

# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND GLOBAL POLITICS: GERMANY'S CULTURAL DIPLOMACY: A POLITICAL-LOGICAL CASE STUDY OF FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG IN VIETNAM

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**Abstract** - *The trend of cultural diplomacy extends beyond the jurisdiction of the state and encompasses the promotion of "national culture" and interactive international cultural exchange, particularly the functions of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) financed by the government, the paper selects the case study of Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) as a non-government organization where the German government finances FES to accomplish some missions of the foreign policies of Germany to have global influence in Vietnam and other countries. The paper argues that the cultural diplomacy of FES has not fully complied with their missions and values of the German government as follows. First, there is the political value conflict between German democratic system where the German political values of civil society, human rights and multi-party system are considered as the threats to the current political system of Vietnam. Second, VCP considers cultural diplomacy as Soviet-style propaganda, where they tend to use the funding of FES as the propaganda tool to disseminate their values and their success, to consolidate the power of Vietnam Communist Party(VCP). Third, as the Western and the Sinic culture conflict emerged, when China uses the sharp power to implicitly counter against the cultural diplomacy of FES (NED, 2017). Thus, FES is not allowed directly to cooperate with civil society in Vietnam. The paper proposes that FES needs to restructure its strategies to partner with civil society sector, rather than only VCP and its partners to strengthen German soft and smart power in Vietnam. The paper has also, relying on a cognitive-logical model, argued that cultural diplomacy is a function that attempts to transform Germany's (and Vietnam's) values into Vietnam's (and German's) values in order to construct a collaborative mutual understanding of the world for them. The cultural diplomacy function is a developer of the phenomena of 'meaning' and 'development' for both Germany and Vietnam in the context of their interactions and communications.*

**Keywords:** *cultural diplomacy, Vietnam and Germany relations, NGOs, international politics*

## INTRODUCTION

Germany and Vietnam have been engaged in a "strategic partnership" since 2011, collaborating on various projects across different policy domains such as international law, multilateralism, global free trade and investment, environmental and climate protection. With a trade value of nearly 14 billion euros, Germany is Vietnam's most significant trade partner within the European Union.. Over 300 German companies are represented in Vietnam. The investment amounts to more than 2.3 billion US dollars.

As cultural diplomacy becomes the priorities of foreign policies, non-government organizations (NGO) are on the upswing for the national interests, which receive grants from government for the foreign policy and cultural diplomacy (Ivey and faula, 2019). Developing cooperation (based on collaboration, co-activation, and coordination) is the priority for the two countries, including educational, energy-based and environmental, cultural, academic and scientific institutional exchanges. Germany is one of the greatest countries that give ODA to Vietnam (about 2 billion USD). Germany financed Vietnam's development projects through both state and non-state actors in which Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES). FES is the German non-profit

foundation is to strengthen the soft power of Germany in Vietnam. As argued by Fukuyama (1992), liberal democratic values have emerged fully victorious over other philosophies, such as, e.g., fascism, communism and socialism. The case study of FES illuminates the cultural diplomacy of NGOs and their problems in Vietnam. Up to now, there are no similar studies to have critical assessment of the contributions and challenges of FES in Vietnam, thus this paper helps to fill the gap of the previous studies. Moreover, we have attempted to, logically and cognitively, make a clear description of as well as a specification for our theorem.

The paper aims to use the case study of FES in Vietnam to answer the question of 'how the German government uses a non-state actor as a cultural diplomacy tool to influence Vietnam's development process' We have attempted to politically deal with the question of 'how the case study of FES in Vietnam can illuminate the cultural diplomacy of Germany in Vietnam?' Moreover, we have tried to logically answer the question of 'how we can have a cognitive understanding of the concept of cultural diplomacy in our case study.'

In addition to the introduction and conclusion, the paper includes five sections. Section 1 concerns with a conceptual framework and analytical approaches. Section 2 clarifies the case study methods for this paper. Section 3 examines the critical problems of FES In Vietnam. Section 4 clarifies cognitive -logical model for the concept of cultural diplomacy.

