

A REVISIT OF VIETNAM-INDIA CULTURAL DIPLOMACY ACTIVITIES (2016–2021) AND ITS PROSPECTS

Ha Trieu Huy^{a*}

^a*Department of Liberal Arts Education, University of Management and Technology,
Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam*

**Corresponding author: Email: huy.hatrieu@umt.edu.vn*

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Abstract

This article traces the evolution of Vietnam-India cultural relations between 2016 and 2021. The methodology of qualitative research design, data collection, and thematic and textual analysis are used to shed light on the rise of Vietnam's and India's cultural diplomacy. The article describes the substantial development in Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy between 2016 and 2021 with clear evidence of cultural events. Based on the closely examined process of India-Vietnam cultural relations and the national policies of Vietnam and India, the author provides an outlook for these bilateral cultural ties in the future.

Keywords: Cultural diplomacy; India; Soft power; Southeast Asia; Vietnam; Vietnam-India bilateral relations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War put international relations on a new trajectory. The multipolar order of the modern international environment lessened the dominance of the great powers and paved the way for the rise of the middle powers. The open-door policy of Vietnam in 1986 helped Vietnam integrate into Southeast Asia, and Vietnam government (hereafter “Vietnam”) bilaterally and multilaterally upgraded an array of diplomatic relations with several countries around the world. India is considered a “dawn factor” that has intervened considerably in the Southeast Asian milieu to spread its power. Southeast Asia is a key region for India government (hereafter “India”) to diffuse “Indian soft power.” The robust relationship between India and ASEAN nations plays a part in establishing bilateral relations between India and ASEAN members. It seems reasonable to say that there is interest in Vietnam and India to forge a close relationship.

While Vietnam performed its own duty toward international relations via open-door diplomacy, India greatly benefited from its soft power to attain a greater degree of power in Vietnam and Southeast Asia. The two countries formed a strategic partnership in 2007, and this relationship turned into a comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016. This is a breakthrough marked by a handful of diplomatic achievements and mutual understanding. Since this event, the approach of Vietnam and India in their foreign policies has translated potential cultural links into reality, and both countries have deepened their relations via cultural links, which are notable illustrations of cultural diplomacy. In the post-pandemic international environment, it is crucial that Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy be examined and assessed to make a forecast for bilateral cultural diplomacy in the post-COVID-19 situation.

This study addresses two research questions:

- How has Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy progressed since their comprehensive strategic partnership?
- What can we see from this relationship, and what outlook can we predict for this relationship in the coming years?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This research topic has earned extensive literature. A wide range of research articles discuss Vietnam-India cultural links during this time interval, and research findings reveal an increase in cultural links in this bilateral relationship. Particularly, Lê and Triệu (2018, pp. 15-16) identified four elements that forge cultural links between Vietnam and India: historical relevance, foreign policies of Vietnam, Indian soft power, and educational demand in Vietnam. Nevertheless, many more factors should be examined, including the international background of Southeast Asia and the emergent notions of Vietnam regarding cultural diplomacy. Ngô (2021) underscored the cultural approach that sheds light on the accomplishments of bilateral diplomatic relations between Vietnam and India. Their study generalized salient points of cultural cooperation

in some key fields, including cinema, literature, art performance, architecture, and education (Ngô, 2021). The content of their paper is substantial, yet it lacks an appropriate evaluation of Vietnam-India diplomacy and its prospects based on the viewpoint of cultural diplomacy. Lê and Triệu (2021) published a general assessment of Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy and its effects on both countries. The authors stated that public diplomacy was an instrument for Vietnam to succeed in implementing comprehensive and effective foreign policies. Public diplomacy contributes to building cooperative, peaceful, and friendly relations between Vietnam and its international partners (Lê & Triệu, 2021). Likewise, Ha (2022) argued that cultural diplomacy is a critical element in Vietnam-Indian relations. The author examined the progress of Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy for the years from 2007 to 2021 and concluded that Vietnam and India are expected to increase their influence in the international sphere through a series of cultural events. This is also a method for Vietnam to reinforce its term-built concept of Vietnam's soft power in the future (Ha, 2022). In fact, Vietnam has built a robust strategy of public diplomacy, which is a key factor in the current foreign policies of Vietnam that stresses the effects of soft power and public diplomacy to carry out the proactive role of Vietnam in international relations. India can be seen as a contributory factor that helps Vietnam boost its influence in South Asia.

