An Analysis of Using Cultural Capacity of Iran in Artistic Diplomacy

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Abstract

If artistic diplomacy is considered as using the cultural and artistic capacities and properties of a nation to directly affect thoughts and beliefs of other nations, then Iran had been a land full of such political, cultural and religious capabilities. To prove this, I have investigated and analyzed three cases of cultural and artistic capacities of Iran: The Cyrus Cylinder, Zoroastrian rituals, and Islam. The question in this research is to what extent the use of such capacities in artistic diplomacy of Iran had been to keep and confirm national interests. The hypothesis behind this research is that the use of such concepts, discussed completely in the body of this research, is best interpreted as a perfect sample of being philanthropic and respecting human rights of all nations. Consequently, I concluded that all nations should accept the fact that Iran, in its entire history, has been a nation with cultural and artistic roots and has always paid attention to the rights of people from other nations. This is actually in sharp contrast to public opinion about Iranians, being introduced as a misanthropic, militant and belligerent nation. However, Iranian policy has improved its national security. This research uses a descriptive, analytic, and historical method and all had been armchair studies.

Keywords: artistic diplomacy, cultural and artistic capacities, The Cyrus Cylinder, Zoroastrian, Islam, national security
Introduction

In modern world, foreign policy plays an important role in providing a country with aims and goals of the society. The policy that each country takes depend on how they use their resources and soft power related to other nations. Moreover, social identity determines how governments overcome their historical, cultural and political aims. All in all, it is clear that diplomacy is the best and the most static way to defend the national security within the international scenes which is called soft power. Cultural and artistic diplomacy are two parts of a collection called general diplomacy. They may directly (tourism) or indirectly (transferring thoughts, beliefs, websites, etc.) affect the addressees’ thoughts and beliefs. Today, media shows a dark picture of Iran, an image of Iranophobia. In order to minimize this dark picture, I have tried to introduce three cultural and religious capacities of the country: (i) Cyrus the Great’s cylinder; (ii) the three ethics of the Zarathustra’s religion; (iii) some positive Islamic views.

Methodology

The methodology used in this research is descriptive-analytic and historical and the data are collected through library resources.

General diplomacy and cultural-artistic diplomacy

General diplomacy are programs which are supported by the government aiming at informing or affecting public opinion in other countries. They are performed via texts, media such as television, radio and Internet and cultural transmissions (Wolf and Rosen, 2004: 5). The same definition has appeared in the glossary from 1985 (Soltani Far, 1389: 20). General diplomacy aims at highlighting the countries’ successes and minimizing the defeats in a country in order to encourage people from other countries to have a positive view of the country (Pour Ahmadi, 1389: 136).

The reason behind the success of the general diplomacy is being trustworthy compared to the traditional view of diplomacy. Public opinion can trust if a country’s policy is clear and honest (Derakhshe & Ghaffari, 1390: 12). Briefly, general diplomacy includes two dimensions: (i) cultural diplomacy; (ii) media diplomacy. Both of which are strong tools in providing trust in a society (Figure 1) This paper aims at investigating cultural diplomacy.
Cultural diplomacy is transmission of ideas, information, arts and other cultural dimensions between nations to strengthen mutual comprehension, providing national benefits via cultural tools. Cultural diplomacy should be a road map for cultural authorities (Keshavarz Shekari et al, 1392: 11-12). The soft power is categorized in four parts: 1. Culture and civilization; 2. Islam and Shia; 3. Economy; 4. Political behavior (Javadi Arjmandi and Esmaeili, 1391: 101). We focus only on the first item, i.e. cultural capacities and civilization.

