

The University as a Transnational Actor with Transnational Power: American Missionary Universities in the Middle East and China

Rasmus Gjedssø Bertelsen, *Aalborg University, Denmark*

Universities are an interesting, but overlooked, transnational actor. Research on universities can yield new knowledge on the interplay of state and nonstate actors, and their respective powers. Drawing on cases from American universities in the Middle East and China with missionary roots, this article illustrates how Nye and Keohane's (1971) analysis of transnational relations is useful in highlighting how universities can be central transnational actors that are two-way conduits for ideas, information, people, and money between nonstate actors across national borders.

American missionary universities are private American-style universities founded by American missionaries with boards of trustees in the United States and deeply rooted in their Eastern host societies. The American missionary universities in the Middle East and China have served as exemplary transnational actors in terms of both the quality and intensity of the transnational relations they have cultivated. Figure 1 illustrates the complicated ways in which these universities have connected with local students and their families and through their alumni far and wide in society. And these American missionary universities have connected local universities, business interests, civil society actors, and government agents in the Middle East or China with counterparts in the United States facilitating the transfer of ideas, information, people, and money across borders. These transnational relations are the basis of these universities' soft power. The American missionary universities in the Middle East and China are *crucial cases* (George and Bennett 2005) for transnational relations and soft power (Bertelsen 2009a; 2009b; 2012a; 2012b; 2014; Bertelsen and Møller 2010).

On the one hand, these universities have expressed soft power in terms of attracting desired behavior, acceptance, and support from students, their families, the host society, and the state. Their soft power is derived from their stellar academic reputation and their track record of improving the life-chances of graduates. On the other hand, these universities generally failed at their original mission of Protestant proselytizing. Also, they did not create any acceptance of US foreign policy (which was not their goal). Instead, these universities have exerted what is called "reverse" soft power, namely helping to shape elite opinion in American society and in the US government thereby attracting substantial academic, political, and financial resources for themselves

and their Eastern host societies through dense elite networks within the United States, again based on academic excellence. But, similarly, these universities failed at advancing Middle Eastern or Chinese interests in the United States.

The American universities in the Middle East with missionary roots are Robert College in Istanbul (1863–1971), Syrian Protestant College (1866–)/American University of Beirut (AUB) (1920–), American University in Cairo (AUC) (1919–) and American Junior College for Women (1924–)/Lebanese American University (1994–). Likewise, American missionaries established more than 20 higher education institutions in China, which played central roles in establishing dense Sino-American social networks. These transnational social ties thrived until the Korean War when the US government banned financial transfers to Mainland China in December 1950 and the People's Republic of China (PRC) nationalized these American universities. (Lutz 1971; Ng et al. 2002; West 1976).

SOFT POWER OF AMERICAN MISSIONARY UNIVERSITIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND CHINA

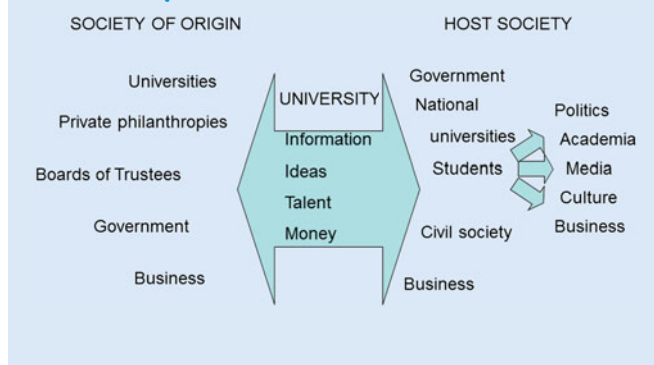
Considerable research exists on foreign civilian and military students coming to the United States for its socialization effects (Altbach and Peterson 2008; Atkinson 2010; Richmond 2003; Selltiz et al. 1963; Watson and Lippitt 1958; Wilson 1951; 1955; Wilson and Bonilla 1955). However, research on the soft power of American universities *overseas* is limited. This is despite significant policy attention in the United States toward higher education as a soft-power strategy for socialization and public diplomacy (Center for Strategic and International Studies 2009; Nye 2004; Nye and Owens 1996; Rice 2006).

Whereas the soft power of the university is independent of the state, it interacts with the American state's larger soft-power goals. Although not yet sufficiently understood, the nonstate sources of state soft power are receiving increasing attention (Hocking 2005; Lord 2006; Nye 2004; Riordan 2005; Zahran and Ramos 2010). The existing research on this subject, however, focuses on soft power as state *resources* such as public diplomacy (Lord 2006; Richmond 2003; Rugh 2006) rather than soft power as desired *behavior* from others.

