

# Thai soft power: Moving forward in the right direction

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### Abstract

This study presents policy guidelines that apply the concept of soft power as a mechanism for a country to enhance its bargaining power at the international level and pursue economic goals. Many countries have leveraged soft power to gain favor within the international community, at both the regional and global levels. Factors that give rise to soft power such as music, film and literature can enable a country to more easily attract and persuade others through a positive national image. Given that soft power is a multifaceted concept, such may be accomplished using cultural appeal, liberal political ideologies and values, favorable foreign policy agendas, and ethical behavior on the world stage. In recognition of the great benefits that regional neighbors such as Japan and South Korea have gained from soft power, the current and previous Thai government administrations have advanced policies aimed at soft power promotion to achieve economic development goals. These policies emphasize cultural resources that have been identified as broadly appealing and are easily accessible to domestic and international consumers. Among the myriad benefits Thailand would stand to gain through the spreading culture around the world include greater internationalization, cultural awareness, and appreciation for democracy and human rights. As this study shows, success in this endeavor is contingent upon private sector cooperation. The role of the government is thus to foster creative ecology and to support public diplomacy through the conveyance of relevant information conducive to promoting a positive national image. Policy formulation and review should consider the results of measuring and ranking soft power using internationally accepted tools, combined with monitoring the results of policies to promote creative industries under the concept of the creative economy. Such will help the Thai government transform cultural and creative values into increased national economic value.

**Keywords:** soft power, hard power, smart power, creative economy

## 1. Introduction

First devised as a concept by Joseph S. Nye, Jr. in the late 1980s, soft power is broadly understood as the ability of a state to attract and influence others by way of culture, political ideology, and foreign policy. Unlike the coercive forces of military might and economic strength upon which hard power is derived, soft power can be regarded as fundamentally persuasive and non-coercive. It has since been applied the world over and has become a fundamental concept in the field of international relations. However, interpretations of its meaning by politicians, journalists, and scholars have been diverse and have arguably deviated from Nye's original conception in some instances.

For Thailand, soft power has become a widely discussed topic in the past few years. The Prayuth government advocated the promotion of soft power as a part of the national agenda, as seen in 2022, when the Policy Committee for National Image Enhancement through Soft Power was created to establish operational objectives of cultural promotion, oversee the implementation of state policy, establish foreign policy in accordance with Thailand's capability development goals with respect to other nations, and act as an intermediary between the government and private sectors, as well as monitoring and assessing the operation to help it reach tangible goals, focusing on five categories of soft power: food, films, fashion, fighting<sup>1</sup>, and festivals; the 5F policy as it is called. This committee has since ceased its operation after the new government assumed office.

Soft power continued to be a policy priority during the 2023 Thai general election, during which many political parties expressed their appreciation of soft power as a way forward towards economic development. Specifically, this meant the inclusion of soft power in their election campaign as embodied in the concept of creative economy; this also extended to policies that focus on the development of some creative industries which connect to the goal of income distribution, raising competitive advantage, and economic development on a national level.

The golden age of soft power is being materialized under the current government, which hails soft power as one of its core policies. The government's policy statement, made on September 11th, 2023 by Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin, offered a strong message of the capability of the government to promote and support the creation of national creative force and soft power, to help improve and develop knowledge, expertise and creativity of Thai people

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<sup>1</sup> Muay Thai

that will generate economic value and income; it also included preservation and revitalization of arts, culture, and local knowledge to foster added value.

Moreover, the government aims to generate more jobs and income through OFOS: a One Family, One Soft Power policy (Policy Statement of the Council of Ministers, 2023). The government also set out to make soft power a major point of consideration in the state budget allocation in which the prime minister directed that a budget for fiscal year 2024 be drawn up with a focal point being the promotion of soft power to support the creation of national identity, as well as improved applications, which would help to highlight Thailand's cultural identity, and its strength in the service sector, that will affect the growing economy.

On this matter, the government associates the concept of soft power with the Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand, Chapter 5, Duty of the State, Section 57, which dictates that the State shall, (1) conserve, revive and promote local wisdom, arts, culture, traditions and good customs at both local and national levels, and provide a public space for the relevant activities including promoting and supporting the people, community and a local administrative organization to exercise the rights and to participate in the undertaking. This will shape the policy of national soft power promotion to include the preservation and revitalization of arts and culture, and promotion of local knowledge that will be developed to create added value.

Under the current climate where the concept of soft power is being extensively discussed in our society, in combination with the awareness of the government which influences policy making and budget allocation, many parts of society still hold different understandings of definition and scope of operation; what perspective and application of the concept of soft power does Thailand currently hold? Should it be the establishment of soft power policy as a national process or protocol to create bargaining power on an international level with cultural appeal through media and tourism, or various forms of foreign policies based on the original definition? This extends to the expansion of the concept to ascertain a policy formulation process that can directly benefit the national economy, and generate a tangible positive externality; thus creating an economic advantage over other nations.

