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International Cultural Relations, Historiographic Sketch, and New Conceptual Issues

The history of International Relations (IR) is recent (between the two world wars) and that of International Cultural Relations (ICR) only dates from the 1980s when we witnessed the “cultural turn of IR”: culture in its different forms (ideologies, cultural productions and their circulation, public opinion), is examined as an intrinsic dimension of the field of operation of IR because it is a tool of diplomatic power/influence. Previously, very few works existed (McMurry et al. 1947; Thomas and Laves 1963), although the 1960s saw the beginning of political reflection in France and the United States by two former practitioners (Coombs 1964; Balous 1970), on the scope of cultural diplomacy in a post-Cold War context. The 1980s and 1990s also corresponded to a new acceleration of social globalisation and to the multiplication of exchanges of all kinds that increasingly escaped the elite mechanisms of cultural diplomacy set up at the end of the 19th century. This observation of an impregnation of international societies by transnational politico-cultural phenomena (migrations in the first place) has thus given rise to a new approach to the history of IR in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which profoundly mixes all manifestations of Culture (including in particular sports, tourism, and even technological aspects) and International Relations (Gienow-Hecht and Schumacher 2003); Culture (alongside the economy or military force) then becomes a rather systematic field of study, no longer considered only in terms of official cultural exchanges (of students and professors, of various cultural productions) but also of complex circulations of individuals and cultural contents outside the state framework of diplomacy. We will attempt to provide an overview of the historiography of ICRs, focusing first on the oldest approaches, linked to distinct national historiographies, around the notions of cultural diplomacy (European historiography) and public diplomacy (American historiography). We will then look at the elements of historiographic renewal under the effect, above all, of the “transnational turn” (sometimes also referred to as the “new diplomatic history”) which strongly relativises the stato-centric dimension of International Relations by emphasising private transnational actors. Finally, we would like to end this presentation on a more theoretical note by returning to Joseph Nye’s conceptualisation of “Soft Power” and to “constructivist” thinking on norms in order to (re)think the field of international relations (some IR theorists speak of a “global” framework that goes beyond the inter-state order) today. These two approaches
seem to us to be useful in order to better reflect on the new context of cultural globalisation since 1980 insofar as they bring into play a definition of culture in terms of “meaning”, of the necessary taking into account of Others in the cultural relationship. In a world increasingly focused on values and notions of identity, external cultural policies should undoubtedly take this into account.

1 Cultural Diplomacy and Public Diplomacy, Two Forms of External Cultural Action

The ICR landscape has been rich over the past forty years. It abounds in case studies while syntheses are rare (see Dulphy et al. 2010). Albert Salon, in 1981, defended a thesis on French cultural diplomacy (late nineteenth century–1970) and Richard T. Arndt, in 2006, delivered a fairly complete assessment of American cultural action in the twentieth century (Salon 1981; Arndt 2006). It is also worth noting that most of the works are by historians; but for recent periods, works by sociologists and political scientists exist, based in particular on interesting oral material (see, for example, Grémion and Chenal 1984; Leclerc 2019).

With the exception of a few works on the history of international cultural organisations, such as intellectual cooperation within the League of Nations before 1940 or Unesco after 1945 (Renollet 1999; Maurel 2010), organisations that promoted a “cultural internationalism” (Iriye 1997), the studies focus overwhelmingly on the “cultural diplomacy” (French terminology) or “foreign cultural policy” (German terminology) carried out by the States. This can be defined, according to Milton Cummings, as “the exchange of ideas, information, artistic productions and other cultural aspects between nations in order to promote mutual understanding”. Defined in this way rather vaguely by practitioners (who were also the first theorists) and also by historians, European cultural diplomacy of exchange has in fact taken three paths of action, very different (even contradictory) to each other: dissemination (end of the nineteenth century–1950s), cooperation (since the 1960s), reciprocity (since the 1990s). This very vague definition also had a political reason insofar as the real goal of cultural diffusion was obviously political, in terms of strategic influence. Undoubtedly the notion of cultural diplomacy, by its deliberate terminological imprecision, also allowed to euphemise the project of influence on Others. This political finality was also masked by the choice of a method of action, the cultural exchanges, depoliticised as much as possible. We will come back to this fundamental aspect below.
1.1 A Rich History of Cultural Diplomacy and its European Tropism

Three types of problems were studied: the role of cultural operators, most often decentralised, and that of central institutional cultural operators (their ideologies in particular); the question of the precise geographical horizons of this foreign policy; and finally the study of the concrete vectors of this foreign intervention.

