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Citation

Gaskarth, Jamie (2022). Culture, Diplomacy and Power Transition. In: Knudsen, Tonny Brems and Navari, Cornelia eds. Power Transition in the Anarchical Society: Rising Powers, Institutional Change and the New World Order. Palgrave Studies in International Relations (PSIR). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, pp. 203–230.

URL

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Culture, Diplomacy and Power Transition

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This is a draft version of a chapter published as Jamie Gaskarth, 'Culture, Diplomacy and Power Transition' in Tonny Knudsen and Cornelia Navari (eds), *Power Transition and Institutional Change - Contours of a New World Order*. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2022.

How is global power transition likely to affect international society and its institutions? This question is of increasing importance given the rise of China and India as non-Western great powers (Gaskarth 2015). Many of the existing institutions of International society have been heavily shaped by Anglo/European states and reflect their historical experiences and attitudes (Buzan and Lawson 2015; Watson 1992). It is therefore important to consider how far they are sustainable if they are maintained by states who may not share these assumptions.

The institution this chapter is most concerned with is that of diplomacy, one of the primary institutions of international society (Buzan 2010). It adopts Hedley Bull's broad definition of diplomacy as 'The conduct of relations between states and other entities with standing in world politics by official agents and by peaceful means' (2002, 156). In *The Anarchical Society*, Bull (2002, 161) noted that diplomacy was 'made possible by the acceptance by the states concerned of complex rules and conventions' but that these emerged from particular historical, cultural and social contexts. For instance, he cites Butler and Maccoby's assertion that resident embassies assume 'a similarity of religion, institutions and language' (among other elements) to solidify as a practice (Bull 2002, 161).

Although diplomacy as an institution did survive the proliferation of states via decolonization (adding over 100 by the time Bull was writing), he perceived a decline in the observance of legal norms. Whilst Bull ultimately concluded that diplomacy was 'the common property of all states' and 'continued to flourish' (2002, 172), a common fear among English School scholars has been that declining diplomatic standards might be due to a 'vanishing shared international culture' (Sharp 2009, 205-6; Wight 1977, 110-128). Given the significance of great powers in maintaining the rules of international society (Cui and Buzan 2016), this would seem to be an acute concern in the present day in light of the relative decline in the power of Anglo-European states and the rise of non-Western ones.

Yet, there is a risk of orientalism in framing this in terms of 'threats' to international society and the institution of diplomacy. Change may occur but is not, of itself, inherently negative. What is

important is to recognise the potential for transformation and acknowledge the social and cultural aspects driving it. The power transition literature is heavily material-centric and tends to focus on economic and military aspects (Kennedy 1987; Casetti 2003; Gilpin, 1981; Beckley 2018; Lebow and Valentino 2009). It usually assumes states are like units with relatable goals and to which existing theories of state behaviour can be transplanted straightforwardly (Mearsheimer 2010). This is useful for understanding conflict and competition but does not illuminate how states cooperate or interact in peaceful terms (as this lies outside the scope of this approach) and does not consider the significant of cultural differences between actors. English School theory is important in this regard as it fleshes out when, how and why institutions like diplomacy emerge and evolve, paying much greater attention to cultural aspects as it does so (Navari 2010, 611; Wang and Buzan 2014, 22).

That said, while culture is an underlying factor in much discussion about diplomacy and international society the concept itself is too often taken as given (Philips and Reus-Smit 2020). This chapter seeks to remedy this by providing a more detailed discussion of culture before considering how cultural differences might impact on the way diplomacy (and hence international society) functions. The argument proceeds as follows. We begin by looking at definitions of culture and try to clarify some of its constitutive elements. We then link these to the study of the institutions of international society, in particular diplomacy. To illustrate this, we look at how individual policymakers may be affected by cultural differences, in terms of their sense of self, their interaction with others, their goals and values. The chapter concludes by asserting that cultural transition needs to be factored into the discussion of power transition, alongside its material elements.

Defining culture

What culture is, and how it differs from other related concepts such as society, is a thorny question. Many accounts begin with E.B. Tylor's (1871) definition of culture as 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'. Tylor's reference to culture as a 'whole' conveys the sense of a unified system of thought and action. Moreover, these systems are perceived to align closely with political communities, thus Tylor went on to assert: 'There is found to be such regularity in the composition of societies of men that individual differences can drop out of sight, and thus we can generalize on the arts and opinions of whole nations' (Tylor 1871). That idea reached its apotheosis in the middle of the twentieth century, with anthropologists and sociologists producing studies that essentialized cultures into discrete units with observable differences between them (Benedict 1934; Mead 1952). In the world of international relations, scholars sought to examine national character and posit different motivating forces driving the behaviour of statespeople based on supposed

differences in their cultural roots (Benedict 1946; Leites 1948, 102-119; Leites 1951; Snyder 1977). Meanwhile, English School theorists posited a common culture underpinning international society, based on the European cultural origins of the great powers shaping the system (Wight 1977, 110-128; Watson 1992).

