

Going Soft? The US and China Go Global

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Edited by

Priscilla Roberts

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P U B L I S H I N G

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PREFACE

JULIA CHANG BLOCH

Whenever I describe the work of the US-China Education Trust to others, I naturally emphasize our hope to promote US-China relations. At these moments, there is something both true and incomplete about my words. It is true, on the one hand, that USCET aims to expand mutual understanding so that the United States and China can tackle global problems together, as well as resolve our differences in a spirit of cooperation. That notion is incomplete, however, because it does not spell out the following implication: more than anything else, we strive for better relations between the United States and China so that we may avoid last century's conflicts. We strengthen cooperation in order to undermine our reliance on hard power. By understanding each other, we sap our countries' need to compel each other primarily through force.

Yet just because we hope to minimize the reliance on hard power does not mean the United States and China will go through the twenty-first century without attempting to influence each other, let alone the rest of the world. Even if we are successful in shunning coercion, we will still have to win friends and allies by means of attraction. It is the ability to attract others to a nation's cause—soft power—that both the United States and China will need to develop continuously.

Unlike hard power, when one country accumulates soft power, this does not have to threaten that of others. Enhancing soft power can also improve our countries from within: while building weaponry merely requires cash, increasing our store of soft power demands we compete for influence on the basis of values. It calls for an open and creative culture, and asks that we abide by even-handed principles when dealing with others abroad. These are the terms by which great powers' effectiveness will be judged, not by the force of their arsenals. The world will be better off if both the United States and China embrace this mind-set.

I am therefore delighted that the US-China Education Trust (USCET) was able to organize the 2011 American Studies Network (ASN) Conference around the theme of soft power. The 2012 ASN conference that followed focused on American elections, which provided a selection

of papers that offer a fitting close to this volume. Even though whole societies build and exert soft power, it is political leadership that harnesses it—or squanders it—when representing a nation. For this reason, American elections continue to stir intense interest around the world—and as these papers attest, not least in China. If American soft power reflects the nature of the United States, our Chinese contributors show why elections reveal how the United States sets priorities for its use. We might even go further to say that, while no one claims the American electoral process is perfect, the way it generates ideas, participation, and debate is admired globally. In other words, US elections are themselves an element of American soft power.

We are therefore fortunate that Professor Priscilla Roberts of the University of Hong Kong has edited her and our third book-length publication drawn from USCET's ASN conferences. In addition to editing the contributions, Professor Roberts opens this volume with a fascinating look at soft power in recent transnational history. I hope her Introduction and the papers collected here will inform USCET's work to advance not just soft power but also understanding between both the United States and China for years to come.

Without the support of top administrators and academics at Northeast Normal University (NENU) and Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU), hosts and co-sponsors of the 2011 and 2012 ASN conferences, the meetings would not have been possible. A special debt of gratitude is owed to Professor Liang Maoxin, Director of the Institute of American Studies and InfoUSA@NENU, who has been a key partner for many of USCET's programs at NENU, and his colleagues Lv Hongyan and Ouyang Zhencheng, who served as conference coordinators. At BFSU, which has hosted three ASN conferences, we are particularly indebted to Professor Sun Youzhong, Dean of the School of English and International Studies; Professor Mei Renyi, long-time head of American Studies at BFSU; Professor Fu Meirong, deputy director of the American Studies Center; and Assistant Professor Chen Juebin, conference coordinator.

For both our 2011 and 2012 gatherings, the US-China Education Trust received additional program support from the Luce and Ford Foundations, and from the US Embassy in Beijing. Within China, their commitment to US-China relations has promoted the study of the United States and research that is as unique as it is insightful. I hope that readers of this book will agree.

Finally, thanks are due to the diverse group of scholars drawn from throughout mainland China and beyond, including the growing number of

members of the American Studies Network, who contributed their papers to this volume.

INTRODUCTION

GOING SOFT? THE US AND CHINA GO GLOBAL

PRISCILLA ROBERTS

The concept of ‘soft power’ has become almost a cliché in recent discussions of international affairs. The Harvard academic Joseph S. Nye, Jr., coined the term in 1990, just as the Cold War was ending. At a time when the United States was suffering from economic recession and soaring budget deficits, leading many Americans to question the wisdom of the massive defense expenditures of the 1980s during the administration of President Ronald Reagan, Nye contended that international influence was the product not just of straight military force, but also of a nation’s ability to persuade rather than compel others to follow its lead through the attraction and admiration that its overall values and way of life exert.¹ Nye’s thinking quickly became popular within the American political elite, winning him the appointment of Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs during Bill Clinton’s presidency. The idea that power could be derived from non-military assets and the ability of a nation’s culture, lifestyle, and ideology to appeal to the imagination of those outside its borders was enticing. Not least to beleaguered policymakers facing tough budgetary choices and pressures to cut spending, to whom the idea of ‘soft power’ seemed to represent and promise power on the cheap. Such influence was by its very nature somewhat intangible, shifting, and difficult to quantify or assess. Prestige, reputation, recognition, especially in such fields as cultural and intellectual attainments, whether popular, middle-brow, or high, are slippery assets, not necessarily to be acquired, kept, or lost by design. Governments may

