

Cultural Diplomacy: What is it? What is it not? And why should Taiwan care?

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‘ ... the idea of soft power dates back to ancient Chinese and Indian philosophers such as Lao Tsu and Kavtilya. Kung Fu and Yoga came to America long before MacDonald’s went to Tiananmen Square and discotheques came to Delhi’ (Chidanand Rajghatta, ‘Sweet are the ways of mango diplomacy,’ *Times of India*, 22 November, 2009).

As Chidanand Rajghatta observes in the quotation above, cultural diplomacy has long been recognised as a means of international engagement and has its origins far beyond Europe or America. The first recorded example of China’s ‘panda diplomacy’ occurred in 685 when Empress Wu Zetian gave a pair of pandas as a gift to Japan’s Emperor Tenmu. Nicholas J. Cull (2019: 63) reminds us that the Indian ruler Ashoka the Great practiced cultural diplomacy by exporting Buddhism to neighbouring kingdoms, while the French Enlightenment of the 18th Century inspired the whole of Europe. Meanwhile, Michael L. Krenn (2017: Chapter 1) dates the beginning of America’s cultural diplomacy to 1787 when Thomas Jefferson sent Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte De Buffon, a dead moose to challenge his thesis of American ‘degeneracy’.

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Despite – or perhaps because of – this long history cultural diplomacy remains an elusive and contested concept and practice. Used interchangeably with ‘cultural relations’ and ‘cultural exchange’, cultural diplomacy is often confused with public diplomacy and soft power. Governments around the world, including those of Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), privilege the attraction of cultural programmes to generate familiarity with their countries and elicit support for their national values, political agendas, and foreign policy ambitions. However, it is not clear that governments always understand adequately how to mobilise the talents of the cultural industries to further engage with audiences overseas. In this paper I will outline the concept of concept of cultural diplomacy and differentiate it from other types of strategic communications. In particular, I will consider the limitations of cultural diplomacy and suggest that governments work best by facilitating cultural relations, nurtured by the cultural industries themselves with little political involvement. This in turn connects with my understanding of soft power that focuses more on political culture than other definitions that converge on its more ‘soft’ and cultural aspects.

The paper draw upon a variety of case-studies to introduce these concepts, but will focus specifically on Taiwan which is only just beginning to appreciate the value of both cultural diplomacy and cultural relations. I will proceed to answer three questions:

1. What is cultural diplomacy and how does it relate to soft power and cultural relations?

2. Why are cultural diplomacy and cultural relations important for Taiwan in particular?
3. How has Taiwan practiced cultural diplomacy and cultural relations, and can we assess their value and impact?

What is cultural diplomacy?

In 2006, Ambassador Cynthia P. Schneider published a paper with the title, 'Cultural Diplomacy: Hard to Define, But You'd Know It If You Saw It' – hardly helpful and lacking the precision so beloved of the social sciences. However, the vague character of cultural diplomacy is part problem, part opportunity. It challenges the social scientist who likes to categorise and box the concepts she encounters, but it also opens up new layers of analysis that defy restriction and permits fluidity. Certainly we need to be aware of the fluid nature of cultural diplomacy and cultural relations and beware attempts to classify strictly the cultural activities we witness, for cultural diplomacy survives and thrives through interactions among multiple actors on multiple levels. One way to understand this is by exploring the connection between cultural diplomacy and soft power. As I will argue in this paper, this is a particularly relevant discussion for Taiwan that is rich in both soft power and cultural assets. Understanding this relationship will help us appreciate how Taiwan may use its cultural capacity to communicate better its soft power.

Cultural diplomacy is *not* soft power. Soft power is a *resource*, while cultural diplomacy is an *instrument*. Soft power may be based on the attractive qualities – the ideas, principles, values, and ultimately the behaviour and therefore credibility and moral authority – of the agent in question. It is a

political concept and advocates must recognise that generating soft power turns on the political rather than the artistic culture. Its success is predicated on the fact that actions speak louder than words, and that how governments, states, political institutions and actors organise, behave, treat people at home and abroad, and the friends they choose all communicate a far more commanding narrative than words or art alone. It is the power of example, of moral authority.