Several researchers have examined the dominant role of soft power in both Vietnam and India. Laskar (2019, p. 250) detailed the elements of Indian soft power, including listening, advocacy, cultural diplomacy, exchange diplomacy, and international broadcasting. A cultural diplomacy is a typical form of public diplomacy, and it plays a decisive role in promoting mutual understanding and helping countries achieve a higher degree of cooperation. David Malone addressed the concept of soft power in a case study of India. Malone argued that the rise of Indian classical and contemporary artists reveals the increasing cultural influence of India in many countries around the world (Malone, 2011, p. 35). This implies that Indian soft power is instrumental in assuming the frequent appearance of India in international relations, and this technique gave India a hand to raise its voice and perform its duty in international cooperation. Likewise, Daya Kishan Thussu stated that the Indian film industry had a significant impact on popular culture in various countries during their wartime. The large Indian diaspora is expected to spread the values of Indian culture overseas (Thussu, 2016, p. 415). Paul (2014, p. 157) argued that soft power could bring reputation, credibility, and legitimacy to a state's power position in the global system if it is developed and exercised in conjunction with hard power. There is no denying that India is employing soft power effectively and closely links its hard power with the intention of building a new image of India in all countries around the world. More importantly, this source is crucial to widely spreading the recognition of Indian culture and its civilizational values.

Overall, this research paper is derivative; it inherits the results of previous research. Data were collected to glean statistics and information from websites, secondary documents, and articles to trace the historical evolution of Vietnam-India cultural ties during the rising use of soft power from 2016 to 2021. Textual analysis was used to examine the reality of policies and diplomatic text as well as a great deal of information, while thematic analysis goes hand in hand with that method to identify academic terms

and theoretical explanations throughout the paper. They are the norm of Vietnam's and India's soft power and elements of their cultural diplomacy.

3. METHODOLOGY

This article uses a historical data collection that systematizes an array of secondary research to provide a comprehensive literature background for the topic. The data were culled from the internet, newspapers, and other media. The information concerns the comprehensive strategic partnership between Vietnam and India (2016–2021). Data were obtained from the official websites of the governments of Vietnam and India and from official information on Vietnam's agenda. The author chronologically organized the typical events to determine whether Vietnam and India had a progression in their cultural ties. A wide range of events should be correlated with their contributions to making foreign policies and their effect on a wide range of cultural activities. The author then employed textual and thematic analysis to assess a series of cultural, and diplomatic activities between Vietnam and India and referred to the theory of soft power to unravel the nature of cultural diplomacy in the foreign policy of Vietnam and India. Finally, the logical method is instrumental in forecasting the prospects of Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy, which is in the trajectory of the foreign policies of the two countries. These methods are critical for making a historical evaluation of Vietnam-India cultural ties and for predicting this relationship down the road.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy activities (2016–2021): A revisit

Cultural diplomacy is considered one of the elements of public diplomacy. It is an illustration of soft power and contains the sub-elements of visual art, religious values, and films and literature (Figure 1).

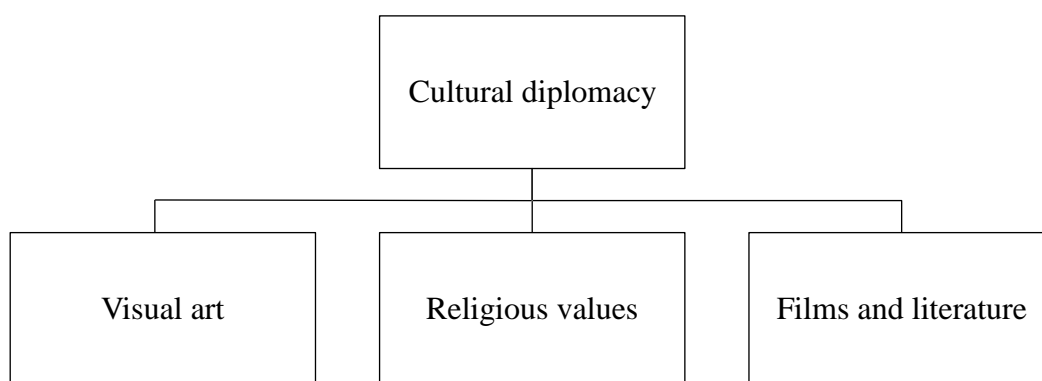


Figure 1. Key elements of cultural diplomacy

Visual art is considered a fundamental form of cultural diplomacy in Vietnam-India cultural ties. Visual art showcases cultural values, which potential viewers can

appreciate directly by enjoying visual art. Visual art includes audio art, some types of performances, and traditional attire. In the contemporary diplomatic history of the world, various countries are using visual art to make an immense influence on popular culture. According to Fernandez Ocon, cultural diplomacy is another term for cultural cooperation, and it expresses a largely interest-driven governmental use of culture to advance specific political, strategic, or national interests and to obtain desired results in international relations (Ocon, 2022, p. 6). In this case, visual art is intended to advance the national interests of both countries via the vehicle of culture.