Diplomacy has a long history in Iran. Iranians have always tried to extend their civilization and culture through soft power so that even those how invaded the country were defeated in the cultural dimensions. Unlike Arabs who tried to extend their ideology by sward, Iranians used cultural and trade relations to expand even Islam to Central and East Asia (Motevali, 1388: 80). Artistic diplomacy is one of the ways for attracting other nation’s attention towards amazing cultural capabilities, originated from the text and context of Iranian culture. For example, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque in Isfahan shows a magnificent artistic historical place that can attract every tourist. I continue this research by explaining three types of such artistic and cultural capacities in a chronological order.

Justice in Persia

Justice is a utopia which all societies have tried to reach it from the first breath of each society. They have used justice as a criteria to distinguish right from wrong especially regarding what governments do. Justice is the basis of all governments. Justice, in Persia, has been a concept that was in a close relationship with religion (Javid & Jamali, 1388: 112).

During Achaemenid dynasty, justice, religion and government were in close relationship so that governors knew themselves as those who are selected by god to guide humans. Governments were known as the Ahura Mazda’s gift to them for guiding people (Ehtesham, 2535: 42). Achaemenid kings believed that everything we have is from Ahura Mazda (Ashraf Ahmadi, 1346: 74). They believed that kings are so great that they will go up into the sky close to the great God, Ahura Mazda (Ehtesham, 2535: 42).
Their commitment to religion and their beliefs towards God caused the enlivenment of their spirits so that they did their best to expand justice in the society. They even did not use their power to legislate laws and they followed God instead (Ashraf Ahmadi, 1346: 32-74).

God remained the main ruler during the ancient Persia, but this ritual was great until the king had commitments toward ‘legislation, justice, honesty’. If he failed to follow God, the Ahura’s power would no longer be his guard and he would die in the worst form. The same power that was his guard once left him and he is over now (Bayani, 1381: 171-177). Moreover, king had not decided on everything, but there had been an assembly of great people who gathered to help king decide on important matters. Herodotus writes that kings in Persia are not free to decide like other nations, but there is an assembly that give pieces of advice to king to decide better (Herodotus, 1343: 134).

Among Achaemenids, there is a close relationship between God, king and law. Therefore, the constitutional law, basics and governmental procedures are based on three principles: 1. Respecting principles of life in other nations; 2. Having secure borders to keep the empire; 3. Keeping justice and law (Bayani, 1381: 176).

We believe that rules had been of two types during this period: 1) general rules and laws to keep regularity in offices, money and army; 2) local customs and rituals. The first of which had been for keeping regularity in the country (Ashraf Ahmadi, 1346: 57-58).

Some rules are to be obeyed by all and even king. Herodotus praises this rule and says that for a crime even king could not kill a person and no other Persian man can kill slaves because of a crime (Herodotus, 1355: 137).

The Cyrus the Great’s cylinder

One of the reasons that proves the Achaemenids had treated people with justice is the existence of the cylinder, on which is carved facts about human rights and religious and tribal minorities. This cylinder was found by Hormoz Rasam the Iranian archaeologist in Babel in 1878. It was a cylinder about 25 cm, on which was written: I am Cyrus King, Great King, the king of Babel, the king of Sumer and Akkad (www.wikipedia.org) (Image 1). Note that we are talking about a time when king considered no rights for the defeated lands (Rezaei, 1375: 249).

Cyrus, the son of Cambyses (from 550 to 529 BCE) had been the founder of the empire. Before him, kings had only run a very small part in south-western Persia (Rezaei, 1375: 239). He was crowned in 559 BCE; he seized Hamedan and the Bebel and Egypt. He followed the customs of the defeated lands and used their calendars and their official methods (Nozari, 1380: 48). Persians were not greater than other invaders. What was great was the policy that Cyrus took (Ferray, 1377: 139). The infamy of Cyrus the great was because he respected others and their rights, especially the defeated nations (Herodotus, 1343: 102).
During that period, kings believed that God had selected them and Cyrus believed that God has selected him to do good deeds for people. Hence, he freed Jews and put an end to their slavery. Jews believed that he had been the Messiah, mentioned in the old testament. His human rights are today used as the establishment of the first human right’s rules around 2500 years ago (Ashraf Ahmadi, 1364: 32-34). He extended education to cover all people in the country and other places and these were what Plato and other Greek philosophers had praised in their books (Ehtesham, 2535: 41-42).

