

Cultural Diplomacy



The problem is culture and politics are never completely separate. Misunderstandings and divisive claims about cultural and political values are the oxygen that extreme minorities use to fan the flames of conflict.

The UK must not underestimate the value of culture as a positive force in international relations.

The phrase "cultural diplomacy" conjures up images of ambassadorial dinner parties and the elite pastimes of the Ferrero Rocher set.

But it stands for something much more important: a web of informal connections and relationships between the UK and other countries, grounded in the exchange of cultural values, that can not only complement, but enable traditional diplomatic channels.

Much of this happens through cultural institutions themselves: educational exchanges, jointly curated exhibitions and intense scientific collaboration underpin the work of our museums, galleries and performing arts.

Cultural bridges

Some of it is happening through everyday interactions. Mass communication and cheap travel make different cultures and ideas more accessible than ever. In the past foreigners saw an image of the UK only as it was projected to them

through the BBC. Increasingly they can learn about it through direct encounters with Brits abroad, or through virtual encounters on websites like MySpace and YouTube. We are all diplomats now.

The Demos report argues cultural diplomacy matters for two reasons. The first is that cultural links can keep a line of communication open when formal diplomatic ties are strained or impossible.

Cultural institutions like the British Museum enjoy a good relationship with Iranian counterparts, for example. Their 2005 Forgotten Empire exhibition about the world of ancient Persia saw the then foreign secretary, Jack Straw, share a stage with the vice president of Iran. Cultural spaces can literally provide forums for a different kind of political debate away from official negotiating tables.

Cultural creep

The second is because of the importance of what some have termed "soft power". The ongoing difficulties of the United States in achieving its goals in relation to members of the "axis of evil" - Iran, Iraq and North Korea - have forced even the world's last remaining superpower to recognise the limits of traditional military and economic might.

Many within the US are urging its government to remember the

lesson of the Cold War, which was won by investing in culture and ideas as much as weapons systems. Interestingly China and India seem to be devoting considerable resources to their cultural diplomacy efforts as they come to terms with "rising superpower" status.

With its rich cultural resources, the UK is well equipped for cultural diplomacy. But in the report I've co-authored for Demos, we've found that too often these resources are poorly coordinated in their international efforts. The contribution of the international activities of cultural organisations, institutions and the World Service and British Council should be much more than the sum of their parts.

The British Council - one of the UK's two official institutions of cultural diplomacy - is reportedly planning to cull a number of its European offices in order to redirect £7.5m to increasing its activity in the Muslim world. The aim of this new strategy is to contribute to the fight against global terrorism and strengthen relations between the UK and the Muslim world, according to The Times.

The paradox is that the more valuable culture is to political relationships, the more independent of politics it must be. The British Council is most effective where it is seen as an independent force for creating cultural bridges.

Risk being perceived as an undercover embassy and any good work will lose its value. And as an organisation that spends £186 million of tax payers' money a year, value is a big issue for the British Council.

Cultural misunderstanding and ignorance are a breeding ground for extremists. Critics may charge that trying to fight global terrorism with culture is like spitting on a forest fire to put it out, but the best way to put out a fire is to take away its fuel.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/>

Differences between friends and best friends

Flora Stanislaus
FOR ORUPAPER

Happy new year to all the oru paper readers. Hope you all enjoyed new year, and had great fun.

In life, a friend just says hi..hello..bye and walks away. But a best friend takes time, stops by your side, and asks how you are doing. This is because, the best friend cares and wants to make sure your fine.

A friend has never seen you cry, whereas a best friend would have its shoulders soggy from your tears. A best friend will never mind you crying out.

A friend thinks the friendship is over due to an argument. However, a best friend will still value your friendship after an argument. A best friend can only show their anger towards a person they really value in life.

A friend gets so annoyed, when you call late night. A best friend will ask why you took so long to call. A best

friend will always pick up your call.

A friend acts like a guest while visiting. A best friend, opens your refrigerator, and helps himself. A best friend treats your house, as his home.

A friend gets jealous of your love history. A best friend wonders about your love history.

A friend expects you to always be there for any help. A best friend is always there, whenever you need any help. A best friend will do anything to make you happy.

A friend doesn't have time in his busy schedule, but a best friend always has time no matter how busy he is. A best friend will always listen to you, no matter how busy he is.

A friend only calls whenever there's some work. A best friend calls you just to hear your voice. A best friend will call regularly, to check that you're well.

A friend doesn't have anything to talk to on the phone. A best friend can't stop talking on the phone. A best friend talks about anything and everything.

Hinduism

Hinduism believes that a person's life is actually the journey of the soul. The Hindu goes through a series of reincarnations that eventually lead to 'moksha', or salvation, freeing the body from the cycle of rebirths (after reaching spiritual perfection). Purity of mind and action is essential, as 'karma' or actions in life determine your reincarnation. Bad 'karma' leads to being born into a lower reincarnation. 'Dharma' on the other hand controls the laws of the social, ethical and the spiritual.

The most interesting fact about the religion is the number of Gods worshipped. The three main manifestations of the omnipresent God are: *Brahma*, the creator of the universe, *Vishnu* the protector and *Shiva* the destroyer. Wars between the *Asuras* (demons) and the *Devas* (Gods) are a common part of the Hindu mythology. The *Asuras* wanted to conquer the territory of the *Devas*.

Hindus follow the principle of ahimsa, non-injury to living creatures. This principle especially applies to cows, which Hindus believe are sacred animals. As a result, hardly any Hindus eat beef, and many do not eat any kind of meat.

Nanny Needed

Nanny needed to live in Manchester to look after a baby for more than a year. Please contact **Dr K Sivanesan** on **07867973327**.

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