In other words, while mission universities exert soft power, it is separate from the US state and focuses on cultivating behaviors desired by the universities without coercion or inducement (Nye 2004). University-based soft power, in other words, is the

Figure 1

University as Transnational Actor



ability to attract acceptance and support from students and their families for the mission and work of the university along with local social and governmental financial, moral and political support, and acceptance. Originally created with the soft-power aim of Protestant proselytizing among local populations and training local elites, local students and their families overwhelmingly rejected proselytizing and, instead, were attracted by the educational quality and the improved life chances offered by the American missionary universities. Thus, the attraction has been limited by the proselytizing agenda of the missionary universities and American China and Middle East policy. Chinese students were strongly nationalist. Student activists at

1964; Bliss, Coon, and Bliss 1989; Dodge 1958; Lutz 1971; Makdisi 1997; 2008, Munro 1977; Murphy 1987; Ng et al. 2002; Penrose 1970; West 1976).

Arnold Wolfers' (1962) distinction between *milieu* goals and *possession* goals is useful for understanding the soft power of overseas universities and their interplay with the soft power of states (Nye 2004). The American missionary universities in the Middle East and China have held significant university soft power concerning the *milieu* goals of introducing their students to American scientific knowledge; attracting them to norms such as academic freedom, religious tolerance, and gender equality; familiarizing them with American educational traditions; and promoting fluency in English, as well as building elite connections to high-ranking members of American society. However, it is equally clear that these universities had no success achieving possession goals, namely the original goal of religious conversion, or any acceptance of American China or Middle East policy (not their aim). Then AUB's president John Waterbury explained this clearly stating that AUB students "continue to resent US policies and criticize US leadership, but they want to import its institutional successes in governance, legal arrangements, and business organization" (Waterbury 2003, 67). In short, the soft power of American missionary universities contributes to state soft power, but only in terms of the *milieu* goals of creating an enabling environment of norms, skills, and connections, and not concerning specific *possession* goals of accepting the foreign policy of the society of origin, or the host society (Bertelsen 2012b; Bertelsen and Møller 2010).

The American missionary universities in the Middle East and China have held significant university soft power concerning the milieu goals of introducing their students to American scientific knowledge; attracting them to norms such as academic freedom, religious tolerance, and gender equality; familiarizing them with American educational traditions; and promoting fluency in English, as well as building elite connections to high-ranking members of American society.

AUB around 1970 expressed this clearly: they sought a quality education but denounced American foreign policy in the region (Anderson 2011; Hanna 1979; Lutz 1971; Munro 1977; West 1976).

Host states, from China and the Ottoman Empire to modern Lebanon and Egypt, have cautiously welcomed American missionary universities for their ability to bridge elite communities with the United States and for their contributions to education, health care, social development, and state-building. But, the American missionary universities in China did not survive the Korean War when neither the US nor PRC governments would tolerate these bicultural institutions. The US government banned financial transfers to Mainland China and thereby cut the American missionary universities off from their New York boards and funders; consequently, the PRC nationalized the institutions. After the 1956 Suez crisis Egypt seriously considered nationalizing AUC as part of nationalization of foreign education (Anderson 2011; Bashshur

REVERSE SOFT POWER OF AMERICAN MISSIONARY UNIVERSITIES BACK IN THE UNITED STATES

Throughout their history, these universities have been able to attract substantial academic, political, and financial support from private and public sources in the United States. In other words, US missionary universities have exerted a sort of *reverse* soft power; that is, they serve as transnational actors founded with a soft-power aim in a foreign host society but actually exercise soft power in their societies of origin (Bertelsen 2012b; 2014; Bertelsen and Møller 2010). Another aspect of reverse soft power is how American missionary university presidents and faculty have tried to advocate in the United States on behalf of China (on concessions during early 1900s), Palestine (in the late 1940s), Egypt (on canal nationalization in 1956), and Lebanon (in the 2006 war) to US political leaders and the US media (Dodge 1958; Lutz 1971; Munro 1977; Murphy 1987; Waterbury 2006a; 2006b; West 1976).

In circulating ideas, information, and talent, missionary universities have connected their host societies with elite American academic circles, recruiting senior American academics and administrators, while placing their graduate students in the United States. The universities have raised funds extensively in the United States, initially from missionary societies and individuals, and later, when the universities had become secular, from foundations and wealthy benefactors. American missionary universities have had boards of trustees, usually based in New York, that brought together American and Eastern elites from

origin and the Eastern host society is still unclear and must be further researched.