## 1. Conceptual Framework and Analytical Approaches

This paper attempts to interpret the concept of cultural diplomacy as a national policy to support the export of representative samples of that culture in order to further the objectives of foreign and development policy of Germany. There are two cultural diplomacy approaches. The first approach is conceptual. It looks at motivations. For instance, it encompasses the actions of nations, leaders, and governments, as well as the aspirations of citizens to promote their culture by making it more widely known. FES's motivation reflects the policy perspectives of German government. The second approach is, in turn, structural. The second approach addresses the setup, and fundamental establishment, of cultural diplomacy. The discussion revolves around certain inquiries, such as 'who are the key actors in cultural diplomacy?', and 'how do these actors align with the interests of the state? This approach includes the historical context, agents, agenda, vehicles, and target audiences. The main reason is that it tries to describe the structures of cultural diplomacy of the FES, see (Jessica and Mark, 2013). By financing FES, the motivation of the German policy is to use the shared set of beliefs and of cultural values of social democracy to influence Vietnam in less coercive, and less tangible manners for its soft powers (e.g., culture, political values, foreign policies), see (Joseph Nye, 2008). While hard power is the use of military and economic power, forcing others to bend to one's wishes, smart power is the combined use of soft and hard power to influence other peoples. According to Nye (2008), power in the current global information age will encompass not only the traditional hard dimensions of coercion and inducement but also a soft dimension of attraction. The capability to blend both hard and soft power effectively is referred to as 'smart power.' (p. 94) The normative Power is the influence of the social sciences in Germany and EU to 'justify truth claims in social science; ideational rather than material or physical; an ideal type of international actor', see (Manners, 2009). FES has used both normative power and soft power to influence Vietnam. Germany is considered as a medium power, which is more dependent on the use of soft power than hard power like a major world or superpower. Germany has an important resource in education and culture, in contrast to the cases of USA and China. The third approach of the study is to apply a cognitive-logical model for the concept of 'cultural diplomacy' with regard to the relationships between Germany and Vietnam, thus it can provide relevant logical policy recommendations for both Vietnam and Germany's diplomacy.

## 2. Case Study methods

In this paper, we use a case study approach to explore FES activities in Vietnam. The case study approach could help to answer our underlying research question of how the cultural

diplomacy of FES in Vietnam has occurred by critical analysis. This case is representative of other cases of cultural diplomacy which the German government provides funding for. The case study approach collects multiple sources of evidence (interviews, secondary data, focus groups, etc.).

According to Jessica and Mark (2013), the Cultural Diplomacy Model of FES can be interpreted in the following five factors. First, the Historical Context of FES's Cultural Diplomacy is clarified by Vietnam and Germany's diplomatic relations on September 23, 1975. Since then, the friendly and cooperative relationship between the two countries has been developing positively, widely, effectively, and comprehensively. Since 2011, the "strategic partnership" has facilitated collaboration in various fields such as multilateralism, global free trade and investment, and environmental and climate protection. With a trade value of almost 14 billion euros, Germany holds the position of being Vietnam's most significant trading partner within the European Union. Over 300 German firms have a presence in Vietnam, with a total investment of over 2.3 billion US dollars aimed at generating approximately 40,000 high-quality jobs in the country. The cultural diplomacy of this relation brings about 300 Vietnamese graduate students receiving research scholarships in Germany and about 4600 Vietnamese students studying at German universities. The cultural diplomacy of both the Communist Party of Vietnam (VCP) and the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) has an annual theoretical dialogue mechanism, held alternately in the two countries. The roles of FES in Vietnam have been considered as the cultural diplomacy to promote cooperation between the two countries and improve the soft power of Germany in Vietnam. Second, the Agent of Cultural Diplomacy is the FES office in Vietnam. As Joseph Nye claims, the power lies not in resources but in the ability to change the behavior of states. The states should change the behavior of other states is through attraction rather than coercion or payments, called soft power. The new public diplomacy often is performed by international actors including nongovernmental organizations as in the case of FES. FES aims to change the behaviors of Vietnam's state in accordance with the core values and foreign policies of Germany. FES is the oldest of Germany's non-profit and non-government foundations, established in 1925 for the support of the ideas of social democracy.[ Its name derives from the first democratically elected German President, Friedrich Ebert. ] FES aims to shape politics in the spirit of freedom, solidarity and social justice through political education, international cooperation as well as scholarship programs and research. FES has its own representations in over 100 countries of Africa, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, Europe, and North America. FES opened its Vietnam Office in Hanoi in 1990, which is the first international non-profit organisation in Vietnam, because FES shares the common features of Marxism with Vietnam's communist party (VCP). Third, the Agenda of FES's Cultural Diplomacy is "the exchange of ideas, information, art and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples to foster mutual understanding" has played an important role in the world (Cynthia, 2003). The agenda of FES is political education and advice as the leading international thinktank to provide current political debates for supporting the social democracy model. FES bring key politicians, scholars and organizations for their dialogue; FES uses diverse methods to foster academic the exchange of international experiences to promote democracy, civil society, human rights, environmental protection as their core values of the democratic society and soft and normative power of Germany in Vietnam through co-operations with VCP and its Vietnamese partners. Fourth, the Vehicles of Cultural Diplomacy are indicated by the FES programs in Vietnam. According to Castelles (2009), the objective of public diplomacy is not to persuade but to communicate, not to proclaim but to hear. Public diplomacy endeavors to establish a public arena where varied perspectives can be expressed despite their divergent origins, distinct values, and frequently conflicting interests The vehicles of FES include the diverse programs to promote the democratic society in Vietnam such as political dialogue and social reforms; worker's rights; economic justice and sustainable Development; scholarship and Internship Program to promote German values and smart power in Vietnam. Fifth, the Target Audience of FES's Cultural Diplomacy includes VCP and its partners under the control of VCP. Since they rely on foreign aid from Germany, it is crucial for them to be considered deserving recipients of that aid in order to continue receiving it, which could enhance the national branding of both Vietnam and Germany