¹ Nye, *Bound to Lead*. Nye elaborated on this theme in several subsequent books, including *The Paradox of American Power*, *Soft Power*, *The Power to Lead*, and *The Future of Power*.

crave the benefits of soft power, while lacking effective means to attain this objective.

Even trying to define soft power can be problematic. Much of what is termed soft power seems to lie in the realm of perceptions and images, themselves as often as not the product not just of formal diplomatic relationships, but also of thousands, even millions, of more informal interactions. At least in countries with a strong private sector, many of these lie largely if not entirely beyond the bounds of state control. Education, missionary enterprises, business dealings, tourism, media reports, novels, movies, television series, and cultural and sporting interactions: all have unpredictable potential to affect the ways in which nations and their people are regarded elsewhere in the world. Depictions of the United States in Hollywood blockbusters or such popular television series as *Dynasty* and *Dallas* may owe much to fantasy, yet still be taken for truth across large portions of the world. Spectacular athletes often enhance the standing of their countries and also of the ethnic groups to which they belong, but rampaging football fans, as the British have discovered in recent years, are equally likely to tarnish national prestige. High crime rates and continuing public disorder do little for any country's reputation. The same holds true for racism, sexism, or political repression. Institutionalized governmental complicity in such practices may compound the damage. But private ventures have equal potential to provoke international controversy. In 2006, a Massachusetts Institute of Technology website featuring Japanese woodblock prints of the Sino-Japanese War and the 1895 Treaty of Shimonoseki that ended the conflict provoked angry complaints from Chinese students, on the grounds that these images were demeaning and insulting to Chinese. Ultimately, the professors who had created this website bowed to student sensitivities and removed the images, despite their historical value.²

At both the official and non-governmental level, the utilization of soft power can be either conscious or the unintentional consequence of other activities. The deliberate use of propaganda in international affairs is far from novel. In the sixteenth century, as Catholicism contended bitterly with various brands of Protestantism for the loyalties of European states, rulers, and populations, adherents of each faith called upon their co-religionists living in nations where another form of Christianity prevailed to rise up and overthrow the existing government, often bloodily. From the late eighteenth century, such ideological warfare focused primarily upon the nature of political systems, with radical and revolutionary democrats, liberals, and socialists launching appeals to sympathetic elements in their

² Elman, "The 'Rise' of Japan and the 'Fall' of China after 1895," 143-171.

own and other countries to change the status quo and construct a more perfect society. Ideological innovation and the repudiation of existing governmental forms characterized both the French and American Revolutions, each of which challenged monarchical and aristocratic norms and sought to replace them with republican systems. In the case of France, dedicated revolutionaries attempted to spread these practices throughout Europe and beyond, and for at least a while succeeded in capturing the popular imagination of much of the continent. By the mid-nineteenth century, socialism and communism claimed to be the ideologies of the future, challenging the *laissez-faire* liberalism and parliamentary democracy that were slowly coming to characterize Western nations.

The outbreak of the First World War brought a new wave of ideological warfare, with the battling governments of Europe each mounting massive propaganda campaigns designed to win support from their own people and, if possible, to undercut indigenous support for their opponents in their own territory. Efforts to destabilize colonial empires of enemy states were extensive. Germany directed propaganda at dissatisfied Muslims in British India and Egypt, while the British and French encouraged separatist forces of various kinds in the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. The overthrow in 1917 of Tsarist rule in Russia initially brought to power a liberal Russian government, but a radical Bolshevik regime, the world's first communist government, soon replaced it. The new Russian rulers, led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, not only withdrew from the war almost immediately but simultaneously launched a vehement propaganda initiative against international capitalism and imperialism throughout the world, exhorting the global proletariat in all countries to rise up and overthrow their existing rulers, and urging all colonized people to repudiate their overlords. The Allies, Britain, France, and the United States, responded by committing themselves to liberal war aims. The most eloquent and best publicized such efforts—thanks to a highly effective American wartime propaganda machine, the Committee on Public Information, which translated his speeches into dozens of foreign languages and disseminated them around the world—were those of President Woodrow Wilson of the United States. Nationalist forces around the world seized upon his statements in the Fourteen Points address of January 1918 and other pronouncements, as endorsements not just of a non-punitive peace settlement, open diplomacy, and the creation of an international organization to prevent future wars, but also as commitments to national self-determination on a global scale. In practice, Wilson probably intended to restrict the latter principle to the populations of the

