

**SOFT POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS; ANALYSING
THE USE OF DIPLOMACY**

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**BEING A RESEARCH SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF
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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **Yusuf Ekinaduese Blessing**, Mat. No. **ART2100712**, in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin Benin City, under my supervision

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Head of Department

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Signature & Date

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to God Almighty for seeing me through different stages of my life and walking with me through it all.

To my parents, Mr. Stephen and Mrs. Becky Yusuf who showed me love and support from my birth to this very stage of my life, for encouraging me spiritually, physically and financially and to my Grand Parents who I never got to spend time with.

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ABSTRACT

Soft power is a term that has gained prominence in the study of international relations and diplomacy over the past few decades. Coined by political scientist Joseph Nye in the late 1980s, soft power refers to the ability of a country to shape the preferences and behaviors of other countries through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or payment. Unlike hard power, which relies on military might or economic leverage, soft power draws upon cultural appeal, values, and diplomacy to foster goodwill and build lasting relationships between nations.

In today's globalized and interconnected world, the role of soft power in diplomacy has become more crucial than ever. It shapes international perceptions, influences global public opinion, and helps countries advance their interests without resorting to force³. Soft power derives its legitimacy from a country's values, institutions, and foreign policy. The instrument for mobilizing a country's soft power abroad is public diplomacy, and therefore the state features prominently in projecting soft power abroad. This power of persuasion is based on intangible resources such as the attractiveness of an international actor's culture and values.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The execution of foreign policy depends on the employment of diverse strategies and tactics to achieve set goals and objectives, these strategies include Power which stands as a crucial and impactful tool. As posited by Nye¹, power has traditionally revolved around military prowess and economic clout, commonly referred to as "hard power." In more recent times, scholars have underscored the significance of soft power, characterized by the ability to influence others' preferences and ideals through persuasion rather than coercion².

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In today's globalized and interconnected world, the role of soft power in diplomacy has become more crucial than ever. It shapes international perceptions,

influences global public opinion, and helps countries advance their interests without resorting to force³. Soft power derives its legitimacy from a country's values, institutions, and foreign policy. The instrument for mobilizing a country's soft power abroad is public diplomacy, and therefore the state features prominently in projecting soft power abroad. This power of persuasion is based on intangible resources such as the attractiveness of an international actor's culture and values. But it also depends on the values and culture of the target audience. In the 21st century, the rise of globalization and the rapid spread of information technology have amplified the importance of soft power. Global audiences can now access cultural Soft power represents the "second facet of power," showcasing the capability to sway others without resorting to overt coercion. Utilizing soft power, particularly through public diplomacy, has proven instrumental in aiding nations in more effectively attaining their foreign policy goals. Nye conceptualizes power as the means to achieve one's objectives and interests through the influence exerted over others, likening strength to affection⁴.

The roots of soft power can be traced back to earlier traditions in diplomacy, where cultural exchanges and the promotion of shared values were used to build alliances and foster mutual understanding. For example, in ancient Greece, the influence of Athenian philosophy, art, and democracy extended beyond its borders, attracting admiration and respect from neighboring city-states. Similarly, during the Cold War, the

United States and the Soviet Union engaged in cultural diplomacy, using art, music, and ideological narratives to win the hearts and minds of people around the world.

There are three avenues for power attainment: coercion and intimidation, incentives and rewards, and appealing to shared culture, values, and ideologies. Soft power, distinguished by its non-coercive nature, involves leveraging attractiveness and appeal to shape others' preferences. It encompasses leveraging foreign policy, cultural elements, and political beliefs to effect change⁵. Unlike coercive force, soft power represents the ability to influence through attraction. In the realm of international politics, all actors including non-governmental entities and international bodies possess the potential to wield soft power.

Diplomacy as it is, encompasses the art, science, and methodologies utilized by states, organizations, or individuals to safeguard their interests and enhance their political, economic, cultural, or scientific relations while fostering amicable ties. Traditionally associated with negotiations aimed at resolving conflicts or convening adversaries to seek common ground, diplomacy is perceived as a substitute for armed conflict, which is deemed a diplomatic failure. Diplomatic endeavours incorporate both coercive measures and value-added incentives, although it is conventionally seen as a peaceful negotiation process⁶. This may entail employing threats, force, or penalties, assessing the costs associated with accepting or rejecting specific agreements, and evaluating adversaries' compliance. Diplomats play a pivotal role in international relations, serving as emissaries

dispatched from one nation to another to engage in dialogue and explore opportunities for mutual interests.

Foreign policy, wielded by national governments, guides their diplomatic engagements and alliances with other nations, reflecting their beliefs and objectives on the global stage. Many foreign policies prioritize national and international security, shaping a nation's interactions with foreign entities and international organizations such as the United Nations. Understanding a nation's foreign policy is integral to comprehending interstate relations, as each country upholds the right and duty to safeguard its national interests, guided by historical and contemporary stances in global politics, cultural legacies, geographical factors, public opinion dynamics, and ideological orientations.

Hence, Power and authority are manifested through force, appeasement, and diplomacy, influenced by cultural, ideological, and technological advancements. Historical contexts like the First and Second World Wars illustrate the spectrum of power application from forceful coercion to diplomatic negotiations. Modern globalization and scientific progressions serve as tools for expanding and consolidating national soft powers⁷. Thus, Comprehending soft power is paramount for formulating effective foreign policies. Nye contends that while non-state actors such as universities, multinational corporations, and influential figures in cultural and creative domains contribute to

persuading foreign populations to align with a nation's policies, the state remains the predominant actor in soft power politics.

Aim and Objectives of The Study

The aim of this study is to examine soft power in international relations by analyzing the use of diplomacy as a tool for imperialism .

The objectives are;

1. To critically examine the Origins of Soft Power In International Relations
2. To examine the use of diplomacy as a tool for imperialism in the interaction amongst states
3. Examine the remaking of the Global South by Global North using soft power

Scope of Study

This study basically focuses on examining, soft power in international relations by analyzing the use of diplomacy as a tool for imperialism . It delves into the evolving nature of power in international relations, focusing on the concept of soft power. The study highlights how nations leverage cultural diplomacy, public opinion, and historical narratives to enhance their soft power and achieve foreign policy objectives. It examines various methods through which soft power is projected, such as cultural exchanges, media influence, and the promotion of national values and ideals. It explores the role of non-state actors, including NGOs and multinational corporations, in shaping global perceptions and aligning foreign populations with a nation's policies. Case studies of

countries like China, Turkey, India, and the United States will be used to illustrate diverse approaches to employing soft power in international affairs.

Methodology

This project work adopts historical research method. data collected are through primary and secondary sources. The primary sources includes oral interviews and reports while the secondary sources includes articles in journals, government publications, book and online materials which focuses on the research project. Hence, both primary and secondary data will be used to gather information for this study

Literature-Review

Nye , in his book titled *Soft power and great-power competition. shifting sands in the balance of power between the United States and China*, avers that the concept refers to a state's ability to influence people without using coercion or force to achieve its goals. Soft power, as opposed to hard power, is built on appeal and persuasion through culture, values, and institutions. Soft power emerged from early arguments about power in international affairs. Joseph Nye originated the notion of soft power in the 1990s and expanded on it in his book *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (2004). It also explores the future of shifting from a hard power approach to soft power during policy development and attaining national interests.

