

## A Pathway to Thai Soft Power: An Exploration of Soft Power Proposals in Post-COVID Thailand

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### Abstract

In the wake of the global success of the Korean Wave, soft power has become a top priority for Thailand as a means to enhance its competitiveness in the post-COVID era. This research analyzes key proposals from the Ministry of Culture, the Thai Chamber of Commerce, and the ASEAN Watch Program through archival analysis. The findings indicate that Thai soft power is primarily conceptualized as the power of popularity, focusing on economic promotion and image-building rather than traditional dominance in international politics. The pathway to achieving Thai soft power involves promoting Thai culture through entertainment diplomacy, which requires significant investment in media production, distribution, and public relations. Moreover, an understanding of soft power from a political perspective is evident solely in the academic proposal, leading to a lack of explicit agendas concerning international relations in most strategies. Non-academic proposals are more aligned with the creative economy and nation branding. This study concludes with suggestions for more actionable concepts that can garner stronger support for the advancement of Thai soft power.

**Keywords:** 1) Soft Power 2) Entertainment 3) Thailand 4) Post-COVID

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## Introduction

Soft power has garnered significant attention in Thai society, particularly following South Korea's success in leveraging its cultural industries as a model of soft power management. This admiration has sparked numerous efforts in Thailand to develop a distinctive version of soft power that can similarly elevate its global image and influence.

South Korea's soft power is widely recognized for its strategic promotion of cultural exports, including K-Pop, K-Dramas, and K-Movies, which have introduced Korean culture to audiences worldwide (Prasirtsuk, 2018, pp. 122-139). Landmark achievements, such as the global success of *Squid Game* in 2021 and *Parasite*'s victory at the 92nd Academy Awards in 2019, have further cemented Korea's reputation in this arena. Inspired by this, Thailand has sought to replicate South Korea's approach. One prominent initiative was the 'Repositioning Thailand for Thai Brand and Soft Power' conference, which aimed to encourage stakeholders to focus on nation branding as a soft power strategy (Parliamentary Commission 4.0, 2020, pp. 1-7).

The demand for soft power in Thailand even intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic as traditional industries, particularly agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, experienced sharp declines (Vienna International Centre, 2020, pp. iii-v; Chokvatana, 2020, pp. 1-11). Soft power emerged as a potential solution to this crisis, with policymakers confident in its ability to boost the economy and restore Thailand's international standing. This was demonstrated during a September 2020 meeting between the

government and Thai movie studios, where it was agreed that collaboration with the film industry could support Thailand's economic recovery while simultaneously enhancing its global reputation (Secretariat of the Prime Minister, 2020).

To operationalize soft power, several strategic proposals have been introduced. Notable among these are The Establishment of an Organization to Promote the Thai Entertainment Industry by the Thai Chamber of Commerce (2022, pp. 1-11) and A Blueprint for Promotion of the National Image via Use of Entertainment Media as the Soft Power Resource by the Ministry of Culture (2022, pp. 1-23). Additionally, the ASEAN Watch Program (2018, pp. 1-22) developed A Policy Brief in Pursuit of Thai Soft Power prior to the pandemic, laying the groundwork for these efforts as the first-ever proposal addressing the vision of Thai soft power. Interestingly, each of these proposals shares common objectives, marking the early stages of Thai soft power development in the post-COVID era.

To understand the trajectory of Thai soft power, it is essential to examine these three foundational proposals, as their influence extends into many current soft power activities, demonstrating how Thailand is utilizing cultural diplomacy. For example, the Ministry of Culture's strategy has already led to the subsidization of films such as *Man Suang*, *Mantra Warrior: The Legend of the Eight Moons*, and *Uranus 2324*, which are now considered tools of Thai cinematic soft power. These films not only reflect Thailand's emerging soft power discourse but may also shape its future

direction. Or, the proposal by the Thai Chamber of Commerce, though it ultimately did not result in concrete actions, reflects the business sector's perspective on soft power, with its content notably referenced by the Ministry of Culture in drafting its ministerial proposal.

