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Vietnam's Cultural Diplomacy in the Context of International Integration (2009–2025)

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ABSTRACT: Cultural diplomacy has increasingly become an important instrument of soft power, contributing to the promotion of national image, the consolidation of foreign-policy standing and the advancement of international cooperation. Against the background of deepening international integration, Vietnam has gradually established cultural diplomacy as one of the pillars of its comprehensive diplomacy and has undertaken a wide range of activities designed to disseminate national identity, intensify international exchange and enhance national attractiveness. This article analyses the development of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy between 2009 and 2025 on the basis of a study of policies, official guidelines and practical activities in the fields of cultural promotion, heritage conservation and valorisation, international cultural exchange and multilateral cooperation. It also compares the cultural diplomacy experiences of several Asian countries, namely South Korea, China and India, and gives particular emphasis to India's yoga diplomacy as an exemplary model of transforming traditional cultural values into a soft-power resource with global reach. On this basis, the article proposes a number of orientations for improving the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy, strengthening soft power and enhancing Vietnam's national brand positioning in the coming period.

KEYWORDS: cultural diplomacy; soft power; Vietnam; international integration; yoga diplomacy; national brand.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalisation and ever-deeper international integration, culture is not only the spiritual foundation of society but has also become a significant resource in international relations. With the development of the concept of soft power, many countries have actively used culture as an instrument of foreign policy in order to increase their attractiveness, build their national image, promote people-to-people exchange and consolidate their standing in the international arena. Cultural diplomacy has therefore become an increasingly important component of the foreign-policy strategies of many states, particularly at a time when competition for influence is intensifying through cultural values, education, media and heritage.

In Asia, a number of countries have achieved considerable success in strengthening their soft power through cultural diplomacy. South Korea has built global influence through the Hallyu (Korean Wave), encompassing music, film and popular cultural products; Japan has promoted its national image through anime, manga and traditional cultural values; and China has advanced cultural diplomacy through its network of Confucius Institutes and international cultural exchange programmes. Notably, India has elevated yoga from a traditional cultural and philosophical practice to a global symbol of health and lifestyle, thereby considerably enhancing its national attractiveness. These experiences show that cultural diplomacy is increasingly an important means of converting cultural resources into soft power and international influence.

For Vietnam, alongside the process of *Đổi mới* (Renewal) and proactive international integration, cultural diplomacy has gradually been established as one of the three pillars of comprehensive diplomacy, together with political diplomacy and economic diplomacy. Between 2009 and 2025, Vietnam implemented numerous activities to promote national culture, intensify international cultural exchange, enhance the value of UNESCO-inscribed heritage and expand cultural cooperation within bilateral and multilateral frameworks. These activities have contributed to promoting the country's image, strengthening understanding between Vietnam and the international community, and creating more favourable conditions for cooperation in many fields.

Nevertheless, amid intensifying competition in soft power and the vigorous growth of the digital media environment, Vietnam's cultural diplomacy continues to face a number of challenges. These include limited resources, the limited competitiveness of cultural products, the absence of cultural symbols with global reach, and the need to reconcile international integration with the preservation of national identity. Meanwhile, existing studies have mostly focused on individual aspects of cultural diplomacy and have not comprehensively analysed the development of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy between 2009 and 2025 in relation to the context of international integration and to trends in the cultural diplomacy of countries in the region.

On this basis, the article analyses the development of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy between 2009 and 2025; assesses its achievements, limitations and the issues arising in practical implementation; and compares it with a number of representative experiences of Asian countries, in particular India's yoga diplomacy. The aim is to draw implications for improving the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy and strengthening Vietnam's national soft power in the coming period.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural diplomacy has attracted wide scholarly attention in international relations and foreign-policy research. Internationally, many scholars approach cultural diplomacy from the perspective of soft power and the building of national influence. Nye (2004, p. 255) argues that culture is one of the principal resources that constitute soft power, enabling a state to achieve its foreign-policy objectives through attraction rather than coercion. Bành (2008), for his part, stresses the role of cultural diplomacy in fostering mutual understanding, building national image and increasing influence in the international environment. UNESCO (2022) likewise affirms that cultural diplomacy is an important instrument for strengthening international cooperation and promoting sustainable development.

