| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural Diplomacy's Effectiveness in Boosting Mutual Understanding

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| **ABSTRACT**

Movements of people and products across borders have always been accompanied by the flow of ideas and ways of life. This implicitly implies that intercultural encounters constantly take place. Cross-cultural interactions can go on smoothly if people understand each other's differences, but misunderstandings are likely to happen when people are not familiar with each other's cultural differences. Intercultural competence is needed so that people can avoid cultural misunderstandings. New players are gaining more ground internationally since international relations are no longer a purely political matter. Person-to-person encounters have become very important to strengthen relations among people who belong to different cultures. Cultural diplomacy has a great role to play in connecting nations and avoiding misunderstandings. Cultural diplomacy practices are designed for the mutual benefit of both participants. Hence, attraction and persuasion have become crucial concepts in contemporary international relations. Promoting a positive reputation overseas is not a new practice, but the ways and instruments once relied on have dramatically changed.

1. Introduction

Following some historical events, international relations have witnessed fundamental changes on different levels, starting from pre-states relations to the Post-Cold War era. However, most specialists such as Joseph Nye, Edmund Guillon, and Jan Melissen, among others, strongly believe that the Post-Cold War era is a turning point in modern global politics, for it has given birth to new instruments in international relations and empowered new actors in diplomatic processes. The fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9th, 1989, known as the collapse of the two-pole world order, can be considered another vital turning point in world politics, one that has fostered a new order. Globalization, with the backup of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), has given international relations a new horizon, especially as ordinary people have started gaining power and coming into visibility both domestically and internationally.

All actors taking part in foreign policy making have gone through deep changes. As a consequence, a new discourse, new lobbying powers, and new instruments have come into play. People-to-people encounters have become very important in strengthening relations among people who belong to different cultures or various cultural groups. It is in this context that cultural diplomacy has gained more ground globally. There are two main reasons behind the rapid development of cultural diplomacy:

> ➤ The first one is that ordinary people have become influential actors in politics, forming pressure groups that affect local and global political issues. People have easy access to media, particularly unofficial ones. That is why governments all over the world pay closer attention to societies' needs and sensitivities. Navel believes that "this means that societies become political subjects and thus states are more sensitive to the demands and expectations

of societies. In parallel to this, there is a process where the importance of media and public opinion in foreign policy are increasing" (qtd. in Eksi 3).

➢ The second factor is the advent of ICTs, which facilitate communication processes. Media and ICTs used to be in the hands of developed Western nations and their representatives overseas, but now individuals have become "news porters", so to speak. Amos Owen argues that "technologies such as television remain concentrated in the hands of developed or core countries and their services are disseminated to developing or periphery countries, to borrow the technology of world system" (7). The news industry is no longer monopolized by states. In simple terms, people have access to all kinds of news. Culture has the ability to bridge the gaps between nations by boosting intercultural dialogue among people from different parts of the world, reaching huge numbers of people via TV programs, food, the internet, and so on.

Cultural diplomacy is a modern art of diplomatic conduct, relying on a variety of actors, non-state ones in particular because conventional bodies of diplomacy are no longer the only players in the field of international relations. Civil society, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary audiences have become focal points in diplomatic affairs. Cultural diplomacy is based on three main concepts: foreign audiences, non-state actors, and soft power. Cultural diplomacy can be used interchangeably with public diplomacy since the two concepts mean and aim at achieving the same outcomes.

2. The Potential of Cultural Diplomacy

According to literature reviews, there is no consensus among scholars as to the reasons why cultural diplomacy is called for in today's international relations. However, it seems that there is a general agreement on the importance of cultural diplomacy in conflict resolution through boosting mutual understanding among nations and simultaneously influencing foreign audiences so as to obtain the desired outcomes. According to Cummings, one of the leading figures in international relations' analysis, cultural diplomacy's influence is tremendous as it focuses on attraction and persuasion rather than on hard power, which always leads to resentment and resistance. He defines cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, values, systems, traditions, beliefs, and other aspects of culture, with the intention of fostering mutual understanding" (Cummings 1). Relations among individuals are based on the belief that attraction is a crucial factor in achieving the desired results, unlike official state-to-state relations, which are based on benefits, be they economic or political.

