

Global Power Shift

Hendrik W. Ohnesorge

# Soft Power

The Forces of Attraction in  
International Relations



Springer

# Global Power Shift

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Center for Global Studies  
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*“What I call Attraction may be perform’d  
by impulse, or by some other means  
unknown to me. I use that Word here to  
signify only in general any Force by which  
Bodies tend towards one another,  
whatsoever be the Cause.”*

—Sir Isaac Newton,  
Opticks: Or, A Treatise of the Reflections,  
Refractions, Inflections, and Colours of  
Light,  
*The Second Edition, with Additions*  
(London: W. and J. Innys, 1718), Query  
31, p. 351.

## Preface: Lessons from the Fence

It is a remarkable historical coincidence that both the years of Samuel Langhorne Clemens' birth and death—1835 and 1910—saw the appearance of Halley's Comet in the night sky.<sup>1</sup> Today, Clemens, who himself had predicted this curious happenstance in his later life, is more commonly known by his pen name Mark Twain and his claim to fame is less based on an astronomical peculiarity but rather on his quips and aphorisms, his essays and travel descriptions, his poems and plays, as well as his short stories and novels. In fact, Twain's immense prolificacy, originality, and lasting impact earned him the epitaph "father of American literature."<sup>2</sup>

Among Mark Twain's works, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) arguably take pride of place. While the former has been a frequent contestant for the myth-enshrouded Great American Novel,<sup>3</sup> the latter, according to Lee Clark Mitchell, even "lays claim to being America's most popular novel."<sup>4</sup> In it, Twain tells his readers about the gests and follies of the eponymous hero growing up in the 1830s or 1840s along the Mississippi River in the small (and fictional) town of St. Petersburg. The author takes us into the rural world of Missouri, a world filled with deep-rooted superstition and imperturbable piety, boyhood friendships and adolescent love, kindhearted ladies, and reckless villains. In the words of Mark Twain himself, as set down in the novel's preface, the author's intention was not merely to present a children's book but also "to try to pleasantly

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<sup>1</sup>Ron Power, *Mark Twain: A Life* (New York, N.Y.: Free Press, 2005), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Quoted in Allen P. Mendenhall, *Literature and Liberty: Essays in Libertarian Literary Criticism* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 114.

<sup>3</sup>Lawrence Buell, *The Dream of the Great American Novel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 258.

<sup>4</sup>Lee Clark Mitchell, "Introduction," in Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Lee Clark Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. x.

remind adults of what they once were themselves, and of how they felt and thought and talked, and what queer enterprises they sometimes engaged in.”<sup>5</sup> Arguably, the most famous among these “queer enterprises” is Tom Sawyer’s handling of the task to whitewash a fence.

Caught by his aunt Polly while climbing in through the window late one night with his clothes torn and tattered after scrambling with a newcomer to the town of St. Petersburg, Tom is condemned to “captivity at hard labor” the following Saturday. Tom’s task, set by the loving yet hopelessly overburdened Polly as punishment for this most recent misconduct, is to whitewash “[t]hirty yards of board fence nine feet high.” On a fair Saturday morning, when “all the summer world was bright and fresh, and brimming with life” and other children are out playing and enjoying themselves, Tom “surveyed the fence, and all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Life to him seemed hollow, and existence but a burden.” After a few spiritless strokes of his brush, Tom sits down in despair as a slave called Jim comes by, charged with fetching water, a task which “had always been hateful work in Tom’s eyes.” Yet considering his present situation, Tom is eager to swap chores with Jim, who, however, steadfastly declines. Even as Tom offers to pay him with an exceptionally beautiful marble (a treasured possession for a boy in those days for sure!), he cannot be easily convinced. While Jim eventually begins to waver, Aunt Polly puts a halt to further negotiations and Tom reluctantly returns to the tedious task imposed upon him. However, “Tom’s energy did not last” very long and he soon begins to count his meager worldly belongings which are “not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom.” Thus discouraged, Tom “gave up the idea of trying to buy the boys.” Yet, as Mark Twain goes on, “[a]t this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him! Nothing less than a great, magnificent inspiration.”

With this “inspiration” in mind, Tom takes a different approach to his plight and subsequently, the first boy to come along—a boy by the name of Ben Rogers—finds Tom deeply bound up in his work. Tom, pretending to not even perceive the boy’s presence, “surveyed his last touch with the eye of an artist; then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result, as before.” Expectedly, Ben commences to mock Tom for having to work while he is about to go swimming on this beautiful summer’s day. Tom, however, nonchalantly disregards such mockery and pretends to immensely enjoy his task, asking the perplexed Ben, ““What do you call work? [...] Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?”” These questions “put the thing in a new light” for Ben and as Tom continues to vigorously paint the fence, Ben ultimately takes the bait. ““Say, Tom,”” he begs, ““let *me* whitewash a little.”” Tom, however, does not give up his brush that easily, arguing that ““I reckon there ain’t one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, that can do it the way it’s got to be done”” and even telling Ben—untruthfully of course—that both

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<sup>5</sup>Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (Hartford, Conn.: The American Publishing Company, 1876), p. ix. As far as not indicated otherwise, all quotations in the following paragraph are taken from this, the first edition of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, pp. 25–32.



his half-brother Sid and Jim had been refused before for that very reason. Now it is for Ben, meanwhile irretrievably ensnared, to offer Tom compensation in the form of an apple in order to be allowed to whitewash a small portion of the fence in return. Tom, “with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart,” finally yields to Ben’s proposition. Consequently, while Ben “worked and sweated in the sun, the retired artist sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangled his legs, munched his apple, and planned the slaughter of more innocents.” Further “innocents” are not long in coming and finally, “when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth.” What is more, “[h]e had had a nice, good, idle time all the while—plenty of company—and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it!”