Austro-Hungarian, Russian, and Ottoman Empires, but his utterances were widely perceived as anti-colonial manifestos.³

Disillusionment with the less than revolutionary settlement that emerged from the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 was correspondingly intense, radicalizing nationalist movements across Asia and the Middle East, and leading many disappointed liberals in North America and Europe to reject Wilson's League of Nations. Official US ventures in overseas propaganda ceased soon after the war ended, although private missionary and educational initiatives continued and—with financial assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation and Carnegie Corporation—even intensified between the world wars. The two latter organizations were particularly active in offering fellowships to enable young and mid-career academics from Europe and the British Empire to study overseas, usually in the United States, Europe, or both, and in encouraging the development of studies of international relations in other countries.⁴ The interwar years also saw the beginning of official efforts by other governments to deploy soft power in efforts to maximize their international influence. The ideologically driven Soviet Union was the first to do so, establishing the Third Communist International or Comintern in 1919, with the objective of appealing to radical and nationalist forces around the world. Rising young to middle-aged potential revolutionaries from other countries, including such notable figures as Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam, Madam Sun Yat-sen (Song Qingling), widow of Republican China's founding president, and Chiang Ching-guo, the son of Republican President Chiang Kai-shek of China, together with thousands of others, all spent significant time in the Soviet Union, often taking university courses specifically designed to train international revolutionaries. Between the wars the Soviet Union enjoyed considerable prestige among idealistic Western liberals.⁵

Other countries responded with their own programs. By the late 1920s, the Dante Alighieri Society of Italy (first established in 1889), the German Goethe Institut, and the French Alliance Française, were all active in other countries, seeking to promote understanding of their own nations' society, culture, and political heritage. Until that time, Britain had relied primarily upon informal, non-governmental initiatives. Elites from around the

³ Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*.

⁴ Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century*, ch. 3; Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy*.

⁵ Rees and Thorpe, eds., *International Communism and the Communist International*; Cauter, *The Fellow Travellers*; Morgan, *Bolshevism and the British Left*; Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*; David-Fox, *Showcasing the Great Experiment*.

British Empire, drawn not just from the white dominions, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, but also such figures as Mohandas Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru of India, were encouraged to study at top British universities, Oxford, Cambridge, and London, the not always justified expectation being that these experiences would ensure their lifelong dedicated support for British imperialism. The Rhodes Scholarships to Oxford University, established in 1902, were a privately funded initiative intended to attract talented young men from the British dominions, the United States, and Germany, in the hope of encouraging closer ties and collaboration equivalent to a *de facto* alliance across the Anglo-Saxon world.⁶ The British Council, established in 1934 at the prompting of Reginald “Rex” Leeper, an Australian-born British diplomat with degrees from both Melbourne University and New College, Oxford, was intended to allow Britain to compete with France and Fascist Italy and Germany in terms of international influence. The novelist Olivia Manning’s *Balkan Trilogy* provides some insight into its workings in the late 1930s and early 1940s.⁷ Then and later, all such ventures in public and cultural diplomacy ran the risk of being taken for intelligence operations, not least because on occasion some of their personnel were indeed linked to the espionage services.

The Second World War further boosted soft power and cultural diplomacy. As the war began, the British enjoyed an advantage in propaganda terms over their German opponents. As Britain faced German power without allies in 1940 and 1941, American journalists based in Britain, Edward R. Murrow being the most notable, were prepared to tone down their disapproval of the British class system and emphasize the dogged determination Britons of all social backgrounds displayed in response to the ferocious German bombing of London and other cities. In return, the British authorities allowed Murrow the freedom to broadcast as he pleased, without censorship, which he used to relay back to the United States dramatic on-the-spot rooftop reports as air raids targeted London. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s widely reported defiant speeches during these months, pledging that Britain would fight on no matter what the odds, also caught the international imagination, dramatizing the British cause. In his own person the British leader seemed to embody the spirit of the British people.⁸ The British Broadcasting Corporation demonstrated further acuity in choosing to report setbacks in the war, including successive disasters in late 1941 and early 1942, a

⁶ Ziegler, *Legacy*; Schaeper and Schaeper, *Rhodes Scholars*.

