

Cultural Diplomacy – Literary Representations Of Soft Power And Smart Power: Tradition and Modernity

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The present paper undertakes to highlight that cultural diplomacy emphasizes people-to-people connection by means of tangible cultural patrimony and intangible cultural heritage - as a fundamental dimension of cultural diversity in contemporary world. Cultural and public diplomacy shape a new paradigm of international relations, where the interdependent connection of art – culture – history – geography politics – economic development define its evolution, and enable a dialogue of cultures transcending geographical boundaries or political interest.

Literature and spirituality enable survival and endurance, temporal continuity as well as spatial connection and coherence in the relation between East and West, tradition and modernity, past memory and foreseeable future, despite and regardless of any social turmoil, economic growth or decline, or waves of national rise and fall.

Keywords: cultural and public diplomacy; art and spirituality; soft power and smart power



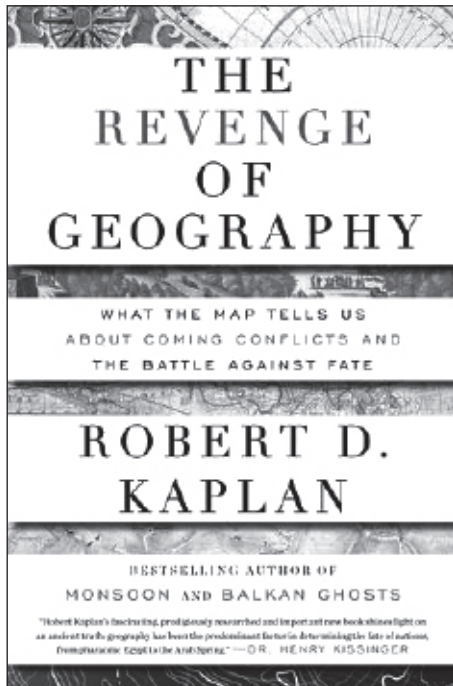
*Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain
 shall meet,
 Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment seat;
 But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
 When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from
 the ends of the earth!
 ("The Ballad of East and West" – Rudyard Kipling)*

*„Most people are principally aware of one culture,
 one setting, one home; exiles are aware of at least two,
 and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of
 simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow
 a phrase from music – is contrapuntal.”
 (Edward Said - Reflections on Exile and Other Essays.
 Convergences: Inventories of the Present)*

Renown American author and geopolitics expert,

Robert Kaplan, utterly stated that “a good place to understand the present and to ask questions about the future, is on the ground, travelling as slowly as possible.” [Robert Kaplan, *The Revenge of Geography*, 2013, p. xiii] Furthermore, we might add that the best way to enlighten and revive the past is to keep its memory alive by reading and writing.

Storytelling proves the most effective means of accomplishing “cultural empathy” between individuals, thus literature connects people – individuals and communities alike – and places; highlighting the relation between art and context – viewed as geographical territory, literary area, space vs. place, as well as the notion of individual and collective positioning in society. Fiction empowers the individual to travel the world by means of narrative imagination, have access to any part of the world notwithstanding



physical distance and relate to the universal matters of the human being, moreover, “a book can connote the place where it was read better than an old photograph can.” [Robert Kaplan, *In Europe’s Shadow*, p. xxix]

However, to sum up, one needs to find a balance between reading and discovering, fiction and reality since “one book means freedom, too many books, though, act as a barrier to further discovery of the world. When you have a ready quote in your head for every new vista before your eyes, you can no longer see clearly.” [Robert Kaplan, *In Europe’s Shadow*, p. xxvii]

After all, history is primarily a ‘story’ that may be narrated from a multitude of perspectives or, as epitomized by Dmitri Trenin, “history is usually what people make of it ... often, factual reality is overtaken by a parallel reality of perceptions.” [Dmitri Trenin, *The End of Eurasia*, 2002, p. 29] Human beings evince an innate proclivity to employ “mental maps” – a subjective perspective and selective view of the world – to read and interpret art, culture, literature, history, primarily emerging from educational background, geographical positioning in space and time, political conditioning and socio-economic welfare, leading to an inescapable polarity based on pre-established biases which can only be overcome by an awareness of and ability to accommodate different cultural patterns. In this context, the dominant perspective called centrality “is a tendency to place one’s own country in a central position, at least, in a more central position than it would be in others’ maps and to group the rest of the world around it.” [Jaap van Ginneken, J., *Understanding Global News*, London, Sage Publications, 2009, p.4] A reliable alternative solution to this is Franco Moretti’s widely acclaimed concept of “distant reading” enabling

a reader to be a more accurate and sagacious interpreter of the world. [Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees. Abstract Models for a Literary Theory*]

