

HUANG PEI

The Art of Cultural Diplomacy:
Deconstructing Parameters
of Soft Power in Global
Peace Dialogues



INTRODUCTION

As human societies vigorously strive for progress and peace, a significant challenge dominating the political landscape is the difficult transition from hegemony to harmony. Fundamental to this issue is the pervasive absence of equitable dialogue. Frequently, we prioritize a single culture (one language) and mainstream narratives as universal standards, thereby marginalizing voices of diverse groups within societies, and overlooking the diversity and value of distinct cultures across civilizations. The manipulation and shaping of power not only govern the form and substance of narratives but also, in effect, monopolize control over social discourse and the distribution of benefits. If the human endeavor is to cultivate a society that fosters peace and wellbeing for all life forms on Earth, and to forge an environment that facilitates healing, it is crucial to embrace a narrative enriched with collective wisdom and moral imagination. Such a narrative must commit to ensure that the stories it tells are inclusive, multifaceted and just. However, in discussions on global issues, mainstream peace dialogues are typically confined to the realms of international relations, geopolitics, and identity narratives.

Yet, it is seldom recognized that irrespective of how the dialogue progresses, most nation-states remain entrenched in the binary thinking of war and peace. This prevailing narrative not only deepens the rifts between various social strata within cultures but also has the potential to amplify the tensions and disputes between different civilizations.




In an age marked by rapid globalization and the fast-paced evolution of information technology, the reach of conflicts and crises has extended well beyond traditional geopolitical boundaries. Public/cultural diplomacy, designed as a mechanism to facilitate friendly dialogues and collaboration between cultures, often unveils inherent contradictions in practice. Routinely employed as strategic instruments, these efforts seek to influence foreign perspectives and sculpt tailored narratives, striving to command a leading role in shaping national image. However, when cultural diplomacy is construed as a symbolic representation of soft power, its tangible impact remains elusive and difficult to quantify, epitomizing a "double-edged sword" within the modern political milieu: it harbors the capacity to foster dialogue and understanding yet simultaneously poses the risk of intensifying divisions and perpetuating cycles of violence. In the realm of cultural diplomacy, different nations integrate their interests and ideologies, each targeting nuanced political

or economic objectives. Nonetheless, this approach frequently engenders propagation of unidimensional narratives, which inadequately recognize and empathize with the profound diversity and intricate complexities ingrained in societies. In such circumstances, the professed "understanding" often takes the form of a one-sided, agenda-driven narrative, which fails to engage with the principles of equality in cultural exchanges, the richness of social emotions, and the profound expression of cultural connotations. This egocentric perspective, subtly at work, serves to underscore and amplify disparities, thereby reinforcing existing biases and potentially setting the stage for deeper misunderstandings and disputes.





The introductory Chapter sets the stage with Paul Kennedy's conception of the decline of the United States, probing the fundamental shifts that have redefined international political paradigms in the post-Cold War era. Providing a counterpoint to this pessimistic perspective, the section interweaves Joseph Nye's theory of soft power with Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations, integrating a cultural dimension into the fabric of international relations, thereby shedding light on the complex and evolving dynamics of the global power matrix. This section clarifies how China, in formulating a localized concept of soft power, responds to the "China threat theory" narrative. It outlines the transition from the rhetoric of "peaceful rise" to "peaceful development" as manifested through tangible actions within the "Belt and Road" initiative. Subsequently, the paper directs its analytical lens to a reappraisal of the historical and cultural significance of the ancient Silk Road. Serving as a crucial conduit for trade and cultural exchange over the centuries, the Silk Road chronicled the tumultuous periods of conflict, prosperity, and turmoil



while also preserving an invaluable legacy of cultural, artistic, technological, and religious exchanges. Today, the "Belt and Road" initiative, envisioned as a modern extension of the Silk Road spirit, is dedicated to deepening the interconnectivity and collaboration between cultures, thereby aiming to amplify the stature and influence of the Eurasian continent within the global system.