Cultural diplomacy, an instrument for communicating soft power generated elsewhere, is defined as the deliberate act of cultural engagement overseas designed to achieve purposes beyond art for art's sake. The term describes purposeful programmes or activities sponsored or organised by the government and its agencies that wish to use culture as a way of advancing political, strategic, or national interests. It is a government-led practice designed to reinforce the national and international representation undertaken by envoys.

Its near cousin, cultural relations represent forms of engagement without, and sometimes despite government intervention. They tend to be organised and undertaken by the cultural industries themselves and are more concerned with arts for art's sake, rather than pursuing specific political objectives. Nick Cull describes this kind of activity as having 'outcomes that can be loosely beneficial rather than specifically goal oriented' (Cull, 2019: 62). Cultural relations, working in the long-term, are most effective when they maintain a distance from government and political agendas.

Cultural relationships may also be forged in everyday arenas of engagement, for example through the presence of overseas students in a nation's higher education system, or through interaction with diaspora communities. By working through civil society rather than through government sponsored

activities and programmes, cultural relations provide opportunities to promote mutual understanding that are not present in cultural diplomacy that may proceed with significant political baggage. One notable and successful example of how such engagement can promote intercultural interaction and understanding is the East-West Divan Orchestra, founded by Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said to bring together musicians of Arab and Jewish background.

Of course, the distinction between cultural diplomacy and cultural relations is one major site of fluidity. Political forces, both domestic and foreign, do interfere with the activities of the cultural industries, thereby eroding the idea that cultural relations are by nature always non-political.

First, some governments believe that the pursuit of foreign policy objectives through cultural means requires a level of intervention if not control. In the US, tensions between official participants in cultural diplomacy, especially the Department of State, and the private cultural sector have been acute since the State Department decided to interfere in their organisation and activities after 9/11 (Krenn: 154).

Second, some governments believe it is necessary to build and protect local cultural industries: South Korea, France and elsewhere use quota systems to limit the number of Hollywood movies shown in local cinemas (Freeman, 2003).

Third, governments are enablers for cultural relations. They help build and maintain the systems and process that allow the creative and cultural industries to work and engage in outreach activities. This may be achieved via the creation of more lenient tax regimes, or helping to secure visas for travel into or out of the country, building stadiums, subsidies for museums and heritage

sites, etc. It is difficult to imagine the regional success of the Hallyu Wave and KPop without substantial government investment following the 1997 financial crisis (Hong, 2014).

Fourth, culture has been used as a tactical instrument in other ways to achieve specific political goals or objectives. The most visible are cultural boycotts that are organised to protest the political behaviour of governments. This goes against the idea that culture promotes mutual understanding, preferring instead to restrict normal cultural relations (Mitchell, 1986: 6). Examples include artistic and cultural boycotts in Apartheid-era South Africa; and the tit-for-tat boycott by the US and USSR of the 1980 and 1984 Olympic Games.

Fifth, the threat of 'cultural imperialism' gives governments a powerful incentive to intervene in the cultural life of their country and limit access to cultural products from outside national borders. As Lee has noted, 'A target may find a sender's promotion of cultural and political values (such as democracy) to be an act of coercion, not persuasion. A sender's cultural and political values themselves may be interpreted by a target state to be the potential source of threat to society' (Lee, 2011, p.22). Thus it is important to recognise that audiences can interpret cultural diplomacy in an entirely different way from how its creator or source intended. After all, culture is highly subjective and will be interpreted by audiences in different ways, either because of artistic differences or political conviction. The purpose of cultural diplomacy or cultural relations may be mutual understanding and respect, but recipients may see the motivation in a very different light. Consuming a cultural product does not necessarily result in a change in opinion or behaviour towards the source (McConnell, 2008).

Fraser (2003: 229) reminds us that after the end of the Second World War, 'Many French intellectuals liked American jazz music, but politically they embraced the slogan "Yankee Go Home!" For the French, America was at once fascinating and repugnant.'

Maintaining as much distance as possible – between both governments and the cultural industries, and between promoting culture for specific political agendas and engaging in art for art's sake - is certainly worthwhile and contributes to the success of cultural diplomacy. However, if we accept that the success of cultural diplomacy is in the gift of the audience (in fact, audiences decide whether to interpret a particular programme as cultural diplomacy, propaganda, or some other form of influence) then it is clear that creating a robust firewall between governments and the cultural industries is not a panacea.