Research on classical American missionary universities in the Middle East and China suggests that universities constitute an interesting category of transnational actors for studying transnational flows of information, ideas, people, money, and power. Universities can have soft power by attracting desired behaviors separate from, but interacting with, state power. Universities can engender power *with* others to address important transnational problems.

Rather than exercise power over another, the policy implications of this research suggest that universities can contribute significantly to the transnational relations of a country and its ability to address problems in concert with other nations.

the academy, business, and government. The prominence of these boards of trustees illustrates the high-level transnational connections fostered by these universities.

Missionary universities have also been connected with the US government. The US government temporarily supported the AUB financially during World War II, and it has continuously financially supported AUB, the AUC, and Lebanese American University for decades for soft power and development policy reasons. Presidents of American missionary universities have been appointed US ambassadors. Yenching University president John Leighton Stuart served as the last US ambassador to Mainland China, and AUC president John Badeau served as ambassador to Egypt in the early 1960s (Munro 1977; Murphy 1987; West 1976).

Graduates of the American missionary universities in China were much in demand for business with the West (Lutz 1971; West 1976). American and British oil companies have been generous sponsors of the American missionary universities in the Middle East. Graduates from the classical American universities in the Middle East remain sought after by Western business because of their American education, Arabic and English skills, and understanding of local cultures (Khalaf 1977; Munro 1977; Murphy 1987).

RESEARCH AND POLICY CONCLUSIONS

American missionary universities, as transnational actors that contribute to shared *milieu* goals, effectively illustrate the distinction between power *with* somebody (usually to solve a chaotic transnational problem such as climate change, pandemics, terrorism, or poverty) versus power *over* somebody (to force them to adopt a certain course of action through hard military or economic power) (Nye 2004; Nye 2011). Transnational universities and the transnational nature of academia increase the ability to address chaotic transnational problems through epistemic communities, knowledge creation, transnational networks, and the spread of norms that facilitate cooperation. Transnational universities, such as the American missionary universities, contribute to power *with* others, with respect to both the society of origin and the host society. However, the distribution of this power between the Western society of

Rather than exercise power over another, the policy implications of this research suggest that universities can contribute significantly to the transnational relations of a country and its ability to address problems in concert with other nations. Therefore, it is important that academic, government, business, and philanthropic actors in the Global North work with institutions in the Global South to create strong transnational relations. ■