⁷ Donaldson, *The British Council*, 1-5, 16-28; Manning, *The Balkan Trilogy*.

⁸ Cull, *Selling War*.

frankness that convinced many around the world that British reporting was credible. This level of self-confidence boosted the standing and prestige of the British government with outside observers, including those in Russia.⁹

Where propaganda and soft power are concerned, credibility is invariably a significant asset. As hostilities continued, African American civil rights advocates in the United States took advantage of this. With the US government supporting the Allies and increasingly claiming that it was backing democracy, freedom, and justice around the world, in early 1941 A. Philip Randolph, head of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, began to demand that the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt allow African Americans equal access to jobs in factories working on government wartime orders. Otherwise, he warned, black Americans would organize a massive march on Washington, the US capital, to protest against American racism. Seeking to avoid international embarrassment that would compromise the overseas standing of the United States, Roosevelt eventually responded by establishing the Fair Employment Practices Commission, a government agency with a mandate to oppose racism in government hiring and employment. As the government of the United States committed itself to defending freedom internationally, disadvantaged Americans demanded freedom at home.¹⁰

The Second World War made the United States into a global power, a founding member and key power in such international organizations as the new United Nations, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank. The US military took the lead in the occupation of defeated Japan, Germany, and Italy, seeking to re-educate those nations and force them to democratize and reject their Fascist past. By the late 1940s, the United States was engaged in global Cold War competition with the Soviet Union and, soon, with communist China. Military alliances and coercion underpinned this strategic conflict, but as often as not, battles in this war were waged not through direct military combat, but through efforts to induce or influence other nations to adhere to either the liberal capitalist or the communist camp. One Norwegian scholar has gone so far as to describe the North Atlantic Treaty Organization alliance with the states of Western Europe that the United States concluded in 1949 as an “empire by invitation,” on the grounds that the nations involved actively sought this alliance as a means of guaranteeing their security against a potential Soviet threat.¹¹ Although the Western position in Germany, Japan, and South Korea was initially the result of military conquest, and the Soviet Union

⁹ Lewis, *Shades of Greene*, 298-302.

¹⁰ Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph*, ch. 2.

¹¹ Lundestad, *The United States and Europe Since 1945*.

imposed and maintained its rule on Eastern Europe largely by brute force, both Western and Communist-bloc powers utilized soft power in the effort to attract foreign friends, influence other nations, and win elite and popular acquiescence in their efforts at global domination. Some of these were economic aid programs, in the late 1940s targeted initially at Europe and certain countries in Asia, including Japan, South Korea, and China, and intended to enable them to withstand communist pressure, ventures soon extended to numerous developing or emerging countries, particularly those that were experiencing decolonization. The objective was not simply to encourage economic development, but also to ensure that this took place within a non-communist political framework, a goal that re-education and cultural ventures sought to ensure.¹²

In the early Cold War years, the United States established its first long-term officially-funded agencies and initiatives in cultural diplomacy, some overt government programs, some covertly funded. Private initiatives, especially those of the major philanthropic foundations, supplemented these. Scholarships, fellowships, and other visitors programs brought foreign elites on short- or long-term trips to the United States, and supported American students, scholars, politicians, and others who went overseas, initiatives intended to develop a cohort of Americans who were familiar with other countries. A wide range of propaganda and media initiatives, including prestigious publications, movies, radio broadcasts, conferences, student, labor, and media friendship organizations, and cultural exhibits and performances featuring American art, music, literature, movies, ballet, and sports, were devised in the effort to persuade non-Americans to view the United States favorably.¹³ Former colonial powers, notably Britain and France, established significant if smaller-scale economic and cultural programs, many though by no means all of their operations catering particularly to those nations that had once been part of their empires. Most Western states had some kind of international aid program, which was usually viewed as a useful, sometimes even essential adjunct to other aspects of diplomacy. American soft power efforts even responded to criticism. In the late 1950s, the bestselling American novel

¹² Hogan, *The Marshall Plan*; Latham, *Modernization as Ideology*; Cullather, *The Hungry World*; Latham, *The Right Kind of Revolution*; Connelly, *Fatal Misconception*.

¹³ Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer*; Cull, *The Cold War and the United States Information Agency*; Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War*; Ninkovich, *The Diplomacy of Ideas*; Laville and Wilford, eds., *The US Government, Citizen Groups, and the Cold War*; Aguilar, *Cultural Diplomacy and Foreign Policy*; Richmond, *Cultural Exchange & the Cold War*.