First and foremost, annual festivals between Vietnam and India play a significant role in keeping cultural ties in contact and maintaining the stability of Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy. A festival is a key occasion to embrace mutual values and gain a deeper understanding. Shortly after the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the 8th Vietnam-India Friendship Festival was organized in Hanoi (Báo Nhân dân, 2016). The festival provided a rewarding opportunity for Vietnam to foster Indian awareness of Vietnamese culture by using local visits of Indian delegates. On this occasion, the Indian delegates paid a courtesy visit to ancient villages in Vietnam and to Truc Lam Zen Monastery, which belongs to a branch of Buddhism shared by both countries. This action of Vietnam reveals that Vietnam made an effort to seek similarities between Vietnamese and Indian cultures through Buddhism and features of agriculture-based societies. A similar festival was organized in 2019 in Ninh Binh Province, Vietnam, with the theme Solidarity–Cooperation–Development (Public Security News, 2019). This is a continued effort to maintain smooth cultural ties and bilaterally transmit culture. All in all, Vietnam and India emphasized their ties in a wide range of fields, using cultural diplomacy as an effective channel to bridge the gap in mutual understanding and encourage the role of cooperation in the new international context. The festivals marked a breakthrough in Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy as the two nations gained the highest degree of comprehensive strategic partnership and strengthened the role of Vietnam and India in Southeast Asia.

Art performance can be viewed as a driver of cultural exchanges. It is a type of visual art that helps viewers experience foreign cultures and grow the influence of countries. The Indian Holi festival that was held in Hanoi in April 2018 is a typical example. The Festival of Colors attracted hundreds of Vietnamese and Indians to experience the peculiarities of Indian culture (Vietnam Ministry of Culture, Sport and Tourism, 2018). Accordingly, a music performance was concurrently organized in Ho Chi Minh City on the occasion of Vietnam-India relations in 2018, which featured Namo Fusion music, a well-known band in India, who performed a variety of Indian songs for the audience (Báo Nhân dân, 2018). More significantly, an Indian delegation paid a visit to Yen Bai Province for the Art Performance Exchange Program Vietnam-India in 2018. Pranavanaadham Fusion is performed with fusion-style musical instruments combining the music of Carnatic, Hindustani, and western music (combining tradition and modernity). The group published two albums titled “Trendz” and “Breath Ecstasy” and has performed at numerous well-known universities and music festivals in India (Yen Bai Portal, 2018). This performance was a valuable occasion for India to disseminate Indian art to a Vietnamese audience and to deepen awareness of the interesting culture of India.

The delegation selected Yen Bai Province in northwestern Vietnam as a target destination, revealing that India desired to showcase its culture even in thinly populated cities to make Indian culture more widely known. These events marked a milestone in cultural cooperation between Vietnam and India and show the role of the art performance in the foreign policies of both Vietnam and India.

Likewise, the Swami Vivekananda Culture Center, in collaboration with the Embassy of India in Hanoi, organized a series of cultural festivals in September 2018. The Ganesha Festival is an example of an event that helped the Vietnamese gain a deeper understanding of Indian culture by introducing the culture of India through the image of Lord Ganesha and its illustration of some facets of Indian art (Embassy of India, 2018). This event attracted numerous Vietnamese to partake and enjoy the cultural space of religions and customs of India. Subsequently, the Indian Business Chamber worked closely with the Indian Consulate in Ho Chi Minh City to kick off the Indian Diwali Festival with the theme of the Festival of Lights in Gem Center, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, in November 2018. This event appealed to more than a hundred Indian ex-pats and Vietnamese visitors. The spectators experienced Indian culture, music, dances, and authentic Indian cuisine (Vietnam Plus Online Newspaper, 2018). The event lasted approximately four hours and introduced Indian art to Vietnamese visitors. Diwali is one of the most sacred festivals for Hindus and is widely celebrated across India. It spiritually signifies the victory of light over darkness or good over evil. Besides Vietnam, several countries in Southeast Asia hold this event annually in an attempt to publicize Indian culture to local people. It shows that the Indian state went hand in hand with the overseas Indian consulate to strenuously enlarge Indian culture. The goal of this event was to meet Indian diaspora cultural demands, yet it could be seen as a rewarding chance to promote Indian culture to external communities. Despite the severe COVID-19 pandemic, cultural links between Vietnam and India have remained at a plateau. The Indian Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City, along with the Indian Business Chamber celebrated the Indian community's Tai Pongal Festival in early 2021 (Báo điện tử Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2021). This event introduced aspects of Indian agriculture to the Vietnamese with Indian gratitude to nature, which offers them seasons of plenty.

