

The Role of Culture and Identity in International Relations

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Abstract: This study emphasizes the importance of culture and identity in international relations, highlighting challenges that arise from cross-cultural communication. It underscores the significance of recognizing and embracing cultural diversity and the need for cultural competence, sensitivity and awareness of biases in policymaking to cultivate positive and productive international relationships. The potential for cultural differences to lead to conflicts is also highlighted, which underscores the importance of cultural competence and sensitivity in communication. Individual and national identities play a crucial role in shaping foreign policy decisions, necessitating that policymakers be aware of their biases and promote mutual understanding and diplomacy through cultural diplomacy efforts and to prevent any impediments to peaceful relationships. While culture and identity can be utilized as soft power, the study advises policymakers to approach it with nuance and sensitivity to avoid cultural imperialism and appropriation. The study stresses the importance of a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity and greater sensitivity in cross-cultural communication through cultural diplomacy efforts so as to foster positive international relations.

Keywords: Culture; identity; international relations; diplomacy.

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Introduction

International relations is not just about policies and decision-making. It also has a profound impact on the lives of people around the world. International relations play a crucial role in shaping our world today. It is a broad field that encompasses a wide range of social, economic and political interactions between nations. International relations are essential in determining complex interactions and connections between nations in the contemporary world. International relations is a dynamic and multifaceted field that encompasses various social, economic and political interactions between nations (Ahmed, 2020). It involves analyzing and understanding intricate relationships between states and factors that shape their interactions such as cultural differences, economic interests, geography and political ideologies (Tsygankov, 2003).

The critical role of international relations is promoting international cooperation to address global issues like climate change, public health, poverty and terrorism (Tsygankov, 2003). It also shapes the global economic system, regulates state behavior and determines the nature of the global order (Reus-Smit, 2020). In the today's interconnected world, international relations are more crucial than ever. They promote peace and prevent conflicts by de-escalating tensions, reducing misunderstandings and promoting dialogue (Ahmed, 2020; Al-Rawashdeh, et al., 2017). International organizations like the United Nations and the International Court of Justice play a critical role in promoting peace and stability in the international system.

Culture and identity play a significant role in international relations by fostering mutual understanding, tolerance and cooperation, and they

influence the way in which states perceive one another (Brown, 2000). They have a profound impact on the world we live by shaping national interests and priorities, contributing to the formation of international institutions and norms. Cultural differences can create misunderstandings and conflict while shared cultural values can facilitate cooperation and understanding. The United Nations is an example of international organizations based on the principles of cultural diversity, respect for human rights and peaceful conflict resolution (Zaharna, 2010).

Culture and identity can also shape power dynamics in international relations with dominant cultures and identities creating imbalances of power and privilege. The importance of culture and identity in international relations is multifaceted, shaping interactions, priorities, and power dynamics between nations. They contribute to national interests and foreign policy priorities, impact negotiations, cooperation and competition and shape the development of international institutions and norms. Integrating interdisciplinary perspectives can provide a comprehensive understanding of their contribution to shaping international relations. Understanding the role of culture and identity in international relations requires identifying power dynamics and the role of dominant actors in shaping the global order. Cultural differences can create conflict or facilitate cooperation and understanding while dominant cultures and identities can create imbalances of power and privilege, leaving marginalized cultures and identities struggling to assert their interests (Abdelal, et al., 2006).

Studying culture and identity in international relations can help promote a more equitable and just global order that recognizes the diversity of perspectives and interests among nations. By analyzing cultural differences and identities, policies and practices can be developed that promote cooperation, respect and understanding among nations.

Defining Culture and Identity

Culture encompasses shared beliefs, values, practices, customs and artifacts that characterize a group or society, including language, religion, social organization, arts and technology (Birukou, et al., 2013). It shapes the individual and collective identity, behavior and communication (Polletta & Jasper, 2001) and serves both as an adaptive mechanism and social construct that influences

power relations and social norms (Fukuyama, 2018). Culture is dynamic and evolving, influenced by globalization, migration, technological advancement and social and political transformations, resulting in significant variations across and within different societies.

