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*Review Article*

## **The library as soft power actor: A review**

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### **Abstract**

This narrative review pursues an understanding of the relationship of libraries to the concepts of soft power and public and cultural diplomacy. The cross-disciplinary nature of the study required that the search approach includes literature from both the International Relations and the Library and Information Science disciplines. The analysed literature reveals four key gaps. First, research explicitly addressing the topic of ‘libraries and soft power’ is scarce. Second, the little Library and Information Science literature that addresses libraries and soft power rarely considers contemporary discourse. Third the literature often has an implicit liberal institutionalist perspective, overlooking negative or hegemonic aspects of soft power. Given that soft power is considered increasingly relevant for representing national interest, understanding libraries’ roles and impact in international relations is significant and warrants further research.

**Key words:** soft power, public diplomacy, information history, international librarianship, libraries

## Introduction

Libraries are increasingly recognised as global actors, contributing to international relations and exercising soft power, in both the scholarly and the grey literature (Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), 2018; Harris and Thaler 2020). Few studies, however, have examined the role of libraries as soft power actors. This literature review will be undertaken from a Library and Information Science perspective drawing on the International Relations concept of ‘soft power,’ and by extension, public and cultural diplomacy.<sup>1</sup> Insights gained from such an understanding would be useful for libraries, library funders, and the community to understand how libraries can further cultural understanding and contribute to international relations.

Both the Library and Information Science and the International Relations literature address the concept of power. In Library and Information Science, power is primarily discussed at an organisational or social level and has been a subject of the growing area of critical librarianship (or critlib) in both theory and practice. In International Relations, power is addressed at one of main three levels of analysis (Singer, 1960), though other levels of analysis, such as regional, have been introduced (Buzan et al., 1998; Buzan and Wæver, 2003). First, the system (or international) level, which provides explanation for phenomena occurring at the level of the international political system between global actors. Second, the state (or societal) level, which examines the characteristics and behaviour of states as they translate into national interest. Finally, is the individual level, whereby individual principles, beliefs, and decision-making translate into national interest and power. Levels of analysis in International Relations are associated with not only different theoretical perspectives, but their associated ontological and epistemological understandings.

### *Significance and context*

As galleries, libraries, archives, and museums (GLAM) are increasingly recognised as global actors contributing at the international level, an understanding of their role and impact in international relations is important. This can be framed within theoretical and geopolitical contexts. Through a literature review, the relevance and value of libraries to the concepts of soft power and public and cultural diplomacy is established.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this literature review, the academic convention of capitalising International Relations in reference to the academic discipline is followed, thus the discipline of Library and Information Science is also capitalised. Conversely, international relations in lower case is used to describe specific instances of relations between states and other global actors.

Power is a contested but key theoretical concept and context in the social sciences, especially in International Relations (Crozier, 1995: 4; Bryman, 2016: 6). Often lacking conceptual clarity, power has been considered too easy an explanation for too many problems (Crozier, 1995: 5). Empirical research in the social sciences can be quick to dismiss such imprecise phenomena, especially when it lacks the quantifiable characteristics of more tangible concepts that can provide causal explanations. Contradictions in reasoning then arise whereby the analysis of power is reduced to rationalist, teleological, and positivist rules-based understanding, approaches that interpret an actor's behaviour and interests as driven solely by power and rational choice (Guzzini, 2020). This is despite the normative and affective impacts of power (Crozier, 1995: 6; Solomon, 2014). Power is a key concept in the study of international relations (Drezner, 2021; Gallarotti, 2021).

In the geopolitical context, soft power is considered increasingly relevant for representing national interests, and Grincheva (2019, p. 745) describes this in the context of an Australian museum and its connections in the Asia-Pacific region. Relationships between GLAM institutions in the region are considered to strengthen political bonds and cultural understanding (ALIA, 2018). Geopolitics vis-à-vis soft power is defined by Black and Schiller (2014: 651) as '... the territorial aspects of the projection of power by states', aiming to 'shape or affect policy in individual countries, regions, or the entire international political economy'. Black goes on to describe how 'its object may be to shape or affect policy in individual countries, regions, or the entire international political economy' (p. 651). The reliance of geopolitics on systems of information to organise, interpret, and disseminate national interests encompasses soft power.

