

## CULTURE AS SOFT POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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**Abstract:** *A global approach has almost generalized over the last decades, suggesting that human security and, related to it – society security- are among the most important themes of contemporary international relations.*

*The management of the Yugoslavian crisis, the terrorist attacks of September the 11th, 2001, as well as the debates over US and its allies’ military interventions in Kosovo, Afghanistan or Iraq, pointed out, on the one hand, that states are not prepared to deal with the cross-border threats of the 21st century alone, and, on the other hand, the fact that military interventions (the “hard” approach to security) do not always represent the optimum solution in managing international security. However, peace-building and security building (the “soft” approach) are usually more discreet, do not attract attention, do not draw the media interest.*

*In recent studies, the issue of “soft” power and “hard” power has been increasingly discussed. “Soft” power refers to the power derived mainly from cultural and imagological sources, exercising its influence more through persuasion or by attracting the weak one to a particular model rather than by coercion. “Hard” power consists especially of military and economic means contributing to enforcing the will of one actor over another actor. These two forms of power do not exclude each other, but, on the contrary, combining “soft” with “hard” means facilitates greater efficiency in achieving the main goal.*

**Keywords:** soft power, hard power, mental power, cultural power, national power

### Introduction

Some authors seemed entitled to state that in the aftermath of the Cold War, a fundamental shift of emphasis occurred in the study of international relations from geopolitics and geostrategy towards geoeconomy [1] or from “hard” power towards “soft” power.

The national power of a state comprises both the material power as well as the mental power that the state owns at one time, for its survival and development. Mental power can be named “soft” power, and it comprises “soft” elements such as psychology and intelligence. These “soft” elements determine the role of “hard” power in tangible forms.

### Conceptual Delimitations and Characteristics

The concept of “soft” power is opposed to that of “hard” power. The American Professor, Joseph Nye, from the Harvard University, was the first to develop the concept of “soft” power [2] which he summarized as a country’s ability to attract others through ideas, values and ideologies. This kind of power resembles to formless power, such as culture, ideology and the social system.

“Soft” power is made up of political power, cultural and educational power and diplomatic power. The political power includes the politic system, strategic goals, social stability, national cohesion, the

national leadership system and the ability to organize and do politics.

The cultural and educational power includes the quality and human resource development, investments in education, the education system, the quality of teachers and professors, the quality of those working in culture, the media power, television, film, books, newspapers, journals and their influence on the international scene. Diplomatic power comprises foreign relations, foreign policy, foreign activity, and the capacity to contribute to the international community.

The "Soft" power characteristics are the following:

- *Traditionality*: every country's „soft" power is, in particular, the most important source of its cultural power, which becomes a reality after a long-term historical evolution of its people's way of thinking, of its ideology, cultural tradition, ethnique customs, social system, economic regim, life style, etc. In this process, each element of „soft" power always receives the influence of cultural tradition, and each culture has its own development path.

„Soft" power develops in this circulatory movement, contradictory but progressive, which bears the marks of its own tradition, specific to every nation;

- *Temporality*: „soft" power is an intangible power, but it is not a mirage. Its formation, development and consolidation is related to the historical background of its nation, with the domestic and international environment, in particular. Only the "soft" power which complies with the main course of history can develop steadily. In modern societies, the „soft" power has close links with scientific and technical development, with the economic development and the information society. „Soft" power increases with the discovery of new means and tools within international relations. The development of information tehnology has turned the media into a dynamic and influent instrument. With the entry of advanced media in international society, its impact on

international relations has expanded dramatically and became a hallmark of a state's national power;

- *Spreading*: the "soft" power has a strong capacity to spread and to compete. With the flow of information revolution and the development of Internet society, "soft" power crosses geografic borders, those of national ethnicity, of time and space, to give power to the progress of society and to have a tremendous impact on the lifestyle and standard behaviour of human kind. In the international society where more "soft" powers interact, competition and rivalry become inevitable, thus leading to conflicts and disputes. Anyway, in the contradictory process of spreading, "soft" powers, at the same time, attract and promote each other. Usually they reach a collective identity when interacting, they mutually adapt, teach and imitate one another;

- *Change*: "soft" power is not a static entity but a dynamic process. It is a great system changing, wherein the formation and the transit of power depends on the contradictory movement of its various components. National strategy, national ethics, diplomatic power, cultural and educational power, as well as the quality of governance, requires a shorter period of time to form, develop and change, in contrast to another element, such as nationality. These uncertainty and change are higher, therefore, they are easier to adapt to and undergo;

- *Dependency*: "soft" power and "hard" power are interdependent. Any country should develop both its "soft" power and its "hard" power in order to build a great national and international power. While developing its material strength, a country should develop its spiritual power as well. One without the other, could not be competitive. If the development of "soft" power is overlooked or ignored, then it will be difficult for "hard" power to maintain its sustained development. Power requires a rich cultural content and plays a mental

role in practice. Therefore, “soft” power and “hard” power are correlated, they support and are accountable to each other with a strong complementarity. “Soft” power is required in order to develop and implement national objectives as well as to mobilize and unify national will.