Although these accounts fell out of favour in other disciplines in recent decades, Christian Reus-Smit (2018) has posited that they continue to frame the analysis of culture in many IR theories, e.g. Johnson (1995), Duffield (1999), and Hadfield-Amkhan (2010). Theorists may pay lip service to its constructed or contingent nature but the common representation of culture in IR portrays it as 'coherent, unified, tightly integrated, neatly bounded, and strongly constitutive' (Philips and Reus-Smit 2020). Rather, Reus-Smit posits that other disciplines have come to see culture as 'highly variegated, often contradictory, only loosely integrated, and fluidly and porously bounded' (Reus-Smit 2018, 7).

In light of this insight, Reus-Smit defines culture as 'webs of intersubjective meanings, expressed through, and embedded within, language, images, bodies, practices, and artefacts' (Reus-Smit 2018, 1). The plural 'webs' conveys the extent to which cultures are seen as comprised of many different potential forms of understanding. That is not to say cultures are formless. In fact, he asserts that 'Culture is not just a grab bag of atomized meanings, symbols, and practices for strategic use: it is patterned and structured, its contradictions bind as much as they divide' (Reus-Smit 2018, 7). What coheres and patterns cultural expression are social institutions. These manage the fact of cultural diversity, privileging certain forms of cultural understanding and marginalising others. Where continuities and structures in culture are apparent, they are 'accomplishments of power and practice, institutionalized for particular ends.' In other words, there is no 'coherent deep culture' but a diversity of cultural resources given contingent form via institutionalization (Reus-Smit 2018, 221).

Reus-Smit's project offers a brilliant analysis of underlying assumptions about culture across the gamut of IR theory, but four key puzzles remain. First, what is the relationship between culture and society? Second, how far does talking about culture as a thing lead to portraying it as unified, coherent and bounded? Thirdly, how purposive is the practice of culture? Fourthly, there is the question of how far individuals and groups from one cultural environment can join, practice and adapt institutions that emerged from another (even if we take cultural diffusion as a given). If we explore each of these in turn, they may shed light on what culture is and how it may impact on the practice of diplomacy – and thereby the nature of international society.

Culture and society

When Reus-Smit talks of ‘webs of intersubjective meanings’, it is not always clear what marks these as cultural rather than merely societal. Does the word culture add any explanatory value? Reading between the lines of the texts, what makes these cultural is that they express the human spirit in particular collective settings and allow its creative fulfilment. In other words, they have an emotional resonance which other individuals within that culture would also be likely to experience – although not necessarily in the same way (Reus-Smit 2018, 127-8). This point is usefully fleshed out in Richard Ned Lebow’s (2008) *A cultural theory of international relations*, a work which is curiously absent from Reus-Smit’s analysis, meriting only one footnote in his first two volumes on culture.

Lebow (2008) posits that societies are ordered according to four animating logics: appetite, spirit, reason and fear. How these are manifested depends on their cultural expression at any one time. Appetite refers to basic human needs (food, shelter, physical safety), spirit is defined in terms of self-esteem and self-fulfilment (status, display), reason relates to the calculation of interest (implied as about being able to transcend immediate appetites or spirit for longer term goals), while fear is always capable of breaking out due to the inherent insecurities in the other logics. According to Lebow, to understand cultures, we need to understand the individual psychological motivations of its members. These emerge from interactions between these divergent logics. This is important as rather than see culture as static and monolithic, Ned Lebow posits an ‘interactionist’ theory, which sees a dynamic process of continual challenge and contestation (2008, 506). The cultural expressions of societies may move from a more appetitive to spiritual, interest-based or fear-based alignment over time but they are in a continual state of flux.

What is important for our discussion is that culture comes to be understood as an expression of the pattern of these logics within a society at a given time. Since it is composed of multiple aspects which vary in salience, the pattern is continually changing. Nevertheless, if we analyse any particular historical moment, we can identify which are ascendant and which dormant or in decline. As a result, one can perceive cultural configurations within a society, even whilst accepting they are not fixed.

The coherence of culture as an analytical concept

This brings us to the second issue with Reus-Smit’s framing: that identifying forms of cultural coherence and portraying culture *as* coherent are not necessarily the same thing. Reus-Smit sees two constructivist approaches to culture, one exploring norms and the other a deep institutional structure of intersubjective meaning. Both of these, he feels, assume a ‘coherent deep culture’ - a picture Reus-Smit views as false (Reus-Smit 2018, 221). Instead, he posits that the constitutive environment is inherently diverse and that institutions, in the form of diversity regimes, manage that

diversity rather than overcome it. Yet, since constructivists see meaning as intersubjective, acknowledgment of diversity is already baked into their theoretical framework. Moreover, once Reus-Smit begins to discuss institutions, he too resorts to talking about the 'patterned and structured' form of culture they produce and we are back where we started. Writing about the cohering effects of culture, and how some cultural forms dominate others, should not be read as meaning that other cultures do not exist. Nor does it mean that culture is settled, unified, or bounded. The assertion of cultural dominance is often evidence of its insecurity and need for affirmation in the face of challenges. Analysing that process should not be read as accepting or naturalising it.