National libraries are well positioned to enhance a state's soft power. The International Federation of Library Associations and Institution's (IFLA) describes how national libraries 'often serve as a national forum for international programmes and projects. They may have a close relationship with national governments, [and] may be concerned with the development of national information policies' (IFLA, 2020). This also includes national cultural policy. Additionally, IFLA's National Libraries Section sponsors the National Organisations and International Relations Special Interest Group (NOIR) (2015). This group represents the interest and functions of national-level organisations engaged in international activities, exchanges, strategy, and policy development. National libraries are well-placed to engage with international relations activities and cooperation promoted within the profession.

## *Definitions of key concepts*

### *Soft power*

Traditional understandings of national power have been resource based, focused on the exercise of power through tangible resources, such as military or economic power. This emphasis on hard power has historically neglected the behavioural and relational aspects of power. Hard power is, thus, power which can be measured in 'hard' or quantifiable terms (McClory, 2015: 8). Consequently, the concept and term 'soft power' was popularised by American political scientist Joseph Nye in his 1990 book *Bound to Lead: The changing nature of American Power*. Soft power involves indirect or co-optive behaviour that uses 'attraction rather than coercion or payments,' to set the agenda and influence preferences (Nye, 1990a: 31-32; 2004: 5). In International Relations it encompasses three resources: political values, culture, and foreign policy (2004: 11). It is reliant on the ability to shape other's preferences and maintain their attraction. Nye (2021: 201) uses the metaphor of hard power as being a carrot or stick, as coercion or push; with soft power being a magnet, as pull or attraction. In response to criticisms by Mattern (2005), Nye (2021: 202) does recognise that elements of coercion can be present in soft power, blurring the extent to where a behaviour might fall on a soft to hard power spectrum or, as Mattern (2005: 587) argues, making the distinction unsustainable.

Soft power, as influence by attraction, is not as easily quantifiable as hard power resources may be. Indeed, Nye (2011: 19) associates it with 'intangible resources like institutions, ideas, values, culture, and perceived legitimacy of policies'. Nye (2004: 150) describes soft power as building on Bachrach's and Baratz's (1962) concept of the 'second face of power'. Bachrach and Baratz (1962) argued that power is conceived by sociological researchers and political scientists as either centralized or widely diffused, respectively, within their communities of analysis, but the second face of power recognises that power can also be exercised indirectly by 'confining the scope of decision-making' (p. 948). That is, power is exercised when 'creating or reinforcing social and political values and institutional practices that limit the scope of the political process to public consideration of only those issues' already set (p. 948).

Over time, Nye (2021: 200-201) has clarified how soft power is defined and conceived, affirming that intangibility is not the defining criteria, despite being associated with 'culture, ideology, and institutions'. That is, 'many types of *resources* can contribute to soft power, but that does not mean that soft power is any type of *behaviour*' (p. 201). The behavioural

definition of soft power necessarily distinguishes behaviours involving force or payment as part of the hard power spectrum, compared to agenda setting through behaviours of attraction and persuasion that are perceived as legitimate and invite voluntary choice from the recipient (p. 201, p. 203).

#### *Actors*

This review defines actors as entities that can hold agency, with agency being the 'capacity to act' (Braun et al., 2019: 788). In the context of soft power, this agency is the capacity to influence the actions or agenda of another actor. Agency is thus understood relationally. This understanding sees soft power attraction as 'codetermined' between agent and target' (2019: 722). This highlights soft power's affective dimensions where power may be a "social process of constituting what actors are as social beings, that is, their social identities and capacities" (Solomon, 2014: 722). Thus, following a relational understanding of actors, in this review, soft power can also be theorised relationally with actors being understood as either agents or targets of soft power.

#### *Public and cultural diplomacy*

Public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy are both foreign policy tools and an instrumental means for states to increase soft power (Kim, 2017: 293; Melissen, 2005). Public diplomacy is focused on information and cultural activities in the context of foreign affairs (Kim: 298). Nye (2008: 101-102) defines it through three dimensions. The first is daily communications concerning domestic and foreign policy decisions, through news media. The second is strategic communications, developing symbolic themes to reinforce and advance government policy. Nye (2008: 102) compares this to the themes that would drive a political or advertising campaign, intending to persuade public opinion. Lastly, it involves 'building long-term relationships that create an enabling environment for government policies' (Nye, 2008: 101). This last dimension reflects how public diplomacy, and indeed soft power, is no longer conceived as a 'one-way information flow' or 'peddling' of information to foreign audiences (Melissen, 2005: 13). While still competitive at the national-level, and not always pursuing 'soft' goals, it is recognised that foreign *engagement* that '... builds on trust and credibility,' with a long-term view, is a necessary component to foreign policy (p. 13-14).

