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Article

The Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum: A Multidimensional Typology of Strategic, Ethical, and Symbolic Engagements

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Abstract

Cultural heritage is increasingly mobilized as a tool of international engagement, yet the diplomatic uses of heritage remain conceptually underdeveloped and analytically fragmented. This paper introduces the *Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum*, a multidimensional framework that maps how states and affiliated actors use heritage — both tangible and intangible — to pursue strategic, symbolic, and normative goals in cross-border contexts. Drawing on critical heritage studies, international relations, and memory politics, the study identifies five analytical dimensions (e.g., proactive vs. reactive, cultural vs. historical, strategic vs. moral) and develops seven ideal types of heritage diplomacy, ranging from soft power projection to post-dependency and corrective diplomacy. These ideal types, constructed in the Weberian tradition, serve as heuristic tools to illuminate the varied motivations and diplomatic postures underlying heritage-based engagement. A central matrix is presented to illustrate how each type aligns with different strategic logics and affective registers. The study argues that heritage diplomacy constitutes a distinct modality of heritage governance — one that transcends soft power narratives and encompasses conflict, reconciliation, symbolic redress, and identity assertion. The framework contributes both to theory-building and policy analysis, offering a diagnostic lens through which the ethical, political, and communicative dimensions of heritage diplomacy can be more systematically understood.

Keywords: heritage diplomacy; cultural heritage; heritage governance; international relations; memory politics; historical diplomacy; cultural diplomacy

1. Introduction

1.1. Background and Rationale

In recent years, cultural heritage has emerged as a prominent instrument in the conduct of international relations. States, international organizations, and non-state actors increasingly mobilize both tangible and intangible heritage to assert identity, build legitimacy, project values, and negotiate contested histories. Practices such as UNESCO nominations, restitution claims, commemorative diplomacy, and heritage-driven regional branding reflect the growing significance of heritage not only as a domestic cultural resource, but as a strategic and symbolic vector in foreign policy. Heritage today is not simply about preserving the past — it is actively deployed to shape contemporary narratives and future imaginaries on the global stage.

This paper recognises heritage as an area of governance [1] and adopts the term *heritage diplomacy* to describe the strategic, symbolic, and often emotionally charged use of heritage in the conduct of international or cross-border relations. It refers to how states and affiliated actors deliberately mobilize elements of their cultural past — including monuments, traditions, sites of memory, and narratives of historical injustice or achievement — to influence foreign publics, negotiate relationships, assert legitimacy, or engage with transnational issues such as restitution,

reconciliation, or regional identity-building. Unlike domestic memory politics or internal heritage governance, heritage diplomacy is inherently *outward-facing*. It seeks to shape international perception, forge or repair foreign relations, and position a state (or its proxies) in moral, symbolic, or geopolitical terms.

This article therefore treats heritage diplomacy as a complex field positioned at the crossroads of international cultural relations, heritage studies, human geography, and memory politics [2]. It recognizes that heritage diplomacy can be celebratory or dissonant, proactive or reactive, moral or strategic — often embodying multiple logics at once.

Despite growing scholarly interest in the topic, heritage diplomacy remains undertheorized. Notably, the field still lacks a comprehensive framework for distinguishing among the diverse motivations, strategies, and diplomatic postures it may entail.

To address this gap, the present study introduces a *multi-dimensional conceptual spectrum* that captures the heterogeneity of heritage diplomacy. This framework — grounded in extensive interdisciplinary literature and critical analysis — distinguishes among various forms of engagement, including strategic projection, dialogic and reconciliatory diplomacy, memory-inflected or corrective initiatives, and grievance-based responses. In doing so, the article contributes a typology that allows for a more systematic understanding of how heritage functions in diplomacy, and how its use is shaped by varying historical experiences, geopolitical positions, and normative commitments.

1.2. Literature Review: Framing the Concept and Contours of Heritage Diplomacy

Cultural heritage is increasingly understood not merely as a preservationist endeavour, but as a dynamic process through which the past is selected, interpreted, and mobilized to serve present-day identities and future aspirations [3]. As Ashworth et al. (2007) note, heritage is a presentist and future-oriented phenomenon, shaped by contemporary needs rather than by objective historical truth [3]. This constructivist view underpins the foundational idea of dissonant heritage, which arises from competing narratives, contested ownership, and conflicts over meaning [4]. Scholars such as Kisić (2016) [5] and Graham & Howard (2008) [6] similarly highlight heritage as a political arena in which values, identities, and power relations are negotiated and contested — a view echoed in critical heritage studies, where heritage is seen not only as a cultural asset but also as a political resource entangled in processes of identity-making, nation-building, and symbolic domination [2,7]. While the performative and constructed nature of heritage is widely acknowledged [8,9], some authors [10,11] caution against treating it solely as a strategic or instrumental construct. Even when mobilized for political ends, heritage may also reflect authentic collective sentiments and deeply rooted cultural attachments — a nuance this paper seeks to emphasize, in contrast to perspectives that risk overlooking the affective or identity-driven dimensions of heritage expression.

Following Winter (2015), heritage can be “activated” diplomatically to suggest shared culture and connectivity, yet it can also serve as a strategic statement in bilateral, multilateral, or unilateral relations, particularly in contexts of grievance, contested narratives, or geopolitical rivalry [1]. By applying a number of tools, techniques and practices [12], it engages in showcasing and branding (UNESCO nominations, cultural seasons, heritage exhibitions) while also functioning in reconciliation, restitution, and defensive memory politics [13].

Although heritage has long underpinned diplomacy through practices such as gift exchange, travel, and the collection of artefacts [14], its relationship with diplomacy is now increasingly recognized as a distinct and analytically significant field. A pivotal contribution to this field comes from Winter (2015), who proposes a conceptual bifurcation between *heritage in diplomacy* and *heritage as diplomacy* [1]. On the one hand, heritage in diplomacy refers to projects deployed in the service of broader foreign policy goals — typically as instruments of soft power, prestige, or national branding. Examples include international exhibitions, UNESCO nominations, and bilateral aid in heritage conservation [1,15–17]. On the other hand, heritage as diplomacy describes cases where heritage itself becomes the medium of diplomatic engagement — often through shared histories, regional connectivity, or civilizational ties. This approach emerges in multilateral cooperation, peace-building,

and post-dependency or post-conflict reconciliation initiatives [1,2,13]. In this context, Groth (2022) suggests that emphasizing abstract heritage values and modes of representation — as seen in EU heritage policy — rather than contested content, can help prevent open conflict [18]. Vandesande (2019) expands on Winter's concept of heritage as diplomacy—that is, diplomacy driven by heritage—by identifying three specific modalities. *Heritage on location* refers to heritage within a given country that is examined, promoted, or supported by international actors. *Heritage of own origin* describes the presentation of a country's or smaller community's heritage beyond its borders, typically by representatives from that same place. Finally, *shared pasts* denotes heritage grounded in common historical experiences, a category whose meaning is largely self-evident [19].

While this bifurcated model remains foundational, it also risks oversimplification. In practice, heritage diplomacy often blurs these boundaries (something which Winter (2015) acknowledges by noting that the categories of heritage *in* and *as* diplomacy are not mutually exclusive [1]), with initiatives simultaneously performing symbolic, instrumental, and dialogic functions. Moreover, the model's emphasis on shared pasts may obscure the competitive, reactive, or asymmetric dynamics underpinning many diplomatic uses of heritage [20]. This study therefore builds upon and extends Winter's model by introducing a more granular typology — a spectrum that captures both the functions and the motivational-affective logics of heritage diplomacy.

A prominent strand in the literature frames heritage as a vehicle of strategic projection and geocultural influence. Winter (2019) and Lin et al. (2021), for instance, show how China's Belt and Road Initiative mobilizes World Heritage narratives to construct a Sinocentric vision of transnational connectivity [21,22]— what Winter terms “geocultural power” [21]. Such practices reflect broader patterns in which heritage is exported as a branded cultural product, serving legitimacy and influence [16,23]. Heritage diplomacy here closely mirrors nation branding strategies from cultural diplomacy [24,25], though with deeper historical anchoring. However, Clarke (2014) cautions that heritage, once projected, can take on unintended meanings in recipient contexts, complicating diplomatic messaging [26]. Clarke (2018) also observes that heritage diplomacy may be driven not only by projection, but also by efforts toward reputation repair, reconciliation, or justice [16]— especially in post-conflict settings [13].

