



CHAPTER I

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

1.1. Culture

1.1.1. Definition of culture

When we speak of cultural diplomacy, it is important that we have a clear understanding of culture. The term ‘culture’ has a long history and has undergone changes in the meaning that it represents. The word ‘culture’ originally stems from the Italian term *cultura*, which appeared in Italian literature in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Interestingly, *cultura* in its original sense means “to cultivate”, referring to activities defined by the present-day term ‘agriculture’. That the French later borrowed this Italian term, first as *couture* and then as *culture* enabled the word to spread and be widely used in Europe, since by the fifteenth century, all things French had become a fascination for the European aristocracies¹.

However, by the eighteenth century, the idea of cultivation began to take on a new dimension related to human beings. Culture from then on to the early part of the twentieth century was “the province of art and literature, of intellectual endeavor and personal achievement, especially the ‘higher’ manifestations of these things. ‘Culture’ was an artifact to be visited at the gallery or to be witnessed at the theatre, and it was, at the same time a quality of attainment, through education and knowledge.”* This concept, according

¹ Julie Reeves, *Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives and Tourists*, UK: Routledge, 2004, pp. 14.

* Ibid, pp. 2-3. In this book, Julie Reeves discusses in details the evolution of and difference between humanist and anthropological concepts of culture.

to Julie Reeves, belongs to the humanist view of culture. To them, culture was the “pursuit of perfection”; therefore people had to work hard to obtain it.

This humanist concept of culture implied that culture was comprised of all the best of everything, which is in contrast to the later-developed anthropological view of culture. According to anthropologists, culture encompasses a broader range of religious, political, and creative practices that together constitute the essential character of societies and communities. That is to say culture includes even the worst of things and is the thing that distinguishes *us* from the *others*. This modern sense of culture has been increasingly accepted and officially memorialized by the United Nations declarations and UNESCO accords. For example, the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity in 2002 states that “culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs.”

The humanist and anthropological concepts of culture can also be termed respectively as traditional and enlarged concepts or categorized into high culture, which appeals to the elites and popular culture, which belongs more to the mass. With the enlarged connotations of culture, many novel terms relating to culture have begun life in academic discourses, such as political culture, economic culture, and diplomatic and security culture. In this sense, culture apparently refers to sets of values and working styles of different people and systems.

1.1.2. Chinese culture

Since we are going to investigate China’s cultural diplomacy, it is essential that we learn how culture is understood in China. As noted by Werner Meissner², the term culture as it appeared in the discussions on Chinese and Western culture among Chinese

² Werner Meissner, “Cultural Relations between China and the Member States of the European Union”, *The China Quarterly*, 2002, pp. 183.

intellectuals since the end of the nineteenth century is based on the narrow meaning. Generally, culture (wenhua) was understood as spirit (jingshen), while what was seen as material (wuzhi) was considered as civilization (wenming). The Chinese also believed in the slogan, invented in the 19th century, that Chinese learning was as substance (essence) and Western learning was for application (Zhongxue weiti, Xixue weiyong), implying that Western learning was just a kind of low-grade and outward “civilization”.

It is also noteworthy that the word culture (wenhua) in Chinese can also refer to education, which obviously belongs to the category of high culture. For example, “culture level” (wenhua chengdu) means educational level, or to “learn culture” (xue wenhua) is to acquire literacy.

1.2. Cultural Diplomacy

It is widely accepted that culture plays an important role in the conduct of modern diplomacy. It is sufficient enough to quote a DiploFoundation’s website on Cultural diplomacy:

... culture is an immense source of power capable of shaping, changing, and influencing the perceptions of public communities. From a broad perspective, culture can be used to defuse ethnic and religious prejudices and create a climate of tolerance, respect and understanding among nations, religions and entire regions. It is thus an essential medium for peaceful and tolerant interaction. From a narrower viewpoint, culture is both a diplomatic tool and an indispensable bridge that leads diplomats into the hearts and minds of their respective audience³.

Therefore, it is hardly surprising that more and more states have come to recognize the significance of and employ cultural diplomacy. Culture has been recognized as the third pillar of foreign policy, along with politics and trade. In the United States, culture is considered as the fourth dimension after politics, trade and defense. Senator J. William

³ <http://textus.diplomacy.edu>, a product of the DiploFoundation.