For the remainder of this paper I will use the term cultural diplomacy to encompass cultural relations, unless in looking at discrete practices I wish to be specific about their distinction.

In understanding how actors, organisations and states interact culturally with audiences overseas, we are also obtaining a glimpse into the political cultures that generate soft power. Thus we should not focus exclusively on cultural products – films, television programmes, art, literature, theatre, food, etc. – but we also need to appreciate the social and political ideas that help shape these products: freedom of thought, expression and movement, equality, social justice, transparency and accountability, and a strong and autonomous civil society. For a democratic society like Taiwan, the political culture provides a robust

foundation for its cultural industries to create, experiment, challenge existing narratives, and reach out beyond national borders; and to confront political interference from its more authoritarian neighbours while presenting a stark contrast to them. Protecting artistic and cultural endeavours often means having to also protect social and political values.

Why is cultural diplomacy considered such a valuable activity that states devote to it such huge amounts of resources and create institutions and government departments tasked with its practice? Cultural diplomacy reflects a normative, some may claim idealist, approach to international relations, one that reflects the significant contribution of social constructivism to international relations theory. Based on Alexander Wendt's *Social Theory of International Politics* (1999) social constructivism introduces culture, ideas, and identity as important building blocks in how we understand each other and ourselves. Most importantly, it acknowledges our capacity as social creatures to interact based on shared, understood, and respected norms and identities. Such approaches have found their way into the literature on soft power. For example, Craig Hayden describes how the value of soft power lies in its 'recognition that traditional metrics of "power" in international affairs should be inclusive of ideational factors: what people believe can shape or constrain the agency of a political actor and their ability to effect change' (Hayden, 2011: 5).

The discourse on cultural diplomacy refers repeatedly to its capacity to facilitate 'mutual understanding'. For example, Milton C. Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as 'the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual

understanding' (Cummings, 2003: 1). Parvan Varma, the head of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, has noted that culture 'can shape, alter, and impact the ideas and opinions of public communities. From a wide-ranging perspective,' says Varma,

culture has the capacity to resolve tensions and prejudices – ethnic, religious, communal, national and international. It can create a climate of tolerance, respect and understanding among nations, religions and entire regions. It is thus an essential medium for peaceful and tolerant contact and communication (Varma, 2007:128).

Jacques Delors noted that cultural diplomacy promotes greater tolerance, mutual respect and understanding, helping societies interact in 'a new spirit which, guided by recognition of our growing interdependence and a common analysis of the risks and challenges of the future, would induce people to implement common projects or to manage the inevitable conflicts in an intelligent and peaceful way' (Delors, *et.al.*, 1996:23). Cynthia Schneider (2006: 1) described cultural diplomacy as 'the use of creative expression and exchanges of ideas, information, and people to increase mutual understanding'.

Others observe in cultural diplomacy an explicit strategic agenda that goes beyond serving 'mutual understanding'. Thomas Jefferson wrote to James Madison on the subject:

You see I am an enthusiast on the subject of the arts. But it is an enthusiasm of which I am not ashamed, as its object is to improve the

taste of my countrymen, to increase their reputation, to reconcile them to the respect of the world, and procure them its praise (quoted in Schneider, 2006: 1).

President Theodore Roosevelt believed that 'a nation with a strong culture (and a common one) will be able to win more battles by diplomatic bargaining than by force of arms' (Collin, 1985:5). When he was the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic of Germany, Willy Brandt famously called culture the 'third pillar of foreign policy' after politics and trade. As Mitchell (1986: 1) points out, culture is the fourth pillar for 'some' Americans 'after politics, trade and defence'. My own research reveals that cultural diplomacy is a high priority for the government of Vietnam, supporting trade and economic power - the second pillar? (Rawnsley and Ngac, 2017).

After the Cold War cultural diplomacy was exiled to the wilderness by the US government, believing that with the collapse of Communism in Europe its mission was complete. Natalia Grincheva's important 2010 survey of American cultural diplomacy reveals a continuous fall in funding for cultural programmes since the end of the Cold War (Grincheva, 2010).

