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Article

Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power: critical analysis and methodological application

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Abstract

The increase in research of cultural issues in International Relations reveals that the interpretations of associated concepts present many dissonances, sometimes being used in an overlapping or mistaken way. This article focuses particularly on the concepts of cultural diplomacy and soft power and conducts a critical theoretical-methodological analysis of the contents and limits of each concept's use. To this end, we recovered the definitions offered by the literature for the concepts, contextualizing them with the political-historical intentions around their creation and use, both in their origins and today. We analyzed problems in the application of the concepts, both regarding the agents involved in its practical application and the nature and selection of the content mobilized. To contribute methodologically to future work, we elaborated possible research structures linked to both concepts.

Keywords: IR research; culture and IR; cultural diplomacy; soft power; methodology.

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Introduction

The expansion of the field of International Relations (IR) in Brazil, taking only the last two decades into consideration[1], was accompanied by the diversification of research topics and conceptual development beyond the positivist or rationalist field of interpretation of international affairs. In this context, cultural approaches have received considerable attention from Brazilian researchers at different academic levels. Terms like cultural diplomacy, soft power, public diplomacy and nation branding,

[1] According to the Ministry of Education's e-Mec platform, in 2003 there were 34 bachelor's degree courses in International Relations "in activity"; by 2023 that number had jumped to 165 and, in addition, there are currently another 12 courses classified as "in extinction" (Ministério da Educação, 2023).

to name a few, are frequently used in undergraduate course conclusion papers and postgraduate dissertations and theses. A search by subject (in titles or keywords) on the Lattes Platform reveals, in national productions alone, 468 records for the concept "cultural diplomacy", 1031 for "soft power", 156 for "public diplomacy" and 61 for "nation branding". When researching titles in the Brazilian Digital Library of Theses and Dissertations (*Biblioteca Digital de Teses e Dissertações - BDTD*), linked to the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation, the results were as follow: "Cultural diplomacy" appeared in 8 theses and 6 dissertations, "soft power" in 10 theses and 13 dissertations, "public diplomacy" in 1 thesis and 7 dissertations, and "nation branding" in 4 theses and 10 dissertations[2]. These figures reveal significant production[3] involving IR and cultural themes.

However, the definition and application of the most common concepts in cultural approaches present many discrepancies. The aim of this article is therefore to present a critical conceptual discussion and methodological use of two of the most cited concepts, *cultural diplomacy* and *soft power*. The questions that we are interested in are diverse and complementary: First, what are the possible definitions of cultural diplomacy and soft power? What are the boundaries between them? In political action, which actors (governments, public institutions, private corporations and individuals) work together to promote a country's cultural diplomacy or soft power, and how does this happen? Methodologically, when and how should the object of study be investigated and explained according to the concepts of cultural diplomacy or soft power?

Undertaking a theoretical-methodological study that contributes to elucidating the nature and theoretical boundaries in the definition and application of concepts seems like a simple objective, but there are epistemological obstacles. First, cultural diplomacy focuses on the technical action – by the diplomatic corps – of a country's foreign policy to disseminate the values and traits of a people to a partner country or international community, albeit in conjunction with other political and social sectors. Soft power checks not only the direct results of the agency for ideological dissemination, but also the elements that induce behavior according to standards consistent with the interests of the country exercising the "soft power". Therefore, as these are different agents and objectives, is it possible for the researcher to verify the causality between actions and consequences in one case and the other? If cultural diplomacy has a pronounced state/governmental nature and

[2] In the case of the BDTD, this search was conducted on July 01, 2024.

[3] In order to ascertain whether the terms involving Culture and International Relations are, in fact, a meaningful production, we compared it with other categories of International Relations field studies in the BDTD. The result is as follows: for the term "Brazil-Argentina" (which also incorporates the term "Brazil, Argentina"), derived from the subarea of Brazilian Foreign Policy, we have 21 theses and 45 dissertations. In the area of International Security, the research with the term "Deterrence", in which we discarded uses by areas other than Defense and International Security, had 2 theses and 7 dissertations. For the concept of "Human Security", we had 4 theses and 15 dissertations. In all cases, both for the connections between Culture and International Relations and references comparing other fields, the research was also carried out with the concept in English. In order to make the comparison effective, disconnected mentions with the broad area of Humanities were discarded (e.g.: in a doctoral thesis in Production Engineering at UFSC, the author uses the term "Human Security" to refer to the development of products that are safer for humans). With the exception of the larger production of theses and dissertations in the area of Brazilian Foreign Policy, research comprising Culture and International Relations has a substantial volume.

soft power expresses an undefined set of agents involved in its promotion, what is the relationship between the two? Are they synonymous, approximate, or complementary categories?

