. has continued to dominate militarily.

This book explores this rapid spread of the concept of soft power across the globe over the last thirty years, and traces how the communication networks, normative concepts, and diplomatic practices associated with it imagined — and to an extent made possible — a multilateral, liberal, global politics that mainly worked to build on the expansion of global markets and tried to mitigate the extremist political reactions, bumptious claims of rising economic powers, and cultural fractures generated by a new world. We start from the paradox that as the concept of soft power was disseminated globally, it became a key word that concealed more than it revealed. Through a comparative lens turned toward the U.S, E.U, China, Brazil, and Turkey, we analyze what facilitated the adoption of the American notion of soft power and in what ways this notion evolved as a reaction to global and regional changes. The result is a study both of how a concept has taken hold worldwide and of a global moment in which many countries sensed a shift in international affairs and saw promise in this new phenomenon.

Methodologically, we combine a transnational critical theory with a historical-sociological approach to examine soft power as a distinct historical period, roughly from 1990 to 2015. Our goal is to de-provincialize the concept from the Euro-Atlantic locus in which it was initially formulated and debated. These five cases showcase the range of soft powers that have appeared over the last thirty years at the global and regional level. While the U.S. tried to claim the original model of soft power – even as it has attempted to modify it several times – the E.U. sought to develop a coherent alternative to U.S. leadership through norm-making, that is, normative power. China and Brazil have become formidable international actors over the last few decades, while Turkey tried to use its momentous economic growth in the 2000s to play an assertive role in the Middle East. All have used the soft-power turn as a way to rebalance the power of the United States and Europe, framing their values in post-colonial terms. Their appropriations of the idea of soft power revealed dimensions that its originator had perhaps not conceived of, while also shedding light on the increasingly globalized intra-state competition around the politics of persuasion.

Our genealogy of soft power starts in 1990 following the fall of the Berlin Wall and the bold proclamations about the end of the Cold War: Nye first introduced the term at a time when many countries were trying to understand their place in the world. We end our analysis circa 2015, when a cluster of events challenged the foundations of each hegemon's quest for normative leadership, thereby calling into question the premises of soft power, as it originated in the American post-Cold War context of the 1990s and after it was taken up by several countries, namely a multilateral, liberal order in international affairs, multi-vocality in global organizations, and the democratizing capacity of information technologies.

Rather than pinpointing a particular date that marks the concept's demise, we note the resurgent nationalism in domestic and foreign affairs, heightened regional conflicts, and a far more conflictual use of digital technologies as indicators of the recent radical diversion. Turkey's ambitions for regional influence were thwarted by domestic crises and the ongoing Syrian conflict; corruption scandals in Brazil exposed the vulnerability of the country's claim to international leadership; the limits of the E.U.'s power were revealed through the conflict in Ukraine, and the weakening of U.S. dominion in global affairs became much more pronounced with the repeated promises of now-President Donald Trump to decrease the country's external commitments. Among our case studies, it is only China that continues its commitment to soft power, much re-framed but also much more ambitious in scale.

The period between 1990 and 2015 is defined by what we call "soft-power internationalism," wherein aspiring regional or global hegemons not only relied on cultural resources to wield influence, but also actively countered established powers through non-militaristic means. Similar to the liberal internationalist project of U.S. foreign policy that aimed for ascendance through the promotion of liberal values,ⁱⁱⁱ soft-power internationalism enabled emerging powers to harness their own values in order to project influence. More acutely aware of the history and changing character of American dominance, many emerging powers recognized that conventional military means could not address complex policy conflicts demanding global leadership and inter-state collaboration, even as they continued to recognize the U.S.'s military superiority. These rising leaders turned to issues of human rights, public health, climate change or cooperative development to pursue national and multilateral interests in international affairs. From the elegantly choreographed ceremonies during the Beijing

Olympics to Turkey's plans to reestablish the one-time unity of the eastern Mediterranean, Middle East and the Horn of Africa or Brazil's attempt at diplomatic leadership in South-South relations, soft-power internationalism became the way to claim a benevolent form of hegemony.

Soft-power internationalism did not necessarily offer an alternative to either the so-called liberal international order or militarism, but it at least raised the prospect of a collective check to the unilateralist vision of American dominion after the Cold War.^{iv} It offered a new framework and politics of persuasion, whose apparatus now expanded to cultural institutes, development aid, communication technologies, multinational companies, public diplomacy, nation branding, and trade policies. As each actor brought distinctive civilizational resources to their endeavors (coming out of meta-narratives about their pasts, whether as empires or anti-colonialists), staked out different modalities of influence, and developed paradigmatic institutional practices, soft-power internationalism became a terrain on which emerging powers could challenge the hegemony of the US-led liberal international order.