However, after 9/11 the government rediscovered culture, but as a way of combating extremism and 'winning hearts and minds' (a decidedly Cold War phrase). In the conclusions to his history of American cultural diplomacy, Michael L. Krenn quotes Helena Finn, a senior diplomat, who in 2003 summarised this turn in American thinking. Cultural diplomacy, she said, 'is one of the most potent *weapons* in the United States's *armory*', and she hoped the government would appreciate that 'in waging its self-proclaimed war against

extremism, winning foreigners' voluntary allegiance to the American project will be the most important prize of all' (Krenn, 2017: 154-5. Emphasis added).

In 2005, the US Department of State pronounced cultural diplomacy the 'linchpin of public diplomacy':

... for it is in cultural activities that a nation's idea of itself is best represented. And cultural diplomacy can enhance our national security in subtle, wide-ranging, and sustainable ways. Indeed history may record that America's cultural riches played no less a role than military actors in shaping our international leadership, including the war on terror. For the values embedded in our artistic and intellectual traditions form a bulwark against the forces of darkness (US Department of State, 2005:1).

Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, brought together the strategic and the normative dimensions in June 2016:

Culture has to be part and parcel of our foreign policy. Culture is a powerful tool to build bridges between people, notably the youth, and reinforce mutual understanding. It can also be an engine for economic and social development. And as we face common challenges, culture can help all of us, in Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia, stand together to fight radicalization, and build an alliance of civilizations against those trying

to divide us. This is why cultural diplomacy must be more and more at the core of our relationship with today's world.²

Aside from strengthening specific strategic or foreign policy-oriented objectives, the normative dimension of cultural diplomacy remains a significant asset for a nation's soft power capacity. Cultural diplomacy builds relationships, credibility, and trust over the long-term, and is especially important when the formal relations between governments or diplomatic envoys are strained or damaged. While it cannot compensate for unpopular policies or misguided behaviour by governments – think of the damage to US credibility and moral authority after images of Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib were posted - it can forge an emotional connection between artist and audience and between societies that may bridge and possibly heal political divisions. Writing on the American experience of 'arts diplomacy', John Brown says that cultural engagement 'provides audiences with unique and memorable experiences. ... Art creates powerful impressions that are often remembered forever ... arts diplomacy can make people abroad associate America with the kind of unique moments that make their lives worth living' (Brown, 2009: 57).

And yet ...

² 'An new strategy to put culture at the heart of EU international relations', 8 June 2016, https://ec.europa.eu/malta/news/new-strategy-put-culture-heart-eu-international-relations_en

Culture has long been the least funded aspect of national expenditure in many parts of the world, including those areas where cultural diplomacy is well developed. The US Congressional Budget Justification for the Department of State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs, Fiscal Year 2019, shows a year-on-year decrease in funds allocated to cultural programmes³; while President Trump's 2018 budget plan cut \$971 million from the national budget by eliminating four independent cultural agencies (the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting). In the UK, government cuts to arts funding had reached over £100 million by March 2019, a fall of 13% in just a decade of austerity. In comparison, America's military budget increased by over 10% in 2018/19, while the UK's defence spending increased by £1.6 billion in 17/18 and grew by a further 1.4% in 18/19. Despite rhetoric to the contrary, it seems that hard will always trump soft power, and governments in democratic societies – faced with regular electoral cycles, pluralism, short-term interests, and the need to show immediate returns on government investment - will always struggle justify spending on culture, an often ephemeral area sometimes lacking tangible outcomes and operating in the long-term.

Cultural diplomacy: Taiwan's strategic rationale

As I have argued elsewhere (Rawnsley, 2012; 2014; 2017) Taiwan has considerable soft power capacity but often struggles to know how to use it

³ See <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/FY-2019-Congressional-Budget-Justification-Department-of-State-Foreign-Operations-and-Related-Programs.pdf>

effectively. The liberal-democratic political culture, consolidated after a succession of direct presidential elections that have established the routine turnover of power between competing political parties, sets Taiwan apart from its more authoritarian neighbours. Most recently, the decision to further LGBT rights and legalise gay marriage is a signifier of Taiwan's democratic progress; while the vigorous debates in the Legislature, in the media, and on Taiwan's streets about major political and social issues – including gay marriage – are likewise important markers that a liberal-democracy has taken root. The 2014 nationwide Sunflower Movement was perhaps the most dramatic signifier of Taiwan's democratic consolidation and communicated a powerful narrative to the international community. In finding the sources of Taiwan's soft power, one need look no further than the political culture and especially the activism of civil society and the raucous discussions and disagreements about major policy issues that occur each day in multiple public spaces. Whether one agrees or disagrees with the proposition in question is less important than recognising the freedom to own and voice different opinions. This should be the central narrative of Taiwan's international communications.

