

**Correlation between Cultural Diplomacy  
and Cultural Exchange:**

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**in Cases of the British Council  
and the Korean Cultural Center**

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## **Abstract**

This research paper aims to find a correlation between cultural diplomacy and cultural exchanges and to ultimately enhance international relations based on two concepts. We will approach this topic by specifically focusing on the illustrations of the two non-profit organizations of the British Council and the Korean Cultural Center (KCC). We will analyze the impacts of cultural exchanges on cultural diplomacy and to figure out the correlations by examining brief history, scales, activities, influences, advantages and disadvantages of both systems.

**Keywords:** cultural exchange, cultural diplomacy, the British Council, the Korean Cultural Center, KCC, system, activities

## **I. Introduction**

For the first step of the process, we will start with clarifying the distinction but resembling terminologies of cultural diplomacy and cultural exchanges. Even if there is a clear difference in cultural diplomacy and cultural exchange, the two concepts are not entirely separable. We viewed cultural exchanges as a subordinate category of cultural diplomacy, perceiving it as a way to enhance the positive linkage between nations. Hence, acknowledging the significance of cultural exchange is a necessary step.

### **I – 1. Definition of Cultural Diplomacy**

The meaning of cultural diplomacy is rather ambiguous; nevertheless, it can be simply understood as mutual interaction of ideas, information, art and also other fields of culture among nations and their people. In other words, cultural diplomacy accompanies and needs the concept of cultural exchange in order to achieve success, which will be further explained.

After the 2012 London Olympic Game, the significance of cultural diplomacy has been highly regarded in the UK. Considering the depressing financial status of the UK before the Olympic, the UK government tried to fuel the economic recovery using this opportunity, according to the Woori Financial

Management Research Center.<sup>1</sup> Through the increasing investment on related infrastructure, this actually brought an improvement in London, approximately expected value of GBP 13 billion by the Department of Trade and Industry in the UK. Korea showed the similar case by starting its sports exchange in 1980s; the Asian Game in 1986 and the Seoul Olympic Game in 1988 activated Korean cultural diplomacy. These cultural exchanges established the rapid progress in economy and politics, and even it is called “Miracle of Han River,” ranking top 15 of economic level in the world. In fact, all the countries which held the Olympic Games for last twenty-five years experienced the progress in a rate of economic growth up to 11.7%, according to International Monetary Fund.

## **I – 2. Definition of Cultural Exchange**

In a broad sense, culture is common lifestyle of people in a certain group including activities, interests, and attitude towards them. In this globalized world, culture is an indispensable factor affecting economy, politics, and other fields concerning the society at large. Cultural exchange derives from the former notion; it is an exchange of art, publication, sports, literatures, studies, music, and so on. Through cultural exchanges, the impact of one culture to another culture increases with generally positive impressions.

Cultural exchange helps interaction among the countries and encourages people to learn more about other cultures. The world can achieve a win-win approach and development through the deep understanding of the cultures. This research paper observes the two cases of Korean Cultural Center (KCC) and the British Council.

## **II. The British Council and the Korean Cultural Center**

Both as non-profit organizations, British Council and Korean Cultural Center serve the same purposes of promoting domestic culture and facilitating cultural exchanges. However, they show differences in terms of their inceptions, sizes, activities, influences, advantages and disadvantages.

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<sup>1</sup> Woori Financial Management Research Center, “Economic impacts of the London Olympic Game”, Weekly Brief (July 25, 2012). pp. 1-3.

## II – 1. System of the British Council

Established in 1934, the British Council's overseas network extends in over 100 countries and territories.<sup>2</sup> The former institution of the British Council, called 'The British Committee for Relation with Other Countries', was established in 1934.<sup>3</sup> It was at the time of the World War, thus it was natural that an initial purpose was to counteract on the threat from Nazism and Fascism.<sup>4</sup> In 1940, the committee renamed it as 'The British Council' and gained permanent independence as written in Royal Charter.<sup>5</sup> A way of operating the British Council might become somewhat different from its early stage. Nevertheless, it is still closely connected with the UK government to progress its mission further; "promoting abroad a wider appreciation of British culture and civilization by encouraging cultural, educational and other interchange between the United Kingdom and elsewhere" according to Ali Fisher.<sup>6</sup>