## 2. Research Question

How should policymakers view and utilize the concept of soft power as a mechanism for building bargaining power at the international level and with the goal of promoting the economy of the country?

As the soft power policy is a newly issued policy of the government and one of the flagship policies aimed at national economic development, many Thai people still lack a clear understanding of the concept of soft power. Therefore, this study will explore the core concept of soft power and related data, such as the use of key resources (culture, political concepts and selling foreign projects), and case studies of other countries that have successfully implemented such policies. This article also presents information on policies to promote the creative economy that Thailand has continuously implemented and are related to the soft power policy, in order to take this data into account for policy formulation and implementation efficiently.

### 3. Analysis of the Definition of Soft Power

Joseph S. Nye, Jr., political science professor, former dean of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, and a former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs under the Clinton administration, is a pioneer of the concept of soft power about which he wrote an article titled “Soft Power” that was featured in *Foreign Policy Magazine* in 1990 (Nye, 1990). He presented the idea through the lens of political science of international relations, in which he assessed that the powerful resources in the United States from the standard economic and military perspectives might still lack some elements. The United States might be able to achieve its goal with the power of attraction, rather than through coercion or economic power. Nye defined this as soft power, and chose to term it “co-optive”, which means persuasive power. Although he initially went with the term “co-optive”, he ultimately changed it to “soft power” afterward to help highlight the contrast against the term hard power.

Nye defines power as “the ability to influence the behavior of others to get the outcome one wants” (Nye, 2004). Then he mentioned that he originally wrote Soft Power as the ability to get others to want what you want ‘tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology and institutions.’ Nye (2021). Soft power emerges when one country can influence other countries to want what it wants, an attribute that stands directly opposite to hard power or authoritative force that commands other states outright. Soft power derives its power from culture that is embed in products and media, (the way American English became a common language, or the world’s lingua franca) ideology or political values. This also includes rules and regulations, and policies established by international institutions that concern international economy such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which operates on free market ideology that corresponds with the United States’ values.

In this regard, Nye (2004) emphasized the factors that are inessential to promote soft power, such as internationalization, which allows large scale adoption; cultural openness; and the acknowledgement of importance of democracy and human rights, which affect other countries. Nye coined the term soft power in his book *Soft Power: the means to success in world politics* in 2004, where he gave an explanation that soft power is a power which can be utilized to influence or persuade target audiences to form a unified opinion without using force or intimidation to coerce the target to comply with the power holder's demands. In Nye's view, soft power is the utilization of important resources: culture, political values, and policies. On this matter, one party may attain influential status on a global stage through soft power by influencing other parties to appreciate its values, to emulate its culture, and to instil a desire to reach the same level of prosperity as it has reached, without having to rely on military power, nor propaganda to constrain, but instead encourage cooperation, emulation, or voluntary compliance. (Nye, 1990/2004) Soft power consists of three aspects: culture and ideology, political values and foreign policy, diplomacy and leadership.

In 2008, Nye wrote about soft power in the article "Public Diplomacy and Soft Power", explaining that soft power is an ability to influence others to achieve a desired result through appeal, and not by force, nor economic power. He emphasized that each country's soft power is different, and is based on important resources: culture, political values, and policy. He also added a new concept, "Smart Power". Smart power can emerge by combining resources from both soft power and hard power together. Soft power has a key tactic which is public diplomacy; it has a long history of helping to promote soft power in the United States and had a critical role in achieving victory in the Cold War. Fighting against transnational terrorism in the modern day also requires the help of soft power.

Therefore, relying solely on hard power may not lead to a path of success. To this, public policy can be regarded as an invaluable weapon in the smart power arsenal, but it requires attention to credibility, self-awareness, and the role of the public sector in creating legitimate soft power. Public diplomacy that degenerates to propaganda will not only fail to persuade but also sabotage the integrity of soft power itself.

Soft power is an essence of democratic politics which emerges in everyday life. The ability to shape desirability tends to correlate with intangible assets such as attractive demeanor, culture, values, or political institute, as well as policy that corresponds with justice or morality. If we were able to persuade others to act in accordance with our goal, there would be no need to force others to act without their compliance. This means soft power is much more than a power to influence or an ability to persuade with argument. Behaviorwise, soft power is a force

of attraction; resources wise, soft power is an asset that can create the aforementioned attraction. Measuring and assessing the outcome of soft power can be done via survey and the brainstorming of focus groups.