In his book 'The Future of Power', Joseph S. Nye, Jr. discusses how power is shifting in the twenty first century. Following globalisation, non-state actors have

emerged as major players in power conflicts. The emergence of Chinese soft power and the competition it represents for the United States are examined here. *Cultural Diplomacy* by Kirsten Bound, Rachel Briggs, John Holden, and Samuel Jones highlights the significance of culture in international relations with examples from the UK, China, Ethiopia, France, India, and Norway. Published by Demos. The work describes how cultural diplomacy can help to build solid relationships and set the path for a new generation of diplomacy in the year to follow.

In view of Brenner N. in his work *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* Developing countries have typically collaborated in international climate change negotiations through the Group of 77 (G77) coalition, which includes China. They established a unified negotiating position on environmental concerns, saying that environmental degradation was mostly caused by human activities in the developed world, and that wealthy countries should play a larger role in dealing with it. They also sought financial and technological assistance from industrialized nations if they were to contribute to problem solutions. For example, at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the G77 plus China coalition was able to reach an agreement on the principle of CBDR, drawing attention to the rich world's differentiated duty from the poor world

While soft power offers many advantages in contemporary diplomacy, it also presents significant challenges. One of the primary difficulties is the intangibility of soft power its impact is often difficult to measure and requires a long-term commitment.

Unlike hard power, which can achieve immediate results through force or economic pressure, soft power relies on shaping perceptions and building relationships over time. This makes it harder to quantify success or failure and can make soft power strategies vulnerable to sudden shifts in global opinion.

Additionally, soft power is often subject to the actions and perceptions of non-state actors. Civil society, the private sector, and global media all play a role in shaping a country's image. A scandal involving a prominent company or a social movement critical of government policies can impact a nation's reputation abroad. In the digital age, where information spreads rapidly through social media and online platforms, managing a country's image has become increasingly complex.

Another challenge lies in balancing soft power with hard power. Countries that rely too heavily on military force or economic coercion may find it difficult to maintain a positive image, even if they invest in cultural diplomacy and public relations. This tension between hard and soft power requires careful management, as countries must navigate the complexities of pursuing their strategic interests while maintaining their attractiveness.

Chapterization

This Research work will be subdivided into chapters to enhance easy understanding and proper organization of the study. It will span through five chapters.

Chapter One: Background to the Study

This chapter covers the blue print of the entire research work, it comprises of the introduction which is the general overview of the research work, the aim and objectives of the study, the scope of the study, the research methodology as well as the literature review

Chapter Two: Origin of Soft Power In International Relations

The chapter elucidate the origin and development of soft power in international relations. It examines the history and emergence of Soft power as a crucial tool in contemporary diplomacy, offering nations the ability to influence global perceptions and shape international relations through cultural appeal, political values, and positive engagement. It also examine the Key Components of Soft Power, Foreign Policy and International Engagement

Chapter Three: Diplomacy as a Tool for Imperialism in International Relations

This chapter seek to evaluate the us of Diplomacy as a tool for neo-colonialism in international relations. It focuses on the concepts of diplomacy and imperialism. The chapter also examine diplomatic relations.

Chapter Four: Remaking of the Global South by the Global North using Soft Power

This chapter focuses on the remaking of the South by North using soft power. It examines the evolving nature of power in international relations, focusing Remaking of the global South by North using soft power. It examines the various methods through which the North uses soft power to control South

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Chapter five is the last chapter of the research work. It encompasses the summary of findings, conclusion and recommendation

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CHAPTER TWO

ORIGIN OF SOFT POWER IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In international relations, "power" is the capacity of a state to influence the behavior of other states or actors to achieve desired outcomes. Traditionally, this influence has been categorized into two primary forms: hard power and soft power. Soft power as defined by the Oxford Dictionary is "a persuasive approach to international relations, typically involving the use of economic or cultural influence."¹ the capacity to attract others to align with our interests without resorting to force". Soft power represents the "second facet of power," showcasing the capability to sway others without resorting to overt coercion. Utilizing soft power, particularly through public diplomacy, has proven instrumental in aiding nations in more effectively attaining their foreign policy goals. Nye conceptualizes power as the means to achieve one's objectives and interests through the influence exerted over others, likening strength to affection.² The concept of power in international relations has historically been defined in military or economic terms. However, the post-Cold War era witnessed the emergence of a new dimension of influence referred to as soft power. Coined by Joseph Nye in the late 20th century, soft power reflects the ability of a country to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion or payment.³

Historical Origin

The conclusion of the Cold War marked a significant shift in international relations, transitioning from a bipolar power structure dominated by military and economic might to a more nuanced landscape where influence is often exerted through non-coercive means. This evolution underscores the growing importance of soft power, a concept introduced by political scientist Joseph S. Nye Jr. in the late 1980s. Nye defines soft power as "the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment"⁴. Unlike hard power, which relies on military force or economic sanctions, soft power leverages intangible assets such as culture, political values, and foreign policies to shape the preferences and behaviors of other nations.

Soft power is mostly linked to international diplomacy as propagated by the US and date back to the end of WWII when the US found itself catapulted into a new position on the scene of international diplomacy. The use of non-military tools as a way of influencing certain international relations is a philosophy that began to be applied to US foreign relations after WWII. The idea to use culture, literature, language and other forms of non-military propagation to bolster one's public image with his neighbours thus, goes back hundreds and thousands of years. Joseph S. Nye describes Soft Power as the Means to Success in World Politics. From the 17th century the success of the French government in propagating French culture and especially language to such an extent that

French became a language of culture and diplomacy with relatively recently. Even today the idea of French culture exudes a certain amount of sophistication for many people⁵. As Nye says, during the French Revolution, France sought to appeal over the heads of governments directly to foreign populations by promoting its revolutionary ideology. After its defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, the French government sought to repair the nation's shattered prestige by promoting its language and literature through the Alliance Française, which was created in 1883.”

In the aftermath of WWII the US found itself in a very strong economic and political position and as a result had to rethink its diplomatic strategies and goals. Apart for the obvious use of hard power or military strength comprising of weapons, intelligence materials and the military the US government also began to look at “cultural influence” as a “supplement” to the well established military or hard power. The idea of using soft power as a form of diplomacy provided the means to fulfil a number of crucial roles linked to the position of the US in the new world order. Firstly soft power was meant to give the US a positive international image, not that of an aggressor but that of a modern, progressive nation. Secondly soft power was meant to counteract any negative consequences of US military power outside the US⁶. Third not the least reason for the deployment of soft power was the gradual and long-term use of America's resources to provide assistance to the allies which needed help in every way.