Fulbright, after whom one of the most prestigious educational exchange programs of the US was named, has once written, “Foreign policy cannot be based on military posture and diplomatic activities alone in today’s world. The shape of the world a generation from now will be influenced far more by how well we communicate the values of our society to others than by our military or diplomatic superiority”⁴.

Although the importance of culture in diplomacy is almost indisputable, there is hardly any definition of cultural diplomacy that is universally agreed on. Essentially cultural diplomacy refers to the use of culture as a diplomatic tool in international relations. But with different concepts of culture employed by different people in different periods of history, a question arises as to which concept of culture is adopted in international relations in general and in cultural diplomacy in particular. Is it the humanist, traditional, narrower concept or the anthropological, modern and enlarged one? In a series of research papers on cultural diplomacy of the Center for Arts and Culture, an independent cultural policy think tank affiliated with George Mason University, USA, cultural diplomacy is defined as “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding.”⁵ In this definition, the author appears to adopt the wider-ranged concept of culture. However, it might be contested by some who do not believe cultural diplomacy is for mutual benefits. As noted in the same above-quoted paper, cultural diplomacy can also be “one-way” in which one nation makes its own initiatives to promote its national language, explain its policies, or tell its story to another country or to the rest of the world. In this respect, as the author has pointed out, there is a blurred line between making the case of one nation’s perceived interests, or the “propaganda” side of the information programs, and the softer side of the cultural

⁴ Quoted in J. M. Mitchell, International Cultural Relations, London: Allen & Unwin, 1986, pp. 2.

⁵ Milton Cummings, Cultural Diplomacy and the United States Government: A Survey, Center of Arts and Culture, 2003, pp. 1; available at <http://www.culturalpolicy.org>.

diplomacy, the programs that primarily emphasize the mutual building of cultural understanding⁶.

A more inclusive definition of cultural diplomacy is cited in a research paper by Heather F. Furlburt and Bill Ivey of the Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, USA. According to the paper, “cultural diplomacy is a domain of diplomacy concerned with establishing, developing and sustaining relations with foreign states by way of culture, art and education. It is also a proactive process of external projection in which a nation’s institutions, value system and unique cultural personality are promoted at a bilateral and multilateral level.”⁷

For that purpose, each country attempts to convey one or some messages in its cultural diplomacy to foreign countries. For example, in their cultural diplomacy efforts, the Germans after 1949 aimed to project an image of “normality” while the French tried to project an image of “national greatness”⁸. The Americans during the Cold War had their own system of values that they would like to communicate to the world through its cultural diplomacy: individual freedom, justice and opportunity for all, diversity and tolerance⁹. After the Second World War, Japan, which suffered from a “culture deficit” as compared to its increasing economic power, also began its cultural diplomacy programs in order to make Japan “a more international state celebrating culture as well as a truly first-rate international power”¹⁰.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 13.

⁷ Heather F. Furlburt and Bill Ivey, Cultural Diplomacy and the National Interest: In search of a 21st-Century Perspective, The Curb Center for Art, Enterprise, and Public Policy at Vanderbilt, Washington DC; available at <http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/files/jxoZIk/CDfor%20web.pdf>

⁸ Peter J. Katzenstein, Open Regionalism: Cultural Diplomacy and Popular Culture in Europe and Asia, presented at the Annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, 2002, pp. 24.

⁹ Cynthia P. Schneider, Diplomacy That Works: ‘Best Practices’ in Cultural Diplomacy, Center of Arts and Culture, 2003; available at <http://www.culturalpolicy.org>.

¹⁰ Peter J. Katzenstein, Open Regionalism, pp. 11.

The concept of cultural diplomacy is often thought to be synonymous with the term 'cultural relations'. In fact, such authors as Werner Meissner and J. M. Mitchell¹¹ have pointed out that, though both are concerned with interactions between modern states in the field of culture, cultural relations are broader in scope than cultural diplomacy. While cultural diplomacy is considered as the business of government institutions, seeking to impress and present a favorable image, so that diplomatic operations as a whole are facilitated, cultural relations can be based on both private and public initiatives, are more neutral, and encompass the cultural influence which is not necessarily transmitted through cultural diplomacy. However, the line of division is not always clear so as to determine what activities belong to cultural diplomacy and what fall under the umbrella of cultural relations. Mitchell's examples of the negotiation and signing of cultural treaties, conventions, agreements and exchange programs, either bilateral or multilateral among governments are obviously the acts of cultural diplomacy. The case for the diffusion of Buddhism, Christianity and Marxism, Western literature and philosophy to China and Confucianism, Daoism and Chinese literature to the West, as mentioned in Meissner's, is undoubtedly a result of the cultural relations between China and the outside world, but not by means of cultural diplomacy. These are the two typical examples at the two extremes, but in many other cases along the scale, it is hard to tell the difference. Youth activities, academic exchanges and artistic exchanges which go a long way towards fostering mutual understanding between the two peoples are normally beyond governmental activity and certainly part of the cultural relations between countries. Yet these activities often form a significant section in cultural agreements and conventions among states. In order to resolve this complexity, Mitchell notes that there is a tendency to understand inter-governmental cultural agreements and conventions to permit, facilitate or prescribe cultural exchanges as cultural diplomacy and the implementation of these agreements as cultural relations.