Another major motive behind encouraging cultural diplomacy is the emergence of soft power. Had countries resorted to soft power, a lot of conflicts could have been avoided. Specialists seem to disagree about the definition of soft power. Nye, an influential analyst of contemporary international relations and global politics, strongly believes that soft power has a great impact on target groups. He defines it as:

> The aspect of power -getting others to want what you want –might be called indirect or co-optive power. It is in contrast to the active command power behavior of getting others to do what you want. Co-optive power can rest on the attraction of one's idea or on the ability to set the political agenda in a way that shapes the preferences that others express… The ability to establish preferences tends to be associated with intangible power resources such as culture, ideology, and institutions. This dimension can be thought of as soft power, in contrast to the hard command power usually associated with tangible resources like military and economic strength. (Nye 267)

Nye's work on soft power has opened up new dimensions in the field of international relations due to its great influence in sparking global debates around the theme of how to win the hearts and minds of foreign audiences. This is because politics does not always lead to positive results and does not give much attention to ordinary citizens, as politicians target only their counterparts.

Cultural diplomacy practices can impact foreign audiences in multiple ways. That is why states are currently doing their very best to organize events to affect public opinion and enhance countries' reputations overseas. Thanks to ICTs, foreign audiences have become easier to reach. The values of foreign audiences have enjoyed great importance, particularly after the advent of the internet, for people can now get in touch with each other via forums, chatrooms, and so on and so forth. Conflict over public opinion, or what is often termed "public capital", is a dominant feature of today's concurrences among countries as public support is urgently needed more than at any time before. Public capital support beyond borders can be attained by gaining the hearts and minds of the Other. Political leaders worldwide have concluded that winning the hearts and minds of foreign audiences is more important than winning politicians' because the ultimate purpose of any cultural diplomacy activity is to target ordinary citizens due to the influence the public has. Gaining political support might be momentary, while, winning the hearts and minds of public opinions lasts longer.

Accordingly, involving ordinary citizens among the target groups of foreign policymakers initiates a new diplomatic order which is based on states' relations with foreign populations to boost intercultural communication and familiarity among nations. However, this does not mean that cultural diplomacy is a perfect process that is free of criticism. Many theoreticians have pointed

out various negative aspects of such diplomacy as they believe cultures are not equally-footed because of the imbalance of cultural power and influence. Economically powerful cultures possess cultural dominance in the world. The culture industry is monopolized by developed countries. Therefore, the effects can never be mutual, for the flow is primarily one-way. Another criticism leveled against cultural diplomacy is that it is believed that diplomacy is a pure political issue that calls for profound trainings which do not engage ordinary citizens.

2.1 Intercultural Dialogue among Nations

Cultural diplomacy is built on the belief that there is a shift from state-to-state relations to public-to-public communication. Intercultural competence is necessary for today's diplomatic relations as ordinary citizens have become crucial players in shaping foreign policy making. To gain a deeper understanding of each other, cross-cultural knowledge/ competence is needed. The ease movements of people across borders have automatically increased the number of cross-cultural encounters. Cultural diplomacy activities promote intercultural communication between peoples and nations. The advent of ICTs and transportation means an increase in cross-cultural contacts. When people meet, cultures face each other in an implicit manner. To avoid potential misunderstandings and conflicts, there should be a minimum level of intercultural knowledge from participants, both sender and receiver.

Cultures have the ability to bind people together and provide them with a great sense of belonging to the world and ultimately becoming a citizen of the world. Music, for instance, can create a common ground for people belonging to completely different cultures. Einbinder states that "in a world of diversity, there are quite different cultural backgrounds. And so, through music, all peoples can come together to make the world a more harmonious place" (4). This harmony is warmly felt when bands from different parts of the world fuse together their rhythms on stage, something which the audience receives with appreciation. Music is able to create a resistance free atmosphere where people can enjoy the same genres of music. People might enjoy an African music band in Paris or Brussels' Opera House, overcoming language problems thanks to the universal language musicians adopt. All in all, there is a pressing need for intercultural communication in our rapidly changing world. The movement of people and products culminate in moving an arsenal of values and beliefs. Cross-cultural dialogues are real solutions to the old problems of lack of understanding, which have led to hatred and conflicts.