The impact of Vietnamese culture has been colorfully illustrated in art exhibitions. An exhibition of Vietnamese art was organized by the Vietnamese embassy in India and the India Council for Cultural Relations in New Delhi in February 2016 (Vietnam Plus Online Newspaper, 2016). This event was significant to promote mutual understanding between Vietnam and India and was immensely informative to Indian people about the attainments of Vietnamese art. This is the first milestone of Vietnam in cultural transmission, which is a specific feature of Vietnam's soft power and Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy. Additionally, Vietnam worked closely with India to kick off the Vietnam-India Friendship Day in Ho Chi Minh City in 2017 on the occasion of the 45th anniversary of diplomatic ties between Vietnam and India (Hanoi Times, 2017). This incident mutually fostered the awareness of the Vietnamese and Indians of their own cultures and spread their values among communities through a variety of songs, art, and local cuisine. More importantly, Vietnam Day 2018 in India was an opportunity for Vietnam to grow its cultural involvement in India. Vietnam organized a show of

Vietnamese culture in India during the first week of March 2018. This event built India's respect for both the material and spiritual values of Vietnam. The great variety of artistic performances had a major influence on the Indian awareness of Vietnamese culture since they were exposed to unique characteristics of Vietnamese culture, including ceramics and traditional musical instruments (Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). This event was instrumental in introducing the image of a dynamic Vietnamese country and its people, rich in humanity and full of development potential. On the occasion of this event, the art exchanges between Vietnam and Indian artists were planned in the Indian Center from March 3 to 4, 2018. The many pictures and works exhibited at this event led to expressions of admiration for both Vietnam and India. The artistry of the Vietnamese thus had an opportunity to foster a growing interest among Indian viewers. In late 2019, the Embassy of Vietnam in India joined hands with the International Chamber of Media and Entertainment Industry of India to organize an exhibition featuring paintings by Vietnamese artists that opened in New Delhi on November 21 (Vietnam Plus Online Newspaper, 2019). This occasion supported an embrace of Vietnam-India cultural ties, and the Indians had an opportunity to understand the role of Vietnamese art and the spiritual soul of the Vietnamese through art. In 2020, classical Vietnamese drama (Tuong) was performed in India, with a welcoming ceremony for Vietnamese Vice President Dang Thi Ngoc Thinh and her entourage, who paid an official visit to India from February 11 to 13 for the 34th Surajkund International Crafts Mela 2020, and an international food and fashion exhibition (Sài Gòn Giải phóng News, 2020). Tuong is a traditional folk music of Vietnam, and its content brilliantly reflects all historical and cultural aspects of Vietnamese culture. It is currently attracting scholarly attention and listeners to recover positive values of Tuong and folk culture of Vietnam. The performance of Vietnamese Tuong in India was a substantial achievement that familiarizes a specific culture of Vietnam in a view of Asian culture to Indian communities.

The other illustration of Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy is proven in religious customs of Vietnam and India. Buddhism is a traditional belief of the Indians, and historically, this religion has a satisfactory outcome in Vietnamese culture through the diffusion of Buddhism in Southeast Asia several centuries ago. The values of Indian Buddhism set up a firm foundation of spiritual life of Vietnamese people and showing a great commitment to the establishment of India-impacted culture in the southern land of Vietnam. In 2017, Indian Buddhism Day was organized by the Vietnam-India Friendship Association in collaboration with the Vietnam Buddhism Assembly and the Indian Consulate General (Báo điện tử Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2017). This event deepened a sense of mutual belief between Vietnam and India and built respect among Vietnamese Buddhists in event of the role of Indian Buddhism in Vietnam Buddhism's history. The event also became a venue to percolating modern values of Indian Buddhism culture.