Nevertheless, as the initiative advances, it grapples with intricate challenges arising from cultural differences and geopolitical disputes. Media coverage, across both domestic and international channels, tends to be disproportionately focused on political and economic agendas, neglecting the nuanced interpretation and broad dissemination of cultural and historical significance. In the trajectory of cultivating cultural soft power and nurturing people-to-people bonds, the prevalence of language hegemony, the cultural conflicts, and the limitations inherent in national identity narratives have surfaced as prominent barriers. The chapter concludes that, although historical interpretations sometimes comes with controversies, heritage sharing in cultural diplomacy demonstrates far-reaching value potential and societal impacts. This practice of sharing should not be simply confined to the established category of cultural preservation and promotion but should expand its perspective to a global scale, fostering a deeper,



critical reflection on prevailing values through the investigation of shared human history. This process redefines traditional notions of preservation, extends beyond simply honoring and perpetuating history and traditions; it embraces innovative communication and connection methods, fostering a culturally interdependent environment that integrates diverse perspectives, enhances cultural representation, and facilitates social engagement.

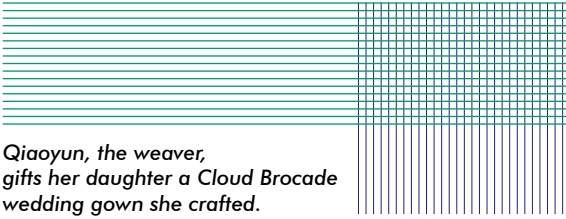


Chapter two delves into three exemplary cases of urban cultural diplomacy: "Milan Expo 2015: Nanjing Week," "Crafts Regeneration, Heritage Revival: International Designers in Residency," and "The Dedication of the Sindberg Statue to Aarhus,

Denmark." The chapter seeks to analyze the role of intangible cultural heritage as an integral component of national culture and diplomatic strategy, focusing on how it contributes to building soft power and projecting symbolic power. Through comparative analysis on these cultural endeavors, the chapter probes how the interplay between culture and politics contribute to the shaping and promotion of national and urban images. It scrutinizes how, intangible cultural heritage, amidst the force of global capitalism and consumerism, is translated from its native cultural and geographical traits into tangible economic assets within the global cultural market through commercial circulation and collaboration. Further analysis reveals the complex entanglements among cultural values, political motivations, and commercial interests throughout the transformation process. It critically assesses their roles in either facilitating or impeding the global exchange and understanding of cultures--how they impact the shaping of cultural identities and the formation of cultural perceptions on a global scale.



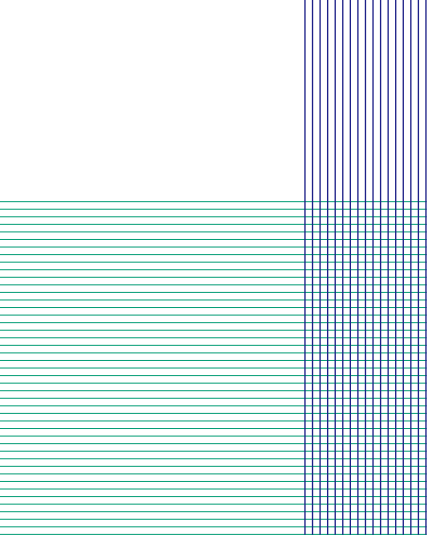
Nanjing Velvet Flowers in Dior Spring/Summer 2024 Menswear Collection



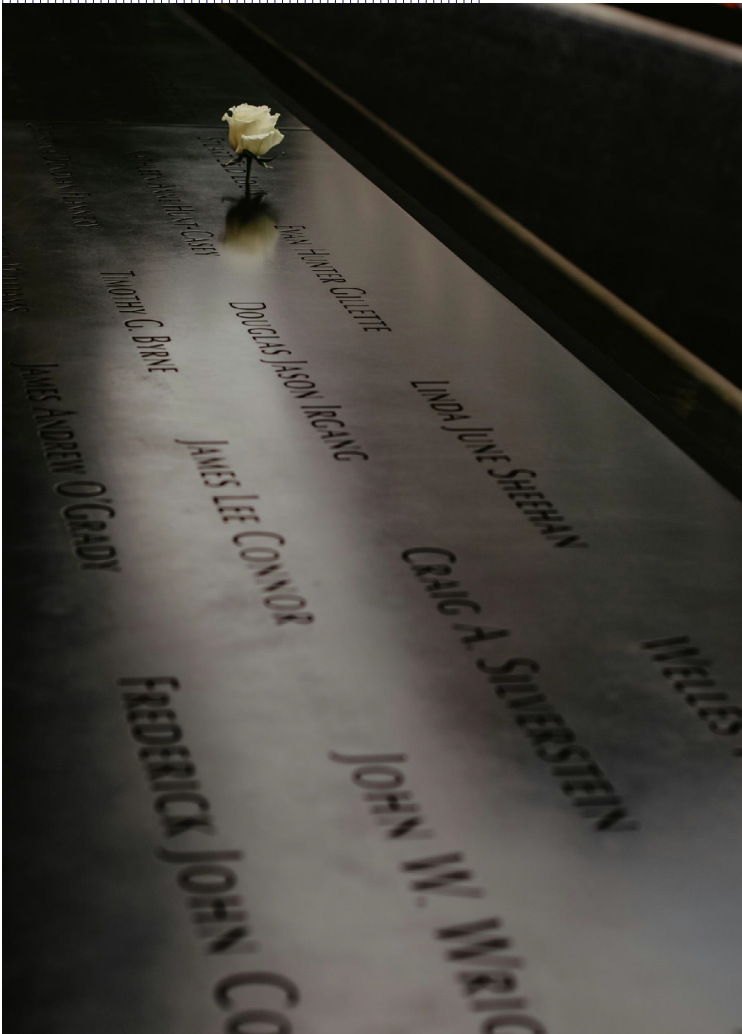
Qiaoyun, the weaver, gifts her daughter a Cloud Brocade wedding gown she crafted.