In Nye's opinion, each country's soft power relies on three important resources: culture that instil interest, liberal ideologies or political values that affect people both in and out of the country; legitimacy of foreign policy; and ethical exertion of power. A good public policy must go beyond propaganda. Public policy is not mere public relations but is a matter of communication and positive representation, which also relates to the creation of an environment that will support government policies in the long run.

In the 2009 article "Get Smart Combining Hard and Soft Power", Joseph Nye referred to smart power, which is a term he introduced in 2003 to counter the misperception of many people that the concept of soft power alone can produce effective foreign policy. In truth, power in this context refers to an ability to influence the actions of others to reach a desired outcome whether through enforcement or attraction. Hard power uses enforcement and financial means to attain power. Soft power is an ability to get desirable results through attraction. Smart power is an astute strategy that combines hard power and soft power together. Multiple types of resources may affect soft power, however, soft power does not refer to any kind of behavior. Important aspects of soft power for each country include culture (when it is appealing to others), values (when it is interesting and consistent), and policies (when it is a result of participation and is legitimate). The search for methods which can combine resources of hard power and soft power (such as public diplomacy, broadcasting, exchanges programme, development assistance, disaster management, defense agreement among the military) that will successfully produce smart power requires contextual intelligence. The authoritative body overseeing foreign policy must rely on contextual intelligence to assess the strength and limitations of one's own country to determine the course of smart power moving forward.

In "*The Future of Power*" (2011), Nye stated that the main global challenge in the 21st century would be the ability to combine soft power and hard power into smart power. The dramatic change in the means to exert power in international politics and numerous protocols are the result of the data revolution, (computer technology and new kinds of communication platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, etc.). Furthermore, globalization has resulted in the new status quo of power, shifting from the West to the East as well as the decentralization of state to non-state actors such as multinational enterprises, which have long been important non-state actors. Some of these multinational enterprises have higher annual revenue than many countries' GDP; what these enterprises lack is resources of authoritative power and resources

of legitimacy, both of which are resources governments still hold. The idea that multinational enterprises are about to dominate the world is not far off, especially data related businesses.

For Nye (2013), a lot of people usually equate the term soft power to mean economic power, or any other power that is opposite to military power. This is a different concept from what he proposed in his 2011 book *The Future of Power*, which could be due to an inability to separate the concept of power granting resources from the desired result, and in the process he created a new definition that differs from his original view.

In 2021, Nye realized that many authors refer to soft power as any power that is not military power, (or hard power) – a position he has tried to clarify – and he denies any similarity with his own proposed view. Many types of resources could become soft power, but that does not mean soft power could be the result of any kind of behavior; coercion or transaction, or any action that was predetermined, for instance, could not be classified as soft power. However, if it is a legitimate arrangement that aims to attract positivity and persuade, then it can be considered soft power. Hard power can be considered a “push”, whereas soft power is a “pull”. Nonetheless, resources that are related to hard power in some contexts may be used to create soft power in another context; on the other hand, some resources may be used to create both hard power and soft power at the same time.

#### **4. Soft Power and Implementation of Cultural Related Foreign Policies Among Asian Nations**

A lot of countries utilize cultural related policies alongside the concept of soft power. When examined on a surface level, this might lead to a misunderstanding that any cultural aspect spreading through the entertainment industry, tourism, cuisine, or various products that originate from a specific culture is entirely soft power. In truth, soft power is an ability to influence others through the power of culture, political values, and appropriate foreign policies. The prime example

in Asia is Japan, which has since become a leading country in terms of its economy, politics, and technology on the global stage. South Korea also employs soft power in the implementation of foreign policies and public diplomacy. Both Japan and South Korea have included the entertainment industry (dramas, films, cartoons, and music) as a driving mechanism for its creative economy, which freely allows the business sector and civil society to participate. This in turn has led to changes in the rules and regulations to support more free and fair competition, thus strengthening the quality of their democracy and allowing both countries to become globally recognized.

Jing Sun (2013) opined that in the first decade of the 21st century, soft power is not only significant, but it is an embodiment of the future, having gained tremendous popularity in East Asia. China has encouraged “peaceful rise”, a concept of peaceful growth that was later changed to “peaceful development”, and Japan implemented a “Cool Japan” policy to expand the popularity of Japanese culture around the globe (such as J-Pop, anime, Japanese cuisine, and high-tech electronics). Not to be outdone, South Korea uses the “Korean Wave” to spread its influence across the Asian market. News reports in these countries frequently reference soft power, which has increased the online searches about soft power enormously. Agencies related to soft power policies debuted many soft power projects. Various publishers have published soft power related books, both academic and general knowledge about the charm offensive of many countries. Concerning charm offensives, Sun (2013) focuses on the way the Chinese and the Japanese deploy customized charm campaigns for each target state, taking into consideration the target culture, international position, and political values. This indicates that soft power has become increasingly popular with each passing moment, and studies regarding soft power are copious.