In Vietnam, research on cultural diplomacy intensified from the late 2000s, in step with ever-deeper international integration. The first group of studies concentrates on clarifying the theoretical foundations and the role of cultural diplomacy in Vietnam's foreign policy. Representative works include those of K. Nguyễn (2008), D. B. Nguyễn (2008) and Phạm (2008), together with publications produced under the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on cultural diplomacy and Vietnamese identity in the international arena. These studies helped to establish an initial understanding of cultural diplomacy as an important component of modern diplomacy.

The second group of studies focuses on theoretical frameworks, international experience and its applicability to Vietnam. Representative works include that of Phạm and Lý (2012) on the theoretical foundations and international experience of cultural diplomacy; the study by Bành Tân Lâm [year to be confirmed] on China's cultural diplomacy and soft power; and the study by Hồ (2016) on India's cultural diplomacy from a soft-power perspective. These works provide an important basis for comparing and assessing Vietnam's position within global trends in cultural diplomacy.

The third group of studies addresses the practical implementation of cultural diplomacy in Vietnam during the period of international integration. The works of Lê and Trần (2022), Trịnh (2019), Nguyễn (2020), Dương (2023), Trần (2022) and Lê and Nguyễn (2025) analyse the role of cultural diplomacy in promoting the national image, building the Vietnamese brand, enhancing the value of cultural heritage and supporting the process of international integration.

Overall, existing studies have illuminated many theoretical and practical aspects of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy. However, most focus on individual dimensions, such as theoretical foundations, policy, cultural heritage or nation branding. Few studies take a holistic view of the development of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy between 2009 and 2025 in the context of international integration, while also offering a comprehensive assessment of both its achievements and the challenges it faces. Building on the findings of earlier research, this article analyses Vietnam's cultural diplomacy activities between 2009 and 2025, thereby clarifying their contributions and limitations, as well as a number of issues bearing on the enhancement of national soft power in the coming period.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. Theoretical foundations of cultural diplomacy

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, cultural diplomacy has been regarded as an important component of the overall diplomatic activity of many countries. According to Goff (2020), cultural diplomacy derives from the view that good relations between states can be nurtured on a foundation of mutual understanding and respect, and that the arts, language and education are important points of access for building solidarity. Clarke (2020), in turn, emphasises that cultural diplomacy is a policy field in which states mobilise cultural resources to achieve foreign-policy objectives. The nature of these objectives and the types of cultural resources employed vary across historical periods, but what they have in common is the aim of generating influence through attraction rather than coercion. Zervaki (2020, pp. 181–200) likewise affirms that cultural diplomacy is a dimension of public diplomacy, serving as an instrument of soft power to build national image and exert influence in international relations. Cultural diplomacy is thus not merely the presentation of a country's culture to the world but also a long-term strategy for consolidating a state's standing within the international system.

Cultural diplomacy can therefore be understood as a proactive form of foreign activity that plays a distinctive role in international relations. Through various forms and instruments, it contributes to promoting and building national image and to affirming a country's distinctive identity and value system. Furthermore, it strengthens understanding and cooperation among peoples through cultural exchange, which creates opportunities for mutual access and comprehension, reduces conflict and promotes multilateral cooperation. Cultural diplomacy also supports political and economic objectives by creating a favourable social foundation for implementing foreign policy, expanding markets and attracting investment. In the context of globalisation and a world order shifting towards multipolarity, soft power is an important instrument of foreign policy and a constituent element of comprehensive national power. Contemporary scholars are generally agreed that culture is a constituent element of soft power. Accordingly, cultural

diplomacy has become an inevitable trend among states, helping to define the identity of a country's diplomacy and to establish the standing of the nation-state in the international arena. UNESCO (2022) affirms that culture is a pillar of sustainable development as well as an instrument for promoting international cooperation.

In practice, many countries have implemented cultural diplomacy strategies in their own ways. The United States regards cultural diplomacy as an extension of soft power, focusing on promoting the English language and disseminating American culture and values (through Hollywood films, music, literature, fashion and so forth) and on educational exchange (such as the Fulbright Program). China likewise identifies cultural diplomacy as a constituent part of soft power and pursues Confucian diplomacy through Confucius Institutes worldwide, with the aim of promoting Chinese language and culture. India takes culture as the pillar of its soft power and implements a cultural diplomacy strategy tied to the promotion of Eastern spiritual values and philosophy; in particular, it has popularised yoga, an enduring crystallisation of Indian culture, across the globe, thereby enhancing national attractiveness. In the new context, with the development of digital technology and global media, the modes of implementing cultural diplomacy have also changed fundamentally and comprehensively. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (now X), YouTube and TikTok have become fast and far-reaching channels for cultural promotion. Many countries are digitising their cultural heritage for online promotion, enabling access to a global audience. Digital diplomacy is also receiving growing attention as culture is embedded in national communication campaigns, producing strong diffusion effects.

