

# Gastronomy, Tourism, and the Soft Power of Malaysia

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## Abstract

This review article examines the link between tourism and soft power in view of five (four proposed by Ooi) interlinked ways (approaches). It also looks whether Malaysia (as a case study) by using the soft power approaches has achieved the desired outcomes or not. The article found that Ooi's approach is adequate to analyze a country's tourism policy, strategies, tourists' perceptions, and the outcomes of tourism. However, it has ignored the independent role of gastronomy, the business-enabling environment, recognition of the cultural and natural sites as world heritage, and methodological approach to address negative stereotypes against other nationalities. The article also maintains that Malaysia has efficiently used the soft power approach and maximally received benefits from it without the use of coercive powers. This research offers insight into different power tools applied in a variety of contexts which shape the image of the country.

## Keywords

soft power, tourism, Malaysia, food, gastronomy

## Introduction

Power has two faces: soft and hard. Nye (2009) defined power as "Power is [ones] ability to affect the behavior of others to get what one wants" (p. 160). Soft power is a country, institution, or person's ability to achieve the desired results through attraction, whereas the hard power tool is about the application of coercion and payment. In international geopolitics, coercive powers have often been used to control the politics and economics of other countries or bring balance in power and take more economical and political advantages. However, in changing world politics, the use of hard powers (coercion and payment) has little winning position; thus, the powerful countries have also opted for soft power approach to bring economic prosperity and development in their countries (ElMassah, 2015; Nye, 1990). Without soft power, winning the heart and minds and becoming successful in world politics has not been possible. Bringing benefits through soft power are extremely difficult because the governments did not have control over the important resources and also soft powers' acceptance greatly depends on the audience's choices in the targeted countries.

In the soft power approach, resources do not work directly to create an environment for the diplomacy; therefore, the impact of these resources took a longtime for getting the desired results (Nye, 2004). In soft power approach, transmission of foreign policies, political values, cultural values, beliefs, and agendas are more important which primarily focus on impressing minds and hearts of the audiences in one

particular country or across the world. When the global audiences empathize and feel sympathetic toward a country's policies, programs, and values, it means, that country has a strong soft power (Ooi, 2016). There is another approach to power: smart power. Nye (2009) claimed that he had developed the term of smart power in 2003 to counter the misunderstanding that one power approach could produce the desired policy outcomes. Nye claimed that soft and hard power tools could not replace each other but have to go together smartly to use the relevant tools. With the concept of smart power, Nye proposed the use of contextual intelligence meaning conversion of the resources and tools of soft and hard powers into smart power strategies (Nye, 2008).

After the emergence of soft, hard, and smart power approaches, the researchers have focused on tourism and its associated areas such as food, culture, diversity, and economic growth. It is because researchers and policy makers have been looking into the country's image building, destination marketing, and global perceptions of the destination country (Saber, Paris, & Marochi, 2018). Through tourism, in geopolitics, countries build mutual understanding and

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