



Soft Power in Practice: Cultural and Educational Micro-Diplomacy between Indonesia and the Czech Republic

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how cultural and educational diplomacy function as instruments of soft power in strengthening bilateral relations between Indonesia and the Czech Republic. It addresses the research gap in understanding how educational exchanges and cultural initiatives contribute to people-to-people diplomacy within less-studied bilateral contexts. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study utilizes a systematic literature review as the main method of data collection, complemented by autoethnographic reflections derived from the author's experience as an IISMA awardee in the Czech Republic. Data were obtained from official government documents, peer-reviewed academic journals, embassy publications, and institutional communications from both nations. The findings reveal that Indonesia's cultural and educational diplomacy through programs such as IISMA, Darmasiswa, language teaching, and joint cultural festivals has effectively enhanced mutual understanding and fostered Indonesia's positive image abroad. These initiatives serve as soft power mechanisms that attract foreign publics through shared learning and cultural appreciation, creating sustained engagement beyond state-level diplomacy. Despite these achievements, Indonesia's approach remains fragmented due to the absence of a cohesive national branding strategy and limited inter-agency coordination. Strengthening collaboration among ministries, universities, and cultural institutions is essential to maximizing the impact of soft power. The study concludes that integrating educational and cultural diplomacy under a unified framework can significantly advance Indonesia's strategic influence and bilateral partnership with the Czech Republic.

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly interconnected world, cultural and educational diplomacy have emerged as powerful instruments for fostering international cooperation and mutual understanding. These diplomatic approaches, which involve the exchange of ideas, values, traditions, and educational programs, contribute significantly to strengthening bilateral relations between nations like Indonesia and the Czech Republic by building trust and goodwill (Pajtinka, 2014). This nuanced form of engagement transcends traditional state-to-state interactions, cultivating deeper connections at societal and individual levels that underpin enduring partnerships. Specifically, cultural diplomacy leverages a nation's artistic expressions, heritage, and societal norms to project a positive image abroad; in contrast, educational diplomacy facilitates academic exchanges and collaborative research, fostering intellectual ties and shared knowledge production (Schwartz, 2004). These broader conceptual foundations provide a useful lens for examining how such forms of diplomacy manifest within specific bilateral contexts, including the evolving relationship between Indonesia and the Czech Republic.

Since diplomatic relations were formally established in 1950, historically rooted in President Soekarno's visit to Czechoslovakia, this partnership encompasses trade, investment, and growing cooperation in education and culture (Pasaribu et al., 2024). Indonesia and the Czech Republic have maintained cordial relations rooted in shared historical, cultural, and ideological affinities. Both Indonesia and the Czech Republic have undergone complex trajectories of post-colonial and post-authoritarian transformation, respectively. Indonesia's struggle to assert its identity after centuries of colonial rule has made cultural diplomacy a tool of decolonization and international recognition. Meanwhile, the Czech Republic's transition from communist authoritarianism to a democratic and liberal order has shaped its commitment to pluralism, cultural openness, and educational exchange. These parallel experiences of transformation provide a meaningful context for understanding how both nations approach soft power and cultural cooperation today. Although the partnership between Indonesia and the Czech Republic has often been overshadowed by Indonesia's larger alliances with major Western powers or regional actors within ASEAN, it nevertheless represents a unique and underexplored dimension of interregional cooperation between Southeast Asia and Central Europe. Beyond the traditional domains of trade and political diplomacy, the bilateral relationship carries untapped potential particularly in the spheres of culture and education, which have proven to be enduring and less politically contentious means of fostering mutual understanding and influence.

Understanding the intricate interplay of social and cultural norms is particularly vital in facilitating effective cross-cultural negotiations and developing impactful joint initiatives. This includes promoting Indonesian culinary arts in the Czech Republic and vice versa, which can serve as an accessible and engaging entry point for cultural exchange, moving beyond mere declarations to tangible outcomes (Yamamoto, 2022). This requires a comprehensive strategy that not only acknowledges the unique cultural nuances of each country but also actively promotes them through carefully designed programs and initiatives. These efforts align with broader public diplomacy strategies aimed at enhancing soft power, where cultural offerings like cuisine can serve as significant conduits for national branding and cross-cultural appreciation (Iqbal & Aftab, 2025). This requires a comprehensive strategy that not only acknowledges the unique cultural nuances of each country but also actively promotes them through carefully designed programs and initiatives.