From the foregoing analysis, cultural diplomacy is evidently an important field of both theory and practice within international relations. It is at once an instrument of soft power in foreign relations and a long-term strategy for building national image in the context of globalisation. International trends evident in UNESCO and in the United States, China, India, Japan and elsewhere show that cultural diplomacy is increasingly a pillar of modern foreign policy. At the same time, the development of digital technology opens up new opportunities but also poses challenges for the governance and preservation of cultural identity in the global environment.

3.2. Research methods

This article adopts a qualitative research approach based on the collection, synthesis and analysis of secondary sources relating to Vietnam's cultural diplomacy and international integration between 2009 and 2025. The data comprise Party and State documents on foreign affairs and international integration, strategies and programmes on cultural diplomacy, domestic and international scientific studies, and reports, monographs and materials from international organisations such as UNESCO.

Document analysis is used to clarify theoretical perspectives on cultural diplomacy and to identify the development, implementation, achievements and challenges of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy in the context of international integration. In addition, the historical method is applied to examine the development of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy chronologically from 2009 to 2025, while the logical method is used to analyse the relationship between cultural diplomacy, the process of international integration and the enhancement of national soft power.

The article also employs the comparative method to contrast the cultural diplomacy experiences of several countries, namely China, India and South Korea, in order to draw conclusions about the opportunities, challenges and development orientations of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy in the new period.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Vietnam's policies on cultural diplomacy, 2009–2025

From the 2000s onwards, cultural diplomacy was proposed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and discussed at a series of conferences, and it was clearly defined in Directive No. 4252/2008/CT-BNG of 23 December 2008 of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "On strengthening cultural diplomacy to create new momentum for Vietnamese diplomacy in the process of international integration". The Documents of the 11th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (Communist Party of Vietnam [CPV], 2011) introduced the concept of "cultural diplomacy" into an official Party document for the first time, regarding it as a special field within the comprehensive foreign-policy strategy. The Documents call for "closely coordinating the external activities of the Party, the diplomacy of the State and people-to-people external relations; foreign affairs, defence and security; political, economic and cultural external relations", and emphasise "using culture as both an object and a means of achieving the fundamental goals of national foreign policy, creating a positive image of the country, and promoting the national culture and language abroad" (CPV, 2011, pp. 47, 98). The 12th National Congress (2016) continued to affirm the requirement to "proactively integrate internationally in the cultural and social fields" and stressed close coordination among political diplomacy, economic diplomacy and cultural diplomacy (CPV, 2016, p. 168). This marked an important development in strategic thinking, because it placed culture on a par with the economy and politics, treating culture not only as a spiritual foundation but also as a strategic instrument for expanding international relations. By the 13th National Congress (2021), this position had been elevated to a strategic orientation: "Further promote cultural diplomacy, making a practical contribution to strongly promoting the national image and strengthening the comprehensive strength of the country" (CPV, 2021, p. 102).

An important milestone was Resolution No. 22-NQ/TW of 10 April 2013 of the Politburo on international integration, which identified cultural integration as an essential part of the comprehensive integration process. The Resolution emphasised that international integration in culture aims to absorb the quintessence of humanity while promoting national cultural values and thereby contributing to raising the country's standing (Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam [Politburo], 2013). In addition, Resolution No. 33-NQ/TW (2014) on building and developing Vietnamese culture and people also set out the task of "proactively integrating internationally in culture and absorbing the quintessence of human culture" (CPV, 2014, p. 12).

Three strategic objectives of the cultural diplomacy line for 2009–2025 can be summarised as follows: (i) to promote the image of the country and people of Vietnam, build the national brand and disseminate Vietnamese cultural values to the world; (ii) to help protect national sovereignty and interests through cultural channels, using culture as "soft power" to build international consensus and reduce political tension; and (iii) to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cultural cooperation and promote exchange within ASEAN, UNESCO, ASEM and APEC, thereby raising Vietnam's standing (Dương, 2023).

