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ASEF Public Diplomacy Training Webinar Series 3rd Webinar:

How relevant is cultural diplomacy in the face of a global crisis?
Thursday, 10 September 2020, 16:00 SGT | 8:00 UTC

BACKGROUND NOTE

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- What is cultural diplomacy?
- Recent trends in public diplomacy & cultural diplomacy
- Reading & watching list

What is cultural diplomacy?

Each of us is - without doubt – an informal ambassador¹ for our own country and the culture it represents. Whenever we interact with citizens from other countries, we - knowingly or unknowingly - facilitate cultural exchange between our country and another. We may, for instance, interest a foreigner in our way of life by sharing literature, music or cuisine from our home country. We may try to convey our passion for football or cricket to those who do not quite understand the intensity of a nation's interest in a particular sport. In doing so, we, everyday folks, become 'cultural diplomats' of sorts, sharing the cultural values of our country, as early travellers & traders did in the past, or artists and sportspersons do in the present

However, when we move away from the realm of daily life into that of international relations, 'cultural diplomacy' acquires very specific connotations. Cultural diplomacy is a form of diplomacy. Diplomacy, as is familiar to many of us, refers to the profession, activity or skill of managing international relations, typically by a country's official representatives abroad i.e. its diplomats. Diplomacy as the practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of states is probably very familiar to us. Here, the objective is to influence the decisions and conduct of foreign governments and officials through dialogue, negotiation, and other nonviolent means.

There are, however, several different types or forms of diplomacy, including those that target the general public of other countries, rather than its officials. Here, we enter the domain of public diplomacy, and, with it, that of cultural diplomacy.

Public diplomacy hopes to influence the general public of another nation (rather than the nation's government directly) & it does so through several different types of communication, usually by the Ministries of Foreign Affairs. For example, exchanges may be arranged between citizens of different countries. The language and literature of a country could be made easily available to the citizens of another country to learn and enjoy. These activities are excellent examples of cultural diplomacy.

¹ See What is Cultural Diplomacy at Institute for Cultural Diplomacy at http://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy

Cultural diplomacy is, therefore, a form of public diplomacy. It has often been termed the 'linchpin of public diplomacy': an accolade that points to the vital importance of this form of diplomacy to the larger enterprise of public diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy includes the "exchange of ideas, information, art, language and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding".² The goal of cultural diplomacy is to influence a foreign audience by creating a favourable image of country; and, to use that influence, which is built up over the long term, as a sort of good will reserve to win support for policies³. Cultural diplomacy, thus, works to foster mutual understanding among people of different nations.

Common forms of cultural diplomacy include live or broadcast performances of the arts, such as films, music, dance & literature. Exhibitions showcasing numerous objects of culture are always successful. Language promotion is another common tool of such diplomacy, as are university exchange programmes.

What governments seek to show foreign audiences when engaging in cultural diplomacy is its 'soft power'. Soft power, as famously defined by Joseph S. Nye, is the "ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from a country's culture, political ideals and policies."⁴

In general, cultural diplomacy can only be said to take place when formal diplomats, who serve national governments, shape and manage the initiatives. However, the role of the private sector and civil society are also critical to the exercise of cultural diplomacy. Not always do national governments produce books, music, films, TV programmes etc. This is the domain of artists & cultural professionals. Often, governments create the platforms for cultural activities and work with cultural operators to advance cultural diplomacy initiatives. In fact, Nicholas J. Cull argues that cultural diplomacy derives its credibility not from being close to government institutions, but from its proximity to cultural authorities.⁵

Recent trends in public diplomacy & cultural diplomacy

In the last decade, distinctions have come to be made between state-led 'cultural diplomacy' and civil society-led 'cultural relations' (for a quick video tutorial on this subject, check out our Reading & Watching List below)

In his excellent essay, *New Directions in Cultural Relations*⁶, Steve Green identifies some key changes happening in the world of cultural diplomacy:

- The emergence of many more & newer state actors engaging in cultural diplomacy
- A growing interest in multilateral cultural diplomacy (given that bilateral relations have long been the cornerstone of cultural diplomacy)
- A change in then goal of cultural diplomacy from mere 'self presentation' towards mutually beneficial co-operation with the other country or countries & therefore, a shift from self-promotion to values promotion.

These changes, it is said, are resulting in a new kind of cultural diplomacy, one that prioritises the establishing of mutually beneficial cultural co-operation, and deepening of mutual understanding. From the use of culture as a tool for the exercise of power, as John Holden pointed out, the new direction points encouragingly towards mutuality and respect.⁷

² See "Cultural Diplomacy, Political Influence, and Integrated Strategy," in *Strategic Influence: Public Diplomacy, Counterpropaganda, and Political Warfare*, ed. Michael J. Waller (Washington, DC: Institute of World Politics Press, 2009)

³ See Cultural Diplomacy, Wikipedia at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cultural_diplomacy#cite_note-11

⁴ Joseph S. Nye in *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (Cambridge: Perseus Books, 2004)

⁵ Nicholas J. Cull in "Public Diplomacy: Taxonomies and Histories," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616 (March 2008)

⁶ Steve Green in *New Directions* (Madrid: Real Instituto Elcano, 2010), available at: <https://ulibajo.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/new-directions-steve-green.pdf>

⁷ John Holden at the international seminar on Cultural Diplomacy: A Perspective from Catalonia, December 2009

The internet has also revolutionised public diplomacy and allowed for instant communication with foreign audiences through digital diplomacy. In fact, we live in an era of [Facebook diplomacy](#) and [Twitter diplomacy](#) by world leaders & diplomats.

In recent months, Covid-19 has also exacerbated changes in the objectives & means of public & cultural diplomacy, living as we do now in an era of resurgent & vaccine nationalism as well amid an 'infodemic' of fake news, It is in this context that

Reading & watching list:

- For a quick e-tutorial on Introduction to Cultural Relations and Cultural Diplomacy, see this lecture by Simon Williams of the British Council at the Culture and Creativity website: <https://www.culturepartnership.eu/en/publishing/cultural-diplomacy/lecture-18-1>
- For insights into the cultural diplomacy of the Philippines, read Andrea Chloe A. Wong's essay *Philippine Cultural Diplomacy: Unraveling Its Full Potential* at <http://www.fsi.gov.ph/philippine-cultural-diplomacy-unraveling-its-full-potential/>
- For an analysis of the changes from cultural diplomacy towards cultural co-operation , read Steve Green's essay *New Directions* at: <https://ulibajo.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/new-directions-steve-green.pdf>