Cultural diplomacy brings art and culture into soft power discourse (Kim, 2017: 294). The Australian government, for example, claims 'creative excellence' is not only a cultural export, but a tool for advancing 'Australia's interests, soft power and influence' through its

promotion to international audiences and through cultural collaboration (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, n.d.). As distinctions between cultural and information activities blur, it also extends to ‘communicating a country’s thinking, research, journalism, and national debate’ (Lending, 2000, pp. 13-14, as cited in Melissen, 2005: 22). It is often considered a type or sub-set of public diplomacy, though the precise relationship between the two is contested as International Relations paradigms shift and the term is regarded with interdisciplinary interest (Kim, 2017; Melissen, 2005). This paper adopts Maack’s (2001: 59) definition of cultural diplomacy, as being

that aspect of diplomacy that involves a government's efforts to transmit its national culture to foreign publics with the goal of bringing about an understanding for national ideals and institutions as part of a larger attempt to build support for political and economic goals.

This definition acknowledges the overlap between cultural and public diplomacy, rather than viewing them as entirely separate fronts. Traditionally, cultural institutions have been reluctant for their cultural relations to be seen as an instrument of public diplomacy (Melissen, 2005: 22). Cultural institutions serve national interests through ‘trust-building,’ which is potentially damaged if perceived as a pursuit of political interests. As a tool for increasing soft power, a lack of trust and perceived legitimacy defeats the ‘pull’ and attractiveness of the values and ideals delivered through cultural exchange. The traditionally dominant ‘realist’ paradigm in International Relations considers states to not have permanent friends, but only permanent interests, driven by a pursuit to maintain or gain power (p. 5, p. 23). The rise of soft power in international relations relies on both public and cultural diplomacy to communicate credibility. As information and cultural activities blur, and public diplomacy shifts to a long-term view of engagement and trust, cultural diplomacy is increasingly recognised as a valuable tool for building and sustaining foreign relationships.

Following a brief description of the methods undertaken to source the literature discussed in this paper, this review is structured into four sections. The first discusses historical case studies. A substantial amount of Library and Information Science literature using historiographical methodologies addresses soft power implicitly. While valuable, it highlights a methodological gap. Second, theoretical perspectives concerning the theme of globalisation and international library and information institutions are discussed. While engaging more substantively with International Relations theory and soft power, the theoretical perspective

has been limited to a lens of ‘liberal institutionalism,’ which emphasises the need for international institutions to promote cooperation between states (Nuruzzaman, 2008). The third section focuses on GLAM institutions (primarily museums) and cultural diplomacy. This literature reveals a gap in this subject matter on libraries. It does, however, contribute a theoretical foundation for further research on soft power in the sector. Finally, the relationship between soft power and language is addressed vis-à-vis library communications. This highlights the significance of discourse to soft power, which is missing methodologically in Library and Information Science research on this topic. This literature recognises how discourse contributes to the construction of national identity, culture, and memory. These are significant themes that concern soft power influence and the role of, particularly, national libraries.

## Literature Search Process

The search process aims to achieve ‘intertextual coherence,’ through a ‘synthesised coherence’ technique, piecing together theory and research previously considered unconnected (Bryman, 2016: 93). The interdisciplinary nature of the topic, libraries and soft power, means that there is not an existing consensus or research program already communicated in the literature. Thus, the search approach and phrases connect established International Relations theory with references from the Library and Information Science discipline to construct a narrative literature review.

Most Library and Information literature refers to soft power only implicitly. Implicit references were identified through parallel terms, such as ‘cultural diplomacy’ and ‘cultural internationalism’, and descriptions of foreign influence at the nation-state level through or by library and information organisations. Additionally, literature from and about GLAM institutions, other than libraries, is largely focused on ‘cultural diplomacy’, without explicitly referring to soft power.

‘Cultural hegemony’ was also included, after finding that Harris and Thaler (2020) highlighted its significance and conflation with soft power behaviour. While theories of cultural hegemony and soft power are related, as evidenced by Harris and Thaler (2020), searching with this new phrase did not uncover a significant body of research and did not fill the existing content gap on libraries and soft power. Including ‘cultural hegemony’ as a search term primarily aided to refine and understand theoretical and operational definitions of ‘soft power’ and ‘cultural diplomacy’.