The Ugly American condemned most American diplomats and aid program officials in developing countries for living insulated existences in pampered and cosseted conditions, engaging largely with elites in their host countries while remote from the ordinary people, practices that were contrasted with those of supposedly more down-to-earth Soviet and Chinese aid workers and the occasional exemplary American engineer. The novel provoked intense media and congressional debate over the effectiveness of American aid programs, and eventually led the newly elected President John F. Kennedy to establish the Peace Corps, an initiative intended to enlist idealistic and unassuming Americans to work closely in the field with aid beneficiaries.¹⁴

Communist-bloc countries were equally assiduous in efforts to use soft power to gain international influence, with aid and educational programs ranking high in their dealings with other states, both communist satellites and non-aligned nations. This was especially so for those countries, notably the Soviet Union and China, that sought hegemonic status within the Communist bloc, either globally or regionally.¹⁵ Throughout the 1950s, the Soviet aid program to China represented one of the largest such ventures ever directed by one state at another.¹⁶ High-profile cultural and scientific achievements also represented opportunities for competition between the Communist and non-Communist worlds. Space programs and spectacular scientific breakthroughs, most notably Soviet successes in launching Sputnik, the first space satellite, and in sending the first man into orbit, were blazoned around the world as evidence that communism had surpassed capitalism, prompting a massive project by the United States to send a manned mission to the moon before the 1960s ended. Athletic excellence was trumpeted as another index of the success of each system, with every bloc and country priding itself on the number of medals it could amass at the Olympic Games and other prominent sporting events. Spectacular dance performances and companies, exciting museum exhibits, outstanding orchestras, and stunning acrobats: all were seen as national assets that enhanced their home country's global power and prestige. Much the same was true in such spheres as fashion, popular music, modern art, and movies, with governments priding themselves on their people's ability to set international trends. This was the case even

¹⁴ Lederer and Burdick, *The Ugly American*; Hoffman, *All You Need Is Love*; Meisler, *When the World Calls*.

¹⁵ Rothwell, *Transpacific Revolutionaries*; Zheng, Hong, and Szonyi, eds., *The Cold War in Asia*; Lee, ed., *Making a World After Empire*; and Vu and Wongsurawat, eds., *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia*.

¹⁶ Westad, *Restless Empire*, ch. 8.

when new developments, the emergence, for example, in the 1960s of such iconic British rock groups as the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, or the whole phenomenon of ‘swinging London,’ owed very little if anything to official encouragement.

Intellectual influence constitutes another valuable commodity on the soft power front. Producing, attracting, and nurturing innovative individuals capable of originating new ideas and concepts that contributed to public thinking and debate on political, economic, and social issues boosted a country’s global status, even when those ideas were not necessarily in accord with government orthodoxy. Conversely, efforts to repress intellectual freedom and to impose orthodoxy, whether in communist states or the United States during the McCarthyite 1950s, or in authoritarian non-communist regimes, rebounded on the government involved, diminishing its standing. For much of the Cold War period, however, certainly during the 1950s and 1960s and probably the 1970s, the communist bloc enjoyed a distinct ideological advantage on the international stage, with leftist and socialist assumptions decidedly in the ascendancy among intellectuals around the world. Even many non-socialists believed that socialism had proved itself more appealing and idealistic than rival faiths, and would ultimately triumph over liberal capitalism and democracy, which were perceived as decidedly on the defensive.¹⁷ Admittedly, China began to embrace its own form of authoritarian capitalist development in the late 1970s, while still formally adhering to Marxist-Leninism. To most Western commentators and leaders, however, until at least the mid-1980s the Soviet Union still appeared a formidable competitor.

In the quarter-century since the Cold War ended, the balance of international power has shifted dramatically and in some ways unpredictably. In the early 1990s, the general expectation was that Japan—today, still the world’s third largest economy—rather than China would, for the foreseeable future, present the most formidable competition to the United States in terms of international power. Two decades of stagflation in Japan, coinciding with breakneck economic development in China, have eroded such scenarios, and for the past decade China has been perceived as the most credible competitor to what is currently, despite the near-global economic meltdown that began in August 2008, the still unrivaled military power of the United States. Historians and political commentators have embarked on intense debate as to whether China is a rising power that will eclipse and replace the United States, possibly through war with the current hegemon of the international system, or whether the two are

¹⁷ See, e.g., Hollander, *Political Pilgrims*.

more likely to work together and perhaps even become co-hegemons.¹⁸ Martin Jacques and Stefan Halper suggest that the “Beijing consensus” Chinese model of economic growth and political authoritarianism is likely to prevail over Western norms of liberal capitalist democracy enshrined in the “Washington consensus.”¹⁹ If current trends continue, China is on track to surpass the United States as the world’s largest economy within the next ten to fifteen years.