The Party's line on cultural diplomacy in this period thus reflects a renewal of foreign-policy thinking, in which culture is regarded as both a spiritual foundation and a strategic instrument for comprehensive international integration. Its strength lies in the consistency of the position from the 11th to the 13th Congress, which shows that cultural diplomacy is not an expedient measure but a long-term orientation. A limitation, however, is that the documents remain oriented towards general guidance and have not been translated into specific indicators for measuring effectiveness, so that practical implementation sometimes lacks a quantitative basis for evaluation.

On the basis of the Party's guidelines, the Government issued the *Strategy for Cultural Diplomacy to 2020* (Decision No. 208/QĐ-TTg of 14 February 2011) and the *Strategy for Cultural Diplomacy to 2030* (Decision No. 2013/QĐ-TTg of 30 November 2021). These strategies define five groups of tasks: opening the way for relations, promoting the national image, lobbying for UNESCO recognition of heritage, absorbing the quintessence of humanity and strengthening international cooperation (Dương, 2023). In practice, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has integrated cultural diplomacy into high-level visits and international conferences, thereby both promoting Vietnam's image and creating a favourable environment for political and economic cooperation. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism has coordinated numerous exchange programmes, festivals and exhibitions, helping to bring Vietnamese culture to the world (Nguyễn, 2020). Among the most prominent activities are the "Vietnam Day Abroad" and "Vietnamese Culture Week" programmes. Since 2010, many cultural events have been organised in France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and elsewhere, featuring diverse activities such as artistic performances, cuisine, photographic exhibitions and film screenings. These programmes have become "brands" of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy and have helped international friends to understand the country and people of Vietnam better (Lê & Nguyễn, 2025). In addition, Vietnam has actively lobbied UNESCO to recognise many tangible and intangible cultural heritage items. At the same time, it has participated extensively in multilateral forums such as ASEAN, ASEM, APEC and the United Nations, thereby affirming its role as a responsible member and contributing to common peace and development. Furthermore, mobilising the overseas Vietnamese community has received attention. Vietnamese-language teaching programmes, traditional festivals and cultural exchanges have enabled overseas Vietnamese to become "cultural ambassadors" who spread the image of Vietnam among local people.

In sum, the implementation of cultural diplomacy between 2009 and 2025 has yielded many important achievements. Vietnam has built the image of a dynamic, culturally rich and responsible member of the international community. Cultural activities have helped to broaden friendly relations and have laid a foundation for political and economic cooperation.

Nevertheless, limitations remain: some programmes are formalistic and have not left a lasting impression; the cultural products introduced abroad are limited in quality and competitiveness; and coordination among ministries and sectors is not yet fully synchronised. This indicates a need to continue improving mechanisms and policies, to strengthen resources and to enhance the professionalism of cultural diplomacy personnel.

4.2. Achievements, significance and limitations (2009–2025)

4.2.1. Achievements and significance

Between 2009 and 2025, Vietnam's cultural diplomacy achieved many important results, contributing to affirming the country's standing in the international arena and laying a foundation for comprehensive integration.

Firstly, *promoting Vietnamese culture to the world.* One of the most prominent activities of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy has been its active lobbying for UNESCO inscription of cultural and natural heritage, combined with promotional activities by Vietnam's diplomatic missions abroad through distinctive cultural events. These activities aim to bring national cultural values closer to the international community and to contribute to presenting the identity, history and creativity of the Vietnamese people. In this process, UNESCO occupies a special position, as a multilateral forum capable of connecting states through shared values in culture, education, science and heritage. Vietnam's strengthened cooperation with UNESCO, from signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for 2016–2020 on the basis of a review of the 2010–2015 period to participating in specialised mechanisms and programmes, demonstrates efforts to broaden and deepen its relationship with the organisation. Notably, Vietnam has held several positions within UNESCO's specialised mechanisms and programmes, including Vice-Chair of the Memory of the World

Programme Regional Committee for Asia and the Pacific (MOWCAP) for 2014–2018 and Vice-Chair of the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission Sub-Commission for the Western Pacific (IOC/WESTPAC) for 2012–2015. A Vietnamese representative also served as Secretary-General of the World Federation of UNESCO Clubs, Centres and Associations for 2011–2015. These outcomes reflect Vietnam's proactiveness in participating in multilateral cooperation mechanisms, which has created conditions for expanding its network of relationships, strengthening professional exchange and enhancing the country's presence in international cooperation.