However, when examining the definition by Joseph Nye, most people usually focus on a cultural policy that has a famous figure with an ability to garner popularity or viewership from media consumers. This is called popular culture or pop culture, but upon examination, focusing solely on culture and entertainment could be considered a diversion from the core principle of soft power. Moreover, if soft power were to be based purely on cultural aspects or commerciality, it would stray further away from the concept of soft power. The appearance of popularity from countries that focus mainly on cultural products correlates with the outcome of achieving the fewest objectives in foreign policy. In truth, culture is the element with the least weight and can be considered to be the weakest resource without the support of two other aspects, political values, and the legitimacy of foreign policies.

## 5. Measuring and Evaluating Soft Power

According to Joseph Nye (2004), measuring and evaluating the result of soft power can be done through survey or focus group. The outcome evaluation of soft power, although intangible, can be perceived based on popularity and acceptance by other nations. Measuring and evaluating the effects of soft power is a crucial process for policy makers and all involved non-state parties. The outcome of soft power will affect foreign relations and the economy of the industrial sector in elevating the country’s status in the perception of global citizens. The result can also be used as a reference when making a policy to promote soft power.

Currently, there are several indicators used among various countries for ranking the degree of soft power that can be used by governments to identify the areas in which they need to improve so as to increase their attractiveness and legitimacy in international politics.

### 1) Global Soft Power Index

The Global Soft Power Index is an index that compiles the results of surveys about soft power capability on various aspects from countries around the world since 1996. It was first conducted by Brand Finance, an international British consultant firm specializing in national brand development, using Joseph Nye's principles, then further developed into a contemporary theory for today. If one nation's soft power is to become stronger, it will directly affect the capability to attract investment and marketing opportunities for products and services.

The Global Soft Power Index comes out annually. The survey has been conducted in more than 53 languages, with more than 170,000 participants in 193 countries. The index details the following categories: familiarity, reputation, influence, and seven dimensions of soft power (business and trade, governance, international relations, culture and heritage, media and communication, education and science, and people and values).

The top ten ranking of the Global Soft Power Index 2024 is shown in the table below.

*Table 1* The top ten ranking of the Global Soft Power Index, year 2024.

Rank 2024	Rank 2023	Country	Index Score 2024	Index Score 2023	Index Score Change
1	1	The United States of America	78.8	74.8	+4.0
2	2	The United Kingdom	71.8	67.3	+4.5
3	5	China	71.2	65.0	+6.2
4	4	Japan	70.6	65.2	+5.4
5	3	Germany	69.8	65.8	+4.0
6	6	France	67.3	62.4	+4.9
7	7	Canada	64.4	60.7	+3.7
8	8	Switzerland	62.9	58.5	+4.4
9	9	Italy	62.0	56.6	+5.4
10	10	The United Arab Emirates	59.7	55.2	+4.5

Source: Global Soft Power Index 2024, Brand Finance.

For the top ten, the order has remained mostly the same or changed only slightly since 2023. The countries in 1st to 9th place can be considered the global leaders in soft power that always appear in the top ten. The United States of America has been in 1st place for two consecutive years, with its score still increasing and distancing the country in 2nd place, the United Kingdom. The United Arab Emirates rose from 15th place to 10th place in 2023 and maintained that ranking in 2024. This year, China has recorded a rapid rise in soft power, overtaking Germany to claim 3rd place.

The current global soft power ranking for Southeast Asian countries is shown in the table below.

Table 2 Global Soft Power Index 2024: The top ten ranking of Southeast Asian countries

Order	Rank 2024	Rank 2023	Country	Index Score 2024	Index Score 2023	Index Score Change
1	22	21	Singapore	54.4	51.0	+3.4
2	35	39	Malaysia	45.7	42.6	+3.1
3	40	41	Thailand	44.8	42.4	+2.4
4	45	45	Indonesia	42.6	40.9	+1.7
5	52	61	Philippines	39.8	38.7	+1.1
6	53	69	Vietnam	39.6	37.8	+1.8
7	107	-	Brunei Darussalam	33.3	-	-
8	112	105	Cambodia	32.8	34.8	-2.0
9	134	117	Laos	30.5	33.6	-3.1
10	136	113	Myanmar	30.3	33.9	-3.6

Source: Global Soft Power Index 2024, Brand Finance.

Thailand is currently in 40th place globally, rising from the 41st place in 2023, and is still able to maintain its 3rd place in the regional ranking, with Singapore and Malaysia in 1st and 2nd places, respectively, for two consecutive years. The top five highest scores for Thailand in 2024 are: familiarity, 6.8 points; reputation, 6.3 points; business and trade, 4.9 points; cultural and heritage, 4.8 points; and people and value, 4.3 points. The above scores show that Thailand is well known by people around the world for its tourist attractions, resulting in a high score for familiarity, as well as reputation.