In more contested environments, heritage diplomacy often confronts legacies of genocide, displacement, or colonization. Huang & Lee (2019) introduce the notion of *difficult heritage diplomacy* to describe efforts to reframe traumatic pasts into constructive memory frameworks [27]. These include acts of corrective remembrance, aimed at redressing dominant narratives or acknowledging historical injustices — a mode this paper distinguishes from both reactive defensiveness and purely instrumental strategies. Navigating such pasts often requires balancing “national history” with “political history” [27], while avoiding selective silencing — a danger when heritage is used to reinforce exclusionary identities or marginalize minority perspectives [28,29]. In this context, Rothberg's (2009) concept of multidirectional memory becomes highly relevant [30]. Rather than viewing memory as a zero-sum competition, heritage diplomacy can facilitate comparative remembering that fosters empathy and solidarity — though this potential remains underutilized in practice.

Despite the growing body of research, several analytical gaps persist. First, many authors foreground the “shared” dimension of heritage diplomacy (Winter, 2015; Clarke, 2018; McClelland, 2020) [1,2,16], often associating it with common values or historical connectivity. However, this assumption is problematic. As this paper argues, many heritage initiatives are grounded not in sharedness, but in asymmetry, grievance, or unilateral claims to legitimacy. Winter's emphasis on consensus risks overlooking the reactive and competitive dynamics that also define this field. Second, while Clarke (2018), Kersel & Luke (2015), and Nakano & Zhu (2020) acknowledge that heritage diplomacy oscillates between cooperation and contestation [16,31,32], few studies offer a systematic way to map this spectrum — particularly in relation to reactive forms like grievance, defensive, or corrective diplomacy. This paper seeks to fill that gap. Third, the motivational landscape of heritage diplomacy remains under-theorized. Although Clarke (2018) identifies a range of motivations —

from influence to reconciliation [16]— further differentiation is needed. This study contributes by distinguishing modes of engagement based on strategic projection, dialogic exchange, symbolic reparation, and affective memory politics.

Finally, Chalcraft (2021) adds a valuable interpretive lens by focusing on the performative dimensions of heritage diplomacy. He contrasts *charismatic diplomacy*, characterized by emotionally charged gestures, spectacle, or grand symbolism, with *careful diplomacy*, marked by technical precision, proceduralism, and long-term relationship-building [28]. While not a typology in itself, this distinction cuts across the forms identified in this paper, illustrating how affect, style, and performativity shape diplomatic outcomes — sometimes reinforcing, sometimes tempering the underlying intent.

Taken together, these contributions underscore the need for a more multidimensional approach — one that accounts not only for the tools and contexts of heritage diplomacy, but also for its emotional, ethical, and symbolic complexity. The *Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum* developed in this paper responds to this need by offering a typological framework capable of capturing this diversity, while remaining analytically rigorous and adaptable to empirical research.

1.3. Research Questions and Objectives

The preceding review shows that scholarship on heritage diplomacy has expanded in scope, sophistication, and disciplinary reach, yet important conceptual and analytical gaps remain. Existing analyses often frame heritage diplomacy either as an extension of cultural diplomacy —emphasizing soft power, image-building, and mutual understanding [33]—or as a subset of historical diplomacy focused on the projection of curated narratives abroad [34]. While these framings capture relevant dimensions, they can obscure heritage diplomacy's broader range of functions and its capacity to operate simultaneously as a bridge of intercultural connection and a battlefield of contested memory. Equally, research has often privileged cooperative or celebratory heritage engagements, giving comparatively less attention to reactive, dissonant, or adversarial practices that emerge in contexts of grievance, asymmetry, or geopolitical rivalry.

This paper addresses these lacunae by conceptualizing the *Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum*: a multidimensional framework that positions heritage diplomacy along a continuum from proactive strategic projection to reactive politics of memory and narrative defence. The typology identifies seven distinct forms of heritage engagement—ranging from reconciliation and memory diplomacy to repatriation, post-dependency heritage diplomacy, defensive heritage diplomacy, and corrective diplomacy—each defined by a particular configuration of motivations, diplomatic posture, and historical-geopolitical context.

The spectrum framework is guided by three key questions:

- What types of heritage diplomacy are currently practiced in global politics?
- How do states' historical experiences and geopolitical conditions shape their proactive or reactive stance?
- What are the broader implications of this typology for international cultural relations?

Rather than subsuming all heritage-related initiatives under broader categories such as soft power or restitution, this approach offers a more differentiated perspective. It acknowledges that heritage diplomacy can serve multiple purposes — strategic, emotional, dialogic, or identity-affirming — often simultaneously. The aim is not to question the sincerity or authenticity of heritage engagement, but to offer a more nuanced understanding of how heritage operates within diplomatic contexts. The spectrum is offered here as a heuristic; while examples are used to illustrate categories, systematic empirical testing is intentionally left for future work.

2. Materials and Methods

This article adopts a conceptual and theory-generating approach that draws from a wide body of interdisciplinary scholarship to map and critically reframe the emerging field of heritage diplomacy. Rather than relying on empirical fieldwork or single-case study analysis, it is rooted in

extensive literature synthesis and analytical abstraction, aiming to construct a typology that captures the diversity of state-led and state-affiliated heritage engagements in international contexts.

The analytical framework developed — the *Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum* — is the product of a qualitative meta-analysis of over fifty key sources spanning heritage studies, international relations, cultural policy, memory studies, and political geography. Sources were selected for their conceptual contributions, theoretical coherence, and relevance to the intersection of diplomacy and heritage, with particular attention to works explicitly or implicitly defining the mechanisms, motivations, and implications of heritage-related practices in foreign policy.

A core conceptual point of departure is Winter's (2015) influential bifurcation between *heritage in diplomacy* and *heritage as diplomacy* [1]. This distinction highlighted the dual role of heritage as both an object of diplomatic exchange and a medium through which diplomacy is enacted. While valuable, this model does not fully account for the range of strategic, emotive, reactive, and normative dynamics observed in state-led heritage engagement. The current study builds on and extends Winter's framework by proposing a multi-dimensional model accommodating a broader set of motivations, postures, and symbolic orientations. Drawing on the Weberian method of ideal-type construction [35], the spectrum distinguishes between diplomatic orientations ranging from strategic projection and branding to grievance-driven or reconciliatory engagements. These ideal types are not fixed empirical categories but analytical tools for describing, comparing, and interpreting diverse practices. This heuristic approach is designed to focus on exemplary types of *heritage diplomacy efforts as practiced by individual states*, rather than on multilateral processes shaped simultaneously by the reciprocal interaction of multiple state actors. Moreover, these exemplary types are conceptualized as being primarily driven by national interests and the pursuit of narrative sovereignty, rather than by an underlying commitment to sharedness, commonality, or mutuality of heritage [36], which often characterizes more collaborative or consensus-oriented diplomatic initiatives.

The literature base was assembled through a structured search strategy using OpenAlex, JSTOR, Semantic Scholar, and Elicit, chosen for their complementary coverage of heritage, memory studies, and international relations. OpenAlex provided broad cross-disciplinary indexing; JSTOR offered deep archival access to foundational humanities and social sciences works often absent from Scopus or Web of Science; Semantic Scholar's AI-assisted search identified emerging scholarship and citation networks; and Elicit enabled targeted, question-driven retrieval and synthesis. This combination was selected to maximise thematic relevance and inclusivity in a field where significant works often fall outside standard bibliometric databases. These sources were prioritised over Scopus and Web of Science for their broader inclusion of humanities and regional scholarship. Searches were supplemented by manual citation chaining and targeted queries in specialist heritage journals to ensure both breadth and depth.