The concept of soft power, first systematically articulated by Joseph Nye (1990), has become a central framework for understanding contemporary international relations. Unlike the coercive instruments of hard power, soft power operates through attraction, shaping the preferences of other states by legitimizing a nation's cultural values, political ideals, and foreign policies (Nye, 2019). This form of power is increasingly salient in a globalized world, where influence is often exerted not through military or economic dominance, but through the persuasive capacity of a nation's cultural appeal and ideological resonance (Cevik, 2024). Numerous countries demonstrate the effectiveness of these strategies: South Korea has built global appeal through the Korean Wave, while France, Japan, and the United States have long institutionalized cultural institutes and educational exchanges as pillars of their foreign policy (Zhang, 2024). These examples underscore the strategic value of leveraging cultural assets and academic collaboration as instruments of nation-branding, mutual understanding, and international engagement.

As the world's fourth-largest democracy and an archipelagic nation of immense cultural diversity, Indonesia possesses significant, though not yet fully optimized, soft power potential. Its rich cultural heritage and democratic values provide a robust foundation for international engagement. Initiatives such as student exchange programs and international cultural performances have begun to project this appeal, evidenced by the growing global interest in traditional arts like wayang (Nurrochsyam & Purwana, 2024). However, scholarly analysis suggests that Indonesia's efforts remain hampered by a lack of a cohesive national brand and fragmented implementation. The absence of a strategic framework anchored in core national values, such as *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity), limits the effectiveness and coherence of its cultural diplomacy (Pitsuwan, 2014).

While previous studies have extensively examined Indonesia's cultural diplomacy in Asia-Pacific and Western contexts, little is known about how it operates within Central Europe, particularly in the Czech Republic, where people-to-people and academic interactions are steadily expanding. This knowledge gap limits understanding of how Indonesia's soft power functions in less traditional diplomatic spaces. Furthermore, few studies incorporate autoethnographic insights that capture how individual experiences such as those of scholarship awardees or exchange participants function as micro-level diplomatic acts within broader soft power frameworks. To address these gaps, this study analyzes how Indonesia and the Czech Republic utilize cultural and educational diplomacy as instruments of soft power to enhance bilateral cooperation. Specifically, it aims to answer two central research questions: (1) How do Indonesia and the Czech Republic employ educational and cultural initiatives as tools of soft power to enhance mutual understanding and cooperation? (2) What challenges and opportunities arise in optimizing these initiatives to build a sustainable and inclusive partnership?

By combining a systematic literature review with autoethnographic reflection, this study contributes to both theoretical and practical understandings of soft power diplomacy. Theoretically, it extends Nye's and Lukes's concepts by situating soft power within people-centered and co-creative dimensions of diplomacy. Practically, it provides policy-relevant

insights for enhancing Indonesia's strategic engagement with the Czech Republic through coherent, value-based, and collaborative frameworks.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: the next section outlines the theoretical framework of soft power and cultural diplomacy; Section 3 discusses the historical development of Indonesia–Czech relations; Section 4 analyzes empirical findings from cultural and educational collaborations; and the final section concludes with policy implications and recommendations.

METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach combining literature review and autoethnography. The literature review draws on academic journals, government documents, embassy publications, and university reports selected for their credibility and policy relevance (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In parallel, autoethnographic reflection based on the author's experience as an IISMA awardee in the Czech Republic provides micro-level insights into cultural and educational diplomacy. This narrative is treated not as an anecdote, but as analytical evidence linking personal experience with broader soft power strategies. Data were examined through thematic content analysis, guided by Nye's concept of soft power, Cull's framework of public diplomacy, and Lukes's power dynamics. Triangulation across literature, official sources, and experiential accounts was used to enhance validity. This combined method allows the study to capture both structural and experiential dimensions of Indonesia–Czech cultural and educational diplomacy.