The first theme focuses on those who develop foreign cultural policy and especially on those who implement it, i.e. decentralised operators. France was undoubtedly the country that invented modern cultural diplomacy at the end of the nineteenth century (creation of French cultural sites abroad, sending of books, lecturers, creation of grants, etc.). Its examination, from the years 1980–1990, mobilised a whole series of researchers. After Albert Salon’s large, pioneering but very general thesis, studies focused more specifically on the French Institutes (Renard 1996 and Guénard 1994) abroad before 1914 and at the end of the 1930s or on the Alliance française (Chaubet 2006). Gradually, apart from the French case, other operators or mechanisms of foreign cultural action were studied, such as the British Institute (Okret-Manville 2002), the Dante Alighieri created in 1889 (Pisa 1995), the Goethe Institute (Michels 2005), or university exchange mechanisms (Kramer 2009) such as the famous Fulbright program, which concerned 48 countries between 1946 and 1964 and reached 21,000 Americans and 30,000 young non-Americans. In addition to the examination of the actors of foreign cultural action in the field, there are, more rarely, works devoted to the analysis of the central institutional steering of this foreign policy, such as those of Pauline Milani for Switzerland (2013), Frank Ninkovitch for the childhood of American foreign cultural policy, or Manfreid Abelin for Germany (1968). One can in particular study the ideologies, the values which underlie the decision-making of the central actors; the study for example, of the cultural universe of the French diplomats during the Cold War, informs on the importance of the Christian references within a small core of influential diplomats (Soutou 2020).

A second type of work, the most numerous, concerns the study of the projection of foreign cultural action in a given country. The cultural presence of France in the United States (USA) has given rise to several theses (Dubosclard 2002), while the implantation of French culture in Latin America (Rolland 2000), in the Mediterranean basin (Cabanel 2006), in Central and Eastern Europe during the interwar period has also given rise to monographs or collective synthesises. In the same way, the German cultural presence in Spain (De la Hera Martinez 2002) or Latin America (Rinke 1996), that of Spain within the South American continent (Rolland 2001), the American cultural action in Austria (Wagnleitner 1994) in the 1950s have been studied.
A third type of approach concerns the choice to study a cultural object of export, including books (Hauser 2011), audiovisual products such as cinema and television (Shaw 2007; Rosenbaum 1997; Cull 2010), theatre, and artistic exhibitions and fairs (Sidorova 2019 and Di Martino 2010). Alongside these works, which are essentially centred on the external cultural devices of European diplomacy, we find another historiographical tradition centred on American public diplomacy.

1.2 American Public Diplomacy, Another Form of Cultural Action

Public diplomacy (a term conceptualised in the United States in the 1960s by Edmund Gullion), a cultural action policy favoured by the United States since the Cold War, covers a broader field of action than that of cultural diplomacy because it involves four distinct domains if we follow Nicholas Cull (2008): classical cultural diplomacy centred on the exchange of ideas or various artistic productions in order to promote mutual understanding with others, but also to influence them; large-scale communication actions aimed at national and international audiences (major communication operations such as the “Campaign for Truth” [1950], “Atoms for Peace” [1953] or “People’s Capitalism” [1956]) (Hixson 1997 and Belmonte 2005); exchange programs centred on the circulation of individuals; and assistance to public and private media in order to reach target populations. It is therefore, above all, a form of communication that anchors it in the “public relations” theorised in the United States since the 1920s (Bernays 1923) and it has inspired a historiographic school distinct from European historiography (Gillabert 2017).

In fact, this public diplomacy already appeared during the First World War around the Wilsonian project of “open” diplomacy that emerged from the Chancelleries. It also relied primarily on audiovisual means aimed at the masses (cinema, radio) and thus covered a much more open social dimension than European cultural diplomacy. Wilson’s discourse of the 14 points was thus conveyed by the first trials of radio broadcasting. It was supposed to act within a short time horizon and sought to obtain rapid results on public opinion. However, it can also carry out classic cultural exchanges. For example, sending books, welcoming students or other categories of people considered strategic (Scott-Smith 2008) more linked to the medium term. The United States thus favoured this public action, notably with its major communication campaigns during the Cold War. Their worldwide domination of the media universe was a decisive tool of their foreign policy. Thus, in 1945–1946, when UNESCO was created, there was immediate
opposition between Latin countries attached to an elite diplomacy of high-level cultural exchanges and the United States (and to a lesser extent Great Britain), which wanted to promote exchanges via audiovisual means. The American academic and political expert, Zbigniew Brzeziński, theorised (and also implemented in the White House between 1976–1980) this “technetronic” power of the US. However, we will see below that the post-9/11 years have led to a profound discussion on the limits of “old” public diplomacy.