Reus-Smit's project is a useful corrective to simplistic and essentialist visions of culture that are often near the surface in public discussion. But, when it comes to IR, cultural analysts already acknowledge the contingent and mutable nature of cultural forms. Thus, Valerie Hudson argues that: 'What culture provides its members is a repertoire or palette of adaptive responses from which members build off-the-shelf strategies of action' (Hudson 2014, 110). This is not a 'deep structure' so much as a reservoir of creative potential, what George Yúdice terms a 'resource' (2003, 9). Indeed, any sense that the wholeness of a culture can be captured is quickly dismissed and Hudson argues that we should instead investigate the 'chunks' of 'prefabricated cultural response' (Hudson 2014, 124). These 'chunks' are themselves temporary, fragile and contestable, reflecting a pattern or coherence of meaning in particular moments. In other words, cultural analysis necessarily involves analysing efforts to cohere forms of cultural expression, whilst also being aware that these are contested, incomplete, open to multiple interpretations, and changeable.

How purposive is cultural expression?

A third issue arising from this discussion is the extent to which cultural expression is purposive. For Hudson, it is the deliberate formulation of cultural responses that is the proper subject of analysis. This view might seem to be evident in the way Phillips and Reus-Smit see culture as only taking form via institutions, which 'authorize some axes of difference over others, and link these to prevailing configurations of political authority' (Phillips and Reus-Smit 2020, 43). Implicit is a sense of institutions as the expression of the power of interest groups within societies; but Reus-Smit and Phillips also note that 'actors tailor their identities, normative priorities, and cultural practices in response to prevailing institutional incentives, models, and scripts' (Phillips and Reus-Smit 2020, 6). Thus, the process is conveyed as more structurationist, with agents and structures mutually constituting each other (Giddens 1984). Nevertheless, in trying to avoid conveying a sense of culture as substantive, deeply rooted and coherent, the authors downplay the informal and unconscious

expression of culture in social life (Katzenstein 1997, 46). Humans are not always purposive and some forms of culture, rather like the evolution of peacock feathers, can persist and be elaborated upon even when they are not in anyone's interest. This is evident when it comes to cultural rituals (Goffman 1967). Lebow, following Durkheim, notes how these can play an important role in structuring behaviour and thought, however small and insignificant they may appear:

'micro-interactions, even though they allow deception and are susceptible to misunderstandings, structure social solidarity, and by extension the identity of participants. None of these interactions necessarily expresses the true feelings of participants and can be significantly at odds with them. Actors nevertheless realize the importance of enacting such rituals, and more generally of projecting an image of themselves and their behaviour consist with them' (Lebow 2008, 565).

Importantly, these kinds of micro-interactions can play a role in both structuring the cognition that gave rise to the expression of the ritual in the first place, as well as the rationalization of behaviour afterwards. Social psychologists have noted that some forms of cultural ritual (i.e. asking after someone's well-being) can affect the quality of an interaction. As an example, when call handlers ask how our day is going, we may be angered by the question, and see it as irrelevant or impertinent, but we are more likely to adopt a reasonable tone during the conversation due to the power of social reciprocity (Cialdini 2007). Thus, forms of cultural interaction can affect the content. Sometimes this can be purposive (the call handler wants to establish a level of civility), but not necessarily for all participants. These unconscious rituals differ between cultures and can be a source of misunderstanding and conflict when they are applied outside their usual context.

Similarly, although arguments have gone back and forth, it is now generally accepted that language can affect the structure and content of thought (Everett 2012). On the one hand, language is an open system whose meanings are brought into existence via the speech acts of its participants (Searle 1969; Austin 1962). As such, it allows a high degree of agency for individuals to create or change understanding through the intersubjective process of communication. On the other hand, it also shapes and delimits what is expressed and how. Speakers have to tailor their expression to their audience. Language provides a coherence of cultural expression over time, even as it is subject to continual change and contestation. Different languages allow different scope for expressing particular thoughts, emotions, or ideas (Wierzbicka 1997). As an example, those with more formal speech patterns can reflect and reinforce social hierarchies compared to more demotic kinds. Where a language borrows a word from another that is often a sign of the lack of previous cultural expressions of that idea, of the level and type of interaction across cultures, and the changes that are occurring in cultural understanding (Thomason and Kaufman 1992). Thus, it is useful to

understand how language (and so culture) coheres cultural meaning and affects cognition in unconscious as well as conscious ways (Shore 1996, 32-35).

The issue is whether acknowledging unconscious forms of cultural expression is a backdoor to cultural essentialism. If culture is formed and expressed without conscious agency, it may appear to exert an independent and structured effect on thought and action. However, few would see language or rituals as fully deterministic. Rather, it is that prior patterns of interaction and cultural expression help steer our beliefs, values and preferences (Gaenslen 1997, 273). They make it easier to think, say and do some things and harder to think, say and do others (Duffield 1999, 771).

Anthropologists and sociologists charting these broad patterns of cultural orientation have identified six markers seen as salient when considering differences between cultures (Hofstede et al 2010); Ting-Toomey 1999; Hall 1976; Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009). These are as follows:

High Context _____ Low Context

High Power Distance _____ Low Power Distance

Individualist _____ Collectivist

Masculine _____ Feminine

Uncertainty avoidance _____ Uncertainty embracing

Long term orientation _____ Short term orientation

Each of these lies along a spectrum, with cultures more or less aligned with one or the other orientation. The separation between high and low context was first set out in Edward Hall's 1976 book *Beyond Culture*. It relates to the extent to which communication is based on immediate, written or spoken language (low context) versus a wider spectrum of verbal and non-verbal cues linked to the broader social system (high context). Power distance refers to the extent to which a culture is hierarchical or egalitarian. Individualist versus collectivist describes cultures that favour individual or collective identities and interests. Masculine and feminine delineates cultures that favour supposedly masculine rather than feminine social traits (e.g. competition or cooperation) and which afford women an unequal or more equal position in society respectively. Uncertainty avoidance links to how far a culture is willing to admit ambiguity, perhaps taking things on trust or allowing cooperative agreements to be worked out in practice rather than at the outset. Meanwhile, long or short term orientation relates to whether a culture favours the pursuit of immediate goals or plans ahead.