Consequently, the discussion pivots to an in-depth review on the concepts, origins, and evolution of public diplomacy/cultural diplomacy, thus offering a macroscopic lens to understand the role and challenges of cultural diplomacy in modern international relations. The chapter, by dissecting the limitations of historical narratives, the deficit of reciprocity in communication, and the inclination towards instrumental realism in cultural diplomacy practices, exposes how the pervasive state of disjunction among cultural, political, and economic sectors amidst the growing entrenchment of capitalist network in the global framework influences the cultivation and development of cross-cultural understanding and global consciousness.



*Contrasting Showcase:
The Cloud Brocade Wedding Gown
and the Dragon Robe*



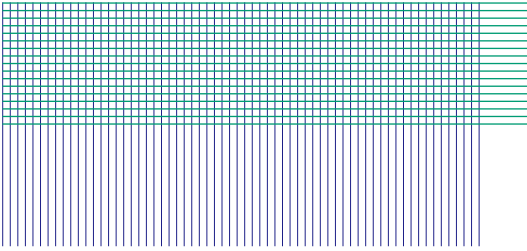
2,983 names of victims on the bronze parapets along the memorial pools, 9/11 Memorial & Museum

10665 names of victims on the granite wall, Memorial Hall of the Victims in Nanjing Massacre by Japanese Invaders




Chapter Three framed against the backdrop of Nanjing's war memories and its pursuits in sculpting an image of peace, along with the United Nations' involvement in the Middle East, probes the ideological tug-of-war at the core of peace initiatives. Within the extensive frameworks of geopolitics and international relations, mainstream peace discourse finds itself trapped in the dichotomy of war versus peace, instigating a ceaseless cycle of conflict and rivalry, thereby reducing

the essence of peace to nothing more than a hollow political representation. Concurrently, academic efforts to expand and reinterpret the paradigm of peace and modern warfare indicate the disillusionment with the conventional narratives of perpetual peace. The case study scrutinizes the disputes over historical narratives between China and Japan, a conflict catalyzed by the recognition of the Nanjing Massacre Documents in UNESCO's Memory of the World Register. It underscores the impediments and quandaries posed by identity narrative inertia within the context of global cultural dialogue. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of the "Shared Values Initiative" and the 9/11 Memorial & Museum reveals a subtle manifestation of hegemonic cultural diplomacy, one that furthers political and national security agendas under the facade of peacebuilding initiatives.