1.3 Differentiating Models of Diplomatic Action

The first element of identification would be to distinguish between what is common and what is different in all the cultural diplomacy at work. France, for example, with its obsession with “influence”, wants to be a universalist country, ready to “evangelise” the world with its messianic type of culture anchored in the cult of Human Rights and carried by great writers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This resulted in particularly one-sided cultural relations with other countries, based on the “diffusion” mode of action. The other European countries have taken up this diffusionist model, but in a more attenuated way, without wanting to subordinate or pretend to culturally assimilate others. This national dimension of cultural diplomacy is fundamental and has provoked criticism from academics (Akira Iriye in particular) who have denounced its false internationalism (Goff 2013); but cultural diplomacy is inextricably national (it wants above all to disseminate its products) and international (it has an opening, at least minimal to others, because cultural exchange, even if unequal, is based on a form of empathy).

Thus, in Brazil, in the 1960s and early 1970s, the differences in style between French and German cultural diplomacy are clearly visible (Lanoe 2012); French cultural diplomacy, through the Alliances françaises, is not very open to local cultural and political realities, whereas the Goethe Institutes are open to popular Brazilian cultures and lead political debates on freedoms. The choice of fields of action can also differentiate countries (Tovell 1958). France has traditionally been attached to a policy of language and artistic cultural exchanges over the medium and long term, Germany has favoured the dissemination of its musical culture, Sweden has encouraged design, Switzerland book exhibitions (Debluë 2015). Leaving aside French messianism, a common vision of the role

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1 Cultural diffusion inherits, strongly, the missionary model, very powerful in the 19th century in the proto-history of cultural diplomacy.
of foreign cultural policy was nevertheless shared by most European countries until the 1960s. It was conceived as an amplifier of commercial dynamism, particularly for certain countries such as Switzerland, and national politics. It is above all a tool of power in terms of attracting foreign elites, especially their scientific and student elites. A geopolitical configuration of European culture existed until the 1950s with a centre (France, Germany, Great Britain) and peripheries (Southern and Eastern Europe, African and Asian colonies, South America to some extent).

Most European foreign cultural policy approaches are therefore connotated by their unilateral way of acting, uncooperative with foreign importing societies that solicit the Cultural Offer to make up for what is perceived as a “delay”. Despite this, change occurred little by little, essentially in the 1960s, with the rise of the notion of “cooperation” in most foreign cultural policy mechanisms. Finally, the policies of European cultural diplomacy were intended to be as far removed as possible from political interests (constant French, West German policy after 1945) and commercial interests (especially France), at least until the 1960s. They are reluctant to select this or that cultural content in order to make a propagandist use of it. The exported culture should only be a good mirror of the cultural landscape of each exporting power. Great Britain also chose this model of an action methodology that was not very political by concentrating on educational exchanges with the creation of the British Council in 1934. This model could be extended after 1945 to other countries, such as democratic Spain after 1977. The United States, on the other hand, favoured public diplomacy of much more explicitly political communication. The creation of the great American cultural agency (USIA) in 1953 (Osgood 2006) certainly mixed two domains, information, and cultural exchanges, but the former tended to prevail over the latter.

A second element of reflection concerns the temporality in the institutionalisation of foreign cultural policies. Wars and the aftermath of war were propitious moments because they accelerated the process of internationalisation of societies; as we will see above with the phenomenon of scientific exile in the United States during the end of the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s, international political crises are the ground and the breeding ground for the renewal and deepening of certain transnational links already established in peacetime. In the same way, within the national elites, the two world wars favoured rapprochements;

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2 Modern cultural diplomacy takes one of her spring in the international university expansion conducted by Germany and France after 1870 near nations of eastern Europe or Mediterranean countries (Tronchet 2014). For Spain, it is the sending of students abroad that constitutes his modern proto-cultural diplomacy (Sanchez Ron 1988).
American cinema thus undertook to strengthen its world role; increasingly close collaborations between the administration and the major studios were established during these moments. We can also note that most of the first real foreign cultural services of the great European powers appeared between 1918–1922 in France/Spain/Germany, while the post-1945 period corresponds to an increased institutionalisation of cultural diplomacy in France and the United States. On the other hand, the end of the period, the years 1970, corresponds to a mutation of the international relations with the affirmation of a new polyarchy of States (those of the Third World, the “Asian tigers”, and Japan), the rise of the regional communities within certain States, the intervention of new transnational actors, especially private (ONGI), which modify the traditional action of the States and establish new interdependencies (Keohane and Nye 1972). The external cultural devices, especially that of France, enter in crisis at the time when a world civil society establishes multiple modes of exchange, outside the state and para-state sphere of the cultural diplomacies.