Intercultural competence helps people appreciate cultural differences among nations so that they can reduce possible intergroup misunderstandings and conflicts. Human beings can highlight cultural similarities and differences because cultures are different from and similar to each other in many ways. Similarities among cultures pave the way for mutual understanding, while differences can lead to serious misunderstandings. Lack of mutual understanding of each other's differences may result in toxic stereotypes. Even within the same society, there are very clear dissimilarities in the way a group of people see the world. To explain, the way young people and elders perceive reality is different, and men and women often do not have the same worldview, let alone differences among people who belong to completely different cultures. Our homework, as citizens of the world, is to find instruments for negotiating these differences so that we can avoid many misunderstandings.

People, states, and non-state actors should be cross-culturally competent so as to avoid problems that might pop up during intercultural encounters. The way ordinary people and/or diplomats interact is culturally loaded, as both senders and receivers derive from their cultural backgrounds to communicate with each other. None of them can escape from their cultural mindset because it is an important part of their behaviors. In this sense, Hofstede perceives culture as a mind programming tool. He argues that "every person carries within him or herself patterns of thinking, feelings, and potential acting which were learned through his or her lifetime. Much of these patterns are acquired in early childhood, as at that time, a person is most susceptible to learning and assimilating (qtd. in Judith and Nakayama 118).

Being familiar with the Other's patterns of life is very crucial for communicating successfully. According to Philipsen (1992), any cross-cultural exchange is pregnant with symbols and meanings that need to be taken into consideration. He states that "a cultural code of speaking, then, consists of a socially constructed and historically transmitted system of symbols and meanings to communicate" (7). Cooperation is highly recommended in order to understand each other, for cultures should not be looked at as zones of contest and conflict. There are many theoreticians who deem it right to claim that cultures are intangible conflict zones due to the implicit struggles taking place once two or more people who do not share the same cultural heritage meet. However, many thinkers, especially the ones influenced by Marxism, believe intercultural communication instances can be effective instruments to put some voices in the margins. They are means to silencing peripheric voices. Hence, intercultural communication can be a way to keep the status quo as it is.

2.2 The Role of Mass Media in Cultural Diplomacy

Reaching out to other audiences and governments has always been at the heart of cultural diplomacy activities. Diplomacy itself is based on the reachability of people in different places in the world. "The origins of diplomacy lie buried in the darkness preceding what we call "the dawn of history". There came a stage when the anthropoid apes inhabiting one group of caves realized that it

might be profitable to reach some understanding with neighboring groups regarding the limits of their respective hunting territories" (Nicholson 2).

This suggests that reaching the Other who adopts a foreign way of life is not a new practice at all, but it has been present in all human exchanges. Throughout history, people have constantly been trying to meet each other, either physically and virtually. It is in this context that mass media has played a tremendous role in connecting people from various places in the world. Indeed, mass media is a very important vehicle for diplomatic influence. Davison, one of the early eminent figures in diplomacy analyses, states that:

> The press serves as the eyes and ears of diplomacy. Diplomatic reporting and national intelligence services play a significant supporting role, but most of the information reaching governments about developments throughout the world comes from wire services, newspapers, news magazines, radio, and television. Furthermore, mass media reports come in first, supplementary information via diplomatic or intelligence channels arrives hours, days, or even weeks later. And it is often maintained that much of the information flowing through official channels is originally culled from the press in any case. (Philipsen, 1992, p. 79)

Mass media, in general, and new media, in particular, play a major role in traversing geographical borders. They provide cultures with a great deal of elasticity since the cultural values of country "A" can move to country "B" and to other parts of the world. Mass media are very important platforms for facilitating encounters among cultures. For this reason, many people deem it right to claim that mass media are crucial factors in promoting relations between people worldwide. New mass media boost intercultural communication as cultures can be put on display. Alternative mass media provide more room for the possibility of being exposed to foreign cultures. Interestingly, even the third world countries' cultures, once marginalized, are now able to open to the world and share their own cultural particularities.