But size is not everything. China has much less in the way of natural resources and a far larger population than the United States, people who on average enjoy a far lower standard of living than Americans. As one chapter in this volume observes, China is still well behind the United States in terms of research and development spending on technology and science. In coming decades, it will also face the problems of an ageing population, exacerbated by the one-child policy, difficulties that high immigration levels to the United States will enable its rival to evade. Admittedly, China is beginning to relax the constraints of its one-child policy, which the wealthy can already use their money to ignore. Yet very recently, it was announced that the renowned film director Zhang Yimou faces enormous financial penalties for having numerous children by several mothers.²⁰ Environmental degradation is also a major and ever increasing problem, the product in considerable part of China’s remorseless industrialization. Skeptics might even ask whether China, rather than ousting the United States, is likely to become the next Japan, widely perceived for a while as the world’s next great hegemon-in-waiting, and even viewed by some as the real victor in the Cold War, but not quite capable of pulling off the trick of becoming the preponderant international power.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Friedberg, *A Contest for Supremacy*; Nathan and Scobell, *China’s Search for Security*; Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*; Scott, ‘*The Chinese Century?*’; Ahrari, *The Great Powers versus the Hegemon*; Li and Lee, eds., *China and East Asian Strategic Dynamics*; Zheng, *On Equal Terms*; Meyer, *China or Japan*; Guo and Teng, eds., *China’s Quiet Rise*; Zhu, *China’s New Diplomacy*; Hickey and Guo, eds., *Dancing with the Dragon*; Womack, *China Among Unequals*; Rosecrance and Gu, eds., *Power and Restraint*; Wu and Lansdowne, eds., *China Turns to Multilateralism*; Bronson, *The Dragon Looks South*; and Hutton, *The Writing on the Wall*.

¹⁹ Halper, *The Beijing Consensus*; Jacques, *When China Rules the World*. For further discussion of the Beijing consensus, see Hsu, Zhu, and Wu, eds., *In Search of China’s Development Model*.

²⁰ Chris Buckley, “Chinese Director Fined for Exceeding Child Limits,” *International New York Times* (January 9, 2014).

As some Chinese contributors to this volume observe, Joseph S. Nye, Jr., first advanced his theory of soft power at a time when the United States, the collapse of the Soviet empire notwithstanding, was perceived as facing significant domestic and budgetary problems, which required it to devote more attention to repairing its infrastructure and tackling internal difficulties. Deploying soft power was perceived as a relatively inexpensive means of ensuring continued American influence beyond the borders of the United States. Throughout the 1990s, that scenario seemed plausible. The United States began the decade with a demonstration of overwhelming military power in Kuwait and Iraq, reminding a recalcitrant Saddam Hussein that attacking and annexing an American client was unacceptable. Having won the war, President George H. W. Bush proclaimed the existence of a “new world order” led and directed by the United States. With American encouragement, throughout the decade once communist nations embraced free market norms and in many cases liberal democracy and joined the new World Trade Organization, which committed them to opening their markets to international competition. Most former Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe also embraced democracy and established electoral systems, as did—at least nominally—the component states, including Russia, into which the Soviet Union dissolved. The most striking demonstration of the strength of attraction and persuasion over brutal military coercion came when the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact military alliance that had been the mainstay of Russia’s Cold War hold on Eastern Europe collapsed, and the states that had been under Soviet domination joined the rival North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) instead. For all its more than sixty years of existence, the NATO alliance had experienced well-publicized difficulties, with recurrent proclamations of “NATO in Crisis” serving as its virtual theme song throughout the second half of the twentieth century and beyond. Yet, with the collapse of the Cold War, its members set about finding new missions and roles for NATO, in an effort, at least in part, to ensure that the United States did not withdraw from the European continent. If the ability to attract and keep willing allies and clients constitutes part of a country’s soft power, in Europe the United States had succeeded where the Soviet Union had failed.