While arguably in itself among the finest episodes in American literature, masterfully combining literary elegance and down-to-earth wit, which place does Tom Sawyer’s “queer enterprise” of whitewashing a fence have in a study on soft power in international relations?

To answer this question, we shall briefly recall what has happened more soberly than with direct recourse to Twain’s unrivaled pen: Tom Sawyer is faced with the unpleasant and wearisome chore of whitewashing a vast fence. Recognizing that to accomplish his task would take a considerable amount of time and effort, and perhaps is even beyond Tom’s capability altogether, he seeks the help of others. Considering the circumstances outlined above, getting others to help him in his troublesome task seems hopeless if not impossible from the outset. Having to choose between a day of carefree fishing and swimming on the one hand and the tedious whitewashing of a fence in the blazing sun on the other hand, chances seem to be very slim at best to convince others to lend a helping hand. Nevertheless, Tom—in different ways—tries to acquire assistance: At first, he seeks to exchange chores in order to take up a less gruesome task. Next, he contemplates to buy others’ help with his meager belongings. Recognizing the futility of both these endeavors, however, Tom sets out to win over the boys’ support in yet another way. Pretending to greatly enjoy the demanding task and even simulating reluctance in relinquishing it, Tom effectively changes the preferences of the boys to help him—without recourse to brute force or monetary inducements but solely by *attracting* the boys to the task he is instructed to perform.

On that score, Mark Twain’s famous fence episode offers an excellent (if literary) example to illustrate a core concept in human interactions in general as well as international relations in particular: the concept of power. Succinctly defined as the ability to get somebody to do something they would not otherwise do, power can be found in various guises.<sup>6</sup> Among these, to be elaborated in greater detail below, is the variety of soft power, which shall gain center stage in the work in hand and at whose very core lies the notion of “getting others to want the outcomes you want.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>For definitions and different varieties of power, see Chap. 2.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2004), p. 5.

It is in this vein that soft power—resting upon attraction and persuasion—complements hard power—resting upon (physical) coercion and/or (economic) inducement—and thus accounts for the classic (if somewhat simplistic) dichotomy in our understanding of power in international relations today.<sup>8</sup>

With these cursory insights regarding the concept of power in mind, we can now return to the episode outlined above: Which possibilities does Tom Sawyer have at his disposal to influence others in order to get them to do his bidding? Which course of action might he take to get the outcome he wants, which in this case is a whitewashed fence, preferably without much toil on his own part? One conceivable option is to resort to physical force. Tom might use hard power to coerce others and thus force them to whitewash the fence for him. As depicted in an earlier chapter of Mark Twain's novel, Tom by no means is averse to physical confrontation. In fact, his very wrangling with another boy got him into the position to whitewash the fence in the first place. However, Tom is not even contemplating to physically force or intimidate others to get the outcome he wants in this particular instance and apparently recognizes that the endeavor to coerce others to whitewash the fence for him is futile. Power, as we shall see in greater detail below, depends on context, and in the present context, the exercise of physical power does not present itself as very promising.

This option being off the table, Tom might attempt to economically or financially induce others in order to get his preferred outcome, thus resorting to the second component of hard power. In fact, he actually does. As briefly illustrated above, Tom first tries to swap chores with Jim and offers—in a more prosaic than belletristic phrasing—a non-monetary exchange. Jim, however, declines this proposition. In his desperation, Tom goes one step further and offers a marble for his help, which in the rural Missouri of those days is as close to pecuniary resources as a poor boy could possibly get.<sup>9</sup> As this attempt likewise fails due to the disruptive intervention of his aunt, Tom counts his modest belongings and recognizes his lack of sufficient funds to buy others' help. As a consequence, economic or financial instruments, just as physical coercion, likewise forsake Tom in order to get the outcome he wants in this particular instance.

Being thus denied the hard power options of either coercive threats or economic inducements, Tom, in his moment of "magnificent inspiration," in Twain's words, bethinks of his true capital: his personal, non-physical, and non-financial powers of attraction and persuasion. Instead of forcing or buying others, he sets out to get the other boys—to paraphrase Joseph S. Nye's key definition of soft power—to want the outcome he wants with recourse to the only means at his disposal in this particular context. Tom thus effectively changes the values of the boys who henceforth no longer want to wander the streets pretending to be a Mississippi steamer or go

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<sup>8</sup>This simplified dichotomy is frequently complemented by a third variety, i.e., structural power, to be elaborated upon below; see Chap. 2.

<sup>9</sup>To be sure, in the further course of the novel, Tom wins a fortune in a series of further "queer enterprises."

swimming in a nearby waterhole, but now rather wish to whitewash a board fence instead. In short: Tom applies soft power.

How does Tom succeed? He makes a wearisome task look attractive and leads by example in order to do so. He *pretends* to greatly enjoy his task and even refuses to give up the brush at first. Tom thus wields what might more precisely be called *delusive* soft power: getting others to do something one does *not* want to do oneself, but rather convincing others of the desirability of the task and then generously standing back. Tom, with his deceptive behavior, therefore, might admittedly be reproached with foul play as he brazenly exploits the boys' credulity. In fact, this reproach goes along perfectly with the observation that soft power, although conversely alleged by some commentators and critics, is by no means a mere normative concept but is explicitly impartial—being available for noble and selfish or downright bad purposes alike (as we shall also see in more detail later).

