Special Topics in Cul Management I

Cultural Diplomacy & Exchanges

Instructor: Dr Biyun Zhu

The course is taught in English

Mondays, 6:45 – 9:30 pm

WMY 50

Welcome & Introduction

Arts and cultural activities are vital components of public diplomacy and the exercise of soft power in international relations. Countries around the world increasingly engage in international cultural initiatives to advance diplomatic, economic, social, and artistic goals. Implementing these activities is often a complex and challenging process, involving a diverse range of stakeholders—including individuals, organisations, and governments. These initiatives take various forms, such as educational and cultural exchanges, exhibitions, cultural trade, and international festivals.

This course introduces key concepts, historical developments, debates, and practical approaches in international cultural relations. At the transnational level, we will examine the role of international organisations such as UNESCO in fostering cultural communication and collaboration across borders. At the national level, we will critically analyse the objectives and strategies of states, exploring how their international cultural policies have evolved in response to shifting global contexts. Case studies from a range of countries—including international cultural centres and the Olympic Games—will be used to examine similarities and differences in practice. At the organisational level, we will explore the governance of international cultural programmes, engaging with arts organisations to understand how such initiatives are conceived and implemented within specific institutional and cultural contexts.

Throughout the course, you will be encouraged to pursue your interests through interactive discussions, group projects, and individual essay assignments. Lectures, seminars, guest talks, and consultations will equip you with the theoretical frameworks and methodological tools necessary for critically engaging with international cultural relations. By the end of the course, you will be able to understand, articulate, and address key issues in the field from the perspectives of policymakers, researchers, and practitioners.

Course Aims

- To understand the role of arts and culture in international cultural relations.

- To investigate the history of using arts and culture as a multi-purpose tool in international relations.

- To familiarise with the tools of international cultural relations and understand how tools can be adapted and used differently in various contexts.

- To analyse how different stakeholders contribute to international cultural activities and how their interests and behaviour are shaped in this process.

- To identify the convergence and divergence of practices in international cultural relations.

- To contribute to the design of international cultural programmes in arts organisations.

Learning Outcomes

- Understand the complexity and ambiguity of the international power dynamic and the role of arts and culture in it.

- Use cultural diplomacy programmes as a lens to observe social, economic, and cultural differences among countries.

- Understand and interpret international cultural relations in both historical and contemporary contexts.

- Identify and analyse the common and conflictual interests of governments, organisations, and individuals in international cultural relations.

- Integrate and apply the knowledge of cultural policy, arts management, and other related disciplines to analyse the issues in international cultural relations.

- Articulate research questions, select appropriate methods, collect, and analyse data, and report results in independent and group research projects.

- Debate and critically analyse the use of arts and culture in international relationship building and capacity building activities.

- Design an international cultural programme by considering the interests of stakeholders and selecting appropriate tools for specific audience and context (30 credits version).

- Communicate and collaborate with partners (local and international) in a multi-cultural working environment.

- Articulate and visualise ideas through written materials and presentation.

- Acquire the ability to research independently and collaboratively.

- Locate, retrieve, and verify data from different sources.

- Coordinate with team members to deliver an effective presentation.

- Develop project management and analytical skills that can be applied in various scenarios.

- Innovate as well as learn from the past and from others to address new challenges.

Assessment & Key Deadlines

The module is assessed through a blend of individual and group work totalling **100 %** of the mark.

Component	Weight	Key dates & details
Attendance & participation	20 %	Awarded for punctual attendance, informed contributions, and completion of in-class tasks throughout the semester.
Reading-summary presentation	10 %	Sign-up in Week 1 (5 Jan 2026); 5–10-minute presentations scheduled during Weeks 2–12.
Essay proposal	Formative	Mon 9 Feb 2026, 12 pm via Blackboard; bring a copy (digital or printed) to class (Week 6).

Essay (3 000 words)	40 %	Wed 15 April 2026, 12:00 pm. See brief below.
Group research project	30 %	Presentations Mon 30 Mar 2026 (Week 13). Slides & one-page hand-out due via email by 12 pm the same day.

Essay Brief

Compare **two cultural-diplomacy programmes** in terms of their aims, tools, operational contexts and impacts. Discuss how they advance artistic, economic and political objectives and shape national brand image.

Choose **one** of the following lenses:

1. **UNESCO Creative Cities** – compare two cities from different countries within the *same* Creative City category.

2. **National-level programmes** – compare two state-funded cultural diplomacy programmes/policies of similar scale in different countries.

3. **Non-governmental programmes** – compare two similarly scaled international cultural programmes run by non-governmental cultural organisations.

Detailed guidance will be provided in class and on Blackboard.

