

## POWER AND INFLUENCE A SOCIO-CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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### ABSTRACT

*The shift in global economic trends has altered the dynamic of leadership and the strategic environment. As new Asian economies strengthen, they shape how states and corporations exert their influence and authority. Indeed, soft power seems to be gaining pre-eminence over the traditional hard power approach, which is perceived as confrontational and inappropriate in the current context. While many attempts to navigate in new and emerging economies such as India, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos, the businesses must develop a cultural-relevant perspective toward power dynamics, and consider the increasing significance of Asian soft power. This article examines the new reality of Asian leadership and management, and considers its implications in a new era.*

**Keywords:** Asia, Culture, Influence, Leadership, Power

### RISE OF ASIAN ECONOMIES

It is indisputable that Asian countries such as China and India have overtaken traditional Asia powerhouses or “dragons of Asia” such as Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan regarding national economic development. More humbling is the fact that in recent years Vietnam and Cambodia are two new emerging economies that demonstrated unprecedented trade and became ranked as one of the fastest growing economies, also surpassing the traditional Asia powerhouses. On 6 January 2025, Vietnam went on to secure the top place in the Asia Cup for soccer. This further pointed to the increasing supremacy of emerging Asia countries which are fast eclipsing traditional Asian powerhouse nations. According to the World Bank (2023), India and China both reported massive GDP growth along with strong technology sectors. These Asia giants exert their soft power through cultural exports such as Bollywood and Yoga, which embodies diversity and democracy. On the other hand, China expands its influence and economy via the Belt and Road Initiative which characterizes its strategy in cultivating soft power through infrastructure development and foreign direct investment (Nye, 2019). In 2021, China emerged as the preeminent worldwide exporter, with exports totaling around \$3.36 trillion (International Trade Centre, 2022). More recently, Vietnam's burgeoning economy, exhibiting a GDP growth rate of 7.1% in 2023, signifies its increasing impact on regional trade agreements (Asian Development Bank, 2023). Vietnam is known to have close cultural heritage with Chinese and a stable political climate to cultivate

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diplomatic connections. Hence, it is often perceived by Western powers to be facilitating China in circumventing trade tariffs.

The interaction between trade and power is essential for comprehending each nation's impact and underscores the importance of recognizing Asia's might in business and strategy. In 2023, India's exports amounted to roughly \$470 billion, and imports totaled around \$650 billion (Ministry of Commerce & Industry, 2023). In 2021, China's total exports were \$3.36 trillion, while imports totaled \$2.76 trillion (General Administration of Customs, 2021). In 2021, Vietnam's exports totaled \$336 billion, whereas imports amounted to \$331 billion (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2021). Asian economies, especially China and India, are experiencing remarkable growth, consequently augmenting their worldwide influence via soft power.

### **CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN POWER BASES**

Power and influence are intricate constructs that govern human interactions, leadership, and organizational dynamics across various cultures. Conventional Western paradigms frequently prioritize individualism and authority, characterizing power predominantly in terms of control and dominance. Conversely, a socio-cultural perspective recognizes that power is complex, context-dependent, and profoundly rooted in cultural frameworks. This article examines classical power bases, Raven's power bases, soft and hard power, sources of power, the impact of leadership theories, and the growing significance of power dynamics in Asian contexts, particularly in India, China, and Vietnam. It examines the ramifications of relational power, socio-cultural ideals, and self-concept psychology in enabling influence via connections rather than through individual authority.

Research on traditional power bases and influence has identified five types of power that leaders may employ in their relationships with followers: reward power, coercive power, legitimate authority, referent power, and expert power (Raven, 1992). The grounds of power can be classified into two primary categories: "hard power," which depends on coercion or manipulation, and "soft power," which utilizes attraction and persuasion. Reward Power denotes the capacity to confer rewards, encompassing accolades, advancements, or material benefits. Coercive Power denotes the ability to enforce fines or adverse consequences, including punishment for non-compliance. Legitimate Power pertains to authority obtained from an acknowledged position or role within an organization or community. Referent Power denotes the influence derived from personal attributes and the capacity to draw others via admiration or respect. Expert Power denotes the ability to sway others through specialized knowledge or skills.

### **HARD AND SOFT POWER**

Hard power utilizes coercive tactics to affect behavior, frequently using force or economic punishment. It is efficacious in scenarios when adherence is crucial, such as in governmental and military engagements. In contrast, soft power employs attraction and persuasion,

using cultural appeal, ideals, and relationships to promote cooperation. Joseph Nye, (1990) introduced the phrase "soft power," emphasizing its significant importance in international relations and diplomacy. Power can originate from diverse sources beyond conventional foundations. Social identity encompasses group membership and can bestow power and influence over decision-making processes. Membership in a specific organizational or cultural group can elevate an individual's prestige and authority (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Cultural norms or clan control pertains to the ceremonial reverence for elders, authoritative figures, or hierarchical institutions that shape power relations across various cultures. The compliance with these standards determines the manner in which influence is exerted and perceived. Emotional Intelligence. Leaders possessing elevated emotional intelligence can leverage the emotions of their followers, fostering conditions of trust and loyalty that enhance their influence (Goleman, 1998). Cultural intelligence has recently been identified as a more significant predictor than emotional intelligence in forecasting leadership performance across many contexts (Liao, 2021).