In any case, Tom's success at the end of his scheme is obvious and presents itself to be manifold: Not only is the fence whitewashed three times over and Tom's main goal thus more than achieved, Tom also enjoys a restful day and is later even rewarded with an apple by his aunt for his miraculous feat. Furthermore, Tom rakes in—besides the apple supplied by Ben Rogers in exchange for the first few strokes referred to above—a kite, a dead rat, a dozen marbles, and countless further goods certainly treasured by the other boys who gave them away. After this “substantial change which had taken place in his worldly circumstances,” as Mark Twain puts it, Tom is able to re-trade his new-found wealth for more desirable objects with other boys later on in the novel.

Summarizing, the whitewashing of the fence and Tom Sawyer's scheme to get others to want what he wants (or in this case more precisely: to get others to want what he does *not* want to do) offers an excellent example of the successful application of soft power.<sup>10</sup> It depicts a situation in which an actor achieves his desired outcome while other forms of power prove unavailable or ineffective to him under the given circumstances. Attractive soft power, although perhaps less tangible and measurable (for it cannot be as easily “counted” as can apples, marbles, or dead rats), it turns out, can at times be even more resourceful than other varieties of power. Mark Twain himself elaborated on the immense powers of attraction when he argued that on this bright summer's day in St. Petersburg, Tom Sawyer “had discovered a great law of human action,”

If he [Tom] had been a great and wise philosopher, like the writer of this book, he would now have comprehended that Work consists of whatever a body is *obliged* to do, and that Play consists of whatever a body is not obliged to do. And this would help him to understand why constructing artificial flowers or performing on a treadmill is work, while rolling ten-pins or climbing Mont Blanc is only amusement.

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<sup>10</sup>With the reference to the attraction emanating mainly from a particular individual rather than other resources frequently attributed to soft power, the episode also foreshadows the introduction of a hitherto neglected source of soft power within the proposed taxonomy; see below, Sect. 3.1.4.

While the fence episode is, of course, fictional (even though Mark Twain states to have included autobiographical and personally experienced elements in his novel), most of us have experienced comparable situations in our daily lives. The attractive powers of activities, objects, ideas, or even individuals thus often rest upon the ability of somebody attracting us to them by praising them, by leading by example, or simply by possessing them and perhaps withholding them from us. Toys, for example, not uncommonly build their attraction upon the very fact that they are possessed by siblings or other children and—just as often—lose their value when others have lost their interest in them. In this understanding, soft or attractive power might indeed be understood—in Twain’s words—“a great law of human action.”

It shall be the objective of the work in hand to offer new insights into this “great law” by, first, introducing a comprehensive and sophisticated taxonomy of soft power and, second, by providing a methodological roadmap for its empirical study in international relations.

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Bonn, Germany  
Summer 2019

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# List of Abbreviations

AAUP	American Association of University Professors
CDU	Christian Democratic Party of Germany
CHA	Comparative Historical Analysis
CNN	Cable News Network
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies
EU	European Union
IBE	Inference to the Best Explanation
ICC	International Criminal Court
IR	International Relations
IVLP	International Visitor Leadership Program
MNC	Multinational Cooperation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PD	Public Diplomacy
PRC	People's Republic of China
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany
UK	United Kingdom (of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
U.N./UN	United Nations (Organization)
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
USIA	United States Information Agency
U.S./US	United States (of America)
USNS	United States Navy Ship
USS	United States Ship
U.S.S.R.	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction: In the Midst of Global Power Shifts



The book in hand seeks to elucidate and elaborate on the concept of soft power in international relations. Hence, it addresses the forces of attraction in world politics—forces that have been a mainspring in political and indeed all social interactions from the first. In the recent past, however, these forces have experienced ever-increasing importance. As shall be demonstrated, this fact renders a through scientific engagement with the issue crucial for our understanding of international relations today.

In fact, *any* scientific research starts with a question to be answered, a hypothesis to be tested, a phenomenon to be explained, or a puzzle to be solved. Still, there are certain requirements regarding the object of investigation that have to be met in order to render the research particularly worthwhile. First, it has been noted—rather obviously—that a research question should be both simple in its formulation and allowing the possibility of yielding negative results.<sup>1</sup> The possibility of fallacy, consequently, has been rightly identified as an integral part of any scientific endeavor.<sup>2</sup> With respect to the work in hand, this means that we may very well come to the conclusion that a substantiated operationalization of soft power (at least as approached here) could not be achieved. Second, research questions in the social sciences ought to be of relevance.<sup>3</sup> In this regard, a social or academic relevance can be distinguished.<sup>4</sup> Matthias Lehnert, Bernhard Miller, and Arndt Wonka agree on

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<sup>1</sup>Bob Hancké, “The Challenge of Research Design,” in *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, eds. David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 236.

<sup>2</sup>Friedrich Dürrenmatt, “Kunst und Wissenschaft,” in *Versuche/Kants Hoffnung: Essays und Reden* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1998), p. 75.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Geschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig, “Introduction: Designing Research in Political Science – A Dialogue between Theory and Data,” in *Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach*, eds. Thomas Geschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup>Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 15–19; Geschwend and Schimmelfennig, “Introduction,” p. 3.

these two crucial dimensions: whereas research that is academically relevant seeks to improve a theory or concept, socially relevant research offers new approaches for the understanding of certain political or social issues for policy-makers and the public alike.<sup>5</sup> Of course, both dimensions are by no means mutually exclusive.<sup>6</sup> Connected with the required relevance, research ideally should be topical, that is, addressing an issue of relevance for the present.