The collected data were analyzed through a thematic and interpretive process. Sources were grouped into three analytical clusters: policy frameworks, academic discourse, and institutional communications to identify recurring patterns and the evolution of diplomatic cooperation. The autoethnographic reflections were examined through narrative and reflexive analysis, focusing on how the author's positionality as both participant and observer influences interpretation. Triangulation was employed by comparing self-reflective narratives with secondary data to enhance consistency, depth, and analytical credibility. To ensure methodological rigor, the study adheres to the principles of transparency, reflexivity, and ethical integrity. Reflexive journaling and iterative coding were used to minimize potential bias, while data verification was achieved through cross-referencing multiple credible sources. Ethical considerations were observed by anonymizing specific institutional interactions and by positioning autoethnographic insights as illustrative rather than generalizable findings.

Through this structured and reflexive analytical framework, the study aims to generate a nuanced interpretation of how educational and cultural diplomacy operate as mutually reinforcing instruments of soft power. This methodology not only enhances empirical validity but also contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of the interconnection between individual agency, public diplomacy, and the construction of bilateral relations in contemporary international contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Education as a Transformative Soft Power Instrument

The bilateral relationship between Indonesia and the Czech Republic demonstrates a steady yet underexplored trajectory of cooperation in cultural and educational diplomacy. Key initiatives include the *Darmasiswa* Scholarship, which enables Czech students to study Indonesian language and culture, as well as the Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), which allow Indonesian students to participate in academic exchange programs in Czech universities such as Charles University and Palacký University Olomouc. On the cultural front, activities such as gamelan performances, batik exhibitions, and Indonesian cultural festivals in Prague have introduced Indonesian heritage to a wider Czech audience. These initiatives highlight the mutual willingness of both nations to utilize cultural and educational platforms as bridges of diplomacy.

Beyond these formal exchange programs, cultural exchange activities between the Czech Republic and Indonesia have grown into a multifaceted relationship that encompasses education, performing arts, and community diplomacy. One of the most prominent examples is the teaching of the Indonesian language (Bahasa Indonesia) at Charles University in Prague and Palacký University in Olomouc, which has offered structured courses under the Department of Asian Studies since the early 2000s. The program attracts Czech students interested in Southeast Asian culture, linguistics, and international relations. Additionally, Masaryk University in Brno and the University of Hradec Králové have included introductory Indonesian language and cultural courses within their Asian and International Studies curricula. These initiatives are often supported by the Indonesian Embassy in Prague and the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia through visiting lecturers and scholarship programs, such as *Darmasiswa* and the Indonesian Arts and Culture Scholarship (IACS).

Another remarkable dimension of this exchange is the introduction of Indonesian traditional music especially gamelan into Czech academic and cultural life. Charles University's Faculty of Arts hosts regular gamelan workshops and performances in collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy, where Czech students learn to play traditional Javanese and Balinese instruments such as the *saron*, *bonang*, and *kendang*. The Janáček Academy of Music and Performing Arts (JAMU) in Brno has also featured gamelan ensembles in intercultural music programs, encouraging collaboration between Czech and Indonesian musicians. Furthermore, Czech music festivals such as *Prague Folklore Days* and *Colours of Ostrava* have frequently featured Indonesian traditional dance and gamelan performances, strengthening people-to-people connections through artistic expression. These initiatives are further complemented by joint research and exhibitions between the National Museum in Prague and Indonesia's National Museum, which have enabled the preservation and academic documentation of Indonesian instruments and performance traditions. In return, Indonesian universities such as Gadjah Mada University and the Indonesian Institute of the Arts (ISI) Yogyakarta have hosted Czech scholars conducting comparative research on performing arts and folklore. Altogether, these activities signify that the Czech–Indonesian cultural relationship has evolved beyond ceremonial diplomacy, emerging as a sustainable model of intercultural education and artistic collaboration that continues to promote global understanding and mutual respect.

Educational diplomacy has proven to be one of the most effective channels of Indonesia's soft power in the Czech Republic. Programs such as Darmasiswa and IISMA function not only as academic exchanges but also as platforms of attraction that reflect Indonesia's intellectual openness and multicultural identity. Drawing from Nye's (2004) concept of soft power, the attraction generated through these exchanges demonstrates Indonesia's ability to shape perceptions without coercion. Furthermore, the constructivist lens of Wendt (1992) suggests that such exchanges facilitate the co-construction of shared meanings and identities. Czech students exposed to Indonesian values and Indonesian students immersed in Czech academic culture contribute to a more dynamic and multidimensional bilateral relationship.