To outline these differences at the aggregate level is not to say that all members of a culture share the same orientations. Rather, it is that these dispositions have a degree of preponderance, such that an individual who does not exhibit them may well face personal or social conflict. Usually, policymakers will adapt their language and behaviour as well as their justifications thereof, along cultural lines in order to maintain public support. None of this is to say that the level of preponderance is fixed. Cultures are continually in flux and internal or external shocks may cause significant changes in attitudes, either in spasms or via more long term processes of mental adjustment. The first three cultural markers are more behavioural, relating to ordering principles within cultural practices, the latter two more cognitive but thought and action are intertwined with each. This is particularly the case when it comes to the gendered construction of masculine and feminine, which impacts on the social status of each gender, their behaviour, and the ways of thinking that play out in social contexts.

This brief sketch provides some useful content to our discussion of culture. Culture is made up of language, myths, rituals, images, bodies, practices, and artefacts, afforded meaning within communities via the spiritual affect they produce. That spirit may have a broad logic, animated by collective motives such as appetite, self-esteem, rationality, or fear. Participants within a culture manipulate, change or reinforce certain cultural understandings to suit their interests and goals. But culture is also made up of unconscious practices and rituals derived from habit. Over time, the regular orientation of cultures towards certain ways of thinking and acting can imbue a level of consistency in cultural expression. At least six kinds of patterned orientation have been identified by anthropologists and sociologists. These are reinforced by official state structures as well as by language, social conventions, and unconscious as well as conscious practices.

How far are institutions culturally dependent?

In light of this discussion, we now turn to the question of how far the form and practice of institutions (in our case diplomacy) depend on its members sharing cultural assumptions and dispositions. Diplomacy as a practice has largely been institutionalised within an Anglo-European milieu and as such reflects the culture of those societies at different times, as they developed. Early diplomatic institutions emerged in European societies that were 'high context' and so involved respect for social hierarchies, elaborate rituals, and indirect forms of expression using heavily coded language (Nicolson 1942; 1966). The diplomacy of the (long) twentieth century was dominated by the United Kingdom and then the United States. In the latter case especially, this low context society preferred more direct language and a problem-solving approach that aimed to cut through layers of cultural obstruction to arrive at a resolution (Ting Toomey 1999). While institutions can be shaped

by smaller powers and even non-state actors (the delegitimization of colonialism being one possible example, Gopal 2019), great powers are generally seen to have a strong influence on the character of the institutions of international society, especially diplomacy. Given global power transition and China and India's status as great powers, this suggests that their cultural dispositions will begin to be reflected in diplomatic practice; even accepting a level of cultural diffusion (Buzan 2010) and socialization (Armstrong 1993).

At first glance, it is easy to dismiss this notion as culturally essentialist, ignoring the way culture transcends national boundaries. No state is monocultural. Each contains a multitude of cultures which interact and overlap within and across national borders. Moreover, cultures are internally diverse, with differing interpretations of what their constituent parts mean and how they should be ordered. Nevertheless, as noted above, state institutions play an important part in structuring the expression of culture and promoting or delegitimising different cultural forms within given territories (Dumont 1986). Governments mobilise and reinforce cultural attitudes through education, the arts, social policy and the law. Political institutions shape what kinds of governments emerge, what national leaders rise to prominence, and their cognitive frames and modes of expression, based on the particular cultural context (Haslam 2011). As a result, the foreign policies of rising powers such as China and India will be shaped by the dispositions of their cultural milieu. As Franz Boas once put it: 'new ideas in society are not free, but are determined by the culture in which they arise. The artist is hemmed in by the peculiar style of the art...the political leader by established political forms' (as cited in Dressler 2018, 162). That does not mean to say societies always give rise to the same kind of leader; but national styles in foreign policy have been well-documented and clusters of similar leadership styles appear to emerge over time (Holsti 1970; Walker 1987; Gray 1981; Keller 2005; Kesgin 2020).

Furthermore, the need to coordinate foreign policy and implement it produces a unifying cultural effect, even whilst this may be subject to continual contestation. As Iver Neumann has noted, 'When posted abroad, diplomats will regularly say things like 'it is the opinion of the United States' or 'Norway thinks' (Neumann 2012, 34). The expression of policy therefore involves the simplification of culture to a singular view, albeit only at the point of articulation. Political dissent at home, which may have cultural roots, is often quietened via appeals to traditions such as bipartisanship (Gaskarth 2006; Taylor 1957). Continuity is also reinforced by social and political groups that delegitimize alternative cultural configurations, neatly captured by the idea of the 'blob' and its influence on US foreign policymaking (Porter 2018; Brands 2020). Foreign policy is itself arguably an institutional mechanism to reduce cultural diversity at home, in order to coordinate action abroad.

