

Soft Power in Japan-China Relations: *State, sub-state and non-state relations*, by Utpal Vyas, London: Routledge, 2010, Pp. xiv+202, ISBN: 978-0-415-55170-0 (hbk).

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United States and Japan are today's 'soft power superpowers', with South Korea coming close. The relationship between United States of America and Japan has been changed by the interaction of soft powers resources and, in the future, the good relationship between the two states is crucial in order for stability and prosperity to develop in East Asia. As such, soft power will continue to play its part in the future. Many writers have thus dedicated themselves to studying the concept of soft power and its influence upon the international system, the main focus being United States and Japan<sup>1</sup>. In recent years however, other states re-evaluated their foreign policy and moved closer to the concept coined by Joseph Nye. Nevertheless, what is soft power? What are the main agents that spread soft power and how does it influence in the end foreign policy? These are some of the issues addressed by PhD Professor Utpal Vyas in his bilateral research on soft power in Sino-Japanese relationship, *Soft Power in Japan-China Relations: State, sub-state and non-state relation*. In this well-known empirical research, the main concern is the degree to which Japan has been able to use soft power in its relation with China.

The book is well structured so even those who are not familiar with the subject can very well understand where Japan stands regarding soft power, mainly in its relation with China. Moreover, the way in which the theory is explained and each theoretical chapter is structured – with an introduction and a conclusion – makes even those that do not have a background in international relations understand the main purpose. Starting from a short summary of his study where the

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<sup>1</sup> Other writings: Yasushi WATANABE, David L.McCONNELL, *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, M.E.Sharpe Incorporated, 2008; Takeshi MATSUDA, *Soft Power and Its Perils: U.S. Cultural Policy in Early Postwar Japan and Permanent Dependency*, Stanford University Press, Chicago 2007; S. Joseph NYE and Richard L. ARMITAGE, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance", *Anchoring Stability in Asia, Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Washington, August 2012, etc.

main hypotheses are mentioned and a short debriefing of the research's background, Vyas briefly introduces today's international structure which undoubtedly influences power and the value of studying Japan's soft power in the context of Sino-Japanese relations. To summarise, because there is not enough literature in English related to this subject, Vyas considered tackling it in order to emphasise the importance between these two main actors on the international arena. After surveying the major school of thought on power (p. 13) and discussing their relevance to the subject of his research (here it can be noticed his particular approach to a neo-liberalist school of thought and his appreciation for constructivist theories), Vyas moves on to what definitely is the main focus of the book: the notion of soft power, conceptualized in the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter (p. 38). In the fourth chapter, further information is given on the empirical data used, focusing on cultural, diplomatic and economic exchanges between these two countries, especially during the post-war period (p. 64). The next three chapters delve deeper into the three main agents chosen which transmit soft power in China: the *Japan Foundation*, *Kobe's sister city relationship* with Tianjin and *Japan-China Friendship Association*. In the end of the book, the conclusions are actually the summary of the author's findings, explaining whether his hypotheses and research questions have been confirmed or not and if the theoretical structure presented in the first chapters still fits the current global background.

Why concentrate on soft power? Or better yet, why study about Japan and China's soft power? As the author argues, soft power has been neglected in recent studies related to East Asia, and this book thus tries to explain and investigate how soft power functions in international relations by looking at case studies related to Sino-Japanese relations after the Second World War. The three cases chosen are actually three different types of agents involved in spreading soft power: state-level, sub-state level, and non-state level. In the end, by using theoretical and empirical research, this qualitative study showed that another type of power is becoming relevant in this globalising age, and not only states and government leaders are the most important actors, but also sub-state and non-state actors. Moreover, all three agents are internationally active, even though the instability of the Sino-Japanese relations continues to cause political disputes and nationalistic tendencies to develop. The most affected is the Japan Foundation, the state agent which depends solely on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the past, it has been an active agent of Japanese soft power, but today, the nationalistic tendencies (somehow predicting the current nationalist streak of Prime Minister Shinzō Abe) affect the ability of this agent to enable the flow of soft power. The smallest agent, the sub-state agent, is actually the most effective, promoting an efficient co-operation between the two sister-related cities, whereas NGOs are the most promising agents for the future of this globalised world.

However, soft power cannot be taken for granted, and in order to balance its weakness, a combination between soft and hard power is necessary, especially in a region such as Northeast Asia, where the ability to attract others and increase the probability of obtaining the outcomes desired lies not only in promoting your culture, political values and foreign policy; the key to success is given by economic might and military prowess. By creating a meaning to a society and by promoting it abroad, you manage to successfully influence a state. Even though the case studies support his hypotheses, the author believes that they should be revisited in the future, because now there is a new way of looking at soft power. This study only researched how soft power is perceived by the user, but the process of receiving the information and the ideas has never been thoroughly touched upon. It would be interesting to see how China really perceives Japan's public diplomacy and whether it influences or not the region itself. Nevertheless, the starting point has been made through this book and anyone interested in Asian studies, more specifically in the study of power in the region, is welcome to read it.