## 2) Portland's "The Soft Power 30" Report

Portland is a consulting firm specialized in communication strategy for public and private sectors. In collaboration with the School of International Relations, University of Southern California, they publish *The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power*, which is based on a concept about the origin of resources of soft power by Joseph Nye.

It ranks the soft power of 30 countries through a survey of 12,500 participants from 25 countries, 500 people for each country. The report analyses more than 75 factors based on empirical data from sub-indexes that are divided into six categories: 1. Enterprise 2. Culture 3. Digital 4. Government 5. Engagement and 6. Education, as well as subjective data from surveys regarding the popularity of local food, tourist hospitality, the appeal of locations for tourism, work or education, contribution to global culture, and the country's reliability to make an ethical choice in foreign relations. This report also ranks the top ten influences of soft power in Asia.

The index aims to show a comparison of the strength of soft power between countries, quality assessment of political institutions, the outline of cultural charm, the strength of diplomatic connections, global recognition of higher education, the appeal of the economic system, and the utilization of digital technology. The most recent report came out in 2019.

Table 3 The Soft Power 30: A Global Ranking of Soft Power, Year 2015-2019

Global Ranking	Year (Score)				
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1	The United Kingdom (75.61)	The United States of America (77.96)	France (75.75)	The United Kingdom (80.55)	France (80.28)
2	Germany (73.89)	The United Kingdom (75.97)	The United Kingdom (75.72)	France (80.14)	The United Kingdom (79.47)
3	The United States of America (73.68)	Germany (72.60)	The United States of America (75.02)	Germany (78.87)	Germany (78.62)
4	France (73.64)	Canada (72.53)	Germany (73.67)	The United States of America (77.80)	Sweden (77.41)

Global Ranking	Year (Score)				
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
5	Canada (71.71)	France (72.14)	Canada (72.90)	Japan (76.22)	The United States of America (77.40)
6	Australia (68.92)	Australia (69.29)	Japan (71.66)	Canada (75.70)	Switzerland (77.04)
7	Switzerland (67.52)	Japan (67.78)	Switzerland (70.45)	Switzerland (74.96)	Canada (75.89)
8	Japan (66.86)	Switzerland (67.65)	Australia (70.15)	Sweden (74.77)	Japan (75.71)
9	Sweden (66.49)	Sweden (66.97)	Sweden (69.32)	Netherlands (73.79)	Australia (73.16)
10	Netherlands (65.21)	Netherlands (64.14)	Netherlands (67.89)	Australia (72.91)	Netherlands (72.03)

Between 2015 and 2019, the top ten in this ranking comprise the same countries, with only changes in their ranking for each year.

Thailand has never reached the top thirty, neither in the main index, nor the cultural subindex. In the 2019 report, which included the top ten influence of soft power in Asia ranking, Thailand came in 6th place with a score of 40.94.

## 6. Comprehension and Soft Power Promoting Protocol in Thailand

Joseph Nye (2021) said in the article “Soft Power: The Evolution of a Concept” that his idea of soft power, which he introduced in 1990, has since been used beyond the scope and definition that he initially proposed.

Peera Charoenvattananukul (2018) opined that application of the concept of soft power in Thailand usually put emphasis on the discussion of the origin of soft power rather than the mechanism and results that affect other actors. Joseph Nye’s soft power is different from cultural policies, public diplomacy, or other cultural resources; academics and activists often express a misaligned perception which leads to problematic application. Soft power should be defined by behavioral results rather than a definition based on cultural resources; thus, culture does not equate with soft power. When examining Nye’s definition, it makes clear that cultural

resources, whether they be food, Thai boxing, creative economy, or tourist attractions, can be commercialized. But that in and of itself is not soft power. Soft power provides desirable results without coercion.

Phitchakan Chuangchai (2023) discussed various phenomena that were cited as elements of the country's soft power, such as the Ministry of Culture's 5F policy, which consist of food, films, fashion, fighting, and festivals. Some government policymakers have expressed their opinion that culture is the national soft power by referring to Joseph Nye's concept of "soft power resources: culture, political values, foreign policies" without a thorough understanding of its characteristics. This leads to the misconception that if Thailand is to possess only one out of the three aspects, the country is considered to have soft power.