To summarise, states are an important institutional means of cohering culture, even while alternative cultural forms proliferate above and below the level of statecraft. For that reason, we can posit a link between how states conduct their external relations and domestic cultural dispositions, since certain types of cultural expression are favoured and promoted by state institutions.

A change of leadership in the society of states, would expect to be followed by a change in the way that society functions, as the different domestic and/or regional culture of rising power(s) influences how they interact with others, with knock on effects across the system. When Anglo-European states dominated international society, their diplomatic practices reflected their cultural dispositions, albeit with some borrowing and inheritance from the practices of previously dominant powers. They were usually able to socialise new participants into adopting their modes of speech and behaviour as a result of their inordinate power (at times through violence). That effect is lessened in the case of China's rise, due to its peculiar history and the scale of its actual and potential power. In consequence, this power transition is important as it perhaps the first time in at least two centuries that an actor with great power status hails from a different cultural milieu.¹

As a corollary, it may be necessary for IR analysts to rethink how we understand important categories of analysis. When it comes to analysing IR, the literature tends to use terminology largely derived from Western social science or political philosophy (Acharya and Buzan 2007; 2017). Scholars debate whether this or that non-Western country is an offensive or defensive realist state or notes the contending forces of nationalism, Marxism and liberalism (Feng 2005; Raditio 2018; Lande 2018; Ahlawat and Hughes 2018; Nau and Ollapally 2013). Occasionally Confucianism or Hinduism are thrown into the mix but rarely in ways that challenge the basic units of analysis: individual leader, government, state (for an exception, see Zhang 2014). On one level, this still has descriptive power due to the transmission and acceptance of these concepts from Western to non-Western cultures (Buzan 2010). Yet, it is also possible that other forms of cultural understanding exist that may challenge the dominant conceptualizations. Barry Buzan has noted that non-Western elites will often mobilise cultural differences to shore up their support (Buzan 2010, 19). In a less instrumental fashion, they may understand and interpret these concepts in different ways, or posit alternatives, as a result of their particular cultural contexts and habits (Qin 2018; Zhang and Kristensen 2017).

¹ Imperial Japan consciously sought to emulate Anglo-European military and diplomatic culture following a series of interventions by Western powers in the nineteenth century.

Capturing these processes in any depth would require a much longer treatment. For reasons of space, the rest of this chapter will sketch out ways in which cultural difference may problematize current assumptions about how international actors interrelate in international society, via the institution of diplomacy. Firstly, it could affect how diplomats and leaders construe themselves and others. Secondly, it might influence the styles of interaction between those participating in diplomacy, domestically and internationally. Thirdly, it may shape the values that leaders are likely to perceive as important. Finally, culture could impact on the goals that leaders are likely to seek. In short, cultural differences in each category may have significant impacts on the tone and quality of diplomatic interactions between international policymakers. This is speculative and the current power transition could be viewed as a natural experiment to see if international society socialises rising powers into conforming to existing practices; or is subject to change in alignment with the cultural dispositions of its leading members.

The self

In relation to the individuals who practice diplomacy, a large body of literature has noted that different cultures conceive of the self in different ways. Individualistic cultures tend to emphasize the autonomy of the individual, focusing on their unique characteristics, interior thought processes, individual conscience and personal history (Welzel 2013; Lukes 1973; Dumont 1986). Meanwhile, collectivist cultures relate the individual much more closely to their societal context (Zhang 2014, 179-80). Indeed, this can even go as far as rendering the self as a category meaningless unless it is construed in terms of social roles and constructed via social interactions (Qin 2010, 139-143). The anthropologist Francis Hsu is said to argue that “the Chinese language has no equivalent for personality in the Western sense. Personality in the West is a separate entity, distinct from society and culture: it is an attribute of the individual. The closest translation into Chinese is *ren*, but this word includes not only the individual but also the intimate societal and cultural environment that makes his or her existence meaningful” (Hofstede et al 2010, 114).

Thus, we have two broad ways of understanding selfhood, an independent and an interdependent view. The independent self utilises social interactions only to ‘strategically determine the best way to express or assert the internal attributes of the self’ (Markus and Kitayama 1991). From this perspective, self- understanding and motivations are largely intrinsic. The interdependent self is one that is ‘part of an encompassing social relationship’ and recognises that ‘one’s behaviour is determined, contingent on, and, to a large extent organized by what the actor perceives to be the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others’ (Markus and Kitayama 1991). In that regard, external actors and interactions are determinant of the individual’s sense of self.

The latter view is very much in evidence in the South African concept of Ubuntu, which was popularised by the anti-Apartheid movement. One of its main proponents, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, noted that it was 'very difficult to render in a Western language' but defined it as meaning 'My humanity is inextricably bound up in yours', or as one commentator put it: 'a person is a person through other people' (as cited in Dinan 2018, 114). From this perspective, one cannot be truly whole unless one's interactions with others accord with social values. By contrast, individualist cultures tend to perceive of the authentic self as one that emerges from introspection. Those who follow their individual conscience are valorised as true to themselves and that is seen as a higher truth than one derived from prior social categories or assumptions.