Finally, the article maintains a reflexive stance toward both the symbolic and instrumental dimensions of heritage diplomacy. While recognising that many heritage engagements serve state interests and image-making, it avoids reducing them to mere tools of soft power. Instead, it acknowledges that some practices may reflect genuine emotional or ethical commitments. This interpretive flexibility enables a fuller appreciation of how states mobilise heritage both strategically and sincerely — often at the same time. The resulting framework serves as a heuristic structure, open to empirical application and theoretical refinement, designed to capture the heterogeneity of contemporary heritage diplomacy and contribute to theorising how memory, identity, and culture are mobilised in international political arenas.

3. Results

3.1. Analytical Dimensions of Heritage Diplomacy

The term *spectrum* in this paper denotes more than a linear continuum; it refers to a multi-dimensional conceptual space in which diverse forms of heritage diplomacy can be situated, compared, and analyzed. While existing studies present heritage diplomacy as either cooperative

[1,23,37] or conflictual [1,2,28,38], proactive [21,39,40] or reactive [27,41], this article argues that such binary distinctions are insufficient to capture the complexity of contemporary diplomatic practices. Heritage diplomacy, as conceptualized here, unfolds across multiple axes that reflect different diplomatic orientations, strategic rationales, and symbolic investments. The spectrum developed in this study is thus both a typological framework and a heuristic device — intended to clarify the field's internal diversity and to facilitate more nuanced empirical or comparative analysis. This five-dimensional model is, to the author's knowledge, the most comprehensive typology developed to date for understanding the full range of diplomatic heritage practices.

To operationalize the concept of a Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum, this paper identifies five analytical dimensions along which different types of heritage diplomacy may be positioned:

- Proactive vs. Reactive Engagement
- Cultural vs. Historical Framing
- Tangible vs. Intangible Heritage Focus
- Top-down vs. Bottom-up Governance
- Strategic Calculation vs. Emotional/Moral Investment

These five dimensions serve as interpretive tools for mapping and differentiating the wide array of heritage diplomacy practices observed globally. They allow us to analyse how particular forms of heritage engagement align with specific diplomatic intentions, audiences, and modes of delivery. They also offer insight into the structural conditions — geopolitical, historical, or institutional — that shape these diplomatic choices.

3.1.1. Proactive vs. Reactive Engagement

The first axis of the Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum distinguishes between *proactive* and *reactive* forms of engagement. This dimension captures the temporal and strategic orientation of heritage diplomacy — whether it is undertaken with a forward-looking agenda or emerges as a response to external stimuli, historical grievance, or reputational challenge.

Proactive heritage diplomacy refers to initiatives that are strategically designed and initiated by states or affiliated actors to advance predefined foreign policy goals. These actions are typically anticipatory, future-oriented, and tightly integrated into broader cultural or geopolitical strategies. Examples include promoting national heritage through UNESCO nominations, establishing bilateral heritage exchange programs, launching cultural heritage exhibitions abroad, or branding heritage as a geopolitical asset (e.g., within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative). Such initiatives often reflect confidence, long-term planning, and an intent to project influence, enhance prestige, or strengthen regional alliances [1,39,42].

By contrast, *reactive heritage diplomacy* arises in response to perceived threats, criticism, or unresolved historical tensions [27,41]. It may be triggered by international disputes, public controversies, or external pressure concerning past actions or contested narratives. Examples include public diplomatic interventions to correct historical misrepresentations (such as misattributions of wartime responsibility), initiatives to counter heritage destruction or appropriation, and symbolic gestures of atonement or recognition (e.g., postcolonial or post-conflict commemorations). Reactive diplomacy often carries an emotive or moral undertone [29], seeking not only to manage damage or appease critics, but also to reaffirm legitimacy and historical interpretation.

While these poles are analytically distinct, many heritage diplomacy practices straddle the line between them — combining strategic planning with responsive adaptation. Nonetheless, the **proactive–reactive axis** remains fundamental to understanding the different temporalities, pressures, and motivations that structure how heritage is mobilized on the international stage.

3.1.2. Alignment with Cultural vs. Historical Diplomacy

Heritage diplomacy occupies a distinct position at the intersection of cultural diplomacy and historical diplomacy, yet is reducible to neither. Cultural diplomacy, as defined in early U.S. State Department formulations and later synthesized by Gienow-Hecht and Donfried (2010), is the

communication between governments and foreign publics aimed at creating “a better climate of international trust and understanding in which official relations can operate” [43] (p.iv), [44]. It has been described as a manifestation of the “cultural policy of display” [45] and as the exchange of values, traditions, and beliefs to strengthen relationships and promote mutual interests [46,47], often blending soft power tactics with elements of persuasion or propaganda. Cull (2008) places it as one component within public diplomacy, alongside listening, advocacy, exchange, and broadcasting [48]. *Cultural diplomacy* typically centres on the promotion of a nation’s cultural achievements, values, and identity through the export of language, art, education, and heritage. It is forward-looking and soft power-oriented, often serving branding and image-building functions. It draws on forms of cultural expression — such as exhibitions, performances, artistic collaborations, or educational exchanges — to cultivate mutual understanding, build reputational capital, and foster favourable relationships with foreign publics. This approach tends to emphasise continuity, creativity, and the celebration of cultural uniqueness or shared humanistic ideals.

Historical diplomacy, by contrast, involves state-led policies to shape interpretations of the past abroad [49,50], functioning as a tool of image-building, legitimacy, and identity formation in the international sphere [51]. It engages more explicitly with the past as a politically charged terrain, often linked to politics of memory. As Nijakowski (2008) and Nawrocki (as cited in Szuldrzyński, 2021) note [52,53], this involves influencing collective historical consciousness — both domestically and internationally — by translating core historical narratives into globally comprehensible forms, countering falsifications, and resisting “faulty codes of memory” ([53], p. 16) arising from ignorance, prejudice, or political agendas. Historical diplomacy can include the invocation, negotiation, or contestation of specific historical events in international discourse — such as colonialism, war, genocide, or systemic injustice. It is often legal-moral in tone, involving apologies, truth-telling, or commemorative gestures that seek to confront legacies of violence, promote reconciliation, or clarify historical narratives. It may also encompass restitution claims, reinterpretations of treaties, or disputes over responsibility and remembrance, and it tends to be more reactive, frequently initiated in response to grievance, pressure, or demands for historical clarification.

Heritage diplomacy, as conceptualised in this paper, draws from both of these logics but also extends beyond them. It mediates the past, present, and future through symbols of continuity, belonging, trauma, or pride, while inevitably involving historic narratives [54]. As such, heritage diplomacy is both bridge and battlefield—a medium for intercultural connection and a site of symbolic struggle—capable of building trust and prestige or asserting narrative sovereignty in the face of external misrepresentation. This duality underscores its outward-oriented nature, where influence, moral positioning, and cultural legitimacy are negotiated on the international stage.

This dual lineage — combining the symbolic optimism and outreach of cultural diplomacy with the reckoning and redress associated with historical diplomacy — justifies one of the key analytical dimensions in our spectrum: the cultural–historical orientation, which situates acts of heritage diplomacy along a continuum between these two poles. By functioning as both bridge and battlefield, heritage diplomacy is capable of building trust and prestige while also asserting narrative sovereignty in the face of external misrepresentation, making it a uniquely adaptive form of international engagement.

3.1.3. Tangible vs. Intangible Heritage Focus

The third axis differentiates heritage diplomacy practices based on their focus on tangible or *intangible* forms of heritage. This dimension highlights the material or symbolic medium through which states engage diplomatically with the past, and underscores how different types of heritage carry distinct diplomatic affordances, audiences, and modes of resonance.

Tangible heritage diplomacy operates through physical sites, objects, or built environments — such as monuments, museums, architectural restorations, archaeological cooperation, or World Heritage inscriptions. These initiatives often emphasize preservation, authenticity, and technical expertise, and tend to involve formal institutions such as ministries of culture, heritage agencies, or UNESCO

bodies. Tangible heritage diplomacy is frequently employed in bilateral cooperation, heritage aid [1], or projection strategies designed to showcase cultural sophistication, stewardship capabilities [55], or civilizational depth. It is particularly visible in branding efforts, international exhibitions, or high-profile restorations used to signal continuity and prestige on the global stage.

