

Cultural Diplomacy at a Glance:

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Cultural diplomacy is a relatively still developing concept in the study of International Relations, International Affairs, Political Science or any other such related discipline. Of course it is not surprising that the concept of cultural diplomacy is actually gaining momentum to become a respectably recognized concept of study. Considering that culture is one of the tools that states and organizations employ to establish or to maintain relations between one another, it seems as though it has only been a ‘matter of circumstance’ before this cultural aspect would gain the respect that other tools commonly employed in diplomacy in establishing, cementing and maintaining relations between states or governments already have. Examples of such tools for establishing and maintaining relations between states include political, economic, aid and trade relations. Politics and trade have dominated the relations between states since time immemorial. Why I choose to say it was only ‘a matter of circumstance’ is because in particular the issues of politics, economics and trade have dominated the relations between states for so long and whilst attention has been given to the cultural aspect too, that level of attention cannot be compared to the amount of attention given to the issues of politics, economics and trade. But as is evident to political experts, scholars and sometimes even to the ordinary citizen,

our world has become more dynamic, this has resulted in both negative and positive implications.

Over the past decade the world has witnessed and experienced immense challenges in particular in the financial sector. The global economic and financial crises of 1998 to 2008 left the political, economic and trade relations between various states in a somewhat fiasco state. Despite the fact that some countries are on the recovery, the ongoing European financial crisis has effects that are not only being experienced in the respective region but its effects are far reaching, spreading across the globe, and those mostly affected are the European countries themselves and the countries that they have strong economic/trade or financial ties with and those that heavily depend on the support from the wealthy states. To some extent, it feels as though the use of political, economic and trade relations have been stretched too far, somehow exhausted such that they are no longer just adequate on their own to maintain strong relations between states. It is with this observation and it is at this point that culture is seen to be emerging on the international scene as becoming a more conspicuous and pivotal instrument in diplomacy and in the diplomatic relations between states. And in this view, not only is cultural diplomacy emerging as a pivotal tool in cementing relations between states, but to some extent it also helps in lubricating and in bringing about progress in the political, economic and trade relations between countries. To borrow from Marta Ryniejska – Kieldanowicz, cultural diplomacy can be appreciated more in the context that is “reduces the level of mistakes, misunderstandings and bad reception which complicate relations of a given country with another”¹ p. 4.

¹ Ryniejska - Kieldanowicz M. Cultural Diplomacy as a Form of International Communication

In order to have a considerable appreciation of the concept of cultural diplomacy it is important to initially comprehend the concept of culture and the concept of diplomacy separately. In this way one can better appreciate how the two relate to one another and where they meet. Thus one is able to appreciate cultural diplomacy as a relatively new and rather developing concept in the realm of international affairs. In this paper the term international affairs will be used as an umbrella term for all disciplines such as International Relations, International Affairs, and Political Science as well as any other such related discipline that involves the relations between states.

Culture itself is a relative term whose definition depends on and varies from one kind of people to another, from one country to another, from one region of the world to another and so forth. The Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute states that “**Culture** is a definition highly misunderstood and misused, thus the need for an explanation: **Culture** refers to the following Ways of Life, including but not limited to: **Language** - the oldest human institution and the most sophisticated medium of expression; **Arts & Sciences** - the most advanced and refined forms of human expression; **Thought** - the ways in which people perceive, interpret, and understand the world around them; **Spirituality** - the value system transmitted through generations for the inner well-being of human beings, expressed through language and actions; **Social activity** - the shared pursuits within a cultural community, demonstrated in a variety of festivities and life-celebrating events and **Interaction** - the social aspects of human contact, including the give-and-take of socialization, negotiation, protocol, and conventions.”² This definition of culture given by the Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute goes along with one given by the United Nations Educational,

² Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute URL:<http://www.roshan-institute.org>

Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) whose specialized cultural sector also attempts to comprehensively define the diverse and plural concept of culture by stating that “Culture... is ... the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, traditions and beliefs.”³

Bringing these definitions on the international arena therefore calls for different peoples of the world to appreciate each other and their uniqueness, to mutually respect each one’s spiritual values, material values, emotional values, art and literature values, traditional values and belief systems, albeit not an easy accomplishment in the real dynamic world. Putting it simply, these all-inclusive definitions call for an appreciation of the way of life of other peoples. In this way different peoples can get to understand each other, each other’s actions and behaviors, or even perceive the behavior or actions of the next person. Being able to understand each other creates an anticipation and room for cooperation at various levels. It is for this reason that earlier on I mentioned that to some extent culture plays a pivotal role as a lubricating factor for state to state relations in the traditionally important political, economic and trade relations. Culture has gained so much importance such that it is now strongly considered as a supporting factor alongside issues of politics, issues of economics and issues of trade in the foreign policies of states.