Finally, a last point raises the question of the scope and effectiveness of these relatively elite mechanisms, at least those of cultural diplomacy. Documentation may also bias the research somewhat, since diplomats’ reports are sometimes an overly optimistic source for assessing their country’s actual cultural influence locally. Their ability to assess “local reception” is very uneven, and the statistics they use or collate themselves (on the teaching of French in schools, for example, for French diplomats) cannot necessarily be sufficient to establish a realistic state of affairs. The same is true for the reception of Hollywood in the world: what can the global statistics of cinema attendance and the impressive % of American films on the screens mean? It is necessary to go further, as Stephen Gundle proposes for the reception of American mass culture in Italy after 1945, notably in the popular magazines published by the PCI (Forgacs and Gundle 2007) in order to grasp the precise mechanisms of acculturation at work in what is called “Americanisation” (Stephan 2006).

But let us not conclude too quickly that these policies are ineffective, although measuring their effect is therefore very delicate. They can, in the medium and long term, capture the loyalty of a more or less elitist public. The French cultural presence in Latin America in the twentieth century benefited from a network of Alliances françaises and a strong intellectual visibility before 1945, which created strong ties in favour of France. Paris’ seat to host UNESCO and permanent membership on the UN Security Council owe much to Spanish-

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3 About the rise of cultural diplomacy between the two world wars, see the recent special issue in Contemporary European History, 30.2 (may 2021).
speaking South American support. American cultural policy in West Germany, with the Amerika Haus in particular, was very successful until the early 1960s; their gradual dismantling in the following decade was counterproductive in the midst of the rise of student anti-Americanism (Schildt and Siegfried 2006 and Mausbach 2006).

The second limitation concerns the state prism that characterises most works on cultural diplomacy. However, since the nineteenth century, a global society has been formed that partly escapes the mechanisms of state control; consider the anti-slavery movement at the beginning of the nineteenth century, the pacifist movement at the end of the nineteenth century. Artistic/literary/scientific exchanges, but also political exchanges (anarchist and socialist currents in the world) and transnational social exchanges multiplied in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their flows escaped, in part, state control. In this world of networks, of small, narrow transnational communities, with very specific functioning (for example, the so-called “epistemic” communities in the scientific or highly specialised expert worlds), forms of cross-border political action and mobilisation occur alongside cultural diplomacy or public diplomacy.

Thus, if the actors of French cultural diplomacy have always prided themselves on defending a universalist message of a literary and humanist nature in the twentieth century by means of thinkers and writers, we must nevertheless put them in relation to another universalist actor, for a long time less visible, but no less effective in the promotion of a global, technical, functional, and rationally inspired knowledge: the American philanthropic foundations. Another historiography, that of transnational politico-cultural movements and actors, which took off in the 1990s, then opened up.

2 The Transnational Approach: A New History of International Cultural Relations Around Circulations

For the past thirty years, transnational history has played an essential role in the renewal of historiography (Iriye and Saunier 2012 and Zeiler 2009), particularly in the field of international relations. Contrary to scientific history, born in the nineteenth century, and centred on the nation-state or on exchanges between nation-states – the history of international relations that appeared in the inter-war period –, transnational history brings to light an interstitial space of international action, imperfectly controlled by states (from tourists to terrorists), where
the circulation of private actors is complex and multiple. Migration phenomena are a good indicator of this overcoming of the inter-state framework when the migrant’s trajectory crosses several state spaces and is part of multiple “circuits”, with more or less incessant return trips between the country of departure and the country(ies) of arrival: the concept of “migration” (unidirectional) thus gives way to that of “circulation” (complexity of geographical itineraries and therefore of the migrant’s political and cultural affiliations). Paul Gilroy’s now famous study on the “Black Atlantic” (1993), with its examination of the circulations of black thinkers such as Marcus Garvey and Du Bois, highlights the multiple circuits between the US, Africa and Europe. Other works, more focused on political sociology, reveal the complex relations on political and cultural grounds between the different waves of Chinese populations settled abroad since the nineteenth century and the Motherland (Ong 1999); the most recent Chinese immigrants feel the most politically attached to the communist regime, unlike other categories of migrants. This transnational history, which rethinks the functioning of the nation-state, simply refers to what occurred at the beginning of the nineteenth century and continued into the twentieth century: the accelerated globalisation of exchanges and contacts, the constitution of cross-border political and social worlds (Bayly 2014). The phenomenon is old and certain transnational actors even allowed the first milestones of cultural diplomacy to be set before 1914. Indeed, it was private transnational actors (Protestant Missions and Catholic Congregations, the Red Cross, the Alliance Française) that were the main protagonists of foreign cultural action. In the artistic, intellectual, and political fields, a good part of the history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is concerned with transnational circulations: history of intellectual exile, artistic history (Joyeux-Prunel 2016–2017), scientific history (Rasmussen 1995 and Kunkel 2021), political and cultural history of communism and anticommunism or fascism, history of the student movements of the 1960s. As we indicated above, transnational history brings into play mainly non-state actors, organised in short networks (for example between international gallery owners such as Durand-Ruel in the nineteenth century for the Impressionists or Leo Castelli in the twentieth century for Pop Art) or long networks, such as those of the philanthropic Foundations or the Comintern (Wolikow 2010). For all that, this history is articulated with that of the traditional state and diplomatic actors. Thus, transnational actors make use, in the national sphere, of their “social capital” acquired in the international sphere; let us think of the history of the Red Cross and their national subsidiaries controlled by the States or today the history of contemporary diasporas and the “remote” control by the Chinese and Indian States (Therwath 2018, 247–266.). Above all, a historiographic mass has imposed itself in transnational historiography,
notably for its exceptional documentary dimension, that of the American philanthropic foundations.

