Cultural Diplomacy as the Means of Soft Power in an Information Age

By Hwajung Kim (December 2011)

Introduction

Cultural diplomacy is regarded as forming international bridges and interactions, identifying networks and power domains within cultures and transcending national and cultural boundaries. With information technologies presence, soft power incorporates national culture including knowledge, belief, art, morals and any other capabilities and habits created by a society. The importance of public diplomacy has been emerging since soft power has growing out of culture, out of domestic values and policies, and out of foreign policy.¹ It draws the significant role of cultural diplomacy as linchpin of public diplomacy.

According to Richard T. Arndt, in the book The First Resort of Kings: American Cultural Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century, after completing a survey regarding the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy, he observed that cultural diplomacy is a cost effective practice considering its outcomes and impacts on international ties between countries.² The survey proves that cultural diplomacy helps create a foundation of trust with other people, which policy makers can build on to reach political, economic, and military agreements. Cultural diplomacy encourages other peoples to give the nation the benefit of the doubt on specific policy issues or requests for collaboration, since there is a presumption of shared interest. In addition, cultural diplomacy demonstrates national values and creates relationship


with people, which endure changes in government. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy can reach influential members of foreign societies who cannot be reached through traditional embassy functions. In the meantime, it provides a positive agenda for cooperation in spite of policy differences, creates a neutral platform for people-to-people contact, and serves as a flexible, universally accepted vehicle for approach with countries where diplomatic relations have been strained or are absent.

As the information age arrived, a new way of communication in a cyberspace has been formed and developed alongside rapidly evolving information technologies. This new way of communication provides new opportunities for cultural policy makers to broaden their target audience and to promote culture even more widely with its new media platforms. Likewise, cultural diplomacy using information technologies will gain and strengthen soft power if cultural policy makers make use of new communication technologies effectively and strategically.

This paper will analyze how cultural diplomacy has been developed since the 1930s to gain soft power and convey how cultural diplomacy has adapted to the information age. After analyzing the cultural diplomacy in the information age, the paper will examine how the future of cultural diplomacy should be directed with suggestions to improve the cultural diplomacy with key recommendations.

**Academic Review**

*Culture, Culture in Politics, Culture in Public Diplomacy*

To fully understand the meaning of cultural diplomacy, it is useful to first define the key terms: Culture, Culture in Politics and Culture in Public Diplomacy. **Culture** is complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other capabilities and
habits created by man who is a member of society where a group of people is related to each other through persistent relations, or a large social grouping sharing the scarce geographical or virtual territory, subject to the same political authority and dominant cultural expectations³; **Culture in Politics** is to place culture within state foreign policy as the expression of a national interest, which contributes to the reification of the national character, belief systems, strategic cultures and national identity. It entails promoting and already existing culture abroad, also involves a more active role in protecting and developing national culture⁴; **Culture in Public Diplomacy** is an international actor’s attempt to promote the national culture, to give impacts on public opinions of counterparts and to build integrity and credibility through cultural exchanges.⁵ It is one of the different ways of practicing public diplomacy such as media diplomacy, cyber diplomacy, aid diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, sport diplomacy and so forth. Hence, culture in public diplomacy implies that cultural diplomacy can be practiced as a means of public diplomacy through the multicultural events, the art exhibition, and through various international festivals.

**Soft Power**

The relationship between culture and public diplomacy is found in the concept of power. According to Joseph Nye, who initiated the concept of soft power, defines power as “the ability to achieve one’s purposes or goals” and “the ability to get others to do what they otherwise would not do.”⁶ He differentiates between soft power and hard power based on the nature of behavior and tangibility of resources.