By the time the idea or concept of soft power had began to play on a realistic role in American diplomacy, the US had found itself competing with the USSR seeking influence all over the world not only militarily but also ideologically. The USSR like the US found itself at the other end of the newly formed “bi polar” world which was divided between the “East and West” the dichotomy of the US and Russia or communism and democracy. The US therefore decided to use the philosophy of soft power as a way of influencing not only people but also nations, entities with which it had not been directly involved with the decision to use soft power as a kind of “preventive tool” to spread a good image of American in places where it had never before ventured. In comparison or maybe in unison the USSR also began to consider the idea of indirect non military influence as an effective form of diplomacy. The US and its arch rival, the USSR were therefore not only competing in the world militarily but also on a “soft” or cultural level. Nowhere was this battle more intense than in the “Third World” a term also developed after WWII to signify countries that were “less developed” than some countries in Europe and the US.⁷

Although the term "soft power" was formally coined by Joseph S. Nye in the late 20th century, the practices and ideas underpinning soft power have deep historical roots. The use of culture, values, ideology, and moral appeal to influence others can be traced to ancient empires, religious institutions, and diplomatic traditions long before the modern international system emerged. In ancient Greece, particularly during the 5th century

BCE, Athens developed a unique form of political and cultural influence over other city-states through its promotion of democracy, arts, and philosophy. The spread of Athenian ideals through the Delian League extended Athenian soft power across the Aegean. The construction of the Parthenon, the writings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, and Athenian theater festivals served not only domestic cultural functions but also symbolic international ones communicating Athens' superiority and civility⁸.

Also, the Roman Empire integrated its subjects not only through military conquest but also through the strategic promotion of Roman law, language (Latin), architecture, and customs. This process, often referred to as "Romanization," created a shared cultural identity among diverse populations. Roman soft power was visible in infrastructure amphitheaters, roads, and aqueducts which symbolized order and prosperity. This form of attraction-based influence helped maintain Roman hegemony across vast territories. Religions, particularly Christianity and Islam, were potent soft power vehicles throughout history. Their influence extended beyond spiritual domains and played central roles in geopolitics⁹.

During the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church held soft power over monarchs and commoners alike, using moral legitimacy and religious authority to influence decisions across Europe. Papal excommunications, for instance, could isolate kings from their subjects. The Crusades, while military in nature, were justified through religious narratives that mobilized populations across kingdoms.⁷ Pilgrimages, cathedral

building, and Latin liturgy served to reinforce the Church's transnational ideological reach. The Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 CE) projected soft power by becoming a hub for science, philosophy, and culture. The House of Wisdom in Baghdad became a beacon of intellectual activity, drawing scholars from various regions.⁸ The spread of Arabic as a scholarly and administrative language extended the Caliphate's influence far beyond its borders. The appeal of Islamic jurisprudence, art, and science often softened resistance to political authority in newly integrated regions.¹⁰

Monarchies and Cultural Power

The reign of Louis XIV of France (1643–1715) illustrates a pre-modern form of soft power. France under the Sun King became a cultural hegemon in Europe through its fashion, cuisine, art, court rituals, and language. French became the language of diplomacy and refinement across Europe.¹⁰ Versailles served not only as a political center but also as a symbol of civilizational superiority. This cultural influence persisted well into the 19th century.

British Imperial Soft Power

The British Empire combined hard imperial rule with soft strategies of cultural dissemination. Through the promotion of English education, literature, science, and liberal political thought, Britain cultivated admiration among colonial elites. Institutions like Oxford and Cambridge became models for colonial schools in India and Africa, producing Anglicized elites who were often co-opted into the colonial administration.

Even critics of empire, such as Gandhi, were educated in this system, attesting to the depth of British cultural penetration.

The 20th Century and the Rise of Mass Media

The 20th century brought new technologies that amplified soft power. Radio, film, and television became tools for projecting national identity and political values globally. After World War I and especially during World War II, the United States began to intentionally cultivate its global image through cultural diplomacy. The U.S. government supported Hollywood films, jazz tours, academic exchanges (e.g., Fulbright Program), and the Voice of America radio broadcasts. These initiatives showcased American values of freedom, prosperity, and modernity critical in countering Nazi and later Soviet narratives¹¹.

The Soviet Union deployed its own version of soft power through ideological education, worker solidarity, art, and scientific achievements (e.g., Sputnik). Communist parties around the world looked to the USSR for ideological guidance. The Comintern and various friendship societies sought to build cultural and ideological affinity with socialist movements globally.

Institutionalization in the Post–Cold War Era

The post–Cold War period saw the emergence of soft power as a formal concept within international relations discourse. The unipolar moment of U.S. dominance allowed Nye to develop soft power theory in contrast to purely military strategies.¹⁵ He argued

that the U.S. would retain global leadership not just through superior arms or economic leverage, but by promoting its values, political institutions, and cultural attractiveness. Organizations like the British Council, Goethe Institute, Alliance Française, and Confucius Institutes became institutionalized forms of soft power deployment by states.¹⁶ Meanwhile, non-state actors—such as universities, media conglomerates, tech platforms, and even celebrities joined governments in shaping global narratives.¹²

Cultural Diplomacy as a Tool of Soft Power

One of the main instruments of soft power is cultural diplomacy, including media, education exchange programs (e.g., Fulbright), and global institutions (e.g., the BBC or Confucius Institutes). Cultural diplomacy enhances a state's global image and shapes perceptions. Culture and media emerge as pivotal instruments in the projection of soft power. Cultural diplomacy involves the exchange and promotion of cultural expressions to foster mutual understanding and strengthen international relationships. Media, encompassing traditional outlets like television and film as well as digital platforms, plays a crucial role in disseminating cultural narratives and shaping global perceptions. The advent of the digital age has amplified the reach and impact of these tools, enabling nations to engage with global audiences more directly and effectively.¹³ The strategic use of culture and media in diplomacy is evident in various national initiatives. For instance, the global popularity of American entertainment has long served to promote U.S. values and lifestyles, subtly influencing international audiences. Similarly, China's establishment

of Confucius Institutes worldwide aims to enhance its cultural presence and foster favorable views. South Korea's export of K-pop and other cultural products, known as the Korean Wave or Hallyu, has significantly boosted its national image and soft power. Additionally, media outlets like Qatar's Al Jazeera have played instrumental roles in shaping regional and global narratives, thereby extending their countries' influence¹⁴.

Understanding how nations utilize culture and media to wield soft power is essential for comprehending contemporary diplomatic strategies and international relations. Cultural diplomacy refers to the deliberate deployment of a nation's culture to support its foreign policy goals and foster international relations. It involves the exchange and promotion of cultural expressions such as art, literature, music, and education to build mutual understanding and trust between nations. This form of diplomacy operates on the premise that cultural interactions can transcend political and ideological differences, laying the groundwork for more formal diplomatic engagements.¹⁵ Effective cultural diplomacy can lead to:

Enhanced Mutual Understanding: By showcasing cultural heritage and achievements, nations can dispel stereotypes and foster a more nuanced understanding among foreign publics.

Strengthened Bilateral Relations: Cultural initiatives can serve as confidence-building measures, paving the way for political and economic collaborations.

Nation Branding: A strong cultural presence can contribute to a positive national image, attracting tourism, investment, and international goodwill.

Institutions like the British Council, Alliance Française, and Goethe-Institut exemplify cultural diplomacy by promoting their respective cultures and languages worldwide, thereby enhancing their countries' soft power.

Media as a Diplomatic Tool

In the digital age, media has emerged as a pivotal instrument in public diplomacy. Mass media outlets, including television, radio, and online platforms, play a crucial role in shaping global narratives and influencing public opinion. Governments and non-state actors utilize media to communicate their perspectives, values, and policies to international audiences.