By no means all American policymakers of the 1990s embraced unfettered economic development on a global scale as the mainstay of their country’s future strategy. The US military remained far stronger than any other in the world, and American defense expenditures far outstripped those of any rivals, equaling those of its next ten or more competitors combined. During this decade, neo-conservatives sought a new strategic

rival and competitor, dividing as to whether China or Iraq—where Saddam Hussein still retained power—would best fit the bill. When the radical Islamic group Al Qaeda successfully attacked the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington on September 11, 2001, the first priority of US foreign policy seemed clear: to eradicate Al Qaeda, attacking its base in Afghanistan and ensuring that no further such attacks could succeed. Having won at least partial victory in Afghanistan, however, eighteen months after the September 2001 attacks, the United States and Britain invaded Iraq, determined to overthrow Saddam Hussein and establish a democratic government there. They did so over strong protests from other NATO allies, including Germany and France, as well as Russia and China. The Iraq War, which was supposed to transform the entire Middle East by democratizing Iraq so successfully that other Arab states would see its advantages and follow suit by establishing democratic political systems, destabilized Iraq, bringing chaos and civil war to much of the country. The tactics the United States used to justify the war in Iraq, its belligerent interventionism and disregard for international organizations such as the United Nations, and false claims that Iraq possessed large caches of Weapons of Mass Destruction and was closely linked to Al Qaeda, were all highly detrimental to American standing abroad. Abuses of Arab prisoners by US military personnel, the illegal seizure and detention without trial of American and foreign nationals, electronic eavesdropping on American and foreign nationals alike, within and beyond the country's borders, and the way the wars and disorder in both Iraq and Afghanistan dragged on, with any kind of genuine resolution problematic, all left the US image heavily tarnished. Anti-Americanism soared around the world, even in countries that were US allies. When a global economic crisis developed in 2008, its effects exacerbated by massive US budget deficits that developed during the presidency of George W. Bush and by bitter political polarization within the United States, American prestige slumped still further.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, as the United States was drawn into expensive morasses overseas, China focused on its own economic development. American preoccupation with the Middle East allowed China to invest heavily beyond its borders, enhancing its economic influence through investment and aid programs across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. China's economic performance soared, as did its products' share of the US market, the US trade deficit with China, and holdings of Treasury bonds by the Chinese government and individual investors alike. China's leaders took pride in China's increasing presence and weight on the world scene, but also repeatedly emphasized that

China's rise would be peaceful. The experience of the United States in this decade was indeed a disquieting object lesson in just how expensive and inconclusive military adventures could become. China was also drawn to the concept of 'soft power' as a means of maximizing its influence at minimal cost. In a keynote address to the Seventeenth Chinese Communist Party Congress in October 2007, President Hu Jintao highlighted the need to boost China's soft power, using the media and Chinese culture to enhance the country's standing overseas. His speech gave added momentum to a flood of writing by Chinese academics and others on the meaning of soft power and on China's efforts to deploy this asset.²¹

China's road to soft power was far from smooth, however. The most prominent feature of this program was the establishment of "Confucius Institutes" in universities around the world, funded by the Chinese Ministry of Education, to provide classes in the Chinese language and Chinese culture. On several campuses in North America, Australia, and Britain, fears were expressed that Confucius Institutes sought to inhibit academic freedom by demanding that host institutions endorse the Chinese government's policies toward Taiwan and the Falun Gong movement. Critics were also apprehensive that Confucius Institutes provided bases from which the government could move to monitor and control Chinese students overseas and conduct intelligence operations. Ironically, these complaints were closely akin to those expressed over the activities of the British Council, US Information Agency, and other Western cultural and educational organizations during the Cold War. Confucius Institutes were only one facet of Chinese soft power. With great fanfare and the construction of spectacular athletic venues, in 2008 China hosted the Olympic Games in Beijing, an event that Chinese leaders viewed as an opportunity to showcase not just their country's sporting prowess, but also its modernization. In capital cities around the world, leading architects designed stunning new Chinese embassies intended to demonstrate China's power and also its sophistication. A new generation of Chinese diplomats, familiar with the outside world, displayed a level of excellence,

²¹ For some relevant discussions of soft power, see among others, Melissen, ed., *The New Public Diplomacy*; Watanabe and McConnell, eds., *Soft Power Superpowers*; Parmar and Cox, eds., *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy*; Ding, *The Dragon's Hidden Wings*; Li, ed., *Soft Power*; McGiffert, ed., *Chinese Soft Power and Its Implications for the United States*; Callahan, *China*; Monroe, ed., *China's Foreign Policy and Soft Power*; Vyas, *Soft Power in Japan-China Relations*; Zhang, *The Transformation of Political Communication in China*; Sun, *Japan and China as Charm Rivals*; and Lai and Lu, *China's Soft Power and International Relations*.