Besides, India was eager to host academic seminars to spread the values of Indian Buddhism. For instance, a regional conference with the theme "The Spread of Buddhist Thought" was jointly organized by the International Buddhist Confederation and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru University. In all, 24 research papers were presented, with six sessions seeking to build a concept of the role of ancient Indian Buddhism and the ancient scripts of Sanskrit in an effort to

recover the underlying values of Buddhism (Giác Ngộ Online, 2021). In the context of the global pandemic, this conference showed a continued endeavor by India in maintaining cultural contacts with Vietnam to deeply research the role of Buddhism in the spiritual life in Vietnam and India. Buddhism is deemed to be the historical element to solidify the cultural link between Vietnam and India and to take advantage of Buddhist doctrines in developing a fair and stable society. The Vietnam Academy of India and Southwest Asia Studies, in collaboration with the ASEAN India Center, organized an international conference with the theme of “Cultural and Civilizational Links Between Vietnam and India” in October 2021. Most scholars claimed that historical links between India and Southeast Asia depended on the heavy influence of the Champa kingdom, Sanskrit culture, cultural diffusion, and acculturation between India and Southeast Asia (Báo Quân đội nhân dân, 2021). Obviously, the profound involvement of India in Southeast Asia is undeniable on the understanding that the relics of the Cham and Funan civilizations in southern Vietnam prove the wealth of historic Indian influence on the material and spiritual life of ancient people. Such historical and cultural roles need academic elaboration to understand India’s deep intervention in Vietnam and to forge a mutual understanding of a shared history.

However, the transmission of religious values in Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy is a bidirectional process. On one side, Vietnam consistently depends on second-channel diplomacy to establish people-to-people relations with the hope of elevating Vietnam in international relations. The folk culture of Vietnam is a peculiar cultural realm which shapes Vietnamese traditional culture. On the evening of December 9, 2021, the Vietnamese Embassy in India organized a cultural exchange program in New Delhi, India, on the topic of *Thờ mẫu tam phủ* (Làm Báo Online, 2020). *Thờ mẫu tam phủ* is a folk belief of the Vietnamese that expresses honor for the role of women in traditional Vietnamese society. It is a splendid chance for both Vietnam and India to have a greater degree of cultural interaction and understanding and to raise Indian awareness of this Vietnamese folk belief. Also, this activity is apt to attract the academic interest of Indian scholars to examine the values of *Thờ mẫu tam phủ* in Vietnamese culture.

Film and literature probably lie at the heart of Vietnam-Indian cultural diplomacy. According to the Academy for Cultural Diplomacy website, the ability to move contributes to creating the illusion of life and reality, opening up new, unknown perspectives on the world. The film is an extremely powerful medium; it can depict human rights abuses and repression through storytelling in a way that challenges each individual to empathize and think about the requirements of justice (Academy for Cultural Diplomacy, n.d.). It is implied that film is instrumental in conveying thoughts, culture, and customs to viewers effortlessly. As a result, the film is one of the keystones of cultural diplomacy. Since the comprehensive strategic partnership, Indian movies have been widely broadcast on television in Vietnam and have caught Vietnam viewers’ attention. Although Indian films probably face a big rivalry with Korean and Chinese movies, they easily appeal to viewers owing to their specific style as well as professional acting. Indian movies also brought the Vietnamese a new experience of Indian culture, which is similar to Vietnamese culture in terms of family ties, love, opinions, and religion. Likewise, Vietnamese movies have been broadcast widely in India since 2016, and the Doordarshan

channel of India has aired numerous Vietnamese movies to introduce the Vietnamese people and culture to Indian viewers (Trang tin điện tử Đảng bộ Thành phố Hồ Chí Minh, 2016). Vietnamese movies introduced by Vietnam via Vietnam Day in 2018 contributed to forging a cultural link between Vietnam and India and raised awareness of Vietnamese culture among Indian communities. The event was valuable for Vietnam to directly circulate the cultural values of Vietnam via emotional movies and dramas, which have similar content and motifs in Indian cinema. Alongside cinema, literature is conducive to the promotion of cultural diplomacy in international relations. Vo Lap Phuc opined that literature is able to enlarge the cultural atmosphere overseas through books due to the rapid development of science and technology. Moreover, translations are beneficial to allow literature to achieve a higher number of readers (Võ & Nguyễn, 2022, pp. 91-92).

The rise of cultural diplomacy in current international relations is leading to the wide diffusion of literature so that readers worldwide possess their favorite works of literature, and it triggers a greater degree of cultural diffusion conveyed by languages. Tagore is a world-renowned author of several poems familiar to Vietnamese researchers and students. In 2020, the Vietnam-India Friendship Association, in combination with the Da Nang Board of Culture and Sport, organized an academic forum in Da Nang with the theme: “Tagore’s Poems and Indian Culture.” Most scholars reached a consensus that Indian culture, which possesses a vast literature, is civilizational. Tagore’s poems satisfy the aesthetic soul of the Vietnamese people, so they have a considerable influence on the Vietnamese. This forum introduced various translated copies of Tagore’s poems to readers (Liên hiệp các tổ chức hữu nghị thành phố Đà Nẵng, 2020). Such events indicate an increase in literary attention by the Vietnamese toward Indian literature, and consequently, Tagore is thought to narrow the gap between Vietnam and India and to implant the soul of Indian culture into the Vietnamese spirit.