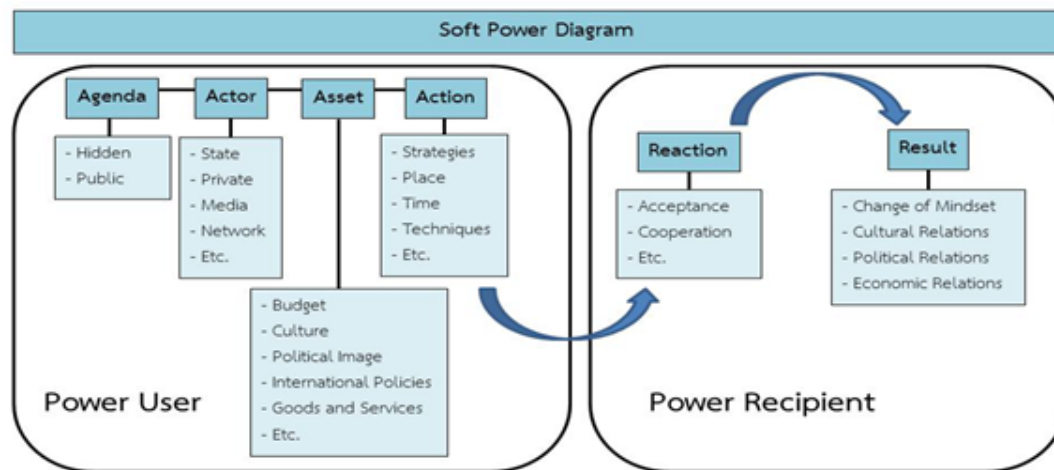
This research, as a result, strives to explore how these strategies reflect Thailand's position as a middle-power nation and assesses how effectively they align with theoretical frameworks of soft power. By analyzing these proposals, one can better understand Thailand's evolving approach to soft power in an increasingly competitive global environment.

### Related Theories

This research draws upon three key theoretical frameworks to analyze the proposed strategies. The first and primary framework is Joseph Nye's soft power theory, popularized

in 1990. The other two focus on entertainment diplomacy and the psychology of attraction, which are crucial for understanding the role of cultural appeal and entertainment media, central elements of each strategy.

In contrast to hard power, which involves coercion, soft power relies on attraction to influence others and achieve desired outcomes (Nye, 1990, p. 5; Nye, 2004, pp. 1-8). Nye's concept of soft power encompasses both an agenda (the objectives pursued in international relations) and constructive actions (methods of persuasion). To deepen understanding of soft power, the 4A 2R model illustrates that soft power is most effective when supported by cohesive components: agendas, actions, assets, and actors (Lopattananont, 2021, p. 269; Lopattananont, n.d.).



**Figure 1** Components of soft power illustrated by the 4A 2R model.

The 4A 2R model emphasizes that soft power is not merely a set of policies but a multi-faceted process that requires these elements to function in harmony. Given that soft power encompasses various tasks, unified networks and specialized organizations are needed to manage multiple accountabilities

and responsibilities (Wongmontha, 2022, pp. 1-5). Furthermore, soft power operates tactically, often intertwined with security concerns, highlighting the importance of recognizing its structural complexities (Akaha, 2008, p.59; Kalimuddin and Anderson, 2018, p. 114).

One of the most interesting aspects



of these strategies is the incorporation of entertainment diplomacy as a key soft power tool. This method has gained prominence, especially after South Korea's successful use of its entertainment industry to foster global relations. Entertainment diplomacy involves the strategic use of media products—such as films, television, and music—to build positive relations with target audiences (Quessard, 2020, pp. 279-295). This approach holds tremendous potential, as it appeals to broad audiences, positioning it as a powerful subset of soft power.