In contrast, *intangible heritage diplomacy* engages with oral traditions, rituals, collective memory, and performative commemorations that can convey a “real” history [56], as well as identity narratives or symbolic reparations. It includes diplomatic gestures such as apologies for historical injustices, recognition of indigenous practices, diasporic outreach, and narratives of shared suffering or solidarity. This form is often less institutionalized and more emotive, relying on memory politics, moral argumentation, and discursive framing. It plays a central role in reconciliation diplomacy, post-conflict identity negotiation, and symbolic inclusion or exclusion within international arenas. As Rozenfeld and Podoler (2022) observe, the very nature of intangible heritage—capable of existing simultaneously and repeatedly across multiple locations—makes it a particularly potent instrument in heritage diplomacy, arguably even more so when heritage itself becomes the medium of diplomacy [57].

Importantly, the two forms are not mutually exclusive. Many tangible heritage sites embody intangible meaning—emotional, historical, or spiritual—that amplifies their diplomatic resonance. A monument may carry the memory of collective trauma or heroism; a museum display may revive suppressed traditions. Conversely, intangible heritage may serve as the basis for concrete demands or diplomatic initiatives, including restitution, recognition of minority rights, or acknowledgment of historical injustices. Thus, the tangible-intangible axis captures not only the *form of heritage* employed, but also the *strategic selection and symbolic weight* assigned to different modes of cultural expression in shaping international posture.

3.1.4. Top-down vs. Bottom-up Orientation

The top-down vs. bottom-up orientation captures the institutional locus and directionality of initiative within heritage diplomacy. It assesses whether heritage engagement in international contexts is primarily driven by state institutions and official actors (top-down), or whether it arises from—as is increasingly the case—grassroots movements [2], civil society, or community-based advocacy (bottom-up).

In *top-down heritage diplomacy*, the state—often through ministries of culture, foreign affairs, or dedicated cultural institutions—takes the lead in designing, funding, and executing heritage-based diplomatic initiatives [58]. These may include national branding campaigns, intergovernmental cultural agreements, official commemorations, or bilateral restoration projects. Such approaches typically align with strategic objectives, often emphasizing soft power, national image, or historical prestige. They tend to be highly curated, coordinated, and reflective of dominant memory regimes or national narratives.

Conversely, *bottom-up heritage diplomacy* emerges from actors outside formal state apparatuses [59]—including NGOs, diasporic communities, indigenous groups [60], memory activists, or transnational advocacy networks. These actors may engage in diplomacy through unofficial commemorations, demands for recognition, or community-led heritage preservation and repatriation efforts. While not always framed as “diplomacy” in the formal sense, these initiatives frequently exert international pressure, shape global discourse, or lead to policy change. They also often address neglected or dissonant pasts, contributing to corrective or reconciliatory heritage practices.

In practice, these orientations often interact and overlap [58]. States may co-opt grassroots initiatives to reinforce legitimacy or global standing, while civil society actors may leverage institutional platforms for visibility and influence. However, the distinction remains analytically useful for identifying *whose voice*, *whose memory*, and *whose agenda* is driving heritage diplomacy in any given context. It also highlights the degree to which heritage diplomacy is shaped from above as an instrument of foreign policy, or from below as a vehicle of memory justice and transnational solidarity.

3.1.5. Strategic Calculation vs. Emotional/Moral Investment

This axis distinguishes between heritage diplomacy pursued primarily for *instrumental purposes* and that which is grounded in *affective, ethical, or identity-based commitments*. Among all five dimensions, it is arguably the most consequential in understanding the *motivational architecture* of heritage diplomacy, as it cuts to the core of *why* heritage is mobilized in international contexts.

At one end of the spectrum lies *strategic calculation*: the deliberate, often highly curated deployment of heritage for diplomatic utility — whether to enhance soft power, manage international image, assert geopolitical legitimacy, or reinforce national branding [61]. In these cases, heritage serves as a means to an end. Its selection, framing, and international promotion are embedded in a logic of influence and symbolic capital, often prioritizing coherence, prestige, and resonance over historical complexity or authenticity. Such initiatives typically align closely with foreign policy objectives and may follow a well-orchestrated logic of message control and audience targeting [62].

At the other end is *emotional or moral investment*, where heritage diplomacy is rooted in affective memory, historical responsibility, or deeply held identity commitments [63]. Actions in this mode may be motivated by sincere desires for reconciliation, acknowledgment of past injustices, or shared mourning and commemoration. Rather than being instrumentalized, heritage here becomes a vehicle of ethical engagement — a way of honouring collective trauma, expressing intergenerational solidarity, or fulfilling a perceived moral or civilizational duty. This orientation does not preclude strategic benefit [64], but its primary impetus stems from internal conviction, not diplomatic calculus.

Importantly, this axis also captures a crucial complexity: emotional or moral investment may reside not only in the state initiating heritage diplomacy, but also in the recipient community or external audience [65]. A government may act out of domestic pressure, historical consciousness, or identity-driven emotion, while simultaneously seeking to connect with the ethical memory, symbolic expectations, or affective needs of its international counterparts. In this sense, heritage diplomacy reflects not only internal identity work but also an attempt to resonate with — or challenge — the narratives of others.

Moreover, heritage diplomacy driven by moral or emotional commitment may serve not merely to affirm national identity, but to assert historical dignity, demand recognition of injustice, and defend against perceived attempts to distort or marginalize one's historical experience in the international arena. It becomes a tool in the symbolic struggle over whose version of the past prevails — a response to what may be seen as erasure, denial, or misrepresentation by other actors. In this form, heritage is not simply expressive but protective: it is mobilized to secure legitimacy, moral standing, and narrative integrity in the face of competing historical claims.

Indeed, many diplomatic gestures — such as returning looted artifacts, issuing apologies, or funding memorials — can be read both as acts of conscience and as tools of strategic image management. The same initiative may carry different meanings for different audiences, or combine sincerity and calculation in ways that are hard to disentangle. This is what makes the **strategic-emotional axis** so analytically powerful: it does not assume a dichotomy between instrumentalism and authenticity but allows us to recognize their coexistence and interplay in complex and often ambivalent diplomatic gestures.

By clarifying this motivational tension, the axis enhances our understanding of heritage not only as symbolic currency, but also as a medium of ethical positioning and moral imagination. It invites scholars and practitioners to look beyond surface-level gestures and to critically assess the *depth, intention, and ethical stakes* of diplomatic heritage practices. In doing so, it provides a more realistic and nuanced lens for evaluating how heritage operates in global politics — sometimes as a tool of prestige, sometimes as a vehicle of justice, and often, as both.

This spectrum of motivations is further textured by the style and performativity through which diplomatic acts are executed. As Chalcraft (2021) notes, some forms of heritage diplomacy adopt a more *charismatic* style — emotionally charged, symbolically dramatic, and publicly resonant — while others are marked by *careful* negotiation, technical dialogue, and procedural restraint [28]. These stylistic differences do not necessarily map onto strategic or emotional motives in any fixed

way, but they do modulate how such motives are expressed, perceived, and received. Thus, affective tone and diplomatic style may influence whether a gesture is seen as sincere, strategic, or both — reinforcing the analytical richness of this dimension.

3.2. *Ideal Types of Heritage Diplomacy*

To operationalize the five-dimensional framework outlined above, this paper proposes a typology of seven core types of heritage diplomacy (see also Table 1):

- soft power heritage diplomacy
- reconciliation diplomacy
- memory diplomacy
- restorative and repatriation diplomacy
- post dependence heritage diplomacy
- defensive heritage diplomacy
- corrective heritage diplomacy

These categories reflect distinct — though sometimes overlapping — motivations, affective orientations, and strategic postures through which heritage is mobilized in international and cross-border contexts. Rather than treating them as fixed or empirically exhaustive classifications, they are constructed as *ideal types* in the Weberian sense: heuristic models that accentuate key conceptual features of complex social phenomena in order to clarify their underlying logics. As such, these types do not aim to describe real-world practices in all their messiness, but to serve as analytical instruments that enable comparison, diagnosis, and theoretical reflection. Each ideal type captures a dominant constellation of values, objectives, and symbolic mechanisms at play in particular modes of heritage diplomacy — from moral engagement and historical redress to image projection and defensive positioning. Taken together, they offer a structured and theory-informed vocabulary through which the plural field of heritage diplomacy can be meaningfully explored.