Key aspects of media's role in diplomacy include:

Agenda Setting: Media can highlight specific issues, bringing them to the forefront of international discourse and influencing policy priorities.

Framing: The way media presents information can shape perceptions and interpretations of events, thereby influencing public sentiment and diplomatic responses.

Digital Diplomacy: The rise of social media platforms has enabled real-time communication between governments and global audiences. Diplomats and leaders engage directly with foreign publics, fostering dialogue and promoting national interests. However, the use of media in diplomacy also presents challenges, such as the spread of

misinformation, propaganda, and the potential for escalating conflicts through inflammatory content. Therefore, strategic and ethical use of media is imperative for effective public diplomacy¹⁶

The origins of soft power are embedded in centuries of statecraft, empire-building, religious diplomacy, and cultural exchange. Though the terminology is new, the practice is ancient. From Athenian philosophy and Roman legal systems to French court culture and American pop culture, the ability to influence others through attraction rather than coercion has long shaped the trajectory of international relations. Joseph Nye's contribution lies in conceptualizing and naming the phenomenon, but the roots of soft power stretch far deeper into the past.

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CHAPTER THREE

DIPLOMACY AS A TOOL FOR IMPERIALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In international relations, diplomacy is a cornerstone of interaction among states. It is widely considered a peaceful alternative to war and an avenue for solving complex global problems. However, beneath its cooperative surface, diplomacy has historically been used as a subtle tool for imperialism. Through strategic negotiation, manipulation, and institutional control, powerful nations have employed diplomacy to expand their influence and sustain global dominance¹.

Diplomacy and imperialism appear antithetical at first glance one emphasizes mutual understanding and the other connotes domination. However, throughout history, diplomacy has been one of the most effective tools through which empires expand and legitimize their power. Rather than being a mere instrument of peace, diplomacy has enabled imperial powers to negotiate unequal treaties, orchestrate regime changes, promote cultural domination, and enforce economic dependency. From the 19th-century European colonization of Africa to 21st-century financial diplomacy, the fusion of diplomatic language with imperial intent is evident. It is worth to mention here that while diplomacy refers to the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations which involves formal dialogue, treaties, and conventions through which states manage international relations, Imperialism is the policy of extending a country's power and

influence through colonization, economic exploitation, or military force, which entails both direct and indirect control over territories, markets, and resources. When diplomacy is used to secure control, promote unequal partnerships, or legitimize domination, it functions as a tool of imperialism²

Origin of Imperial Diplomacy

The origins of imperial diplomacy can be traced back to the early modern period in Europe, particularly with the rise of nation-states and the development of formal diplomatic practices. While diplomacy existed in various forms throughout history, the formalization of diplomatic institutions and practices, such as resident embassies and ambassadorial representation, is closely linked to the Peace of Westphalia (1648) and the subsequent growth of the European state system. Imperial diplomacy has deep roots in early human civilizations, where nascent empires and kingdoms forged relationships with neighbors through a mix of negotiation, gift-giving, marriage, and force³. Diplomatic practices in imperial contexts commonly included the exchange of envoys and exotic gifts, dynastic marriages binding ruling houses, formal treaties or oaths defining alliances or vassalage, trade missions along routes like the Silk Road, and overt military coercion when persuasion failed. From the clay tablets of Mesopotamia to the papal bulls dividing New Worlds, these tools served to secure peace or dominance and to structure cross-cultural exchange.

Imperialism" was and is mainly used to refer to Western and Japanese political and economic dominance, especially in Asia and Africa, in the 19th and 20th centuries. Its precise meaning continues to be debated by scholars. Some writers, such as Edward Said, use the term more broadly to describe any system of domination and subordination organized around an imperial core and a periphery. In the 19th century, European powers used diplomacy to gain footholds in Africa and Asia through treaties that were often misunderstood or signed under duress.⁴ The British, for instance, entered into so-called "protection treaties" with African chiefs that ceded significant political control to the colonial administration under the pretense of mutual cooperation. At the Berlin Conference, European powers convened to diplomatically divide Africa among themselves, establishing spheres of influence without consulting African leaders. Diplomacy was employed to legitimize imperial expansion, presenting it as a civilized and orderly process.

In an interview with Victoria, a historian/journalist reflects on how Western powers use all tools of "soft" influence to sustain imperial control. She notes that U.S. power in Africa operates not just through military force but through "systems of influence and funding" including "NGOs, think tanks \ diplomacy" which have "shaped, and continue to shape" the political history of Southern Africa. In her view, diplomatic engagement by former colonial powers often serves to steer post-independence politics in the Global South to preserve Western strategic and economic interests thus, diplomacy

itself becomes part of the apparatus of modern imperialism.⁵ Imperialism is thus, a form of international *hierarchy* in which one political community, or polity, effectively governs or controls another political community. It is one of the oldest known political institutions, characterizing relations between peoples in ancient Mesopotamia, China, and Rome through modern Europe. It includes rule both within relatively contiguous areas – as in the Habsburg and Ottoman empires – and the overseas colonies held by various European states after the Age of Discovery. The term has a long and tortured history. It was apparently first used as an invective against the expansionist policies of Napoleon I and has been employed most frequently to refer to the colonial practices of the European states in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, attempts to revise the international territorial status quo, and the economic domination of one country by another (also referred to as ‘neocolonialism,’ see below). Used as a tool of political rhetoric, the term is highly malleable and often devoid of any general meaning.⁶

Also, in an interview with Daniel Adebayo, a historian, he emphasizes that American diplomacy often conceals U.S. imperial legacies. In the interview he argues that the United States “hides” its empire by rhetoric, even while “the evidence of American colonialism blankets Asia: from the scars of massive conflicts in Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, to military bases dotted across the region”. He pointed out that U.S. diplomats and policy-makers seldom describe these actions in colonial terms, partly because of America’s anti-imperial founding narrative. In his opinion, official U.S.

diplomacy downplays coercive “open door” policies (as in the Philippines, Panama, etc.) by framing them as defense of free trade or security. his comments illustrate how diplomatic narratives and alliances can mask a nation’s imperial expansion, making formal control seem benign or forgotten⁷.

As an analytic concept, imperialism refers to the effective domination of one political community by another. According to Michael Doyle (1986, 19), “empires are relationships of political control imposed by some political societies over the effective sovereignty of other political societies. Imperialism is the process of establishing and maintaining an empire.” By domination we mean the ability of the dominant polity – the metropole – to decide policy for the subordinate polity – the colony. This ability may entail substantial delegation of decision-making authority to elite members of the colony, but the metropole retains the power to decide what gets delegated and how, and when this authority is revoked⁸

The Roman Empire

The Roman Empire (1st century BCE–5th century CE) inherited many Near Eastern practices but also developed its own system. Rome rarely used intermarriage with foreign dynasties at the imperial level, but it was expert at treaty-making and patron-client relationships. Foreign rulers (kings of Armenia, Judea, Numidia, etc.) were bound as client kingdoms: they ruled their domains under Roman overlordship, paid tribute, and furnished troops when required. Roman envoys (legati, ambassadors) were sent

across the Empire and beyond to negotiate on matters of war, peace and trade. Treaties (often called foedera) formalized alliances: for example, after defeating Antiochus III the Great in 188 BCE, Rome imposed a treaty forcing Seleucid concessions and indemnities. The Pax Romana relied on a network of Roman roads and “civic diplomacy” in subject provinces.