At its core, culture is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing material, symbolic, behavioral and cognitive dimensions (Henrich, 2015). Material culture refers to tangible expressions of a society's identity, such as its buildings, clothing, technology and food. Symbolic culture encompasses the non-material aspects of culture, including language, beliefs, values, norms and social duties (Knight, 2010). Behavioral culture encompasses the observable patterns of behavior that are characteristic of a society while cognitive culture refers to the mental models, knowledge systems and worldviews that shape the individual and collective identity (Talmy, 1995). Understanding these different dimensions is crucial for promoting cross-cultural understanding and cooperation, and for analyzing complex interactions between societies and nations.

Identity is a dynamic and multidimensional construct that encompasses various characteristics, values, beliefs, and experiences that define an individual or group. It is shaped by a range of internal and external factors, such as personal values, social norms, cultural expectations and historical context. Identity is not fixed but rather a fluid process that evolves over time and can be negotiated and contested. Understanding identity is crucial for analyzing social interactions and power relations and for promoting social inclusion and diversity (Bilgrami, 2006; Beech, et al., 2008; Coupland & Brown, 2012)

Identity is a multifaceted construct that can be expressed and perceived in various forms. There are different types of identity, which can be broadly categorized into individual and collective identity. Individual identity refers to the unique characteristics, values, beliefs and experiences that define a person as an individual. Collective identity, on the other hand, refers to the shared characteristics, values, beliefs and experiences that define a group of individuals as a collective. Other types of identity include gender identity, sexual identity, racial identity and ethnic identity, among others. Understanding and recognizing different types of identity is crucial for promoting social

inclusion and diversity (Coupland & Brown, 2012; Polletta & Jasper, 2001; Buckingham, 2008).

Importance of Culture and Identity in International Relations

Culture and identity play a vital role in international relations as they form the basis for interaction between states and societies. Both have a significant impact on policy formation and decision-making in different societies (Anholt, 2011). They contribute to strengthening relations between countries and promoting international cooperation and understanding. Culture and identity are also important tools for promoting the understanding and tolerance between different cultures and societies. Understanding of other cultures greatly supports overcoming obstacles and difficulties that may occur in the process of interaction between different cultures (Berenskoetter, 2010). They work to enhance international cooperation in the economic, trade, cultural, scientific and technological fields. In general, culture and identity are essential elements in shaping healthy international relations, enhancing understanding of different cultures and societies and stimulating cooperation and understanding between countries (Alexandrov, 2003).

Understanding Different Cultures

Understanding different cultures is essential in international relations as culture plays a significant role in shaping behavior and interactions. Culture encompasses various factors, including language, religion, history, values, and beliefs. These factors influence how individuals and groups perceive the world, interpret events and interact with others. By understanding different cultures, nations can promote mutual understanding and respect, reduce misunderstandings and foster greater cooperation in addressing global challenges (Khan, et al., 2020). However, studying culture in international relations is challenging due to its complexity and dynamic nature, especially in cross-cultural contexts. Different cultures have different ways of understanding and expressing themselves, leading to miscommunications and misunderstandings. Additionally, cultural differences can be used for political or economic domination, leading to cultural imperialism and marginalization of minority cultures (Jora, 2013).

Building Bridges between Cultures

Building bridges between cultures is important for promoting the understanding and cooperation in

international relations. Cultural diplomacy, interfaith dialogue and language learning are some of ways to achieve this objective (Carté & Fox, 2008; Sidney & Gary, 1995). However, cultural differences can be challenging to overcome, and these approaches can be used for political or economic domination.

Preventing Conflicts

Preventing conflicts through understanding different cultures is a critical aspect of international relations. Cultural exchange programs and intercultural communication are two ways to promote greater understanding and respect among nations. By gaining a deeper understanding of each other's cultural values, norms and beliefs, we can build trust and reduce misunderstandings that could lead to conflicts (Kamil Kazan, 1997; Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007, p. 43).

However, it is essential to approach this task with a critical sense, recognizing the diversity within cultures and avoiding stereotypes and generalizations that can perpetuate conflicts. Additionally, it is important to address cultural differences constructively, engaging in dialogue and negotiations to find mutually acceptable solutions that respect cultural values of all parties involved (Steers, et al., 2010, p. 76). By recognizing and appreciating the unique cultural identities of others, we can promote peaceful relations and build bridges of understanding and respect.