Countries like the U.S., China, and South Korea have successfully derived soft power from the export of entertainment content, which generates strong emotional attachment among global audiences (Aydemir, 2017, p. 79; Flew, 2016, p. 278; Valieva, 2018, p. 207). While content creators tailor their products to meet audience preferences, other stakeholders—such as governmental bodies and private sector distributors—facilitate production and international distribution processes.

For the U.S., soft power has played a pivotal role in reinforcing its global leadership, especially in the post-Cold War era (Nye, 2017, pp. 1-3). American entertainment conveys themes of exceptionalism and seeks admiration from international audiences (Coyne, 2008, pp.1-7). U.S. embassies also play a critical role by promoting free trade agreements (FTAs), protecting intellectual property, and facilitating screenings of American films in global markets (Moody, 2017, p. 2912).

Conversely, China's soft power strategy is rooted in fostering global connectivity, with a

strong emphasis on strengthening international relationships (China.org.cn, 2014). Chinese television dramas, for example, aim to portray a positive, progressive image of China, countering global misconceptions by highlighting Confucian values, technological advancement, and cultural diversity (Traipanyasart & Prasirtsuk, 2022, p. 359). The Chinese government also works closely with industry professionals to improve production quality and advance the country's film industry (Madrid-Morales, 2017, pp. 38-55).

South Korea, while similarly using entertainment diplomacy, focuses on expanding its economic influence and establishing itself as a regional leader (Lee, 2009, p. 205). Its soft power agenda is grounded in promoting Korean culture and showcasing the resilience of its people. The South Korean government actively supports media distribution by researching target markets, streamlining access to global markets, and encouraging participation from academics and the general public in content creation.

Alongside soft power and appropriate entertainment diplomacy, attraction has been key to the success of these three countries. As Vuving (2009, pp. 17-20) argues, attraction is rooted in a nation's core values, including benignity, brilliance, and beauty. Studies by Su (2010, p. 317) and Suwankaewmanee (2020, p. 87) further support the idea that film and television can serve as powerful soft power resources by captivating audiences with their emotional appeal and compelling messages.

This aligns with attraction theory, which posits that emotional, aesthetic, intel-

lectual, or physical appeal drives the success of entertainment products (Kleczek, 2008). The global popularity of K-Dramas exemplifies this: their appeal stems from well-crafted narratives, high production standards, and relatable characters, all of which contribute to South Korea's ability to extend its influence on a global scale (Zur, 2021). Through these narratives, South Korea conveys its values of benignity, brilliance, and beauty, fostering emotional connections between audiences and Korean culture.

Learning from the experiences of the U.S., China, and South Korea, it becomes clear that successful soft power through entertainment diplomacy requires four key components:

1. An agenda aimed at enhancing international relations and security.
2. Engaged and capable actors from state, private, academic, and popular sectors.
3. Tactical actions to maximize success.
4. Engaging entertainment that delivers clear and attractive messages.

These elements underscore that soft power, especially in the realm of entertainment diplomacy, is far from a simple task. It requires a concerted effort from multiple sectors and a clear understanding of the cultural appeal needed to achieve long-term global influence.

### Research Methodologies

This study employs archival analysis, focusing on three key soft power strategies from the Ministry of Culture, the Thai Chamber

of Commerce, and the ASEAN Watch Program. These proposals were selected for their significant influence on Thailand's cultural diplomacy efforts during the post-COVID era.

The proposals from the Ministry of Culture and the Thai Chamber of Commerce were accessed through involvement in a working group on soft power strategies, providing firsthand insights into state and business perspectives. The Ministry of Culture's proposal spans 23 pages, covering vision, mission, strategies, and conclusions. The Thai Chamber of Commerce's proposal, though shorter at 11 pages, is more detailed, including specific action plans.

Meanwhile, the ASEAN Watch Program's academic proposal was obtained from publicly available documents. This proposal comprises 22 pages, focusing on broad policy recommendations and actionable principles rather than detailing specific strategies, as in the first two proposals.

The analysis followed guiding questions derived from soft power theory, including:

- What are the key agendas of each proposal?
- How are actions designed and implemented?
- Which actors are assigned, and what assets are utilized?