2.1 American Foundations and Global Knowledge Organisation

The vast documentary and historiographical continent of American philanthropic foundations in the twentieth century has given rise to an abundant literature over the past forty years. Armed with abundant money, competent men, and a precise vision of the world (peace, freedom, rationality), they were indeed one of the essential agents of the decompartmentalisation of the scientific, intellectual, and political world in the twentieth century in general (Salzman 1987 and Berman 1983); more specifically, they embodied a fourfold role (guide [1910–1938], pilot-fish [1938–1950], auxiliary [1950–], and critic) in American public action abroad. While the first public actors in the latter did not appear until late in the 1930s (Ninkovich 1981), the Foundations, including Carnegie, created in 1910, played a “guiding” role in convincing America to move away from its isolationism (Berghahn 1993, 393–419; Tournès 2016). From now on, it is impossible to evaluate the “American century”, the American presence and its political and cultural influence, its capacity for global expansion (especially in terms of conceptualisation), without examining this discreet but skilful actor with decentralised and transnational action.

Their historiography has thus made it possible to renew the traditional questioning of the “Americanisation” of European societies in the twentieth century. Alongside the classic actors of American public diplomacy, who tended to address a broad public, the Foundations, for their part, carried out a resolutely elitist action in order to influence and shape the systems of knowledge and education in the world. The work of the Rockefeller Foundation in France between the wars, in the medical and social sciences (Saunier et Tournès 2010, 46–64 and Tournès 2011), or that of the Ford Foundation in Italy (Gemelli 1994) after 1945 in fields as varied as economics and management or agricultural development, have given rise to exhaustive works. They allow us to understand a very original type of intervention from a distance (a culture of reporting and evaluation, also found in the Comintern) which establishes a close relationship between the sender (the Foundations) and the receivers. The former has and offers money (the Ford Foundation spent 325 million dollars in Europe between 1950 and 1980), institutional models (for example, the large care and research hospital) and methodological references (empirical investigation in sociology or economics) in the service of a liberal and
rational ideology. However, the receiver is not passive and tries to select from the offer what best fits his own objectives.

The Foundations create intercultural relationships, asymmetrical to be sure, but not pure domination either. This is one way to seriously qualify all the vague notions such as “American imperialism”. Have the Foundations exercised this type of pure domination? The debate remains open as to how to properly assess their mode of intervention, between the thesis of “soft hegemony” and that of “imperialism,” which is more classic in the analysis of American power in the twentieth century. But most of the works lean more towards a balanced position where the receiver proves capable of orienting a good part of the American offer when, for example, the VIth section of the *Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes* in France reoriented (in a more historical sense, less linked to the present time, and keeping some of its communist academics) the “areas studies” program financed by the Rockefeller Foundation in the early 1950s. Most of the time, we see that the funded institution assumes its own scientific choices and proves capable of freeing itself from the strict American model; like INSEAD in Fontainebleau, created in 1957, largely financed initially by the Ford Foundation (one million dollars) and inspired by Harvard Business School, the French institution nonetheless adopts the principle of case studies, geographically very broad, which relativises the example of American capitalism as the table of the law. Thus, the “Americanisation” of Europe is increasingly reconsidered in terms of negotiation, an arrangement between the American sender and the European receiver.