Promoting Mutual Understanding

Promoting mutual understanding and acceptance of different cultures is crucial in international relations. Recognizing the value of cultural diversity and the unique strengths of each culture can lead to greater harmony and cooperation among nations. Cross-cultural dialogue and exchange programs can facilitate this process by providing opportunities for individuals from different cultures to interact and learn from one another. These programs can also help to dispel cultural stereotypes and biases, which can be a barrier to intercultural understanding (Zhao, et al., 2019). However, promoting mutual understanding and acceptance requires a genuine respect for different cultural values and practices, rather than an attempt to assimilate other cultures into one's own worldview. It also requires a willingness on the part of all parties to engage in dialogue, actively listen to each other, and be open to new perspectives. Additionally, cultural self-determination must be respected, where each

culture has the right to preserve and promote its unique identity and traditions (Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007).

Fostering International Cooperation

Fostering international cooperation through cultural understanding and acceptance is a vital aspect of modern international relations. Cultural diversity should be viewed as an asset that can promote better communication, trust, and mutual learning. However, cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts. Stereotypes and biases can also hinder cooperation. Therefore, cultural sensitivity and respect are essential. It is crucial to approach cultural acceptance critically and to recognize the importance of cultural self-determination (Nishii & Özbilgin, 2007 p. 57).

Examples of Cultural and Identity Conflicts in International Relations

There are many conflicts where culture and identity play roles as stimulating factors in both positive and negative directions. Such conflicts affect policies and decisions taken by states and people. Today, the world is witnessing many cultural and identity conflicts such as conflicts between ethnic and religious minorities, regional conflicts and conflicts based on political dimensions. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the prominent examples of cultural and identity conflicts in international relations as Palestinians and Israelis fight over land. Both sides follow and depend on their own different culture, identity, and religion. Added to this example is the genocide in Rwanda, the conflict in Kashmir and the Balkan wars, as these conflicts affect regional and international stability, hinder international cooperation and exacerbate instability in the affected regions (Krause & Renwick, 2016).

The Arab-Israeli Conflict

The Arab-Israeli Conflict has been influenced by cultural differences, including disputes over land ownership and religious beliefs. The competing claims to land ownership have fueled the conflict as both Jews and Arabs consider the land holy. Religion has also played a significant role, as differing religious narratives have led to an intense cultural divide. These cultural differences have created challenges in communication and understanding, making it difficult for effective dialogue and negotiation. Cultural stereotypes and prejudices have also contributed to mistrust and a lack of understanding. As cultural disputes are deeply embedded in the conflict, any attempt to resolve it

must take these factors into consideration (Ronit et al., 2008).

The Rwandan Genocide

The Rwandan Genocide in 1994 was primarily driven by ethnic and cultural tensions between the Tutsi and the Hutu communities in Rwanda. The origins of the conflict can be traced back to colonial policies of the Belgians, who categorized Rwandans into two ethnic groups, Tutsi and Hutu based on arbitrary physical characteristics. Following independence, tensions between the two communities continued to simmer, with periodic outbreaks of violence and political turmoil. Cultural and ethnic divisions were exploited by political leaders to incite violence and justify the mass slaughter of Tutsis. Hutu extremists used hate propaganda and dehumanizing language to justify their actions, portraying Tutsis as a threat to the Hutu way of life and urging Hutus to "exterminate the cockroaches." The dehumanization of the Tutsi people was a vital component of the genocide, with perpetrators using cultural and ethnic differences to justify the killing of fellow Rwandans (Hintjens, 1999; Staub, 2004; Gourevitch & Andrews, 1999; Chevan, et al., 2012).

The Kashmir Conflict

The Kashmir conflict is a longstanding dispute between India and Pakistan over the region of Jammu and Kashmir. The conflict has its roots in the partition of India in 1947 (Mathur, 2014). Both India and Pakistan claim the region of Jammu and Kashmir, which has a majority Muslim population, but is ruled by India.

The cultural and religious differences between the two countries are major factors contributing to the Kashmir conflict (Husain, et al., 2020). The region of Jammu and Kashmir has a majority Muslim population and many Muslims in the region see themselves culturally and religiously closer to Pakistan than to India. The cultural dispute has led to violent clashes between Indian security forces and militants in the region (Kamil Kazan, 1997). International efforts to resolve the Kashmir conflict have been ongoing for decades with little success. The job of cultural dispute in the Kashmir conflict highlights the importance of understanding and addressing cultural and religious differences in international relations.

