

Olivier Krischer  
Australian National University

Title:  
Putting 'soft power' in its (historical) place: revisiting Asian art as industry at the World Expositions, then and now.

### **Abstract**

While pundits date the concept to the 1990s, the notion of cultural commodities and transnational fashions, and the industries that underpin them, can be traced to the mid-19th century World Expositions. Even in that steam-driven era, at the dawn of the original 'wireless' radio, the implications were imagined as global, inviting reflection on the history of so called soft power in Asia.

This paper looks back before Cool Britannia and Japan of the 1990s, to a time when artisanal industries were leveraged for necessary hard currency by the fledgling Meiji government. It was in this context that the Chinese word *yishu* was born, as the character phrase 芸術 *geijutsu*, translated for Japan's application to the 1873 Vienna Exposition. The commercial, 'industrial' or 'applied' genealogy for the very term 'art' is more than anecdotal, and continues to play out in events such as the 2010 Shanghai Expo. With this history in mind, I argue that the slippery impact of real 'soft' power will elude Creative Industries (CI) theory, to the extent that it remains rooted in making creative labour into 'intellectual property', binding it to a quantifiable (hence predictable and accumulative) 'hard' bottomline—not creativity but productivity.