Taiwan's cultural diplomacy performs two valuable services in generating and communicating the island's soft power capacity. First, it is an instrument of statecraft, organised by the government and its agencies (including its diplomatic missions) to persuade global audiences to pay more attention to Taiwan, sympathise with its seclusion from mainstream world politics, and support its foreign policy agenda. Thus, cultural diplomacy then has a strong strategic dimension; and given Taiwan's predicament – its relations with the PRC, the declining number of formal diplomatic allies, its exclusion from the world's

major multinational organisations and fora, and its lack of visibility in the world's media (what I have called the 'disabling environment'. Rawnsley, 2017) – the role of cultural diplomacy in building Taiwan's profile is imperative.

A primary concern with cultural diplomacy is encouraging international audiences to become more familiar with Taiwan (for data on global familiarity with Taiwan see Rawnsley, 2017). We can refer to the 'hierarchy of impacts' developed by Leonard, Stead and Smewing in their study of public diplomacy to demonstrate Taiwan's predicament. The hierarchy envisages four possible results of public diplomacy: increasing familiarity; increasing appreciation (seeing an issue or challenge from the perspective of another actor); engagement (which may lead to attraction and then possibly impact on trade and investment, tourism, education etc.); and finally influence (Leonard, Stead and Smewing, 2002: 9-10). Of course we should not expect public diplomacy programmes to follow this hierarchy in linear fashion, but it is impossible to influence another state or its people without first making sure they are familiar with who you are. Taiwan's cultural diplomacy is focused on increasing visibility and familiarity, building the profile and relationships that may help Taiwan's international engagement climb the hierarchy towards influence.

Culture can help Taiwan explain itself to the world, increase prestige, and encourage respect from the international community. It will not solve all the problems Taiwan faces in the hard power domain – consuming Taiwan's culture will not persuade governments to switch their diplomatic recognition from the PRC – but it may contribute to greater understanding about, and empathy for Taiwan that might have long-term positive effects. Cultural diplomacy can help explain *Why Taiwan Matters* (Rigger, 2011).

Second, cultural diplomacy connects the political system to civil society. As noted above the creative industries, the foundation of cultural relations, require a level of social, political and artistic autonomy to function, but they also need good relations with the government when political assistance is necessary. It goes without saying that the creative industries are a reflection of the political culture in which they operate. As culture can help us understand, engage with, come to terms with, satirise, and challenge power wherever it is encountered, art can be a powerful political instrument. Taiwan's cultural diplomacy and cultural relations reveal society's liberal character.

President Ma Ying-jeou seemed to understand this. He claimed that 'the most important asset' of Taiwan's foreign policy 'is our democracy, our way of life, our willingness to maintain cross-Strait stability, and our determination to fulfil our obligations to the international community' – everything one expects from a soft power rich society. The problem was that the Ma government privileged the communication of culture, and especially traditional Chinese culture, over all other narratives. Taiwan thus squandered the opportunity to showcase its liberal-democratic political culture and its vibrant civil society, except by accident when, through the Sunflower Movement, civil society communicated its own narrative.

Under President Tsai Ing-wen's leadership public diplomacy has improved. Many of the problems I identified in my 2017 paper published in *The China Quarterly* have been (albeit partly) remedied, especially in terms of Taiwan's government now occupying a larger space in social media. Representative Offices too are taking far more seriously how they communicate with their host countries, with the office in London hosting regularly a range of

cultural events (although again with room for improvement in terms of outreach and intended audience). While much of Taiwan's cultural diplomacy still occurs in traditional centres of activity, namely the US, Europe, and Japan, President Tsai's Southbound Policy means that far more programmes are now developed for, and in co-operation with Taiwan's neighbours in Southeast Asia. Moreover, the cultural diplomacy has turned away from showcasing Taiwan as the 'preserver of traditional Chinese culture', the dominant theme under President Ma, to cultural and ethnic diversity, with many activities and programmes celebrating Taiwan's encounter with multiple languages, cultures and traditions. I will provide some examples of these activities below.