There is also the difficulty of verifying results. In the case of cultural diplomacy, based on the agency, the task is limited to the measures and operational results of diplomatic action associated or not with other actors. For soft power, since it has the central element of power, there is the problem of reception, signification and incorporation by the public, of varying dimensions, of foreign culture. If, as Nye Jr. (1990) postulates, the central point of soft power is to form a collective mentality in an external community in a way that it reproduces the ways of being and doing of the sending country, it is essential to check whether the target audience has, in fact, been acculturated. In this vein, to verify the effectiveness of power in this modality is also to ascertain whether there is governmental and/or societal commitment, as well as to investigate the means to implement acculturation that are at the country's disposal. These points, and others, animate the following discussion, which begins, in chronological order of the records mapped in the area, with the concept of cultural diplomacy.

Cultural Diplomacy

In the current scenario of intense exchanges and interconnections, traditionally unappreciated aspects are gaining increased ground at national and international level. The changes that have taken place since the 1970s, with the emergence of digital communication technologies, have boosted cultural production and consumption, giving rise to new actors in diplomacy that have come to be considered central to the construction of knowledge and power in the international system. As a result, elements related to cultural diplomacy have been driven by transformations in the social, economic and geopolitical environment, giving rise to new forms of intervention by governments (Zamorano 2016).

In epistemic terms, the international conjuncture ushered in by the end of the Cold War made it possible to revalorize fields of IR studies other than positivist theories, such as cultural approaches. The concept of cultural diplomacy, previously used in conjunction with, if not subordinate to, bipolar state dynamics of confrontation, has been rescued, reframed and has gained ground in academic and political circles, more often accompanying analyses of traditional diplomacy. The intensification of the use of this concept in recent decades has not excluded the fact that there is no consensus on its content and that a more rigorous and instrumental theoretical definition is needed for IR analysis. However, despite controversies, this category can be seen as a powerful resource in building a country's image and its relationship with other nations, which makes it an essential part of a state's foreign policy.

Although the characterization of this concept is considered broad and imprecise, the definition of its constituent terms – diplomacy and culture – is also complex. When looking for a definition of diplomacy, for example, a variety of formulations can be detected. This can be considered as

a set of institutions and public policies dedicated to promoting and managing a government's foreign policy with other states and transnational actors (Cervo 2008, 8-9; Pinheiro and Milani 2017). Other times it is associated with, or even reduced to, the act of technical negotiation – a fundamental element, but not sufficient to describe it (Putnam 2010).

Culture is also multifaceted. For Geertz (1973), culture gives meaning to the world and makes it understandable because it is the set of meanings constructed and bequeathed by people, binding them together. In a more descriptive sense, culture can include the language of a people, art, habits, priorities and customs shared from generation to generation in a given part of the world. Eagleton's (2016) synthesis presents a wide range of meanings of the term, encompassing artistic manifestations, technical capabilities, various symbolic products and, even more broadly, everything that gives meaning to a civilization.

Given the definitions of diplomacy and culture, one would imagine that combining them in the concept of cultural diplomacy would also result in a broad explanation. In historical terms, the characterization of cultural diplomacy started when links between different independent administrative units were established and culture began to be shared and transited in these relationships. Long before the concept was used, culture was already traveling through trade, navigation and migration. The "diplomats" of the time brought with them the best of their culture and returned home with lessons learned from the culture of the countries they visited (Stelowska 2015). From these relationships emerged terms such as "international cultural relations" and "foreign cultural policy", which precede and provide the basis for the study of what cultural diplomacy is.

The concept of cultural diplomacy, in turn, is constructed as one of the ways in which a state gains respect and admiration from the world through the "exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding" (Cummings 2003, 1). Applying this concept, Cynthia Schneider (2006) argues in favor of the crucial role of cultural diplomacy in the United States' relationship with the world and how the actions involved in this context are essential instruments, perhaps the best, for propagating intangible aspects of a country and its culture. In a slightly broader definition, Bélanger (1994, 422) presents cultural diplomacy as a residual category of foreign policy, alongside the more classic dimensions of economics and politics, and summarizes it as the set of "foreign policy activities relating to culture, education, science, and, to a certain extent, technical cooperation, this therefore concerns the activities of the spirit". Thus, considering elements from all these descriptions, cultural diplomacy involves intentional activities by governments in the arts, sciences and other cultural expressions, aimed at mobilizing these elements in their international relations.

About the political purpose of governments with cultural diplomacy, Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht and Mark C. Donfried (2010) broaden the definition in terms of both agents and objectives. According to the authors, the practice of mobilizing symbolic goods in relations with other countries can be conducted by state and government agents, but also by private entities of multiple nature: individuals (artists and intellectuals), Non-Governmental Organizations, Non-Profit Institutions (associations and foundations, for example) and private companies – whether

or not they are articulated with the public sector of their country. As for the objectives, these include the "conquest of hearts and minds", an common expression to the Cold War period, and others, such as: reversing cultural ignorance between countries; promoting the recognition of existence; building a global identity by presenting cultural credentials (artistic dissemination, language teaching and educational exchange programs) and promoting diplomatic agreements and trade (Gienow-Hecht and Donfried 2010, 17-19).