According to his theory, power rests along the continuum: Command – Coercion – Inducement – Agenda Setting – Attraction – Co-optive Power. **Command Power**, the ability to change what others do, can rest on coercion of inducement. On the other hand, **Co-optive Power**\(^7\), Joseph Nye’s term to indicate the ability to shape what others want, can rest on the attractiveness of one’s culture and ideology or the ability to manipulate the agenda of political choices in a manner that makes actors fail to express some preferences because they seem to be too unrealistic. He puts hard power resources on the command power; while soft power resources rest on the co-optive power. That is, hard power is a country’s economic and military ability to buy and coerce, and soft power is the ability to attract through cultural and ideological appeal.

In particular, he underlines the significance of public diplomacy since soft power grows out of culture, out of domestic values and policies, and out of foreign policy. Further he predicts a greater role for informational and institutional power as a transition to a new age.\(^8\) He emphasizes short-term responses can be fine-tuned through using broadcast capabilities and narrowcasting on the Internet, thus increase budget in soft power and public diplomacy is necessary to raise a nation’s profile. He also underlines “the most effective communication often occurs not by distant broadcast but in face-to-face contacts.” It is critical to be aware of how soft power can be used as a means of public diplomacy. Further, he highlights smart power is the better balance of hard power and soft power in foreign policy.\(^9\)

---


Cultural Diplomacy

Cultural diplomacy has become linchpin of public diplomacy as globalization in the sense of connectivity in economic and cultural life across the world has been growing for centuries. With a rise of soft power, the term ‘Cultural Diplomacy’ has been faced definition confusion with similar words such as international cultural exchange, cultural public relations, cultural cooperation. By looking at precedent studies, cultural diplomacy is referred to as meaning from actual implementation structure.

According to Milton Cummings (2003), cultural diplomacy has been defined as “the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understandings.”\(^\text{10}\) It explains cultural diplomacy is in cultural activities that a nation’s idea of itself is best represented so as to continue to inspire people the word over despite political differences and cross borders.

Shizuru Saeki (2002) defines that cultural diplomacy is to exchange ideas, information, arts and culture to promote mutual understandings amongst citizens or different countries. She underlines cultural diplomacy should be considered as multilateral perspectives to avoid one sided culture policy such as coercion of implementing ideology and policy to the world as a whole or public relations only to promote its languages course.\(^\text{11}\)

Myung-sub Kim (2003) defines cultural diplomacy as self-interest strategies of foreign policy chosen by a nation’s cultural interests. He emphasizes it needs to be considered through stereoscope visions because diverse actors such as government bodies, non-governmental organizations and individuals are able to conduct cultural diplomacy.

Cultural diplomacy of the past has focusing on protection and propaganda of the own


national culture in the process of international exchange. Under the given accent of globalization, however, the focus cannot be set solely on the interest of nation states any more. Conversely, international cultural exchange cannot be separated from national interests either. Therefore, the influence of public, private and regional actors in the realization of concrete cultural exchange programs is doubtlessly rising. Also the need for an enhanced engagement in people-to-people diplomacy along with a deep understanding of international cultural exchange, has never been more significant.

**History of Cultural Diplomacy**

The link between culture and politics has evolved since 1930s. France and Germany focused on “cultural expansion” with cultural relations program before World War I. Soon other nations followed the trend, Great Britain established the British Council for Relations with other countries in 1934 and the United States created the Interdepartmental Committee on Cooperation with the Other American Republics in 1938 and set up the Division of Cultural Relations in the Department State in order to meet the need for “national interpretation.”

During the Cold War, the United States government supported exchange programs for students and artists under the 1936 Convention for the Promotion of Inter-American Cultural Relations, the model for the numerous exchange programs integral public diplomacy. It helped the spread of American knowledge, skills, and ideas in the war of ideas with Soviet Union. Especially the Information and Educational Exchange Act of 1948 was successful cultural diplomacy policy to promote better understanding of the United States. However, after Cold War, cultural diplomacy ceased to be a priority until 1970s.