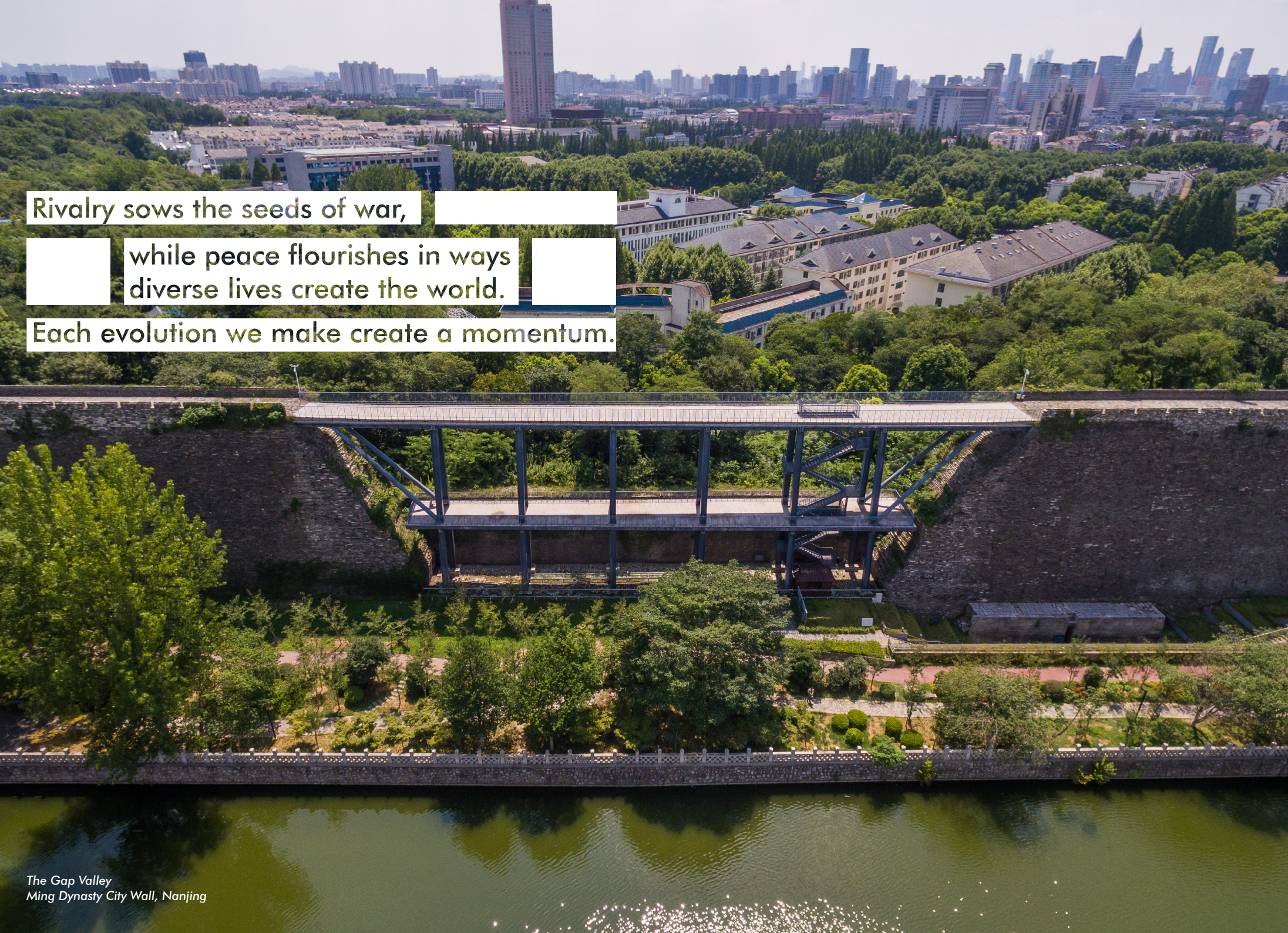


Academic debates on the tianxia system unearth intense ideological battles in sculpting visions of global order amid diverse cultural and political differences. These controversies accentuate the sophisticated nexus of power dynamics, value orientations, and collaborative mechanisms that weave together Western nations and rising geopolitical players. Moreover, it casts light on the prospective avenues for collaboration and mutual enrichment among diverse civilizations, navigating through the complexities of cognitive discrepancies and entrenched historical biases. In expounding the concept of cosmopolitanism, the final chapter dissects the complex social structure arising from the interplay of multiculturalism, disparate value systems, and assorted political traditions within the current global scenario. It underscores the imperative of formulating and improving the theories, methodologies and practices of intercultural communication within this multifaceted landscape as an immediate priority. Drawing on the insights from the ancient Chinese maxim, "The beauty of harmony in stew lies in the mingling of diverse ingredients," the chapter posits that true global coexistence should not be predicated



The Music Terrace, Dr. Sun Yst-sen Mausoleum, Nanjing

solely on homogeneity, uniformity, or an idealized vision of a collective peaceful utopia. Rather, it should endeavor to build consensus in the face of deep cultural, political, and economic divergences, maintaining cohabitation through unavoidable disagreements and conflicts, thus seeking a shared equilibrium and sustainable pathways for development amidst the intricate mosaic of global diversity.



Rivalry sows the seeds of war, [redacted]
[redacted] while peace flourishes in ways [redacted]
diverse lives create the world. [redacted]
Each evolution we make create a momentum.



Let's brick the future with better us.