3.2.1. Soft Power Heritage Diplomacy

Soft power heritage diplomacy encompasses initiatives in which heritage is mobilized primarily to enhance a country's international attractiveness, prestige, and influence without coercion [2,66,67]. Closely linked to nation branding and cultural diplomacy, this type involves the strategic promotion of heritage as an emblem of national sophistication, stability, and historical continuity [24]. States may pursue UNESCO World Heritage inscriptions, sponsor traveling exhibitions, or fund restoration efforts abroad as a means of asserting civilizational status or signaling alignment with shared global values. Although often top-down in design and tightly curated, such efforts can carry significant emotive weight, particularly when heritage is framed as a universal good. While ostensibly apolitical, this form of diplomacy is deeply embedded in global hierarchies of symbolic capital and frequently serves competitive geopolitical purposes [68–70]. An example is Japan actively utilizing its rich cultural heritage—such as traditional arts, historical sites, and UNESCO-listed properties—to strengthen its international image through cultural values and attraction [32].

While soft power heritage diplomacy shares with *reconciliation* and *memory diplomacy* the projection of heritage narratives abroad, it differs in its fundamentally proactive and promotional character, aiming to attract and persuade rather than to repair relationships or correct historical narratives.

3.2.2. Reconciliation Diplomacy

Reconciliation diplomacy reflects the deployment of heritage in the service of repairing fractured relations, whether between states, communities, or identity groups. By attempting to translate a sense of shame into a sense of honor [27], it focuses on building trust, healing historical wounds, and fostering mutual recognition. Often practiced in post-conflict or post-authoritarian contexts, reconciliation diplomacy includes bilateral restoration of contested sites, co-curation of memory

exhibitions, or joint commemorative rituals. These efforts are typically dialogic and symbolically rich, invoking heritage not simply as a site of identity but as a bridge for empathy and shared future-making. Importantly, such diplomacy depends on mutual willingness to acknowledge the past and often unfolds over extended timeframes. While potentially vulnerable to political instrumentalization, reconciliation diplomacy can be transformative when grounded in sustained ethical commitment. An example is North–South Korean music diplomacy, which incorporates traditional musical forms and performances [71].

Unlike restorative and repatriation diplomacy, which centres on the act of material restitution, reconciliation diplomacy is relationship-driven, with heritage serving as a means to cultivate trust and mutual understanding over time.

3.2.3. Memory Diplomacy

Memory diplomacy centers on the cross-border narration and circulation of national or collective memory [72]. It involves the strategic dissemination of identity-defining narratives — of heroism, trauma, resistance, or victimhood — often directed toward diaspora communities, multilateral forums, or international publics [73]. It includes state-led commemorations abroad, international education campaigns, and partnerships with memory institutions in other countries. While memory diplomacy overlaps with reconciliation and soft power forms, it is distinguished by its focus on symbolic representation of the past and the affective consolidation of collective identity beyond borders — something which McClelland (2020) refers to as a “geography of care” [2]. It may draw upon intangible heritage, rituals, or iconic events, and frequently intersects with diasporic diplomacy, historical justice campaigns, or efforts to assert moral legitimacy on the international stage. An example is the annual commemoration of the genocide against the Tutsi at the Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda, an event of global visibility that is attended by international political leaders and often accompanied by diplomatic expressions of remorse and solidarity [74].

Whereas *reconciliation diplomacy* seeks to heal specific bilateral or multilateral rifts, memory diplomacy is primarily about narrative projection — the international circulation of symbolic histories — whether or not such narratives lead to relational repair.

3.2.4. Restorative and Repatriation Diplomacy

Restorative diplomacy is concerned with the redress of historical cultural dispossession, including the return of looted artifacts, repatriation of ancestral remains, and restitution of sacred sites. It often stems from decolonization efforts, transitional justice frameworks [75], or pressure from source communities and international institutions. While it may be pursued in a spirit of reparation, it can also reflect strategic recalibration — with former holding states using restitution as a means of enhancing moral standing, managing reputational risk, or avoiding legal escalation [76]. Conversely, source states may engage in assertive diplomatic campaigns to reclaim heritage as a matter of sovereignty, identity restoration, and post-colonial dignity [16]. This form of diplomacy foregrounds both tangible heritage and the moral economies surrounding ownership, authenticity, and historical justice. Examples include recent cases of repatriation and restitution of colonial looted art objects and human remains by Western European countries to formerly colonized countries [77,78].

Unlike *post-dependency heritage diplomacy*, which focuses on identity reconstruction in the wake of structural domination, restorative diplomacy is rooted in tangible acts of redress and legal or moral restitution.

3.2.5. Post-Dependency Heritage Diplomacy

This expanded category includes not only post-colonial states but also countries emerging from broader histories of power imbalances [79], political subordination, ideological control, or forced alignment — such as former Soviet republics or Eastern Bloc states. Post-dependency heritage diplomacy involves deliberate efforts to deconstruct imposed narratives, reclaim indigenous or

national heritage, and reposition identity within a new international order. In line with right-based approaches [80,81], such diplomacy may involve acts of symbolic rupture (e.g., renaming streets, removing monuments), the promotion of pre-colonial or pre-imperial cultural forms, or rearticulations of national history that challenge previous hegemonic frames, a process Tillet (2012) terms “mnemonic restitution”[82]. While these gestures are often inward-facing, their international projection — for instance, through disengagement from multilateral heritage regimes perceived as biased — constitutes a form of diplomatic self-assertion. This type of diplomacy expresses a politics of memory that resists erasure and seeks re-legitimation within global narratives. Examples range from bottom-up initiatives, such as the targeting of long-standing statues and colonial monuments by local populations [83], to top-down measures stemming from statutory bans on the promotion of communism or other totalitarian regimes in the names of administrative units, municipal subdivisions, public buildings, facilities, and monuments. The latter includes the removal of “monuments of gratitude to the Red Army” by Polish municipalities with the involvement of the Institute of National Remembrance [84].

While post-dependency diplomacy can intersect with *defensive heritage diplomacy* in its rejection of external narratives, its emphasis lies on reclaiming and reasserting a liberated identity rather than countering specific accusations.

3.2.6. Defensive Heritage Diplomacy

Defensive diplomacy arises when states seek to shield themselves from external critiques, reputational damage, or historical accusations they perceive as unfair or politically motivated. This form is often reactive, aimed at challenging prevailing international narratives, or discrediting allegations of past wrongdoing. It may include official rebuttals in international fora, media campaigns, or the promotion of alternative historiographies. Defensive diplomacy frequently engages both tangible and intangible heritage and often blurs into memory politics. Its primary function is protective — asserting control over historical interpretation and defending national dignity. Although it may appear combative, it can also reflect a deeply affective response to perceived narrative delegitimization or historical injustice. An example is Turkey’s efforts to counter its internationally entrenched genocide-related reputation by restoring the religious heritage of Armenian and other minority communities [85].

Defensive heritage diplomacy differs from *corrective heritage diplomacy* in that it primarily seeks to block, deflect, or neutralise external narratives, whereas corrective diplomacy actively advances an alternative, authoritative interpretation of heritage.