The dynamics of power in leadership are shaped by the techniques employed by leaders to exert their influence. Diverse leadership theories offer frameworks for comprehending these strategies. Traditional leadership theories underscore a leader's capacity to harmonize task-oriented behaviors with concern for their followers, so promoting both productivity and relational dynamics (Blake & Mouton, 1964). Visionary leadership pertains to leaders who articulate a compelling vision, hence enhancing their ability to motivate followers. Visionary leadership is founded on explicit aims and common goals, enabling collaborative progress toward success (Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996). Charismatic leadership involves leaders that captivate their followers via excitement and personal appeal, fostering deep emotional connections that amplify their power (Weber, 1947). Transformational Leadership is characterized by charisma, wherein transformational leaders motivate people to transcend their self-interests for a collective objective. They emphasize the joint development of their team members and the organization (Bass, 1985). Inspirational leadership cultivates optimism and dedication, as inspirational leaders promote a feeling of purpose that unifies followers in pursuit of overarching objectives.

### **SOFT POWER AND RELATIONAL POWER IN ASIAN CULTURES**

Cultural values profoundly influence the manifestation of soft power in Asian environments. The notions of face and guanxi (i.e., relational networks and social connections) are essential for comprehending social relationships in nations such as China and Vietnam. In numerous Asian societies, preserving face-symbolizing social status and esteem-is of utmost significance. Leaders who sustain harmony and respect within their teams have higher influence (Brown, 2016). Guanxi is a Chinese phrase denoting the network of interactions and connections developed over time. Guanxi prioritizes reciprocity, trust, and mutual benefit, serving as the foundation for economic transactions and personal

interactions (Gold, 1985). The influence of *guanxi* can surpass that of formal authority.

Emotional intelligence and relationship power augment influence in both Vietnamese and Indian cultures. Leaders who exhibit genuine care for their followers' welfare can cultivate dedication and loyalty, profoundly impacting teams. Asians wield power and influence by relationships, social ideals, and endorsement. In Asia, power dynamics and influence frequently depend on relationships rather than personal attributes. The communal approach prioritizes harmony, collaboration, and societal unity. In interpersonal dynamics, support, endorsement, and social networks are essential elements of power. Studies demonstrate that individuals with robust social connections frequently possess enhanced influence inside their organizations (Ibarra, 1993). In Asian cultures, collectivist beliefs emphasize community harmony and cohesion over individual authority, resulting in a leadership style focused on consensus-building rather than authoritative direction. This viewpoint corresponds with social psychology theories that highlight the relational self-concept (Markus & Kitayama, 1991), wherein dependency influences identity. Soft power is enhanced or weakened based on contextual and environmental factors. The contextual application of power is essential for comprehending influence. In the Asian market, soft power and relational influence are more salient than in Western situations, where explicit shows of authority may dominate. In Western culture, overt demonstrations of authority are indicative of a strong leader. Concepts such as "Trump syndrome" or "Conquistador Syndrome," characterized by the exertion of power by explicit demonstrations of authority, are typically regarded negatively in collectivist cultures. Conversely, relationship power depends on nuance and emotional involvement (Hofstede, 2001).

Comprehending power and influence from a socio-cultural perspective has profound consequences for international business and leadership initiatives. Leaders must modify their methods to align with the socio-cultural environment of their operational regions, acknowledging the significance of relational and emotional intelligence over conventional authority. The relational self-concept within sociocultural contexts prioritizes interdependence and social identity rather than individual traits. Effective leaders thrive by establishing shared objectives and fostering a positive perception among their teams (Triandis, 1989). Establishing robust networks founded on trust and reciprocity is crucial for influence and success in Asian marketplaces. Leaders must prioritize the development of relationships that augment their organizational influence and efficacy. Collective success prioritizes shared accomplishments over individual achievements, aligning with cultural norms and enhancing team cohesion and morale.

The essential distinctions between Asian and Western notions of power highlight relational as opposed to individualistic methodologies. Western frames typically emphasize aggressiveness and individual accomplishment, whereas Asian contexts prioritize cooperation, emotional intelligence, and a profound comprehension of socio-cultural norms. Power is commonly linked with authority and control, information

asymmetry, and ostensions, which favors competitiveness and direct confrontation. In Asian power dynamics, relationships are instead defined by nuance, where the capacity to manoeuvre through intricate interpersonal networks (*guanxi*) and uphold societal harmony (*face*) confers resources and influences over others. Another is that Chinese and Indian leaders are increasingly recognized in top U.S.-listed companies, embodying the growing influence of Asian leadership styles that emphasize collaboration and innovation in the global business arena. Adaptive and versatile leadership provide cultural narratives underpinning leadership in Asia highlights gender-neutral practices and adaptability in leadership models. Asian countries are progressively adopting more equitable leadership structures. The emphasis on inclusive governance promotes the participation of women and marginalized groups in leadership roles, fostering diverse viewpoints and innovative solutions (UN Women, 2021). The success of Asian leaders in top U.S. companies demonstrates the effectiveness of soft power-inflected leadership styles in contemporary management settings. Asian leaders often adapt their strategies to align with diverse, global teams, fostering an environment of inclusivity and collaboration. Such approaches facilitate trust and enhance employee engagement, leading to better performance outcomes (Goleman, 1998).