**Some quotations from Cyrus the Great written on Cylinder**

On his cylinder is written: 1. Now that I am the king of Babel with the aid of Ahura Mazda, I say that I respect rituals and religion of the nations and I will not let someone looks down to them or insult as long as I am alive. 2) from now on until the time when Ahura Mazda guards me, I will not impose my dynasty on any groups. Each nation is free to accept it, if they don’t accept my kingdom, I will not go toward those people. 3) as long as I am king of Persia, Babel and other parts, I will not allow anybody to tyrannize others. If they do, I would support the weak to fulfil his rights. 4) as long as I am alive, I would not allow a person to take someone else’s properties. 5) I will fight slavery; 6) people are free to follow any religion they want. 7) people are free to live in any lands, 8) and to choose any jobs as long as they respect others’ rights. 9) none would not get punished for what their relatives had done. 10) I put an end to slavery (Lococock, 1381: 209-215; Jafari Tabar, 1384: 51-52).

**The Zarathustra religion**

One of the most important roles of the ancient Persia was the appearance of the Zarathustrianism which was prophesied by Zarathustra. This religion looked like a ritual based on aesthetics and monotheism (Nas, 1968: 456). Their book is written in Avestan, one of the most important languages of the ancient Persia (Zarshenas, 1330). Their holy book includes Yasna and Gats which were verses and prayers to God (Nas, 1968: 450). In these verses Zarathustra depicts a complete man characterized by three factors: Good words, good deeds and good thoughts (Image 2).

**Zarathustra**

The life of Zarathustra is missed in the nonwritten texts and it is not clear where and when he had lived (Rajabi, 1380: 154). Greeks believe that he might have lived around 6000 years ago during neo-Paleolithic. Based on Islamic texts, Zarathustra was born in March 22, 630 BCE (Dehshiri & Eslami, 1391: 120).
Features of a complete man based on Zarathustra’s teachings

Based on the Gats, which is the most complete documents, complete human is defined. Gats have 17 sections which are inserted within Yasna, which are ancient prayers to God.

Close to Ahura

Ahura is creator of the world. He gives goodness and no evil. He creates and does not destroy. He gives intelligence, right, calmness, accepted power and immortality (Mehr, 1380: 27). Ahura has the holy knowledge ‘Amshaspand Wahumana’ and it belongs only to him (Hat 28, line 11). He is the creator of righteousness (Hat, 31, line 7). If Ahura’s intelligence is allotted to someone, he will do good deeds and will never be deceived by lies (Hat 43, line 6). In Gats, finding calmness in both worlds is obtained through closeness to Ahura (Hat 28, line 2); All should go towards Ahura (Hat 32, line 1).

Following Asha or righteousness

Asha is the rule of righteousness. Doing right in deeds, thoughts and words. No deeds are right, unless they are based on Asha. Rules that are not based on righteousness are not constant. Asha never changes is constant and everlasting (Mehr, 1380: 61). He is the father of a global rule, i.e. Asha is the father or creator. i.e. Ahuramazda. Within Gats closeness to Ahura Mazda is righteousness (Hints, 1382: 232).

From Zarathustra’s point of view, that who follows Sepanta Minu or good deeds, is actually following Asha. He will be always victorious over enemies (Hat 28, line 26) and differentiate clever from stupid (Hat 46, line 17). Ahura accepts a governor who is just and kind and does not annoy people (Hat 29, line 3). In Zarathustra everyone will get the result of what he/she has done which is called Mizdeh (Mehr, 1380: 62).