3.2.7. Corrective Heritage Diplomacy

Corrective Heritage Diplomacy refers to a reactive yet normatively driven form of diplomatic engagement, in which states or affiliated actors confront historical misrepresentations, omissions, or distortions — both internal and external — through the strategic mobilization of heritage. Unlike reconciliation diplomacy, which involves mutual acknowledgment, corrective diplomacy is often unilateral or adversarial, aimed at restoring interpretive legitimacy. It not only addresses silenced aspects of a nation’s own past but also *actively responds to external attempts to politicize or redefine its heritage*. Heritage — tangible and intangible — serves as the medium of correction. This includes the reinterpretation and global promotion of contested heritage sites, traveling exhibitions challenging dominant narratives, reframing of monuments or memorials, and campaigns to protect terminology and symbolic associations (e.g., with cultural achievements or historical traumas). Rituals, commemorations, and digital heritage platforms may also function as tools of corrective messaging. Corrective heritage diplomacy becomes especially salient when external actors impose or misapply historical blame, prompting diplomatic efforts to defend symbolic integrity and cultural dignity. It operates at the intersection of memory politics, legal discourse, and media strategy, yet remains grounded in heritage as a *vehicle for asserting narrative agency, resisting instrumentalized memory, and upholding cultural sovereignty* on the international stage. An example is the consistent and resolute

corrective diplomatic response of the Polish authorities to instances of misnaming by foreign politicians and media, in which the term “Polish death camps” is erroneously applied to Nazi German concentration and extermination camps located in occupied Poland—established and administered by the Third Reich—where Poles constituted a significant proportion of prisoners and victims [86]. These sites, as dark heritage objects and places of painful memory, carry profound emotional and moral significance for survivors, descendants, and broader communities of memory. In this context, diplomatic interventions seek not only to correct historical inaccuracies but also to protect the dignity of the victims, safeguard the integrity of heritage narratives, and counter distortions that risk undermining both national and global remembrance.

This form of diplomacy also may also encompass efforts to preserve or assert interpretive authority over *residual heritage*, i.e., sites and symbols located beyond current national borders due to historical displacements or geopolitical shifts [87]. In such cases, states or cultural institutions may seek to protect the narrative integrity of culturally significant monuments, cemeteries, or archives now situated abroad — aiming to counter neglect, reinterpretation, or symbolic appropriation. These cross-border corrective engagements reaffirm cultural continuity and act as diplomatic tools for safeguarding identity across fractured historical geographies.

In this way, corrective heritage diplomacy stands apart from *defensive diplomacy's* primarily protective stance, by not only rejecting unfavourable narratives but actively reframing and replacing them with authorised, historically grounded interpretations.

Table 1. Typology of Heritage Diplomacy: Types, Aims, Drivers, Diplomatic Postures, and Primary Actors.

Type of Heritage Diplomacy	Core Aim	Primary Driver	Diplomatic Posture	Primary Actor(s)
Soft Power Heritage Diplomacy	Enhance international attractiveness, prestige, and influence without coercion	Nation branding, cultural prestige, geocultural influence	Proactive, curated, competitive	Predominantly state actors: ministries of culture/foreign affairs, cultural institutes; occasionally large cultural NGOs with state sponsorship; mostly former and established powers
Reconciliation Diplomacy	Repair fractured relations, rebuild trust, foster mutual recognition	Moral-political commitment, post-conflict healing	Affective, dialogic, relational	State actors (heads of state, special envoys, ministries), sometimes supported by truth commissions, memorial foundations, and intergovernmental organizations; can involve NGOs and faith-based mediators
Memory Diplomacy	Circulate and project identity-defining historical narratives	Narrative sovereignty, moral legitimacy	Narrative-focused, symbolic, emotive	State actors (ministries, embassies, cultural diplomacy offices), memory institutions, diaspora networks, advocacy NGOs; mix of established and post-dependency states
Restorative and Repatriation Diplomacy	Redress historical cultural dispossession through return/restoration	Legal-ethical compliance, sovereignty claims, reputational repair	Transactional, ceremonial, sometimes reconciliatory	Former powers (as restitution providers), post-dependency countries (as claimants), intergovernmental mediators (UNESCO, ICC), heritage NGOs, indigenous communities
Post-Dependency	Reclaim heritage narratives and identity after	Decolonization, narrative reclamation,	Assertive, identity-affirming	Post-dependency states (post-colonial, post-Soviet, post-protectorate), often both state-led

Heritage Diplomacy	colonial or ideological subordination	mnemonic restitution		and grassroots; municipal actors; cultural movements
Defensive Heritage Diplomacy	Protect national narratives from perceived distortion or revisionism	Sovereignty defense, discrediting allegations of past wrongdoing	Reactive, protective, sometimes combative	State actors (government spokespersons, ministries, national historical institutes), diplomatic missions; sometimes civil society actors mobilized in coordinated campaigns
Corrective Heritage Diplomacy	Confront misrepresentation or distortion of heritage narratives	Interpretive legitimacy, cultural sovereignty	Reflective, reformist, educational, sometimes adversarial	State actors (foreign affairs, culture ministries, heritage boards), museums, academic institutions; occasionally diaspora advocacy groups

3.3. Heritage Diplomacy Matrix

To synthesize the preceding conceptual framework, this section introduces a matrix that maps the seven ideal types of heritage diplomacy across five analytical dimensions (Table 2). This visual model serves to translate abstract typologies into a comparative structure, helping to clarify how different forms of diplomatic heritage engagement are situated in relation to one another. Rather than reducing these types to fixed classifications, the matrix provides a flexible heuristic for identifying recurring strategic patterns, motivational logics, and operational tendencies. It is intended as a conceptual aid that can bridge theoretical analysis and empirical observation, highlighting the internal diversity of heritage diplomacy as a field.

Table 2. Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum Matrix.

Type of Heritage Diplomacy ↓ / Analytical Dimension of Heritage Diplomacy →	1. Proactive / Reactive	2. Cultural / Historical Framing	3. Tangible / Intangible Focus	4. Top-Down / Bottom-Up Orientation	5. Strategic Calculation / Emotional–Moral Investment
Soft Power Diplomacy	Primarily Proactive	Leans Cultural	Emphasis on Tangible (sites, objects, exhibitions)	Strongly Top-Down	Heavily Strategic, but may include symbolic pride
Reconciliation Diplomacy	Mixed, often Proactive with Reactive roots	Balanced, often Historical–Cultural hybrid	Both Tangible and Intangible	Usually Top-Down, with Bottom-Up inputs	Often Emotionally/Morally driven, with strategic overlap
Memory Diplomacy	Typically Reactive, tied to historical trauma	Strongly Historical	Leans Intangible (commemoration, recognition)	Often Bottom-Up, sometimes state-integrated	Strongly Emotive/Moral, potentially strategic in effect
Restorative / Repatriation Diplomacy	Usually Reactive, may become Proactive	Predominantly Historical	Tangible (artifacts, monuments) with symbolic intangibles	Often Bottom-Up, but executed Top-Down	Ethical/moral obligation driven, with strategic implications

Post-Dependency Heritage Diplomacy	Often Proactive, sometimes Reactive	Strongly Historical	Mixed: Tangible (monuments, documents) and Intangible (colonial memory, identity)	Often Bottom-Up, gradually co-opted Top-Down	Mixture of Identity-based moral drive and assertive strategy
Defensive Heritage Diplomacy	Typically Reactive	Leans Historical, with Nationalist tones	Often Tangible, but infused with symbolic meaning	Strongly Top-Down	Dominantly Strategic, with identity-based undercurrent
Corrective Heritage Diplomacy	Highly Reactive	Strongly Historical, in opposition to imposed narratives	Mixed: Tangible reinterpretation and Intangible narratives	Frequently Top-Down, but sometimes informed by grassroots pressure	Tensioned: strong Moral/Identity defence with strategic delivery

By systematically juxtaposing the types of heritage diplomacy with core dimensions such as affective investment, institutional origin, or material emphasis, the matrix reveals subtle yet significant distinctions across cases. It helps expose the layered motivations that drive heritage diplomacy — including image-building, identity protection, and moral redress — and points to areas of convergence or tension among them. While the framework is inevitably abstract, it provides a structured foundation for comparative research and normative evaluation. Its strength lies not in prescriptive categorization, but in offering a diagnostic lens through which the complexity of heritage-based diplomacy can be more sharply understood and contextually analyzed.

3.4. Typological Logics and Strategic Orientations: A Narrative Analysis

The Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum Matrix offers a multi-dimensional typology that organizes seven ideal types of heritage diplomacy along five analytical axes. These axes — proactive vs. reactive engagement, cultural vs. historical framing, tangible vs. intangible focus, top-down vs. bottom-up orientation, and strategic calculation vs. emotional or moral investment — serve as prisms through which the diplomatic mobilization of heritage can be compared, evaluated, and better understood.