As anticipated, most relevant papers were an analysis of historical trends in the development of libraries and the Library and Information profession and organisations (Harris and Thaler, 2020; Ignatow, 2011; Yu, 2008). Historical case studies support the existence of a research gap on libraries and *contemporary* soft power influence. An additional reason for its inclusion in this literature review is to inform future research that fills this gap. By examining historical themes, practices, and structures, history can act as a policy tool and provide insight into contemporary practice (Beddie, 2014). This is especially significant where history reflects libraries as spaces of political and social significance.

## Critical Review of Literature

Libraries and other GLAM institutions have emerged as national and international actors in international relations. The terms international and comparative librarianship are used to describe literature studying the library sector globally and international relations between libraries (Lor, 2019). Often this literature discusses influence, cultural diffusion, and national libraries as a means of legitimising national identity and the nation state (Byrne, 2007: 17-19; Laugesen, 2019; Lor, 2019: 12-13). Broadly, the current international literature observes the strategic roles of libraries in national security (Ignatow, 2011; Itsekor et al., 2017; Buenrostro and Cabbab, 2019), national development (Coghlan and Robertson, 2014), diplomacy (Gutierrez, 2015), and international cooperation in the library and information profession (Witt, 2014a; 2014b). This has included recent recognition of the role libraries play in achieving the United Nation's (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Thorpe and Gunton, 2019; Koscieljew, 2020; Missingham, 2021). Other GLAM institutions, primarily museums, have been considered as valuable international actors for cultural diplomacy and foreign policy (Cai, 2013; Flamini, 2014).

The literature addressing libraries and soft power, either explicitly or implicitly, is predominantly historical analyses, presented as case studies from a humanities perspective with qualitative research methods (Harris and Thaler, 2020; Barnhisel, 2010; Yi and Thompson, 2015; Maack, 2001; Witt, 2014a). Harris and Thaler (2020) and Liu et al. (2017) provide the only two published research papers that explicitly recognise 'libraries' and 'soft power' in the title and direct attention towards libraries rather than other GLAM institutions. Other substantial publications addressed are grey literature, primarily policy and responses from IFLA and the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA, 2018).



### *Historical case studies*

Historical case studies are the dominant research method for addressing libraries vis-à-vis International Relations concepts (Black, 2016; Gutierrez, 2015; Harris and Thaler, 2020; Witt, 2014a; 2014b; Yi and Thompson, 2015). This qualitative and archival research is primarily from a Library and Information Science perspective, typically published in Library and Information Science journals. These methods, while producing research that contributes to library and information historiography, are not positioned to address the broader and contemporary discourse of libraries as international actors.

Historical case studies that engage with International Relations theory overtly include Gutierrez (2015) and Harris and Thaler (2020). Gutierrez (2015) provides both a historical and statistical analysis of the libraries of four cultural heritage and language centres (the British Council, the Alliance Française's Institut Français, the Goethe Institut, and the Cervantes Institute). These centres aim to promote and disseminate their nation's cultural assets through international relations and exchange. The research positions these libraries as strategic communication tools of public diplomacy. Comparatively, Harris and Thaler (2020) address the concept of soft power explicitly, focusing on the practices and policies imported into Japan's information and library sector. They describe soft power influence from the United States (US) in the post-World War II (WWII) years and ask 'how Japanese information professionals have challenged or promoted that influence' (p. 33). They begin to establish a needed theoretical understanding of libraries' and information institutions' soft power behaviour at the international level. This has interdisciplinary significance for both the Library and Information Science and International Relations disciplines and begins to fill a gap in library and information research on libraries' capacity to exert soft power.

Unpacking the soft power influence of the US on Japan's libraries and archives confronts the discourse of soft power. This presents challenges with the entanglement of cultural hegemony with cultural diplomacy. Following Allied occupation of Japan, the Allied mission 'to rebuild Japan's libraries and promote the values of Western democracies, [was] one that would be waged via the soft power of [North] American libraries and the materials therein' (Harris and Thaler, 2020: 37). Civil Information and Education 'information centres' established in Japan were, effectively, American-style public libraries, staffed by North American librarians, circulating North American media throughout Japan, and thus extending North American soft power influence in an effort to democratise Japan (p. 37). This largely

resembled the Western justification of public libraries as an educating force for North American virtues and democratic values (p. 38).