(Anholt, 2006). FES in Vietnam has collaborated with them to provide international political dialogue, and the exchange of experiences and ideas between Germany and Vietnam among high-ranking politicians for policy change. However, the common fear of VCP is that poor states like Vietnam are exploited by the rich countries as mentioned by dependency and world system theory (Ferraro, 2008) and (Wacquant, L. (2006), where Aid dependency arose from long-term provisions of aid to develop a dependency syndrome as the top donors are US and Germany. The term political dependency refers to a situation where donors wield excessive influence over the governance of the recipient country.

### 3. Critical Problems of FES IN Vietnam

However, FES in Vietnam face three critical problems as follows: First, FES faces the political value conflicts between Vietnam and Germany. While trust building has always been fundamental to cultural diplomacy, discovering common values among countries and cultures can reduce legitimate differences in perspective (Cynthia, 2006). The political values in Germany include democracy, equality, and freedom, civil society, and social justice. However, Vietnam considers the Western powers to mask ugly abuses of political power of politicians and lobby groups. Vietnam is influenced by Chinese Confucianism, where the Confucian ideal of harmony aims for peaceful order and consensus, or an oppressive order imposed by the ruling class.

FES supports pluralism of different beliefs, political orientations, and multiple parties; ethnic minority protection (Cynthia, s. 2006). The cold war attitude of VCP towards the civil society of the west still prevailed. Thus, the political value conflict does not allow FES's cultural diplomacy to use German's political values in Vietnam as expected. Instead, FES is closely supervised and controlled by security system of Vietnam. Their annual funding for FES (183 million EU in 2019) aims to facilitate these values and activities. However, Vietnam is a one-party state. Civil society development in Vietnam is constrained by the government such as time-consuming and difficult NGO registration, external funding limits, etc. Globalization has given rise to the development of a global civil society and global governance (Castells, 2008).. The Western aim is argued to foment regime change in Vietnam like the "color revolution" in the Former Soviet Union and the Arab Spring, thus the promotion of Western-style practices and values as designed to undermine their rule through a creeping peaceful evolution resulting in turmoil. Thus, FES has no right to choose the civil society partners, rather they must finance the state partners guided and controlled by VCP to consolidate the power of VCP. Second, the Soviet- style propaganda of Vietnam is to make FES as their propaganda tool. The Soviet- style Communist propaganda was based on the Marxist-Leninist ideology to consolidate the power of VCP to control its citizens' perspectives towards their political systems.. The Soviet union did its best to try and create a new society in which the people must obey communism ideologies and to repress opposing political groups. As argued by Nye (2008), public diplomacy is an important tool for smart power, but smart public diplomacy requires the relevant roles of credibility, self-criticism, and of civil society to generate soft power. In contrast, public diplomacy degenerates into propaganda, which not only fails to convince, but reduces their both soft power and smart power. In this context, FES is to strengthen the soft power and normative power of VCP, rather than the soft power of German's government. Third, China's sharp power in Vietnam has counter-effects on FES's cultural diplomacy. An authoritarian China seek to expand its influence beyond its borders, while using its diplomacy to ensure their legitimate interests. According to INSS (2020), Western involvement can assist in mitigating the possibility of China transforming into an adversary. China's manipulation and management of information about itself in the news media and educational systems of another country to mislead or divide public opinion with distorted and negative information is referred to as sharp power. Since Vietnam normalized its relations with China in early 1990s, China attempts to increase their sharp power in Vietnam. Vietnam frequently dispatches officials to China to gain insights from its economic accomplishments. However, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has impeded Vietnam's progress towards political reform aimed at adopting Western-style liberal democracy.. The goal of culture diplomacy of China anchors its "peaceful rising" and a "harmonious world" (Liu, 2008).