By structuring the research in this way, it is possible to compare the goals and practices outlined in each proposal and assess their alignment with soft power theory.

### Visions and Goals

All three proposals—from the Ministry



of Culture, the Thai Chamber of Commerce, and the ASEAN Watch Program—share a common overarching objective: to strengthen Thai soft power through entertainment diplomacy. This approach is aimed at enhancing Thailand's global image and driving economic growth through increased demand for Thai products and services. However, the strategies diverge in their depth and focus. While the Ministry of Culture and the Thai Chamber of Commerce emphasize economic promotion through cultural exports, the academic proposal from ASEAN Watch advocates a broader vision that integrates multiple sectors beyond entertainment, aligning more closely with Joseph Nye's conceptualization of soft power as a tool for international relations and diplomacy. This distinction highlights the tension between viewing soft power as a means of economic branding versus its potential as a tool for broader geopolitical engagement. The following is detailed visions and goals from each proposal.

### **The Ministry of Culture**

The Ministry of Culture's proposal outlines the following visions, aiming to shape a positive global perception of Thailand:

- Thai media content becomes popular both domestically and internationally.
- Thai media practitioners achieve greater recognition and competitiveness.
- Thai products and services are featured in exported media, leading to increased demand for these offerings.
- Thailand improves its global standing, as reflected in a higher ranking in the Global Soft Power Index.

These visions were developed un-

der the guidance of the Subcommittee on Promotion of the National Image via the Use of Entertainment Media as a Soft Power Resource, chaired by the Minister of Culture. The subcommittee included representatives from state departments, the private sector, and experts in diplomacy, film, arts, and culture (The Secretariat Office of the National Audio-Visual Committee, 2022a, p.1). Before finalizing these goals, the subcommittee, in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, held a two-day workshop where various stakeholders, including the National Federation of Motion Pictures and Contents Associations, the Thai Film Archive, and the Thai Game Software Industry Association, contributed (The Secretariat Office of the National Audio-Visual Committee, 2022b, pp.1-2). During the workshop, large-scale media projects were discussed, and a budget of 5 million baht per project was proposed for developing six top-tier scripts (The Secretariat Office of the National Audio-Visual Committee, 2022c, pp. 10-31). These finalized visions reflect the Ministry's ambitious scale for advancing entertainment diplomacy.

### **The Thai Chamber of Commerce**

The Thai Chamber of Commerce, however, developed its proposal earlier, focusing on soft power as a tool to mitigate the economic damage caused by the pandemic. They viewed soft power as the ability to influence perceptions and sentiments toward Thailand to create a favorable economic environment. Their key goals include:

- Elevating Thailand's soft power to rank within the top 20 of the Global Soft Power Index within 10 years.

- Expanding Thailand's entertainment industry to reach a value of 500 billion baht annually within 10 years.
- Increasing tourism receipts from foreign visitors to 3 trillion baht annually within 10 years.
- Establishing at least five Thai brands as global brands within 10 years.

These goals emphasize measurable outcomes related to rankings and financial gains. The Thai Chamber of Commerce identified the entertainment industry as the most effective soft power generator and positioned it as the primary resource. They believe this strategy will achieve success rapidly by leveraging existing entertainment subsectors, including short films, feature films, animation, manga, television/OTT, music, online/console games, and user-generated content, alongside emerging tech-driven formats like AR/VR (The Thai Chamber of Commerce, 2022, pp. 1-11).

### **The Academic Proposal**

The academic proposal from the ASEAN Watch Program, funded by the Thailand Research Fund (TRF), was formulated during the TRF-ASEAN Policy Round Table in 2018, prior to the government's active pursuit of soft power strategies. This proposal was informed by discussions among scholars who synthesized lessons from the soft power practices of China, Japan, and South Korea. While the proposal does not explicitly state specific goals, it implies a desirable outcome through introductory statements:

- Thailand possesses abundant soft power resources, categorized into cultural assets (e.g., food, TV dramas, films, Muay Thai,

and dance), economic strength, educational exchange, and philosophical concepts like the self-sufficiency economy and Thai Buddhist principles.