Rome’s approach combined military coercion with legal diplomacy. Senate decrees (senatus consulta) often set foreign policy, and triumphs over enemies would be followed by treaty delegations imposing terms. Though Roman emperors were worshipped as gods in client states, Romans also sent formal letters to foreign courts. The famous embassy of King Tiridates of Parthia to Nero in 63 CE – after Nero declared himself an ambassador of “peace” to the Parthians – is one example of ceremonial diplomacy.⁹ Trade missions also played a role: Romans sought luxury goods (silks, spices) from the East, dispatching ships and traders as ad hoc ambassadors. Conversely, Rome insisted on recognition of its supremacy; shameless breaches (such as Parthia’s refusal to return a captured legion’s standards) could trigger war. In essence, Roman diplomacy was an extension of imperial “do ut des” – “I give so that you give” – backed always by the threat of the legions.

Imperial Diplomacy in China: Han and Tang

China’s great dynasties combined tributary ideology with ceremonial gift exchange. As in Egypt, Chinese emperors saw themselves as universal sovereigns;

foreign states seeking trade or peace had to enter the Sinocentric order. Under the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), this meant dealing with nomadic neighbors through the heqin policy. In 200 BCE Emperor Gaozu negotiated a Heqin (“Peace and Family Relations”) arrangement with the Xiongnu. China agreed to pay annual tribute of silk, grain and other goods and to marry a Han princess to the Xiongnu chanyu (khan) in hopes of pacifying the steppe confederation. Such marriage alliances (one of the first documented such diplomatic marriages in China) were accompanied by elaborate gift-exchanges. Nonetheless, they often proved fragile, and the Han alternated tribute with war (later Han emperors launched large-scale campaigns when raids resumed).¹⁰

Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BCE) also began projecting diplomacy westward along the Silk Road. He sent the explorer-ambassador Zhang Qian to Central Asia to forge alliances against the Xiongnu and to open trade routes. Although Zhang’s mission did not secure a military coalition, his reports led to relations with Ferghana, Dayuan, and other states. Imperial envoys subsequently traveled (or were sent) to Greco-Bactrian and Indian courts, exchanging gifts of silk and horses for precious gems and gold. Chinese annals record envoys from those western lands arriving at Chang’an (the capital). Meanwhile, neighboring Korea, Vietnam and even Central Asian oasis-states entered a tributary system: they sent periodic missions with exotic tribute (giraffes, musicians, medicinal herbs) to the Han court and in return received Chinese silk and honors.

Later, during the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), the tribute system became even more elaborate. Foreign countries that wanted diplomatic or trade relations had to formally declare themselves vassals of the Son of Heaven. Ambassadors from Korea, Japan, the kingdoms of Southeast Asia, and even distant Persia and India came to Chang’an bringing tribute of local products. In practice, as one scholar notes, “foreign countries wanting to establish diplomatic or trade relations were declared subjects of the Emperor and were expected to pay homage and deliver ‘tribute’ in foreign goods.¹¹” The Emperor would then bestow “gifts” in return. This ritualized system assured China’s symbolic primacy. Tang protocol even included giving envoys matching bronze fish-shaped tablets (tokens of accreditation) so that when an envoy presented his half, he was granted provisions and rank. Thus, Tang diplomacy offered prestige to tributaries while maintaining hierarchical order.

Marriage diplomacy also recurred: Tang princesses were married to Turkic, Tibetan or Korean rulers as part of peace accords. Simultaneously, Chinese Buddhist monks (such as Xuanzang and later Yijing) and envoys (often Buddhist or Confucian scholars) traveled to India and Central Asia on missions of religious diplomacy, translating texts and exchanging knowledge. Overland and maritime trade missions carried both goods and ideas between China and the Islamic Caliphates, Japan, and Europe (via intermediaries). In sum, Han and Tang China illustrate imperial diplomacy

entwined with tribute ideology: foreign polities engaged China through ritualized submission in return for economic and political benefits¹².

European Colonial Empires

From the 15th century onward, European maritime empires projected diplomacy globally. Spain, Portugal, Britain, France (and later others) all engaged in treaty-making and statecraft far beyond Europe's borders. Early on, even Iberian powers divided the world by treaty: the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas (papally mediated) split the non-European world between Portugal and Castile along a meridian west of the Cape Verde Islands. This diplomatic line-of-demarcation exemplified the use of formal treaties to legitimize colonial claims. Thereafter, Europeans often struck treaties with indigenous polities *de jure* to justify conquests *de facto*.

Spanish conquistadors in the Americas, for example, sometimes negotiated surrender terms with native rulers (e.g. Tlaxcalan allies against the Aztecs), and Catholic missionaries acted as informal envoys. The Portuguese crown negotiated the "Padroado" with the Papacy, giving it ecclesiastical control in Asia in exchange for spreading Christianity in colonial territories. Over the 17th–19th centuries, European trading companies (Dutch, British, French East India companies) signed pacts with Indian, Southeast Asian and African rulers. Often these pacts promised "protection" by the European power: as historian Stefan Amirell notes, "international treaties were a key instrument of imperialism... providing the legal and moral justification for European

colonial rule”. In Asia, lengthy lists of agreements governed port access, trade rights and cessions of territory, sometimes negotiated after forceful military campaigns.¹³

A striking pattern was the so-called “unequal treaty” era (19th–20th century). Industrialized powers employed gunboat diplomacy to impose terms on non-Western states. China’s 1842 Treaty of Nanjing with Britain – ending the First Opium War – forced China to cede Hong Kong and open several ports to foreign merchants. Similar treaties followed with the French, Americans and Japanese. In these, Asia’s sovereignty was curtailed (extraterritorial rights, fixed tariffs) without reciprocity. The leverage was often military: as Amirell points out, many unequal treaties were “the result of threats in the form of ... gunboat diplomacy or followed a war imposing European dominance”. Elsewhere, in Africa and the Pacific, Europeans signed treaties with tribal chiefs, sometimes duping them by language barriers; afterward, these served as legal cover for annexation. Locally, colonizers also deployed marriage diplomacy: British officers in India occasionally took local wives to cement alliances with princely states, while European royals married into each other to bind empires (e.g. Habsburgs intermarriages).¹⁴

Interview with Paul Osagie a historian, how colonial governments used resource control – including water diplomacy to enforce imperial rule. He stresses that “water was a realm of imperial power whose control and distribution were closely bound up with colonial hierarchies and inequalities”. For example, treaties on river navigation or

irrigation projects often privileged the colonizers' interests and tied colonized economies to the metropole. Paul argues that these colonial water agreements and infrastructure projects were as much instruments of empire as military conquest. He stated that such diplomatic negotiations over natural resources cemented European dominance in Africa and Asia, and that their legacies (e.g. unequal transboundary water rights) persist long after independence¹⁵.