As the legal status of the British Council is based on Royal Charter in 1940, it sets obligations of the Council. The Council sets its own goals by itself relating to the Charter, but not by the UK government. It means that the Council is an operationally independent institution even though it should get approval from the UK government on specific issues. It is not possible for the British Council, for example, to establish new operations in any country without prior approval from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). It receives grant-in-aid from the UK FCO less than 25% while its turnover from teaching and exams, tendered contracts and partnerships is over 75%.<sup>7</sup> This means that the British Council is financially sponsored from FCO, but relatively little amount of the funding system makes it possible for the Council to independently operate.

## II – 2. Activities of the British Council

The British Council works in various areas including arts, science, sports, society, culture, and so on.

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<sup>2</sup> British Council website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/about>

<sup>3</sup> Ali Fisher, *A story of engagement: the British Council 1934-2009* (London: British Council, 2009), p.13.

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas J. Cull, *The National Theatre of Scotland's Black Watch: Theatre as Cultural Diplomacy* (London: British Council, 2007), p.12: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/files/documents/usa-arts-theater-black-watch-cultural-pub.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ali Fisher, *op.cit.*, p.19

<sup>6</sup> British Council website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/about/history>

<sup>7</sup> British Council website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/about/our-relationship-with-uk-government>

As in arts, it is divided into architecture, design, fashion, film, literature, music. Its global arts team aims for the development of quality events and collaborations with artists and cultural institutions. For example, the British Council exhibited Atlas of the Unbuilt World, which showed the architectures and landscapes around the globe. It gathered about 60 architecture models. The exhibition gave a chance to compare and investigate architectures.<sup>8</sup>

The British Council also builds a linkage among scientists. It provides information for international researchers on jobs and funding in the UK as well as encourages heated discussion on science and sustainability issues. The British Council, for instance, runs the British Council Researcher Links to make an intimate relationship between different cultures. Working with researches and educations, the Council has partnership with various countries including Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, and Morocco.<sup>9</sup>

There is Premier Skills sector using football as a tool to engage with and develop the skills of young people. It is a partnership between the British Council and the Premier League. It mainly concentrates on training coaches and referees with highly skilled trainers from the Premier League. A free website for learning English is managed by the British Council in association with the Premier League.

## **II – 3. System of the Korean Cultural Center**

There are 24 Korean Cultural Centers in 20 countries through Africa, Asia and Oceania, Europe, North and South America. The first abroad Korean Cultural Center was established in 1979, located in Japan. The Government Information Agency had been responsible for most of KCCs until its reorganization.<sup>10</sup> The Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS), a subdivision of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST), started to manages the whole KCCs from 2009.<sup>11</sup> That is, KCC is not independent institutions from the government.

As stated above, KCC is under control of Korean government. However, the responsibility of KCC is not limited to only one department; both MCST and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) are related to its operation. Accounting procedure, such as budget compilation on founding and operating KCC, belongs to

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<sup>8</sup> British Council website: <http://backoftheenvelope.britishcouncil.org/2013/may/03/atlas-unbuilt-world/>

<sup>9</sup> British Council website: <http://www.britishcouncil.org/science/british-council-researcher-links>

<sup>10</sup> Doopedia website: [http://www.doopedia.co.kr/doopedia/master/master.do?\\_method=view&MAS\\_IDX=101013000868423](http://www.doopedia.co.kr/doopedia/master/master.do?_method=view&MAS_IDX=101013000868423)

<sup>11</sup> KOCIS website: <http://www.kocis.go.kr/history.do>

MCST whereas MFA is legal senior institution of KCC. Since it is established as an affiliated institution under diplomatic offices abroad, MFA is legally in charge of KCC.<sup>12</sup>