### **Culture as soft power**

“Soft” power is a kind of mental power and it is an important component of a state’s national power. All the “soft” elements of mental power are contained in the category of culture. The core of culture are the values. As to the content of culture, broadly speaking, we consider it comprises the materials and spiritual wealth created in the history of human society. In a narrower sense, we believe that culture is social ideology as well as the systems and the institutions related to this, including ideas, political thoughts, legislation, morality, art, religion and science. However, from whatever angle we look at it, culture is not a static entity but a dynamic process. As “soft” power, culture is relative to politics, economy and military.

Increased competition regarding current national power involves: economic power, scientific and technological power, defense power as well as cultural power.

A country’s cultural universality and its capacity to determine norms, rules and regims to govern international behaviour represent the key resources of that country’s power. Joseph Nye appreciates that the intangible power can be estimated based on the cohesion of a country, on its global cultural popularity and on its role within international institutions.

Without a strong national spirit, a nation cannot cope efficiently with an international crisis. Without cultural assets and without a global influence by resorting to culture, a nation cannot have a voice in international activities [3].

Culture, as “soft” power, is an essential part of national power. Many countries have chosen to strengthen international

competitiveness and influence through cultural development. Within the competition for national power, a nation’s “hard” power cannot be improved without the development of “soft” power. However, many people always place more emphasis on rivalry in terms of power, neglecting, at the same time, the competition of power, viewed as cultural power.

Due to the increased influence of “soft” power in international relations, the world powers emphasize the enhancement of “soft” powers. Even since the 1980s, the Japanese former prime minister Nakasone has proposed a strategic plan for “creating a culturally developed country”. The former French president Chirac suggested achieving a cultural Europe and establishing a European cultural community. The Russian president Putin has started implementing the “cultural expansion” strategy since he was interim president. In September 1992, the former American president Bush emphasized the importance of using American culture as a new type of “soft” culture within his agenda entitled “Agenda for America’s Revival”. In November 2000, another former American president, Clinton, held a seminar on the topic of American culture and of foreign relations, at the White House, aiming to achieve the 21st century American foreign cultural strategy. In the report concerning the national security strategy, Clinton settled clearly “encouraging the development of external democracy”, as being one of the three pillars of USA’s security strategy and foreign policy. This report states that, “extending the great family of democratic societies and of countries with a free market promotes the strategic interests of the United States” [4].

Currently, we consider the following as relevant major issues, in terms of “soft” power competition: the relations between human rights and national sovereignty; the control and influence on international institutions; the employment of market economy to impose culture; rivalry in

terms of human resources; the fight for a better position for the media; contradictions and collisions caused by ethnic and religious issues. There is a tendency for competition on national power, focusing on cultural power, to continue far into the new century. Although less developed countries are on a disadvantageous position in the competition for “soft” power, the power of the weak ones is not to be neglected. This is another source for intangible power. The competition of a powerful country can be retained due to a weak country, but with a better ability to organize and concentrate [5]. Thus, cultural advantages and disadvantages are relative. In international modern society, due to increased overlap of interests, diverse cultures present and learn reciprocally, while being in conflict with one another. However, nowadays, conflicts between diverse cultures are limited, partial and will not lead towards large-scale global conflicts.

In the evolution of international relations, the intangible “soft” power represents an engine that drives the relations between states or unions of states. This “soft” power, of a state, comes from: ideology, social system, its organizational mechanism, life style, the development model, cultural traditions, national values, ethnic characteristics, religious beliefs, informational resources, interdependency, mutual trust, etc. In this respect, the “soft” power can be named cultural power. In the international society of today, the competition concerning national power, based on cultural power, is an important phenomenon in developing international relations.

In our opinion, the impact of cultural power on international relations is that culture is a knowledge filter. Culture plays an important role in the decision-making process that involves political leaders, who make decisions in the light of cultural perceptions specific to their own culture. Leaders, states and people are affected by cultural differences that reflect

their own values, perspectives, interests, customs, and hopes. Failing to appreciate these differences will lead to wrong misinterpretations and misjudgements. Hence, obviously, cultural systems are closely linked to international relations.

- culture is a “navigation compass” in decision-making. Different states have different strategic preferences which have their roots in the early experiences of the state formation and which are influenced up to a point, by the psychological, political, cultural and cognitive characteristics of the state and of its political leaders. Cultural concepts strongly influence the way national leaders regard political issues, and often determine the solutions they choose to solve the issues, both individually and collectively. Thus, cultures are critical for these leaders, as long as they will address these issues in international relations. Therefore, culture is a “navigation compass” within international relations.