Even colonial administration was often diplomatically framed. Britain and France established "protectorates" by treaty: as one source notes, "Many territories which became British protectorates already had local rulers with whom the Crown negotiated through treaty, acknowledging their status whilst offering protection.". Under such agreements, local dynasts kept internal authority while Britain or France controlled defense and foreign affairs. In practice this indirect rule secured colonies with fewer troops. Similarly, France's protectorates in Morocco (1912) and Indochina (1887) were formalized by treaty clauses ceding diplomacy and arms to the French. Across the colonial world, treaty-making – whether between equals or under duress – was the ubiquitous language of empire. By the 20th century the map of nation-states had largely been drawn by these diplomatic formulas, often at the expense of older imperial polities¹⁶.

Continuities and Transformations

Across three millennia, key continuities are clear. Gift-exchange and ceremony remained central: even the most militaristic empires understood that lavish gifts and protocol could win loyalty (whether Mesopotamian silver, Han silks, Mongol paizas, or 19th-century presents). Marriage as diplomacy persisted from Bronze Age royal unions to modern political marriages (e.g., between European royals or between conquering and conquered lineages in colonial settings). Written treaties, from cuneiform tablets to parchments, have been a constant means of codifying imperial relationships. And crucially, diplomatic emissaries – whether clay-sealed clay tablets or elaborate embassy entourages – were always used to negotiate and to communicate prestige.

However, transformations are equally evident. Early diplomacy was often bilateral and ritualistic; later it became multilateral and bureaucratic. The notion of sovereignty gradually shifted: whereas ancient kings treated foreign rulers as either divine peers or vassals, the Westphalian concept of equal sovereign states (17th century) eventually underpinned modern diplomacy. European imperialism globalized diplomacy: empires learned each other's languages of negotiation (from Ottoman to Chinese offices of protocol), and legal norms of international relations emerged partly from negotiating with non-Western societies. The tools also changed: gunboats and global telegraph networks gave nations new leverage, while modern international law theoretically outlawed the blatant coercion seen in earlier ages (though in practice, power politics often remained coercive). Throughout, cross-cultural exchanges shaped practices: e.g.,

Chinese tribute ceremonies inspired later European court rituals, Islamic diplomatic immunities influenced the Mongols, and European ideas of treaty-making were transmitted to Asia in the 18th–19th centuries.

In sum, imperial diplomacy grew from simple gift-exchange and marriage ties into a complex global system of treaties, missions and conventions. It evolved as empires collided and intertwined: a Babylonian tablet could be seen as a distant ancestor of a colonial treaty inked in a governor-general's office. Yet underlying motives – securing peace, expanding trade, legitimizing rule – remained surprisingly similar. The study of these origins shows that even as methods changed, the basic challenge of governing a diverse, connected world through both persuasion and power has been a constant in human history.

Gunboat Diplomacy

In the 19th century, "gunboat diplomacy" became a common imperial tactic, especially in Asia. Britain used military threats to impose unequal treaties on China, such as the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842, which ceded Hong Kong and opened Chinese ports to British trade. Following World War I, the League of Nations created a mandate system to redistribute former German and Ottoman territories to victorious powers. Britain and France diplomatically justified their control of Palestine, Iraq, and Syria by presenting it as tutelage rather than conquest¹⁷.

The United States used diplomatic policies like the Monroe Doctrine and Roosevelt Corollary to justify interventions in Latin America. Treaties, loans, and trade agreements were employed to bind nations economically and politically to U.S. interests a form of informal empire. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union entered into diplomatic alliances such as the Warsaw Pact to establish a sphere of influence over Eastern Europe. While these agreements were framed as collective security arrangements, they ensured Soviet dominance over member states.

In the postcolonial era, diplomacy shifted toward economic mechanisms. Institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank negotiate loans and aid packages with developing countries. These often include structural adjustment conditions that reduce sovereignty and perpetuate dependency. China's BRI is a modern form of imperial diplomacy. By funding large-scale infrastructure in developing countries through loans, China gains economic leverage and strategic influence. Though promoted as "win-win," the BRI has led to debt dependency in several African and Asian states. Diplomacy today also involves the global promotion of values, ideologies, and languages. Western powers often use diplomatic platforms such as embassies, NGOs, and international organizations to disseminate liberal democratic norms, thereby reinforcing ideological control over formerly colonized nations¹⁸.

Mechanisms of Diplomatic Imperialism

Unequal Treaties: One-sided agreements that favor imperial powers while binding weaker states to disadvantageous terms.

Debt Diplomacy: Loans tied to foreign policy concessions or economic restructuring.

Military Alliances: Diplomatic agreements that tie weaker states to imperial security strategies.

Development Aid: Often serves as a tool for influence, with donor nations dictating terms and conditions.

Institutional Control: Influence over international institutions like the UN, IMF, and WTO allows powerful states to shape global norms.

While diplomacy remains essential for international cooperation, it has frequently been manipulated to serve imperial ends. From colonial treaties to modern economic diplomacy, powerful nations have used diplomatic tools to secure compliance, extract resources, and expand influence without direct conflict. Understanding the historical and contemporary use of diplomacy as a vehicle for imperialism is critical for building a more equitable global order.

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CHAPTER FOUR

**REMAKING OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH BY GLOBAL NORTH USING SOFT
POWER**

Over the last century the Global North has reshaped political, economic and cultural life in the Global South less by direct coercion than through layered soft-power techniques—cultural diplomacy, aid and lending conditionalities, educational exchanges, media/consumer influence, philanthropy, transnational NGOs and private sector ties—producing durable structural, ideological and institutional transformations that both enable and constrain postcolonial sovereignty¹. Remaking” here means structural and cultural reordering: reconfiguring states’ policy choices, institutional architectures, economic dependencies and social imaginaries so that they align (even partially) with Northern models of development, governance, consumption and security.

According to Dr. John Ochei the phrase “remaking the Global South” captures the long-term, layered processes by which external actors shape the institutional, ideological and cultural contours of states and societies in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. While military conquest and formal colonial rule played a foundational role in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the twentieth century—especially after formal decolonization—saw the intensification of influence that worked through persuasion, expertise, institutions, economic incentives and cultural attraction. Soft power

performs remaking because it is durable: ideas and institutional forms, once embedded, shape future choices and the “what counts as normal” in governance and public life².

Soft power, cultural influence, and institutional diffusion in global North

The roots of Northern dominance lie in colonialism, which exported European languages, religion, and governance systems across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. After World War II, the United States and Western Europe institutionalized global governance structures through the Bretton Woods system, establishing the IMF, World Bank, and later the WTO. These institutions diffused economic liberalization models globally, entrenching Northern preferences in international law and trade. Joseph Nye’s concept of soft power—power as attraction—provides one conceptual starting point³. Soft power works through culture, political values, and foreign policies perceived as legitimate or attractive. Yet the story of remaking requires broadening the concept to include institutional diffusion (the spread of legal forms, bureaucratic norms, regulatory frameworks), epistemic influence (dominant research and policy paradigms), and economic-cultural convergence (consumption patterns and media flows). The remaking process is best thought of as an ecosystem: universities, think tanks, multilateral institutions, philanthropic foundations, private corporations, and mass media all act as vectors in a distributed soft-power architecture.