The association between culture and politics conducted by the diplomatic corps at the international level, which necessarily involves political intent with varied objectives (Bélanger 1999), is not peaceful. Defining the "new cultural diplomacy", Natalia Grincheva, in an approach to the notion of "international cultural relations", displaces governments in the categorization of the concept: "However, in the 21st century, cultural diplomacy has expanded its meaning to embrace exchanges and interactions among people, organizations and communities that take place beyond the direct control or involvement of national governments" (Grincheva 2021, 2). A comprehensive characterization is also present in Gienow-Hecht and Donfried (2010), Biltekin (2020), Goff (2013), Falk (2010), just to name a few.

Although inclusive, this position admits a paradoxical practice when it comes to cultural diplomacy: indifference to political intent and to the diplomatic act itself. The diplomatic act is understood as deliberate political action, whether by formal national state bodies (such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) or the international relations offices of sub-national governments. Incorporating a multiplicity of actors as representatives of cultural diplomacy leads to the depoliticization of the concept. After all, it does not prohibit, but dispenses the representation of interests and the establishment of objectives. Therefore, we believe that a current definition of the concept requires the incorporation of a political purpose in terms of cultural diplomacy. Theoretically and instrumentally, ignoring the intention leads to the characterization of another, more generic concept, such as international cultural relations.

Still on diplomacy, it is important to revisit the expansion of actors and openness to social participation in international affairs. With the diversification of bodies involved in international relations and their democratization, diplomacy is no longer the exclusive activity of specifically designated state institutions (Pinheiro and Milani 2017). In any case, this diversification in diplomatic action is not detached from political intent and objectives, however modest. It follows that cultural diplomacy, in a more operational theoretical and methodological conception, should follow similar principles: it can be conducted by state or private actors, but should not be distanced from a definition minimally marked by political purpose. The political foundation must be understood here on a broad basis, not restricted to the exercise of power, but also connected to economic, scientific, identity and cultural goals. Thus, we propose to understand cultural diplomacy as the intentional mobilization of symbolic cultural goods by state and non-state actors towards other states and peoples, with political, economic, social, identity, academic and cultural scopes of a diverse but recognizable nature.

The second essential element of the conceptual discussion concerns the "cultural" component. Cultural diplomacy is based on a constructed representation of an identity that is intended to be disseminated abroad to promote some of the country's interests. This image necessarily starts with a selection, given the natural multiculturalism of a nation's peoples. This situation often results in the internal contestation of the constructed representation. In the past, this was less of a problem, given the limitations of the media, the dominance of a cultural industry or the restricted circulation of products from this industry by states and the control of bureaucracies over cultural diplomatic acts. Nowadays, state and non-state political actors act internationally and often challenge the version created of what represents the nation in cultural terms, which intensifies an internal and external dispute over what would be the "faithful" representations of the country abroad.

Some examples of these tensions around representations of a country can be found in works dedicated to understanding US foreign propaganda during the Cold War. Belmonte (2008) shows how complicated it was to construct an idealized and unified vision of the "American Way of Life" to be exported as a cultural product, given the internal problems of capitalism, democracy, race and gender relations. Falk (2010) highlights how the ideological convictions and critical stances of Hollywood artists, articulated in network, resisted McCarthyism and disseminated perspectives inside and outside the United States that differed from official government propaganda. Both cases show how, even during a period of strict political control over cultural diplomacy, dissenting voices proliferated, questioned the country's constructed image abroad and, in Falk's research, demonstrated that it was possible to spread alternative representations of the official narrative abroad.

Difficulties with creating a selective, homogeneous and laudatory cultural vision are also currently observable for the so-called Korean Wave (Hallyu) – a coordinated movement between the state and private companies to promote the country's cultural product globally. Seen as a strategic cultural policy for South Korea, which goes beyond the duration of elected government terms, Hallyu has been eroded. First, because of the bias of the South Korean cultural expression. Increasingly, national artists are challenging the representation aimed at domestic and international audiences and promoting independent productions in what Kim et al. (2017) have called "Beyond Hallyu". This movement is not an opposition to the different trends that have marked the Korean waves, but a rectification from the artistic field to show the real problems of the country and its cultural diversity, invisible in the vision structured by the government and companies. Another source of dissatisfaction among the artistic community with the Korean Wave is the stipulations put in place by corporations that define productions according to parameters that facilitate the worldwide circulation of the works (Lie 2012). Finally, the vigorous internal and, especially, external promotion of South Korean culture and national values has prompted counteraction in regions where there has been intense propagation over the last few decades. Anti-Hallyu waves are a reality in countries such as China, Japan, Taiwan and Vietnam (Ang et al. 2015; Chung 2015).