It is evident that Civil Information and Education information centres were models for Japan's own library system. Soft power also extended, however, to the professionalisation of librarianship, with library education and training being informed by Western 'ethics, codes, and ideals' (Harris and Thaler, 2020: 39, p. 44). Harris and Thaler (2020) describe this as a negative end result of soft power, whereby the current state of library education in Japan sees an overproduction of qualified librarians, with too few jobs available. Further, the programs see professional credentials prioritised over the quality of education. It is suggested that this could also be a result of North American moulding, with North American style for-profit education potentially seeing the quality of education delivered neglected (2020: 44).

Soft power is not reducible to the cultural hegemony described in Harris' and Thaler's (2020) case study. Indeed, Black (2016) describes the influences, whether accepted or resisted, of American librarianship on British librarianship through cultural exchange and internationalism. Contemporary studies of soft power in Library and Information Science, however, need to recognise and address socio-political structures – past and present - that have shaped current library systems globally. Harris and Thaler (2020) characterise soft power as having two faces, with positive and negative outcomes. The historic discourse and rhetoric used in Civil Information and Education mission statements can be read as 'covert structural forms of racial exclusion' where the library's purpose is framed as neutral but reveals unequal power under the guise of a 'democratising mission' (Honma, 2004). Harris and Thaler (2020: 40) and Yu (2008: 75) also argue that 'the culture that is borrowing, or is imposed upon to borrow, from another will accept only the elements that are in line with its already established values'. This highlights how soft power can be distinguished from either merely influence or the more coercive elements present in hegemony. The intangible values, culture, institutions, and policy promoted through soft power are considered attractive to adopt because they are recognised or represented as having political legitimacy or moral authority (Nye, 2004: 6).

### *Globalisation and international librarianship*

Much of the historical analysis of libraries and the contemporary research on museums and cultural diplomacy is limited to a theoretical lens of either the International Relations theory of 'institutional liberalism' (Witt, 2014a; 2014b; 2020) or the sociology theory of 'neo-institutionalism' (Grincheva, 2014). Liberal institutionalism emphasises the need for

international institutions to promote cooperation between states (Nuruzzaman, 2008). These are typically institutions and organisations such as the United Nations, World Bank, European Union, or World Trade Organisation. Where GLAM institutions are positioned as global actors, with international agency and soft power, their contribution may also be positioned within this theory. Neo-institutionalism studies organisational behaviour, with agency and goals defined by rational choice (Grincheva, 2014). It considers the norms, rules, and structures that form institutional pressures and constrain behaviours. Both liberal institutionalism and neo-institutionalism can present ‘cosmopolitan’ assumptions that promote “universal” values of democracy, freedom, and liberal economy’ (p. 34). As previously discussed, such discourse is identified by Harris and Thaler (2020) as a ‘democratising mission’, in the context of American soft power in Japan’s libraries in the context of American soft power in Japan’s libraries. It is most prevalent in literature discussing global (or international) librarianship (Black, 2016; Byrne, 2007; Rudasill, 2009; Witt, 2014a).

A liberal institutionalist perspective can be seen in Witt’s (2014a) analysis of the ‘rise of international librarianship’, through a historical case study of the Paris Library School, as influenced by the American Library Association (ALA). Just as Harris and Thaler (2020) analysed the mission statements of Japanese library and information institutions, Witt (2014a) has done the same for the Paris Library School, examining themes related to soft power and cultural diplomacy, but does not explicitly identify them as such. These themes are seen in descriptions of ‘cultural internationalism’ that positions library institutions and the library profession as pursuing global exchange and understanding through institutional cooperation (p. 506). Witt recognises, however, that at the surface level, the power structures involved in cultural internationalism may appear as cultural imperialism with nationalistic goals (p. 516). This resembles soft power and public diplomacy, which are now considered most effective as a ‘two-way street’ built on exchange (Nye, 2004: 111) than being the one-way flow that Witt (2014a: 516) presupposes of nationalistic goals. Witt (2014a: 508) suggests that when the library profession is studied in the context of globalisation theories, that librarianship parts from ‘nationally orientated activities toward cultural internationalism’. The ALA saw the Paris Library School as an ‘opportunity to promote American ideals in librarianship, which were perceived as providing superior technique’ (p. 508). The Paris Library School is eventually conceptualised as a hybridization of American and French needs, with French faculty credited for its increased internationalisation of knowledge production and exchange in librarianship (p. 509, p. 511). Witt’s findings are significant as they contribute to characterising library

organisations as global, non-state, actors. The methodological and theoretical lens that Witt (2014a) adopts, however, is limited in addressing issues of power, especially concerning nationalistic ambitions, cultural hegemony, and the limitations of international co-operation.