Four features distinguish soft-power internationalism as a mode of governance, the first and most fundamental being that it was unabashedly bound up with the neoliberal project coming out of the 1980s. We see the effort to mobilize normative values and institutions of norms-making as another dimension to the more or less coordinated political project to encase free markets within an interdependent world in such a way as to insulate the global economy from the whimsical decisions of nation-states.^v From that perspective, the development of soft resources went hand in hand with the notion of sweet commerce, meaning that accelerating global trade would generate a wealth of transnational and international connections. Though reflecting

their own national interests, many countries would have to present themselves in the same normative language and thus be ancillary to the dominant nexus of global institutions, including the World Bank, the IMF and the European Central Bank, and trade agreements like NAFTA and the WTO, to effectively protect international capital from infringement by domestic policies or the unpredictability of democratic politics. The institutional nexus of neo-liberalism flourished with the booms and busts of the 1990s and early 21st century until the financial crisis in 2008, thereby accounting for the astounding economic growth of the BRICs, Turkey, and the E.U. This cycle gave fresh legitimacy not only to these international organizations, but also to the promise that these new global actors – and their soft power projects burgeoning from the commodity booms that made their states exceptionally well off in those years – could have a voice in them.

From China's legitimation of its international image through the WTO to integrating Europe toward a single market or Turkey's use of its Ottoman imperial past to develop new markets in the Middle East, soft-power internationalism reshaped diplomacy into market-confirming practices. The relationship between neoliberalism and soft-power internationalism was mutually beneficial. In the 2000s, as more countries accessed international-capital flows, grew their exports and benefited from rising commodity prices, they ramped up soft-power practices to advance their political and diplomatic standing around the world.

The second feature is that soft-power internationalism created a new kind of interdependence that did not fit traditional definitions of actors, ideologies, and alliances. Not only have many governmental institutions become significantly globalized since the Cold War's end; a new crop of actors shaping political demands

and opportunities has emerged in international politics. Multinational firms, civic groups, trade consultants, and transnational NGOs engaged more visibly with and contested conventional diplomats and political leaders as they all grappled with the political and economic risks and benefits of globalization. This new “policy interdependence” led not just to forging new kinds of alliances in different jurisdictions, but also highlighted the significance of norm-making and consensus-building in international affairs.^{vi} While soft-power internationalism generated a new kind of cooperation among state and non-state actors, its modus operandi presented itself as a pragmatic approach of mutual benefits and shared values, as opposed to pure ideologies. Subalternity, South-South solidarity or shared histories of poverty, for example, were taken up by countries like Brazil or China to build solidarity, in contrast to the way Western aid had been traditionally framed as unreciprocated gifts and used to reaffirm global leadership.^{vii}

The evolution of various information technologies into the global internet marks the third feature of soft power internationalism. This new kind of multilateralism came about not just from socio-cultural shifts in global politics, but from a new material network that intensified the ties binding international institutions, governments, and citizens. The hyper-connectivity enabled by computer networks since the 1990s has led to an intensified circulation of ideas, money, and people. The communicative promises of the global internet to foster social change and cultivate liberal democratic values were deeply embedded within the progressive narratives of expanding the liberal international order post-cold war.^{viii} Simultaneously a global broadcast medium, a gateway to competing in international markets, and a network that ties the critical infrastructures of nation-states to one another, the global internet has significantly

changed the pillars of statecraft in the 21st century. It created new industries, recast older ones that traditionally relied on global supply chains, and centered strategic communication at the heart of diplomatic initiatives. The global internet was not just a conduit to circulate soft narratives and mold public opinion; it has also become a competitive terrain on which countries, companies, and civil society actors mobilize their values and norms to reshape governmental control over cyberspace, and techniques of state-to-state and people-to-people communication.^{ix}

The fourth and perhaps most complicated feature of soft-power internationalism has to do with what it is not, or, better, what it claims not to be: war-making. While a soft approach to power was allegedly an antipode to warfare (“hard power,” as Nye called it), it never eliminated war, nor did it necessarily distance itself from the military

