

Vietnam's Cultural Diplomacy Towards ASEAN Countries in the Digital Age

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ABSTRACT

Vietnam has used cultural diplomacy as a significant diplomatic tool to cooperate and integrate with the world in general and ASEAN regional countries in particular. In the era of globalization, cultural diplomacy has played a vital role as a bridge which connects many nations with the aim of enhancing the mutual understanding and maintaining the friendships between Vietnam and other countries. More importantly, cultural diplomacy helps Vietnam to boost national image and reputation to the world. This paper presents the importance of cultural diplomacy in the context of international integration and Vietnam's cultural diplomacy strategy to ASEAN countries and discuss some kinds of cultural activities which Vietnam utilizes to promote the Vietnamese culture abroad. Furthermore, the paper also mentions the achievements and limitations of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy in the digital age.

Keywords: *cultural diplomacy, mutual understanding, identity, digital age*

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, all countries are interested in strengthening and promoting soft power, thereby creating a national synergy beside to hard power. For Vietnam, soft power stems from the country's own values such as history, tradition, culture, humanistic ideology, the conceptual system of human life and worldview and the accretion, care and promotion of these values through the policies of the Party and the State as well as the awareness and action of each Vietnamese person at home and abroad. Culture is a bridge to diplomatic relations. By improving diplomatic relations, cultural exchanges bring countries closer together. In Vietnam's history of diplomacy, cultural diplomacy has been used successfully in resolving conflicts and establishing sustainable friendships with other countries. Throughout history and the geographical location as the connection point between the North and the South, the West and the East, Vietnamese culture is influenced by many major cultures, including Chinese, Indian and Western cultures. However, the Vietnamese people still preserve their traditional identities, skillfully absorb and select the external cultural quintessence that suit their own culture, customs and beliefs, thus avoid the assimilation of great cultures. As a result, cultural diplomacy is identified as a pillar, along with political diplomacy, economic diplomacy and overseas Vietnamese-related affairs to create a comprehensive and modern Vietnamese diplomacy. Cultural diplomacy helps Vietnam to boost the image of a modern country still retaining traditional values, a country that is open and friendly, loyal to friends, respects partners, responsible for world affairs. In addition, information and images about the country, culture, history, people and policies of Vietnam have been promoted, disseminated and widely spread, helping people in the world understand, sympathize and love Vietnam, thereby leading to the decision to choose Vietnam as a destination for cooperation, investment, travel, and they will tend to use of Vietnamese branded products and services or even support Vietnam's views and policies in the international forum. Besides, Vietnam specifies the importance of cultural diplomacy and a long-term strategy proposed for cultural diplomacy will continue to enhance Vietnam's prestige in the world ("Vietnam's cultural diplomacy", 2021).

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Vietnam's Cultural Diplomacy in Asean Countries

a. *The Orienting of Vietnam's Cultural Diplomacy*

Viet Nam's cultural diplomacy has gained significant achievements in theory, policy and practice of this new field of foreign activity, meticulously identifying the theory, the concept, the connotation, and the method has helped to implement cultural diplomacy successfully. The theory and policy formulation of cultural diplomacy has been carried out in a very scientific way. Vietnam Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son said that "Cultural diplomacy together with political diplomacy and economic diplomacy was identified as the three pillars of Vietnamese diplomacy" ("Vietnam's soft power", 2020). Cultural diplomacy is ostensibly the driving force in the strategic shift of national ambitions and priorities: from "want to befriend" to "search for friends and reliable partners" to an aspiration for Vietnam to be a responsible member of the international community (Pham Sanh Chau, 2009). Vietnam identifies five main activities of cultural diplomacy, including the first point is developing and opening relations with countries and regions having many relations with us; the second point is promoting, strengthening and deepening understanding about other countries; the third one is promoting the national image and the image of Vietnamese people in the international arena; the fourth point is taking steps to help Viet Nam have many heritages recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); the final point is acquiring the quintessence of human culture to enrich the national cultural identity. In addition, Vietnam's cultural diplomacy resonates more with audiences in Asia than in the rest of the world; and this demonstrates the geographical and cultural proximity with shared values (especially Confucianism), histories and interests and help identify what might be shared culturally to advance the relationship with foreign nations. Furthermore, cultural diplomacy can help preserve Vietnam's national security and connect with both the domestic constituency and the overseas Vietnamese to nurture a sense of national identity. These are characteristics that Vietnam shares with its Asian neighbors ("Culture is an important pillar", 2022).