The Balkan Wars

The Balkan Wars of the 1990s and the Kashmir Conflict both involve cultural disputes that have led

to violent conflict. In the Balkan Wars, the conflict between Bosnian Serbs, Croats and Muslims was driven by cultural and religious differences. Similarly, the Kashmir Conflict between India and Pakistan has a deep cultural dimension, with both sides claiming the region as their own. The contribution of cultural disputes to these conflicts highlights the importance of addressing these disputes diplomatically and promoting mutual understanding between different groups. International organizations such as the United Nations play a crucial role in preventing conflicts and promoting peace in such situations (Musaraj, 2013; Simić, 2013; Husain, et al., 2020).

Challenges in Cross-Cultural Communication

Cross-cultural communication involve many factors, including language, cultural understanding and social expectations. There may be a difference in the interpretation of vocabulary, phrases and physical gestures between different cultures, which leads to misunderstandings and complications in communication. Tension and misunderstanding can also arise between people due to cultural differences in beliefs, values and social perceptions.

Different Cultural Communication Styles

In today's globalized world, cross-cultural communication is essential to international relations. However, different cultural communication styles can present challenges. Direct communication may be seen as confrontational in some cultures while low-context communication may lack empathy in others. Cultural competence is necessary to overcome these challenges, involving an understanding of and respect for different cultural communication styles, active listening, and adaptability (Kamil Kazan, 1997; Craik, et al., 2003; Kim, 2017). Nonverbal communication, such as eye contact, facial expressions, gestures and body language also varies across cultures and should be taken into account.

Misunderstandings Other Cultures Challenges

Misunderstandings from cross-cultural communication can have negative effects on individuals and societies, leading to frustrations, misinterpretations, negative perceptions and damaged relationships. At the societal level, misunderstandings can lead to conflicts between nations, ethnic groups, or social groups, resulting in

war, discrimination, and other forms of violence (Ter-Minasova, 2008). Misunderstandings can also lead to economic losses, especially in international business transactions, such as the termination of business relationships or missed opportunities. Therefore, it is crucial to develop cultural competence and promote effective cross-cultural communication to prevent these negative consequences.

The Role of Cultural Diplomacy in International Relations

Cultural diplomacy is a soft power strategy that promotes mutual understanding and enhances relations between nations through cultural exchanges and collaborations (Rivera, 2015). It aims to break down cultural barriers, increase mutual understanding and build trust between nations by creating an environment of openness and intercultural dialogue. Cultural diplomacy can take many forms, including art exhibitions, music and dance performances, film festivals and academic exchanges such as seminars and conferences. Through these forms, cultural diplomacy allows people to engage with other cultures on a personal and emotional level, creating opportunities for deeper understanding and connection.

Cultural diplomacy uses cultural elements to advance a nation's interests in the international arena. It includes activities such as art, music, film, literature and language to promote mutual understanding between nations. The goal is to create positive relationships, foster cross-cultural exchange and build long-lasting relationships based on mutual respect (Ang, et al., 2015).

Other function of cultural diplomacy is to promote intercultural dialogue, respect and tolerance, which is crucial in the interconnected world. It showcases a nation's cultural heritage, creates opportunities for people to learn about different cultures and can build and strengthen relationships between nations. It can also serve as a bridge between nations with different ideologies or economic systems, promoting a positive image of a nation and influencing how people think about it (Zamorano, 2016). Cultural diplomacy programs promote international understanding and cooperation in various fields, including politics, economics and social. Many successful programs have been implemented globally, demonstrating their effectiveness in strengthening international relations.

The "Korean Wave" or "Hallyu" is an example of a successful cultural diplomacy program, which promotes South Korean culture through music, television dramas and movies. This helped improve the South Korea's global image, build its soft power and promote its values and traditions (Kim, 2018; Dhawan, 2017). Another successful program is the "China House" initiative, which promotes Chinese culture and arts through cultural centers in various countries. These centers serve as hubs for cultural exchange and provide a platform for Chinese artists to showcase their work and engage with local communities (Songjie & Xinghua, 2016).

The "European Capital of Culture" program is also a successful initiative, promoting European culture and identity through the designation of a European city as the "Capital of Culture" for a year. The program includes a range of cultural events, aiming to promote cross-border cultural cooperation and dialogue (Falk & Hagsten, 2017).

The Role of Identity in Foreign Policy

Identity refers to the beliefs, values and norms that shape a state's perception of its role in the international system (Urrestarazu, 2015). The impact of identity on foreign policy decision-making is crucial in international relations (Vucetic, 2017). This can affect how states interact with each other and their willingness to cooperate. Identity can also be used as a tool in foreign policy, such as when states seek to promote their cultural or religious values abroad.