A prominent achievement of cultural diplomacy has been the lobbying for UNESCO inscription of Vietnam's heritage. As of 2025, Vietnam had 37 items recognised or inscribed by UNESCO (comprising 9 World Heritage sites, 17 items of intangible cultural heritage and 11 items of documentary heritage), the highest number in ASEAN across these three categories (Lê, 2026). UNESCO inscription provides additional international grounds for Vietnam to present its distinctive cultural, historical and natural values, broadens its access to a global public and consolidates the image of a country with a long history, diverse identity and rich potential for cultural exchange. Heritage items such as Huế court music (*Nhã nhạc*), Bac Ninh *quan họ* folk songs, the central Vietnamese *bài chòi* art, Hạ Long Bay and Phong Nha–Kẻ Bàng have become emblematic images that help to shape international perceptions of Vietnam. Each item carries its own historical, artistic, intellectual and religious values; when presented in the international arena, these values help to reveal the cultural depth and diversity of the country. In particular, they enable Vietnam to convey stories about the formation of its communities, its spiritual life and the creativity of successive generations of Vietnamese. This is a basis for building a national image from concrete cultural values that are attractive and capable of transcending differences in language, institutions and customs.

Beyond promoting traditional cultural values and heritage, cultural diplomacy has also contributed significantly to building Vietnam's national brand. Through cultural festivals, Vietnamese culture weeks abroad, and the promotion of cuisine, the arts and tourism, Vietnam's image has been presented as a peaceful, friendly country that is rich in identity and open to the world. Cultural diplomacy activities are increasingly linked with trade, investment and tourism promotion, helping to raise international recognition of Vietnamese products, places and cultural values. According to Dương (2023, pp. 3–4), cultural diplomacy not only promotes the image of the country and people of Vietnam but also contributes to building the national brand, supporting the expansion of economic cooperation, promoting tourism and enhancing the integration capacity of both localities and the country as a whole.

Secondly, *cultural diplomacy contributes to strengthening the country's international standing.* Through exchange, promotion and cultural cooperation activities, Vietnam has gradually affirmed its image as a country with a rich cultural identity and a long historical tradition, while also demonstrating its proactiveness and dynamism in the process of international integration. Programmes such as "Vietnam Day Abroad" and "Vietnamese Culture Week", organised in France, Germany, Japan, South Korea, Thailand and many other countries, have given international audiences direct access to Vietnamese culture, arts, cuisine and people. The significance of these activities goes beyond presenting cultural values: they help to narrow perceptual gaps, strengthen mutual understanding and generate goodwill towards Vietnam. When implemented regularly, with a clear focus and in a manner suited to the cultural characteristics of each locality, exchange programmes further consolidate the national image in the perception of the international public and create a favourable social foundation for expanding cooperation in many fields.

From the perspective of international relations, a country's standing is established not only by its economic, political and defence potential but also by its credibility, its cultural attractiveness and its capacity to contribute to the common concerns of the international community. In this respect, cultural diplomacy provides a complementary channel to political and economic activity, enabling Vietnam to convey messages about its identity, perspectives and development orientations through soft, accessible forms of communication. The presence of Vietnamese culture in international exchange spaces enriches understanding of the country, counters one-sided views and allows external relations to be built on a deeper knowledge of Vietnam's history, society and people.

Beyond direct promotional activities, Vietnam's active participation in multilateral cooperation mechanisms, including ASEAN, the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM), Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and UNESCO, also enables cultural diplomacy to play a part in raising the country's standing. Through cooperation programmes, exchange initiatives and cultural exchange activities, Vietnam has opportunities to share experience, promote dialogue among cultures and contribute to resolving common problems in a spirit of respect for diversity. Moreover, participation in these mechanisms helps Vietnam to link the goal of promoting national identity with its responsibility for international cooperation, demonstrating its proactive approach to integration and its readiness to contribute to common peace, stability and development. The combination of affirming its own identity and respecting shared values provides a basis on which Vietnam can consolidate its image as a responsible member of the international community.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy in raising Vietnam's international standing should be judged by substantive changes in Vietnam's relations with the international community, rather than primarily by the number of events or the scope of cultural promotion abroad. The value of these activities is most evident when exchange helps partners to understand Vietnam and its people more deeply, builds goodwill and opens up new opportunities for cooperation. To achieve such results, cultural diplomacy programmes need to be maintained regularly, with clear direction and in a manner suited to the characteristics and needs of each partner. The active participation of communities, together with close coordination among diplomatic agencies, cultural agencies, local authorities, enterprises and overseas Vietnamese, will help to connect resources and sustain exchange relationships. Ultimately,

the significance of cultural diplomacy lies in its capacity to nurture understanding and trust among communities, creating a favourable social foundation for international cooperation and contributing to strengthening Vietnam's prestige and standing in the international arena.