Of course, there is nothing new about the fact that soft forms of displaying foreign-policy leadership often go hand in hand with making war – even when the link is not at the forefront. From state propaganda to private publicity, governments – and peoples – always mobilize values and belief systems to distinguish between friends and foe in the name of drawing up either alliances or opposition. But the dialectical relationship between war-making and diplomatic publicity became blatantly obvious in the period of soft-power internationalism. If Nye’s concept began to be bruited in the early 1990s, the moment it took hold was in the wake of 2003, when the U.S. military saw soft power as a complement to the global war on terror. Fighting against an unspecified enemy with an always-shifting geographic scope, the military incorporated the techniques and discourse of soft-power internationalism into its never-ending occupations and renamed them “peace-building.” As anthropologist Madiha Tahir astutely recognizes, the adversaries in this new war were rarely defined by their

ideological or even legal status – they were merely against the U.S. culture, or, as George W. Bush once put it, “they hate our way of life.”^x Technological infrastructures that facilitate this war-making from distance, along with their promise of “precision,” were used to keep an illusory distinction between what the robots (making offensive attacks) and people (offering humanitarian support) did.^{xi} But, in the end, military action always complemented, if not eclipsed, soft power initiatives.

Nye eventually labeled this co-constitution of soft power and war-making “smart power,” which he described as “neither hard nor soft, but the skillful combination of both.”^{xii} (The concept’s original inventor was Suzanne Nossel, a long-time actor in U.S. foreign policy, media and human rights advocacy).^{xiii} When Hillary Clinton became secretary of state, she immediately adopted this new term to emphasize the role of “technology, public-private partnerships, energy, economics” that prop up traditional diplomacy, even as she stayed committed to guns, bombs, and tanks.^{xiv} As soft-power internationalism extended beyond the Euro-Atlantic sphere, a similar conflation of humanitarianism with military interventions reverberated through Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and Turkey’s 2019 attack on northern Syria.

Some soft-power critics point to the blurred lines between the soft, hard, and smart versions as indicators of the concept’s intellectual weakness, adding that it has always been challenging to measure soft power’s effectiveness. Yet we suggest that the vague premises and ambiguous boundaries of soft power are exactly what made the concept generative and appealing enough to cross borders. Even Russia, a country that has emerged as a significant critic of a West-centric liberal international order, has invested in soft-power internationalism to raise its profile in world politics. Stanislav Budnitsky and Melissa Aronczyk catalogue Russia’s foray into soft power in three

phases: “the humble and clumsy attempts to be liked in the West in the early and mid-2000s, the assertive promotion of Russia’s standpoint in the global media space after the 2008 Georgia War, and most recently the aggressive push to disrupt and divide the Western narrative following Putin’s 2012 return to presidency and especially with the beginning of the 2014 Ukrainian crisis.”^{xv} Russia’s most recent soft-power initiatives aim not just to upset what it calls Western narratives, but also to use tools of the internet and cultural programs to sow suspicion and disarray, thereby challenging the legitimacy of dominant global communication channels.^{xvi} This emerging version of soft power, what some pundits call “sharp power,” appears more state-driven, more centralized, and significantly less liberal, but it nonetheless showcases the deep appeal of managing political narratives, beliefs, and images in international politics.

After a prolific reign around the world for twenty-five years, soft-power internationalism has given way to bellicosity as more countries have started gravitating toward more nationalist, if not authoritarian, styles of domestic governing and adopting inward-looking foreign policies. The new key terms are trade war, cyber war, hybrid war, and sharp power. This shift clarifies that the illusion of soft-power internationalism as a distinct order of multilateral diplomacy, networked communications, and international civil society was perhaps just that, an illusion. Globally, it seemed to license the belief that countries could substitute cooperation for hostility, generosity for retaliation, and trade partnerships for military force, but it also obscured the fact that the pursuit of geopolitical interests by nation-states would always predominate in international affairs. The paradoxes and contradictions of this international order were bared by the 2008-2009 financial crisis that made it harder to sustain public diplomacy budgets, fractured trade-led global integration, and intensified regional competition.

While many countries scrambled to cope with the consequences of austerity, the U.S. and the E.U., so-called protagonists of soft-power internationalism, failed to burnish themselves as models of international liberal order.

But this sharp shift also underlines the fact that soft-power internationalism, albeit briefly, demonstrated that nations outside of the Euro-Atlantic context have the capacity not just participate in, but to shape international politics. The new hegemons benefitted from a thriving global capitalism, broke out of the traditional hierarchies of global governance, created new alliances among countries and peoples, and imagined global public goods collectively. This populist foreign-policy environment, certainly not what Nye intended back in the 1990s, aimed to generate new solidarities and sociality outside of the old Western colonial legacies. Trying to bind the world horizontally through connectivity among different state and non-state actors, soft-power internationalism attempted to even out the balance, despite the overwhelming military power exercised by the U.S. Most importantly, this soft diplomatic vitality attempted to respond to the fierce challenges of the 21st century.