The disputes surrounding the cultural component of the concept have repercussions on the study of cultural diplomacy. There is a selection of what is to be shown, which presupposes silences and erasures; instrumentation takes place to mobilize national values and reach societies and markets of a lucrative industry, which often generates negative reactions and consequences. This requires improvement in research proposals, producing contextualized sections where the agents who promote cultural diplomacy, as well as their objectives, can be identified.

Regarding how to research issues related to cultural diplomacy, the first guideline focuses on the planning and action of the promoting actors, according to the "more synthetic" concept outlined previously. Focusing cultural diplomacy on the actions of the agent, the investigative path should be to observe this aspect and the phases of the process. The research design would focus on structure, means and action of dissemination associated with specific objectives, measurable in terms of the acts agreed between the parties: agreements, treaties, and other formal measures, even if they are not typical of the public service, or even if the parties are not restricted to governments. Checking the outcome of actions would only play a complementary role and would be limited to the actions of the agent, both official diplomatic actions and the corresponding international non-state practices. In this sense, evaluating the efficiency of cultural diplomacy is limited to measures conducted by states, companies and non-state entities. Assessing the impact of the agent's actions on target societies refers to another concept, that of "soft power", which is discussed next.

Based on these guidelines, we present a non-exhaustive list of topics for research proposals linked to the concept of cultural diplomacy, starting with a greater focus on the "diplomacy" element:

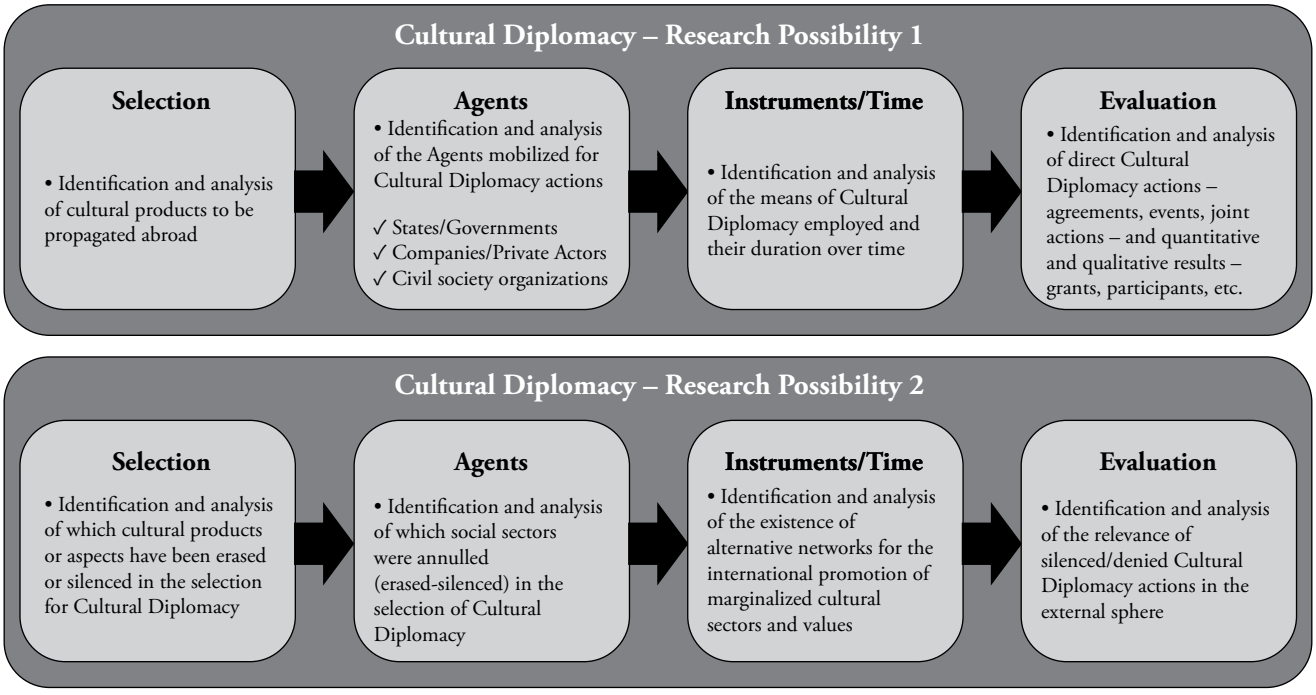
1. State structures and programs aimed at promoting national culture abroad;
2. Investments, agreements and incentives from governments, public entities, private companies, the third sector and individuals to promote cultural diplomacy;
3. Student, academic and technical exchanges involving institutions, teachers, researchers and students;
4. Opening of cultural diplomacy units (such as the Alliance Française, Cervantes, Goethe and Confucius Institutes);
5. Promotion of artistic and cultural exhibitions and events;
6. Verification of which cultural products and sectors of society have been selected to make up the cultural diplomacy program; and
7. Duration and intensity of cultural diplomacy actions for certain priority regions.