In international relations and corporate management, power dynamics are crucial in shaping strategies and leadership styles, which affect their influence. It is important to be conscious of the impact of soft and hard power on strategic direction and leadership orientation. Traditionally, "hard power," defined by coercive tactics and military strength, has served as a principal method of exerting influence. In contrast, "soft power" entails appeal and persuasion, capitalizing on cultural values, and connections to attain objectives. It is necessary to recognize the increasing significance of Asian soft power in the contemporary global landscape. Coupled with a focus on egalitarian principles and emphasis on innovative trends, the current business and management landscape favors collaborative achievement. Hard Power denotes a nation's capacity to apply coercive force or economic sanctions to exert pressure in international relations. Traditional methods based on hard power emphasize supremacy through conflict, which includes military involvement, coercion, and the capacity to compel people to act against their desires (Nye, 2004). Governments possessing significant military capabilities, such as the United States, have depended on hard power, a militarily-centric strategy in foreign policy characterized by aggressive measures aiming at securing a decisive victory over adversaries to influence geopolitical dynamics. On the contrary, soft power refers to the capacity to allure and assimilate rather than to compel (Nye, 1990). Soft power depends on the sway of culture, political ideals, and international policies. Some countries could adeptly and subtly apply their soft power, including forming alliances, developing cooperative partnerships, and diplomatic stance. Strategies rooted in soft power emphasize dialogue, collaboration, and reciprocal advantage. Nations can achieve objectives via alliances and cultural exchanges. This strategy is becoming more common among Asian nations, that rely on soft power to



enhance their worldwide influence (Kissinger, 2011). Leaders apply soft through collaboration and teamwork, with preference of collective success over personal accomplishment. This leadership style corresponds with the collectivist beliefs inherent in numerous Asian cultures, where communal concerns frequently take precedence over personal ambitions (Hofstede, 2001). Such style emphasizes relational dynamics, communal objectives, and a shared vision. Emerging leaders from Asian countries, like China and India, demonstrate relational orientation which resembles gender-neutral leadership that appreciates multiple viewpoints. Studies showed that diverse leadership can promote increased creativity and innovation in organizations, thus improving performance (Post, 2018).

Amidst US-China tension and hiking tariff, the Chinese economy maintain position as second-largest in the world, with a projected GDP of approximately \$19 trillion in 2023 (International Monetary Fund, 2023). Asian leaders are demonstrating greater flexibility, and adaptability in their strategies, and adeptly maneuver through intricate geopolitical environments. This adaptability allows leaders to engage in win-win scenarios that prioritize peaceful co-operation avoiding conflict. Asian strategies often adopt indirect, non-confrontational approaches to attain objectives, such as circumventing trade tariffs in response to global trade disputes. Consequently, Asian governments are increasingly seeking creative techniques to address economic issues. For instance, China's Belt and Road Initiative is one. It focuses on enhancing economic collaboration across borders while sidestepping direct military confrontation with adversaries (Petri & Plummer, 2020). China's investments in infrastructure initiatives, exemplified by the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), illustrate its soft power strategy. Through the China's BRI, trade connectivity is enhanced across Asia, Europe, and Africa, fostering economic interdependence and cooperative relationships while indirectly circumventing the challenges posed by U.S. sanctions (Huang, 2016). Asian value collective success or a "win-win" outcome. Sino-Indian economic ties are also being developed through mutual benefits that promote economic growth and stability, rather than through coercive measures. These techniques depend on relational power, promoting collaboration rather than conflict (Kumar, 2022).

## CONCLUSION

This article elucidates the relationship between power and influence in business, management and international relations. It provides insights into how Asian cultural values with strong social and interpersonal nature often influence and effect via soft power. Marked by care, trust, and social networks than on individual authority or coercion, it is important to understand such dynamic as cultural boundaries blur with globalization. Soft power entails values such as collectivism, emotional intelligence, and relational power is a secure, the economic strength of Asian nations encapsulates collective victory, and innovative strategies, which reflects a transformative shift in leadership and strategy. By prioritizing collaboration and indirect engagement over confrontation, Asian leaders are pioneering effective management practices that align with global trend influence in the increasingly interconnected world. In

conclusion, the relevance of soft power, particularly Asian soft power, has grown substantially in the current context of rising Asian economies.

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