3.4.1. Soft Power Diplomacy

Soft power diplomacy occupies the most proactive and strategic quadrant of the matrix. Here, heritage is mobilized not in response to trauma or controversy, but as a deliberate tool of influence and image-building, in line with *patron* and *excellence* discourses as conceptualized by Lähdesmäki (2021) [8]. Rooted firmly in cultural diplomacy, this type of engagement privileges tangible heritage — such as exhibitions, architectural showcases, or World Heritage inscriptions — as symbols of civilizational depth, national pride, and aesthetic appeal. It is state-driven, highly curated, and often decoupled from difficult histories [18]. Its primary aim is to generate admiration, align with global soft power logics, and enhance international standing — though it may also subtly shape historical narratives under the guise of celebration.

3.4.2. Reconciliation Diplomacy

Reconciliation diplomacy resides closer to the center of the matrix, combining proactive foresight with reactive acknowledgement. Often initiated after historical trauma or political rupture, it aims to build bridges through shared memory and symbolic gestures [27]. It draws from both cultural and historical framing, frequently mixing material commemorations with intangible gestures of apology, healing, or solidarity [88]. Though often state-led, it tends to be responsive to civil society pressure, and its legitimacy depends on moral sincerity as much as strategic benefit. It exemplifies a

hybrid form, acknowledging wrongdoing while attempting to generate goodwill and rehabilitate legitimacy in international eyes.

3.4.3. Memory Diplomacy

Memory diplomacy is among the most reactive and affectively charged forms. Emerging often from societal trauma — genocide, colonization, displacement — it is driven by the need to remember, mourn, and reclaim visibility. Its language is deeply historical, and its primary tools are intangible: commemorations, memorial days, transnational remembrance rituals, or symbolic recognitions [89]. Memory diplomacy is frequently bottom-up or civil society-initiated, though it may be adopted by states seeking legitimacy or alignment with global human rights norms. Unlike soft power diplomacy, its strength lies not in spectacle, but in moral clarity and affective resonance — often invoking universal ethics and historical justice.

3.4.4. Restorative and Repatriation Diplomacy

This form of diplomacy blurs the lines between legal redress, cultural justice, and historical accountability. It typically begins as a reactive response to demands for the return of looted or displaced heritage but can evolve into a proactive relationship-building tool [16]. While framed in historical terms, it deploys tangible heritage (e.g., artefacts, sacred objects, monuments) as its primary medium — yet these items carry profound intangible significance for communities of origin. Its motivations range from ethical reparation to diplomatic optics [75,90], and it is often co-produced by grassroots campaigns and institutional negotiations. This dual nature — emotional sincerity and strategic negotiation — makes it a particularly complex diplomatic posture.

3.4.5. Post-Dependency Heritage Diplomacy

This type, broadened beyond post-colonialism to encompass formerly dependent states — such as those emerging from the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia, or the Ottoman Empire — represents a form of identity assertion and historical rebalancing. Its actions are often proactive, attempting to rewrite narratives, reclaim agency, and demonstrate cultural distinctiveness after long periods of suppression or foreign dominance. It leans toward historical framing, but often uses both tangible and intangible forms — from heritage revival festivals and language reclamation to the reinterpretation of monuments or archives. While frequently bottom-up in origin, it is increasingly co-opted by states in search of symbolic capital. Its strategic and moral dimensions are tightly interwoven, reflecting the tensions between national dignity, decolonial ethics, and geopolitical ambition [27].

3.4.6. Defensive Heritage Diplomacy

This type sits on the reactive, top-down, and strategic end of the spectrum. It is often triggered by external accusations, reputational crises, or perceived symbolic threats. The state — as primary actor — engages in narrative protection, seeking to shield national history or identity from external reinterpretation or condemnation. It aims to close the “credibility gap” that can emerge in the pursuit of a nation’s heritage diplomacy efforts when there is a mismatch between the projected image and the underlying reality [91]. The tools of defensive diplomacy are largely tangible — memorials, museums, official publications — but they function to protect intangible values and memories. It is strategic in tone but often emotionally infused with a rhetoric of pride, sovereignty, or victimhood. This form may risk isolationism or historical denialism, but it is a key diplomatic response to the growing internationalization of historical judgment [92].

3.4.7. Corrective Heritage Diplomacy

Corrective diplomacy occupies a unique space: reactive, yet normatively ambitious. It does not only address internal silences or historical omissions; crucially, it also resists external distortions of a

nation's heritage or historical experience [93]. This makes it a vital form of symbolic self-defense and moral recalibration. It may involve tangible reinterpretations (e.g., museum updates, recontextualized monuments) or intangible efforts (e.g., archival diplomacy, terminological correction). While often state-driven, corrective diplomacy can be instigated by pressure from academic, legal, or diasporic circles. Its strength lies in its dual function: asserting narrative agency while aligning with international norms of justice and inclusivity. It reflects a commitment to cultural sovereignty in the face of both past wrongdoing and present misrepresentation.

3.4.8. Overall Interpretation

The matrix reveals that heritage diplomacy is not a linear practice, nor easily reducible to "soft power" or "moral responsibility." Rather, it is a complex ecosystem of actions that range from aspirational and strategic to remedial and emotionally driven. Some types — like soft power diplomacy — aim to shape future perceptions through pride. Others — like memory, corrective, or post-dependency diplomacy — attempt to reclaim the past to safeguard present dignity.

Critically, these types overlap, transform, and sometimes conflict. A gesture may begin as memory diplomacy and morph into defensive posture. A reconciliatory act may be undercut by perceptions of strategic manipulation. Therefore, the matrix is not prescriptive, but interpretive — a heuristic tool to assess how, why, and to what end heritage is deployed across borders. It also invites reflection on the ethical ambivalence at the heart of heritage diplomacy: how affect, authenticity, and ambition coexist — and how we, as analysts or practitioners, make sense of their interplay.

4. Discussion

4.1. Rethinking Heritage Diplomacy Through a Multidimensional Lens

This study has proposed a multidimensional typology of heritage diplomacy, positioning it not as a subset of cultural or public diplomacy but as a distinct, multifaceted domain situated at the intersection of symbolic politics, historical memory, and international cultural governance. Through five intersecting axes and seven ideal types, the *Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum* offers an analytical framework that clarifies the diversity of diplomatic uses of heritage while resisting reductive or binary classifications.

The spectrum challenges earlier approaches that treat heritage diplomacy as a primarily celebratory or cooperative phenomenon. By integrating emotional and moral dimensions alongside strategic calculation, it foregrounds heritage as a site of symbolic contestation, ethical negotiation, and identity politics — one that may be shaped as much by grievance and affect as by branding or influence. Inspired by Weberian ideal-type construction, the model does not seek to catalogue all empirical forms but rather to illuminate the internal logics, motivations, and postures that structure heritage-related diplomatic action.

This reconceptualization contributes to both heritage studies and international relations theory. It expands the critical vocabulary available to scholars, moves beyond instrumentalist paradigms of soft power, and aligns heritage diplomacy with broader patterns of memory politics and post-conflict reconciliation. By including reactive, corrective, and post-dependency forms of engagement, the model accounts for dynamics often underexplored in the literature.

4.2. Tensions and Hybrids Across the Spectrum

An important insight that emerges from the typology is the frequency and inevitability of tensions between dimensions — and within specific forms of heritage diplomacy. For instance, strategic projection and emotional investment are not mutually exclusive. A single initiative, such as the repatriation of cultural artifacts, may be driven simultaneously by a desire to improve international standing, acknowledge historical injustice, and appease domestic constituencies.

Similarly, bottom-up memory activism may be co-opted into top-down diplomatic agendas, as when state actors adopt local reconciliation efforts into official foreign policy discourse.

The spectrum also reveals cases of hybridization. Corrective diplomacy, for example, often combines historical framing with strong moral investment, but may also serve strategic ends — such as reclaiming international legitimacy or countering a rival's narrative. Repatriation diplomacy, while often framed as ethical redress, can serve nation-branding purposes [75,94]. These hybrids challenge the assumption that heritage diplomacy is either sincere or calculated, cultural or historical, top-down or grassroots. In practice, most forms exist along a fluid continuum where these binaries blur.