Thirdly, *cultural diplomacy contributes to the development of bilateral and multilateral relations.* One of the important contributions of cultural diplomacy is its capacity to create points of connection between countries through shared cultural values, needs and experiences. Compared with foreign-affairs activities that take place mainly within formal frameworks, cultural exchange allows actors to interact in a more open and approachable environment, which fosters empathy and widens opportunities for cooperation. In Vietnam, events such as the Huế Festival, the Da Lat Flower Festival, the Da Nang International Fireworks Festival, the Vietnam–Korea Food Festival and the Japanese Cherry Blossom Festival in Hanoi have created spaces for exchange involving artists, enterprises, cultural organisations and the domestic and international public. Through these activities, cultural values are presented through direct interaction between communities, giving foreign relations greater social depth.

The influence of cultural events is also reflected in their capacity to connect fields of cooperation that are closely interrelated. An arts festival may open opportunities for exchange among performing troupes; culinary promotion may stimulate interest in products, services and tourism; and local exchange programmes may lay the groundwork for cooperation in education, research and the development of cultural industries. On this basis, cultural diplomacy provides additional momentum for bilateral relations, since initial contacts in the cultural sphere can develop into concrete cooperation programmes when sustained by coordination mechanisms and tangible benefits. However, this diffusion effect depends on how events are organised, the quality of their content and the extent of follow-up after each event. Holding festivals regularly generates lasting diplomatic value only when accompanied by exchange, linkage and cooperation programmes with a sense of continuity.

In multilateral relations, cultural diplomacy enables Vietnam to participate more actively in dialogue among cultures, to share experience in heritage conservation and to promote respect for cultural diversity. Through international forums, exchange programmes and cooperation initiatives, Vietnamese culture is placed in interaction with other traditions and value systems, which widens its scope for reception, exchange and cooperation. The significance of this process is that the affirmation of national identity proceeds alongside openness, respect for difference and readiness to contribute to common goals. It is also a condition for Vietnam to strengthen its connections with partners, to mobilise cultural resources in the process of integration and to participate in addressing issues of conserving and promoting the heritage of humanity.

Another aspect that deserves attention is the role of the overseas Vietnamese community in maintaining and developing cultural ties between Vietnam and host countries. Vietnamese-language teaching and learning, the organisation of cultural and artistic activities, the maintenance of traditional customs and the presentation of national history help to ensure cultural continuity among generations of Vietnamese living far from home. These activities also enable Vietnamese culture to be present in the social life of host countries in a natural way, through family, community, educational and professional relationships. In the practice of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy, the overseas Vietnamese community is increasingly an important actor in promoting national culture. Through Vietnamese-language programmes, traditional festivals, community cultural life, artistic activities, religious practice and social exchange, overseas Vietnamese not only preserve national identity but also directly introduce Vietnamese culture to local people (Bùi, 2022, p. 6). These activities enable foreign audiences to encounter Vietnamese culture naturally and regularly through community, educational, business and everyday relationships. For this reason, overseas Vietnamese are regarded as "cultural ambassadors" who help to spread the country's image, strengthen understanding among peoples and broaden the social foundation of Vietnam's external relations. Unlike time-limited promotional programmes, the continuous presence of the Vietnamese community creates durable channels of exchange, enabling local people to encounter Vietnamese culture through concrete experience. Overseas Vietnamese can therefore help to link organisations, enterprises and cultural institutions in Vietnam with those in other countries, promote people-to-people exchange and broaden the social base for external relations.

Another important achievement of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy between 2009 and 2025 has been to promote the selective absorption of international cultural values, knowledge and experience in order to enrich the national culture. In the context of globalisation and international integration, cultural exchange means not only promoting Vietnamese values to the world but also creating conditions for Vietnam to access new trends in cultural development, experience in cultural management and creative industries, and the progressive humanistic values of humankind. This process takes place on the basis of the principle of "integrating without being dissolved", that is, absorbing the quintessence of world culture while preserving national cultural identity. According to Nguyễn (2015, pp. 57–58), cultural exchange and acculturation are a universal law of cultural development, creating opportunities for countries to raise their standing, expand cooperation and promote cultural creativity under conditions of globalisation. In addition, cultural diplomacy activities have helped to bring the quintessence of human culture into Vietnam in a selective manner, while enabling Vietnamese cultural values to participate more extensively in the cultural life of the region and the world.