b. *The Activities of Vietnam's Cultural Diplomacy to Abroad*

Cultural diplomacy activities in place through international forums, conferences, seminars or major holidays, the day of establishing diplomatic relations of Viet Nam with other countries, targeting the main guests and communities of other countries working and living in Viet Nam. Throwing Festival of the three countries Viet Nam - Laos - China from 2014 to present; The "Vietnamese National Culture" day is held every year. Especially, the successful organization of the United Nations Vesak Celebration 2014 and 2019 has contributed to promoting the image of Viet Nam – a peace loving country, which always endeavor to act for peace, cooperation and social progress in the world. In addition, Vietnam also build the Vietnam cultural center in Laos with the mission to promote the image of the country and people of Vietnam to Lao people and foreigners living in the land known as millions of elephant nation and to cultivate the special relationship and solidarity between Vietnam and Laos through cultural diplomacy. Also, Vietnam successfully held the festival of arts and culture between Vietnam and ASEAN countries such as Cambodia, Thailand, and Indonesia. Moreover, Vietnam also carried out the exhibition among many countries in the multilateral cooperation. More significant exhibition is graphic painting with 10 ASEAN countries; silk culture festival day between Vietnam and ASEAN. In addition, the exhibition of Vietnam folk art paintings was held in Laos, the exhibition of traditional textile identity of Vietnamese ethnic groups at Cambodia Textile Museum, the exhibition of Vietnamese architecture in Thailand. In terms of Vietnamese cuisine, exhibition on Vietnamese cuisine to promote the cuisine with ASEAN countries. Last but not least, cultural diplomacy through Vietnam's cultural week or day at overseas which is an effective form of cultural diplomacy activities. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2008).

Evaluating The Achievements of Vietnam's Cultural Diplomacy in Asean

a. *Achievements*

First, cultural diplomacy activities between Vietnam and ASEAN countries have contributed to maintaining the environment of peace, stability, consolidation and strengthening the friendship and comprehensive cooperation with ASEAN countries.

Second, the cooperation and exchange with ASEAN nations are always enhanced with many dynamic activities in the direction of being substantive and effective.

Third, the promotion of Vietnam's image to ASEAN countries through cultural diplomacy which is placed in the focused overall foreign policy of Vietnam.

Fourth, the effective cultural diplomacy activities for the overseas Vietnam communities in preserving and promoting traditional cultural values.

Fifth, cultural diplomacy activities between Vietnam and ASEAN countries are growing in width as well as depth. This demonstrates the thoughtful recognition about the role of cultural diplomacy.

b. *Limitations*

First, the quality and effectiveness of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy has not yet met the requirements set forth. The activities between Vietnam and ASEAN countries are still inclined to the format and it has not determined the purpose and each type of audience.

Second, underexploiting the potential of cultural diplomacy of the overseas Vietnamese communities.

Third, the limitations and inadequacies of the tourism industry negatively affect the efforts of national cultural diplomacy.

3. CONCLUSION

When political diplomacy and economic diplomacy are proved helpless with cross-border disagreements, cultural diplomacy will become an optimal tool to remove the knots flexibly. In addition, cultural diplomacy is the diplomatic activities of a country towards the outside through culture so as to obtain the achievements of foreign policy. Cultural diplomacy activities in Vietnam give the opportunities to ASEAN countries to mutually understand the culture and get closer together. Furthermore, proposing solutions to boost the cultural diplomacy which is the solid pillar of modern Vietnam's diplomacy, will be an urgent requirement in the current situation.

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