Hendrik W. Ohnesorge, *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations*, Cham: Springer, xxi + 307 pp., 88.39 € (hardcover), ISBN 978-3-030-29921-7

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The concept of power is central to the analyses of international relations, politics, society, economy as well as human life. Power could be regarded as the lifeblood of a social and political system. Power is multifaceted and, therefore, is hard to measure in concrete quantitative use of the term. It is of two basic types: hard and soft power. Nearly three decades ago, American political scientist Joseph Nye put forth the idea of soft power, a concept that caught fire and went on to define the post-Cold War era (Nye 1990). He asserts that soft power is the ‘ability to affect others by attraction and persuasion rather than just coercion and payment’ (Nye 2017, p. 17). A country’s soft power comes from its civil society and culture rather than from the government. The conceptual definition of soft power offered by Nye is indeed precise, useful and also impactful. The state apparatus; especially the military, police, para-military, and border forces constitute the core of the hard power. The use of force is conceptually linked to hard power. Soft power and hard power are not mutually exclusive, and that soft power complements hard power.

This current book entitled, *Soft Power: The Forces of Attraction in International Relations* by Hendrik W. Ohnesorge, Managing Assistant and Research Fellow at the Center for Global Studies/Chair in International Relations at the University of Bonn (Germany) is a new addition to the literature on the study of soft power. The book, originating from a doctoral dissertation, provides a detailed examination of the concept of soft power both from theoretical and empirical perspectives. It seeks ‘to elucidate and elaborate on the concept of soft power in international relations’ (p.1).

In total, the book has five chapters. In chapter 1, the author illustrates the concept of soft power, its current state of research and importance of the study in light of the existent research gap. The author raises a number of pertinent questions, including:

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What is soft power and how does it take effect in international relations? How can the concept of soft power be operationalized and made more resilient? How can the impact of soft power in international relations be empirically studied?

Chapter two discusses the definitions, origins, contexts, workings and measures of soft power. The end of the Cold War, American declinism, economic liberalization, growing global democratization, globalization, the dawn of the information age, and new challenges to established International Relations theories have contributed to the triumphal march of the concept of soft power. The notion of smart power, referring to a combination of hard and soft power resources, has been broadly explained. Indeed, a rich body of scholarship on the notion of soft power has developed over the last several decades, but much remains to be done. To this end, Ohnesorge notes, ‘The concept of soft power is still plagued by a high degree of vagueness and imprecision, calling for a thorough (re-)examination’ (p.72).

Chapter three offers a new taxonomy of power, and accordingly develops a conceptual paradigm for the analysis of the notion of soft power. The soft power consist of four subunits: resources, instruments, reception and outcomes. These four subunits has distinctive components and each component is composed of several key indicators. The main components are culture, values, policies, personalities, public diplomacy, personal diplomacy, attraction, apathy, repulsion, compliance, neutrality and opposition. These terms are thoroughly defined and explained in this chapter. To illustrate, the author has applied the proposed paradigm to analyze the soft power of the *Roman Empire*. Thus, the taxonomy of the author’s soft power scheme is capable to capture its innovative mechanisms when applied to an empirical example.

Chapter four deals with the underlying issues relating to the approaches of ontology, epistemology and methodology. The interplay of ontology, epistemology, and methodology for the study of soft power along with an exploration of the approaches and methods- positivism, realism, interpretivism, qualitative and quantitative methods- are well treated. The relative merits and drawbacks of these approaches are analyzed in this chapter. The author has analyzed the comparative-historical approach to study the notion of soft power for a few reasons. First, the comparative historical approach is interdisciplinary. Second, with its defining characteristics of causal analysis, focus on processes, systematic comparison, and also taking into account respective contexts, the approach ‘fits in perfectly with the requirements imposed by the study of soft power in international relations’ (p.249). Third, any study of soft power in international relations has to draw on a broad a spectrum of sources. The comparative-historical analysis frequently draws on both primary and secondary sources.

Chapter five offers some concluding remarks on the notion of soft power by providing an anatomy of the taxonomy developed and framework proposed in the previous chapters. The overall framework could be executed in further empirical study of soft power, because of its high degree of its applicability and flexibility. Introducing a comprehensive taxonomy of soft power, thus, the book offers an innovative and substantiated perspective on a pivotal phenomenon in today’s international relations.

However, the rise of regional powers is a decisive factor in determining the nature of a new world order, especially after the global outbreak of the COVID 19 pandemic. For instances, China and India both are consequently trying to enhance their

spheres of influence forcing the states in the Asian region to align with either of them in a binary framework of regionalism (Bhatta 2019). The broad opportunity for soft power influence for China is clear by means of the creation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (LaForgia 2017). Also, the establishment of Confucius Institutes since 2004 to promote the understanding of Chinese language and culture is a striking example of how the Chinese government promotes soft power through cultural means. While China promoted the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) for people-to-people contacts and better conveyed the message of a progressive China by building a network of Confucius Institutes, increasing the number of foreign students studying in China, enhancing tourism, extending generous economic assistance, and participating in peace keeping missions; in India, religious tolerance, thriving civil society, and cultural activities are the main areas for soft power strategy (Shah et al. 2017). The peaceful rise/peaceful development policy in Chinese grand strategy has sought to integrate Chinese hard power and soft power to create a soft rise for China (Yiwei 2008). China has had mixed success with its soft power strategy. In 2007, Chinese President Hu Jintao told the 17th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party that they needed to invest more in soft power, and this continued under President Xi Jinping. Yet, China ‘lags behind the United States in overall attractiveness in most parts of the world, including Asia’ (Nye 2021, p. 205). In Africa, only South Africa and Nigeria consistently display the regional power feature of an Afrocentric foreign policy posture woven around sufficient material preponderance and strong soft power influence (Ogunnubi 2019). In terms of territory, resource and population, Nigeria is a large country in Africa. Given the perceived leadership vacuum in Africa, Nigeria is critical for understanding regional power dynamics in Africa (Ogunnubi 2020a). Nuclear diplomacy in South Africa is an example of soft power development. This diplomacy has evolved through two parallel stages of norm promotion and niche construction aimed at establishing multilateral structures on nuclear disarmament, and peaceful use of nuclear energy in the global nuclear industry (Ogunnubi 2020b). Since the outbreak of the coronavirus, vaccine diplomacy has been used effectively as political tool of soft power. Future research projects may focus on these tools and instruments of soft power in a more systematic and integrative manner.

Overall, the book is highly recommended as it is thought-provoking, well-researched and a good production. For those researching international relations, political science, development and governance studies, the volume offers useful information and insights.

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