Compared with many Asian countries, such as South Korea with Hallyu, Japan with anime and manga, or India with yoga diplomacy, Vietnam has chosen an approach based on its system of cultural heritage, people-to-people exchange and traditional cultural identity. Although it has yet to develop a global cultural symbol with a level of recognition equivalent to India's yoga or South Korea's K-

pop, Vietnam has built its own advantage through its network of UNESCO heritage sites, the "Vietnam Day Abroad" programmes, the activities of the overseas Vietnamese community and active participation in multilateral cultural mechanisms.

4.2.2. Limitations

Alongside its achievements, Vietnam's cultural diplomacy in 2009–2025 has revealed a number of limitations, reflecting the difficulty of converting strategic orientations into implementation capacity and actual foreign-policy effectiveness. These limitations are manifested mainly in the following respects.

(i) Resources for cultural diplomacy remain limited and do not fully meet development requirements in the context of ever-deeper international integration. Funding for exchange and cultural promotion programmes and for implementing international cooperation initiatives is not commensurate with the scope of the tasks set. In addition, specialised personnel are in short supply and uneven in capacity, particularly those with in-depth training in cultural diplomacy, international communication and intercultural communication. Although this activity requires a combination of foreign-affairs knowledge, organisational capacity and adaptability to the characteristics of each locality, training and professional development still need to be strengthened. Limitations in resources and personnel directly affect the professionalism, the capacity for regular operation and the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy programmes.

(ii) Professionalism and long-term orientation in organising and implementing cultural diplomacy programmes are not yet consistently assured. Some activities abroad still tend to present and showcase existing cultural values, and insufficient attention has been paid to developing content that suits the characteristics, reception needs and tastes of the public in each country. As a result, the effectiveness of programmes is sometimes evident only at the time of the event, without generating sustained interest or forming cultural ties capable of enduring over the long term. What is needed is a consistent content orientation, the selection of values capable of representing Vietnamese identity and the organisation of forms of communication suited to each audience. The absence of a highly recognisable national cultural message, expressed consistently across many channels and products, also limits the capacity to create a distinctive imprint for Vietnamese culture in the international environment.

(iii) Growing competitive pressure in the field of soft power places higher demands on Vietnam's capacity to develop and promote its culture. In a cross-border media environment, many countries have systematically invested in developing cultural products capable of reaching a wide international audience. South Korea exploits the reach of popular music and film; Japan has developed anime and manga into products that appeal to multiple generations; and China promotes cultural values through cinema, martial arts and cuisine. These cases show that cultural advantages must be supported by creative capacity, production industries, distribution systems and appropriate communication strategies. In Vietnam, a proportion of cultural products still face difficulties in production scale, quality, market access and presence on international platforms. Consequently, abundant cultural resources have not always been converted into products with broad appeal, competitiveness and lasting reach. This limitation requires cultural diplomacy to be linked with the development of cultural industries, the enhancement of creative capacity and the expansion of channels for distributing Vietnamese cultural products abroad.

(iv) Globalisation and the commercialisation of culture pose a challenge in maintaining a balance between international integration and the preservation of national identity. Greater exchange, contact and consumption of transnational cultural products widen opportunities for learning and creativity, but may also put pressure on traditional values, especially when reception is uncritical and driven by market tastes. In some cases, traditional culture risks being reduced to easily consumed images, detached from its original historical and social context and meaning. Where the exploitation of cultural values is oriented mainly towards immediate promotional and commercial goals, the depth of heritage and the agency of the communities that practise it may be overlooked. The challenge, therefore, is to absorb the quintessence of human culture proactively, on the basis of selection and creativity, and to enrich national identity, avoiding both uncritical reception and closure to external influences.

The gap between the orientation that regards cultural diplomacy as an important component of foreign affairs and the capacity for organising its implementation therefore still needs to be narrowed. These problems are closely interrelated: limited resources reduce the capacity for in-depth investment; the lack of continuity in implementation makes it difficult for activities to accumulate effect; insufficient capacity to develop and disseminate cultural products undermines competitiveness; and the pressure of commercialisation calls for mechanisms to protect the foundational values of national culture. Overcoming current shortcomings must accordingly be approached holistically, combining the improvement of strategic orientations, the development of human resources, the enhancement of creative capacity and the building of communication methods suited to the international environment.