The work in hand meets these standards and arguably ranks exceedingly high in both regards. In particular, it is the phenomenon of shifting power configurations observable in international relations today that lends academic, political, and social relevance as well as a particular topicality to the study. These power shifts, according to Joseph Nye, can be perceived in two different yet interdependent dimensions: “a power transition among states and a power diffusion away from all states to nonstate actors.”<sup>7</sup>

## 1.1 Power Transition in International Relations

Beginning with the former, power transition, identified by Joseph Nye as constituting the first of the major power shifts in the twenty-first century, concerns the shifting distribution of power among different nation-states.<sup>8</sup> This process, as well as its recognition, is, of course, nothing distinctly new: the ancient Greeks and Romans envisioned different ages (i.e., Iron, Heroic, Bronze, Silver, and Golden Age), which were thought to be constantly recurrent and they had no illusions as to the perpetuity of human affairs and social institutions<sup>9</sup>; Herodotus, to offer just one example in this vein, hence opened his *Histories* with the exposition,

I shall go forward with my history, describing equally the greater and the lesser cities. For the cities which were formerly great, have most of them become insignificant; and such as are at present powerful, were weak in the olden time. I shall therefore discourse equally of both, convinced that human happiness never continues long in one stay;<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Matthias Lehnert, Bernhard Miller, and Arndt Wonka, “Increasing the Relevance of Research Questions: Considerations on Theoretical and Social Relevance in Social Science,” in *Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach*, eds. Thomas Geschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 23–27.

<sup>6</sup>Lehnert, Miller, and Wonka, “Increasing the Relevance of Research Questions,” p. 28.

<sup>7</sup>Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York, N.Y.: PublicAffairs, 2011), p. xv.

<sup>8</sup>Nye, *The Future of Power*, pp. 153–204.

<sup>9</sup>The most famous expression of this view can arguably be found in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (I, 89–150), a passage which opens with famed line, “Aurea prima sata est” (Ov. Met. I, 89); Ovid (P. Ovidius Naso), *Matamorphosen/Metamorphoseon Libri* (München: Artemis & Winkler, 1992), p. 10.

<sup>10</sup>Herodotus, *The History*, Translated from the Ancient Greece by George Rawlinson, Volume I (New York, N.Y.: The Tandy-Thomas Company, 1909), p. 31 (Hdt. I, 5).

Church Father Augustine of Hippo famously declared in the early fifth century, against the immediate backdrop of the Sack of Rome by the Visigoths in 410, that every secular state (*civitas terrena*), however powerful, is but ephemeral and only the City of Good (*civitas dei*) will prove eternal<sup>11</sup>; one millennium later, Florentine Renaissance scholar and historian Francesco Guicciardini remarked, confining himself to this world alone, “All cities, states and governments are mortal, since either by nature or accident everything in this world must some time have an end.”<sup>12</sup>

In the light of such notions, recurrent changes in the power positions among nations and states may, in fact, be considered, to paraphrase Heraclitus, the single greatest constant in world history: Ancient China, Egypt, the Greek poleis, Rome, the Byzantine Empire, the Italian Renaissance principalities, the overseas empires of Portugal or Spain, the nations conducting the Concert of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth century, all saw their rise and fall. As Henry Kissinger has aptly written in this regard, “The history of most civilizations is a tale of the rise and fall of empires.”<sup>13</sup> Historian Norman Davies, in his magnificent *Vanished Kingdoms: The Rise and Fall of States and Nations*, agreed emphatically,

[S]tudents of history need to be constantly reminded of the transience of power, for transience is one of the fundamental characteristics of both the human condition and of the political order. Sooner or later, all things come to an end. Sooner or later, the centre cannot hold. All states and nations, however great, bloom for a season and are replaced.<sup>14</sup>

Politicians frequently subscribe to this observation of power shifts among nations as well. British Prime Minister Tony Blair, for example, reminded his audience in a 2003 address before the United States Congress, “As Britain knows, all predominant power seems for a time invincible, but in fact, it is transient.”<sup>15</sup> Actually, it was with respect to Britain that Rudyard Kipling had warned an empire on the very apogee of its power on the occasion of the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1897,

Far-called our navies melt away—  
On dune and headland sinks the fire—  
Lo, all our pomp of yesterday  
Is one with Nineveh and Tyre!  
Judge of the Nations, spare us yet,  
Lest we forget—lest we forget!<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History* (London: Pan Books, 2006), pp. 228–232.

<sup>12</sup>Quoted in Vincent Cronin, *The Florentine Renaissance* (London: Pimlico, 1992), p. 300.

<sup>13</sup>Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (London: Allen Lane, 2014), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup>Norman Davies, *Vanished Kingdoms: The Rise and Fall of States and Nations* (New York, N.Y.: Viking, 2011), p. 5.

<sup>15</sup>Tony Blair, “Address by the Right Honorable Tony Blair, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,” Washington, D.C., July 13, 2003, in *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, First Session, Vol. 149 – Part 14, July 17, 2003 to July 25, 2003* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 2003), p. 18598.

<sup>16</sup>Rudyard Kipling, “Recessional,” *The Times*, July 17, 1897, p. 13.