If the verification of the results of the concept's "diplomacy" component focuses on external action, the "culture" element is an equally important variable in the selection of the cultural identity to be "exported" and in the movements that contest this identity, both inside and outside the country. Themes along these lines include:

1. Investigation into the process of what should constitute national culture to be disseminated abroad, as well as deliberate obstructions and silencing of other cultural identities;
2. Identification of the cultural products selected and those obstructed/silenced, and their links to specific social and political sectors;
3. Analysis of the internal and external articulation of cultural diplomacy networks with their respective cultural representations constructed for dispersal abroad.

For the analysis, it is important to note that the items described for the diplomacy and culture components constitute a procedural method and can be approached individually or in conjunction. Below is an outline of the alternatives mentioned, articulated in a comprehensive and functional sequence:

Summary Table 1 - Research Design Possibilities - Cultural Diplomacy



Source: Authors' own elaboration

As we have argued here, the configuration of cultural diplomacy can only be seen in terms of the immediate results of the actions promoted by its agents. Examining how these actions were re-signified and incorporated by the population they were aimed at refers to reception studies and deals with the effectiveness of actions to increase the power of the promoting country. The concept of soft power, understood critically, and terms similar to it, are better suited to these objectives, since they include the ideas of power and reception in their formulation.

Soft Power

One of the reasons for the closer ties between Culture and International Relations since the 1990s has been the incorporation and dissemination of the concept of soft power, proposed by Joseph Nye Jr. With the appeal of the element of power it carries, the term has become popular and part of the media lexicon. A search in the archives of Brazilian newspaper *Folha de São Paulo* between January 1990 (the year Nye Jr.'s first book presenting the concept was released) and October 2023 registered 289 mentions of the concept. Articles used the term to express various ways of exercising power other than "hard power" – traditionally associated with political-military and, less frequently, economic measures. Curiously, Nye Jr. himself (2011, 81) has noticed a tendency to trivialize the term when used in public debate. More than three decades after it was first formulated and despite its popularization, the category has accumulated criticism and its application is imprecise.

In short, the concept of soft power means a country's ability to influence others to do what it wants without the use of military coercion or economic pressure. Hence the label that it is a softer way of exercising power. The attraction of the ideas and positions of the issuing agent should generate adherence by the target audience to a desired behavior without the need for threats. According to the author,

> The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority) (Nye Jr. 2004, 11).

In a 1990 publication (the year the concept was published in *Bound to Lead*), Nye Jr. (1990) explains that the nature of power has changed substantially since the end of the great wars of the 20th century and, in addition to direct coercive resources, intangible forms of power have emerged:

> Soft co-optive power is just as important as hard command power. If a state can make its power seem legitimate in the eyes of others, it will encounter less resistance to its wishes. If its culture and ideology are attractive, others will more willingly follow. If it can establish international norms consistent with its society, it is less likely to have to change. If it can support institutions that make other states wish to channel or limit their activities in ways the dominant state prefers, it may be spared the costly exercise of coercive or hard power (Nye Jr. 1990, 167).

These conceptual elaborations make it possible to visualize direction to support the agent's intentionality. The 2004 formulation mentions a deliberate action to "shape what others want" (Nye Jr. 2004, 7). Therefore, in addition to a natural attraction, there is a normative and voluntarist device of power, an orientation for international politics – which implies establishing means to

shape the wills of others elsewhere. This point is important both for a critical understanding of the idea and for evaluating the methods associated with the concept.

Just over ten years after its initial formulation, Nye suggested to the US government that soft power and hard power should be combined to build a more intelligent international strategy, a smart power (Nye Jr. 2005; 2009)[4]. Although he has never underestimated the importance of the use of force and economics, in his previous publications, soft power was seen as a priority guideline for the United States globally. With the end of the Cold War, the attention given to softer forms of power was understandable, compared to the privilege given to harder ones until then, given the possibility of definitive confrontation. However, the turn of the century and the configuration of new enemies of the United States changed the context. Smart power, launched at the time of the War on Terror, appears as a concept of synthesis, reviving a characteristic combination of the Cold War period, the need to articulate hard and soft forms of international action.

An initial thought on Nye's concepts is about its originality, and a classic example in the field of Human Sciences helps to verify this. The foundations of soft power are similar to the idea of consensus, which is a component of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony, adapted to IR by neo-Gramscian critical theorists. For Robert Cox (1983), Gramsci's concept of hegemony is essential for understanding the forms of domination in the international system.

> Gramsci took over from Machiavelli the image of power as a centaur: half man, half beast, a necessary combination of consent and coercion. To the extent that the consensual aspect of power is in the forefront, hegemony prevails. Coercion is always latent but is only applied in marginal, deviant cases. Hegemony is enough to ensure conformity of behavior in most people most of the time. (Cox 1983, 127).