Group Research Project

Choose **Option A** *or* **Option B**.

Option A – Analysing an Olympic opening ceremony

Maximum 3 students per group

Select one Summer or Winter Games (excluding Beijing 2008 and London 2012) and analyse its Opening Ceremony:

- Contextualise the host country's political, economic and cultural situation and strategic aims.

- Identify external perceptions that could shape international reception.

- Analyse themes, imagery, music and historical references used.

- Explain how the arts convey national values, history and image.

- Summarise international reception and evaluate whether objectives were met.

Option B – Designing a bottom-up cultural diplomacy programme

Maximum 4 students per group

Partner with a cultural/arts organisation and propose a feasible new programme:

- Align the proposal with the organisation's mission, assets and stakeholders.

- Outline goals, required resources (monetary, staff, venue, etc.), timeline, participants, risks and evaluation methods.

- Obtain and integrate feedback from the partner organisation.

- Include a work-log and reflection on the planning process.

For both options, the group needs to submit a concise **one-page hand-out** summarising your presentation, research process and labour division must accompany your slides. Late or non-submission will incur a penalty.

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Reading Summary Presentation

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During **Weeks 2–10**, each student will present one core reading (5–10 min):

- Introduce the text's structure and main arguments.

- Highlight insights or surprises and explain your take-aways.

- Field questions from the class.

Weekly Schedule and Topics

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Week 1: Welcome & Introduction: Arts, Culture, and Power

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Date: 5th Jan 2026

In the first week of this course, I will provide an overview of what the course will cover, including ground rules, assessment, preparation, group work, reading, and resources. This session will also address some fundamental questions:

- How arts and culture can be utilized to acquire, maintain, and demonstrate power by individuals, organizations, and nation-states.

- The relationship between governments, arts organizations, people, and society.

- The competition for soft power.

Core reading

Nisbett, M. (2016). "Who holds the power in soft power." *Arts & International Affairs* 1(1): 110-148. Available at: https://theartsjournal.net/2016/03/13/nisbett/

Zamorano, M. M. (2016). Reframing cultural diplomacy: the instrumentalization of culture under the soft power theory. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research, 8*(2), 165-186.

Further reading

Holden, J., & Tryhorn, C. (2013). *Influence and attraction: Culture and the race for soft power in the 21st century*: British Council.

Nye Jr, J. S. (2009). "Get smart: Combining hard and soft power." *Foreign Affairs*: 160-163.

Wilson III, E. J. (2008). "Hard power, soft power, smart power." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616(1): 110-124.

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Week 2: Key Concepts, Definitions and History of International Cultural Relations

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Date: 12th Jan 2026

In Week 2, we will explore the various definitions of cultural diplomacy and discuss how these definitions are shaped by different actors in diverse contexts:

- The concepts of international cultural relations, cultural diplomacy, public diplomacy, propaganda, and soft power.

- The contexts, purposes, and implications of different definitions.

- The histories and practices of international cultural relations in various countries.

Core reading

Cull, N. J. (2008). Public diplomacy: Taxonomies and histories. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 616*(1), 31-54.

Wyszomirski, M. J., Burgess, C., & Peila, C. (2003). International cultural relations: A multi-country comparison. In. Washington DC: Center for the Arts and Culture.

Mitchell, J.M. (1986). *International Cultural Relations* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315673905

Further reading

Rivera, T. (2015). "Distinguishing cultural relations from cultural diplomacy: The British Council's relationship with Her Majesty's Government." *USC Center on Public Diplomacy at the Annenberg School*.

Hayden, C. (2012). *The rhetoric of soft power: Public diplomacy in global contexts*: Lexington Books.

Week 3: Multi-purposes and Tools of International Cultural Relations

Date: 19 Jan 2026

In Week 3, we will explore the multiple purposes of international cultural relations and the popular tools employed by actors at different institutional levels and in various contexts. We will examine the instrumentalism of arts and culture, encompassing artistic, cultural, educational, social, and political objectives. Additionally, we will discuss diverse perspectives on cultural diplomacy.

- The development of the cultural diplomacy toolbox.

- The contexts, selection, and adaptation of tools.

- How cultural diplomacy is perceived and used in different national contexts.

Core reading

Ang, I., Isar, Y. R., & Mar, P. (2015). Cultural diplomacy: beyond the national interest? *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 21*(4), 365-381.

Nisbett, M. (2013). New perspectives on instrumentalism: an empirical study of cultural diplomacy. *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 19*(5), 557-575.

Clarke, David. "Theorising the Role of Cultural Products in Cultural Diplomacy from a Cultural Studies Perspective." *International journal of cultural policy*: CP 22.2 (2016): 147–163. Web.