---

In 1980s, foreign policy has changed considerably as culture has been considered as efficient tools of diplomacy. Mitchell(1986) characterizes the cultural diplomacy by saying it is essentially involved strengthening a country’s cultural influence by funding artists’ tour or by promoting the study of the country’s language and culture in universities abroad.\(^\text{13}\)

As the Information Age has arrived, scholars emphasize the importance of the international cultural agenda because cultural products are increasingly swept into the trans-national communication and economic flows caused by globalization. Nye and Owens(1997) stressed that “to be culturally powerful – or even culturally significant – in today’s world, a country must exercise control over these flows,”\(^\text{14}\) which implies cultural diplomacy can be defined as the politicization of culture by foreign policy.

**UK Cultural Diplomacy**

The British Council for Relations with Other Countries was founded in 1934, by the Foreign Office of the United Kingdom (UK). It offered a new and alternative approach to the traditional conduct of foreign affairs. At that time, it was called “Cultural Propaganda” and widely interpreted as “the dissemination of British ideas and beliefs in general” rather than specifically political form. Also it was believed that the cultural propaganda would “not only serve to enhance British influence and prestige abroad, but would also effectively further the wider ideals of international peace and understanding.”\(^\text{15}\)

At the initial stage, the British Council focused on supporting for English education abroad and promulgation of British culture through lecture tours, musical troupes and art exhibitions. And the Ministry of Information was created as many offices in abroad complied


information about local conditions, opportunities and openness to British initiatives in 1939. While going through World War II most offices were closed except Sweden, Portugal and Spain due to lack of fund. After the war, the British Council focused on Europe and undertook the mission of providing support for foreign students and short-term visitors. Post-war intelligence came to emerge from foreign office for the purpose of profit making in foreign countries.

Consequently, the British Council becomes the world’s largest English language teaching organization with 70 centers in 53 countries. Also it dedicates to ‘Military English’ and ‘English for Peace’ by helping military personnel to express their rights and values for which they are fighting. Furthermore, it provides ‘Working Abroad’ program in over 80 countries for students to take an internship as a part of an international placement working abroad. ‘Sports Festivals’ and ‘Online Initiatives’ are designated to attract young people, and a new community website for English learners and teachers created by the British Council China Region in 2007 records 30,000 members with social networking functionality and a range of podcast.

US Cultural Diplomacy

In the United States (US), cultural diplomacy, funded by the CIA and the State Department’s Division of Cultural relations, was considered to be significant because policy makers understood the link between engagement with foreign audiences and victory over ideological enemies during the Cold War. When the US assumed the mantle of global leadership after World War II, cultural diplomacy became a central part of its strategy. Cultural activities, foreign conferences and intellectual publications were continuously taken place until the

---

1950s, and the US Information Agency was created during that period. As the Soviet Union collapsed down, the US took it as an opportunity to disseminate information through educational and cultural exchange. American Centers began to build up its values in positive perceptions of the US abroad. They functioned as libraries and provided a venue for engagement between visiting American experts and local audiences.

Especially cultural exchange programs, such as the Fulbright program and youth exchange initiative called the American Field Service program are designated to cultivate favorable impressions of the US since it has become the greatest military power. The US encourages foreign educational reforms, extends existing foreign exchange programs and improves the access of foreign publics to American institutions and values.

Also the US encourages better cross-cultural understanding and revitalizes American volunteerism abroad. In order to create the favorable images, the US is keen to conduct cultural diplomacy by having skilled and committed diplomats to educate the language, culture, and history of their postings. Hence, it is required that the government should increase fellowship in the study of strategic languages and recruit young people with the requisite language skills into the diplomatic service.17

Cultural Diplomacy in the Information Age

Information Age

Since the 1970s, the fundamental transition had been foreseen and referred to as the “post-industrial society”18, the “third wave”19, and the “age of unreason”20. In the late 1990s, this

---

new transitional period is referred to as the Information Age by both academics and practitioners. The information age has resulted to the “Informatization” and “Globalization.” Increasing computer processing power and declining computer processing price show that the information age has arrived, additionally, the presence of the Internet has the average person to perform a broader range of actions on their computer more easily than ever before. Internet use is evolving so rapidly that it is impossible to foresee what will become, but its impact on human communication is tremendous in particular Social Networking Services (SNS) such as Facebook or Twitter worldwide, and Cyworld in Korea.