The experience of several Asian countries suggests noteworthy approaches for Vietnam. South Korea has built the international reach of K-pop and film through a combination of artistic creativity, cultural industries, media platforms and promotional activities abroad. Japan has developed anime and manga into products accessible to a global audience, helping to bring Japanese cultural images and stories into international popular life. China draws on elements such as martial arts and cuisine to present distinctive aspects of its national culture. India, in particular, has promoted yoga as a practice linked to physical and mental health and to philosophical heritage. The initiative for an International Day of Yoga, proposed by India, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2014, with 21 June selected for annual observance (Hồ, 2016). These experiences suggest that, in order to compete in the global environment, Vietnam needs to build an internationally recognisable cultural symbol that both reflects national

identity and has the capacity to spread widely. This is an important direction for overcoming current weaknesses and raising Vietnam's standing through soft power.

A point to note from these cases is that each country seeks to develop cultural resources that are recognisable, to turn them into forms of expression suited to the international public and to sustain their presence through many different channels. However, the effectiveness of these models stems not simply from possessing a famous cultural symbol but also from a creative ecosystem, organisational capacity, support mechanisms and the ability to adapt to changes in the global media environment. The lesson for Vietnam is therefore not to search for a symbol in order to copy another country's model, but to identify cultural values that can represent national identity, appeal to the international public and be developed into lasting products, experiences or cooperation initiatives.

Accordingly, the construction of Vietnam's cultural message needs to be linked with a strategy for developing cultural industries, improving the quality of creative products, expanding international cooperation and strengthening the participation of artists, enterprises, research institutions and the overseas Vietnamese community. This message must be consistent enough to build recognisability, yet flexible enough to reflect the diversity and vitality of Vietnamese culture in different contexts of exchange. This is one of the conditions for overcoming fragmented promotion, enhancing the capacity to convert cultural resources into foreign-policy influence and developing cultural diplomacy in a more professional, in-depth and sustainable direction.

5. CONCLUSION

The period 2009–2025 marked important steps in the development of Vietnam's cultural diplomacy in the process of international integration and in the implementation of an independent, self-reliant, multilateral and diversified foreign policy. As one of the three pillars of a comprehensive and modern diplomacy, cultural diplomacy has received growing attention for its role in promoting the national image, spreading national cultural values, strengthening understanding between Vietnam and the international community and widening opportunities for cooperation. This process has been guided by Hồ Chí Minh's thought on the role of culture in national construction and defence, together with the Party's perspectives on promoting the strength of culture and national soft power in the context of globalisation.

The implementation of cultural diplomacy in 2009–2025 produced many results across several dimensions. Stronger cooperation with UNESCO and the promotion of heritage inscription helped to introduce Vietnam's distinctive values to the world; exchange and cultural promotion programmes created further opportunities for contact between the Vietnamese people and other countries and territories; and bilateral and multilateral cultural cooperation broadened the scope for connection in education, the arts, tourism and heritage conservation. These results have consolidated the presence of Vietnamese culture in international life, generated goodwill and broadened the social foundation of foreign relations. In particular, cultural diplomacy has increasingly shown its capacity to link cultural resources with the broader goals of foreign affairs and national development.

Nevertheless, the results achieved are not yet commensurate with Vietnam's rich cultural potential. Limitations in resources and specialised personnel, the lack of synchronisation in organising long-term programmes, the competitiveness of cultural products and the challenges arising from commercialisation show that there is still considerable room for improvement in converting potential into international influence. This calls for continued improvement of coordination mechanisms, greater professionalism in implementation, increased investment in creative activities and a focused promotional orientation suited to the characteristics of each partner and audience.

In the next stage, making cultural diplomacy effective will require Vietnam to combine, in a balanced way, the preservation of national identity with the absorption of the quintessence of human culture; the promotion of traditional values with the development of creative products capable of reaching the international public; and the organisation of exchange events with the building of cooperation programmes marked by continuity and depth. The application of digital technology, an expanded presence on international media platforms, the development of cultural industries and the mobilisation of artists, enterprises, educational institutions, local communities and overseas Vietnamese will help to diversify modes of implementation and enhance diffusion. In addition, it is important to evaluate results on the basis of public reception, the quality of the cooperative relationships formed and the capacity to sustain cultural values in practice.

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