The consensus component of the concept of hegemony is constructed in order to shape ways of understanding the world in peripheral regions, where dominant central ideologies have not yet taken root, and where the contradictions of the system are more evident. Exogenous values are incorporated into the marginal areas of the system by passive and vertical revolution, culturally homogenizing peoples based on the dominant standard. In a dynamic of hegemony, coercion is also present, but it should only be conducted in specific cases, such as exemplary measures aimed at political movements that are critical of nature or the systemic hierarchy. According to Cox, international institutions, created as a common denominator of the dominant values and rules of the central countries, are essential for the reproduction and maintenance of the status quo globally. As a prescription for overcoming this hegemonic political-economic model, Cox (1983, 140) suggests counter-hegemonic ideologies and forms of action to be conducted inside and outside states and hegemonic international organizations.

[4] According to the author, the term smart power was coined in 2003 (Nye Jr. 2023, 63), but it first appeared in publications in a 2005 article (*On the Rise and Fall of American Soft Power*) and, with more developed content, in another 2009 publication (*Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power*).

Taken together, the definitions of soft power from 1990 and 2004, and subsequent ones relating to smart power, are similar to Cox's diagnosis of hegemonic exercise. The deliberate construction of means of cooptation, articulated with means of coercion, suggested by Nye Jr, is a reformulation of the binomial consensus and coercion of the neo-Gramscian approach in IR. However, the signal is changed for the liberal theorist, and, in his formulation, the critical dimension of the concept is lost. While Cox (and Gramsci) detailed the essence and resources of hegemony to overcome it, Nye Jr recommends emphasizing consensus building from the 1990s onwards, which implies the perpetuation of hegemony. Furthermore, while the defense of softer tactics was the priority until the early 2000s, the situation changes with smart power, which combines coercion and consensus, elements that are also combined in the concept of hegemony. It is important to note that there is a brief mention of Cox in the 1990 book, *Bound to Lead*, and an even more succinct mention of Gramsci in *The Paradox of American Power* (Nye Jr. 2002), but the references disappear in later publications dealing with the concepts of soft, hard and smart power.

Understanding the real meaning of this term involves identifying the context of its creation and development. The explanation and prescription for state behavior based on soft power was launched in the 1990s, when events and processes of global significance signaled radical changes in the international system. The realization that the Cold War had been transformed and that the dynamics of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were undergoing profound changes was clear in that scenario (Hobsbawm 1995). Attentive to his time and his role as a US state bureaucrat, Nye offered a theoretical interpretation to conceptually support the US government in the new historical circumstances that were emerging. This is how soft power was born, as a result of the conclusion, timely for the context, that the military efforts implemented by the US since World War II should give way to initiatives based on the *American Way of Life* model. A model of society updated and transfigured according to the neoliberal principles of the 1980s, a proposal modeled after the system that prevailed over the Soviets (Brzezinski 1986).

Operationally, the idea seemed feasible, as the US government had been building a formidable propaganda machine for decades, in parallel with the military complex, to highlight the advantages of capitalism and liberal democracy over the Soviet model. In addition, the need to reduce defense spending and stimulate other sectors of the economy, such as the cultural industry and the financial market, were on the agenda. Nye's concept offered a sophisticated solution to these demands and relied on the triumphant vision of the American exceptionalist environment of the early 1990s. Finally, the cultural neo-colonial component of the term remained implicit: with unquestionable coercion via the military apparatus guaranteed, the intention was to build a consensus based on the superior values of the society that had won the dispute with a competing model.

The nature of smart power would only be better elaborated in a 2011 publication, *The Future of Power*, in which Nye ponders on the changes in notions of power throughout recent history and suggests a theoretical approach based on Realist Liberalism. In short, the proposal – use of force and the dissemination of American values – was not exactly an innovation, but a celebration of the foreign policy of Barack Obama's administration. Obama's combination of valuing international

institutions, cooperation and global governance with the use of force, when necessary, summed up a new form of power that combined Realism and Liberalism in a more *intelligent* way, suited to the modern times. More specifically, the War on Terror, launched by George W. Bush in 2001 in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and Barack Obama's initiatives to contain Chinese expansion at the end of the 2010s, were the processes that induced US smart power. Thus, they opted for a return to recommendations for the use of force, without dispensing incentives for ideological persuasion.

The use of Nye's terms, both soft and smart power, must consider this history. They are normative concepts, designed to instruct or legitimize US government behavior. Their explanatory value is limited and, from our perspective, is restricted to two factors. First, the involvement of entities other than the state in promoting values globally. Second, the verification of how the dissemination of these values is received and internalized in different realities, since soft power can only be spoken of when the effect intended by the issuer of the actions effectively reaches the recipients. Considering this relational dimension is fundamental given the power component of the concept.