- Actions to promote Thai soft power are feasible and only require clear strategies and vision. Thailand could leverage its cinematic appeal to showcase positive aspects of its culture, such as humor and societal harmony. Additionally, popular Thai celebrities and international festivals could enhance Thailand's socio-economic image. Muay Thai, already globally recognized, should remain a core focus of these efforts.

From these statements, it can be inferred that the academic proposal views multiple sectors as potential drivers of soft power, with the entertainment industry being a major focal point.

### **Meaning as Reflected in all Visions and Goals**

The visions and goals outlined in all three proposals align with the mainstream understanding of soft power in Thailand. A survey titled Thai People and Soft Power, conducted by Intasara (2022), revealed that 94.56% of respondents, representing the general public, viewed soft power primarily as a means of economic enhancement. Additionally, 93.79% emphasized the importance of promoting Thai traditions, festivals, and tourism, while 68.23% highlighted local diversity and identity as valuable assets.

Further supporting this interpretation, the Research and Development Institute at Nakhon Phanom University held a conference in November 2022 where soft power was equat-





ed with the creative economy (The Research and Development Institute, 2022), underscoring local wisdom as a critical resource. Similarly, Thailand Science Research and Innovation issued a 2022 document recommending the creation of soft power through cultural heritage in conjunction with economic growth for sustainable development (Chanthavong, 2022, pp. 5-7). In 2023, the popularity of Thailand's BL series across Asia was recognized as a contributor to the perception of Thailand's soft power, as it popularized Thai identity through modern media (Shih, 2023).

These examples suggest that, in Thailand, soft power is largely associated with wealth generation and cultural export. "Thainess" is positioned as an attractive asset that can expand fan bases and drive demand for Thai products globally. Consequently, all three proposals focus heavily on utilizing entertainment media as the main driver of soft power.

### **Proposed Practices**

The visions and goals of the three proposals focus primarily on popularizing Thainess through entertainment media, with an emphasis on industrial management. Collaboration between the state and the business sector is identified as crucial to achieving this. Both the Ministry of Culture and the Thai Chamber of Commerce stress the importance of "working together," while the academic proposal offers broader suggestions that highlight collaboration.

### **Ministry of Culture's Proposed Strategies**

The Ministry of Culture outlines several strategies to foster partnerships between the state and the media sector. These include:

#### **Train Together**

- Develop content creators and creative personnel to produce engaging scripts and original stories.
- Create a free database (including information, photos, clips, music, etc.) to support creative activities.

#### **Give Together**

##### **(Short term)**

- Provide partial support to those creating works aligned with approved topics.
- Announce financial or tax incentives to encourage the creation of new entertainment.
- Promote pre-sales through a special corporation that manages a pre-sale application, while guaranteeing tax cuts for co-productions, especially those funded by crowdfunding methods.

##### **(Long term)**

- Establish a fund for media production and distribution with an annual budget of no less than 500 million baht.
- Begin legal procedures to establish a film organization responsible for managing industrial support on behalf of the government and the media industry. This organization should operate efficiently and flexibly, coordinating tasks across multiple state departments.

#### **Create Together**

- Promote the production of media content that can be adapted into various media formats for widespread distribution.

#### **Show Together**

- Enhance advertising and marketing efforts by creating a market research team to retain existing customers and attract new ones.



This team would understand the demand for entertainment products and foster growth in the Thai entertainment industry.

- Implement a licensing-free campaign, allowing foreign TV stations to air Thai dramas without payment.

- Utilize supplementary methods, such as encouraging user-generated content (e.g., personal reviews), supporting Thai stars or artists participating in international shows, and inviting foreign media to press conferences.