Librarianship is framed as ‘institutionalised international cooperation’ and ALA’s initial objective ‘to promote American ideals in librarianship’ is treated as insignificant (2014: 505, 508). In contrast to Witt’s (2014a) analysis, Maack (1986: 329) pays more attention to the ‘gradual acceptance’ of North American innovations and the role cosmopolitan attitudes played in this diffusion. Maack (1986) addresses American *opinion leadership*, as an exercise of influence and soft power, as a key factor in a new model of French librarianship. Elsewhere, discussing the British Council in Africa, Maack (2001: 81) focuses on the underlying national ideologies that ‘entangled altruism with self-interest and idealism with pragmatic reality’. While Witt (2014a) acknowledges the presence of these phenomena, the focus on globalisation and cultural internationalism as a source of mutual benefits and cooperation neglects power structures and inequalities in cultural understanding and diplomacy.

#### GLAM institutions and cultural diplomacy

Both the International Relations and GLAM literature have addressed concepts of soft power and cultural diplomacy in the role of museums, archives, and galleries (Cai, 2013; Burgess et al., 2010; Flamini, 2014; Sylvester, 2015; Grincheva, 2019; 2020; Hoogwaerts, 2017; Kong, 2015; Lord and Blankenberg, 2016; ; Davidson & Pérez-Castellanos, 2019). Libraries, however, have largely been overlooked. This may be because GLAM institutions, other than libraries, are more likely thought of as sites of a nation’s collective memory, which is well documented as informing foreign policy (Langenbacher, 2010; Hoogwaerts, 2017). This is despite the role that national, state, and territory libraries have in working with collections and cultural exchanges that address collective (or cultural) memory and national identity (Burgess et al., 2010; Galligan, 2000; Hrančak, 2018). Indeed, Galligan’s (2000: 102) history of the National Library of Australia (NLA) positions the NLA as not only formative to cultural memory and national identity, but also functioning as a national resource for international co-operation.

A range of methodologies are used to address museums and soft power, including the historiographical and case study approaches discussed earlier (Maack, 1986; Maack, 2001). The literature largely focuses on museum exchanges. The idea of ‘exchanges,’ as two-way action, has been considered a more effective approach to soft power than ‘broadcasting’ (Nye,

2004: 111-113). Cai (2013) presents a case study of Singapore-France cultural collaboration and exchange. Their research uses mixed methods, including interviews, personal observation, and textual analysis of exhibition material. Significantly, Cai (2013) found that cross-cultural museum exchanges, as a strategic platform for cultural diplomacy, often have limited soft power effectiveness. This is because the nation's political goals are not considered, and the intention for the exchange remains largely apolitical, despite having political consequences owing to power relations. Comparatively, Grincheva (2014: 35), in a study of the Guggenheim museum's soft power, found that even 'activities with apolitical intentions outside of governmental control project strong political messages and exert political influences'. This reinforces the importance of researching soft power in a geopolitical context, to assess its intentions in influencing the policy, values, or agenda of a global public.

Institutionalism, described earlier, is a common framework for research on museums, but may prioritise operational aspects or the institutional context over the broader geopolitical context the museum exists in (Cai, 2013: 131-132). That is, giving institutions 'analytical primacy' (Lecours, 2005: 3). Like Cai (2013), Grincheva (2019) uses a mixed-methods approach to analysing soft power activities. Through an Australian digital humanities project, Grincheva (2019) contributes to theoretical understandings of soft power in cultural institutions but does not reflect on power relations vis-à-vis political goals. The project uses Geographic Information System (GIS) technology to map 'specific measurable indicators' of soft power to produce an 'inductive "exploratory" tool' (p. 730, p. 746). Despite soft power not typically having the quantifiable characteristics that hard power does, Grincheva endeavours to measure its resources and influence by mapping such areas as museum collections, activities, audiences, partnerships and networks, community engagement, and sentiments. The Soft Power 30 ranking is a current assessment of countries soft power. Given soft power's subjectivity, measuring its 'impact on perceptions of a country' remains a challenge (McClory, 2015: 26). GIS becomes a method that can encompass qualitative data, including social, cultural, and critical discourse, rather than purely a storage or display tool for quantitative and spatial data (Grincheva, 2019: 748; Kwan and Knigge, 2006: 1999). While Grincheva (2019) enriches GIS 'deep mapping' through multiple layers and critical readings, the challenge to incorporating qualitative data is avoiding its decontextualization (Kwan and Knigge, 2006: 2000). This is especially so when qualitative data needs to be quantified, as its complexity may be lost. Grincheva's (2019) digital humanities project is certainly embedded in a geopolitical context and contributes to theoretical understandings of soft power in cultural institutions. It follows,