In the case of defining diplomacy as a concept on its own it is important to be aware of the simple generalizations that people usually make. It is quite often the case that students and in particular the general public find it difficult to

³ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization: CULTURE. URL:<http://portal.unesco.org>

differentiate between diplomacy and foreign policy. Whilst the two are closely related and are in one and the same field they are different and it is very important for students in the field of international affairs to be knowledgeable about the difference. Kishan S. Rana the author of the book 'Bilateral diplomacy' as well as an expert in the diplomatic field says that diplomacy "refers to the way in which a given foreign policy is executed by the foreign ministry (MFA) and implementation on the ground by professional diplomats...foreign policy is about what to do and diplomacy is about how to do it"⁴ p. 16-17

The art of diplomacy was or became very important and popular during the periods 1919-1939. This was mainly motivated by the prevailing volatile political environment in which individual states appreciated the need to establish communications and negotiations with other states. This period saw the birth of the League of Nations though its failure and eventual death was manifested by the outbreak of the Second World War. Diplomacy during this period was mainly conducted through bilateral negotiations. With the League of Nations in scuffles, multilateral talks seemed not to yield credible results hence states turned to bilateral negotiations, targeting states that they knew had common ideas or goals as their own. Hence diplomacy during this period was quite different from today's form of diplomacy which involves more states and even non-state actors such as International Organizations (IOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), eminent persons e.t.c. Modern diplomacy takes the form of publicity which is relatively of contrast to the secretive nature of diplomacy in the past.

⁴ Rana K. S. 2002. Bilateral Diplomacy. Malta Manas Publications. New Delhi. Manas Publications

If, as stated by Rana, diplomacy is about how to execute foreign policy, then in the history of diplomacy we are able to isolate various diplomatic instruments for executing foreign policy. It is also possible to group these diplomatic instruments into two categories, namely, a) aggressive, assertive or confrontational instruments. b) Peaceful or pacifist diplomatic instruments. The first category includes such diplomatic instruments which are classified as hard power. The second category includes such diplomatic instruments classified as soft power, and it is within this latter category and classification that culture falls into as one example of a form of a diplomatic instrument.

It is useful to also look further back into our world history so as to get a better appreciation of how politics and economic issues were important and dominated as issues in international affairs as well as to appreciate how they were intertwined with diplomacy. During the World Wars a state was perceived in positive light if it allied with another, shared political ideals and assisted militarily. This is was the circumstance of that time. So foreign policies and diplomatic relations were strongly characterized by political issues. As the World Wars ended, the Cold War started. It was also during this Cold War period that foreign policies of countries particularly in Europe began to establish economic and trade relations. Executed through diplomatic engagements “the integration process of Europe mainly began after the Second World War with particular attention to the production and marketing of coal and steel. There was a strong drive towards economic development following the devastations of the war,”⁵ and even as the Cold War drew to an end, the European Commission (EC) continued to face economic challenges as the patterns of international trade began to change, but stability in the region was

⁵ Roberts G and Hogwood P. 1997. European Politics Today. Manchester. Manchester University Press

marked by the German reunification in 1990. Whist states concentrated on economic and trade relations and development, this did not mean to imply that political issues were sidelined. But the fact is that, on the political dimension, the Cold War era was characterized by two main blocs, the communist-socialist bloc led by the Soviet Union versus the capitalist bloc led by the US. These were the two main forms of security groupings and the major political roles were fulfilled by the Soviet Union and by the U.S hence the other states saw it a worthy opportunity to try and concentrate on their economic and trade developments. Also in tandem with crises presiding after the World Wars are the global economic and financial crises that we have witnessed and experienced over the past decade. In such circumstances it is somewhat evident that states see other states in positive light if they bail each other out financially or assist in one way or the other. It is also through such circumstances that diplomatic relations have increased.

Having made this background preview, one can clearly observe how politics, economics and trade have dominated the diplomatic relations between states. But this is not to say culture was nonexistent. In fact, culture has always existed as diplomatic tool except that it was not a pivotal issue and hence was overshadowed by the political, economic and trade components of diplomacy. But as time has progressed and as our world has become ever more dynamic so has culture gradually risen as an important diplomatic tool in state to state relations. The cultural dimension of diplomacy seems to attempt to merge various differences and seems to at least cultivate an appreciation of these differences between peoples and states. Currently the world is encountering many and major challenges. Take for example the Climate Change stalemate that has been ongoing for a considerably long period of time now. Whilst cultural diplomacy will not work any miracle or some sort of magic in forging a

lasting solution to such principal issues, but it does make a contribution in bringing about a better environment and better understanding between involved states. This is a point which is acknowledged by Rana. K. S when he speaks of various components of culture and shares that they are “not a powerful basis for mutually beneficial relations, but they serve as a starting point”⁶p. 35

⁶ Ibid Rana K. S. 2002