In view of Martins Adewunmi, despite its success, soft power faces resistance. Many Global South actors critique it as neo-imperialism in disguise, noting that cultural

globalization often marginalizes local traditions. Institutions like the IMF are accused of perpetuating dependency rather than development. Moreover, the rise of BRICS and South-South cooperation has created counterweights to Northern soft power, illustrating the contested nature of cultural and institutional influence. The future of Northern dominance depends on its ability to adapt. Digital globalization has decentralized influence, empowering actors from the Global South. Artificial intelligence, social media, and digital platforms have created new soft power arenas⁴. Meanwhile, climate change governance requires Northern and Southern cooperation, diluting unilateral dominance. As China, India, and other rising powers expand their own cultural and institutional reach, the balance of global soft power is increasingly multipolar.

The future of Northern dominance thus, depends on its ability to adapt. Digital globalization has decentralized influence, empowering actors from the Global South. Artificial intelligence, social media, and digital platforms have created new soft power arenas. Meanwhile, climate change governance requires Northern and Southern cooperation, diluting unilateral dominance. As China, India, and other rising powers expand their own cultural and institutional reach, the balance of global soft power is increasingly multipolar⁵.

Soft Power in the Global North

During European colonial expansion, soft power took the form of missionary work, education, and cultural assimilation. Western education systems, Christian

missionary activities, and European languages (English, French, Spanish, Portuguese) became powerful tools of influence. The spread of Enlightenment ideas, science, and Western philosophy helped justify colonial expansion as a “civilizing mission.” This period demonstrates an early form of soft power, where cultural superiority and knowledge production legitimized imperial domination.

Kingsley Eghosa stated that after World War I, the U.S. and Europe increasingly turned to cultural diplomacy—scholarship programs, radio broadcasting, and international exhibitions—as instruments of influence. Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the Soviet Union also recognized the importance of propaganda and ideology, showing that control of narratives was as powerful as military strength. The U.S. projected soft power through Hollywood films and mass media (which glamorized American lifestyle). Jazz diplomacy and cultural exchanges, scholarships, and universities that attracted international elites. Western Europe, thus rebuilt under the Marshall Plan, exported ideals of democracy, human rights, and liberal capitalism as an attractive alternative to Soviet communism. The USSR countered with ideological soft power (Marxist-Leninist ideology, socialist solidarity movements, sports, and scientific prestige such as the space race). Ultimately, the fall of the Soviet Union demonstrated the enduring strength of Western cultural and ideological soft power⁶.

The United States projects soft power through Hollywood, Silicon Valley, Ivy League universities, and global music. Europe leverages its integration model, legal

frameworks, and cultural diplomacy. Japan and South Korea, though not traditionally considered 'Western,' have exercised cultural soft power through anime, K-pop, and consumer brands, complementing the North's dominance in global attraction.

Cultural Influence institutional influence

Media empires like CNN, BBC, and Netflix have globalized Northern narratives, while the spread of English, French, and Spanish cemented linguistic dominance. Universities in the U.S. and Europe attract millions of students worldwide, who later carry Western ideas back to their countries. Sports, from the Olympics to the FIFA World Cup, have become channels of influence, projecting ideals of competition, excellence, and global unity while commercializing culture⁷.

Institutions remain critical carriers of Northern soft power like the IMF and World Bank promote economic policies favoring liberalization and privatization. The European Union has diffused democratic governance norms to Eastern Europe and beyond through its accession process. International organizations such as the United Nations embed human rights frameworks reflective of Northern liberal values. These institutions reproduce norms, creating pathways for the Global South to internalize Northern practices

Imperial legacies and cultural dominance (pre-1945)

Language, education systems, legal codes, and missionary networks implanted Northern worldviews and elites. Even after formal decolonization, these institutional and

cultural residues persisted — schools, legal systems, and elites trained in metropolitan institutions continued to reproduce Northern frames of governance and legitimacy. Formal empires established the initial infrastructural, legal and cultural foundations that later soft-power actors built upon. Colonial education systems trained elites in metropolitan languages and legal systems; missionary institutions reshaped religious landscapes and introduced new social services; extractive economic patterns reorganized labor and land estates. Even after political independence, path dependencies remained: law codes, educational curricula, bureaucracy, and elite networks continued to reproduce metropolitan logics. Soft power in the postcolonial era did not begin from a blank slate but from a field already transformed by direct rule and cultural penetration⁸.

The post war order and institutional soft power (1945–1975)

The post-World War II settlement reconfigured global governance in ways that greatly expanded Northern institutional influence. The creation of the IMF, World Bank and United Nations, alongside the architecture of multilateral development lending and technical assistance, created channels that combined financial leverage with normative claims about development. Bretton Woods institutions transmitted policy orthodoxies—macro-stability, open trade, and technocratic planning—through conditional lending, structural advice and research dissemination. Simultaneously, cultural diplomacy—exchange programs, scholarship systems, cultural centers, film and radio broadcasting—seeded pro-Northern frames of legitimacy among postcolonial elites.

The expansion of higher education exchanges (scholarships, fellowships) produced cohorts of bureaucrats, academics and leaders socialized in Northern institutions. These alumni networks became carriers of epistemic frameworks that later shaped policy choices on taxation, public administration, and economic strategy⁹.

The Cold War made soft power a strategic imperative. The United States, Western European states and the Soviet Union competed to win hearts and minds. This competition expanded cultural programming—radio broadcasting, cultural centers (e.g., British Council, Goethe-Institut), cinema diplomacy, and international aid tied to ideological alignment. Northern soft power here had a dual effect: it both buttressed friendly regimes and supplied alternative models to nonaligned states. In many countries, Cold War-era scholarships, broadcasting and media provided not only cultural consumption but also political vocabularies (modernization, democracy, development) that influenced domestic debates.

Structural adjustment, neoliberal diffusion and policy orthodoxy (1980s–2000s)

A decisive era in remaking came with the debt crises of the late 1970s and 1980s and the subsequent structural adjustment programs (SAPs) administered by the IMF and World Bank. These programs introduced a package—fiscal austerity, privatization, trade liberalization, deregulation and market-oriented reforms—that remade state capacity and public priorities across many countries in Africa, Latin America and parts of Asia¹⁰. The influence of these programs was not purely coercive; it worked through norms and

expertise: training of finance ministries, technical assistance, and the prestige of “best-practice” manuals distributed by international financial institutions and Northern think tanks. Over time, the language of policy debate in many capitals became suffused with neoliberal assumptions about efficiency, market primacy and fiscal discipline.

The social consequences were profound: reduced public spending on health and education in many contexts, the growth of private provision, and the reorientation of higher education and public research toward commercially relevant, fundable projects aligned with donor priorities¹¹.

The rise of NGOs, philanthropy and private authority (1990s–present)

The 1990s and 2000s saw the proliferation of international NGOs, private philanthropic foundations (notably those based in the North), and public-private partnerships. These actors played a large soft-power role by delivering services, setting policy agendas (through pilot programs and research grants), and shaping public discourse on welfare, health and governance. Philanthropic foundations funded research networks and policy centers that produced knowledge often adopted by governments and donors alike. NGOs introduced projectized modes of service delivery and monitoring that shifted the practices of local organizations and state agencies. This emergent private authority sometimes bypassed state capacities, reconfiguring the relationship between citizens and providers of welfare and policy expertise¹².