Nevertheless, the problem of blurred distinction between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations is not to be solved as far as motivations are concerned. An Indian

¹¹ Werner Meissner, "Cultural Relations", pp. 181, and J. M. Mitchell, International Cultural Relations, pp. 2-7.

ambassador has described cultural diplomacy as using the instrumentality of 'culture' in promoting a country's diplomatic interests in commercial, political and strategic fields¹². The motivations are perfectly clear. Meanwhile, as stated earlier, cultural relations are neutral and supposed to present an honest picture, not a beautified one as in cultural diplomacy, of a country, a people to foreigners so as to achieve mutual understanding and cooperation for mutual benefits. Still, it is hardly possible to find a single activity which is not at all connected to national interests of the states involved. In another aspect, an act of cultural diplomacy which is aimed at an immediate national advantage might result in mutual understanding as a long-range effect.

There is also some similarity between cultural diplomacy and cultural propaganda, in that both are aimed at conveying a favorable image to foreign audience so as to shape their perceptions of the originating country. The term propaganda, which seemingly did not carry negative sense until very recently, around the period between the two World Wars, implies that the image might be false and often constructed to serve explicit political purposes. Yet as Mitchell notices, there might be an element, small or great, of propaganda in almost every activity of cultural diplomacy, as even in the most enlightened policies there may be the desire to persuade the foreign partners. Moreover, the persons who represent the host country also have to show their belief in the quality of their own country's culture, though in fact they do not do so.

There is a great variety of activities that a cultural diplomacy program may cover. Many people nowadays still think cultural diplomacy is limited to art exhibitions and exchanges of artists and art works. In this manner, it is more appropriately called "art diplomacy" and in fact just a small portion of the whole range of cultural diplomacy. Heather F. Furlburt and Bill Ivey indicate that at a minimum, cultural diplomacy should include (1) the actions of diplomats in the cultural sphere, (2) the governments' shaping of media content so as to influence international public opinion, (3) long-term efforts to achieve cultural mutuality, and (4) intervention in informal cultural interactions such as

¹² His Excellency P.S.Sahai, former Indian Ambassador to Malaysia, Sweden and Russia, quoted at <http://textus.diplomacy.edu>.

trade and immigration in order to produce a policy outcome¹³. In further detail, the following activities can be incorporated in cultural diplomacy of a country:

- + Educational exchanges and scholarships
- + Cultivation of ties with foreign journalists, academics, key foreign leaders, etc.
- + Programmed cultural visits of artists, such as painters, dancers, musicians, etc.
- + International broadcast of cultural events, symphonies, concerts, etc.
- + International culture related conferences, symposiums and workshops
- + Language promotion
- + Publications
- + Promotion of tourism
- + Promotion of popular culture such as movies, popular music and television industries, etc¹⁴. *

With regard to aims and tools, the scope of cultural diplomacy also overlaps to a certain extent with the concept of public diplomacy. Both not only deal with governments but also primarily with the public in the target countries, as opposed to traditional diplomacy in which one government works officially and directly with another government. Major instruments of public diplomacy are also publications, motion pictures,

¹³ Heather F. Furlburt and Bill Ivey, Cultural Diplomacy and the National Interest, pp. 2.

¹⁴ <http://textus.diplomacy.edu>, a product of the DiploFoundation.

* For China, some activities tend to be more dominant than others. China has made full use of international culture related conferences, symposiums, workshops and exhibitions and actively been promoting Chinese traditional, popular culture and Chinese language. Meanwhile, there are several restrictions that China has to face in the areas of international broadcast and publication, especially when it comes to language barrier.

cultural exchanges, educational exchanges, and radio and television.* However, public diplomacy is broader in range than cultural diplomacy, as it embraces the responsibility to explain and defend government policies to foreign audiences as well. Therefore, it can be said that culture and information are the two essential functions of public diplomacy¹⁵.