Nishamil Hayeesa (2023) said the understanding of soft power in Thailand is usually limited to the relation between cultural policy and economy where soft power is the promotion of cultural resources that will lead to increased economic value through the commercialization of culture. In truth, soft power is the exertion of power through culture and the power of culture in itself. Therefore, cultural merchandise, products, cultural tourism, and cultural branding should be regarded as ingredients of a creative economy that uses culture and creativity, but not soft power directly. Cultural logic, practices, or the power to present culture through cultural products or services, these qualities instead, should be regarded as soft power. Soft power is not directly implemented by the state; the resources are not under state control, but the state has a duty to create an environment that fosters creativity, culture, and ideas through policy formulation. Thus, the state is not the leading actor in promoting culture. For the creative economy to become soft power, it requires not only the creativity to turn culture into products, services, or branding but also a supporting policy from the government, such as the creation of an atmosphere or environment that nurtures creative ecology, and facilitation in terms of laws and regulations, finance, trade, and/or public relations.

The Royal Decree B.E.2561 (2018) on the establishment of a Creative Economy Promotion Office (Public Organization) defined Thailand's creative economy as a development of the economy through creativity that is based on knowledge, intellectual property, and academic research that links to culture, historical background, collective society experience, technology and innovation that help develop new business, products, and services which increase both economic and social value. Creativity, in this sense, means an ability to handle various multidisciplinary approaches to knowledge and experience to develop or create something more valuable or superior.

The Creative Economy Agency (Public Organization) has since circulated the definition of soft power as a protocol or mechanism that creates bargaining power on an international level through cultural appeal in media, tourism, and foreign policy to instil imagery and national branding that one wants to be remembered by the rest of the world. This operation requires a systematic strategy and a clear long term objective. The process of soft power needs insight that goes beyond the question of how to export culture and in what way; it is a matter of assessing successful policies that reflect the capability and potential which gives advantage over other nations. To make Thai exports sufficiently appealing requires a driving mechanism in the soft power process, the creativity and technology to increase its economic value, and the further expansion of cultural capital and local wisdom. This in turn improves the income and living standards of the people and fosters a creative ecology which will create a constructive atmosphere, environment, and social structure, thereby encouraging expression of creativity without any restriction. Creativity is an important driving force that gives Thai people the courage to transform old traditions into new business models, reflecting a modern image of Thailand. This will propel Thai local identity and products onto the global stage. If the government wants to elevate national soft power, relying solely on preservation might not be enough. It is crucial to keep up with modern society. So far, Thailand has started to garner its name in the contemporary world and has increased participation, as seen in T-Pop, Boys' Love series, and products of the film industry, to name a few.

## 7. The Promotion of Soft Power Today in Thailand

Thailand is still considered to be in the early stage of establishing a tangible policy to promote soft power. In 2022, the previous government created The Policy Committee for National Image Enhancement through Soft Power for the first time, focusing on five categories of soft power, called a 5F policy, including food, films, fashion, fighting, and festivals. The committee had only eight months in office and its operation had little time to yield any tangible result due to the change of the government.

Thailand has prioritized the formulation of soft power promoting policies, and has since formed;

1) The National Soft Power Strategy Committee, which includes the public and private sectors and specialists. The committee is responsible for strategizing national soft power, overseeing policy making and national strategy. It consults with the cabinet on matters regarding the establishment of policies and budget allocation, finance, and investment. As such,

this also extends to other rules, regulations, and benefits that relate to the promotion of national soft power.

2) The National Soft Power Development Committee has responsibility for promoting and pushing soft power policies to achieve its objectives as well as to appoint subcommittees to help develop soft power in eleven sectors. These include tourism, films and series, design, sports, games, music, festivals, fashion, arts, publishing, and food.

The current government has announced a policy to bring various soft power industries to global markets by promoting its national soft power at an international level through the cultural diplomacy protocols of related government agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Finance. In addition, it plans to also cooperate with the private sector to introduce Thai soft power to the global market with a clear strategy including an application of behavioral research, communication tactics, and participation of event organizing on the regional and global scale. This involves both organizing international projects in Thailand and sending high performing soft power acts to attend international events abroad.

When comparing the government's policy to promote soft power with Joseph Nye's ideology –which focuses on the importance of three resources of soft power, namely political values, legitimacy of foreign policies, and culture– it is apparent that the government puts an emphasis on cultural resources, which are more accessible and attractive for the general population than political values or foreign policies. If the cultural aspect corresponds with universal interests or values, or the values of other nations, the chance that said culture can become soft power is higher. There are various methods that culture can be promoted to an international audience, such as cultural merchandise, trade, state visits, communication, and tourism, along with the inclusion of public diplomacy that helps to relay a positive message and boost the image of the country.

## **8. Promotion of Soft Power and its Effect on the Economy and National GDP**

The measuring and ranking of the soft power of various countries by surveys or small group interviews like the Global Soft Power Index or The Soft Power 30 Report is the result of the implementation of soft power promotion policies by numerous nations that have led to increase in investment and the economic benefits that follows. Upon examining Thailand's policies to promote and develop soft power in eleven categories, there are overlaps – in terms of similar creative industries – with the other policy regarding the promotion of creative economy that utilizes cultural resources as its driving force. Thus, the body evaluating government spending to promote soft power and assessing the benefits derived from the

implementation of the policy could draw an example from the assessment of the creative economy policy, which records the operating budget allocation to the state and the apparent effect on the economy and gross domestic product.