There are strong differences of opinion in the culture literature over how far personality traits correlate with cultural dispositions (Mandelbaum 1985). What is less controversial is the fact that how we interpret leaders varies according to our cultural background. When an individualist culture sees a foreign leader being lionised and their image plastered all over official publications and billboards, it is assumed that this means that the individual in question has significant personal autonomy, can make individual choices and can exert control over political outcomes. Yet, if the leader inhabits a collectivist culture, this may be a misinterpretation. In the latter case, the individual's significance is premised on their link to wider social systems and processes. As a result, their image is not simply individual in a personal sense but is given to represent a broader set of ideals that the leader then has to live up to (restricting their autonomy). Moreover, in a collectivist environment, the decision-making structure may be far more collective and less individual than in individualist cultures. When a collectivist culture adopts individualist frames, it often has to go through a process of reorientation to render the concept meaningful and to transmit this understanding to the wider culture. Chinese Communist party responses to the personality cult of Stalin, and Khrushchev's denunciation of him in his secret speech in 1956, offer a fascinating case study (Leese 2011, 25-86).

In our own era, President Vladimir Putin of Russia is often portrayed as a master strategist, making individual choices with a high degree of autonomy (Spyer 2019). Julia Ioffe argues 'most Russians don't recognize the Russia portrayed in this story: powerful, organized, and led by an omniscient, omnipotent leader' (2018). In reality, Putin's power is linked to his membership of a network and he has to be cognisant of group interests (Sakwa 2011; Belton 2020). Moreover, one commentator estimates that during Putin's first two terms as President 'over 1,800 of Putin's presidential decrees and instructions (excluding appointments) had not been implemented' (Monaghan 2012). Thus, even when he does make choices, they are not necessarily followed by his subordinates. On the one hand, Putin cultivates his image as a strong leader as this links with longstanding cultural

expectations in Russia about leadership, from Tsarist times through the Soviet era to the present day. On the other hand, why it is accepted by Western analysts may partly be derived from their own individualist expectations that leaders can be understood as autonomous actors making rational decisions according to their own subjective preferences (Smith and Bond 1993, 86-7).

From an analytical perspective, different conceptions of the self present a problem for anyone considering individual leadership traits across cultural boundaries. In an individualist culture one may talk about the individual as a more autonomous thing but in a collectivist context, their sense of self may be only intelligible with reference to their institutional or social position. Of course, no individual is fully autonomous, any more than they are wholly subsumed within a social system. Even in individualist cultures the self is generally seen as constructed via social interaction; but this process is conveyed as constructing a unique person, based on the specific and nonreplicable set of social exchanges they have participated in during the course of their life. For collectivist cultures, the individual becomes meaningful by locating them within socially understood roles and relationships. Put crudely, one sees individuality as separateness, the other as sameness.

This has relevance to diplomacy as individualist cultures are arguably more inclined to personalise issues, seeking to extract commitments from individual leaders and officials, or blame them for negative behaviour. Collectivist societies tend to see issues like the persecution of minorities as emerging from social contexts. Individual autonomy is downplayed in favour of awareness of social pressures and group interests. As a result, they will usually emphasize collective over individual responsibility. We can see this in responses to the civil war in Syria, with Western countries in the UN Security Council favouring condemnation of President Assad personally whilst China and Russia emphasized the responsibility of the Syrian government as a whole (Gaskarth 2017). In this way, power transition away from individualist Western states in international society could result in less emphasis on international criminal justice and individual accountability and more on collective responsibility.

Styles of interaction

Although we have acknowledged that not all individuals within a culture share its dominant configuration of orientations, they are nevertheless subject to its socializing effects and may well mimic those dispositions in order to thrive politically. As Hofstede puts it: 'the person internalizes the appropriate behavior to elicit a given outcome (retention) in the cultural context and is able to imitate appropriately at the correct time (reproduction)' (2003, 338). Leaders that cease to align themselves with the expectations of their culture may face accusations of being in hoc to foreign interests or out of touch (Haslam 2011, 167-69). Similarly, when leaders from different cultures

attempt to communicate, contrasting cultural dispositions can hamper their ability to understand one another (Ting-Toomey 1999).

The categories outlined above do not operate as a binary set and there is significant variation in the combination of dispositions even in similar cultures (e.g. Scandinavian countries are located within a Western cultural milieu but score higher for collective and feminine cultural traits than the more individualistic, masculine societies of the UK and US). However, certain categories are often seen as complementary and serve to reinforce particular norms of interaction and delegitimize other forms of communication.

To give an example, a particular combination of high context, collectivist, uncertainty embracing and long term oriented interaction is often associated with cultures in Asia in particular (Gao and Ting Toomey 1998). A high context communication has been described as 'one in which little has to be said or written because most of the information is either in the physical environment or supposed to be known by the persons involved, while very little is in the coded, explicit part of the message' (Hofstede 2010, 109). The importance of social context is a feature of collective societies, as is the notion of 'face', whereby interlocutors are attuned to the impact of any interaction on their social position or reputation (Goffman 1967, 5-45). With high context communication requiring extensive interpretation, and the possibility of misreading inexplicit cues, there is a greater degree of tolerance for uncertainty. Indeed, to preserve face and avoid confrontation that might lead to social embarrassment, uncertainty embracing cultures may deliberately cultivate a constructive ambiguity in their interactions. Raymond Cohen notes that the Japanese language offers a number of ways of refusing requests indirectly, such as 'taihen muzuhashii', meaning 'very difficult', and 'zensho shimasu', which can be interpreted literally as 'I will do my best', but in practice means 'no way' (Cohen 1997, 143). This caused a diplomatic row in 1969 when the Japanese Prime Minister, Eisaku Satō, responded to President Nixon's request for export restrictions with the latter phrase, only to be accused of bad faith when nothing was done.