### **Thai Chamber of Commerce's Proposed Strategies**

The Thai Chamber of Commerce takes a more comprehensive approach, centering its strategy around the “Happy Model” for self-portrayal. This model highlights four core aspects:

**Eat Well:** Emphasizes Thailand’s variety of tasty, clean, and nutritious foods, as well as the safety and benefits of local products and herbs.

**Live Well:** Highlights Thailand’s high-standard accommodations and sustainable environmental practices, such as wastewater treatment and garbage disposal, which enhance modern living.

**Fit Well:** Showcases Thailand’s abundant sports complexes and fitness spaces, offering activities like cycling, jogging, swimming, diving, Muay Thai, and mountaineering.

**Give Well:** Focuses on Thai people’s interest in exchanging knowledge about culture, nature, and adventure, along with their commitment to communal activities and volunteering.

The proposed strategies aim to convey these messages through entertainment media, with improvements facilitated by collaboration. The establishment of a central organization is proposed to serve as the main driver of these efforts:

### **Cooperative Giving**

- The organization coordinates with state departments to create a storytelling database and identify fundraising opportunities. It must also facilitate collaboration between partners to develop stories aligned with selected themes.

- Local administrations may serve as partners, providing support (either in-kind or cash) to storytellers.

### **Cooperative Creation**

- In collaboration with content providers such as TV stations, animation companies, and film studios, the organization will co-invest in media content production. Co-investors must be exclusively Thai to ensure legal ownership of the final product.

- The organization will oversee the crossover process, selecting popular content for adaptation into other entertainment forms (e.g., adapting a comic into a video game).

### **Cooperative Showing**

- Domestically: The organization will showcase selected content, including films, novels, music, TV dramas, animations, and comics, with the support of leading Thai distributors. Budgets for these projects should not exceed 15 million baht per piece.

- Internationally: The organization will target markets such as China, the Pan-Asian region, and the global market. It will provide fi-



nancial support for content shown in first-class channels like movie theaters or OTT platforms.

### **Cooperative Training**

- The organization will establish an art school designed to nurture young talent, particularly in arts, culture, history, economics, and psychology. Selected students will receive three-year scholarships, with successful graduates eligible for international higher education scholarships.

Additionally, the Thai Chamber of Commerce has proposed an organizational structure for the central body, which would operate as a non-departmental public body reporting to the Office of the Prime Minister. Senior members would include representatives from the Ministries of Culture, Tourism, Commerce, Foreign Affairs, and Digital Economy, along with members from the private sector and industry experts. The board would manage an administrative team, led by a director appointed by the board.

To fund these efforts, the Thai Chamber of Commerce anticipates an annual budget of at least 2,500 million baht, sourced from:

- Sponsorships or donations,
- 10% of the annual income allocated to the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Research and Development Fund for Public Interest,
- 20% of tax revenues from the entertainment industry,
- Contributions from Thailand's Tourism Promotion Fund,
- Government financial support,
- Fundraising through donation-based or reward-based campaigns.

### **Academic Proposal's Strategies**

The academic proposal from the ASEAN Watch Program is less detailed but provides a foundational framework for enhancing Thai soft power. It emphasizes:

- Identifying core soft power resources such as TV dramas, films, food, Muay Thai, and the self-sufficiency economy.
- Establishing specific goals and target groups through comparative studies with countries like South Korea.
- Creating a long-term roadmap that synchronizes efforts across government departments and the private sector.
- Supporting research and collaboration to improve the quality of Thai media content.
- Incorporating Thai cultural values into media, such as the culinary culture and Muay Thai's symbolic representation of the Thai spirit.
- Encouraging Thai celebrities to participate in cultural diplomacy.
- Utilizing various soft power channels, including foreign affairs initiatives, to promote Thai culture on the global stage.

This proposal focuses on using cultural products and services to meet international standards while addressing sensitive issues in historical narratives. It highlights Thailand's leadership role in ASEAN and the importance of a strategic government-led approach.