As Marshall McLuhan once prophesied that information technology would turn the world into a global village, the global village is getting even smaller thanks in part to SNS. Recently the line between the public and the private spheres has become blurred because of online lives on SNS. Some individuals can be revealed to the public through posting their lives onto Internet while others can be remained unknown. This is how the information age has been formed new culture.

Cultural Diplomacy in an Information Age

Cultural diplomacy in the information age to gain soft power can be defined as the ability to attract one’s culture and ideology or the agenda of political choices with sharing intelligence and capabilities with others through information technology. Within this rapidly evolving

Internet era, Joseph S. Nye points out that “Power in the information age will come not only from strong defenses but also from strong sharing.” Also he underlines “such sharing not only enhances the ability of others to cooperate with us but also increase their inclination to do so,”26 which is matched with the meaning of power, the ability to achieve one’s purposes or goals. If cultural diplomacy uses the Internet with specific purpose to shape culture, it would strengthen the soft power effectively.

Regarding concerns over rapid process of informatization and globalization, Randy Kluver states, “informatization and globalization have the capacity to transform culture, then they also strengthen them.”27 For instance, the recent proliferation of non-English media in cyberspace helps to fortify and strengthen the cultures of immigrants, rather than weaken them. Thus informatization and globalization create new cultures such as a real-time revolution and new digital competitive landscape in cyberspace. Information has become an increasingly important resource.

**Examples of New Culture in an Information Age**

The presence of the Internet in the information age provides for youth to interact globally on issues of mutual interests. It impacts on human communication and shapes human culture.

The conflict between the US and China happened in 2001, over the crash of an American spy plane with a Chinese fighter, resulting in the death of the Chinese pilot, and the forced landing of the American plane in China.28 When the news broke that a US surveillance plane and a Chinese fighter had collided, the Internet became a hub of activity.

---

for gathering and publishing information concerning the event and the subsequent political stand-off between two governments. Public interest among citizens of both nations was high, and this interest was expressed through web activity, including online chats and forums, news gatherings and hacking. The Internet became an important means of bypassing the official media gatekeeper.²⁹

The example shows how information technologies open communications between two peoples and whether information technologies overcome the differences between two nations that have the vast historical, political, linguistic, and cultural differences. The Internet’s ability to open new doors and create new understanding forms new types of behaviors, patterns and culture.

**The Future of Cultural Diplomacy in the Information Age**

The world is now beginning to recognize the importance of cultural diplomacy as the means of soft power, and it is important to implement and manage diverse cultural exchanges and developing effective communication through information technologies since the Internet has been rapidly evolving and it now affects our daily lives in some way and social media services and bringing nations and people closer together. It is hard to detach cultural policy from the on-line environment; hence policy makers need to apply extra effort in developing effective strategies of promoting cultural diplomacy through information technologies along with strategic cultural policy frameworks.

**To Have Strategic Frameworks for Cultural Policy**

Cultural policy makers should consider policy frameworks cross government including

cultural regulations such as media policy, education, copyright and censorship law, tax etc. Also they should facilitate Research and Development Centers to investigate and build up local knowledge and to effectively interact with local people.

Cultural policy makers should abandon biased opinions when dividing high art and popular art. Art and culture of all different genres and types can be popular or unpopular. Cultural policy should not be based on preconceptions about which art-forms are worthy of public support, but on cultural values that can manifest themselves in many ways, across many forms and genres. The cultural interchange projects should not be overemphasizing to specific regions and/ or countries, and should cultivate cultural interchange programs with cultural characters of each region and country.

Also, cultural policy makers should reduce unnecessary bureaucratic processes that affect culture. Many artists and cultural organizations are constrained by access to appropriate infrastructure, like venues and working space, as well as lack of capital. The ability to put in place policy settings that allow them to perform, present and produce with unlimited capital is more important and effective in ensuring their success than direct subsidies.

