

## **Soft Power and Hard Power in the East Asian Portal Ecumene: The Reach and Limits of Aesthetic Authority**

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Film, pop music, television drama, software, Internet sites, communication hardware and the like cross national and national-linguistic boundaries relatively easily. How important is this in explaining the dynamics of power? The soft power school of thought sees culture as a basis for alliance and friendship. This places great weight on media flows across borders. It supposes that commercial cultural product can take over from the “Voice of America” model of public diplomacy, and that comics and soaps will ultimately render the hard power of arms unnecessary. The maritime East Asia ecumene illustrates the sense and nonsense of this proposition. The paper will discuss how such ecumenes (both in history and today) function as cultural powerhouses with strong intellectual capital flows across borders. Thus following a long established world historic pattern, it is to be expected that Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and maritime China will have intensive popular cultural and intellectual capital exchange. However, another equally powerful pattern of such portal regions is the high level of political-military-hard power antagonism between exchange partners. War and trade are not mutually exclusive, notwithstanding the view of Immanuel Kant. Export of television dramas will not turn “old enemies” into “good friends”. Nonetheless such exportation is the expression of high levels of circulation of goods, people and information in portal ecumenes. As maritime East Asia continues the development of strong portal characteristics, this circulation will be manifest in deepening ties between Tokyo, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Taipei, Seoul, and the like. But this civic and mercantile mutualism will also coexist with hard power rivalry. Partly this is an expression of the differentiation of the levels of city and state, especially in modernity. How cities behave then is not how states behave. Aesthetic authority, primarily the work of cities and their cultural and intellectual capital industries, is tremendously important in long-run social functioning. But socio-cultural authority has a complex relationship with the authority of arms, states and nations. One tends to export, the other not. This is especially true as aesthetic authority becomes increasingly a force of production, and via technology has to be imported by nations ‘catching up’. This, though, does not translate into political friendship necessarily. There are two important models of political friendship. One is formal territorial Union (e.g. the European Union), the other is the implicit ties of settler societies (e.g. the global maritime Anglophone world). But maritime East Asia by definition is not a candidate for territorial Union, whilst its settler societies (Taiwan and Hong Kong) have been sources of socio-cultural power but not of political stability. All in all, this means that hard power dynamics, including not least of all the hard power brokering of the United States, will remain a continuing feature of the region in the long run.