While China has become Vietnam's largest trading partner, Vietnam cultivate cordial ties with China. China uses the sharp power of combining both economic and cultural power to keep their authoritarian direction under its circle of influence. More than 200 Party officials, managers and researchers of Vietnam and China's communist parties involved in their theoretical dialogue to ensure their ideological and theoretical guidance for Vietnam. The number of scholarships for Vietnamese students and scholars has been uncountable. In this context, the activities of FES have relatively weaker influences than that of the Chin's sharp power in Vietnam.

#### 4. A Cognitive -Logical Model for the Concept of Cultural Diplomacy

In this section, we are going to offer a cognitive-logical model for the concept of 'cultural diplomacy' (and the meanings that can be produced by it) with a special focus on the relationships between Germany and Vietnam.

Let us represent the nations of Germany and Vietnam by the conceptual symbols 'G' and 'V', respectively. As it has been pointed out above, in the recent decade, there has been a strategic partnership between German and Vietnam. In more conceptual words, in this paper, our background of thought has been the fact that G and V have collaboratively created a 'knowledge and capacity base' for satisfying some needs of human beings (we shall represent the concept of need by the symbol 'N' in our formalism). In fact, the conceptual disjunction of G and V (formally speaking:  $G \sqcup V$ ) has been constructed to satisfy the concept 'N' (that is a collection of needs 'Ni' for  $i \in [1, n]$ ). Thereby, we have:

$$(G \sqcup V) \models \{N1, N2, \dots, Nn\}.$$

This formalism expresses the fact that there has been a conceptual disjunction of the concepts of G and V and, based on such a unification, we have had a collection of needs satisfied. As we discussed above, German government (or 'G')—by some Cultural Diplomacy programs (let us identify it by 'CD')—has been financing government organisations (say 'GO') as well as non-governmental organisations (say 'Not GO') in order to influence Vietnam's society (or 'V'). In more logical words, functionalising both GO and  $\neg$ GO (i.e., the negation of GO) utilising CD functions, G has affected V. This can be summarised as followings:

$(GO \sqcup \neg GO)G$  is the domain of the CD function

CD is a function from  $(GO \sqcup \neg GO)G$  into V. Formally speaking, CD:  $(GO \sqcup \neg GO)G \rightarrow V$  (\*)

Now we have formally represented the fact that CD or Cultural Diplomacy is a function (i.e., transformation) from a concept into another concept.

At this point we need to—existentially and structurally—describe and analyse the function 'CD'. As mentioned above, the domain of CD is ' $(GO \sqcup \neg GO)$ ' and, in our scenario (which is already analysed in German context), it is ' $(GO \sqcup \neg GO)G$ '. Now our question is 'what ingredients and components of our domain would be affected (as well as operated and functionalised) by CD?'. Actually, there are many ingredients (e.g., ideational, informational, artistic, cultural) that all would be transformed by means of CD. In this approach, we name these ingredients 'values'. In fact, CD functionalises G's values and creates some transformed values (in V) based on them.

In our opinion, CD is a conceptualisation function that supports the development of a shared understanding of values (among G and V). In such a cognitive and logical system, CD semantically makes an interpretation of G's values. Subsequently, V's values will also be interpreted (relied on CD). It shall be noted that the interpretation of CD:

interprets G's (as well as V's) values,

interprets the interrelationships between/among G's (and V's) values, and

classifies G's (and V's) values under some specific labels.

Correspondingly, we have two important semantic components (see our articles Badie (2016 a-b; 2017a-c; 2018) for more information) for any of the countries Germany and Vietnam.

The semantic analysis of CD in the case of Germany is relied on these components:

A non-empty set  $\Delta G\_Values$ .  $\Delta G\_Values$  is, in fact, the interpretation domain in the German context. It consists of all values that are valid in Germany and that are going to be transformed.

The function 'I'. It assigns every individual value to an element  $G\_value1 \in \Delta G\_Values1$ . Also, it assigns to every interrelationship among various German values a relation  $(G\_value11, G\_value21, \dots, G\_valuen1) \in \Delta G\_Values1 \times \Delta G\_Values1 \times \dots \times \Delta G\_Values1$ .

Also, the semantic Analysis of CD in the case of Vietnam, as similar as the German case, is analysable based on the following components:

A non-empty set  $\Delta V\_Values$ .  $\Delta V\_Values$  is the interpretation domain. It consists of all values that are valid in V and are going to be transformed.