The Cold War, in its cultural aspect, has represented one of the recent particularly fertile historiographical fields where the historian can grasp the action of the Foundations, with sometimes their ambiguities. In this case, they displayed an undeniable patriotism by relaying a certain number of initiatives of the American government, whether it was a question of the policy of “intellectual containment” to counter the influence of Marxism (from research on “areas studies” to the funding granted to empirical works in sociology, economics or political science to the support of anti-communist intellectual organisations) or of the shift, from the 1960s onwards, of investments towards the Third World in accordance with John Kennedy’s policy. Their action in parallel with official diplomacy proved to be very significant. But sometimes the Foundations also distanced themselves from the official instructions when, for example, the anticommunism of the American public authorities between 1950–1954 was judged excessive by some of them who supported European intellectual actors of socialist tendency, although, of course, vigorously anticommunist (Grémion 1995 and Stonor Saunders 1999).
Several other fields of historiography have also taken the transnational route, including intellectual and scientific exile in the twentieth century and the history of the European Community. The history of the European Community (Vauchez 2013) lends itself to transnational approaches, at the crossroads of political history, the history of international relations and the cultural history of international cultural policies, or the transnational history of legal knowledge and the intellectual professions of law. The examination of the role of European jurists within the Court of Justice of the European Communities was at the heart of the political and legal construction of a new political community.

2.2 European and French Exile in the US, Articulation of the Transnational and the National

As for the history of European scientific and political exile to the United States, between the 1930s and the 1940s, it reveals the destiny of a transatlantic human community in a context where chains of social interdependence on a global level (in the economic and political order, and especially in the scientific field) became longer during the interwar period. The exile of the war years became for some exiles the means to reinforce these chains and to build a European post-war period inspired in part by the political and social experience in the United States; Whether it was participation in certain international institutions after 1945 in order to establish a world that was culturally and politically more egalitarian (the role of Claude Lévi-Strauss at UNESCO, of Hervé Alphand at the UN), or the creation in France of a reformist political model that brought together diverse elites (bankers, scientists, intellectuals, senior civil servants) and that drew on expert knowledge (those of the French Plan created in 1946, for example). The French exile in the United States during the war made it possible to consolidate lasting political links with certain American networks on the non-communist French left (Jeanpierre 2004). Here again, we touch on the question of “Americanisation”. Unquestionably, if the France of post-1945 modernisation was partly shaped by these scientific and political-administrative networks forged in American exile, their action was nonetheless largely “patriotic,” in the service of a modernised France capable of independence.

If transnational history allows us to rethink the history of classic cultural international relations and the history of international relations in general, we would also like to focus on the conceptual and practical renewal imposed by the new stage of globalisation since the 1990s. In a world that is more interconnected than ever (in 1993, there were about fifty websites in the world, in 2000 there were 5 million, and there are 20 billion connected objects), where each
country, each segment of society, each individual claims equal treatment and a right to his or her cultural identity, how does the field of international cultural relations function? New analytical concepts are appearing (soft power, diplomacy of influence in France) while new theories (constructivism) are being developed to think about this new world.

3 Thinking about Globalisation and its Effects on the Field of International Relations

It is advisable to return in a word to the new context, since 1980, of the cultural globalisation (Lash and Robertson 1995) characterised by an explosion of new media and by a world of networks, enrichment of the individuals who have access almost everywhere to the cultural and informational goods, new cultural powers in the “South”. The characteristics of the cultural globalisation would be the horizontality of the actors who are conscious to participate in the global universe, who intend to defend their cultural identity within this globalisation; another characteristic would be the hybridisation of the references and the identities which result from the contact between global flows of information and the local reality in which the individuals live (“glocalisation” according to Roland Robertson); the decentralisation of world cultural power with the rise since 1980 of new powers in the field of cultural industries (Brazil, Japan and South Korea and their media culture in particular) would represent another new political and cultural fact. The notions of cultural and political hierarchy that had long given European countries and the US a global superiority have faded. A world of symbolic complexity has triumphed (Hannerz 1992).

These changes have disrupted both the functioning of cultural diplomacy and that of public diplomacy by forcing them to engage in dialogue with foreign populations, whereas for decades they had favoured monologues. The analytical notion of Soft Power has come to offer a new way of thinking and acting in this new international universe, while a theory of international relations, Alexander Wendt’s Constructivism, seeks to account for a world that is defined, above all, by the defence of identities, individual or collective.

3.1 Soft Power, a Floating Conceptualisation

In 1990, in a book entitled Bound to leave, the American specialist in international relations, Joseph Nye, put forward a new analytical concept, that of Soft
Power, which was a dazzling success in the media, if not in the academic world (Parmar and Cox 2010). At a time when the Cold War was coming to an end, and when there was growing doubt about the capacity for coercion embodied by American military force, Nye sought to think about the foundations of a new incarnation of American power, of which Soft Power would be a specific mode of action (a point that was later abandoned). He defines Soft Power both as a power of attraction thanks to cultural excellence in three “intangible” resources (cultural achievements themselves, ideologies, norms and values, and the quality of a given country’s foreign policy) and as a power of persuasion. It is a matter of getting others to voluntarily modify their behaviour and thus align themselves with the attractive power (Nye 2004).