however, Grincheva's (2014) earlier neo-institutional research, positioning institutional discourse and interests as independent of government diplomatic agendas. While the museum's socio-cultural and political context is considered, the social reality emphasises museum soft power behaviour as autonomous and inherently cosmopolitan (2014).

### *Soft power and language*

Language and discourse are key themes in the analysis of power in the social sciences and humanities. Bryman (2016: 540) describes critical discourse analysis as 'emphas[ing] the role of language as a power resource that is related to ideology and socio-cultural change'. Works by Hbranchak (2018) and Pacios and Pérez-Piriz (2019) show the significance of libraries' discourse as it presents in mission statements and online publications. This discourse provides insight into libraries' identities, encompassing their functions and purpose. While soft power is not addressed in their research, they reflect a key focus of International Relations, the 'co-constitution of language and identity' (Solomon, 2014: 731). Indeed, Solomon (2014) reinforces a current International Relations understanding of soft power attraction being expressed through language. It is 'elicited and cultivated through narrative and aesthetic presentations of collective identity' (p. 731).

In International Relations, discourse analysis is frequently adopted to analyse soft power discourse (Cao, 2011; Solomon, 2014; Hashimoto, 2018; Jiang, 2016). Library and Information Science research has considered libraries' discourse when examining 'critical intersections of LIS and social justice' (Oliphant, 2015: 228; Buschman, 2020) and also as it presents in mission statements and online publications (Hbranchak, 2018; Pacios and Pérez-Piriz, 2019; Wadas, 2017). While soft power is not addressed in this latter research, it reflects a key focus of International Relations, the 'co-constitution of language and identity' (Solomon, 2014: 731). Indeed, Solomon (2014: 725) and Mattern (2005) reinforce an understanding of soft power attraction as being constructed through language. It is 'elicited and cultivated through narrative and aesthetic presentations of collective identity' (Solomon, 2014: 731).

In the contemporary information environment, government soft power communication is complicated by a mass of other information sources and media, also producing narratives and discourse (Nye, 2004: 113). Intangible power increases in significance as information comes to be considered a crucial power resource (1990b: 164). As historians of 'systems of information' in Library and Information Science, Black and Schiller (2014: 651) affirm a

relationship between geopolitics and information that encompasses soft power. Liu et al. (2017) also signifies the importance of ‘information’ to soft power at the organisational level. Liu et al. (2017: 855) maintain that ‘information literacy’ contributes ‘not only to service quality but also to the cultural soft power of [university] libraries’ in China, with significance to Chinese culture and national strategy.

## Conclusion

The analysed literature presents four key gaps in existing research on libraries and soft power. These relate to subject matter, method, and perspective. First, research explicitly addressing the topic of ‘libraries and soft power’ is scarce. While the importance of GLAM institutions in cultural diplomacy is increasingly recognised, libraries are neglected. Second, the little Library and Information Science literature that exists on libraries and soft power is primarily historiography, without structured consideration of contemporary discourse. The GLAM and International Relations literature often focus on causal explanation and measurable indicators of soft power interaction, foregoing discursive practices and meaning in soft power *language* (Grincheva, 2019). Third, it is primarily archives and museums that have been analysed in soft power research. Finally, the literature often has an implied liberal institutionalist perspective that overlooks negative or hegemonic aspects of soft power (Najafqolinejad and Hassanzadeh, 2016; Witt, 2014a; 2014b; 2020). Thus, libraries and their role as soft power actors is an area that presents opportunity for future research that may contribute to understanding how they operate in the wider political and international arenas.

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