4.2. Prospects

Cultural diplomacy is predicted to design its powerful influence in contemporary international relations. Policies of cultural diplomacy have the ability to be formulated contingent on national interests with the hope of creating a country’s impact. On the one hand, cultural diplomacy is considered a type of soft power that a country uses hand in hand with hard power to investigate its influence or coerce other countries into its wishes. In the context of comprehensive worldwide cooperation, cultural diplomacy is widely employed by states to build an image of their presence in the international community.

Recently, Vietnam has been acutely cognizant of the role of soft power as well as cultural diplomacy, so it intends to raise awareness of those kinds of power through its approach to foreign policy. In the 13th Congress of the Vietnam Communist Party, Vietnamese leaders asserted that the power of Vietnamese culture was apt to strengthen the internal power of Vietnam. Thus, Vietnam is expected to principally focus on soft power in the future, including patriotism, self-reliance, pride, and solidarity. It will seek to absorb foreign culture in combination with its traditional culture to build cultural well-being, which is considered a driving force for social development (Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam, 2021, pp. 145-146). Likewise, Vietnam emphasizes the role of advertising, with the

purpose of promoting Vietnam's cultural aspects in other countries and increasing tourism and improving the economy. While Vietnam is a developing country, the power of traditional culture is expected to be a favorable element that helps connect Vietnam with other countries and takes advantage of historical pride to modify conflicting interests in international relations. India is a long-standing user of cultural diplomacy. The effectiveness of the 2014 Act East policy is politically instrumental in taking a balanced approach to numerous countries in Southeast Asia. This policy, including economic, strategic, and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels, contributed to wielding the power of India in Southeast Asia as well as having a dynamic influence on Vietnam's culture. Based on the examined events and foreign policies of Vietnam and India, the outlook for Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy is discussed below.

First and foremost, Vietnam is likely to expand the significance of its soft power (Figure 2). Although lacking an official newspaper on this issue, Vietnam would assert its centrality in the role of culture to exercise its soft power. This effort includes festivals and exhibitions, academic forums and conferences, cinema, songs and stories, and the role of the Vietnamese diaspora. Traditional art performances unveil a handful of historical aspects, and art performance is a short way to foster an appreciation of Vietnamese culture. Religion is presumed to be a shared element to diffuse indigenous values to religious practitioners. Movies, songs, and historical stories provide lively insight into Vietnamese customs and etiquette. Finally, it is hoped the Vietnamese diaspora will promote the spread of cultural influence overseas.

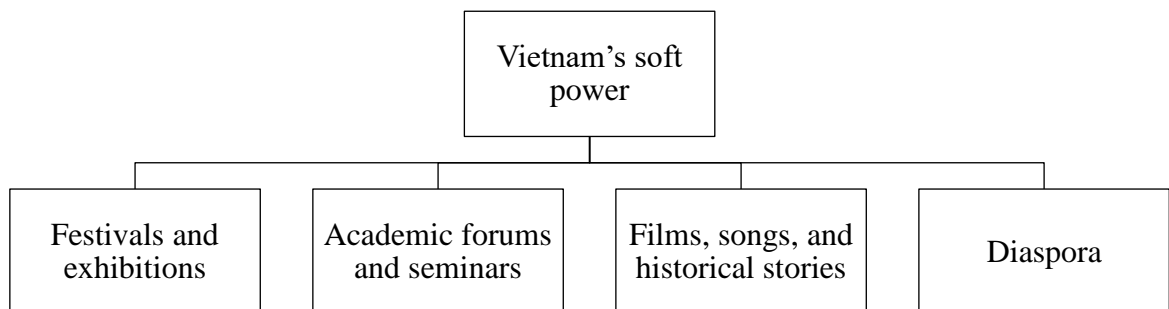


Figure 2. Vietnam's soft power elements

With regard to India, the success of festivals and cultural events are highly important to guarantee satisfactory benefits in promoting the values of Vietnam. After the global COVID-19 pandemic, the resumption of festivals has been beneficial for healing the halt of cultural exchange due to the pandemic and building deep mutual understanding between Vietnam and India. As a result, Vietnam-India cultural exchange activities and annual festivals constitute an era of deeper cultural cooperation for a bright vista of this relation. Despite the hardship of the pandemic, cultural events are presumed to recover as soon as Vietnam and India open their borders to exchange and tourism.