Moreover, the typology sheds light on what might be termed “mode-switching” — where the same actor moves between types depending on geopolitical context. A state may engage in dialogic diplomacy with one partner and grievance diplomacy with another, even while drawing on the same heritage assets. Understanding these shifts requires attention not just to discourse, but to structure, history, and strategic positioning.

4.3. *Heritage Diplomacy Within the Field of Heritage Governance*

While this paper focuses on the international orientation of heritage diplomacy, it situates these practices within the broader field of heritage governance — understood as the processes by which heritage is selected, interpreted, authorized, and mobilized by a range of actors [95]. Heritage diplomacy, as conceptualized here, constitutes a subdomain of heritage governance that is outward-facing and internationally communicative, pursuing political goals of the state in question [32,96]. It mediates how states and institutions negotiate their historical identity in the global arena, but remains deeply connected to domestic narratives, institutional structures, and political incentives.

The typology developed herein can thus be understood as a framework for diagnosing international heritage governance strategies, with diplomacy functioning as a vehicle through which governance extends beyond borders. By viewing heritage diplomacy in this way, we can better understand how states not only manage their cultural past, but project it, defend it, and rearticulate it under conditions of international scrutiny, expectation, or contestation.

4.4. *Diagnostic and Comparative Utility of the Framework*

One of the principal contributions of the *Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum* lies in its diagnostic value. The five analytical dimensions — ranging from motivational to material and institutional — provide tools for comparing diverse heritage diplomacy practices across national contexts, historical moments, and geopolitical alignments. For scholars, the framework offers a means of typological clarification. It helps differentiate, for instance, a UNESCO nomination driven by soft power aims from a restitution campaign rooted in moral redress, or a grassroots commemorative effort from a government-led branding initiative. The matrix also allows researchers to track transformations in heritage posture — for example, when reactive memory politics become co-opted into national projection strategies.

For policymakers, the framework serves as a self-reflexive instrument. It invites heritage actors and diplomats to examine their own motivations, anticipate how heritage initiatives may be received abroad, and recognize the potential trade-offs between strategic visibility and ethical credibility. In doing so, it supports more responsible, dialogic, and context-sensitive heritage diplomacy.

4.5. *Policy Implications: Symbolic Capital and Ethical Responsibility*

The findings presented in this paper have implications for the design and assessment of heritage diplomacy efforts. First, they suggest that clarity of intent and coherence between values and action are crucial to sustaining diplomatic credibility [97]. For instance, a restitution initiative framed as reconciliation may backfire if perceived as primarily cosmetic or unaccompanied by deeper moral engagement.

Second, the typology encourages diplomats and cultural policymakers to consider the affective and historical registers of their international audiences. While this paper does not explore reception directly, it acknowledges that meaning is co-produced, and that symbolic gestures may acquire unforeseen or ambivalent meanings in global settings.

Third, the model foregrounds the risk of over-instrumentalization. When heritage is used merely as a soft power resource, stripped of its complexity or discomfort, it may undermine its own legitimacy. Conversely, heritage diplomacy that is grounded in ethical responsibility and genuine memory work can foster trust, recognition, and long-term cooperation — even in post-conflict or asymmetrical relations.

4.6. Limitations and Scope

This paper advances a conceptual typology, not a comprehensive empirical classification. While the ideal types and dimensions are grounded in extensive literature, they must be empirically tested and recalibrated in diverse geopolitical and historical settings. In practice, many diplomatic initiatives straddle multiple types or shift orientation over time.

Furthermore, this study has deliberately bracketed questions of audience reception. While crucial, the interpretation, contestation, or appropriation of heritage diplomacy by international publics or foreign governments constitutes a distinct field of inquiry. Here, it is important to note that foreign audiences are not homogeneous. Broadly, they may be divided into two categories: *historically entangled audiences* — those whose connection to the heritage in question derives from shared statehood, colonial or imperial ties, conflicts, alliances, migration flows, or other long-standing interdependencies; and *historically unentangled audiences* — those with no direct historical involvement, but who may be targeted for perception-shaping in light of globalisation, entrenched stereotypes, or strategic image management. The former group is more likely to interpret heritage diplomacy through the lens of shared experiences, contested narratives, and historical grievances, while the latter encounters it as a mediated and often unfamiliar proposition. Both groups require tailored approaches and invite different dynamics of reception, resistance, or appropriation — matters that require empirical work beyond the scope of this conceptual paper. An additional, often overlooked, audience comprises the *domestic public* of the state conducting heritage diplomacy. Although such initiatives are primarily outward-facing, their narratives, symbolism, and international visibility can significantly influence national self-perception, historical consciousness, and identity formation. In this sense, the domestic audience becomes an indirect yet consequential recipient of externally oriented diplomatic messaging — experiencing a form of “reflected nationhood” in which international recognition, validation, or contestation of heritage feeds back into internal discourses of legitimacy, pride, or grievance. This reflexive impact represents a critical, though underexplored, by-product of outwardly directed heritage diplomacy and warrants further empirical scrutiny.

The model also focuses primarily on state and state-affiliated actors. Non-state, diasporic, and indigenous diplomatic forms — while acknowledged — deserve fuller conceptual treatment. So too does the intersection of digital heritage diplomacy and algorithmic circulation of memory and identity across global platforms.

4.7. Directions for Future Research

This paper began by asking what forms heritage diplomacy takes, how they are shaped by geopolitical and historical experience, and what this means for international cultural relations. The typology developed in response to these questions does more than classify diplomatic practices — it uncovers how heritage operates as a symbolic language through which states narrate themselves into (or out of) global orders. The analysis shows that heritage diplomacy cannot be understood merely as soft power, apology, or branding, but as a spectrum of identity work: reactive and proactive, strategic and ethical, material and narrative. The proactive–reactive axis, in particular, reveals how historical wounds, ideological ruptures, or civilizational ambitions orient diplomatic memory

differently across contexts — from postcolonial reassertion to post-imperial distancing, from reconciliation to defensive denial. In bringing these elements together, the *Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum* is not simply a map of typologies but a diagnostic lens for how nations symbolically govern the past in transnational arenas [17]. Its broader implication is to reframe heritage diplomacy not as a subset of international cultural relations, but as a distinct modality of governance through which states negotiate legitimacy, responsibility, and identity in a contested global memory economy.

This study opens several pathways for further research. First, it invites comparative empirical analysis of heritage diplomacy practices — e.g., across post-Soviet, post-colonial, and conflict-affected contexts. Second, it encourages further refinement of the typology, particularly in relation to hybrid forms or transnational advocacy. Third, researchers may examine institutional and narrative misalignments within heritage diplomacy: where state-led strategies clash with civil society memory work, or where diplomatic intent diverges from reception [26]. Future studies should address the reception and interpretation of heritage diplomacy by both historically entangled and historically unentangled audiences. Comparative empirical research could explore how each group's responses influence diplomatic effectiveness, provoke resistance, or generate unintended narratives. Fourth, scholars may study how heritage diplomacy intersects with international law, transitional justice, or environmental diplomacy, offering broader ethical and strategic entanglements.

Finally, there is a need for greater interdisciplinary dialogue between heritage scholars, political scientists, and practitioners, to bridge the gap between conceptual innovation and policy impact. The typology presented here offers a foundation for such work — a shared language through which the complex motivations, forms, and implications of heritage diplomacy can be more systematically understood.

5. Conclusion

The Heritage Diplomacy Spectrum is proposed here as a heuristic device to organize and compare the many ways heritage operates as a diplomatic resource. It avoids prescribing a single normative model, instead offering an adaptable lens through which to situate practices ranging from cooperative cultural engagement to contested memory politics. Its primary strength lies in transferability: the spectrum can be adapted to diverse regional, thematic, and institutional settings without losing conceptual coherence. Future studies may operationalize its categories into empirical indicators, trace movement along its axes over time, or test its explanatory power in emerging heritage diplomacy arenas such as digital restitution or indigenous cultural governance. In offering this model, the intention is not to close debate but to create a baseline for dialogue — clear enough to orient comparative analysis, flexible enough to accommodate the evolving realities of heritage in international affairs.

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