As the course of further events has shown, Kipling's fears, voiced even before the turn of the twentieth century, were not unfounded. In our days, the "Rise of China" (which more accurately should be termed "Return of China" or "Reemergence of China"<sup>17</sup>) and a presumed coincidental decline in the global position of the United States of America are especially high on the agenda with respect to power transitions. In recent years, observers thus identified a global power shift in the direction of the Middle Kingdom as well as other emerging countries (frequently subsumed under the acronym BRICS<sup>18</sup>) with regard to the hard power factors of military expenditures and capabilities as well as economic strength and technological innovation.<sup>19</sup> Fareed Zakaria accordingly identified what he has called "the Rise of the Rest" as the defining characteristic of the most recent among the "three tectonic power shifts over the last 500 years."<sup>20</sup> Christopher Layne pointed out in the same vein in 2010,

Even before the current financial and economic meltdown, the dramatic ongoing shift in the distribution of global economic—and ultimately geopolitical—power from the Euro-Atlantic world to Asia was prompting calls that international institutions reflect the diminishing clout of the 'West'—especially the USA.<sup>21</sup>

As a result of these developments, discussions about the United States decline have flared up again in recent years, albeit—as shall be argued below at greater length—they have accompanied the United States virtually since its foundation and can be detected even prior to that. However, in recent years "declinism" gained considerable momentum. With Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "The narrative regarding the US international position has clearly shifted: pundits, scholars, and policymakers frequently and prominently argue that the United States

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<sup>17</sup>Henry Kissinger, *On China* (London: Allen Lane, 2011), p. 514. See also Nye, *The Future of Power*, p. 179 and Gordon H. Chang, *Fateful Ties: A History of America's Preoccupation with China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 9.

<sup>18</sup>The BRICS states include Brazil, Russia, India, the People's Republic China, and South Africa. The term (first styled as BRIC and soon to be augmented by the addition of South Africa) was coined in 2001, see Jim O'Neill, "Building Better Global Economic BRICs," *Global Economics Paper No: 66*, Goldman Sachs, November 30, 2001, online at: <http://www.goldmansachs.com/our-thinking/archive/archive-pdfs/build-better-brics.pdf> (accessed September 4, 2017).

<sup>19</sup>James F. Hodge, Jr., "A Global Power Shift in the Making," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (July/August 2004), pp. 2–7.

<sup>20</sup>Fareed Zakaria, "The Future of American Power: How America Can Survive the Rise of the Rest," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 87, No. 3 (May/June 2008), p. 42; the previous two shifts having been the rise of the Western world from the beginning of Early Modern Age until Enlightenment and the rise of the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; see also Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World: And the Rise of the Rest* (London: Penguin Books, 2009).

<sup>21</sup>Christopher Layne, "The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power," in *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 72.

has tumbled from its previous global position and that a fundamental, system-altering power shift is underway.”<sup>22</sup>

In this context, power shifts have not only been detected in the realm of hard power alone. In fact, the realm of military power has been considered to be the one dimension in which power has *not* been shifting away from US preeminence.<sup>23</sup> By contrast, the dimension of soft power has been identified as witnessing fundamental power shifts today in particular. Joseph Nye has hence pointed out,

[S]oft power is not static. Resources change with the changing context. They have varied in the past and will continue to do so in the future. Historical trends from the Cold War era may not prove reliable guides when forecasting the ebb and flow of American soft power in the war on terrorism.<sup>24</sup>

Other commentators agree that equal to hard power, soft power may also be subjected to change and competition between nation-states.<sup>25</sup> For instance, the “Rise of China” has not only been touching upon the dimensions of hard power but has crucially included the dimension of soft power as well.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, others have hinted at the declining US soft power.<sup>27</sup> Kostas Ifantis, for example, pointed out in 2011 that “foreign perceptions of the United States have declined considerably in the past few years as a result of various unpopular international American actions.”<sup>28</sup> Joseph Nye, drawing on the results of a 2007 Congressional Smart Power Commission (cochaired by Richard Armitage and Nye himself), agreed, “We concluded that America’s image and influence had declined in recent years and that the United States had to move from exporting fear to inspiring optimism and hope.”<sup>29</sup> After the most recent change of government in Washington, the issue of (declining) US soft power returned to the very top of the agenda once more. Eliot A. Cohen, for example, has recently detected a “rot that is visible in America’s standing and ability to influence global affairs.”<sup>30</sup> The fact that soft power has for long been a prominent and important part in US foreign policy renders this perceived decline particularly significant.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, *America Abroad: The United States’ Global Role in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 3.

<sup>23</sup>Zakaria, “The Future of American Power,” p. 43.

<sup>24</sup>Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004), p. 68.

<sup>25</sup>R. S. Zaharna, *The Cultural Awakening in Public Diplomacy, CPD Perspectives on Public Diplomacy, Paper 4, 2012* (Los Angeles, Cal.: Figueroa Press, 2012), p. 42.

<sup>26</sup>Richard Falk, *Power Shift: On the New Global Order* (London: Zed Books, 2016), p. 13.

<sup>27</sup>Layne, “The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power,” p. 66.

<sup>28</sup>Kostas Ifantis, “Soft Power: Overcoming the Limits of a Concept,” in *Routledge Handbook of Diplomacy and Statecraft*, ed. B. J. C. McKercher (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 444.

