



## **The allure of Asia and America's role** by Joseph S. Nye

President Bush has just returned from Asia after attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum summit, but he should continue to pay attention to another Asian summit to which he was not invited. In December, Malaysia will host an East Asian Summit (EAS) that deliberately excludes the United States. According to many close observers, America's attractiveness is declining in the region where the allure, or "soft power," of others has increased.

Asian countries have impressive potential resources for soft power. The arts, fashion, and cuisine of Asia's ancient cultures have had a strong impact on other parts of the world for centuries, but Asia went through a period of relative decline as it lagged behind the industrial revolution in the West, and this undermined its influence.

In the 1950s, Asia conjured up images of poverty and starvation. There was a brief political infatuation among some Westerners in the 1960s with Nehru jackets and Maoist revolution, but it was brief. As John Lennon sang in 1968, "if you go carrying pictures of Chairman Mao, you ain't gonna make it with anyone anyhow."

Asia's resurgence began with Japan's economic success. By the end of the century, Japan's remarkable performance not only made the Japanese wealthy, but also enhanced the country's soft power. As the first non-Western country that drew even with the West in modernity while showing that it is possible to maintain a unique culture, Japan has more potential soft-power resources than any other Asian country. Today Japan ranks first in the world in the number of patents, third in expenditure on research and development as a share of GDP, second in book sales and music sales, and highest for life expectancy. It is home to three of the top 25 multinational brand names (Toyota, Honda, and Sony).

The decade-long economic slowdown of the 1990s tarnished Japan's reputation, but it did not erase Japan's soft-power resources. Japan's global cultural influence grew in areas ranging from fashion, food, and pop music to consumer electronics, architecture, and art. Japanese manufacturers rule the roost in home video games. Pokemon cartoons are broadcast in 65 countries, and Japanese animation is a huge hit with filmmakers and teenagers everywhere.

In short, Japan's popular culture was still producing potential soft-power resources even after its economy slowed down. Now, with signs of a reviving economy, Japan's soft power may increase even more. But there are limits. Unlike Germany, which repudiated its past aggression and reconciled with its neighbors in the framework of the European Union, Japan has never come to terms with its record in the 1930s and 1940s. The residual suspicion that lingers in countries like China and Korea sets limits on Japan's appeal that are

reinforced every time the Japanese prime minister visits the Yasukuni Shrine.

Japan also faces serious demographic challenges. By mid-century, Japan's population could shrink by 30 percent unless it attracts 17 million immigrants – a hard task in a country historically resistant to immigration. Moreover, the Japanese language is not widely spoken, and Japan's meager English-language skills make it difficult to attract international talent to its universities. Japan's culture remains inward-looking.

Looking ahead, China and India are the looming giants of Asia, with their huge populations and rapid economic growth rates. Not only are their military, or "hard power," resources growing; there are signs that their soft-power resources are increasing, too. In 2000, Chinese novelist Gao Xingjian won China's first Nobel prize for literature, followed a year later by the Indian diaspora writer V.S. Naipaul. The Chinese film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" became the highest grossing non-English film, and Indian movies like "Monsoon Wedding" were global box-office successes. Indeed, "Bollywood" produces more movies every year than Hollywood.

The list goes on. Yao Ming, the Chinese star of the National Basketball Association's Houston Rockets, could become another Michael Jordan, and China is set to host the 2008 Summer Olympics. Large expatriate communities in the United States – 2.4 million Chinese and 1.7 million Indians – have increased interest in their home countries among other Americans. Moreover, transnational connections in the information industry are close, as Western high-tech companies increasingly employ affiliates in Bangalore and Shanghai to provide real-time services.

But the real promise for China and India lies in the future. A country's soft power rests upon the attractiveness of its culture, the appeal of its domestic political and social values, and the style and substance of its foreign policies. In recent years, both China and India have adopted foreign policies that have increased their attractiveness to others. But neither country yet ranks high on the various indices of potential soft-power resources that are possessed by the United States, Europe, and Japan. While culture provides some soft power, domestic policies and values set limits, particularly in China, where the Communist Party fears allowing too much intellectual freedom and resists outside influences. Both countries have a reputation for corruption in government.

India benefits from democratic politics, but suffers from overly bureaucratized government. In foreign policy as well, both countries' reputations are burdened with the problems of long-standing disputes over Taiwan and Kashmir. Moreover, in the United States, the attraction of an authoritarian China is limited by the concern that it could become a future threat.

The soft power of Asian countries, then, lags behind that of the U.S., Europe, and Japan, but it is likely to increase. Indeed, if the U.S. continues to pursue unattractive policies, it may find that its absence from the summit in Malaysia in December is a harbinger of things to come.

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