This conceptualisation must also be gradually linked to the post-9/11 attempts to explain the American model to the rest of the world on new grounds: a “new public diplomacy” (Cowan and Arsenault 2008) has emerged in the field of American international expertise, thought in terms of multilateral dialogue in an interconnected world where citizens have become direct actors in international politics and co-creators of the public diplomacy policies they try to influence. As Nye says, it is a matter of shaping the preferences of others, of negotiating with them. We have entered a relational world and this decisive element is well taken into account with the notion of Soft Power. How then can we project a policy of Soft Power? The adoption of the principle of reciprocity or cooperation with partners would be one of the essential modalities. The credibility of cultural action is indeed essential in the policy of persuasion. On the other hand, a simple policy of promotion (the notion of “brand” that came into fashion in the 2000s) of cultural elements towards the rest of the world is not enough to define a policy of Soft Power. This was seen in the “Cool Japan” campaign of the early 2000s, where the great success of Japanese cultural industries (animated films, manga, TV programs) throughout Asia since the 1980s (Japan has become the world’s second largest cultural exporter) does not constitute a sufficient element of attraction, since the “target” cannot be controlled in this undifferentiated promotion policy (Kados Otmazgin 2008, 1–10).

On the other hand, it is possible to touch here a weak point in Nye when he thinks, initially at least, that attraction is totally untied from economic hard power; this aspect has provoked the distrust of many IR historians who have judged Nye’s model too disembodied. The notion of “smart power” came to answer these criticisms. Developed by Ernest Wilson (2008, 110–124) and taken up by Nye, it reconciles “hard” and “soft” power when the decisive element is not so much the resources as the two possible ways of using them, coercive or cooperative. We have seen this in the past with the Marshall Plan, which skilfully mixed the two dimensions (hard and soft) but where, above all, a cooperative
way of acting (pushing the Europeans to unite) took precedence over coercion, while economic aid made the liberal model attractive via, in particular, the trips organised through the famous “productivity missions”. Today, the cultural industries, a typical mix of hard and soft, have become unavoidable in the globalised world (7% of the world GNP). They certainly participate in the cultural influence exercised by a country itself, but with the limits that we have just recalled above. Hollywood and its worldwide prestige throughout the 20th century nevertheless attests to an undeniable force of seduction. French diplomacy and a certain number of its experts evoke, for their part, in the 2010s, a “diplomacy of influence” where, as in Smart Power, the economy becomes the unavoidable medium of cultural action; the diplomacy of museums, the diplomacy of technical-scientific and legal norms (for example, French notary law has imposed itself in China), and the diplomacy of major sports events become in this way the new grounds of cultural influence. Thus, a research firm was able to rank France 1st in 2017 and 2019 in Soft Power.

How can we assess the differences and points of convergence between Soft Power and cultural diplomacy or the “new” American public diplomacy? The convergence lies in the need to count on the long term, to subtly control the target through constant and close dialogue (the metaphor of the dance), to value ideas (the role of think tanks, international forums such as Davos or the COP) as much as information. The difference seems to lie in the constant danger of Soft Power falling into propaganda by seeking to control its “target” too closely. Nye also has some difficulty in thinking about the relationship between the agent of Soft Power and its subject (partner), according to Craig Hayden (2012, especially chapter 2). Strangely enough, given his background as a theorist of interdependence and the role of INGOs, Nye also has little to say about non-state actors. The Harvard political scientist evokes the qualities (attention to others, competence, charisma) to be implemented in the soft power relationship and he is perfectly right: to succeed, foreign cultural action policies must be an action of meticulous and loving gardening and not a mechanised farming operation.

All in all, the most characteristic point of Nye (and, on another intellectual level, of Iriye) is that, in a liberal theorisation of IR, he tends to obscure the dimension of constraint on others; his vision of Soft Power would still be a little too abstract, despite the correction provided by the notion of Smart Power. In the

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4 See the special issue in Revue internationale et stratégique, “Diplomatie d’influence”, n°89, printemps 2013.
5 This point is in chapter 4 of Nye’s book, The Future of soft power, New York, Public Affairs, 2010.
eyes of certain critics, Robert Cox in particular, he still has difficulty thinking about power itself, its mixture of coercion and consent according to the approach once established by Antonio Gramsci with his concept of “hegemony” (Zahran and Ramos 2010, 12–31). The realisation of a project of cultural hegemony thus rests also, in part, on a form of symbolic and material violence; and the policy of cultural diffusion adopted formerly by European cultural diplomacy was part of this policy of hegemony. But this European hegemony had been built earlier on the cultural and political grounds and was no longer explicitly displayed in the twentieth century in the deployment of European cultural diplomacy. This ambiguous reality of Culture, if not an element of barbarism as Walter Benjamin said, then at least a battleground for ideas, as reflected recently by the debates around the concept of “cultural diversity” adopted by UNESCO in 2005 (Vlassis 2015), Nye seems uncomfortable to define it precisely. However, the notion of Soft Power has made it possible to reflect on it in a renewed way, notably via this critical Gramscian approach that encourages a re-reading of the ambiguous political model that was European cultural diplomacy in the past.