<sup>29</sup>Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “The War on Soft Power,” *Foreign Policy*, April 12, 2011, online at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2011/04/12/the-war-on-soft-power/> (accessed September 4, 2017).

<sup>30</sup>Eliot A. Cohen, “Is Trump Ending the American Era?,” *The Atlantic* (October 2017), p. 71.

<sup>31</sup>Matthew Fraser, *Weapons of Mass Distraction: Soft Power and American Empire* (New York, N.Y.: St. Martin’s Press, 2003), p. 9.



## 1.2 Power Diffusion and the Growing Importance of Soft Power

Turning to the second power shift identified, it has become a much discussed theme that a diffusion of power has been taking place, resulting in a declining importance of nation-states as the traditional actors in international relations.<sup>32</sup> The entry of various other actors onto the international scene, including international organizations, terrorist networks, large enterprises, and even individuals, underlines this observation, which has become common since the accelerated advent of globalization in the early 1990s. Werner Weidenfeld hence pointed out in 1996,

The East-West conflict is no longer one of the main strategic determinants of world politics—and the dominating significance of security policy has also waned. The number of actors on the international political stage is growing, and with it the scope for different patterns of cooperation and conflict is also increasing. This development means that the power structures of old are having to be increasingly relativized. Although the USA has remained the only ‘superpower,’ it is finding it increasingly difficult to bring its weight to bear, because military and political domination is no longer as crucial as it once was when it comes to solving the conflicts of the day (civil wars, economic crisis, nuclear proliferation).<sup>33</sup>

After the turn of the century, Niall Ferguson has likewise argued that “[t]he paradox of globalization is that as the world becomes more integrated, so power becomes more diffuse.”<sup>34</sup> For Joseph Nye, five major trends contribute to the global diffusion of power: “economic interdependence, transnational actors, nationalism in weak states, the spread of technology, and changing political issues.”<sup>35</sup> Not all these trends identified by Nye need to be considered in detail at this point. (Some of them shall be picked up again below when discussing the origins of soft power.) What is important, however, is the changed setting in which international politics is being made today. In an age of globalization, nation-states today are more economically interdependent than ever before, as events like the most recent global financial and economic crises have so dramatically demonstrated. Additionally, the (realist) view of the state as the foremost, and indeed only relevant, actor on the international stage is being heavily contested. Large multinational corporations or even private foundations, for example, frequently have larger revenues than a great number of nation-states. As a consequence of these developments, Joseph Nye has fittingly noted, “States will remain the dominant actor on the world stage, but they will find the stage

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<sup>32</sup>Nye, *The Future of Power*, pp. 113–151.

<sup>33</sup>Werner Weidenfeld, *America and Europe: Is the Break Inevitable?* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Foundation Publishers, 1996), pp. 19–20.

<sup>34</sup>Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America’s Empire* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Press, 2004), p. 298.

<sup>35</sup>Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990), p. 182.

far more crowded and difficult to control.”<sup>36</sup> And Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin have elaborated in this regard, “States, non-state actors, great powers, normal powers, rogue states, terrorists, NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), and MNCs (multinational corporations) are all actors associated with the international system today.”<sup>37</sup>

Consequently, along with an ever increasing dispersion of power between a growing number of actors comes a shift in the importance among the different varieties of power. While Edward Bulwer-Lytton famously claimed in his play *Richelieu* as early as 1839, “The pen is mightier than the sword,”<sup>38</sup> today’s new and more sophisticated technologies of information and communication make his observation more topical than ever. Claudia Auer, Alice Srugies, and Martin Löffelholz have, thus, appropriately argued that the parameters of interaction and communication in international relations have changed over the last few decades.<sup>39</sup> Accordingly, in the words of John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, the decisive question of the twenty-first century may no longer be about “whose military or economy wins,” but rather “about whose story wins.”<sup>40</sup> Joseph Nye, echoing these very words, likewise noted that “in the information age, success is not merely the result of whose army wins, but also whose story wins.”<sup>41</sup>

Nye has also elaborated on the consequence of such developments,

Some observers have argued that the sources of power are, in general, moving away from the emphasis on military force and conquest that marked earlier eras. In assessing international power today, factors such as technology, education, and economic growth are becoming more important, whereas geography, population, and raw materials are becoming less important.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Nye, *The Future of Power*, p. 114.

<sup>37</sup>Laura Roselle, Alister Miskimmon, and Ben O’Loughlin, “Strategic Narrative: A New Means to Understand Soft Power,” *Media, War & Conflict*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2014), p. 75.

<sup>38</sup>Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Richelieu; Or, The Conspiracy: A Play, in Five Acts* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1839), p. 39.

<sup>39</sup>Claudia Auer, Alice Srugies, and Martin Löffelholz, “Schlüsselbegriffe der internationalen Diskussion: Public Diplomacy und Soft Power,” in *Kultur und Außenpolitik: Handbuch für Wissenschaft und Praxis*, ed. Kurt-Jürgen Maaß (Baden Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2015), p. 39.

<sup>40</sup>John Arquilla and David Ronfeldt, *The Emergence of Noopolitik: Toward an American Information Strategy* (Santa Monica, Cal.: RAND Corporation, 1999), p. 53.

<sup>41</sup>Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “The Future of Soft Power in US Foreign Policy,” in *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 8.

<sup>42</sup>Joseph S. Nye, Jr., “The Changing Nature of World Power,” *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 105, No. 2 (Summer 1990), p. 179.