Rather than deciding whether soft-power internationalism was a momentary illusion or a valid promise, this volume reveals the interlinked histories of how this hierarchy-breaking period of foreign affairs took shape as an intellectual project as well as a diplomatic practice. The essays in the first section probe the origins of culture, reputation, and global communication in post-Cold- War international relations **Victoria de Grazia** traces the genealogy of two key terms that appeared at the outset of the 1990s, soft power in the United States and normative power in Europe. Through the

distinct, yet intertwined, histories of these concepts and their intellectual architects, she reveals the divergent histories of Euro-Atlantic hegemony at the turn of the 21st century. Her review lays bare the contradictory relationship between the utility of intellectual concepts and their political import. While normative power fails to gain traction outside of Europe, its mere existence as a coherent program speaks to the rise of the E.U. as a new leader in international politics. Soft power, in contrast, elicits worldwide attention and cooperation, yet remains a testament to the decline of the U.S. as the only superpower.

Burcu Baykurt then examines one of the structural elements of soft-power internationalism, the making of the global internet as it was shoehorned into the larger ideal of creating horizontal, pluralistic, and democratic networks dominated by civilian power. The history of the global internet as a liberal myth parallels the history of soft-power internationalism: both projects begin in the 1990s with the marriage of the technological and economic interests of the U.S. dominion; enjoy a truly international, multilateral phase in the 2000s when various state and non-state actors circulate across cyberspace even as U.S.-origin companies (and to an extent the U.S. government) orchestrate both the material network of telecom and internet infrastructures and the soft messaging of global connectivity as a civilizing virtue; and face challenges from counter-hegemons from 2010 onward, as the U.S. origins of both projects are unmasked, as nation-states take issue with the mythology of a global internet and seek governmental control over digital information flows.

Chapters on Turkey focus on how the country has asserted itself as a regional power since the mid-1980s (the “Turkish model”), and how it significantly revised its foreign policy (“neo-Ottomanism”) after a new government came into power in the

early 2000s. After recounting Turkey's long history of reputation-building in global politics, **Dilek Barlas and Lerna Yanik** suggest that the shift toward a more pronounced adoption of soft power during the AKP government paralleled Turkey's shift from trying to integrate itself into an international order led by the U.S. and Europe to claiming a more autonomous role. Its historical and cultural heritage was an important soft-power asset in public diplomacy, and Turkey also exploited the opportunity of trade-driven foreign policy instruments as it tried to build ties with the Balkans, the Middle East, and Turkic-language areas of the former USSR. **Mustafa Kutlay** recognizes the influence trade-led powers like Japan and Germany exercised coming out of the 1980s to explore Turkey's endeavors from the first decade of the 20th century. His essay on the use of "economy as a problem-solving mechanism" in foreign policy discusses its limits given the economic turbulence, as well as the identity concerns and geopolitical conflicts in the region.

Priding itself on being "the republic of diplomats," Brazil emerged as another ambitious regional influence in the mid-1980s, immediately after the country moved from dictatorship to liberal government. Despite Brazil's uncertainty and suspicion about a new post-Cold-War global order, it quickly, as **Oliver Stuenkel** observes, became a natural leader in South America. From leading the charge in global trade and diplomatic negotiations to opposing the U.S.-led Iraq War, to making winning bids to host the World Cup and the Olympics, Brazil exploited its soft power capacity to project its regional and global ambitions. Particularly during the presidency of leftist populist Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the country expanded its humanitarian aid strategy and presented its domestic success in reducing poverty as a form of expertise in the Global South.

Brazilian soft power mobilized a new kind of South-South diplomacy, in which commitment to democracy and liberalism went along with horizontal solidarity, as opposed to the more traditional North-South developmental aid marked by verticality. Yet as **Fernando Santomauro and Jean Tible** astutely point out, this radical reimagining of humanitarian aid and cooperation suffered from the structural demands of global capitalism, geopolitical tensions, and the historical legacy of the country's peripheral status in international politics. What the authors call the country's "hovering illiberal clouds," its dependency on international finance, widespread corruption, selective scrutiny from international organizations, and clashing factions within the political establishment, brought first Lulismo and then the new model of diplomacy under attack. While Brazil's assertive foreign policy in the 2000s had the potential to challenge the hegemony of the Global North, its experience with soft-power internationalism also demonstrates the deep-rooted effects of peripheral dependency.

Among the countries we survey in the volume, China is the only one that has consistently and significantly invested in soft power even as similar initiatives in the U.S, EU, Brazil, or Turkey were slowing down.