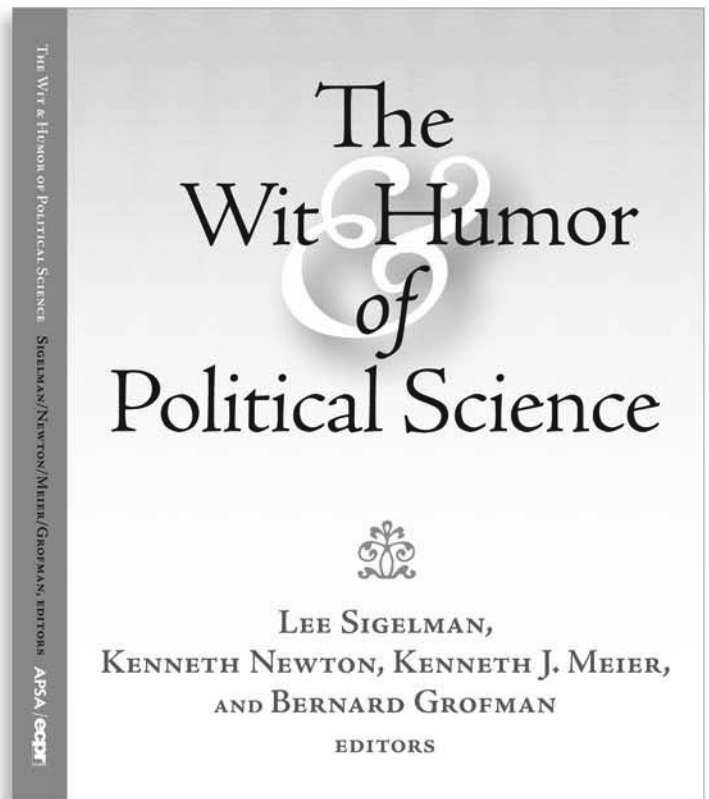
REFERENCES

- Altbach, Philip G. and Patti M. Peterson. 2008. "Higher Education as a Projection of America's Soft Power." In *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, ed. Yasushi Watanabe and David L. McConnell, 37–53. Armonk, NY; London: M. E. Sharpe.
- Anderson, Betty S. 2011. *The American University of Beirut: Arab Nationalism and Liberal Education*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Atkinson, Carol. 2010. "Does Soft Power Matter? A Comparative Analysis of Student Exchange Programs 1980–2006." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6 (1): 1–22.
- Bashshur, Munir A. 1964. *The Role of Two Western Universities in the National Life of Lebanon and the Middle East: A Comparative Study of the American University of Beirut and the University of Saint-Joseph*, Doctor of Philosophy edn, Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Bertelsen, R. G. 2009a. *American- and French-Affiliated Universities in the Middle East as 'Information and Resource Bridges' to the West*. Cambridge, MA: The Dubai Initiative, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.
- . 2009b. *Private Higher Education in the GCC: Best Practices in Governance, Quality Assurance and Funding*. Cambridge, MA: The Dubai Initiative, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government.
- . 2012a. "The Effect of Public and Private Decisions on University Governance on the Transnational Relations of American-Associated Universities in the Middle East." *Revue Des Mondes Musulmans Et De La Méditerranée* 131 (1): 45–62.
- . 2012b. "Private Foreign-Affiliated Universities, the State and Soft Power: The American University of Beirut and the American University in Cairo." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 8 (3): 293–311.
- . 2014. "American Missionary Universities in China and the Middle East and American Philanthropy: Interacting Soft Power of Transnational Actors." *Global Society* 28(1 (Special Issue: American Philanthropy and the Hard, Smart and Soft Power of the United States)): 113–27.
- Bertelsen, Rasmus G., Ying Dai, and Greta Solinap. 2013. "Learning, When You Are Not Learning": Artistic, Scientific, Professional and Political Culture at Leading Universities in Britain, France, USA and China." In *Teaching and Learning Culture, Negotiating Context*, ed. Xiangyun Du, Annie A. Jensen and Mads J. Kirkebak, 145–62. Rotterdam: Sense Publisher.

- Bertelsen, Rasmus G., and Steffen T. Møller. 2010. *The Soft Power of American Missionary Universities in China and of their Legacies: St. John's University, Yale-in-China and Yenching University*. Copenhagen: Asia Research Centre, Copenhagen Business School.
- Bliss, Daniel, Carleton S. Coon, and Daniel B. Bliss. 1989. *Daniel Bliss and the Founding of the American University of Beirut*. Washington, DC: Middle East Institute.
- Center for Strategic and International Studies 2009. *Smart Power in the Obama Administration: The Role of International Education and Exchange*, Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies.
- Dodge, Bayard. 1958. *The American University of Beirut; a Brief History of the University and the Lands which It Serves*. Beirut: Khayat's.
- George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Hanna, Faith M. 1979. *An American Mission: The Role of the American University of Beirut*. Boston: Alphabet Press.
- Hocking, Brian. 2005. "Rethinking the 'New' Public Diplomacy." In *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. Jan Melissen, 28–43. Basingstoke; NY: Palgrave.
- Khalaf, Nadim G. 1977. *The Economics of the American University of Beirut: A Study of a Private University in the Developing World*. Beirut: American University of Beirut.
- Lord, Carnes. 2006. *Losing Hearts and Minds? Public Diplomacy and Strategic Influence in the Age of Terror*. Westport, CT: Praeger Security International.
- Lutz, Jessie G. 1971. *China and the Christian Colleges 1859–1950*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Makdisi, Ussama. 1997. "Reclaiming the Land of the Bible: Missionaries, Secularism, and Evangelical Modernity." *The American Historical Review* 102 (3): 680–713.
- Makdisi, Ussama S. 2008. *Artillery of Heaven: American Missionaries and the Failed Conversion of the Middle East*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Munro, John M. 1977. *A Mutual Concern: The Story of the American University of Beirut*. Delmar, NY: Caravan Books.
- Murphy, Lawrence R. 1987. *The American University in Cairo, 1919–1987*. Cairo: American University in Cairo Press.
- Ng, Peter T. M., Philip Y. S. Leung, Edward Y. H. Xu, and Jing H. Shi. 2002. *Changing Paradigms of Christian Higher Education in China, 1888–1950*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press.
- Nye, Joseph S., Jr. 2004. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: Public Affairs.
- . 2011. *The Future of Power*. New York: PublicAffairs.
- Nye, Joseph S., Jr., and Robert O. Keohane. 1971. "Transnational Relations and World Politics: An Introduction." *International Organization* 25(3, Transnational Relations and World Politics): 329–49.
- Nye, Joseph S., Jr. and William A. Owens, William A. 1996. "America's Information Edge." *Foreign Affairs* 75: 20–36.
- Penrose, Stephen B. L. 1970. *That They May have Life; the Story of the American University of Beirut, 1866–1941*. Beirut: American University of Beirut.
- Rice, Condoleezza. 2006. *Remarks at the U.S. University Presidents Summit on International Education Dinner*. Washington, DC, January 5. Available: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/58750.htm> [2006, 11/22].
- Richmond, Yale. 2003. *Cultural Exchange and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Riordan, Shaun. 2005. "Dialogue-Based Public Diplomacy: A New Foreign Policy Paradigm?" In *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft Power in International Relations*, ed. Jan Melissen, 180–95. Basingstoke; NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rugh, William A. 2006. *American Encounters with Arabs: The "Soft Power" of U.S. Public Diplomacy in the Middle East*. Westport, CT: Praeger International Security.
- Selltiz, Claire, June R. Christ, Joan Havel, and Stuart W. Cook. 1963. *Attitudes and Social Relations of Foreign Students in the United States*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Waterbury, John. 2003. "Hate Your Policies, Love Your Institutions." *Foreign Affairs* 82: 58–68.
- . 2006a. "A Bad Status Quo: We Must Address the Roots of the Mideast Crisis." *The Washington Post*, 7 August.
- . 2006b. "A President's Beirut Diary." Washington, DC: *Chronicle of Higher Education*.
- Watson, Jeanne, and Ronald Lippitt. 1958. "Cross-Cultural Experience as a Source of Attitude Change." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 2(1, Studies on Attitudes and Communication): 61–66.
- West, Philip. 1976. *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relations, 1916–1952*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wilson, Elmo C., and Frank Bonilla. 1955. "Evaluating Exchange of Persons Programs." *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 19 (1): 20–30.
- Wilson, Howard E. 1951. *Universities and World Affairs*. New York: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.
- . 1955. "The Role of the University in International Relations." *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 301(Higher education under stress (September)): 86–92.
- Wolfers, Arnold. 1962. *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Zahran, Geraldo, and Leonardo Ramos. 2010. "From Hegemony to Soft Power: Implications of a Conceptual Change." In *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox, 12–31. London; New York: Routledge.