The hybrid method of seminars and academic forums is conducive to maintaining discussions between Vietnam and India on cultural affairs. These events become

diplomatic leverage to encourage the development of mutual beliefs and facilitate Vietnam's and India's soft power. While awaiting the full reopening, Vietnam and India would take advantage of online forums to float an idea of cultural cooperation and exchange. Also, those events would translate research projects into reality for the betterment of cultural events, including Indian Buddhism, literature, and history. The lessons and academic activities at universities are worthy of Indian culture so as to equip students with a rich knowledge of India.

Songs and movies are also assumed to be key aspects of promoting Vietnamese culture in India. The appearance of Vietnamese movies and songs at festivals indicates that Vietnam is making a continued attempt to show its diverse culture to the people of India. There is no denying that cinema and songs are considered the best way to convey thoughts, soul, and local culture to viewers, and these are likely to build a concept of Vietnam among Indian communities. Thereby, Vietnam intends to promote the spread of Vietnamese cinema and songs in India via festivals and the annual Vietnam Day in India.

Likewise, the establishment of Vietnamese diasporic communities in India has greatly helped diffuse Vietnamese culture in India. According to Elonora Petrova-Mitevka, diasporic cultures exist as an outcome of the diffusion of communities throughout the world, often through forced dispersion or for other historical reasons (Petrova-Mitevka, 2004). Diasporic communities represent and maintain a culture different from those of the countries in which they are located, often retaining solid ties with their country and culture of origin (real or perceived) and with other communities of the same origin with the purpose of preserving that culture. This is an essentially cultural phenomenon and not necessarily linked to migration (Petrova-Mitevka, 2004). The role of diasporic communities is significant to distribute soft power of a country and promote nation branding overseas. The contribution of the diasporic culture would diversify the national culture and bolster the strategic presence of the state in promoting soft power. The existence of Vietnamese communities in India is a huge benefit for Vietnam in growing its influence in India. The showcasing of Vietnamese festivals and holidays in India has the potential to heighten India's attention to Vietnamese culture and to foster people-to-people cooperation in culture.

On the other side, India opened up a bright vista for its strategic presence in Southeast Asia by means of Indian soft power and its Act East policy. This policy buttresses the voice of India in soft power and Vietnam as a destination of Indian soft power. Laskar (2019) identified seven elements that constitute India's soft power (Figure 3).

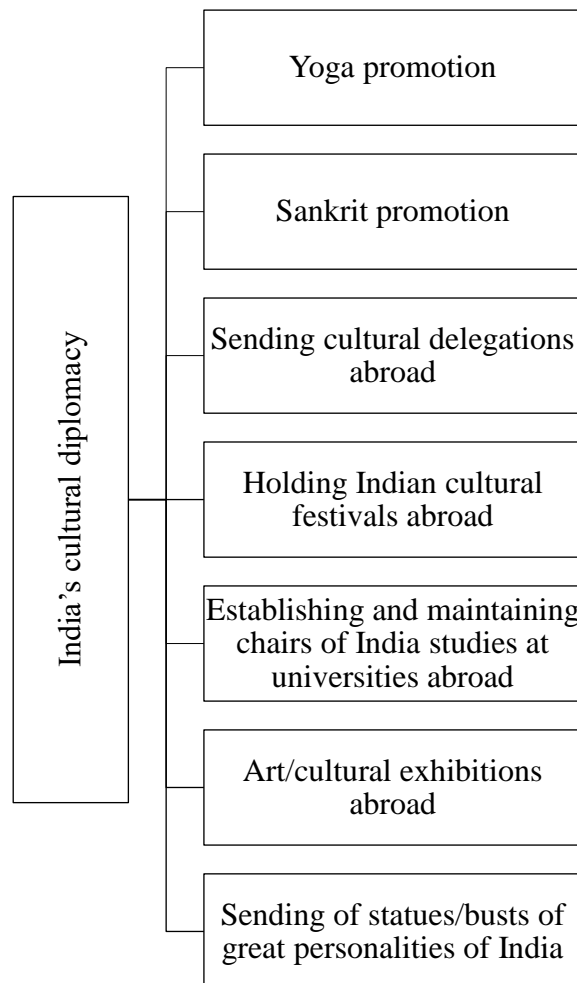


Figure 3. Main activities of Indian cultural diplomacy

Source: Laskar (2019, pp. 252-253).