Regarding the first point, Nye states that soft power is exercised by public and/or private agents without distinction, and does not articulate a hierarchy in this sense, but asserts that individuals, organizations, governments and states are part of a specific culture, and their global actions are guided by natural values. Therefore, rather than a plan to promote an ideology approved or authorized by the state elsewhere, Nye believes that the basic principles of a nation, especially Western nations, are disseminated naturally by organizations, groups and individuals. In the 2004 book, *Soft power: the means to success in world politics*, a set of these fundamentals is presented as a reference for dissemination, such as Democracy, Human Rights, Individual Freedom and Free Market. To exercise power in other nations in a "soft" way, a country should use the natural formation of diverse actors internationally so that the behavior of others is identical to that of the sending agents. In an optimal scenario, a world would be created that is organized according to a common identity, a reflection of that originating in the central country, the issuer of the uplifting values.

There are problems with this interpretation. First, by considering the exercise of soft power by private and public agents on an equal footing, without coordination, the element of intentionality of power is lost. In whose name would companies in the cultural sector act if not in the name of self-interest and profit? If the diffusion of values guided by financial gain is the guideline, would it be appropriate to classify the process as soft power? When we study, in history, examples such as the Disney studios, which projected themselves in Latin America during the period of the "Good Neighbor Policy", we see the existence of a political project, converging with Disney's own economic objectives (Zanella 2015). Conceptually, therefore, there is damage in advocating that soft power be executed decentrally, without management and guidance. Furthermore, there are, again, inconsistencies in Nye's position on the relevance of the state to soft power. While his initial publications did not indicate a hierarchy between governments and society, in the context of the War on Terror, in 2008, he stated that public diplomacy (i.e. that promoted by the public

authorities) was an important resource in the application of soft power, as part of the smart power strategy (Nye Jr. 2008).

Second, if political intentionality is a theoretical difficulty, another concern is the selection of terms that are the object of a nation's international cultural projection. Ideas such as Democracy, Human Rights, Individual Freedom and the Free Market seem appropriate to the reality of the broadcasting nations, but they are very superficial and subject to different interpretations upon reception. In the first case, we already have a suitable number of Western, Eastern, Southern and Global North nations exercising electoral liberal democracy, at least in its minimalist sense (Przeworski 1999) – electing representatives on a regular basis. Furthermore, the demand for the incorporation of differences must be considered: countries that do not have liberal democracy in its basic terms reinterpret the pressure for its adoption by arguing that, in their nations, there are democracies of other kinds.

Considering this last point, there is a similar problem corresponding to the adoption of the terms mentioned as soft power flags: the internal contradictions in the sending country. In the case of the United States, it is possible to see substantive criticism of the content of each of the ideas that underpin soft power (Democracy, Human Rights, Individual Freedom and Free Market). According to critical authors, democracy (and its American peculiarities) has been in crisis since the late 1970s, the culmination of which being the election and administration of Donald Trump (Mounk 2019; Runciman, 2018; Dardot and Laval 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). The internal democratic crisis, for foreign policy operators, becomes a counterproductive aspect for the realization of soft power.

If the mobilization of diverse actors, in addition to the state, and the promotion of essential values for soft power were innovations of the concept, the use of the concept of power associated with cultural diffusion deserves similar attention. In a different sense from the Cultural Diplomacy category, soft power involves the effective exercise of power. In the conceptual definition, there is a frequent comparison with hard power, the latter translated into coercion (and, less often, bribery) to get others to do what the coercive agent wants. Once the comparison has been made, soft power must have an effective and verifiable component, in which the ultimate goal is to shape the other person's worldview. How else would it be possible to ascertain whether populations, organizations or governments targeted by soft power have changed their way of perceiving their daily political reality? In Cultural Diplomacy, the emphasis is on the action of ideological propagation, and soft power focuses on the promotion and impact of this exercise – *before and after* its practice. As the author of the concept says "By definition, soft power means getting others to want the same outcomes you want, *and that requires an understanding of how they are hearing your messages and adapting them accordingly*. It is crucial to understand the target audience." (Nye Jr. 2008, 103, our emphasis).

Analyzing the chain of actions related to soft power is not simple. Verifying changes in collective mentality has an abstract burden that is difficult to quantify and involves a complicated methodological approach about the reception, internalization and reproduction. The intellectual process of transforming political perception requires the suppression of original cultural/ideological

conditions and their replacement by new values. This cultural conversion only occurs through immersion in an environment in which symbolic cultural goods are present redundantly and constantly over time, in a way to constitute an almost exclusive narrative for an audience to be influenced. When it comes to reception, internalization and response, the emission of ideas and individual/collective reception procedures are complex. Rational and emotional responses are variable and depend on the conditions of acculturation and the context of the time. There is a high and verified risk that the meaning instilled in the symbolic product will be interpreted differently on reception, that there will be explicit rejection or veiled resistance (Fried 1980; Freedberg 1989; Gruzinski 2006; Burke 2017).