Taiwan's practice

I have previously been critical of the Ministry of Culture (MoC), its formation, organisation and work. While I maintain that the abolition in 2012 of the Government Information Office (GIO) was a mistake (the GIO provided a valuable nexus for the inter-governmental coordination of external communications thus providing consistency in messaging and resource allocation. Rawnsley, 2017) – I accept that, with hindsight, my judgement of the MoC has been a little harsh. The level of activity and investment undertaken by the MoC since its creation in 2012, together with its commitment to building strategic relationships with the cultural industries at both home and overseas, indicates a strong awareness of how cultural diplomacy and cultural relations work and how they should be organised. In the limited space available here I

cannot do full justice to the wide range of activities undertaken by the MoC and its partners inside and outside government. Nor can I discuss in detail the considerable number of programmes, activities, tours, etc. that are organised by the cultural sector itself without government intervention. Any piece of art that travels outside Taiwan – a dance group, a movie, a craft exhibition – is an example of cultural relations, just as all visits to Taiwan by cultural producers and artists provides an opportunity for interaction, exchange, and the wider appreciation of Taiwan. ‘Inbound’ cultural diplomacy is just as important as exported activities, especially given the low familiarity with Taiwan overseas.

In this section, I will highlight just some of the ways Taiwan’s Ministry of Culture practices cultural diplomacy by connecting their practices to the overview provided in previous sections of the paper. However, it is worth noting here the size of the Ministry of Culture’s budget. While exact data is not easy to obtain, it is instructive that the reports prepared by the 2018 National Conference on Cultural Governance revealed that in 2019, the MoC’s budget ‘will *for the first time* account for over 1% of the central government’s annual budget, while the budget for supporting the cultural agencies of local governments is set to grow by 300%’ (emphasis added).⁴ The fact that the MoC chooses to celebrate a budget of over just 1% indicates first how small the budget had been until 2019; and second, just how much the MoC had accomplished with inadequate finances, usually due to developing lucrative public-private partnerships.⁵

⁴ ‘National conference outlines vision for Taiwan’s cultural governance’, 26 September 2018, https://english.moc.gov.tw/information_196_89635.html

⁵ According to information available from the National Statistics Bureau education, science and culture have spent more annually since 1976. In 2013, expenditure in these areas amounted to NT\$599,058 million, growing to NT\$690,852 million in 2017. However, the fact that this data does not

The MoC as facilitator

Governments and government agencies perform a facilitative role in cultural relations. By providing funding and subsidies, lenient tax regimes and access to travel visas, and legislation directed specifically at building and protecting the cultural and creative industries, governments help construct and maintain an environment in which the cultural organisations can develop their own programmes and relationships. In 2015, the Art Taipei festival attracted participants from North America, Europe, East and Southeast Asia (as well as China), and was co-organised by the MoC with the Taiwan Art Gallery Association and the Taiwan External Trade Development Council.

Such partnerships are the basis of the 2018 National Conference on Cultural Governance, organised by the MoC and involving participants from local governments as well as the private cultural sector. Such partnership also informs the work of the Taiwan Creative Content Agency (TCCA), established by the MoC in January 2019. At its launch (as the Cultural Content Institute in December 2018), the MoC pledged the TCCA would ‘support the nation’s creative industries and help introduce Taiwan’s cultural output to the world’. With \$NT10 billion from the Ministry the Agency would ‘serve as a proxy between the government and private sectors ... dedicated to facilitating resource integration, interdisciplinary collaboration, and investment’.⁶

disaggregate science, education and arts means we have to treat such data with caution when considering culture.

https://eng.stat.gov.tw/public/data/dgbas03/bs2/yearbook_eng/y091.pdf

⁶ ‘Taiwan’s Cultural Content Institute to be Launched in 2019’, 25 December 2018, https://english.moc.gov.tw/information_196_96249.html

Other facilitative developments include the MoC's successful negotiation with other government agencies on a range of changes to legislation that benefit the arts and culture. For example, in 2017 the Ministry secured agreement from the Council of Labor Affairs to soften the rules for foreign passport holders who are employed in Taiwan's cultural sector. The MoC has also overseen amendments to the Cultural Heritage Preservation Act, as well as moving towards new legislation around the management of Taiwan's historical buildings and monuments.