For the conduct of cultural diplomacy, today's governments often set up a separate ministry for cultural affairs to formulate and execute the country's external cultural policy, establish mechanisms for funding and organizing cultural projects, as well as to supervise cultural missions abroad. Meanwhile, in some countries, the external cultural affairs are handled by a department affiliated to the foreign ministry, for example in France, Italy and Germany, or the education ministry like in the case of Thailand nearly a decade ago. In diplomatic missions abroad, most countries maintain a cultural affairs section, normally headed by a cultural attaché. Some countries establish a cultural center in the host country in order to promote culture, language and enhance understanding via inter-cultural interactions. The cultural center may be under the patronage of the embassies or a non-governmental organization working independently of the government.

1.3. Soft Power

In discussing cultural diplomacy, there should be some mentioning of the newly-created but widely used term 'soft power'. Coined in 1990 by Harvard University Professor Joseph S. Nye, the term 'soft power' means "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments"¹⁶. A country's soft power derives from three sources, namely culture, political values, and foreign policies. These three sources can be regarded quite appropriately as three aspects of the broadly-defined culture: culture with

* General knowledge on public diplomacy can be obtained at <http://www.publicdiplomacy.org>, a website sponsored by the United States Information Agency Alumni Association.

¹⁵ Terry L. Deibel and Walter R. Roberts, "Culture and Information: Two Foreign Policy Functions", *The Washington Papers*, Volume IV, USA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1976.

¹⁶ Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York: Public Affairs, 2004, pp. x.

conventional connotations, political culture, and diplomatic culture. Hence, soft power appears to be an outcome of the state's cultural diplomacy. Furthermore, the ultimate goal of the cultural diplomacy is to shape foreign perceptions in a favorable way, which implies soft power. Therefore, soft power is obviously what a country wants to achieve in their cultural diplomacy.

There are many examples of soft power. Despite a sea of criticisms of its cultural values and foreign policies, the United States still possesses huge resources that have produced soft power for the country. As regards culture, it has maintained a great variety of educational, academic and cultural exchanges, with such well-known programs as the Fulbright Program and Ford Foundation scholarship. These high-culture programs have played significant role in promoting American soft power. Moreover, much of the US soft power also comes from its world-leading brand names such as Hollywood, Harvard, Microsoft, and Michael Jordan. The values of American society, which are "open, mobile, individualistic, anti-establishment, pluralistic, voluntaristic, populist, and free",¹⁷ are appealing to many people in the world. The Soviet Union too enjoyed a certain level of soft power thanks to its great achievements in science and technology, its classical music, ballet, and athletes. Japan in the 1990s used to cause the "Cool Japan" phenomenon with elements of its popular culture such as animated movies, Manga – the Japanese comic books, Sushi, J-pops (Japanese pop music), and Japanese fashion. According to a report posted in the Businessweek on 4 August 2003, Japan also owns three of the top 25 multinational brand names, namely Toyota, Honda and Sony¹⁸, which contribute considerably to Japan's soft power.

Despite standing in contrast to hard power which refers to military and economic might, a nation's soft power is not totally unconnected with its hard power. According to J.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 47.

¹⁸ Ibid., pp. 86.

S. Nye, soft and hard power can either reinforce or interfere with each other. To put it simply, military and economic power can bring about fear or admiration in others.

Nye's discussions of soft power offer a deeper insight into the realm of cultural diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy might be more successful if a state has good political values and legitimate foreign policies. As Nye puts it, "the values a government champions in its behavior at home (for example, democracy), in international relations (working with others), and in foreign policy (promoting peace and human rights) strongly affect the preferences of others. Governments can attract or repel others by the influence of their example." That also means domestic politics and foreign policies can set limits on the soft power and therefore obstruct the government's efforts in cultural diplomacy. On the other hand, cultural diplomacy contributes to promoting the political values and facilitates the fulfillment of foreign policy's goals of that nation.