The more recent phrases, *cultural dialogue*, *cultural empathy*, *cultural diplomacy* or *cultural intelligence*, highlight the thorough scholarly preoccupation and multidisciplinary engagement with the role and reinvention of culture as a perpetual and inextinguishable resource that humankind has always resorted to as the most enduring and powerful pillars of its millennial existence.

Elisabeth Plum’s definition of the notion of cultural intelligence as a most effective and reliable ability in today’s interconnected world whose dynamism in terms of cultural exchanges and ethnic migration has reached an unforeseen peak, is relevant at this stage of our analysis:

Cultural intelligence is the ability to act appropriately in situations where cultural differences are important, and the ability to make yourself understood and to establish a constructive partnership across cultural differences. Cultural intelligence is judged on the results of the encounter, not on the participants’ intentions or thoughts. An intelligent result of a cross-cultural encounter is the creation of a shared understanding across all the participant cultures ... Cultural intelligence is a broad concept which is related to emotional intelligence and social intelligence, but cultural intelligence is wider than either of these because it sees both feelings and human relations as culturally determined, and not as identical across cultural boundaries. ... Seen as a broad concept of intelligence, cultural intelligence is a set of abilities/skills which can be developed throughout life. ... Cultural intelligence has three dimensions: intercultural engagement, cultural understanding and intercultural communication. This tripartite division follows the classic division into emotion, cognition and practice [Elisabeth Plum, *Cultural Intelligence: The Art of Leading Cultural Complexity*, Middlesex University Press, London: 2008, p. 19-21]

Moreover, connectedness and fragmentariness seem to co-exist in a paradoxical ambivalence that may be alleviated by an enhanced role of the humanities nowadays, particularly at a time when “not-for-profit” studies or sciences – liberal arts in particular – apparently undergo a time of crisis.

Does global citizenship really require the humanities? It certainly requires a lot of factual knowledge, and students might get this without a humanistic education – for example, from absorbing the facts in standardized textbooks (assuming these are correct). Responsible citizenship, however, requires a lot more: the ability to assess historical evidence, to use and think critically about economic principles, to compare differing views of social justice, to speak

a foreign language, to appreciate the complexities of the major theory and practice of liberal education in Western tradition ... The idea that one will take responsibility for one's own reasoning, and exchange ideas with others, in an atmosphere of mutual respect for reason, is essential to the peaceful resolution of differences, both within a nation and in a world increasingly polarized by ethnic and religious conflict. [Martha Nussbaum, (2010) „Skills for Life”, TLS, April 30, pp. 13]

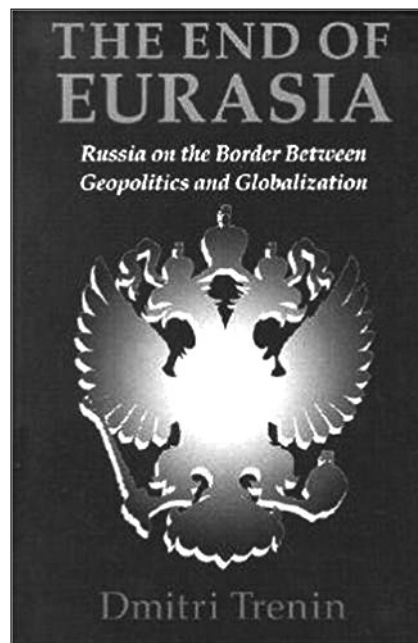
Now, more than ever, we urgently and essentially need humanities to help us overcome the “civilization of the spectacle” as defined by Mario Varga Llosa or “civilization of illiteracy” - as defined by Mihai Nadin - and revive by means of literature the relevance of the national in a globalized world as well as restore the power of the word versus image.