In line with this argumentation, it has frequently been pointed out that “military force’s utility is declining”<sup>43</sup> and that a “declining leverage of hard power”<sup>44</sup> in international affairs can be detected. Different rationales account for this development. First, political issues such as ecological threats, global health issues, or transnational and cyber terrorism escape the boundaries of nation-states and their traditional spheres of influence and do not easily lend themselves to the instruments of hard power, particularly military force.<sup>45</sup> Kostas Ifantis in this regard fittingly remarked, “Hard power is of little use with a range of today’s security challenges: nuclear proliferation, jihadism, collapsed states, refugees, piracy, suicide bombers, and ‘black swan’ (high-impact, difficult to foresee, and usually outside customary expectations) events.”<sup>46</sup> Consequently, power has increasingly been losing its dependence on stipulated territorial boundaries.<sup>47</sup> Secondly, with rising interdependence among nation-states, the costs of applying military force have increased dramatically. As Nye aptly pointed out, “In earlier periods, the costs of coercion were relatively low. Force was acceptable and economies less interdependent.”<sup>48</sup> Today, global interdependence has increased dramatically. Ali S. Wyne, with respect to the application of hard power, thus, noted that “the world’s interconnectivity ensures that the use of conventional power is mutually inimical.”<sup>49</sup> This view, of course, also gave rise to the International Relations theory of interdependence first formulated by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye in 1977.<sup>50</sup> While hence already observable for decades, these developments gathered pace dramatically after the end of the Cold War. Recently, Richard Falk has accordingly elaborated on this issue,

I wish to critique the old geopolitics which is based on the primacy of hard power, essentially conceived as military power and its accompanying diplomatic clout, as the essential agent of historical change in the affairs of sovereign states. It seems appropriate at this stage of history to contrast this old geopolitics with an emerging but yet not emergent new geopolitics that relies on soft power and grasps the limits of the role of force in achieving the goals of peoples and the objectives of national governments and international institutions.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Ali S. Wyne, “Public Opinion and Power,” in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, eds. Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2009), p. 43.

<sup>44</sup>Falk, *Power Shift*, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup>Nye, *The Future of Power*, p. 231.

<sup>46</sup>Ifantis, “Soft Power,” p. 444.

<sup>47</sup>Byung-Chul Han, *Was ist Macht?* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005), pp. 120–121.

<sup>48</sup>Nye, *Bound to Lead*, p. 190.

<sup>49</sup>Wyne, “Public Opinion and Power,” p. 42.

<sup>50</sup>Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (Boston, Mass.: Little Brown and Company, 1977).

<sup>51</sup>Falk, *Power Shift*, p. 10.

In fact, commentators have in recent times increasingly agreed to such assessments.<sup>52</sup> Eytan Gilboa, for example, has in the same vein noted, “Favorable image and reputation around the world, achieved through attraction and persuasion, have become more important than territory, access, and raw materials, traditionally acquired through military and economic measures.”<sup>53</sup>

As a consequence of these trends, the currency of soft power in world politics has been gaining in importance and is likely to become even more crucial for years to come. Actually, particularly since the end of the Cold War, countless observers have explicitly pointed to the growing importance of soft power and its fundamental resources, including culture, in international affairs. Of course, Nye himself had led the way in this regard in his 1990 *Bound to Lead*, which introduced the very concept of soft power (at least under this designation) in the first place.<sup>54</sup> However, Nye’s was hardly a lone voice in the wilderness. Benjamin R. Barber, for example, has argued as early as 1992 in a much-noted article,

[C]ulture has become more potent than armaments. What is the power of the Pentagon compared with Disneyland? Can the Sixth Fleet keep up with CNN? McDonald’s in Moscow and Coke in China will do more to create a global culture than military colonization ever could. It is less the goods than the brand names that do the work, for they convey life-style images that alter perception and challenge behavior. They make up the seductive software of McWorld’s common (at times much too common) soul.<sup>55</sup>

In the twenty-first century, voices on that score, if anything, grew even louder. Giulio M. Gallarotti thus pointed out, while underlining the fact that soft power has continuously been a major component of national power in the past, that recent developments have rendered it all the more important today.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the list of authors subscribing to the increased importance of soft power today could be expanded considerably.<sup>57</sup>

Going yet one step further, Simon Anholt even claimed that the variety of soft power constitutes the most important variety of power in the world today.<sup>58</sup> While

<sup>52</sup>See, for example, Xuewu Gu, “Ist Globalität gestaltbar?,” in *Bonner Enzyklopädie der Globalität*, eds. Ludger Kühnhardt and Tilman Mayer (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 2017), p. 1537.

<sup>53</sup>Eytan Gilboa, “Searching for a Theory of Public Diplomacy,” *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, Vol. 616, Public Diplomacy in a Changing World, No. 1 (March 2008), p. 56; see also p. 60.

<sup>54</sup>Nye, *Bound to Lead*, p. 33 & p. 188.

<sup>55</sup>Benjamin R. Barber, “McWorld vs. Jihad,” *The Atlantic Monthly* (March 1992), online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1992/03/jihad-vs-mcworld/303882/> (accessed September 4, 2017).

<sup>56</sup>Giulio M. Gallarotti, *Cosmopolitan Power in International Relations: A Synthesis of Realism, Neoliberalism, and Constructivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 38–42.

<sup>57</sup>See, for example, Jan Melissen, “The New Public Diplomacy: Between Theory and Practice,” in *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. Jan Melissen (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p. 4 and David Ronfeldt and John Arquilla, “Noopolitik: A New Paradigm for Public Diplomacy,” in *Routledge Handbook of Public Diplomacy*, eds. Nancy Snow and Philip M. Taylor (New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2009), p. 353.