*Table 4* provides an Overview of budget spending results of projects related to all 15 creative industries by relevant government agencies that received operating budgets in fiscal years 2021 and 2022. The data is sourced from the eMENSCR system studied by the Creative Economy Agency (Public Organization) together with a consultant

Unit: Million Baht

Creative Industry	Fiscal Year 2021	Fiscal Year 2022	Change
Handicraft	668.50	362.96	-305.54
Music	114.42	72.38	-42.04
Performing Arts	561.46	86.88	-474.58
Visual Arts	27.75	52.25	24.50
Film	299.55	635.88	336.33
Publishing	200.18	219.35	19.17
Broadcasting	363.05	842.92	479.87
Software (Game)	54.45	672.44	617.99
Advertising	305.33	551.99	246.66
Design	231.25	320.87	89.62
Architecture	632.62	1,114.84	482.22
Fashion	485.53	227.15	-258.38
Thai Food	318.23	456.99	138.76
Traditional Thai Medicine	92.59	101.29	8.70
Cultural Tourism	1,904.36	4,735.30	2,830.94
Overview	1,057.20	995.50	-61.70
<b>Total</b>	<b>7,316.47</b>	<b>11,448.97</b>	<b>4,132.50</b>

Source: Monitoring Report on Government Project Operations in 15 Creative Industries, Fiscal Year 2022; and Thailand's Creative Industries Movement Report 2023 by Creative Economy Agency (Public Organization)

The budget for projects related to creative industries totaled 7,316 million baht in fiscal year 2022, and 11,448 million baht in fiscal year 2023. The budget was allocated to every co-acting agency, ministries and independent organizations, both regional and provincial.

## 9. Evaluation of Economic Value of Creative Industries

The revenue statistics of creative economy per GDP, provided by the Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, categorized by 15 creative industries, is shown in the table below.

Table 5 Revenue Statistics of Creative Industries per GDP, year 2017-2021.

Unit: Million Baht

Creative Industry	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
1. Thai Food	271,068	267,068	296,883	280,896	279,349
2. Fashion	183,781	190,039	197,100	202,722	222,205
3. Advertising	198,679	207,747	212,719	195,779	191,381
4. Cultural Tourism	361,392	409,575	445,988	158,640	83,551
5. Design	119,015	127,689	126,054	105,533	99,453
6. Handicrafts	81,667	76,049	72,723	65,913	54,565
7. Traditional Thai Medicine	36,340	38,905	40,359	32,592	26,220
8. Software	36,538	40,643	41,538	43,751	49,047
9. Television & Broadcasting	32,664	32,920	33,393	32,465	32,731
10. Vision Arts	21,124	23,101	25,331	22,842	24,842
11. Performing Arts	19,389	19,465	19,750	16,970	14,877
12. Publishing	15,800	14,318	14,048	13,408	12,517
13. Architectural Services	11,018	11,146	10,854	9,631	8,211
14. Film	2,353	2,421	2,488	1,573	1,028
15. Music	1,324	1,433	1,594	1,288	1,022
<b>Total Budget for Creative Industry</b>	<b>1,392,152</b>	<b>1,462,519</b>	<b>1,540,822</b>	<b>1,184,003</b>	<b>1,100,999</b>
<b>% Change</b>		<b>5.05</b>	<b>5.35</b>	<b>-23.16</b>	<b>-7.01</b>
<b>GDP at Current Price</b>	<b>15,488,664</b>	<b>16,373,343</b>	<b>16,889,174</b>	<b>15,661,146</b>	<b>16,166,597</b>
<b>% Change</b>		<b>5.71</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>-7.27</b>	<b>3.23</b>
<b>Percentage of Creative Industry per GDP at Current Price (%)</b>	<b>8.99</b>	<b>8.93</b>	<b>9.12</b>	<b>7.56</b>	<b>6.81</b>

Source: Creative Information Center (CIC) , Creative Economy Agency (Public Organization), Estimation of the Data from Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council.

The total worth of the creative economy, collected from 12 categories of creative industries: handicrafts, music, performing arts, visual arts, film, broadcasting, publishing, software (game & animation), advertising, design, architecture, and fashion, as well as three related industries –Thai food industry, traditional Thai medicine, and cultural tourism– was 1,100,999 million baht in 2021, which accounted for 6.81% of national GDP.