Accordingly, cultural diplomacy practitioners believe that mass media are good instruments to target foreign audiences. Many countries rely on media to sell an attractive image to the rest of the world. Nonetheless, official media credibility is put under severe criticism, for it is believed that governments' ideologies are implicitly and/or explicitly included in the processes implemented in promoting a specific culture. Official broadcasters, governmental or partisan ones, face strong resistance on the part of ordinary people. The media's ideologically loaded editorial lines are what make foreign audiences suspicious of official mass media. That is why people constantly look for alternatives; hence, social media has recently gained more ground, power, and visibility as they are able to reach every corner of the world, even the most remote areas. Unofficial media play a major role in fostering intercultural relations because they face less resistance overseas from their users. Cultural diplomacy policymakers should pay close attention to the great effects of new media on people worldwide. It would be completely wrong to assume that new media target only a specific group of people when they rather have become holistically inclusive. Political leaders resort to social media to interact with citizens, locally and globally. Many of us nowadays think that new media, especially social media, have for long played an important role in accelerating the rate of cross-cultural communication since messages, in spite of the censorship many governments apply, travel from one place to another faster than they used to in the past.

As a conclusion, the speed with which information travels from one place to another makes exchanges fruitful as people receive and send a multitude of messages simultaneously, which makes mutual influences likely to happen. New mass media empower non-state actors. The internet, for instance, gives governmental and non-governmental institutions plenty of opportunities to contact worldwide audiences. Mainstream media no longer monopolizes peoples' perception of the world. The advent of new media paves the way for more interactions among people from all over the world. It is high time to use media tools to know the Other, thereby bridging any real or potential gap between people who belong to different cultural backgrounds.

2.3 Cultural Imperialism
As mentioned earlier, cultural diplomacy is a means of tapping into people's minds and hearts worldwide by attracting and boosting familiarity among people who belong to different cultures. However, cultural diplomacy has been criticized for many reasons. Some theorists, especially the ones with a Marxist influence, have harshly obliterated cultural flows coming from the West. Some of the leading figures who have dealt with cultural imperialism in its wider and specific senses are Colin Sparks and John Tomlinson. They strongly believe that the notion of influence has never been mutual or reciprocal. This is what has become known as "cultural imperialism". That is, cultures of the centre swallow those of the margin. "It is the centre that produces and distributes, and the periphery that modifies and adapts. Such a process is clearly distinct from the claim that the artifacts produced by the cultural industries of the developed world embody materials that originate elsewhere and which embody a global consciousness rather than that of a developed country" (Sparks 145).

Some theorists strongly believe that many sorts of cultural exchanges that take place among nations, particularly between cultures of economically unequal states, lead to a form of cultural invasion, so to speak. Developed countries dominate mass media; hence, they are influencers. That is why cultures of economically powerful countries "devour" the ones of poor countries. They disseminate information and news worldwide. By this token, cultural diplomacy is an instrument to maintain cultural hegemony either within

the same country or across borders. Some scholars believe that cultural diplomacy is a euphemized version of "cultural imperialism". Such a concept constitutes an essential component in post-colonial discourse. This latter seeks to unveil the neo-silencing role cultural imperialism hides, one that gives the subaltern the illusion that it is free and possesses means to sell its ways of living and thinking overseas. According to Zamorano

> Nevertheless, the construction of hegemony through culture, as Gramsci pointed out, is developed in a context of multiple tensions and negotiations with subaltern positions within its framework (1975). In this regard, cultural diplomacy is structured following diverse government strategies of bureaucratic, social, or industrial pre-eminence, and the power relations of these spheres in different contexts affect cultural diplomacy in various ways, both culturally and politically. (2016, p.17)