skill, and charm that until recently were largely absent in China's representatives. A massive museum show on China's imperial culture toured the world, hosted by several top international museums. Overseas students were also encouraged to enroll in China's universities.²²

These tangible evidences of Chinese wealth and culture were not, however, the whole picture. Ironically, much of China's traditional culture is rapidly disappearing, a casualty of rapid economic development. Thousands of hutongs and traditional courtyard houses, not to mention temples, have fallen victim to the developer's bulldozers, replaced with tower blocks. Intangible aspects of rural heritage, including songs, dances, rituals, theater performances, and even cuisine, are disappearing, as 300 villages are destroyed every day in China.²³ Glaring discrepancies of wealth and poverty, corruption, the absence of the rule of law, and environmental deterioration: all can rebound upon a nation's international standing and prestige, particularly when a country seems unable to tackle them. And, as other nations have learned, injudicious governmental actions can quickly undercut a country's soft power. Academics warned that initiatives to boost China's image outside its borders would only slowly become effective. And one young Chinese graduate student observed that those Chinese officials conducting public diplomacy for the most part had little experience of living overseas and were unfamiliar with how Westerners thought, meaning that they were "not developing the campaign around what interests foreigners." Moreover: "Officials also have to learn one important thing—that public diplomacy is neither a tool to deceive foreigners nor to hide the negative side of China."²⁴

Chinese officials have displayed few such sensitivities to date. Present-day China possesses a thriving and lively literary and cultural scene, with writers and artists alike producing stimulating works, some of which challenge government policies. In 2010 the literary critic, writer, and political activist Liu Xiaobo, who was serving a prison sentence for his efforts to campaign for greater democracy, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, the first Chinese citizen to receive any Nobel award. The Chinese government responded by forbidding Liu to go to Stockholm to receive the

²² The most comprehensive treatment of China's overall international strategy in the first decade of the twenty-first century is Lampton, *The Three Faces of Chinese Power*. See also Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive*; and Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*.

²³ Ian Johnson, "Forced Into Cities, Chinese Lose Traditions," *International New York Times* (February 3, 2004): 1, 4.

²⁴ Teddy Ng, "Beijing Aims to Make Message More Positive," *South China Morning Post* (March 14, 2013): A5.

prize, and establishing its own Confucius Prize, awarded to Russian President Vladimir Putin. The Chinese Foreign Ministry also reprimanded the Norwegian ambassador in Beijing for the action of the non-governmental Norwegian Nobel Institute in selecting Liu, and three years later was still denying visas to Norwegians who wished to travel to China. These heavy-handed efforts to pressure outside organizations largely backfired on the Chinese government, providing concrete evidence that it had no understanding of the workings of non-governmental organizations outside China, and failed to appreciate that government-sponsored efforts to pressure them are liable to prove counter-productive. The same was true when the avant-garde artist Ai Weiwei was imprisoned for three months after criticizing his government's political and human rights policies.²⁵

Cyber-attacks on the websites of academic institutions whose staff publish articles or books critical of past or present Chinese policies, together with threatening e-mails to the authors, and hate campaigns intended to discredit such works with other academics, are all part of the repertoire of current Chinese propaganda. The current wave of denying visas to foreign journalists, and the massive official apparatus devoted to controlling the Internet within China, all send the message that the country has a great deal to hide. Strong and confident societies, governments, and institutions have the capacity to deal with criticism, however irritating, and when necessary and appropriate to take complaints on board without resorting to censorship. And the examples of Jawaharlal Nehru of India, Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar, and Nelson Mandela of South Africa all suggest that in the long-term repression of political dissent is rarely effective. Determined political activists are stubborn, bloody-minded, durable, and resilient. Many also possess formidable charm and charisma. As often as not, yesterday's dissident and prisoner is tomorrow's prime minister.

The most recent twist in the 'soft power' story is Nye's espousal of what he terms 'smart power.' This concept calls for the deployment of a judicious blend of hard and soft power, applied in varying combinations according to the differing requirements of each situation.²⁶ So what's new, some may ask. For much of the twentieth century and beyond, major powers have employed such tactics. Like Monsieur Jourdain in the Molière play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who discovered that all along he been speaking prose, they now learn that for many decades past they have—albeit with varying degrees of skill or success—been following a

²⁵ Shambaugh, *China Goes Global*; Nathan and Scobell, *China's Search for Security*.

²⁶ See, e.g., Nye, "Get Smart".