3.2 The Constructivist Theorisation of IR and the Consideration of Identities

Cultural globalisation poses another challenge to external cultural action policies by highlighting an anthropological definition of culture. More than ever, it is not only a question of exchanged cultural products, but of the meaning and symbolic value of exchanges for receivers who construct, at the very moment of receiving the message, their “mediascapes” (Arjun Appadurai): international communication allows individuals to be both “agent” and “acted upon”. Cultural globalisation is in fact largely horizontal, egalitarian in its aspirations, “glocal” in its reformulations. As the work of the French IR sociologist Bertrand Badie repeatedly points out (Badie and Smouts 1992; Badie 2020), the old world of IR was stato-centric (elements of power, sovereignty, territory), Western, economically, politically, and symbolically unequal. This world has changed under the effect of the return in force of particular cultures (the international actors that are the globalised individuals do not all have the same rationality) and of transnational forces. As such, his historical sociology of IR preceded the constructivist theory of IR proposed by Alexander Wendt (Guzzini and Leander 2006; Lapid and Krautwil 1996). The latter also comes to bring a useful lighting to the RCIs because he incites to take into account, as a priority, the values, the ideas in the sphere of international relations, although his reflection is rather state-centred compared...
to that of Badie. The ideal structures (norms) determine the relations between
the states as well as the actors.

Beyond the interdependence of material interests or the interactions of strat-
egies, the sphere of values constitutes today in the field of international relations
the most diffuse reality, the most difficult to analyse, and perhaps the most deci-
sive in the eyes of theorists such as Badie, Lapid and Wendt. It indeed becomes
the field of reality that allows us to understand the two other aspects of interna-
tional life. To take a concrete point, the politics of restitution of stolen objects in
Africa (or elsewhere) acquires a new political centrality in IR. Similarly, informa-
tion politics has become the new terrain of these identity struggles. The creation
of the Al Jazeera news channel in 1996 allowed the affirmation of an “Arab de-
ocracy” through an “Arab media” (Talon 2011; Powers 2013).

Historical memory, a key element in the construction of political and cul-
tural identities over time and in the functioning of foreign cultural policies, car-
ries a lot of weight: China consumes Japanese manga but does not forget the
Nanking massacre of 1937! Here, the new challenge is opposed to the devices of
cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy in their capacity to dialogue with this
new globalised and conflictual social world. Should we then dissociate the cul-
tural from the diplomatic by involving as a priority new intercultural mediators
such as journalists, members of INGOs (their number has multiplied by ten
since 1960) or academics, and thus operating in a “bottom-up” manner? Or do
we need to associate the cultural and the political more closely in order to deal
with this new social and cultural globalisation, which involves new themes
(ecology, health)? The debates are ahead of us.

From the First World War onwards, the history of ICRs has been, first and
foremost, a state (or parastatal) history of politico-cultural actors engaged in
cultural or public diplomacy in order to exert political influence via the export
of cultural products and informational content. This policy has helped shape a
history of cultural exchanges between elites; it has shaped a whole part of the
global cultural history of the twentieth century (the Peruvian Nobel Prize win-
ner for Literature, Mario Vargas Llosa, was trained in the library of the Alliance
Française in Lima in the 1950s).

But this external cultural action had serious shortcomings, the main one
being the lack of consideration for the audiences it addressed. Now, the process
of social globalisation at work since the nineteenth century, qualitatively and
quantitatively overdriven since the end of the twentieth century, renders more
and more ineffective, even counterproductive, any action based on cultural “dif-
fusion” alone. And this process relativised the all-powerful role of the States.
Transnational history then appeared as another history, with other actors (unoffi-
cial actors, networks of international sociability), other objects (the construction
of research devices and new knowledge for scientific transnational history, for example), other methods and purposes of action (the co-elaboration of projects in the image of the action of the American Foundations, the co-negotiation of migration identities). Today, the history of RCMs must combine both of these approaches insofar as the national, the international and the transnational must be understood in their dynamics and their overlaps. By extending the questioning, we can think that the IR and the ICR have been able to renew their field of study and definitively escape the criticism of intellectual immobility that some great historians of the past, such as Lucien Febvre or Charles Maier, had regularly addressed to them.

Reference List