Consistent development assistance in the African continent has been central to Chinese soft power. **Martina Bassan** reviews this relationship, which began in the mid-1950s as a shared struggle against Western hegemony and neocolonialism. Her analysis of China's recent investments and cultural diplomacy efforts in various African countries demonstrates not only the extent of its economic heft and cultural sway, but also the persuasiveness of its alternative views on global issues. China's rapid economic growth in recent decades and ambitions toward global leadership culminated in the 2013 announcement of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), intended to link the economies

of Europe, Asia, and Africa with roads, rails, ports, and telecom networks. The economic promises and perils of the BRI are a work-in-progress, but its political message is obvious: China is attempting to build a new model of global leadership in its image.

Pang Zhongying recounts this history of “soft power with Chinese characteristics,” which began when China learned of Nye’s original conception in the 1990s and began considering how soft power might go with a clear strategy of non-interference. In the 2000s, China slowly developed its own understanding of soft power and took up leadership positions in several regional and international organizations. As the country’s influence expanded into global trade, development, higher education, and the internet, however, Chinese soft power appeared to heavily rely on economic coercion and investment in military, thereby moving far from the original concept. By unpacking the evolution of Chinese foreign policy and its ambitious project of global leadership (one that mixes the country’s soft and hard capabilities), Pang suggests that China’s path to its current status as an emerging imperium was neither linear nor neat. He also questions the fluid boundaries between terms such as soft, hard, and sharp power, especially as they are applied to countries whose practices do not conform to Western traditions.

Anastas Vangeli examines how countries in Central, East and Southeast Europe have engaged with the BRI and how that reflects on China’s symbolic power. The BRI’s planetary vision for infrastructure growth prompts policy discussions that legitimate China’s centrality in global governance. It also introduces a new frame for partnerships between post-socialist Europe and China, one that, while awkward at times, nonetheless aims to upend established identities of the former socialist countries.

The last two chapters of the volume turn to the so-called main protagonists of soft power internationalism, the E.U. and U.S., and account for their failure in burnishing their leadership in international politics. If normative power in Europe had a radical vision, **Thomas Diez** asks what caused the crisis of EU foreign policy. Rather than placing blame on the waning influence of the U.S. or interference by domestic groups in EU policy, his answer is both a defense of the moral underpinnings of normative power and a realistic review of institutional capacity in global politics. There was, Diez suggests, a growing gap between the solidaristic vision of normative power, in which states look out not just for their own interests but those of others, and the structure of the E.U. as well as international society overall, which prioritizes preserving national sovereignty and non-intervention. The radical vision of normative power could only go so far when the structure of international politics remained stubbornly reformist.

Jack Snyder grapples with the worldwide rise of illiberal populist nationalism—and what that means for soft power and international relations. Many countries, advanced democracies as well as rising semi-democratic or even illiberal states, enjoyed the growth and strong partnerships facilitated by soft-power internationalism since the 1990s. Nonetheless the collective pull toward populist nationalism over the last few years is unmistakable. Drawing on Polanyi, Snyder recognizes this divergence as a response to the tension between unregulated markets and demands for mass participation, a tension that is pervasive in all these countries, albeit in different forms. This contradiction between markets and politics is nothing new, neither is illiberal populist nationalism, but is there potential for building solidarity among these illiberal countries and transitioning to an illiberal form of soft power? Without the structural

backbone of economic heft or military might, soft interventions alone do not carry much weight, Snyder suggests. More importantly, he argues that without shared principles among illiberal actors other than their commitment to putting self-interest above all else, it is impossible to conjure up an illiberal nationalist international peace.

Is soft power then only conceivable within a liberal international order? The evidence we have from the last thirty years points that way, but there is also emerging empirical work that examines illiberal countries' soft interventions in the era of a waning worldwide commitment to liberal internationalism. Media scholar Bilge Yeşil, for example, investigates how Turkey's soft-power interventions under an undeniably authoritarian regime exploit subalternity and deploy resentment to create regional solidarities.^{xvii}

Instead of being seduced by the soft interpretations of soft power, such as the effectiveness of messages or appeal of cultural frameworks, we focus on the political and economic conditions that made this particular epoch possible and how the practice of cultural power in international relations transformed global governance. By making the intellectual baggage and contradictory roots of soft power more visible and showcasing the varieties of soft powers in non-Western contexts, each chapter illuminates the underlying assumptions and expectations of a concept born of the post-Cold-War period. At a time when there is a pervasive sense that the liberal international order is unravelling, we hope this book provides insights into what has happened over the last thirty years and what it meant to sustain peace in a multipolar world, in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War.

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