The Wit & Humor of Political Science

The *Wit & Humor of Political Science* is the serendipitous product of two senior scholars working across the world from one another and who independently collected funny and satirical articles on political science over the years with the intent of someday publishing them for a wider audience. The lead editors—Kenneth Newton (Professor Emeritus, University of Southampton, Visiting Professor, Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, and Hertie School of Governance, Berlin) and the late Lee Sigelman (Columbian School of Arts and Sciences Distinguished Professor of Political Science, George Washington University)—learned by chance of each other's projects. Newton and Sigelman joined forces with Kenneth Meier (Charles H. Gregory Chair in Liberal Arts and Distinguished Professor of Political Science, Texas A&M University) and Bernard Grofman (Jack W. Peltason (Bren Foundation) Endowed Chair in the Department of Political Science, University of California, Irvine) to publish this collection under the joint imprint of APSA and ECPR. The collection includes previously published essays as well as original pieces never formally published.



A joint Publication of the American Political Science Association
and the European Consortium of Political Research

FROM THE EDITORS: *This volume collects what in our opinions are the wittiest and funniest pieces about political science and political scientists. We are confident that even a small investment of the reader's time will be sufficient to disprove Baker's slur on our discipline. Like all good humor, much of the work we have chosen for inclusion has a serious point. It helps scholars keep an open and skeptical mind, it picks out our weak points in theory and methods, points out how research may be going wrong, and it pricks the balloon of bombast, pretentiousness, and jargon. And, not only that, it's fun... Its contents make essential reading for all political scientists, even the most senior, but it may be enjoyed by younger scholars, especially those without tenure (or worse yet, without a job), by other social scientists, and even—gasp—by readers unaffiliated with any academic discipline.*



www.apsanet.org/pubs



www.ecprnet.eu/ecprpress

READERS WILL FIND ESSAYS ON:

The Practice of Political Science

- Academic Pecking Order
- On Journal and Research Monograph Publishing
- On Textbook Publishing
- Preparing a Curriculum Vitae
- Conference Going
- Administrative Service

Political and Social Theory

- Research Methods
- Public Policy Analysis
- Voting Behavior and Party Competition
- Legislatures
- Executives
- Conspiracy Theories

ISBN 978-1-9073011-0-0

Reserve your copy today from APSA (www.apsanet.org/pubs) or ECPR (sales@ecprnet.eu)!