Cultural Diplomacy: Beyond the National Interest?

YUDHISHTHIR RAJ ISAR, IEN ANG AND PHILLIP MAR

ABSTRACT
The field of cultural diplomacy looms large in present-day cultural policy and discourse, yet there is widespread confusion about the meaning of the term, both in theory and practice. This talk, based on the authors’ work as editors of a Special Issue of the Journal of Cultural Policy Studies (prepared on the basis of an international symposium held at ICS in October 2013), seeks to scrutinize the current confusion surrounding cultural diplomacy and, in the context of the changing role of the nation-state, to explore its possibilities as an instrument for going beyond the national interest in the conduct of international relations. Distinguishing between ‘cultural diplomacy’ as essentially interest-driven governmental practice and ‘cultural relations’, which is ideals-driven and practiced largely by non-state actors, we pursue a two-fold aim in this presentation: First, to demystify the field, especially when it is yoked to the popular notion of ‘soft power’; second, to better understand how actually-existing cultural diplomacy and/or cultural relations discourses operate in different national contexts, focusing principally on Australia and Asia.

BIOGRAPHIES
Yudhishthir Raj Isar is an independent analyst, advisor and public speaker who straddles different worlds of cultural theory, experience and practice. He is Professor of Cultural Policy Studies at The American University of Paris and Adjunct Professor at the Institute for Culture and Society. He has also been maître de conférence at Sciences Po, Paris. Professor Isar is co-editor of the Cultures and Globalization Series (SAGE). He is a trustee of civil society cultural organisations and consultant to international organisations and foundations, and Past President of Culture Action Europe.

Earlier, at UNESCO, where he served from 1973 to 2002, he was notably Executive Secretary of the World Commission on Culture and Development and Director of the International Fund for the Promotion of Culture.

Distinguished Professor Ien Ang is a Professor of Cultural Studies and was the founding Director of the Institute for Culture and Society. She is one of the leaders in cultural studies worldwide, with interdisciplinary work spanning many areas of the humanities and social sciences. Her books, including Watching Dallas, Desperately seeking the audience and On not speaking Chinese, are recognised as classics in the field and her work has been translated into many languages. Her most recent ARC research project is entitled ‘Sydney’s Chinatown in the Asian Century: from Ethnic Enclave to Global Hub’ (with Donald McNeill and Kay Anderson in collaboration with the City of Sydney). She currently chairs an Expert Working Group on Asia Literacy: Language and Beyond, for the Australian Council of Learned Academies’ Securing Australia’s Future program. As a prominent public speaker and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities, she is frequently called on for keynote addresses in Australia and internationally.

Dr Phillip Mar is a Research Associate with the Institute. He has a background in social anthropology and the sociology of culture. His research interests include transnational migration and culture, emotions and migration, and cultural policy. Most recently Phillip has been working with Professor Ien Ang on the ‘Diversity of Cultural Expressions’ project, a research partnership with the Australia Council for the Arts which is developing best practice case studies to guide the implementation of the UNESCO Convention for the Promotion and Protection of Diversity of Cultural Expressions.