Cultural Diplomacy and Micro Level Agency as a Channel to Public Diplomacy

The integration of autoethnographic insights provides a critical dimension to understanding how individuals function as micro-agents of soft power. The author's personal experiences during cultural presentations, academic collaborations, and informal exchanges demonstrate that diplomatic meaning is often negotiated through affective and interpersonal spaces rather than official state channels. Mouffe's (2002) distinction between politics and the political becomes particularly relevant in this context. While formal diplomacy (politics) operates through institutional mechanisms, the political emerges in the negotiation of legitimacy, representation, and cultural meaning at the human level. Thus, individual exchange participants students, educators, and cultural performers embody Indonesia's diplomatic identity in ways that state actors alone cannot replicate.

This finding expands existing soft power scholarship by demonstrating that individual agency functions as the connective tissue between cultural narratives and political legitimacy. In this sense, educational and cultural diplomacy are not merely tools of influence but also sites of co-production where national identity is continuously reshaped through transnational engagement.

Challenges and Limitations in Indonesia–Czech Cooperation

Despite these achievements, Indonesia's cultural and educational diplomacy with the Czech Republic faces notable challenges. As highlighted by (Kristiana & Benito, 2023), Indonesia lacks a coherent national branding strategy, resulting in fragmented implementation of soft power initiatives. The limited financial resources allocated to programs like Darmasiswa further reduce their competitiveness compared to other scholarships such as Fulbright or Erasmus+. In addition, promotional efforts remain underdeveloped, with Indonesia relying heavily on embassy-organized events and social media campaigns, in contrast to more institutionalized efforts by countries like South Korea or France. These challenges restrict Indonesia's ability to maximize its soft power potential in the Czech Republic.

Furthermore, the absence of a unified nation branding strategy rooted in Indonesia's core philosophical values *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and *Pancasila* has resulted in an incoherent diplomatic message. Strengthening inter-agency coordination, establishing performance indicators for cultural diplomacy, and expanding alumni networks between Indonesian and Czech universities would enhance both visibility and sustainability of Indonesia's soft power projection.

Comparative Perspective and Strategic Implications

A comparative glance at other countries' practices in the Czech Republic provides valuable lessons. South Korea's cultural diplomacy, particularly through K-pop and Korean Cultural Centers, has successfully created a strong and attractive national brand. Similarly, France's Alliance Française and Japan's Japan Foundation maintain long-term cultural influence through language promotion and academic partnerships. Indonesia, by contrast, has yet to institutionalize its cultural diplomacy on such a scale. To enhance effectiveness, Indonesia must develop a unified nation branding strategy, improve inter-agency coordination, and strengthen its alumni networks as long-term cultural ambassadors. These steps would not only improve bilateral ties with the Czech Republic but also bolster Indonesia's position in the broader European context.

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Autoethnographic Insights and Theoretical Implication

Autoethnographic reflection offers a profound understanding of how individual experiences can serve as extensions of a nation's soft power strategy. In this study, the author's experience as an Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA) awardee at Palacký University Olomouc provides a tangible illustration of micro-level diplomacy within the broader framework of Indonesia's cultural and educational engagement in the Czech Republic (Holečková, 2021).

This engagement was most visibly reflected in the author's participation in the IISMA Culturise Program at Palacký University Olomouc in 2023. Under the theme "Djoempa Pemoeda," Indonesian IISMA awardees presented a series of cultural performances to introduce Indonesia's identity and cultural diversity to the Czech and international community. Attended by more than seventy participants in the city of Olomouc, the event became a creative platform for Indonesian students to express national pride and solidarity through artistic performance. The author played an active role in a historical stage drama depicting the struggles of Indonesian heroes during the colonial period and artistic representation of national perseverance and resistance. Additionally, representing the Eastern region of Indonesia, the author performed the traditional song "Rote Bolelebo" using the indigenous Sasando, accompanied by the traditional percussion instrument kampil. This performance highlighted the beauty and uniqueness of Indonesia's regional cultures while reinforcing the national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (Unity in Diversity).