Therefore, from the point of view of viable methods for using the category of soft power, it is essential to incorporate devices capable of revealing the ways in which power has been implemented. In the case of the use or threat of the use of force (hard power), the ways of verification are consolidated in research that deals with analyzing wars, military capabilities, force profiles, deterrent power, among others. In the case of soft power, we suggest the following summary table as research paths:

Summary Table 2 – Research Design Possibilities – Soft Power

Soft Power – Research Possibility 1: Process chain

Theme(s)	Agent(s)[1]	Instruments/Time	Evaluation
• Checking which symbolic themes/products a nation has mobilized as instruments of Soft Power	• Identification of the Agents involved in Soft Power (not restricted to governments or states)	• Analysis of the means by which Soft Power was employed and its duration over time	• *1st evaluation* – Resources: intensity and duration of cultural, political and ideological actions used for Soft Power • *2nd evaluation* – Reception/Response: Variable method(s) to verify the results (degree of assimilation) of the values disseminated by Soft Power

Soft Power – Research Possibility 2: Effectiveness evaluation[2]

Target nation selection	Symbolic Products/Time	Effectiveness Level
• Identification of the nation towards which a country's soft power is directed and implemented	• Verification of which products have been disseminated and for what period of time	• Analysis of the degree of effectiveness is gradual and considers possible elements: **A.** Intensity of dissemination **B.** Manifestations of local resistance **B1.** Explicit denial via public policies **B2.** Social pressures from different actors **C.** Possible reinterpretation of exogenous values **D.** Level of internalization, conditioned by: **D1.** Perceived change in political positions in the receiving nation **D2.** Regions where the impact of foreign ideas/values has been greater

Notes:

[1] When verifying the agents involved, it is essential to indicate their political intentions. As Nye Jr. extends the action to different agents in a society, it is important to clarify their objectives. If there is no intention, other categories should be mobilized to explain the external projection of a given agent (nation branding, internationalization of companies, International Cultural Relations, symbolic capital, etc.).

[2] The two research possibilities indicated are correlated and can be applied individually or as part of a single research proposal. The aim of breaking them down into two separate models was to make their explanation more didactic and use more dynamic.

Source: Authors' own elaboration

While cultural diplomacy focused on actions to promote symbolic products abroad, with a variety of objectives, the emphasis of soft power is verifying impacts and results. This leads to the conclusion that they are complementary concepts. However, the difference lies in the intended objective and the power component is the preponderant factor. Ideological co-optation, whether in the sense of incorporation, attraction or cultural colonization, must be considered for the theoretical understanding and methodological application of the term – a goal that is rarely present in research designs related to the concept. In cultural diplomacy, as developed above, the purposes are diverse and do not necessarily involve the ideological conversion of the population and government of the country in which it is conducted. There is an emphasis on actions, not on measuring the final consequences.

The theoretical and methodological discussion developed here sought to focus on concepts that link International Relations and Culture. The selection made, analyzing the terms "cultural diplomacy" and "soft power", was based on their academic relevance and frequency with which the terms are used. However, there are other terms dedicated to the relationship between international studies and cultural products. Just to name a few found in the bibliography, without intending to cover them all, it is possible to mention: international cultural relations, foreign cultural policy, public diplomacy, propaganda, nation branding, internationalization of companies (in the cultural-artistic sector) and cultural hegemony, representation of identity and external projection, and culture wars.

Conclusion

This article investigates two concepts that have been widely mobilized in recent decades, linking culture and international relations. Given the variety in the interpretation of these concepts, the motivation for this theoretical discussion was to delimit the nature of both, highlighting their origins, virtues, problems, differences and methodological use. In other words, the aim was not to invalidate one or both terms, but to contextualize them, to warn about their current and original political intentions and to translate them into viable research proposals.

Regarding Cultural Diplomacy, a current revival of the concept was conducted, highlighting the expansion of the agents involved without leaving aside its political intent and the focus on the construction and emission of the message via symbolic cultural products. For methodological gains, two potentially complementary research designs were presented. The first deals with the formation, emission and evaluation of the impacts of cultural manifestations promoted by a given agent. The second focuses on the selective processes, of valorization or exclusion and silencing, of the cultural aspects that are desired to form a country's identity abroad.

The contextualization and evolution of the concept of soft power was dealt with in the initial discussion of Joseph Nye Jr.'s contribution to IR. The convenience of the category for the United States in the 1990s and early 2000s was highlighted. Initially, it was a central guideline for US

foreign policy, prevalent during the Cold War. Later, with the changes in the global scenario due to the War on Terror, it was reframed and incorporated into the broader concept of smart power alongside hard power. We also address the problems of application, relating to the agents involved and the nature of the values selected for disclosure abroad. Finally, in methodological terms, we highlighted the power factor, which requires verification of how it was implemented. In other words, if cultural diplomacy focuses on the emission of values by a nation, soft power, because it requires verification of the application of power, must ascertain the impacts on a target audience. After all, if the aim is to win hearts and minds, the conquest must be attested to.

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