## II – 4. Activities of the Korean Cultural Center

KCC works with various areas including music, traditional culture, languages, and so on. KCC mainly works in Korean traditional music which is named K-music in general. Geomungo Factory, a band that takes Korean traditional instruments, showed various Korean instruments and provided a chance to experience them, such as Geomungo and Gayageum.<sup>13</sup> Pansori Night by Ahn Sook-sun was another example in this field. Pansori is Korean traditional musical which is majorly about daily lives of Korean common people, focusing on their diverse feelings like sadness, humor, and happiness.<sup>14</sup> KCC also concentrates on K-pop as it gets more fame worldwide. It hosts K-pop contest, rewarding its champion to meet his or her favorite K-pop star and support free trip to Korea.<sup>15</sup>

KCC also exhibits Korean cultural features. For instance, there was an exhibition that displayed Korean traditional cosmetics from February 19 to April 6 this year. It featured various traditional makeup tools and accessories. This exhibition is not only about Korean cosmetic culture but also implies glimpse into Korean traditional life.<sup>16</sup> KCC runs Korean language course as well. This course also introduces Korean culture including music, fashion, and movies even though it focuses on teaching Korean. Because it is related to many events by KCC, Korean language course can take synergy effect.<sup>17</sup>

Specifically in the case of Korean Cultural Center UK (KCCUK), it showed an active movement starting from June 1 to September 9, 2012, targeting the opening ceremony of the London Olympics. It was a

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<sup>12</sup> Asia Economics, January 31, 2013:

<http://view.asiae.co.kr/news/view.htm?idxno=2013013008510421147&nvr=Y>

<sup>13</sup> London Korean Cultural Center website: <http://london.korean-culture.org/navigator.do?siteCode=null&langCode=null&menuCode=200903170055&promImg=1198673979402.gif&menuType=BG&subImg=1198673979402.gif&action=VIEW&seq=48638>

<sup>14</sup> London Korean Cultural Center website: <http://london.korean-culture.org/navigator.do?siteCode=&menuCode=200903170055&page=3&pageDown=0&minSeq=43395&maxSeq=48777&action=VIEW&seq=48069>

<sup>15</sup> London Korean Cultural Center website: <http://london.korean-culture.org/navigator.do?siteCode=&menuCode=200903170055&page=2&pageDown=0&minSeq=43395&maxSeq=48777&action=VIEW&seq=48097>

<sup>16</sup> London Korean Cultural Center website: <http://london.korean-culture.org/navigator.do?siteCode=&langCode=null&menuCode=200903170054&promImg=1198673979402.gif&menuType=BG&subImg=1198673979402.gif&action=VIEW&seq=46973>

<sup>17</sup> London Korean Cultural Center website: <http://london.korean-culture.org/navigator.do?siteCode=&langCode=null&menuCode=200803250047&promImg=1198673979402.gif&menuType=CH&subImg=1198673979402.gif>

great opportunity for KCCUK to gain people's attentions from diverse backgrounds and introduce Korean culture.<sup>18</sup>

### **III. Analysis**

In order to achieve a successful cultural diplomacy between nations, it is beneficial to create an emotional attachment, which is, cultural exchanges. People tend to positively acknowledge a certain nation when they are exposed to its culture frequently and repetitively. As mentioned in the front, cultural exchange includes an ability to embrace differences and create mutual understandings of each group. It is closely linked to multi-aspects of the society such as political, economic, environmental and other aspects since it changes people's perceptions. Hence, cultural exchange is a primary step.

With its relatively early start, the British Council has solid and systematic programs. Although the British Council is supported by the government, it still maintains its independent status with strong influences. Being one organization controlling several others, the British Council has a role to integrate culture-related departments. Compared to the British Council, KCC is yet to achieve such impacts. The effect is probably shown because related organizations regarding cultures are not integrated enough. Even though departments have similar names and roles, there is no center to mediate them.

### **IV. Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the world is influenced by globalization. Culture is in the middle of this matter when it comes to cultural exchange and cultural diplomacy, and this can be a very effective soft power. As mentioned above, there are some strength and weakness which each international organization has in its own operational systems and activities. Therefore, it is essential to learn and know more about other organizations and see how those features can be applied for themselves, so that they can improve altogether.

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<sup>18</sup> Korea IT Times website: <http://www.koreaitimes.com/story/22730/all-eyes-turn-korean-culture-london>

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