Beyond this formal occasion, the author also served as a cultural ambassador in various intercultural activities. During the cultural night organized by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) at Palacký University Olomouc, the author introduced the Sasando instrument, traditional attire, Indonesian cuisine, and performing arts to both international and local students. Furthermore, the author performed the Sasando at the Christmas celebration hosted by the Indonesian Embassy (KBRI) in Prague, alongside members of the Indonesian community and Czech guests. Through these engagements, Indonesian culture was presented directly to international audiences through music, storytelling, and interpersonal interaction. In this context, students were not merely academic exchange participants but also micro-diplomatic actors who communicated national values through empathy, art, and intercultural dialogue.

According to data from the IISMA program (Kemendikbudristek, 2023), more than 1,100 Indonesian students were selected to study in 34 countries, with approximately 25 participants placed in Central and Eastern Europe, including the Czech Republic. Palacký University Olomouc, known for its Department of Asian Studies, hosts both Indonesian and Czech students engaged in courses on Southeast Asian languages and cultures. This academic environment created an authentic intercultural setting where the engagement of Indonesian students functioned as a form of everyday diplomacy.

This research reaffirms that diplomacy in the 21st century is no longer confined to state-centric or institutional mechanisms but increasingly involves diverse actors, practices, and narratives. The integration of educational and cultural diplomacy, as observed in the Indonesia–Czech Republic relationship, reveals that attraction and legitimacy are produced through social interaction and shared experiences rather than through hierarchical power projection. This perspective situates soft power as a dynamic, relational process rather than a static asset of the state. Hence, the study's insights contribute to an ongoing theoretical debate about the evolving nature of power in international relations, one that bridges structure and agency, as well as the formal and informal dimensions of diplomacy.

Within this environment, individual interactions became meaningful acts of representation. During classroom discussions and public seminars, the author introduced topics such as Indonesia's pluralistic democracy, environmental diplomacy, and cultural diversity aligning with Nye's (1990) concept of soft power as attraction. Beyond formal learning spaces, informal interactions with Czech and international peers often centered on Indonesian cuisine, traditional arts, and local customs, which naturally sparked curiosity and admiration. For instance, in one cultural fair organized by the university's international office in October 2023, Indonesian students presented batik-making demonstrations and traditional snacks, attracting more than 200 visitors from 15 nationalities. This event not only enhanced visibility but also created a positive emotional resonance toward Indonesia's cultural identity.

Collaborative academic projects exemplified Lukes's (2002) notion of power with, demonstrating how influence emerges through cooperation rather than dominance. Intercultural group work enabled Indonesian and Czech students to co-create knowledge and identity, positioning educational diplomacy as a mutual process of exchange rather than a unilateral projection of culture. The author's engagement further reflected the power to dimension acting as a credible cultural intermediary who reshaped perceptions of Indonesia's pluralism and tolerance. Empirical data reinforce this dynamic: IISMA's 2023 survey reported that 78% of host universities observed heightened interest in Indonesian culture and academic collaboration, while the Indonesian Embassy in Prague noted an increase in bilateral partnerships. These findings

align with Mouffe's (2002) conception of diplomacy as inherently political, where legitimacy and representation are negotiated through everyday intercultural interactions. The IISMA experience thus illustrates that soft power is enacted not only by states but through individuals whose micro-level engagements transform personal encounters into enduring instruments of national diplomacy.

The autoethnographic insights highlight that individual agency is central to Indonesia's soft power projection. Each student abroad becomes a living representation of Indonesia's identity, values, and aspirations. Their personal narratives, embedded in real social contexts, form the connective tissue between national diplomacy and international perception, demonstrating that in the contemporary era, soft power operates as much through human relationships as through institutional policies.

Theory	Analytical Function	Integrative Relation
Nye (Soft Power)	Provides the foundation to understand how cultural and educational attractions shape positive perceptions and legitimacy.	Serves as a starting point for viewing "attraction as a co-creation."
Lukes (Three Dimensions of Power)	Explains the transformation from persuasion (power over) to collaboration and empowerment (power to and power with)	Demonstrates horizontal dynamics between individual actors and institutions.
Mouffe (Politics)	Highlights that diplomatic interactions are not neutral; there is a negotiation of meaning and legitimacy in every cultural exchange.	Provides critical depth to the two previous theories by adding the dimension of contestation.