In terms of funding, the MoC also offers a range of very generous grants and scholarships designed specifically for intercultural engagement. These include grants for translations of literature written by Taiwanese authors, to allow publishers to participate in international book fairs (most notably the annual Frankfurt Book Fair), and to develop collaborative cultural projects with partners in other parts of the world, including Southeast Asia (the Emerald Initiative) and with West and South Asia (the Lazurite Initiative).

The government's role as facilitator is captured in the 2018 Culture White Paper: 'Creative freedom and diversification', it said, 'are the two driving forces behind cultural development. The government will [create] a fertile and supportive ecosystem for creative advancement, artistic growth, and everyday access to culture and the arts'.⁷

Strategy

⁷ Available from https://mocfile.moc.gov.tw/files/201812/541fdcce-38ef-435e-8856-0b79e2110ef0.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1xUZkkAP_XA57t5emq2NsQzC5v9bBcLuYmSf-XJoThB9SB6rvb0xcMdw4

In contrast to the Ma Ying-jeou presidency when external engagement focused on communicating Taiwan as the preserver of traditional Chinese culture, under Tsai Ing-wen cultural diplomacy activities reflect two key strategic areas:

(i) promoting indigenous cultures to reflect Taiwan's demographic diversity; and
(ii) strengthening through cultural programmes the government's Southbound Policy.

Examples of the former include programmes organised through the Spotlight Taiwan initiative. Sponsored by entrepreneur Samuel Yin with the explicit aim of helping 'promote Taiwan's soft power to the world', Spotlight Taiwan co-operated with the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka (Japan) to showcase Hakka culture in 2015. In September 2018, Taiwan's Minister of Culture, Cheng Li-chun, signed an accord in France to display Taiwan's indigenous heritage at the new musée de quai Branly in Paris. Hakka art decorated the Taiwan Pavillion at the 2015 Frankfurt Book Fair (which hosted Kao Yi-feng, an author of Hakka literature), while Hakka culture featured alongside Nanyuan, Taiwanese and aboriginal cultures at the grand opening of the Taiwan Cultural Centre in Tokyo. These initiatives are wrapped up in a greater concern with heritage preservation, including professional training by both the Vatican and the Ironbridge Institute at the University of Birmingham (UK).

Cultural commitment to the Southbound Policy is institutionalised through the creation in 2015 of the Southeast Asian Advisory Committee to help build 'mutually beneficial partnerships' (note the customary normative language). A range of initiatives help deepen relations with Taiwan's southern neighbours, including both inbound and outbound cultural programmes.

Examples include the MoC's sponsorship of authors from Southeast Asia to visit and tour Taiwan to meet readers, organisation of the month-long Asia-Pacific Arts Festival, and a series of agreements with museums in Thailand to showcase there Taiwan's cultural heritage and diversity. One of the key programmes designed to strengthen the Southbound Policy is the Youth Cultural Gardeners programme which, building on the success of the Youth Ambassador programme, facilitates exchanges of young people from Taiwan and Southeast Asia. Beginning in 2016, the programme sent 49 young artists to communities in Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Malaysia to interact with local residents through art, dance, film and other forms of cultural expression. The programme connects with the Mekong Cultural Hub that, with seed money from the MoC and Cambodian partners (Cambodian Living Arts), helps creative practitioners from Taiwan and across the Mekong region, make connections in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam.⁸ Events organised in April 2019 were themed around 'Diversity, Inclusivity, Southbound' and brought to Taiwan cultural actors from across Southeast Asia and, for the first time, Australia and New Zealand.

Political interference

Taiwan is trapped within a disabling environment defined chiefly by the PRC. This means Taiwan is denied membership of such international organisations as the United Nations and the World Health Organisation, while formal diplomatic allies continue to dwindle. The PRC's interference in Taiwan's cultural sphere shatters the illusion that art and culture exist independently, impervious to

⁸ The 2018 report, *The Mekong Mapping Project*, is available at <https://mekongculturalhub.org/wp-content/uploads/MekongCulturalHub-MappingProject.pdf>

political intervention for political ambitions.