The desire to avoid direct confrontation often leads to a more indirect style of negotiation in collectivist societies. For instance, it has been suggested that a distinctive Chinese approach to discussion is apparent: 'To begin with, discussants present their common problems and identify all the constraints that all the participants must meet. Only then do they state their own views. To Westerners, such a pattern appears as vague, beating around the bush, and not getting to the heart of the matter, but it is part of a carefully executed strategy of avoiding conflict' (Markus and Kitayama 1991). A similar technique has been employed in diplomatic negotiations over climate change. Borrowing the Zulu and Xhosa concept of 'indabas', talks at Durban and Paris offered the

main participants the chance to express themselves without interruption in a circle. As an observer put it: 'Instead of repeating stated positions, diplomats were encouraged to talk personally and quietly about their 'red lines' and to propose solutions to each other (Vidal 2015). These approaches are a product of the particular cultures of collectivist societies but they are changing the way leaders are interacting in international diplomacy.

This is important given the above mentioned transition of power towards Asia, which includes a number of societies with collectivist cultural orientations. Global politics has been dominated for decades by the United States, which privileges a different set of cultural dispositions, ones that are often low context, individualist, uncertainty avoiding, masculine and short term. US policymakers tend to adopt low context, short term problem solving approaches to conflict, addressing specific sources of dispute rather than the broader historical, economic and social drivers of contestation. Their language is frequently direct and can be interpreted as rude by high context interlocutors. The other side effect of their low context patterns of communication is an emphasis on explicit verbal and written agreements (Hofstede 2010, 109). Cultural analysts have noted the difference in the length of legal contracts between high and low context societies, with high context cultures willing to leave many things unsaid and low context ones wishing to ensure that all expectations are rendered in black and white text. Whilst eliciting clear expressions of intent has advantages in terms of allowing actors to be held to account for failing to uphold their commitments, it can present difficulties for leaders in other cultures. The latter may want to maintain ambiguity or flexibility and develop trust via an ongoing process of implementation, rather than expose themselves at the outset.

Thus, if the structures of power are changing in global politics, and new ascendant powers have differing cultural conceptions of how people should interact, this may lead to new and perhaps more effective forms of interaction in international diplomacy. On the one hand, progress may be made in disputes through ambiguous agreements which are less likely to attract domestic opposition. On the other hand, ambiguity also sets up the possibility of greater misunderstandings and potential conflict. None of this is inevitable and cultural dispositions are not consistent or wholly deterministic. The US and UK used constructive ambiguity in negotiating the Northern Ireland peace process. Chinese diplomats and 'wolf warriors' are being increasingly blunt in their criticism of other states. Rather, cultural dispositions are assumed to lend themselves to particular styles of interaction over time.

The impact of the transition from Western to non-Western states on styles of interaction may arguably be more acute if the lingua franca of diplomacy changes. As noted above, language affects

the way we structure our thinking and this can impact on behaviour (Boroditsky et al 2011; Benítez-Burraco 2017). The move in diplomacy away from Latin languages as the default form of communication, with their hierarchical and gendered tenses, to English, which largely lacks those social markers, coincided with, and perhaps facilitated, a more direct mode of diplomatic interaction. Should Chinese become the standard language of diplomacy, one might expect this to change again, and interaction be aligned with Chinese cultural assumptions. With that in mind, it would perhaps be in China's interest to promote Chinese language learning among foreign elites, so that modes of expression align with their acculturated approach to social interaction.

One possible counterpoint to this focus on national cultures lies in the socialising effect of diplomacy as a practice. Diplomacy has its own cultural expectations and attitudes. Whilst these may have largely emerged from historical interactions in the European states system, they have now been universalised and co-opted by participants across a variety of cultures. In the process, they allow the transcendence of individual cultural differences. Similarly, while language variations operationalise these differences domestically, globally, many policymakers communicate their opinions and desires in English and so the form and content of interaction becomes socialised into a shared diplomatic culture in its own right.

It is arguable, however, how far international societal norms can overcome the more deeply embedded and institutionally reinforced dispositions of national and regional cultures. Diplomats and leaders are usually in post for a short period of time relative to their lifespan. What may be more likely is that non-Western practitioners are better able to coopt, subvert or challenge Western diplomatic norms due to their greater cross-cultural awareness. Intercultural understanding in global politics is rather one-sided, due to the imbalance of foreign language speaking (which is very low in the UK and US, for instance, compared to other states).² As a result, it is arguably easier for non-Western foreign policymakers to understand their Western counterparts due to greater language proficiency and awareness of these dominant cultures.