Finally, cultural policy makers should consider establishing partnership with funding networks that have main objectives of developing cultural diplomacy and strengthening international ties. Cultural policy needs to develop the synthesized management system for colligation and conciliation of all international cultural interchange, expand financial support, export various cultural contents and push ahead with multifarious programs for reciprocal cultural interchange out of unilateral cultural interchange.

To Develop Cultural Identity in an Era of Globalization

Cultural policy makers should generate a fundamental redefinition of the cultural identity, not to state sovereignty but the identity of societies to cope with enormous impacts on culture
caused by globalization.

Globalization has had notable effects on basic values and beliefs. As a result of the economic and cultural effects of globalization, together with the impact of mass media such as cable TV, the Internet and mobile phones, modern society is faced with blending identities.

People develop a sense of belongingness to a worldwide culture, by adopting practices, styles, and information that are part of the global culture, which then creates a global identity. However, in parallel, people continue to hold their local identity as well, based on their socialization to their local culture. Accordingly, individual identity is influenced by both a local and global identity. Therefore, it is important for cultural policy makers to maintain a cultural identity by keeping cultural values, social group, and national identity constant.

Cultural identity can be considered a soft power asset because it projects its values, culture and perspectives into cyberspace. Emerging technologies will make it easier to blend cultural activities with traditional diplomatic work by multiplying the opportunities for connections between peoples. Thus cultural policy makers should consider human resource and operating procedures to develop cultural identity through technological improvement and innovation.

**To Drive Cultural Diplomacy into Cyberspace**

Information technologies are transforming diplomacy in many of the same ways that they are transforming societies. In accordance with the transition, cultural policy makers should provide advanced training and professional development opportunities for public affairs officers having responsibility for public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy throughout their careers, with particular attention to research, polling, and the use of new media.

It is necessary to have information technology teams inside embassies to effectively respond and obtain international goodwill, political advantage and business opportunities
given that over a billion of the world’s citizens have access to the Internet. The expertise of diplomats at posts can be harnessed in virtual teams with links across the globe and apply emerging technologies fully. The use of information technology is to help conduct international relations.

To improve contact with posts or field operations, it is required to employ a highly sophisticated, integrated and dedicated world wired telecommunications system. In addition, links to other government departments and to public networks are necessary. For instance, both department and embassy websites have been developed in a timely manner. A wide variety of information should be available, such as travel advisories, current research and high-profile issues, as well as links to the constantly growing and already well-developed infrastructure of government sites and public sites.

Conclusion

Cultural diplomacy implies reciprocal cultural exchanges between peoples to promote national cultures. It is believed that cultural diplomacy would inspire people over the world despite political differences and national borders as soft power would be enhanced through cultural diplomacy. Further, it is expected to enhance engagement in people-to-people diplomacy based on mutual understandings of cultural interests.

With the arrival of the information age, information technologies are having a sweeping impact on how cultural policy makers would interact with the public. Also it influences national identity because a new culture has been formed in cyberspace and both the local and individual identities are affected. Accordingly, cultural identity of a nation has been blended due to rapid involving information technologies.

Today’s information technologies require that cultural policy makers should have
strategic frameworks for culture exchanges, develop a fundamental cultural identity in accordance with globalization and drive cultural diplomacy into cyberspace by having highly sophisticated information technology teams. Indeed, cultural diplomacy in the information age should be encouraged to effectively adapt to new technologies.

References


Hellyer, David. (1951).*The Cultural Approach To Inter-American Amity*, World


**Internet Sources:**

http://billbennett.co.nz/must-read-books-the-age-of-unreason-by-charles-hand/
http://www.thedegree.org/educn022.pdf

Calendar of the Year of Friendship. http://australiakorea50.com/


http://www.livinginternet.com/i/ii_mcluhan.htm

http://newlearningonline.com/new-learning/chapter-3-learning-for-work/daniel-bell-on-the-post-industrial-society/