It can be seen from the finding of Laskar that India paid heed to form a complete norm of Indian soft power. Based on previous activities, India pulled off in organizing several cultural events. These festivals kicked off in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City and attracted many visitors to join the Indian cultural exhibition. As analyzed, India took great advantage of festivals to exhibit their art performances, which showed up the achievements of Indian civilization. India has encouraged the development of yoga, which is a therapy for mediation and good health. The International Day of Yoga, which is celebrated every June 21, is a typical example of the promotion of Indian cultural diplomacy. The Indian Consulate, along with Vietnam's local authorities, organized an online celebration on the occasion of International Yoga Day in 2021. The topic, "Yoga for Wellness," stimulated the Vietnamese to choose this exercise to maintain physical well-being during the prolonged COVID-19 lockdown (Báo Dân tộc và Phát triển, 2021). Hence, it is recommended that India and Vietnam partner celebrate this occasion annually and encourage their residents to practice yoga widely in their lives.

Educational cooperation lies at the center of Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy. McKenzie et al. (2008) argued that people exchange is the oldest form of educational collaboration. It involves international exchanges of students, teachers, researchers, and administrators through scholarships, study visits, curriculum projects, and research collaboration (McKenzie et al., 2008, p. 28). Vietnam-India educational cooperation probably is a target of Indian soft power. As a result, it is predicted that India would offer Vietnamese students a wide-ranging selection of scholarships in the future. Moreover, the organization of academic activities will be capable of tightening cultural ties via the effectiveness of research and scholarly publications. Vietnam and India would stress the importance of scholarship sources to educate a generation of students in Indian studies, which is believed to be a key solution to elevate the echelon of Vietnam and India in international relations.

Furthermore, India and Vietnam have established various research centers and departments in Vietnam for education and studies. Examples include the IT and English Training Center at the National Defense Academy of Vietnam, the Vocational Training Center in Ho Chi Minh City, and the High-Performance Computing Center at Hanoi Polytechnic University. From 2000 to 2021, the University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City educated a large number of Vietnamese students who majored in Indian studies. The students are taught to achieve linguistic proficiency in the Hindi language and to gain familiarity with several issues in India. The universities offer chances for students to participate in research activities to foster an awareness of all aspects of India. Also, clubs of the Faculty of Oriental Studies have organized various cultural events to promote prominent values of India to student communities. Thanks to the Indian embassy and government funding, the Faculty of Oriental Studies shoulders the responsibility of spreading Indian values to Vietnamese students and researchers. Hence, it directly contributes to improving the quality of human resources and to educating new generations who commit to Indian studies in Vietnam.

Last but not least, India is certain to encourage the teaching of Hindi language and other native languages of India in Vietnam. While meeting the requirements of researchers to recollect a phase of India-based influences on ancient kingdoms of Vietnam through learning Sanskrit and other vernaculars, the Hindi language paves the way to modern Indian culture and rivet the relationship between the Vietnamese and Indian people. In essence, the teaching of the Hindi language in Vietnam has earned the scant attention of Vietnamese students and is less popular than in other languages. The complexity of the language, together with a dearth of teacher resources, is a major challenge for this issue. As a result, a rising role for the Hindi and Sanskrit languages is suggested to promote Indian language teaching and learning among the Vietnamese communities. Language scholarships for Vietnamese students will be a significant means of boosting the study of Indian languages in Vietnamese academia.

5. CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, this article draws two major conclusions. First, Vietnam-India cultural diplomacy developed after their comprehensive strategic partnership in 2016. The author

traced the evolution of this relationship based on a wide range of reports, articles, and documents to shed light on the flourishing Vietnam-India cultural ties. The theoretical framework of soft power was employed to examine the policies of Vietnam and India, and it is conspicuous that Vietnam and India have increased their utilization of soft power in Southeast Asia. The evidence reveals that both Vietnam and India stimulated freedom of soft power and cultural activities. The two authorities emphasized specific elements of soft power, including the effectiveness of festivals and art performances, while the presence of movies and other factors were also instrumental in enhancing soft power. Second, both Vietnam and India would share their bright mutual vision to advance their cultural diplomacy. India is expected to promote soft power in its relationship with Vietnam through cultural cooperation. Recently, Indian researchers have paid more attention to India-oriented civilizations in Vietnam, but more research is much needed to build a new concept of Vietnam's and India's cultural diplomacy and to examine it in the new history of this bilateral relationship down the road.

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