No other time than ours has had more of the future in it – and less of the past. The civilization we are entering is no promised land. The literate heritage might not be perfect, but it protects from the often disquieting changes that we all – enthusiasts, pessimists, critics – experience. In the palace of printed books, we were promised not only eternal truth and beauty, but also prosperity. One of the results of the conflict is that the visual has already surpassed the written, though not always for the better. [Mihai Nadin, *The Civilization of Illiteracy*, Dresden University Press, 1998, pp. vii-viii]

Therefore any dialogue of cultures requires an ability called cultural empathy as an effective means of “cultural shock” (Alvin Toffler) in today's multipolar world or narrative imagination (Martha Nussbaum)

Citizens cannot relate well to the complex word around them by factual knowledge and logic alone. The third ability of the citizen, closely related to those two, is what we can call the narrative imagination. This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person's story, to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have. The cultivation of sympathy has been a key part of the best modern ideas of democratic education, in both Western and non-Western nations. [Martha Nussbaum, (2010) „Skills for Life”, TLS, April 30, p. 15]

Special mention, in this context, should be made to the international significance and echoes of recipients of Nobel Prize in literature, for instance, Pearl Buck and Mo Yan – whose writings are reflective for travelling eastwards to China and worldwide, by means of art, performing an intercultural analysis of the role and significance of storytelling in connecting people – individuals and communities alike – and places; highlighting the relation between art and context – viewed as geographical territory, literary area, space vs. place, as well as the notion of individual and



collective positioning in society.

Moreover, Orhan Pamuk and William Golding highlight the dialogue of cultures connecting hearts and minds through the power of the written word and the artful process of telling stories. Literature is the most valuable resource in the study of cultural geography as it facilitates the reader to envision the reality worldwide, to bridge the gaps between individuals and fellow human beings worldwide, between different and distant communities, between the centre and the periphery: “Good literature erects bridges between different peoples, and by having us enjoy, suffer, or feel surprise, unites us beneath the languages, beliefs, habits, customs, and prejudices that separate us ... Literature creates a fraternity within human diversity and eclipses the frontiers erected among men and women by ignorance, ideologies, religions, languages, and stupidity.” [Mario Vargas Llosa, *Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech*].

On a similar occasion, upon receiving the Nobel Prize Award for literature, Orhan Pamuk acknowledged that “literature is never just a national concern; the writer ... must have the artistry to tell his own stories as if they were other people's stories, and to tell other people's stories as if they were his own, for this is what literature is.” [Orhan Pamuk, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech] The cultural echoes of Nobel Prize Awards, whose recipient will enjoy worldwide recognition, transgress both local and national borders thus opening up new territories of the mind full of literary significance as well as connecting the centre and periphery. “As for my place in the world – in life as in literature – my basic feeling was that I was not “in the centre” ... Today I think that I share this feeling with most people in the world. In the same way, there was a world literature, and its centre, too was very far



away from me.” [Orhan Pamuk, *Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech*]

In his Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, William Golding set forth the idea that language has the power to connect people and cultures, from nearby or far away, enabled by the talent and craft of the artist who is “...endowed with a sensibility and a power of communication, a capacity to ‘put things across’ which events and the majority of people to whom events happen do not possess.” [Huxley “Tragedy and the Whole Truth:” in *Music at Night*, London: Chatto&Windus, 1960 print p. 17]

“Words may, through the devotion, the skills, the passion, and the luck of writers prove to be the most powerful thing in the world. They may move men to speak to each other because some of those words express not just what the writer is thinking but what a huge segment of the world is thinking. They may allow man to speak to man, the man in the street to speak to his fellow until a ripple becomes a tide running through every nation.” [Golding, Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech]

It is particularly this approach reinforcing the **power of culture** not only to connect individuals to a homogenous and coherent community, to enable national survival throughout millennia, to endure dominance and preserve its tangible and intangible heritage as the most valuable asset of continuity and worldwide harmony.