### **Assessment of the Strategic Actions**

While all three proposals emphasize the role of the government in generating Thai soft power, they tend to neglect the importance of bottom-up initiatives where the pop-

ular sector can play a larger role. Collaboration is primarily envisioned between the government and the business sector, but these proposals do not specify how such collaboration will benefit the broader economy or identify the key beneficiaries of soft power operations. As a result, the overall content may appear more ideological than practical in the eyes of potential stakeholders.

### Conclusion and Discussion

This research aimed to analyze the soft power proposals issued by the Ministry of Culture, the Thai Chamber of Commerce, and the academics involved in the ASEAN Watch Program, sponsored by the Thailand Research Fund. The findings reveal that all the proposals share a common focus: aligning soft power with economic promotion and the popularization of Thai culture, primarily to recover from the impacts of COVID-19. Notably, the academic proposal was drafted before the pandemic and was intended to address the broader politico-economic context.

All three proposals advocate for the development of soft power through cultural attractions, particularly entertainment media, to project socio-cultural identities that resonate with foreign audiences. The assumption behind these proposals is that significant investments in infrastructure, media production, and talent development will yield positive results. The academic version additionally emphasizes soft power in the context of education and economic activities, aligning with Nye's soft power theory.

These proposals reflect a degree of

coherence with existing discourse on Thai soft power, particularly the mainstream understanding that soft power boosts a nation's reputation or serves as a tool for promoting the Thai brand. While all proposals incorporate entertainment media, the academic proposal is more politically oriented, aiming to advance Thailand's international relations, even though it also embraces entertainment.

However, Thai soft power strategies, with the exception of the academic proposal, do not fully comply with Nye's original soft power theory, which emphasizes leveraging a nation's appeal for specific international purposes. According to Nye (2021, p. 196), soft power aims to reduce resistance to hard or economic power by projecting attractive resources and compelling agendas, often centered on international relations and security. In contrast, Thai soft power strategies in this study are more focused on enhancing popularity to drive trade, exports, and tourism, with little connection to long-term security or diplomatic objectives. As it stands, Thai soft power is largely aligned with creative economy initiatives and nation branding rather than traditional foreign policy objectives. This raises the question: can such strategies effectively capture and sustain global audiences in the long term?

A comparison with the strategies used by the U.S., China, and South Korea further highlights the differences. As discussed in the theoretical section, these countries employ soft power with clear political and economic agendas aimed at building international networks and expanding global influence. The U.S. promotes "exceptionalism", China em-



phasizes “civilization”, and South Korea conveys both “strength” and “beauty” through high-quality entertainment. They also utilize a wide array of actors, including the state, media professionals, and cultural practitioners, all working collaboratively to enhance content and disseminate it globally.

In contrast, Thai soft power strategies focus on media production with subsidized outputs, but they lack clear mechanisms for ensuring successful export or maintaining content quality. Furthermore, while the Thai Chamber of Commerce promotes a message of healthy living, and the academic proposal highlights characteristics like humor and cultural beauty, the Ministry of Culture has yet to specify a clear message. As a result, there is no unified agenda beyond economic enhancement and nation branding, leaving the goals of Thai soft power somewhat fragmented.

The comparison between Thai soft power and theoretical frameworks reveals notable gaps. In discussions by non-academic groups, soft power is often seen as the “power of popularity”, devoid of a coherent political agenda or strategic implementation. This observation aligns with an analysis by Hayeesa (2023), which argues that Thai soft power is often misunderstood, with every cultural product being incorrectly labeled as soft power. Similarly, Charoenvattananukul (2022, pp. 1-5) contends that Thai cultural products are not inherently soft power; they require strategic management aimed at achieving international relations objectives.

To address these gaps, this research highlights the importance of knowledge man-

agement. Soft power strategies need a clearer, more inspirational concept that goes beyond mere economic goals and focuses on Thailand's international stance. A strong concept of soft power would:

- Clarify misconceptions and demonstrate that Thai soft power is essential for addressing non-traditional security challenges, power competition, and trade relations.

- Involve ordinary citizens, showing that soft power is not restricted to large investments or elite actors. Ordinary Thais can contribute using available resources and capabilities.