<sup>58</sup>Simon Anholt, “Soft Power,” *Internationale Politik* (January/February 2014), p. 49.

the work in hand subscribes to observations of a growing importance of soft power in international politics, Anholt's assumption, arguably, goes too far. Hard power, that is, military might and economic prowess, of course, remains vitally important in international affairs. Countless empirical events in the recent past all around the world, from Crimea to Syria to North Korea, underline this point. At the same time, power—across all its varieties—is no zero-sum game and the increasing importance of one variety does not necessarily result in the decrease of others *in all instances*. However, as Tom Sawyer's fence episode referred to above has demonstrated (and as shall be elaborated upon at greater length in the following), power is always dependent on context—and in recent decades, this context of international relations has shifted considerably, rendering soft power more important than ever before. As Joseph Nye aptly put it, "Winning hearts and minds has always been important, but it is even more so in a global information age."<sup>59</sup> Today, in a nutshell, "[s]oft power is more relevant than ever."<sup>60</sup> This development points at the great topicality of the central concept of the work in hand. At the same time, it emphasizes the need to elaborate a more detailed conceptual framework for the understanding and study of soft power.

Hand in hand with this perceived increase in the *importance* of soft power in international relations also went an ever-greater *interest* in the concept of soft power itself, both in the more theoretically oriented academic world and in the practical political arena. With particular respect to the United States, Christopher Layne, though a fierce critic of the concept of soft power itself, has accordingly admitted, "Soft power and its associated concepts have resonated both with those who make American foreign policy policies [sic!] and those who write about it."<sup>61</sup> Others have shared this view,

Given the ubiquity of the term 'soft power' it is clear that the concept represents, without doubt, one of the key elements of international relations. The strength of the concept lies in the fact that it allows theorists and practitioners to think about power in more complex and dynamic ways—at least in ways more complex than some Realist [sic!] assertions of hard power.<sup>62</sup>

Detecting a regional focal point in the concept's triumphal march, Michael Mandelbaum has recently pointed out,

The concept came to have a considerable appeal because it promised influence without exertion. It appealed in particular to the Western Europeans, who had ceased to field formidable military forces but believed—not without reasons—that the peaceful,

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<sup>59</sup>Nye, *Soft Power*, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup>Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Responding to My Critics and Concluding Thoughts," in *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010), p. 226.

<sup>61</sup>Layne, "The Unbearable Lightness of Soft Power," p. 58.

<sup>62</sup>Gitika Commuri, "'Are You Pondering What I am Pondering?' Understanding the Conditions Under Which States Gain and Lose Soft Power," in *Power in the 21st Century: International Security and International Political Economy in a Changing World*, eds. Enrico Fels, Jan-Frederik Kremer, and Katharina Kronenberg (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 2012), p. 43.

prosperous, cooperative community they had built since World War II inspired others to emulate them.<sup>63</sup>

In line with these sentiments, Su Changhe has even asserted, “In contemporary diplomacy and international relations, there is probably no concept more widely accepted among policy-makers and students of international relations than that of soft power.”<sup>64</sup> Actually, a simple Google search seems to substantiate these widely shared estimations, as the phrase “soft power” yields 4,730,000 results with the search engine in general, 187,000 with Google Books, 149,000 with Google News, and 104,000 with Google Scholar.<sup>65</sup>

Concurrently, not only has much ink been spilled on the issue but also various countries around the world have sought to add the arrow of soft power to their quiver of statecraft. Matthew Fraser has in this context fittingly observed, “No empire—Greek, Roman, French, Ottoman, British—has been indifferent to the effects of its soft power resources.”<sup>66</sup> In our present information age, however, a wide range of countries as well as other actors in international relations have dramatically increased their quest for soft power on an hitherto unprecedented scale.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, on a more personal note, it has fittingly been pointed out that a strong individual interest in and identification with a given topic is required on the part of any researcher.<sup>68</sup> This requirement becomes all the more important when pursuing an extensive research project conducted over the course of several years. With the present study and its focus on the concept of soft power, which is decidedly interdisciplinary and which touches upon a plethora of different literatures, this requirement is met with flying colors. The study of power in general, and soft power in particular, this “great law of human action,” thus proves to be a highly rewarding endeavor and the desire to shed some new light on so old a phenomenon is intellectually stimulating, indeed.

Given the concurrency of the factors, especially the two different yet highly interdependent power shifts outlined above and not least the growing interest in the concept of soft power itself, it seems utterly timely to offer ways to empirically analyze the workings of soft power in international relations by providing a sound conceptual basis and rigorous methodological approaches.

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<sup>63</sup>Michael Mandelbaum, *Mission Failure: America and the World in the Post-Cold War Era* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 375.

<sup>64</sup>Su Changhe, “Soft Power,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, eds. Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine, and Ramesh Thakur (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 544.

<sup>65</sup>Searches were conducted by the author on April 17, 2019.

<sup>66</sup>Fraser, *Weapons of Mass Distraction*, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup>Janice Bially Mattern, “Why ‘Soft Power’ Isn’t So Soft: Representational Force and the Socio-linguistic Construction of Attraction in World Politics,” *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2005), p. 589; Su, “Soft Power,” pp. 547–548 & p. 554.

<sup>68</sup>Hancké, “The Challenge of Research Design,” pp. 232–233.