People are connected like never before. New opportunities are opening across the globe for exchange and cooperation. But these are also turbulent times – times of uncertainty and economic crisis, when societies are ever more diverse and vulnerable. This is why dialogue and mutual understanding are so essential. We need new forms of exchange between cultures, between societies and within them, on the basis of respect and equal dignity. Dialogue is the best way to strengthen the solidarity of humanity against the pressures of fragmentation [Irina Bokova, Director-General UNESCO, address on the occasion of the event “Dialogue of Cultures” 13 April 2013]

As the concepts of culture and language are imbued with notions of power, it is worth focusing on their interdependence as theorized by French social scientist Pierre Bourdieu,

“Culture provides the very grounds for human communication and interaction; it is also a source of domination. The arts, science, religion, indeed all symbolic systems – including language itself – not only shape our understanding of reality and form the basis for human communication; they also help establish and maintain social hierarchies. Culture includes beliefs, traditions, values, and language; it also mediates practices

*by connecting individuals and groups to institutionalized hierarchies. Whether in the form of dispositions, objects, systems, or institutions, culture embodies power relations. Further, many cultural practices in the advanced societies constitute relatively autonomous arenas of struggle for distinction. Intellectuals – the specialized producers and transmitters of culture – play key roles in shaping arenas and their institutionalized hierarchies. [David Swartz, *Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu*, The University of Chicago Press: 1997, p.4]*

Language is the foundation of culture, embedding and preserving the identity of a nation and ensuring its millennial survival. Moreover, a language with international circulation aspires to and potentially achieves global status, not for any quantitative reasons, such as the number of speakers at a particular time worldwide, the widespread use and acceptance of a language is directly related to the notion of power and dominance: military, economic or cultural, and, more recently, technological advancement as well as new information and communication technologies, market growth and competitiveness, mass media or the promotion of cultural values. “Why a language becomes a global language has little to do with the number of people who speak it. It is much more to do with who those speakers are ... Without a strong power-base, of whatever kind, no language can make progress as an international medium of communication [...] A language has traditionally become an international language for one chief reason: *the power of its people.*” [Crystal, D., *English as a Global Language*, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p.7]

The more recent notion of cultural vitality highlights the role of art, with its wide range of representations, addressed both to the elite as well as mass audiences, has become a consistent priority of contemporary national and international policies, the fourth pillar of sustainable development, bringing to the forefront the essential and vital connection between tradition and modernity revived by (hi)story – thinking backward and employing the power of synthesis and analysis in addition to looking forward enabled by intellectual design and narrative imagination, cultural empathy and emotional intelligence – valuable skills in a planetary world. Culture also interacts actively with other areas of life: education, science, different forms of communication and is strongly related to the notion of human rights and peaceful development.

The *power of the word* is enlivened and enlightened equally by literature and spirituality, testified by a few cases we have selected to endorse our thesis that cultural, public or religious diplomacy evince a twofold purpose: promoting individuality and creating connections by mutual awareness. It is imperative to understand the distinction between genuine, vital as



opposed to targeted, mechanistic forms of cultural promotion.

In this respect, mention should be made of previous records of East-West diplomacy undertaken by: in the 17th century, Nicolae Milescu Spatarul – scholar, geographer, diplomat and author of the landmark of his *Travel Notes and Description of China*, to 20th century examples of cultural or religious diplomacy as promoted by St. John Maximovitch, Archbishop and Wonderworker of Shanghai and San Francisco – and his Orthodox mission to China, and literary critic and theoretician George Calinescu's account of his travel to China.

A most recent and topical speech delivered by Ana Blandiana, occasioned by acceptance of the honorary title of Doctor Honoris Causa, commanding us to preserve and defend our culture as the essential means of survival and enduring civilization. [Ana Blandiana, "Istoria ca viitor" speech occasioned by the acceptance of the honorary title of Doctor Honoris Causa in March 2016] Despite overwhelming globalization and its inescapable consequences, we should be aware that cultures are reluctant to integration or assimilation, therefore the phrase "European culture" is self-contradictory concept. [Mircea Malita, Dan Dungaciu, *Istoria prin ochii diplomatului*, Rao: Bucuresti: 2014, p. 27] In the Romanian context, mention should be made of the 150-year continuous activity of *Transylvania Review* as the most pro-active publication undertaking the mission set forth by ASTRA to "enable culture – as a common heritage – to shed its light onto all the offsprings of Romanian people." [Enciclopedia Romaniei]

At a critical time in the evolution of humankind, linguistic unity and cultural continuity still stand as the most enduring pillars of preserving national identity precisely at a time when the year 2018 celebrates both national unity and continuity for the Romanian people.

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This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian Ministry of Research and Innovation, CCCDI – UEFISCDI, project number PN-III-P1-1.2-PCCDI-2017-0821/ INTELLIT, within PNCDI III.