- culture represents the architect of international social trust. The competitiveness of a nation depends on a unique universal characteristic, and that is social trust. Some countries have a higher level of social trust, others have a lower level, which will influence the degree of cooperation in international relations. Culture determines the degree of social trust and influences the nature of the cooperation institutions. Culture is a model for structuring the social, economic and military institutions, exerting a strong influence on the behaviour and outlook of the world community.

- culture represents an important power for international integration. There is a strong trend of unification and homogenization in the rise and fall of civilizations. This trend reached the climax in the industrialization era. This is the thesis of cultural convergence. A critical aspect in terms of the convergence thesis is connected to temporal limitations. Hundreds of different social structures were possible, yet the basic features of

all advanced economies are relatively uniform: all have common institutions such as central banks, ministries of finances, technological research centres, schools at various levels, organizational systems such as the military one and dozens of other parallel structures. The homogeneity and complementarity of world cultures produce an irresistible ruling power to international relations.

- culture is a gene of conflict in international relations. About two decades ago, Samuel Huntington proposed the concept of “clash of civilizations”. He wrote that in the post-Cold War world the dominant source of conflict will be cultural in nature. Many agree with Huntington on the fact that, cultural differences will lead to conflicts, since the source of the conflict is related to the cultural gene. But the clash of civilizations should not be exaggerated or overstated as an absolute sentence.

We appreciate that a nation is a cultural system, and international relations are interactions between cultural systems. The role of culture, as “soft” power in international relations, can be summarized in two aspects: facilitates convergence and causes conflict. Both positive and negative effects of culture in international relations are reflected in the contradictory process of convergence and conflict.

Culture, as “soft” power, is a deep cause of the contemporary international relations model development. The transition in terms of configuration and adjustment of international relations between the great powers is really an adjustment of interest relations. Sharing interests is closely related to the orientation of values, and the orientation of values represents the core of culture. In this respect, the integration of different cultures facilitates interdependency of the great powers, increases the probability of pursuing common interests and consensus.

Culture represents a kind of formless “soft” power and it must play its role in international relations by means of some tangible media such as politics, economy

and the military system. The media, economic competition between famous brands as well as psychological battle within the military system, are all part of the competition between cultural powers. With the globalization of the world economy, national interests increasingly overlap and international interdependence is expanding. In the process of globalization, cultural conflicts that may occur during interactions will certainly be limited and reduced.

The increase of common interests will encourage mutual learning and integration between different cultures. Since the degree of integration of different cultures increases proportionally decreases the intensity of cultural conflicts. It is worth mentioning here that there are cultural differences even between cultures sharing the same cultural tradition. Even within the present European Union, that has made monetary unification, member countries do not diminish their various cultural characters.

EU soft power is less observed, although foreign and international policy analysts appreciate it more and more. And not only them. Otherwise one cannot understand EU attractiveness, especially to its neighbour countries, apparently stronger than that exercised over the Union’s own citizens. The fundamentals of global power are changing more and more, as globalization is becoming increasingly felt. EU global power manifests itself more as global influence, an influence that is growing as the Union expands its strategic vision. This influence does not necessarily regard military missions, which are actually quite shy and limited, but can include anything from the influence of the European currency (Euro) to the humanitarian missions within various theaters of operations or economic aid given to underdeveloped countries.

### **Conclusions**

We can conclude by stating that “soft” power is an important part of national power. There is still no agreement on its

definition. To summarize, “soft” power can also be called mental power. “Soft” power is a concept opposed to that of “hard” power, whereas mental power is a concept opposed to that of physical power, and culture opposes to politics, economy and the military system. It is also formless power, derived from factors such as the spirit (including psychology) and intelligence, both belonging to the category of culture.

Competition on national power in the world today is very intense. “Soft” power which revolves around cultural power has both positive and negative effects on the development of national power. Its implications on the evolution of international relations are increasing. Many contemporary international issues have deep cultural causes. Countries of the world pay more attention to the use of “soft” power in the service of national interests. Within the international politics of today, “soft” power resources are becoming increasingly important. The cultural construct is strategically vital to

the development of a country’s national power, to the increase of “hard” power as well as of the contributions and international influence.

“Soft” power that revolves around cultural power plays and will continue to play a major enduring role in the transition of international relations and in the global configuration.

In conclusion, our world is rich and colorful. The diversity of civilizations is the main feature and simultaneously the driving force behind the progress of human civilization. In the competition for national power, respect should be given to history, culture, social system and to the way each country develops. Diversity of the world is a reality that must be recognized. Different civilizations and social systems should enjoy long-term coexistence. They should turn to and benefit from each other throughout the competition and achieve common development while seeking to discover common issues and bridge differences.

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