Lord, G. D., & Blankenberg, N. (2016). *Cities, museums and soft power*: Rowman & Littlefield. Read Chapter 3, 4, 7 & 15.

Further reading

Bound, K., et al. (2007). *Cultural Diplomacy— Culture is a Central Component of International Relations. It's Time to Unlock its Full Potential.* London, Demos.

Wallis, B. (2004). Selling nations: International exhibitions and cultural diplomacy. Museum culture, Routledge: 285-302.

Zhu, B. (2021). Tool selection for public diplomacy flagships: toward an adaptive model. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy.* doi: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00217-3

Week 4: Educational and Cultural Exchanges

Date: 26 Jan 2026

In Week 4, we will continue our discussion from the previous week, focusing on educational and cultural exchanges as tools of international cultural relations. We will explore the distinctiveness, advantages, and limitations of these exchanges through case studies of established programs. You will also have the opportunity to learn about:

- The history, stakeholders, and mechanisms of educational and cultural exchanges.

- The multiplier effects and challenges associated with evaluation.

Core reading

Mulcahy, K. V. (1999). Cultural diplomacy and the exchange programs: 1938–1978. *The Journal of Arts Management, Law, and Society*, 29(1), 7-28.

Vogel, R. H. (1987). "The making of the Fulbright Program." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 491(1): 11-21.

Zanardi, C. (2016). "China's soft power with Chinese characteristics: the cases of Confucius Institutes and Chinese naval diplomacy." *Journal of Political Power* 9(3): 431-447.

Further reading

Fisher, A. (2009). *A Story of engagement: the British Council* 1934-2009, British Council.

Bellamy, C., & Weinberg, A. (2008). Educational and cultural exchanges to restore America's image. *Washington Quarterly*, 31(3), 55-68.

Week 5: UNESCO, Transnational Organisations, and International Festivals

Date: 2nd Feb 2026

In Week 5, we will conclude our discussion on educational exchange and examine why it is favoured by governments as a tool of cultural diplomacy. We will then briefly summarize the practices of government cultural diplomacy discussed so far and shift our focus to a transnational actor in cultural diplomacy - UNESCO. By reviewing the UN's sustainable goals, as well as UNESCO's mandates and programs, we will explore their contributions to cultural sustainable development through cultural diplomacy. Specifically, we'll cover the following topics:

- UNESCO's mandates and cultural sustainability goals.

- The case of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network.

Core reading

Throsby, D. (2017). "Culturally sustainable development: theoretical concept or practical policy instrument?" *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 23(2): 133-147.

Singh, J.P. (2010). *United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): Creating Norms for a Complex World* (1st ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203838587

Further reading

Ocón, D. (2021). "Cultural Diplomacy and Co-operation in ASEAN: The Role of Arts and Culture Festivals." *The Hague journal of diplomacy*: 1-29.

Wiktor-Mach, D. (2019). "Cultural heritage and development: UNESCO's new paradigm in a changing geopolitical context." *Third World Quarterly* 40(9): 1593-1612.

Liu, Y.-D. (2014). Cultural events and cultural tourism development: Lessons from the European Capitals of Culture. *European Planning Studies, 22*(3), 498-514.

Paschalidis, G. (2009). Exporting national culture: histories of Cultural Institutes abroad. *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 15*(3), 275-289.

Dragićević Šešić, M. (2017). *Cultural Diplomacy. Arts, Festivals and Geopolitics*, Belgrade: Creative Europe Desk Serbia, Faculty of Dramatic Arts.

Week 6: Essay Workshops

Date: 9 Feb 2026

In week 6, you should submit your essay proposal by 12 pm.

*You must bring a copy of your essay proposal to class for discussion and feedback.

Week 7: No Class

16-22 February 2026 Vacation

Week 8: Place Branding, National Branding, and National Image

Date: 23 Feb 2026

In Week 8, we will delve into the "space" in international cultural relations. This will provide you with an opportunity to draw connections between what you've learned in this course and others, such as arts management and creative industries. Under the framework of national branding and national image, we will explore the following topics:

-   Rationales and common practices.

-   Issues, concerns, and trends. Additionally, this week's seminar will be dedicated to preparing you for the group project.

Core reading

Snow, N. (2008). "International Exchanges and the U.S. Image." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 616(1): 198-222.

Jaffe, E. D. and I. D. Nebenzahl (2006). *National image & competitive advantage: the theory and practice of place branding*. Herndon, VA, Copenhagen Business School Press.

Further reading

Gienow-Hecht, J. (2019). "Nation Branding: A Useful Category for International History." *Diplomacy and statecraft* 30(4): 755-779.

Wang, J. (2006). "Localising public diplomacy: The role of sub-national actors in nation branding." *Place Branding* 2(1): 32-42.