The function 'I'. It assigns every individual value to an element  $V\_value1 \in \Delta V\_Values1$ . Also, it assigns to every interrelationship among various values a relation  $(V\_value11, V\_value21, \dots, V\_valuen1) \in \Delta V\_Values1 \times \Delta V\_Values1 \times \dots \times \Delta V\_Values1$ .

It shall be interpreted that the characteristics and properties of G's values by means of the 'cultural diplomacy' function become mapped into V's values, and vice-versa. In fact, cultural diplomacy can relate the characteristics of a German concept to a Vietnamese concept (and vice-versa).

According to (\*), 'CD:  $(GO \sqcup \neg GO)G \rightarrow V$ '. Correspondingly, we can claim that the cultural diplomacy function 'CD' can also be formally represented in the form 'CD:  $(GO \sqcup \neg GO)V \rightarrow G$ ' (let us identify this function by (\*\*)).

In such a cognitive-logical model (and relying on (\*) and (\*\*)), the meanings that are created by CD (in both Germany and Vietnam) are interpreted to be related to the importance, worthiness, authentication, authenticity, and precision of what values Germany and Vietnam express. Accordingly, it is assumed that the phenomenon of 'meaning construction' is highly related to the phenomena of 'interpretation', 'explanation', 'sense making', 'comprehension', and 'construing', see Badie (2019; 2020a-b; 2021).

We must consider meanings as the active and dynamic processes of knowledge construction for both Germany and Vietnam in this scenario. Thereby, Germany and Vietnam, by constructing meanings, become connected to their constructed models of knowing and subsequently to their own constructed models of knowledge.

According to our cognitive-logical model, Germany, and Vietnam construct their own meanings with regard to their own conceptions of the world. More specifically, as we have analysed the semantic interpretation of the concept of 'cultural diplomacy', the semantic phenomenon of 'meaning' can be interpreted as a function from any German's (or Vietnam's) conceptions into their own updated and developed conceptions.

In our cognitive-logical model, the constructed meanings by any of the countries Vietnam and Germany become reflected in their own meaningful understanding of the world.

Regarding the aforementioned points, the state of the knowledge of any of the countries Vietnam and Germany could—relying on its constructed meanings—be highly reflected on the meaningful knowledge of cultural diplomacy.

Based on the fact that Germany/Vietnam reorganise and update their constructed meanings, it is reasonable to expect that Germany's, as well as Vietnam's achievements, are connected to the developments and advancements of meaningful knowledge of the concept of 'cultural diplomacy'.

It is emphasised that the main belief of any cultural diplomacy (between Germany and Vietnam) is that the phenomena of 'meaning' and 'development' would be tied to Germany's and Vietnam's communicative and social interactions.

In the context of Germany-Vietnam cultural diplomatic communications, any of these two countries must be permitted to express, explain, defend, prove, and justify their conceptions of the world. Accordingly, they will be able to move toward the most appropriate meanings and, subsequently, toward the most proper meaningful mutual understandings of the world.

## CONCLUSION

The case study of FES illuminates some aspects of the relational model of public diplomacy of Germany, where the German government provides funding and guiding for FES as the private-public partnership to build up the smart powers of Germany in Vietnam as well as spreading the

Western values (civil society, democracy, human rights, climate change and environment protections, and disseminating the values of German political values of social democracy). However, the paper argues that the cultural diplomacy of FES has been constrained by building mutual interests and trust problems in three areas: the political value conflict between German democracy and Vietnam's autocracy, where VCP prevails their sole power over the society; China's sharp power reduces the impacts of FES in Vietnam; VCP considers cultural diplomacy as the Soviet-style propaganda, thus FES is used as the the propaganda tool for VCP instead of German smart power. The paper recommends that FES needs to find some ways to support neutral and emerging civil society actors in Vietnam, countering the sharp power of China in Vietnam and stick to their core values. The paper has finally offered a cognitive-logical model for cultural diplomacy. According to the model, it can be realised that the main belief of our cultural diplomacy is that the phenomena of 'meaning' and 'development' are tied to Germany's and Vietnam's communicative and social interactions. Based on this cognitive-logical model, the study also suggests the main diplomacy values and belief of any cultural diplomacy of both Germany and Vietnam will be tied and revised in the process of Vietnam's communicative and social interactions. Even, the conflict of the values and belief of the cultural diplomacy of both countries will be compromised through this interaction for the greater purpose of foreign policies which can be implemented by both official channels (government) and non.official channels (NGOs).

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