1.4. Measure of success

An evaluation of cultural diplomacy should always be done in the context of the country's foreign policy objectives. It should be noted, however, that like the value of the arts, the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy is not easy to measure. J. S. Nye also asserts that attraction has a diffuse effect, creating general influence rather than producing an easily observable specific action. Furthermore, the results can only become perceptible over the long term period rather than immediately. Therefore, as Milton Cummings predicts, there will be always debate about how important cultural programs are in the real world. However, this author's citation of a cultural diplomacy example is very telling and demonstrates clearly the success of cultural diplomacy in an individual case. The former president of South Africa, F.W. DeKlerk made a visit to America under the sponsor of the United States Information Agency. He was later reported to say that this visit was a defining event that changed his ideas about blacks and whites living together. It was him who released Nelson Mandela from prison and began the transformation of South Africa to

a multiracial democracy.¹⁹ This example also indicates that in order to evaluate cultural diplomacy, it is practical to apply the methods of conducting survey, questionnaire and in-depth interviews so as to find out changes in minds, attitudes and perceptions of the targets as a result of the cultural diplomacy programs, certainly in a long-term, or at least medium-term period of time.

1.5. Limit of scope in this paper

1.5.1. Concepts

Since the anthropological concept of culture has widely replaced the humanist view in social sciences in general and in international relations in particular, this paper will also employ it when discussing cultural diplomacy. With regard to the scope of cultural diplomacy, this paper will take into account the four areas pointed out by Heather F. Furlburt and Bill Ivey as stated above. Focus will be put on activities and exchanges in the field of the broadly-defined culture, particularly arts, education, language promotion, popular culture, media and publications, and tourism, which are initiated, sponsored or inspired by the government. However, non-governmental cultural exchanges will also be paid with due attention due to the blurred distinction between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations.

1.5.2. Research Objectives. Countries Selected. Time Span.

This paper is aimed at the following objectives:

1. To examine the forms and contents of China's cultural diplomacy towards Southeast Asia in the period from the early 1990s to present.

2. To investigate how effective are the activities and actions of China in their cultural diplomacy in the region. In other words, it is attempted in this paper to give some observations about China's cultural diplomacy in the target countries.

¹⁹ Milton Cummings, Cultural Diplomacy and The United States Government, pp. 14-15

For the purpose of this study, Thailand and Vietnam are selected as a study case. It is because Thailand and Vietnam are both big and important countries in mainland Southeast Asia, thus supposed to be main targets of China's cultural diplomacy. However, though both countries now maintain good relations with China, their historical and social backgrounds vis-à-vis China are different. Therefore, the selection of these two countries is useful in that the effectiveness of Chinese cultural diplomacy is to be investigated in different settings within mainland Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, this paper is not aimed at comparing, but contrasting China's cultural diplomacy and its effectiveness in Thailand and Vietnam, since a meaningful comparison requires much more research time and efforts.

The time span selected for this study is from the early 1990s to present, because by the early 1990s China began to rise economically while actively integrating in regional and international politics and economy.

1.6. Research methodology

This paper is mainly based on documentary research. Reviews of relevant books, academic papers and newspaper articles, many of which were obtained from Internet-based resources, were done in order to provide a picture of the forms and contents of China's cultural diplomacy in Thailand and Vietnam, followed by analysis of its effects and effectiveness. Furthermore, primary-source documents which were obtained from relevant bodies and organizations have also been used. In addition, the researcher has also conducted talks and interviews with four university professors and lecturers, including Dr. Panithan Wattanakorn at Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Dr. Somphop Manarangsun at Chinese Studies Center, Asian Studies Institute, Chulalongkorn University, a lecturer at Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand, and Dr. Luc at the Department of Northeast Asian Studies, Institute for International Relations, Hanoi, Vietnam; one officer from the Thai MOFA's Department of Information, Ms Chansuda Rakpolamuang at the Thai MOC's Permanent Secretary Office, two officers from the Thai MOE's Bureau of International Cooperation, and one cultural affairs officer in the Hanoi-

based Chinese Embassy in order to gain knowledge and points of view concerning the researched topic.

It is noteworthy that there is little academic literature dealing directly and comprehensively with the topic. Therefore much of the documentary research is based on newspaper articles, especially those in the Bangkok Post and The Nation in Thailand, the China's People's Daily Online, and various online newspapers in Vietnam.

For the second objective of this research, which is to measure the effectiveness of China's cultural diplomacy in Thailand and Vietnam, the researcher took advantage of already-done surveys and polls about attitudes towards China, as well as points of view expressed by Thai and Vietnamese people in newspapers and other types of publications.

1.7. Limitations

Due to limited command of Thai and Chinese languages, some existing materials dealing with the chosen topic might be beyond the knowledge of the researcher.