Week 9: Cultural Diplomacy and the Olympics

Date: 2 March 2026

In Week 8, we will explore another popular tool of cultural diplomacy favoured by nation-states: mega-events such as the Olympics. We will use the opening ceremonies of the Olympics as a lens to analyse how arts and culture are used to deliver messages and communicate a national image to international audiences. Specifically, we will focus on the following cases and topics:

- The 2008 Beijing Olympics.

- The 2012 London Olympics.

- Hosting the Olympics: the costs and benefits.

Core reading

Garcia, B. (2008). One hundred years of cultural programming within the Olympic Games (1912–2012): origins, evolution and projections. *International Journal of Cultural Policy, 14*(4), 361-376.

Bourgeois, T. (2019). "London 2012 Olympics: exercises in cultural diplomacy." *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy* 15(3): 198-205.

Further reading

Cull, N. J. (2008). "The public diplomacy of the modern Olympic Games and China's soft power strategy." *Owning the Olympics: Narratives of the new China*: 117-144.

Zhou, S., et al. (2013). "Creating a Competitive Identity: Public Diplomacy in the London Olympics and Media Portrayal*." Mass Communication and Society* 16(6): 869-887.

Week 10: Top-down Versus Bottom-up Cultural Diplomacy

Date: 9 March 2026

We will broaden our perspectives to consider the commonalities and differences between top-down cultural diplomacy practices conducted by nation-states and bottom-up initiatives at the community level. We will identify:

- The differences in resources, audiences, stakeholders, and practices.

- The unique challenges and opportunities of bottom-up practices and what can be learned from existing experiences.

- How bottom-up cultural diplomacy practices can be better supported by policymaking.

Core reading

Fullman, A. R. (2011). *Backyard Diplomacy: Prospects for International Cultural Engagement by Local Arts Agencies*. Americans for the Arts.

Grincheva, N. (2021). Cultural diplomacy under the "digital lockdown": pandemic challenges and opportunities in museum diplomacy. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41254-021-00237-z

Further reading

Sabatier, P. A. (1986). "Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approaches to Implementation Research: a Critical Analysis and Suggested Synthesis." *Journal of public policy* 6(1): 21-48.

Risse, T. (1995). Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 11: Cultural Diplomacy versus Cultural Transnationalism

Date: 16 March 2026

This week, we will examine cultural transnationalism as an alternative to cultural diplomacy and discuss their commonalities and differences, as well as the implications for our future research and practice.

Core reading

Paquette, J., Zhu, B., & Schiele, A. (2025). From Cultural Diplomacy to Cultural Transnationalism: The Contribution of Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museums to the Evolving Narratives of Culture and Histories.

Further reading

Risse, T. (1995). Bringing Transnational Relations Back In: Non-State Actors, Domestic Structures and International Institutions. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Week 12: Group Project Tutorials

Date: 23 March 2026

In Week 12, we will discuss the progress and challenges of your group project and prepare for the final presentation.

Submission of presentation outline in class

Week 13: Group Project Presentation & Feedback

Date: 30 March 2026

20 mins presentation + Q&A

Schedule of group presentation will be published a week before the presentations.

* Slides and handout should be submitted by 12 pm on the same day.

Week 14: No class

6th April 2026, Ching Ming Festival

Week 15: Extended Office Hour & Essay Submission

Mon 13th April 2026: Individual meeting available for sign-up

*Wed 15th April 2026: Essay submission by 12pm (noon).

Honesty in Academic Work

The Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) attaches the highest importance to academic integrity and operates a zero-tolerance policy toward cheating and plagiarism. Any offence may result in disciplinary action up to and including termination of studies.

Since September 2008 all undergraduate and postgraduate written work must be submitted through VeriGuide:

http://veriguide1.cse.cuhk.edu.hk/portal/plagiarism_detection/index.jsp

Even though plagiarism and cheating are uncommon, every member of the University community should familiarise themselves with CUHK's guidelines to avoid unacceptable practices. The key resources are grouped below for ease of reference:

1. **What is Plagiarism**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p01.htm

2. **Proper Use of Source Material**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p02.htm

3. **Citation Styles**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p03.htm

4. **Plagiarism and Copyright Violation**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p04.htm

5. **CUHK Regulations on Honesty in Academic Work**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p05.htm

6. **Disciplinary Guidelines & Procedures**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p06.htm

7. **Guide for Teachers and Departments**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p07.htm

8. **Recommended Syllabus Statements**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p08.htm

9. **Electronic Submission via VeriGuide**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p09.htm

10. **Declaration to Include in Assignments**

http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty/Eng_htm_files_(2013-14)/p10.htm