2.4 Research Limitations

One of the most significant challenges that we face is a significant lack of comprehensive literature, combined with the ubiquitous uncertainties and negative connotations surrounding the concept of cultural diplomacy. That is, there is a scarcity of in-depth literature that appropriately portrays the various facets of this delicate phenomenon in the field of cultural diplomacy. While there are scattered studies and articles on the subject, the lack of a unified body of work makes it difficult to gain a thorough grasp of cultural diplomacy's historical evolution, contemporary dynamics, and future trajectories. This scarcity impedes the establishment of a strong theoretical framework to guide practitioners and policymakers. As a concept, cultural diplomacy is associated with a sense of ambiguity. Confusion and misinterpretation are exacerbated by the lack of a globally acknowledged definition. Furthermore, the concept's negative connotations, such as cultural imperialism or manipulation, cast a shadow on its potential benefits. These unfavorable perceptions can impede effective implementation and limit nations' desire to participate in cultural diplomacy programs.

2.5 Further Research

The effectiveness of cultural diplomacy is a rich and multifaceted topic that can be investigated through a variety of future study avenues. Here are some ideas for further research:

- **Cultural Diplomacy Program Impact Assessment**: researchers can examine the long-term impact of certain cultural diplomacy activities or programs. They will evaluate the success of cultural exchange initiatives, festivals, and exhibitions in promoting mutual understanding, collaboration, and good impressions across nations.
- **Evaluating Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies**: researchers may evaluate the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy communication tactics. They investigate the effects of language, visual communication, and narrative framing on the receipt and understanding of cultural messages by diverse audiences.
- **The Impact of Digital Media on Cultural Diplomacy**: this is a rich avenue for future inquiries. Researchers can investigate the role of digital platforms, social media, and online cultural interactions in contemporary cultural diplomacy. They will examine how these instruments impact views, promote cross-cultural discussion, and influence the success or failure of cultural diplomacy operations.

3. Conclusion

Cultural diplomacy is a new concept that has created a big shift in international relations, for new practices, players, and instruments have become involved. International relations are no longer political issues per se. Raising familiarity among people is needed more than ever before. The shallowness of interpersonal knowledge among people can be ascribed to the widespread impact of stereotypes and previous beliefs on their thought processes. These mental models serve as filters for perception, influencing how people see and evaluate other people and making it more difficult to develop a deeper, more complex understanding of one another... Carson states that "men hate each other since they fear each other, and they fear each other as they don't know each other, and they don't know each other because they are often separated from each other" (qtd. in King and Carson 273). One of the most important functions of cultural diplomacy is establishing and boosting mutual knowledge among people. The main roles of cultural diplomacy are:

- *Increasing familiarity* – making people think about your country and updating their image of it.
- *Increasing appreciation* – creating positive perceptions of your country and getting others to see issues from your perspective.
- *Engaging people* – encouraging people to see your country as an attractive destination for tourism and study and encouraging them to buy its products and subscribe to its values.
- *Influencing people's behavior* – getting companies to invest, encouraging public support for your country's positions, and convincing politicians to turn to it as an ally. (Bound, et al, 2007, p. 25).

Cultural diplomacy practices are crucial vehicles to promote local cultures worldwide through organizing and/ or hosting cultural events. Cultural diplomacy gives local cultures more visibility. It is the best way to boost intercultural dialogue; hence, it really does reinforce mutual understanding. It may not lead to a full mutual impact, but it has the ability to initiate understanding among nations, paving the way for the negotiation of meanings to arrive at a common ground free of misunderstandings. However, achieving cultural diplomacy purposes is not as easy as many people might think. It is an ongoing process which does not stop. It calls for a lot of effort, as people must be interculturally competent and tolerant. Cross-cultural communication takes place in numerous ways. No one can deny that people are constantly communicating with each other either directly or via social media. It is in this context that cultural diplomacy has an important role to play so as to connect people who belong to different cultures. It is also a good instrument for enhancing intercultural communication and boosting mutual knowledge of each other.

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