Values

Values are defined by Welzel as 'long-term orientations that shape people's personal identity' (Welzel 2013, 106). The values of individuals are perceived to 'gravitate around national anchor points, reflecting the fact that national societies develop as entities, with a common imprint left on

² The UK ranks lowest in Europe for foreign language proficiency, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Foreign_language_skills_statistics. The US ranks lower than the UK, with only 20% of K-12 students enrolled on foreign language courses, and foreign language proficiency rated lowest of 8 categories important for worker success. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/06/most-european-students-are-learning-a-foreign-language-in-school-while-americans-lag/>.

all members' (Welzel 2013, 89-90). When analysts have tried to quantify the impact of culture on what values individuals express, they arrived at a range of 25-50%, with other factors such as gender and age accounting for much of the rest (Gannon 2008, 30). That highlights the fact that cultures are not deterministic but also suggests that they have a non-trivial impact. National anchor points are often linked to 'culture zones', meaning that national societies that inhabit these zones share similar trajectories of emancipation and development. Broadly speaking, collectivism is strongly associated with low levels of development and individualism with higher development. These differing pathways are linked to the strength of underlying 'emancipatory values', such as autonomy. Individualism's emphasis on autonomy allows a greater level of personal initiative, both in terms of creativity and risk, compared to collectivism's privileging of conventionality. In addition to regional patterns of development, culture may also impact on trade flows, with cultural affinity facilitating close economic ties, even during periods of political hostility – mainland China and Taiwan being an example (Katzenstein 1997).

As noted above, cultural dispositions do not fit neatly within national territories and are subject to significant contestation, internally and externally to the culture itself. Values change over time, and there are generational differences observable, with younger people more likely to alter their values than those who have embedded them over a longer lifetime. Nevertheless, if collectivist cultures are in the ascendant and they have a different conception of which values individuals should privilege compared to individualist cultures that could have real world effects. For instance, the pattern of rights which the international community promotes is likely to shift from individualised ones stressing autonomy to those which reflect collective interests. Writ large on the international scene, individual states may be expected to sublimate their particular values in favour of those which accord with collective harmony (as defined by the hegemon). That could result in a more solidarist international order, but one cohered around a non-Western set of cultural assumptions (Buranelli 2020); or, the development of spheres of influence where a regional hegemon governs the values of a particular geographical area and expects others to subordinate their cultural understanding to that order (Buzan 2010).

Goals

Lastly, cultural differences will shape the goals that individual leaders see as morally or practically desirable to achieve. On a personal level, some cultures will permit and even encourage leaders to pursue individual self-interest or favour their family or sub-group whilst others emphasize impartiality and universal public goods. In terms of the wider milieu, cultural differences affect what is viewed as desirable in terms of social order. Dissatisfaction with existing cultural processes or

configurations of power may lead to states seeking to change the status quo, hence having a destabilising effect on the system – a key concern of power transition theory (Tammen et al 2017).

For some time, a discourse posited that China and India's cultural dispositions are more consensual than confrontational and so they will not seek to challenge the prevailing institutions of international society (Qin 2010; Jacob 2015, 25-29; Hall 2015, 93-97). In the case of China, this is supposed to reflect a dominant cultural orientation to seek harmony via social agreement (Chen 2015; Qin 2010, 147-148) whereas individualist cultures in the United States emphasize seeking the truth, which is expected to emerge from the clash of competing opinions. Whilst harmony implies a more beneficent end state, E.H. Carr noted, with reference to the supposed 'harmony of interests' among states, that this phrase can mask patterns of domination and coercion (Carr 2016). At the very least, it requires the subordination of individual interests to those of the collective. In practice, that can either mean the pursuit of global dominance or regional hegemony – with China generally seen as favouring the latter. A corollary of this would be the need for others to subordinate their individual goals to maintain the harmony of that order, something neighbouring states, particularly those with alternative collective cultural imaginaries, or more individualist orientations, may resist (Kerr 2015, 110-116).

Here we need to be careful about overstating the consistency with which states align their goals with one or other orientation. Foreign policies can change with new leaders or governments. Although one might assume the individualist orientation of many people in the US, if reflected at the national level, it would carry the potential for pluralism and acceptance of difference. In practice, the US has been notably intolerant of different political systems in Latin America, South America and South East Asia in the past (Porter 2020). For the most part though, it has allowed difference while engaging in discriminatory practices in favour of those who either embrace free market capitalism or promote US security interests. Many of these relationships (such as US support for Saudi Arabia) are conveyed as hypocritical by critics, but they are enabled by the series of dualisms that characterize US culture, between the private and public, the individual and the collective, the domestic and the foreign, the self and other. A culture that seeks to resolve internal conflict and promote harmony may find it more difficult to reconcile such contradictions (Markus and Kitayama 1991).

Conclusion

Returning to our question of how power transitions affect international society, this chapter has attempted to offer some granular detail about how cultural differences among leading powers may impact on diplomatic interactions. Specifically, it has posited that differences in the understanding of the self (i.e. individuals in world politics), styles of human interaction, values, and goals may differ

according to cultural context. Human beings are too complex and numerous for these differences to be deterministic of any particular interaction, but cultural analysis allows us to understand dispositions over time. What these insights suggest is that culture could be an important factor shaping the transition from an international society dominated by Western states to a multipolar one with non-Western cultural attitudes and behaviours assuming greater importance.

To flesh out these insights will require substantial ethnographic research. At the same time, analysts need to maintain a critical stance. Individuals and sub-groups within communities will utilise culture instrumentally to further their interests. Without greater knowledge of the cultural resources available to policymakers, we cannot be aware of the contingent nature of their modes of expression. Whether instrumental or unconscious, cultural transitions are likely to go hand in hand with material power ones and have a significant effect on the international society of the future.

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