- Link soft power with foreign policy, emphasizing that Thailand's soft power efforts must be aligned with its broader international strategies.

Attraction techniques are also critical for content creators to connect with global audiences. Insights from the success of K-dramas and Hollywood movies illustrate the importance of emotionally resonant content. Equipping Thai creators with knowledge about the psychology of entertainment will enhance their ability to create content that resonates with diverse audiences. Studies by Philippe & Guintcheva (2015, p. 5), Wiley (2003, pp. 169-178), and Hofer (2013, pp. 109-117) on the dynamics of emotions in media consumption offer valuable guidance for crafting attractive entertainment.

Lastly, understanding foreign audiences is vital. For instance, Chinese audiences have shown an affinity for Thai TV dramas, particularly for their aesthetic qualities, as noted by Jirabovornwisut (2019, p. 50). Similarly, the

Arabic market shows interest in plotlines involving love triangles, which Thai dramas could cater to, as discussed in the study titled ‘Thailand’s Opportunities in the Arabic Countries’ (Lopattananont, 2022, pp. 1-9). Such insights can inform content creation and distribution strategies tailored to specific international markets.

It can be concluded that the three proposals provide a snapshot of how Thai soft power has been conceptualized during

a period of peak demand. The concept has evolved into two branches: one focused on international politics and the other on business sector-driven self-promotion. The latter has received more attention, positioning entertainment diplomacy as the primary approach. The table below encapsulates the key elements of the non-political dimension of Thai soft power.

**Table 1** Comparison of Thai Soft Power and Soft Power Theory.

Aspect	Thai Soft Power	Soft Power in Theory
Focus	Economic promotion, nation branding, cultural exports through entertainment media	Influence and attraction through values, culture, policies, and diplomacy
Key Tools/Assets	Entertainment media, cultural beauty, humor, subsidized media production	Attractive cultural resources, compelling agendas, and strategic international messaging
Main Actors	State and media industry.	State actors, media professionals, cultural practitioners working collaboratively
Goals	Enhance economic outcomes, promote Thai brand, boost tourism and trade	Shape international relations, reduce resistance to hard power, promote security and diplomacy
Challenges/Limitations	Lack of unified agenda, limited media production capacity, fragmented strategies, unclear foreign policy connection	Requires coordination across sectors, significant investment, and understanding of global audience preferences

From this table, it is evident that Thai soft power partially aligns with the theory, as it emphasizes popularity and economic goals rather than broader international affairs.

Unlike global powers such as the U.S. or China, Thailand occupies a distinct position in the international arena as a middle-power nation. This status presents both challenges

and opportunities in the realm of soft power. Middle-power nations typically do not seek global political dominance but instead leverage their cultural and diplomatic assets to foster regional influence and global connections. Thailand’s approach to soft power, particularly through entertainment diplomacy, reflects this middle-power strategy. The focus on cultural



exports and nation branding aligns with Thailand's desire to enhance its economic standing and maintain regional prestige, rather than pursue broad geopolitical influence. However, Thailand's soft power potential may be limited by its smaller media production capacity and global reach compared to countries like South Korea, which have robust state-supported media industries. This raises the question: Can Thailand effectively position itself as a soft power leader in ASEAN, leveraging its cultural assets in ways that extend beyond economic outcomes?

To conclude, this research has demonstrated that Thailand's soft power strategies are primarily focused on enhancing economic outcomes through cultural exports, with entertainment diplomacy positioned as the primary tool. However, to fully harness the potential of soft power, Thai policymakers must look

beyond economic benefits and develop a cohesive strategy that integrates foreign policy goals. This could include fostering deeper collaboration between the creative sector and diplomatic channels, ensuring that cultural products not only promote Thai-ness but also enhance Thailand's influence in international relations. Future research should explore the role of digital platforms and emerging technologies in amplifying Thai soft power and examine the potential for grassroots cultural initiatives to play a larger role in this effort.

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