In July 2018, the Ministry of Culture issued a strongly worded statement criticising the PRC's political intrusion in two cultural programmes overseas in which artists from Taiwan were participating. The statement began: 'Respect for artistic creation and freedom of expression have always been at the core of the Ministry of Culture's policies.' It explained that the Fang Shiang Dance Theatre had been invited to perform in Italy and had been issued identification cards depicting the flag of the PRC; while the performance of the Juann Choir at the World Peace Choral Festival in Vienna was cancelled after pressure from China. The statement concluded: 'We call on the international community to support the universal values of freedom of artistic creation and freedom of expression, and not to let the purity of international cultural exchange events be sullied by political manipulation by China.'⁹

Then in April 2019, the PRC's Ministry of Culture announced it was cancelling several scheduled trip to China by Czech cultural organisations, including the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra. This was in response to the Czech Ministry of Industry refusing to exclude from a meeting a diplomat from Taiwan.¹⁰

Finally, in August 2019, the Twitter feed of Taiwan's Presidential Office Spokesperson reacted to the China Film Administration's decision to prohibit Chinese films and filmmakers from attending the 56th Golden Horse Awards:

⁹ Ministry of Culture, 'Why should cultural exchanges be sullied by China's interference?', 28 July 2018, available from https://english.moc.gov.tw/information_196_8840.html

¹⁰ It just so happened that the Mayor of Prague, Zdenek Hrib, had been a exchange student in Taiwan and said the orchestra could perform in Taipei instead.

‘Political intervention in art,’ said the statement, ‘is not acceptable. Taiwan will continue to spare no effort to safeguard the freedom of artistic expression.’

In addition to demonstrating the close connection between politics and culture, these examples also suggest further the soft power generated by artistic endeavours. The cultural product itself is less important than the values – artistic autonomy, freedom of creative expression – that require protection.

Conclusions: Does it Work?

Assessing the impact of cultural diplomacy is difficult, sometimes impossible.

Unlike other attributes of a state’s power culture is difficult to quantify. We can count guns and tanks, measure the size of the economy, and even calculate how many foreign tourists or international students have crossed our borders. But cultural engagement works on an emotional level, often across many years if not decades, and depends on building relationships based on trust, respect and understanding. Perhaps Frank Ninkovich (1966:58) was correct to conclude that at the end of the day cultural diplomacy is an ‘act of faith’.

Of course this assumes that the purpose of cultural diplomacy, cultural relations, and cultural exchange is to ‘move the needle’ of opinion about the source and help achieve foreign policy ambitions. While this does guide much of what we might call cultural diplomacy, it is only a partial part of the story. Art for art’s sake, seeking connections with people through culture, can help realise the more normative dimension of cultural relations: mutual respect and understanding, tolerance, familiarity, and empathy. These may in the long term contribute to foreign policy success, but what if they don’t? Does that mean all the activities, programmes, initiatives, and exchanges organised in the name of

cultural diplomacy are a waste of time? Is all that government sponsorship, all those agreements with museums, galleries and theatre groups overseas, all those partnerships between the government and the private sector merely futile gestures?

For societies like Taiwan, trapped in its own 'disabling environment', cultural diplomacy is an essential way of managing the external challenges it faces. Culture can grow the familiarity that will help people across the world know Taiwan better and help Taiwan advance up the 'hierarchy of impacts'.

Moreover, cultural diplomacy reflects Taiwan's soft power capacity. By helping development of autonomous cultural expression within civil society, the Ministry of Culture is sending a powerful message about the government's commitment to liberal-democratic values. It would be wrong to say simply and clearly that arts and culture do not have a role to play in generating soft power, even if we do accept that the source of soft power lies in the political, rather than the artistic culture. The latter is a clear reflection of the former. The MoC facilitates the freedom of creativity in Taiwan and, through inbound and outbound cultural diplomacy, throws a spotlight on the way a liberal-democracy works and progresses, and how governments can work *with*, but without interfering *in* civil society.

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