Good deeds

The complete man is one who do good deeds. Kindness is the prerequisite to righteousness. With good deeds and thought, the spirit gets righteousness (Hat 34, line 2). Only those who try and do their best can get the best benefits (Hat 51, line 1). In fact, if he/she does good deeds, he/she will be the real follower of Asha. The best rewards will be allotted to those who try to make the world a better place (Hat 34, line 14).

Pieces of Advice

Happiness is allotted to those who try to make others happy (Hat 43, line 1). The complete human is the happy one. He is the leader of the society if he advises people to follow Ahura, Asha and kindness. The complete man, the Ahu one, tries to advise people doing good deeds.
Islam

The entrance of Islam to Iran had been one of the most important historical-cultural events. This raids did not end in a complete divergence and as Motahari says: Islam was nurtured in Iran and they tried to elevate it using their religious background (Golshan Pazhuh, 1387, 313). Islam said that life is based on brotherhood, equality, justice especially regarding Allah.

Tylor writes that Islam changed animalistic life with humanity. Tried to minimize slavery. Taught brotherhood to humanity (Mostafa Pour, 1387: 55). From Islamic point of view, all humans are equal and all have greatness. In koran, there are verses that advises towards greatness of humanity (Baderin, 2001: 72). Equality sometimes means to be equal or to be united. It also means justice, which is anti-discrimination. It means that all humans should have equal possibilities to follow God and use His rewards (Jaffari Tabrizi, 1380: 204).

The question remains whether the Islamic thoughts are shown within Iranian-Islamic architecture or not. If we look curiously at the Islamic arts and architecture, we realize that following religious affairs, beauty is shown in their artistic creations. The existence of mosques shows a good opportunity to show artistic beauty. Why is mosque considered as the House of Allah?

To know an Islamic city, we need to know the ideology of Islam. The ideology of Islam has affected architecture’s mind. Cities are created based on ideology and the best appearance is using Islamic ideology in creating scenes in cities. An Islamic city is the one in which the Islamic ideology is observable so that the existence of Allah is felt anywhere at any time (Bagheri, 1386: 86-87). Mosque is the heart of Islamic architecture. It is a symbol of faith. The indexes are domes, minaret, etc. (Helin Brand, 1377: 144).

It is crystal clear that mosques in Iranian cities are indications of religiousness, history and belief. It is a symbol of the Islamic identity: these cities are turned to the artistic, architectural cities (Figure 3)
Discussion and conclusion

Today culture plays an important role in international transactions and the world is a competition and transaction between different cultures. Conferences and congresses all help find common cultural grounds to institutionalize mutual cultural talks since general diplomacy including artistic and cultural sorts of diplomacy increases spiritual power, cultural attraction and improves the view of the countries in the eyes of other nations. Iran from the beginning had been a land that has followed ethics. Within religious and political texts, you can find numerous examples of responsibility and commitment to improve our own land and other nations based on their national conditions and religion. These ethical thoughts roots in Iranian culture and art and is a pattern for creation and decoration of homes and buildings. Therefore, each angle of this culture and art has a right and curious look to advise people towards philanthropy and even. Religion and politics had been two inseparable units of the nation regarding national and international ties. Advertising the correct national thoughts and religion of the land, philanthropy seen within the rules legislated by Cyrus the great, ethical thoughts of Zarathustra, keeping humans’ greatness, which is allotted to human via his/her relation with Allah, blossomed. Moreover, thoughts that appeared in texts and images are the best and infiltrating way for those thoughts that have unjustly expressed about originality of ethics and humanity in Iran. If Iranian government tries to educate suitable and informed people within national and international culture and art, firstly, the domain of cultural and artistic capabilities extends far beyond; secondly, it increases motivation from other countries. The entrance of the human rights cylinder to the Iranian National Museum expands the number of tourists who tried to visit the museum, which is an indication of different nations’ motivation for visiting Iran and is a golden time for showing the real face of the Iranian ethics and civilization. If this policy continues, in the near future Iranophobia turns to Iranothropy to expand national security and international ties.
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