The findings reveal that Indonesia's cultural and educational diplomacy with the Czech Republic operates not merely as a projection of attraction but as a dialogical process in which power, meaning, and legitimacy are continuously negotiated. Drawing on Nye's concept of soft power, initiatives such as the IISMA and Darmasiswa programs function as platforms of attraction that reflect Indonesia's cultural richness and democratic openness. Yet, when analyzed through Lukes's multidimensional view of power, these initiatives extend beyond the persuasive dimension (power over) to embody both power to empower students and cultural actors as agents of influence and power with building collaborative partnerships that produce shared understanding. This relational power dynamic transforms soft power into a co-created process rather than a top-down strategy. Mouffe's notion of the political further illuminates that these interactions are not ideologically neutral but take place within arenas of contestation where identity, representation, and legitimacy are subtly negotiated. For instance, cultural performances, classroom discussions, and informal social exchanges become micro-sites where Indonesian values such as pluralism and tolerance are interpreted, questioned, and redefined by Czech counterparts. Thus, the practice of Indonesia–Czech cultural and educational diplomacy exemplifies how soft power functions as an evolving space of collaboration and contestation

where attraction (Nye), empowerment (Lukes), and negotiation (Mouffe) converge to produce a more inclusive and participatory form of diplomacy.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that Indonesia's cultural and educational diplomacy with the Czech Republic exemplifies how soft power operates as a relational, co-constructed, and politically negotiated process rather than a unidirectional projection of national image. Through initiatives such as the IISMA and Darmasiswa programs, Indonesia has successfully leveraged cultural and educational exchanges as vehicles of attraction that embody its pluralistic identity and intellectual openness. However, the effectiveness of these efforts lies not merely in symbolic promotion but in the dialogical interactions that occur among students, educators, and cultural practitioners, interactions that foster genuine collaboration, mutual understanding, and enduring networks of trust.

The analytical integration of Nye, Lukes, and Mouffe offers a holistic understanding of how soft power operates within contemporary diplomacy. Nye's concept of attraction elucidates the initial appeal of Indonesia's cultural and educational programs, while Lukes's multidimensional power framework reveals their empowering and collaborative dynamics. Complementing these views, Mouffe's notion of the political exposes how legitimacy and representation are negotiated within intercultural exchanges. Collectively, these perspectives position soft power as a dynamic arena where attraction, empowerment, and contestation converge, transforming diplomacy into a participatory and co-creative process.

Empirically, the Indonesia–Czech case illustrates how students and cultural actors function as micro-level diplomats who embody national values and cultivate genuine people-to-people connections that transcend formal institutions. Yet, the fragmented structure of Indonesia's soft power initiatives limits their continuity and strategic coherence. Greater institutional synergy, alumni mobilization, and value-based national branding grounded in *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and *Pancasila* are vital for strengthening Indonesia's influence in Europe and beyond.

From an autoethnographic perspective, the author's participation in the IISMA *Culturise* program and related intercultural performances underscores the transformative power of micro-diplomacy. These experiences reveal that students abroad can serve as living bridges of understanding, embodying national values through music, art, and interpersonal dialogue. The act of performing, teaching, and engaging with diverse audiences became not only a form of cultural representation but also a deeply human exercise in empathy, humility, and exchange.

In reflecting on these experiences, it becomes evident that the effectiveness of Indonesia's soft power depends not only on institutional programs but also on the personal agency and creativity of its cultural actors. Diplomacy today requires authenticity as much as strategy. The author's own encounters in Olomouc and Prague highlight that cultural influence is most powerful when it resonates emotionally and ethically with others. This insight invites policymakers to view students, artists, and educators as integral components of Indonesia's diplomatic ecosystem—micro-level agents whose everyday interactions collectively shape the nation's image abroad.

Looking ahead, Indonesia's cultural and educational diplomacy would benefit from stronger coordination among governmental institutions, universities, and cultural communities. Establishing a long-term strategy that integrates *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* as the moral foundation of Indonesia's nation-branding could enhance the coherence and sustainability of its soft power

abroad. Ultimately, diplomacy in the 21st century thrives not merely on policy or persuasion, but on the capacity to connect people through shared culture, mutual learning, and humanity. In essence, this research advances the understanding of diplomacy as a shared human enterprise one in which meaning and legitimacy are co-created through empathy, collaboration, and dialogue. As reflected in the author's experience, true soft power lies not in projection, but in connection.

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