Digital platforms, media flows and cultural economies (2000s–present)

The global expansion of media industries and digital platforms—many headquartered in the North—intensified cultural influence in new modes. Global television, film, music, and later social media, streamed Northern cultural products into everyday life across the South, shaping tastes, aspirations, and consumer cultures. Platforms also mediated political information and civic debate. Algorithmic curation and platform economies exerted new forms of soft power: the norms embedded in platform design, moderation policies, and economic models influenced economic opportunities (e.g., gig work) and public discourse. Information ecosystems then functioned as soft-power terrain where narratives and frames circulated globally.

A pivotal development in the early 21st century is the rise of China as an alternative external partner. China deploys its own mix of soft power—Confucius Institutes, infrastructure investment, scholarship programs, media presence, and a model of state-guided development—that offers recipient countries options that sometimes avoid the conditionalities associated with Western aid. This plurality does not nullify Northern influence—decades of embedded institutions, legal frameworks and cultural penetration remain powerful—but it does complicate the landscape and afford Southern states more maneuver room in some domains¹³.

Mechanisms of remaking

Education and elite formation. Scholarships, colonial-era partnerships, and the prestige of Northern universities produce cadres of leaders and experts who internalize models of governance and policy.

Aid, loans and conditionality. Financial instruments shape policy choices by attaching conditions, accompaniment, or through the incentives they create for domestic actors to conform to donor preferences.

Norms and legal diffusion. Western models of corporate governance, human rights frameworks, intellectual property regimes, and regulatory standards spread through treaties, trade negotiations, and technical assistance.

Consumption and cultural industries. Broadcasting, film, advertising and consumer brands remake social aspirations and lifestyles.

Knowledge infrastructure. Think tanks, research grants, and journals centered in the North produce epistemic authority that sets research agendas and legitimates policy pathways.

The remaking of the Global South by the Global North through soft power is a historical process with deep roots in empire and with evolving institutional forms. While soft power can generate positive cooperation and capacity-building, its historical deployment has too often produced dependencies and constrained policy autonomy. The contemporary landscape—with multiple external actors, digital flows, and rising

Southern agency offers openings for renegotiation, but the structural legacies of earlier remaking remain influential.

Soft power, cultural influence, and institutional diffusion have allowed the Global North to dominate international relations without direct coercion. From Hollywood to the IMF, Northern states have set global norms and values. However, resistance from the Global South and the rise of alternative power centers challenge this supremacy. The future of global order will be shaped by how the Global North adapts its soft power strategies in a rapidly changing world.

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CHAPER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study explores the intricate role of soft power in international relations by analyzing the use of diplomacy as a tool for imperialism, emphasizing its function as a dynamic instrument of soft power and as domains fraught with ethical and strategic complexities. Through a comprehensive analysis, the study examines how nations utilize cultural exports and media platforms to project influence, foster diplomatic ties, and navigate the delicate balance between promoting national interests and respecting global diversity. The increasing importance and focus on the necessity of understanding, urgently establishing cooperative programs, and recognizing the benefits of global cooperation, combined with key takeaways from the revolving nature of state interaction, have placed diplomacy in an unfamiliar and unclear limelight. Users and uses of diplomacy will, at minimum, demand that the return on and outcomes of the investments required for diplomacy be revalued and, if needed, realigned. This implies not only advocating for and achieving increased funding levels but also seeking and optimizing the benefits of cultural diplomacy. Whether one still believes that cultural diplomacy will serve as a decoration or acceleration to a desired iconic position in international relations or as a tool for ameliorating conflicts in an increasingly volatile and fragmented world depends on the diplomatic and strategic knowledge of its planners and practitioners.

The study identifies and analyzes several key challenges associated with diplomacy as a tool for imperialism. Cultural and media diplomacy, including issues of authenticity versus perceived propaganda, the asymmetrical influence stemming from disparities in cultural infrastructure, and resistance from target audiences who may perceive such efforts as cultural imperialism. By dissecting these challenges, the thesis offers a nuanced understanding of the potential pitfalls and ethical considerations that nations must navigate in their pursuit of soft power. It underscores the importance of authenticity, mutual respect, and cultural sensitivity in designing and implementing effective cultural and media strategies.

The study provides actionable recommendations for policymakers and diplomats. These include investing in cultural institutions and creative industries to enrich cultural offerings, promoting authenticity and mutual understanding over mere propaganda, leveraging digital tools and platforms to enhance global engagement, and training diplomats in media literacy and intercultural communication to effectively navigate the modern media landscape. By adopting these strategies, nations can enhance their soft power, build stronger international relationships, and contribute positively to the global cultural and media ecosystem.

Soft power operates within a complex international landscape, influenced by historical relationships, geopolitical dynamics, and the evolving digital environment. The rise of digital diplomacy has introduced new opportunities and challenges, as nations

navigate the ethical implications of online influence and information dissemination. Moreover, the blending of soft and hard power, often referred to as "smart power," requires careful calibration to ensure that efforts to attract and persuade do not veer into coercion. In conclusion, soft power remains a vital component of international relations, offering nations the means to influence and collaborate on the global stage. However, its application necessitates a nuanced understanding of cultural sensitivities, a commitment to authenticity, and a strategic approach that harmonizes national objectives with the rich tapestry of global diversity.

Over the last few years, some authors have raised doubts about the relevance and effectiveness of soft power in the current international political dynamics. The facts confirming this trend are considerable and very significant. In the attempt to promote soft power values such as democracy, human rights, Western liberal democracies utilised hard power means in some areas of the world (i.e., Iraq and Libya), and such endeavors were perceived negatively by the public opinion deteriorating soft power of those liberal democracies. The European Union has a long time benefited from its soft power potential, and now it is facing severe challenges. For instance, the EU is suffering the increasing number of political parties questioning the European integration process. Moreover, if until some years ago the soft power potential of the European Union was enormous, if we consider its enlargement policy and the number of countries interested in joining it, in 2020 the EU faced for the first time in its history the withdrawal of one of its member

states. Also, the migration crisis is putting a strain on the European Union's capacity to manage international crises, its ability to offer humanitarian aid, and containing people's rising fears of migrants' invasion.

There is an open debate if coronavirus will reshape the global order, and if we can still speak about *soft power* after 30 years of its formulation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the nation-states' strategies to face the virus have been diverse and under the eyes of the global public opinion. In a big globalised world, the spread of coronavirus in all the corners of the globe was swift. Also, news circulated very fast, and the measures taken by international actors had a rapid impact on the people and, in some cases, on the financial markets. Some examples are the medical aid offered by China to other countries profoundly affected by the virus, which enhanced its soft power after the harsh critics received in the first phases of the COVID-19 outbreak. Moreover, the position of the European Central Bank, especially at the beginning of the crisis in Europe, and afterwards the debate among EU partners on the measures to be adopted to contain the economic crisis in the European countries most affected by the virus had a substantial impact on the financial markets and European public opinion. Probably the way of understanding soft power today is different from 30 years ago, but using effective public diplomacy is still crucial in international relations.

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(Oral Interview)

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Martins Adewunmi.	75	Journalist	Benin	15 July 2025
Kingsley Osamudiamen	59	Journalist	Lagos	02 July 2025
Mrs. Victoria Igbokwe	43	Trader	Benin	12 July 2025

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