In the current climate where the concept of soft power is widely discussed and is set to become an established policy that the government and public sector use to promote various projects through a soft power development strategy, it is crucial that a clear objective is established. This includes guideline for methods and resources that will be utilized, the conversion of soft power into economic and industrial values, and the development of metrics to evaluate the results of soft power operations. Even though the implementation of soft power strategies may not directly generate revenue for the government and country, nor directly affect or increase GDP, the promotion of soft power is still an economic opportunity that will generate income, and it will remain a tool that many countries employ to attract investment, promote trade, encourage tourism, and attract talent from around the world. All of this will increase employment and economic growth; therefore, the establishment of a soft power policy will benefit the income of the country.

## 10. Conclusion

Soft power is the ability to make others want and accept what you want them to, specifically, to influence others through the power of culture, political values, and appropriate foreign policies. The factors that are essential to promote soft power are linked to internationalization which allows large scale adoption, cultural openness, and acknowledgement of the importance of democracy and human rights which affect many countries. According to Global Soft Power Index 2024, Thailand is currently in 40th place globally, rising from 41st place in 2023, while maintaining its 3rd place in the regional ranking. The top five highest scores of Thailand are familiarity, reputation, business and trade, culture and heritage, and people and value. Thus, it is of great importance that a mutual understanding is established between the government and all sectors regarding the definition of soft power, its scope of action and the mechanisms for promoting the use of all three resources (culture, political ideology, and foreign policy). Communicating this understanding will lead to

determining procedures, assigning responsible agencies, and finding ways to monitor and evaluate policy results. And ultimately, all of this will help Thailand's soft power promotion policy to achieve its goals of economic development and other positive externalities.

## 11. Recommendations

The policy formulation to promote soft power should coincide with the core ideology of the concept of soft power to create appeal that can influence and persuade by focusing on three sources of soft power as follows:

(1) Culture: If the culture corresponds with the global interests or universal principles, or the values of other countries, the chance of the aforementioned culture becoming soft power will be higher. There are various channels to export culture to other countries, such as trade, communication, and tourism.

(2) Political value: If the political value correlates with other nations' values, especially democratic ideologies, it will strengthen the nation's soft power.

(3) Foreign policy: If the foreign policy is able to clearly communicate about important topics that global citizens are concerned with, such as equality, peace, and human rights, the chances of establishing soft power will be higher.

To reliably utilize soft power to seek economic opportunities that generate income for the country, the government or policy makers must be knowledgeable, and able to accurately identify the sources of soft power in their country. This is to prevent the policy formulation and promotion from progressing without direction, because apart from diplomatic advantage, soft power is also a tool that many nations employ to attract investment, to boost trade, and to promote tourism, which will bring forth economic growth to the country.

Hard power is held exclusively by the government, whereas soft power will have a dimension that is beyond the control of the government because of the involvement of non-state actors. Soft power is a process or mechanism that creates bargaining power on an international level by infusing the mindset and establishing a positive image of how the country is perceived by the rest of the world. This process requires the establishment of policy and systematic strategies with a clear long-term objective, led and operated mainly by the private sectors and civil society – the government playing a supporting role. Therefore, it is important to focus on cultivating nation branding to create or develop a distinct national identity, image, and reputation. This identity then needs to be communicated outward to encourage greater and wider acknowledgement so as to raise the country's competitive advantage, using the nation's powerful resources to create nation branding.

The government should aim to create long term policies and lay down a road map that will encourage a constructive atmosphere and environment to foster a creative ecology, as well as legal and financial support, budget, targeted marketing and public relations, and constructive foreign relations. This is because soft power produces indirect effects and requires a great length of time before tangible results can be realized. While utilizing soft power might be a better and safer choice when compared to economic or military power, soft power is also more difficult to employ; it can be easily destroyed and is difficult to rebuild. The advocacy in creating soft power requires a tremendous investment in time and money on education, culture, and diplomacy, and might not produce immediate results. It also needs clear established objectives, methods and resources that will be used, as well as a metric to evaluate the outcome and benefits of the aforementioned soft power operation.

Soft power does not focus solely on culture, but rather the act of exerting authoritative power through culture. Thus, cultural merchandise is not soft power in itself, but soft power should be the act of employing cultural logic, practices, or the power to present culture through cultural products or services. Since Thailand has announced its policy aiming to promote eleven categories of soft power, it is advisable that the definition of culture and Thai national identity be widened for more diverse and broader interpretation, to make it more concurrent with global citizens' values and to create and communicate Thai national identity in a way that can be universally perceived, understood, and accepted. Only by this approach can cultural value be converted into economic value. On this matter, Thai national identity exists in multiple forms and can be interpreted by both Thai citizens, and foreigners looking in. People who inherit the culture therefore must remain flexible in terms of interpretation and application, as well as in the use of more diverse mediums, which ultimately will allow greater engagement by a broader and more diverse audiences.

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