The role of identity in foreign policy can be seen in the case of India's foreign policy towards Nepal. India's identity as a regional power and a leader of the South Asian region influenced its policies towards Nepal, which has often been seen as within India's sphere of influence. Similarly, Japan's identity as a pacifist state influenced its foreign policy decisions, including its support for international peacekeeping operations and disarmament initiatives.

National identity is a significant factor in foreign policy decision-making (Vucetic, 2017). It shapes a country's views of itself in the international community and informs its interests, values, and goals. National identity also influences a country's perception of threats and opportunities, affecting its willingness to engage in diplomatic, economic, or military interventions. In times of crisis or conflict, leaders often use national identity to justify their actions.

Turkey's national identity plays a significant function in shaping its foreign policy. Its unique position as a bridge between Europe and Asia, with a predominantly Muslim population, has led to a focus on issues related to its identity, such as the promotion of its historical and cultural heritage and the defense of the rights of its Turkish-speaking minorities. National identity has also influenced Turkey's approach to conflicts in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean and its alignment with other Muslim-majority countries (Kösebalaban, 2008). National identity is also significant in shaping public opinion and domestic politics. A country's foreign policy decisions are often evaluated based on how well they align with its national identity. Policies that are perceived as violating or challenging a country's identity can be met with resistance, criticism, and protest (Kowert, 2010).

Individual identity can influence the foreign policy decision-making (Smith, 2012) but can also lead to unintended consequences such as biases or prejudices that may result in conflict or strained relations (Berg & Ehin, 2016 p. 97). To mitigate the negative impacts, policymakers must be aware of their biases and seek to understand and empathize with other cultures and perspectives. Diplomacy and dialogue can also help bridge differences, and diverse advisers can challenge assumptions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Culture and identity have a tangible impact on how people interact both within and across borders, making it important to recognize and embrace diversity in international relations. Bridging cultural differences through cultural diplomacy and language learning can promote cooperation and mutual respect, tapping into the creative potential that comes from diverse perspectives and experiences and working towards a more peaceful and harmonious world.

Central to international relations is the recognition of the influence of cultural heritage on our behavior, values, and beliefs and the importance of understanding and appreciating these differences to promote social inclusion, diversity, and respect for human rights. Recognizing and embracing different cultures means building bridges, encouraging cross-cultural exchange and promoting cultural diplomacy, enabling mutual understanding and cooperation in tackling global challenges such as climate change, poverty, and conflict. At its core, international relations is about working together

towards a common goal - a world where everyone is valued, respected, and able to contribute to a better future.

In a connected world, cultural differences can hinder effective communication. Developing cultural competence and sensitivity is key to building strong relationships and promoting harmony between diverse groups. This requires open-mindedness, active listening and respect for cultural norms. Adapting communication styles to fit different cultural contexts can help avoid misunderstandings and promote cooperation. By developing cultural competence, sensitivity, and adaptability in our communication, we can foster better relationships and avoid conflicts, working towards a more harmonious and understanding world.

Cultural diplomacy promotes peace and understanding through the exchange of cultural elements such as arts, music, films and literature. By showcasing different cultures, countries can build bridges of friendship that go beyond borders, creating an environment of mutual respect and understanding. Successful cultural diplomacy programs from around the world have brought people together and fostered long-lasting relationships, making it a powerful tool for promoting international cooperation.

Foreign policy decisions are heavily influenced by a state's national and individual identities. However, identity can be a double-edged sword - it can provide a powerful sense of unity but it can also lead to conflicts. Policymakers must therefore be mindful of their own biases and promote mutual understanding and diplomacy to ensure that identity doesn't hinder peaceful relationships between nations.

At last, in the field of international relations, culture and identity are crucial components of a state's soft power, which refers to the ability to achieve foreign policy goals through attraction and co-option rather than coercion or force. By promoting national symbols, traditions, and values, states can utilize culture and identity as a means of soft power in its foreign affairs. However, it is important to recognize challenges and limitations of using culture and identity as soft power, such as the potential for cultural imperialism and appropriation. To effectively use culture and identity as soft power, policymakers and diplomats must approach it with sensitivity and respect for other cultures and traditions. They must also have a nuanced

understanding of the complexities of identity and culture in the international arena to ensure that their efforts to promote their own culture do not inadvertently create misunderstandings or conflicts with other nations.

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